

IT-Enabled Value Co-creation in a Tourism Context: The Portale Sardegna Case

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1 Introduction

The value of information technology (IT) in a business's production process is still a highly debated issue among researchers. Most studies on business value have considered IT value from the individual firm perspective, which assume that IT investment by a single firm leads to value-creation for that firm (e.g., Barua et al., 1995; Hitt & Brynjolfsson, 1996; Kumar, 2004; Melville et al., 2004; Ramirez et al., 2010). However, recent research has highlighted the importance of studying IT value beyond the level of individual firms and has developed the concept of IT-enabled co-creation value. This concept derives from the awareness that organizational boundaries are increasingly permeable and that emerging novel arrangements enable previously unattainable value propositions (Kohli & Grover, 2008). In particular, the co-creation of value is seen as occurring through the joint, voluntary actions of multiple parties, which include value network partners, customers, and even competitors (Kohli & Grover, 2008). Despite the importance of this subject, few studies have attempted to understand how IT-based value is co-created and shared among multiple partners (Sharaf, Langdon, & Gosain, 2007). Multi-firm IT implementations generally have been considered in the context of transactions in inter-organizational systems (Gebauer & Buxmann, 1999) or outsourcing arrangements (Dos Santos, 2003) in which the value research has focused primarily on how

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22 each firm benefits from such relationships. To address this gap, this study contains
 23 an analysis of the role played by IT in terms of value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch,
 24 2004; 2008a, 2008b). The study examines how different companies with different
 25 ITs can join together and co-create value. It also explains why some companies can
 26 successfully capture more of the value co-created in the partnership while others are
 27 less successful. The setting is the tourism industry because it is inevitably
 28 influenced by IT and no player can escape its impacts (Werthner & Klein, 1999).
 29 The rapid development of both supply and demand makes IT an imperative for
 30 hospitality firms; they must rethink the ways in which they do business to satisfy
 31 tourism demands and survive in the long term (Buhalis, 1998).

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32 We conducted an in-depth case study of an online tour operator (Portale Sarde-
 33 gna), which represents a remarkable case of travel innovation. Our objective was to
 34 demonstrate why comparable hotels showed different abilities in appropriating of
 35 value co-created. First, we investigate how customers and firms co-create value.
 36 Second, we explore why some organizations successfully capture a portion of the
 37 value co-created while others fail to do so.

38 The article is organized as follows: First, a review of the literature on Service-
 39 Dominant logic and IT-based value co-creation; second, an outline of the method-
 40 ology and details about data collection; and finally, the presentation of the data
 41 analysis, discussion of results, managerial implications and concluding remarks.

42 2 Literature Review

43 Many past studies have demonstrated a relationship between IT and some aspects of
 44 firm value (Devaraj and Kohli, 2003; Santhanam & Hartono, 2003), and the
 45 business value of IT tackle different aspects of IT business value ranging from
 46 productivity benefits and customer surplus (Hitt & Brynjolfsson, 1996), market
 47 value, market share, sales, and assets (Sircar et al., 2000), and a firm's profits (Lee,
 48 2001) to cost reduction, competitive advantage, inventory reduction, and other
 49 measures of performance (Devaraj and Kohli, 2003). Melville et al. (2004) defined
 50 IT business value as "the organizational performance impacts of information
 51 technology at both the intermediate process level and the organization-wide level,
 52 and comprising both efficiency impacts and competitive impacts" (p. 287). In this
 53 study, we focused on a firm's financial performance (i.e. revenue) as the organiza-
 54 tional performance affected by IT adoption.

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55 3 IT-Enabled Value Co-creation

56 While the business value of IT is extremely important, only recently researchers
 57 have focused their attention on the co-creation of value through IT rather than on IT
 58 value alone. In this view, "co-creation represents the idea that (a) IT value is

