Empirical Validation for Impetus for Co-Creation in Travel Services

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ABSTRACT - The aim of this study is to investigate the main antecedents of co-creation in tourism. Based on an in-depth literature review, a survey was designed, and data was collected from tourists/travellers. A SEM analysis revealed that the involvement, perceived ease of use and electronic word of mouth (e-wom) ,interactions among tourists and tourism service providers and the active participation of tourists and sharing of experience are antecedents of co-creation in the tourism industry using mobile devices. As one of the first studies in this area in the field of tourism, this study contributes to the body of knowledge by proposing and empirically testing a model that shows six antecedents of customer value co-creation in tourism

Key words: Co-creation, m-commerce, involvement, e-wom, active participation, degree of co-creation.

I. INTRODUCTION

During the past few years, a new paradigm has been increasingly gaining ground within the

service marketing literature: the service-dominant (S-D) logic (1)(2)The principal foundation in the S-D logic is that consumers are not passive respondents to firms' value propositions. Instead, consumers become co-creators of value throughout the consumption process (3), while the firms develop, design, manufacture, and deliver resources that facilitate consumers' value creation (4).

The view of customers as co-creators of value is a central idea in the service-dominant logic of marketing, which challenges the view of consumers as passive buyers to see them as actors in the production of personalised offers (5,6,7). The increased digitalization of the economy and the adoption of omni-channel strategies by firms (8) empower consumers and enable mass and multifaceted co-creation (9,10).

Co-creation is a demand-centric and interactive process that involves at least two willing resource-integrating actors who are engaged in specific forms of mutually beneficial collaboration that results in value creation for them (11). The foundational idea of customer value co-creation refers to participants creating something in collaboration with or influenced by others (12). In the tourism context, the concept of co-creation is particularly relevant. First, offering unique and memorable customer experiences are of paramount importance for tourism service providers in order to remain competitive. Creating a unique experience involves both customer participation and a connection which links the customer to the experience (13,14). Second, the internet has significantly changed the way customers allocate knowledge about hotels, flights or even destinations. New information and communication

technologies, such as online booking engines, have transformed the structure of the tourism distribution system into a multi-channel network that raises new challenges for both customers and tourism companies (e.g., travel agencies). Third, customers create value not only for themselves and the company, but also for other customers which is due to the fact that they often share their travel experiences in online social networks. Online booking engines and websites that allow customers to post their opinions and reviews about tourism service companies are not only a helpful co-creation tool for customers, but also an important source of marketing information about customer experiences for companies (14; 15).

II. RESEARCH GAP AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The literature documents several recent studies conceptualizing value co-creation in

hospitality (16)and tourism (17). Empirical evidence of co-creation research in tourism is scarce and a number of research questions are still unanswered. (14) were among the first to empirically assess the concept of S-D logic and its implications for tourism management in a hospitality setting. Li and Petrick (2008) conceptually looked into the importance of S-D logic for tourism marketing. Both the above mentioned studies emphasize that S-D logic and cocreation activities demand further examination in context of tourism marketing and management. More research should be devoted to the drivers of co-creation activities in terms of firm actions and processes (18). Previous studies have acknowledged experience co-creation as a successful strategy of differentiation against competitors However, previous studies have dedicated little attention to the possible antecedents related to experience co-creation, especially in the tourism industry (19).

The study by Lee (20)reveals that perceived benefits, subjective norms, and ability to co-create are antecedents of the tourists' intention to co-create. (21), instead, focus on the consequences of tourism experience co-creation, showing that satisfaction with co-creation of a tourism experience positively affects the satisfaction with vacation experience and the loyalty to the service provider. Grissemann and Stokburger-Sauer (22) highlight the company support as an antecedent of the degree of co-creation, and customer satisfaction with the service company, customer loyalty, and service expenditures as consequences. It, however, does not investigate any other antecedents of co-creation in tourism. The empirical research on the co-creation in tourism is, therefore, still limited. In this research, we follow up on calls for further research on customer co-creation and investigate both theoretically and empirically a model of antecedents of customer co-creation in tourism services. We examine involvement, (electronic word of mouth)e-wom quality, and perceived ease of use, interaction between tourist and tourism service provider, active participation and sharing experience as drivers or antecedents of co creation. Therefore, with the aim of increasing the limited empirical knowledge on co-creation, the objectives of the study was to develop and empirically test a parsimonious, yet robust, conceptual model that explains the antecedents of customer value co creation through the use of mobile applications.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

Value co-creation

Co-creation refers to an interactive process involving at least two actors who are engaged in

specific forms of mutually beneficial collaboration and resulting in value creation for those actors (11). Co-creation is at the basis of Service Dominant Logic (SDL) that places services instead of products at the center of the economic exchange (1). According to SDL, a customer is no longer considered a target to reach with positioning strategies but must be seen as an active resource who should be involved in the value creation process. With this active role, the customer is able to influence and improve the available resources of the organization. The customer can contribute to realizing innovative products and services that can help create memorable experiences (16; 23; 24, 25).

