Guest editorial

Understanding and Advancing Service Experience Co-creation

Experience as a concept has its background in economics, consumer behavior, psychology, sociology, marketing, and managerial practice (Klaus and Maklan, 2012). For service scholars, the issue of service experience has become relevant in a broad range of fields, such as retailing, service marketing and management, operations management, service innovation, and service-dominant logic. Managers regard the creation of superior customer experiences as a precursor of competitive advantage for a firm (Berry et al., 2002; Verhoef et al., 2009), and contemporary researchers tie experience closely together with value creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, Helkkula et al., 2012). Reflecting the increasing importance of this topic, the recent call by Marketing Science Institute highlighted customer experience as a tier-one research priority for 2014–16 (MSI, 2014).

The research perspective on service experience has evolved from studying the internal, hedonic, or extraordinary experience by the individual consumer toward studying experience as a collective, co-created phenomenon that is not limited to a specific actor, such as a customer, or a specific event in the service process, such as a service encounter (Arnould and Price, 1993; Helkkula et al., 2012). Researchers have acknowledged that service experiences emerge from interactions between actors (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006; Ramaswamy, 2010), which in contemporary markets take place not only in provider-customer dyads but also between broader networks of actors (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). The interactive, co-created aspect of service experience has become a topical issue due to the rise in consumer collectives organized around shared interests (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Schau et al., 2009) and complex service delivery networks in which a variety of suppliers and providers contribute to customers' experience formation over a series of exchanges (Hakanen and Jaakkola, 2012; Tax et al., 2012). In other words, service experience is increasingly co-created in the interactions between the customer and service provider(s), other customers, and/or other stakeholders.

Despite these notions, service experience co-creation has to date seldom been the focus of research. Furthermore, research contributing to our understanding of this phenomenon is scattered in a range of research fields, mostly focusing on only one aspect of it at a time. Therefore, the objective of this special issue is to bring service experience co-creation into the spotlight and to present state-of-the-art research that advances our understanding of this phenomenon and provides future directions for researchers and practitioners. As whole, this special issue serves as an opening to the study of service experience co-creation. It aggregates current research knowledge on the topic and features a rich mixture of perspectives on its study.

To this end, this special issue features seven articles. The first article by Elina Jaakkola (Turku School of Economics, Finland), Anu Helkkula (Hanken School of Economics, Finland), and Leena Aarikka-Stenroos (Turku School of Economics, Finland) opens the discussion by developing a conceptualization of service experience co-creation and examining the range of theoretical approaches that contribute to extant understanding on the phenomenon: service management, service-dominant logic and service logic, consumer culture theory, and service innovation and design. The paper identifies important emerging topics for future research on service experience co-creation and postulates that this topic has wider marketing implications in terms of i) understanding the circularity of value creation and experience, ii) the foundational sociality in contemporary markets, and iii) the renewal of marketing methods and measures. The remaining six articles bring pioneering insights into such aspects.

Circularity of value and experience

The second article, "The context of experience," is contributed by Melissa Akaka (University of Denver, USA), Hope Schau (University of Arizona, USA), and Stephen L. Vargo (University of Hawaii, USA). This research integrates consumer culture theory and service-dominant logic by focusing on the experiential view of value and the context of experience with a cultural ecosystem view of markets. The paper explores the social and cultural aspects of the context that frames market-related experiences to better understand how value is co-created and experiences are evaluated. In essence, the authors extend the context of experience to practices and perspectives of multiple actors and various views on value.

The third article, "Service experiences beyond the direct use: Indirect customer use experiences of smartphone apps," is the work of a doctoral candidate, Apramey Dube, and his supervisor, Anu Helkkula, of the Hanken School of Economics in Finland. This paper differs from most prior research in experiences in that it focuses on indirect-use experiences and claims that they are an important part of the service experience. The paper draws attention with an empirical analysis to the use experiences of smartphone apps, which have gained limited focus in the service-marketing context despite their rapidly growing importance in current marketing practices.