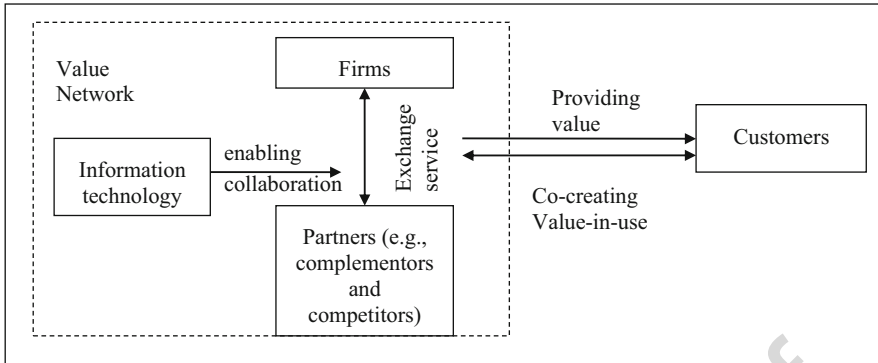


Fig. 1 The IT-enabled value co-creation network

increasingly being created and realized through actions of multiple parties, 59
 (b) value emanates from robust collaborative relationships among firms, and 60
 (c) structures and incentives for parties to partake in and equitably share emergent 61
 value are necessary to sustain co-creation” (Kohli & Grover, 2008, p. 28). 62

The notion of IT-enabled co-creation of value emerges from the realization that 63
 novel arrangements enable previously unattainable value propositions (Kohli & 64
 Grover, 2008). Looking through the lens of service dominant logic (S-D logic), a 65
 firm provides value proposition to its customers (i.e., other firms as the parties in the 66
 value co-creation actions), and IT enables such new arrangements and offers the 67
 potential to reshape how value can be created in collaborative relationships (Fig. 1). 68
 This co-created value exists when several firms, interacting with each other through 69
 IT, work together to create value that is greater than the sum of the value generated 70
 by single firms. 71

4 Methodology 72

4.1 Research Design and Data Collection 73

We adopted a theory-building case study methodology (Eisenhardt, 1989) to 74
 provide in-depth understanding of the IT-enabled value co-creation phenomenon 75
 in the tourism industry. We ground the discussion in a case history of Portale 76
 Sardegna, an Italian online tour operator on the island of Sardinia. In 2004, Portale 77
 Sardegna launched a new product, Open Voucher (OV), with the bold objective of 78
 prolonging the tourist season on the island, because Sardinia’s tourism sector 79
 suffers from strong seasonal flux. The idea was conceptually simple—to create a 80
 Sardinian tourist product capable of attracting travellers to the island during the low 81
 season (autumn and winter). Our objective was to demonstrate why comparable 82
 hotels showed different abilities in appropriating of value co-created. 83

t1.1 **Table 1** Summary of the
 t1.2 interviews administered to
 t1.3 Portale Sardegna
 t1.4

Interviewee	Position
Interviewee A	Portale Sardegna's CEO
Interviewee B	Open Voucher's COO
Interviewee C	Portale Sardegna's Director of Group Travel

t2.1 **Table 2** Summary of the interviews administered to hotels

	Star	Hotel	Performance	Number of hotel guests through OV	Number of room	Hotel guests/room
t2.2	4	S1	Successful	749	29	25.8
t2.3	4	U1	Unsuccessful	93	30	3.12
t2.4	3	S2	Successful	168	12	14
t2.5	3	U2	Unsuccessful	2	29	0.06
t2.6	4	S3	Successful	749	58	12.91
t2.7	4	U3	Unsuccessful	63	95	0.66
t2.8	3	S4	Successful	429	20	21.45
t2.9	3	U4	Unsuccessful	45	34	1.32
t2.10	3	S5	Successful	459	22	20.86
t2.11	3	U5	Unsuccessful	0	20	0.0
t2.12						

84 Portale Sardegna attempted this de-seasonalization through the development of
 85 an Internet-enabled network of affiliated hotels, providing availability of rooms
 86 year round, and offering its product through the OV platform at a low, fixed rate of
 87 29,90€ per person, per day in a 3-star hotel for the autumn/winter season and 39,90€
 88 in spring, including car rental. Unlike other online travel agents in Sardinia, OV
 89 allows tourists to plan a personalized itinerary in which they can change hotels daily
 90 to enjoy different parts of the island.

91 We collected data through interviews and secondary sources. The primary
 92 source was semi-structured interviews with individual respondents. Thirteen inter-
 93 views were conducted over the telephone between July and October 2009, includ-
 94 ing three interviews with co-founders of Portale Sardegna and ten with the
 95 managements at the hotels participating in OV (Tables 1 and 2).