Impetus for Value co-creation

The paper investigates the influence of antecedent factors of co-creation behaviours: involvement, perceived ease-of-use and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) quality. These three factors are representative of the three components that impact on encounters of value cocreation according to the conceptual model of (5): customer processes, supplier processes and additional sources of brand knowledge. In addition to the above mentioned antecedents, other drivers

of value co creation identified from the literature are : interaction between tourist and tourism service provider, active participation, sharing experience.

Involvement and co-creation

The relationship between category involvement and customer co-creation has not been evidenced yet but is a research proposition of (26), who suggest that for cocreation to occur customers must have a sufficient level of involvement in the specific category of the brand. Involvement is a motivational variable reflecting the extent to which an activity is personally relevant to the individual (27,5) suggest that those customers that share values and concerns related to a specific task would be more willing to co-create; by co-creating, customers embed themselves in the process of learning about the product category. The more important the product is to a customer, the more he or she has a stake in the co-creation task and, therefore, the more likely he or she is to participate in online co-creation(28). From a list of potential motivators to co-create in virtual words, (10) identifies passion for a task and learning through co-creation from and with others; these are attributes that belong to the concept of involvement in the product category, Thus, it can be expect that highly involved customers will be likely to undertake online co-creation:

H1: Involvement positively affects customer value co-creation.

Perceived ease of use and co-creation

The perceived expertise of the customer, or their self-efficacy related to the task, will also affect the intention to co-create or the actual co-creation behaviour (28). In online co-creation processes, customers have to learn to participate through an online platform. The perceived ease-of-use of a technological system is a variable drawn from the technology acceptance model – TAM ,which has been widely employed as an antecedent of the usage of a technology for performing a task. Higher perceived ease-of-use of the internet for co-creation will act as an intrinsic motivation to participate as it will reduce the barriers to perform the task

H2: Perceived ease-of-use of the mobile application platform positively affects customer value co creation.

Electronic word of mouth

The growth in the use of the internet and virtual social media has changed the way people interact with each other. In the omnichannel era, when people engage in a shopping process their preferred method of information is e-WOM (29). e-WOM is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (30). The strength of the influence of e-WOM on consumer behaviour is related to the quality of the posted message. e-

WOM quality is defined as the relevance and usefulness of e-WOM based on the information content, the strength, and accuracy of the argument (31). When a customer receives quality e- WOM they are moved by a kind of altruistic motivation to co-create as a way to correspond by doing something that will benefit others. Thus, the hypothesis:

H3. e-WOM quality positively affects customer value co creation.

Interaction between tourists and tourism service providers and customer value co creation.

Payne, Storbacka, and Frow (5) recognize the fundamental role of interactions and introduce the encounter process as part of their conceptual framework to explain the travel experience co-creation of customers. The authors define it as a process of interactions and transactions occurring between the tourists and the tourism service providers at the destination during moments of contact in which both parties are involved. According to these authors, there are critical encounters that may positively or negatively influence co-creation. According to Chathoth et al. (32), effective communication between tourism service providers at the destination and tourists is an important antecedent for tourist involvement and consequently for co-creation. Therefore, interaction is considered to be an important antecedent of experience cocreation because firms can achieve a competitive advantage by dialoguing in a personal way with customers at all points of the relationship, these points being the locus of experience co-creation (6). Based on the above discussions, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H4. The interaction between tourists and tourism service providers has a positive effect on experience co-creation in tourism.

Active participation and customer value co-creation

Co-creation presupposes the combination of customers' resources with those of organizations (33). According to Andersson (34), customers contribute to the final step of the production process by\ combining their resources with those of organizations and co-creating their own experiences, implying the transformation of customers from passive to active partners .Carù and Cova (35) suggest that customers can be actively or passively involved. Passively, organizations have control over the relationship, whereas active participation allows customers to immerse themselves in an experience, taking responsibility for each step in the process. In other words, in order to actively engage customers, an effort on the part of organizations must be aimed at adopting a customer perspective. In this way, the customers' needs and expectations can be better met (32). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (6) affirm that experience co-creation is influenced by the active involvement of customers before, during, and after consumption. The challenge for the organizations is actively engaging customers by providing them a space in

which they may combine their resources and thereby generate a variety of potential co-created experiences (36). The active role of tourists is especially important in the co-creation of tourism experiences because successful experiences should be personalized and require the direct intervention of tourists with their own resources. Thus the hypothesis

H5. The active participation of tourists in the entire experiential process has a positive effect on experience co-creation in tourism.