The inherent connectivity and sociality of markets

The fourth article, "Co-creating service experience practices," is contributed by Janet McColl-Kennedy, Lilliemay Cheung, and Elizabeth Ferrier of the University of Queensland, Australia. In this paper, service experiences are conceptualized as dynamic and relational activities and interactions developed with the customer and potentially other actors. By drawing parallels and contrasts with biological ecosystems, the paper introduces a practice-based framework designed to integrate and deepen our understanding of how individuals co-create service experience practices. The paper also provides a compelling agenda for future research and offers practical strategies to enhance co-created service experiences.

The inherent connectivity of markets is also elaborated on in the fifth article, "Co-creating the collective service experience," authored by Antonella Carù (Università Bocconi, Italy) and Bernard Cova (Kedge Business School Marseille, France). By using a multiple-case approach from leisure industries, their paper identifies multiple co-creation practices, such as helping and judging, that build collective service experiences in co-consuming groups. The findings highlight the sociological aspects of collective service experiences and also the ambivalence of the identified practices in terms of the co-creation or co-destruction of the experience. The authors suggest that the collective service experience is shaped by both company- and community-initiated practices and is therefore not easy to design or manage.

The renewal of marketing methods and measures

The sixth article, "Experience co-creation in financial services: An empirical exploration" is contributed by Frederic Ponsignon (University of Exeter Business School, UK), Philipp "Phil"

Klaus (Prof. Dr. Phil Klaus & Associates Consulting, UK), and Roger S. Maull (University of Surrey, UK). Drawing on an extensive multiple-case study, the paper explores how financial service organizations design and manage the customer experience. The paper brings new insights into managerial practices for customer experience management, the role of industry-specific characteristics influencing the choice of practices, and the ways in which these practices support experience co-creation from the service providers' perspective.

The seventh article, "The Co-Creation Experience from the Customer Perspective: Its Measurement and Determinants," is authored by Katrien Verleye from the Center for Service Intelligence at Ghent University, Belgium, who conducted this study as a visiting scholar at Kenan-Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA. The paper proposes and tests a multidimensional co-creation experience scale and employs an experiment to study the individual and environmental conditions that affect the customer experience in co-creation situations. The paper provides insight into the co-creation experience dimensions and their relative importance for customers with different expectations. The key implication here is that academics and practitioners should pay attention to customer heterogeneity in terms of expected co-creation benefits.

These seven papers draw on various fields of literature and provide a rich theoretical understanding and new empirical insights into service experience co-creation across different contexts. Service experience co-creation is a multidimensional phenomenon, as depicted by Jaakkola et al. (2015). These multiple dimensions are well represented in the articles featured in this special issue, with each elaborating on specific aspects of service experience co-creation. As a whole, this set of papers brings forth both conceptual propositions about the general nature and role of service experience co-creation and practice-level manifestations of this phenomenon. The seven articles also highlight important future research avenues and therefore should stimulate new research on this topic. We hope that this special issue proves to be useful for researchers working in this area. Aside from academics, we hope that the special issue eventually increases managerial awareness on this phenomenon and helps practitioners to develop their service businesses.

Finally, we would like to thank the academic community, the contributions of which made this special issue possible. The call for papers for this special issue resulted in 61 abstract

submissions, and because of such a high volume, we could not accommodate all promising papers in this special issue. Fourteen full papers were invited to be reviewed, resulting finally in the acceptance of the papers in this issue. We thank the authors for their hard work. We also wish to express our sincere gratitude for the reviewers whose comments and criticism have improved the quality of the papers and helped us to select the work to be published in this issue. Finally, we are very grateful to the editor, Professor Jay Kandampully, for his support, advice, and encouragement during the production of this special issue.

It has become evident that the topic of co-creating service experience is of keen interest to many, and we are eagerly looking forward to future contributions on the topic!

Guest Editors

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