96 The sample hotels are selected based on a polar-type research design
 97 (Eisenhardt, 1989). With the help from Portale Sardegna, we identified hotels
 98 that, despite similar characteristics in terms of stars and the geographical locations,
 99 showed significant difference in performance (Table 2). We chose to select hotels
 100 based on the performance in 2008 instead of the most successful year (2006)
 101 because it was important to evaluate whether the good performance was due to
 102 the novelty of the product or the hotel's long-term appreciation by the market.
 103 Based on our definition of value in terms of financial performance, we used the
 104 number of hotel guests booked through OV, standardized by the size of the hotels
 105 (number of rooms), as a measure of value co-created. We divided these hotels into

two groups based on financial performance: successful and unsuccessful ones. In 106
this way, we were able to set up comparisons for five pairs of hotels. 107

To conduct the semi-structured interviews, two common protocols were 108
adopted. The first protocol was employed for the interviews administered to Portale 109
Sardegna’s chief executive officer (CEO), OV’s chief operating officer (COO), and 110
Portale Sardegna’s director of group travel. The second semi-structured interview 111
protocol was adopted for the interviews with the officials from the hotels that had 112
implemented OV. The interview script for the hotels was developed from one pilot 113
interview. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. These data sources were 114
supplemented with archival information from the OV’s CEO. 115

5 Data Analysis and Findings 116

Qualitative data analysis was carried out using QSR Nvivo8, with no a priori 117
hypotheses. We compared the hotels to identify the emerging constructs (Straus 118 [AU12](#)
and Corbin, 1998) and the number of references found for each in the source 119
documents (Table 3) that would be relevant to the IT-based value co-creation. 120
We then devised a case study for each hotel and used the method of within- and 121
cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989) to analyze them. From within-case analyses, 122
we gained a deeper understanding of the processes of value co-creation each 123
organization underwent. The outcomes of the within-case analyses were then 124
compared with the cross-case analysis to improve rigor and quality of results 125
(Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7). This approach gave us the opportunity to highlight the 126
similarities and differences among hotels and to indicate the factors important to 127
IT-enabled value co-creation. 128

One foundational premise of S-D logic is that “the enterprise can only make 129
value propositions” (Vargo and Lusch, 2005, p. 11). It is obvious that, in this case, 130 [AU14](#)
Portale Sardegna does not deliver value, but only offers value propositions. Value is 131
created by the interaction of a number of organizations (airlines, car rentals, hotels) 132
and participation from travelers who customize their holiday package by choosing 133
their own travel itinerary and hotels that best suit their accommodation needs. The 134
novel arrangement of partnership is enabled by IT. The interviews performed with 135
the executives of OV demonstrated that the launch of OV would not be possible 136
without the Internet. More specifically, the CEO of OV stated: 137

It would have been impossible to provide the same service without the Internet. It was the 138
only way to sell Sardinia at a low price and with an itinerant package. The same product 139
provided by a travel agency would have been more expensive and difficult to assemble. 140

Similarly, the COO of OV recalled: 141

Internet is essential for us [. . .]. This technology allows us to satisfy the requirements of 142
immediacy, simplicity, and low cost of our main customers. 143

t3.1	Table 3 Number of references to co-creation of value	Nodes	Source	References
t3.2		Partner readiness	10	11
t3.3		Business alignment	10	15
t3.4		Strategic fit	10	17
t3.5		Synergy	10	17

t4.1 **Table 4** Matrix of cross-case analysis linking value co-creation and strategic fit

t4.2	Hotels	Insights
t4.3	S1	<i>"The OV product allows the hotel to have a reason to be open because it provides a continuous flow of incoming tourists."</i>
t4.4	U1	<i>"They didn't make us work at all. They were interested in sending guests to other hotels."</i>
t4.5	S2	<i>"The tourist season in Sardinia ends during the month of September. The collaboration with OV is an incentive to attract tourists to Sardinia during low season."</i>
t4.6	U2	<i>"We decided to accept the OV offer in spite of the fact that the prices were low; we thought that we could recover some of the earnings with the meals. The results were totally unsatisfactory."</i>
t4.7	S3	<i>"We have the same objective. With year-round opening, the proposal provided by OV, which enables guests to arrive during the low season, is like a ray of sunshine on a rainy day."</i>
t4.8	U3	<i>"We decided to collaborate with OV only to increase our profits."</i>
t4.9	S4	<i>"The out-of-season is our major objective. OV's offer was the answer to our needs: that is, to be able to keep the hotel opens year round."</i>
t4.10	U4	<i>"We started to collaborate with OV because we thought that it could help us to keep the hotel open during the low season, but our expectations were not completely satisfied."</i>
t4.11	S5	<i>"Operating with OV enables us to keep our hotels open during the low season."</i>
t4.12	U5	<i>"[...] Our objectives differ from those of OV operators. They aren't interested in what months guests arrive. We are interested only in the low-season months."</i>