Sharing of an experience and customer value co creation.

The social dynamics during travel are considered to be fundamental outputs of tourism because social dynamics facilitate getting to know new people, reinforcing friendships, making new friends, and spending time with relatives. In addition, maintaining relationships within their own networks is essential for tourists. This need is especially satisfied by new technologies. In fact, ICTs can provide tourists with new tools that allow them to respond in a more accurate way to the environment and to share suggestions, opinions, questions, and memories related to their journey (37). Tourists share their experiences with their network of relatives and friends and with unknown users of the internet before, during, and after the experiential process. The attitude of sharing tourism experiences through technology enlarges the experience in time and space (38) and improves the role of tourists as experience co-creators. Hence the hypothesis.

H6. Tourists' sharing of an experience with others has a positive effect on experience cocreation in tourism.

IV.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Context of the study

The context of the study is the tourism industry because of the enhanced relevance of co creation in tourism and also scarcity of empirical research in the same. For the purpose of integrating mobile commerce with tourism, all the applications available on app store (IOS) /play store(Android)that can serve as a platform for the consumer to co create a travel package were included in the questionnaire. This was done to ascertain the degree of awareness among the users regarding various applications that facilitate customer value co-creation.

5.2 Research design

The research hypotheses were tested through a quantitative approach in which data was collected based on a survey due to its suitability with the purpose and nature of the study in question. The focus of the research is on the young travellers who are desirous of exploring new places in the upcoming holidays. The central idea is to comprehend the degree to which the consumer is involved in the arrangement process and not the co-created product itself.

More specifically, we focused on the co-creation process rather than on the outcome of this process.
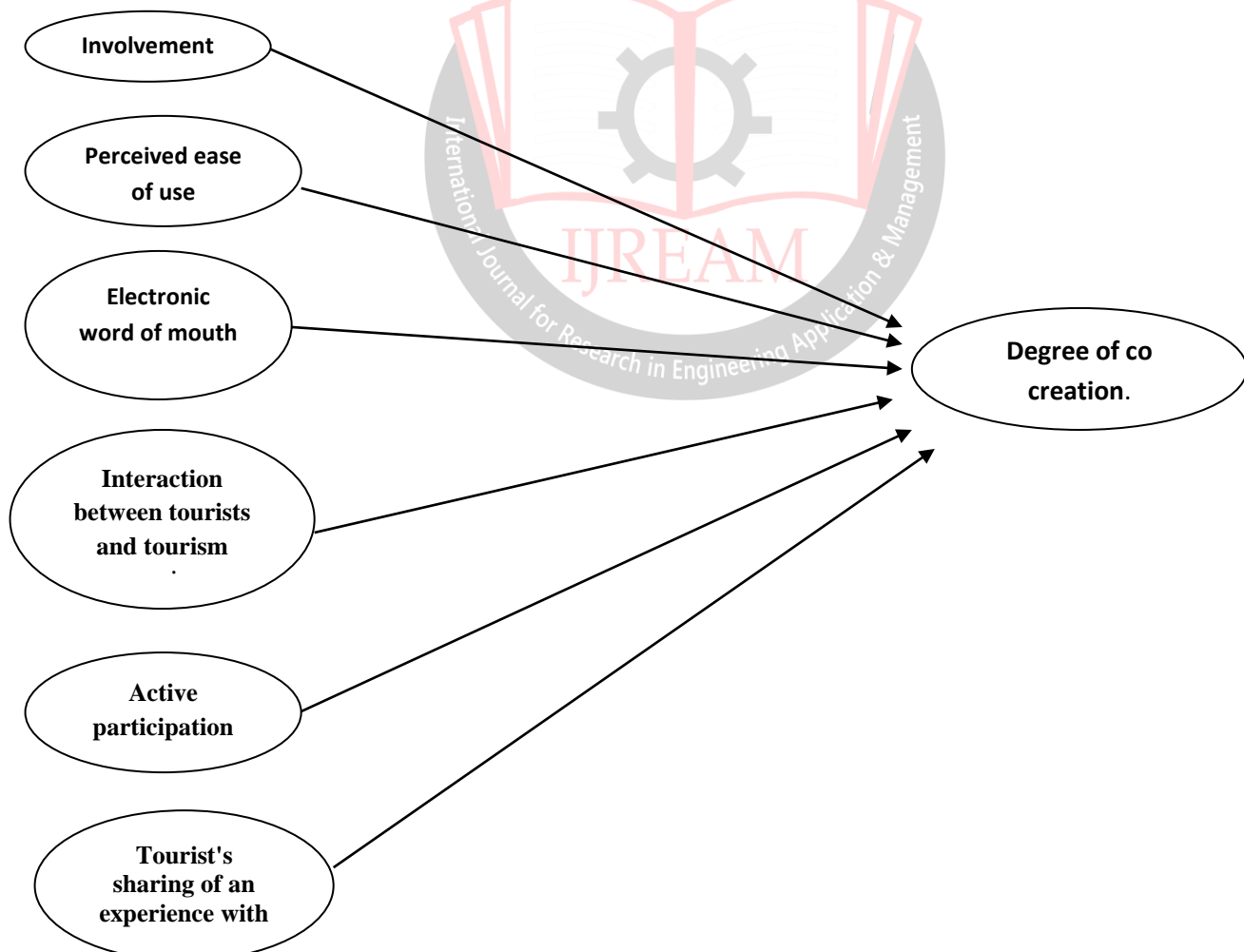
5.3 Measures