144 The above statements point out that the Internet allowed the followings: a quick
 145 and immediate response by all partners involved; immediate access to the OV
 146 package by travellers; completeness of the offer (hotel and car); and time-saving
 147 aspects for the travellers.

148 Originally, the sales in hotels in Sardinia were so low during winter that most
 149 hotels had to close during the low season. The launch on OV has generated business
 150 for Sardinia tourism industry. Indeed, the numbers grew rapidly, reaching 1287
 151 bookings during the first year of activity (2005) and 2266 the next. Specifically,
 152 more OV packages were sold during the low seasons than during the high seasons
 153 because, during the high seasons (July and August), hotels can sell their rooms
 154 without the help of an intermediary at the highest price. This phenomenon is
 155 relevant to explain that co-creation of value during the low season was accom-
 156 plished through the collaboration of different partners taking part in the OV
 157 initiative.

Table 5 Matrix of cross-case analysis linking value co-creation and synergy 15.1

Hotels	Insights	15.2
S1	<i>“The positive results obtained by using OV are determined by the consistent attitude of the hotels that joined the initiative and also by the professional expertise of Portale Sardegna in the management of collaboration among partners.”</i>	15.3
U1	<i>“The element that created great resistance toward OV is that they requested our hotel’s availability to achieve their personal interests.”</i>	15.4
S2	<i>“Each partner involved in the selling of the OV product is responsible for 50 % of final results.”</i>	15.5
U2	–	15.6
S3	<i>“The positive results are due to both players (hotels and OV), since it is important for both players to act in synergy.”</i>	15.7
U3	<i>“OV is only an additional distribution channel for us; it allows for greater visibility and advertising opportunities.”</i>	15.8
S4	<i>“All together (hotels, OV, car rental,) we contribute to reaching the final goal. None of us could have individually reached such positive results.”</i>	15.9
U4	<i>“OV allowed us to complete our offer. By using OV we were able to have a 5 % increase in presences, which is no mean achievement for a small hotel as we are.”</i>	15.10
S5	<i>“The hotels, car rentals, and the services provided by OV are all important for the success of this initiative. Indeed, customer satisfaction is generated by the entire holiday package.”</i>	15.11
U5	<i>“We believe that the positive results obtained with the OV products are not synergistic. Those that have the best outcome are Portale Sardegna and Gearar.”</i>	15.12

The hyphen (–) indicates that no statements were provided by interviewees 15.13

Table 6 Matrix of cross-case analysis linking value co-creation and process alignment 16.1

Hotels	Insights	16.2
S1	<i>“Use of the online booking system has become vital for our business. Traditional travel agencies are superseded.”</i>	16.3
U1	<i>“We didn’t understand to what point the technology was useful for the management of our business.”</i>	16.4
S2	<i>“The control panel employed by OV for the bookings makes all our tasks much easier. It is not, however, a true innovation. Nowadays, it is become essential for the management of our business.”</i>	16.5
U2	[. . .] <i>“Knowing how to use the technology is not of great help in our business.”</i>	16.6
S3	<i>“OV’s software has its advantages: You can access the Web site at any time and change accommodation availability. Furthermore, it allows you to make fewer mistakes. The more the system allows you to operate in the best possible way, the more this creates an advantage for your guests. ”</i>	16.7
U3	–	16.8
S4	–	16.9
U4	–	16.10
S5	<i>“The control panel used by OV helped us to better manage our bookings and the services offered to our guests.”</i>	16.11
U5	<i>“We use all major online channels such as Booking.com and Expedia. By using more than one channel, we can attract more guests to the island.”</i>	16.12

The hyphen (–) indicates that no statements were provided by interviewees 16.13 [AU13](#)

t7.1 **Table 7** Matrix of cross-case analysis linking value co-creation and partner readiness

t7.2	Hotels	Insights
t7.3	S1	<i>“In order to create value by using the OV offer, flexibility is essential. This trait is of fundamental importance to manage the online booking system.”</i>
t7.4	U1	<i>“We are not well acquainted with the platform; nobody ever explained to us how accommodation availability should be entered online.”</i>
t7.5	S2	<i>“Even before starting our collaboration with OV, we knew how to use the software that allowed us to manage the booking of guests online.”</i>
t7.6	U2	<i>“Particular competencies are not at all useful in order to create value with OV. Being able to use the technology helps very little.”</i>
t7.7	S3	<i>“To create value by using OV, it is important to understand the importance of using the Internet.”</i>
t7.8	U3	<i>“I cannot underline any particular skill that could allow us to improve the value created by using OV.”</i>
t7.9	S4	<i>“We have never had any kind of problem in collaborating with OV and in interacting within the control platform.”</i>
t7.10	U4	<i>“Our hotel uses different booking channels, similar to OV. Interacting with the control panel utilized by OV didn't create any problems at all.”</i>
t7.11	S5	<i>“Some hotels are not able to create value with OV because they don't understand to what extent their Web site represents a showcase for guests. We have understood well how to interact with the Internet.”</i>
t7.12	U5	<i>“Customers were used, with other systems like booking.com, to receive immediate responses. [...] second] customers increasingly ask to build their itinerary directly online [...] [this technology] helps us and helps them.”</i>

158 **6 Key Factors for Successful Co-creation of Value**

159 While the above market responses illustrated the positive value co-creation, some
 160 of the hotels benefits more than the others through OV. Our objective was to
 161 demonstrate why comparable hotels showed different abilities in appropriating of
 162 value co-created. With this in mind, we structured the following section based on
 163 the key factors that emerged from the qualitative data analysis, as listed below:
 164 Strategic fit, Synergy, Process alignment, Partner readiness.

165 **6.1 Strategic Fit**

166 The concept of fit has received considerable attention in the literature. Studies
 167 (Chandler, 1962; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Thompson, 1967; Smith & Reeceb,
 168 1999) defined this concept as the synchronization between the organizational
 169 structure, strategy, and/or the wider environment (external fit) and the harmony
 170 among groups or units within the organization (internal fit). Based on the grounds
 171 on which this work was conceived, strategic fit may be defined as the degree to
 172 which the objectives of one company within the partnership are consistent with
 173 objectives of another company.

The evidence regarding strategic fit (Table 4) suggested that there were substantial differences in terms of strategic fit between successful (S) and unsuccessful hotels (U). 174
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Successful hotels (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5) demonstrated a higher level of strategic fit compared to unsuccessful ones (U1, U2, U3, U4, U5). The former stated that their objectives were in line with those of OV; the latter, with one exception (i.e., U5), asserted that they have different goals or that their objectives were at least partially in line with those of OV. A relevant comment is from the director of Hotel S3: “We have the same objective. With an opening year round, the proposal provided by OV, which allows for guests to arrive during the low season, is like a ray of sunshine on a rainy day.” 177
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Another meaningful statement, which was given by an unsuccessful hotel director (U5), is the following: “Our objectives differ from those of OV operators. They aren’t interested in what months guests arrive. We are only interested in the low-season months.” 185
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6.2 Synergy 189

One of the fundamental reasons why two firms combine their resources is to create value by pursuing the potential synergy existing between them. Synergy refers to the condition whereby the combination of two firms’ resources is potentially more efficient than those of either firm operating independently. Usually, synergy exists when firm resources are different but interdependent and mutually supportive (Tanriverdi & Venkatraman, 2005). An example of synergy in a business context of service is elevated service offerings, “defined as a new or enhanced service offering that can only eventuate as a result of a collaborative arrangement, one that could not otherwise be delivered on individual organizational merits” (Agarwal & Selen, 2009, p. 432). 190
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In our sample (Table 5), successful hotel managers acknowledge the higher value they were capable of attaining within their business because of the collaboration among different partners with different expertise and competence. 200
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The statements provided by the director of Hotel S1 are quite meaningful in this sense: “The positive results obtained by using OV are determined by the consistent attitude of the hotels that joined the initiative and also by the professional expertise of Portale Sardegna in the management of collaboration among partners.” The insights provided by the director of Hotel S4 are quite significant as well: “All together (hotels, OV, car rental), we contribute to reaching the final goal. None of us could have individually reached such positive results.” At the same time, it is also clear that, among the unsuccessful hotels, there was not a full understanding of the increased value that could have been obtained by operating together, but rather the belief that they would have reached more or less the same goals without collaboration. In line with this issue, a particularly interesting comment by the director of Hotel U3 deserves to be highlighted: “OV is only an additional 203
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215 *distribution channel for us; it allows for greater visibility and advertising*
 216 *opportunities.”*

217 It should also be pointed out that among unsuccessful hotels (i.e. U5) there was
 218 the strong idea that the collaboration did not create any type of synergy at all, but
 219 advantages for only a few partners and not all those involved in the initiative.

220 **6.3 Process Alignment**

221 We defined process alignment as the degree of fit between business processes and
 222 underlying technology assets to facilitate online transactions and sharing of, and
 223 access to, strategic and tactical information (Barua et al., 2004). By referring to the
 224 above-mentioned context, we can also pinpoint a number of differences between
 225 successful and unsuccessful hotels (Table 6).

226 The successful hotel owners clearly demonstrated that they understood the
 227 importance of IT in better managing their business, and they considered both the
 228 software and the control panel used by Open Voucher to be useful tools that allowed
 229 them to improve the management of bookings and offer higher quality services to
 230 guests.

231 Some of the statements provided by successful hoteliers were in line with the
 232 concept of process alignment, as in the case of the director of Hotel S3: *“OV’s*
 233 *software has its advantages: You can access the Web site at any time and change*
 234 *accommodation availability. Furthermore, it allows you to make fewer mistakes.*
 235 *The more the system allows you to operate in the best of ways, the more this creates*
 236 *an advantage for your guests.”*

237 The director of Hotel S2 had an opinion similar to that of the director of Hotel
 238 S3: *“The control panel employed by OV for the bookings makes all of our tasks*
 239 *much easier.”*

240 On the other hand, the unsuccessful hotel operators demonstrated, with only one
 241 exception (U5), that they hadn’t fully understood the importance of the use of
 242 technology to conduct their business as required by the market. An example of this
 243 view is provided by the director of Hotel U1: *“We didn’t understand to what point*
 244 *the technology was useful for the management of our business.”*

245 **6.4 Partner Readiness**

246 The management of information systems literature (Davis et al., 1989) has demon-
 247 strated that cognitive perceptions of technology, such as usefulness or ease of use,
 248 influence individuals’ intent to use technology. In this paper, according to the
 249 literature, we used the concept of partner readiness to refer to the degree to which
 250 firms, customers, and suppliers are willing and ready to conduct business activities
 251 electronically (Barua et al., 2004).

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The willingness of the hotels to use technology to operate their businesses is certainly an important element in understanding the ways in which IT can support the co-creation of value (Table 7). The hotels that refused to acknowledge the utility of technology to improve their business practices were, in fact, not able to completely take advantage of the opportunities of working within a partnership environment in which customer and partner relations of those involved were accomplished online.

As for this instance, it is important to highlight the statement provided by the director of Hotel U1: *“We are not well acquainted with the OV’s platform. Nobody ever explained to us how accommodation availability should be entered online.”*

Conversely, the hotels that took full advantage of the given opportunity were those that had a positive perception and that had fully acknowledged the use of technology. This can be seen from the statement provided by the director of Hotel S5: *“Some hotels are not able to create value with OV because they don’t understand to what extent their Web site represents a showcase for guests. We have understood well how to interact with the Internet.”*

7 Discussion and Conclusion

Our goal in this paper was to explore the key successful factors of IT-enabled value co-creation within an inter-organizational context. In particular, the case study of Open Voucher has allowed us understand the fundamental role played by technology in the co-creation of value. When considering the statements provided by Portale Sardegna CEOs, it appears quite clear that the same results could not have been achieved without the use of IT. It is also clear that, in this case, IT was used as a tool for the creation of a travel product which in turn co-created business value (i.e., brought more tourists to the island).

Even though researchers (Devaraj & Kohli, 2002) have pinpointed a number of factors (IS-strategy alignment, organizational and process change, process performance, information sharing, IT usage) that are generally accepted as key conditions that lead to IT value creation, the key factors of IT-based value co-creation that emerged from this study provide new insights to the issues under investigation.

With regard to strategic fit, many past studies have examined the fit between a company’s business strategic goals and its IS goals. In this paper, we demonstrated that the fit among the strategic goals of partnering hotels is achieved whenever the goals of one hotel can be reached only through the participation of all other hotels sharing the same project. However, when the participating firms have a different structure, strategy, or external environment, strategic fit is more difficult to achieve than the strategic fit involving only one firm. When the boundaries among companies become blurred by the advent of information technology, how can firms ensure that the objectives of one company within a partnership are consistent with the objectives of the other companies becomes an important issue. Second, as to synergy, our results were in line with existing literature (Tanriverdi &

293 Venkatraman, 2005; Nevo and Wade, 2010). It is evident from our work that market
 294 response was enhanced by the contributions of hotels, car rental companies, and
 295 airlines that make their resources available to all partners to attract tourists to
 296 Sardinia. The same results could not have been obtained without the involvement
 297 and contributions provided by all partners in the relationship. With the help of IT,
 298 there is more potential for different kinds of collaboration in terms of resources
 299 sharing to enhance synergy (Cabiddu & Piccoli, 2010; Cabiddu, Lui, & Piccoli,
 300 2013).

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301 When considering the third key factor, process alignment, our results pinpointed
 302 that the more the technology matches the business process that users must perform,
 303 the greater the positive impact on financial performance from its use. These findings
 304 are consistent with IS theory concerning task-technology fit (Goodhue and Thomp-
 305 son, 1995). However, the level of difficulty increases when multiple firms are
 306 involved. Each firm has its own way to conduct business. The underlying technol-
 307 ogy that aims to facilitate multiple firms' business processes will inherently pro-
 308 duce a different fit with different firms. Therefore, how to optimize the degree of fit
 309 between business processes *in different firms* and the underlying technology that
 310 enables collaboration among these firms to facilitate transactions and the sharing of
 311 information should be studied.

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312 Finally, with regard to partner readiness, our findings highlighted that the greater
 313 the perception of usefulness and ease of use of technology, the greater the propen-
 314 sity to embrace technology by the partners involved. The technology readiness
 315 index (Parasuraman, 2000), a key factor in adopting and embracing technologically
 316 innovative products and services, indicates the same result. In the case of OV, the
 317 successful hotels expressed *optimism* (the degree to which one believes that the
 318 technology offers increased control, flexibility, and efficiency) to OV, while the
 319 unsuccessful hotels (e.g., U2) showed *insecurity* (distrust of technology) by indi-
 320 cating that using the technology helps very little. Therefore, for a firm to take
 321 advantage of the IT-enabled value co-created, the employees have to be technology
 322 ready, which means that they need to understand the benefits delivered by the
 323 technology and be willing to act as a technology pioneer. Based on our results, we
 324 can assert that managers should find ways to implement the key factors highlighted
 325 in this paper to enhance the realization of the value co-created in inter-firm relation-
 326 ships. One core factor is the development of partner readiness. Managers should
 327 take advantage of partnership opportunities in which customer and partner relations
 328 are accomplished online.

AU19

329 This chapter has presented an exploratory study into how information technol-
 330 ogy may play a central role in terms of co-creation value within an inter-
 331 organizational context. The evidence from the 13 interviews suggested that the
 332 factors (strategic fit, synergy, process alignment, partner readiness) presented in this
 333 article are the elements enabling the co-creation value and are likely to be of interest
 334 to the researcher dealing with these issues. This study also has its limitations. The
 335 first limitation is related to the research context. The qualitative and empirical data
 336 analysis was undertaken with data collected from a single tourist service provider
 337 and its partner organizations. To further foster the multidisciplinary debate yet

maintain a link with practice, future researchers may want to explore the gathering of data from the entire tourist industry sector and partner organizations and to consider other service sectors or cross-service industry collaborations, as well as those organizations for which collaboration is pivotal to success. This may also include additional data collection from the travellers' side. This further research could improve or expand our finding in several ways.

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