The seven constructs were measured by a set of multiple five-point Likert scales ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5), realized by combining existing scales in the literature. Furthermore, as affirmed by Revilla, Saris, and Krosnik (39), five-point scales yield better quality data than scales with more points.

The instrument was divided into three sections, where section A asked the qualifying questions such as whether in the last two years, have respondents had planned/booked a holiday package, did they get the holiday package designed as per their own requirements, and did they buy that holiday package online. Section B had questions regarding the constructs, the items of which are adapted from the literature. The scale for involvement was adapted from Novak et al., 2000) and had 5 items. Perceived ease of use was measured using 4 item scale given by Teo, et all 1999. A three item scale given by Awad and Ragowsky, 2008 was adapted to measure electronic word of mouth. The three items related to the interaction between tourists and tourism

service providers at the destination were adapted from Grissemann and Stokburger- Sauer (22) and Mathis et al. (21). Three items on the active participation of tourists during their experiences were adapted from Mathis et al. (2016) and Peterson et al. (2005). Studies conducted by Wang et al. (15) have been useful to individuate items related to tourists' attitudes on sharing their experiences with others. In particular, items related to the intrinsic motivation for sharing were adapted to this current study. The degree of co-creation was measured using four items, which were adapted from Grissemann and Stokburger-Sauer (22).

A list of all the mobile applications that can assist the respondents in co creating the travel package were also included. The third section included demographic questions. The questionnaire was pretested by fellow researchers and university professors with specific knowledge of tourism experience and co-creation. After this process, the questionnaire was modified and improved; the final version was used for the research study.

V.   CONCEPTUAL MODEL

5.4 Data collection and Data Analysis.

The data was collected through the self administered questionnaire in a pen and paper format and online survey method. The individuals were asked to answer the questions about the mobile application they co-created with most recently, which they could choose from an extensive list of travel and tourism applications or else write a valid name. Individuals who had planned/booked a holiday in the last two years and also got the package tailor made according to their own requirements only filled the whole questionnaire. In the present study a total of 186 responses were collected. Since most of the responses were from the online method, the problem of missing values and unanswered questions was taken care of as all the questions were marked compulsory. Participating pre-tests method was used for pretesting the questionnaire. The respondents were told that the pre-test is a practice run and they should explain in detail what they actually understood of the questions and also talk about their experience. Ten respondents were chosen as they were representative of the sample and also well educated to answer the questions in detail and suggest the required changes. The setting of the pre-test was such where the respondents could freely talk about the questionnaire and raise their doubts. The reliability of the constructs under study was checked through cronbach alpha(table 1), the value of which was above the acceptable 0.7.

Table 1: Reliability coefficients.

	Involvement	Perceived ease of use	E-Wom	Interaction	Active Participation	Sharing	Co creation
No. Of Dimensions	5	3	4	4	3	3	4
Cronbach Alpha	0.804	0.861	0.899	0.930	0.755	0.738	0.794

VI.   RESULTS

. The study results shows that majority of the respondents were from the state of Haryana (49%) followed by equal participation by Punjab and Chandigarh (18% each) and Himachal Pradesh (13%). Most of the respondents were post graduates (50%) and belonged to the salaried class(48.4%). With regards to travel behaviour 63% of the respondents travelled with their families , 22.6% travelled with friends and only 3.2% travelled alone.

Before evaluating the structural model, we analyze the measurement model. Following the theoretical guidelines (Hair et al., 1999) we carry out a factorial analysis using structural equations and taking into account four criteria: the significance and value of the factorial loadings, the individual reliability of each item and the model's fit indices. CMIN/DF ($\chi2$ / df) is the minimum discrepancy divided by its degrees of freedom; the ratio should be close to 1 for correct models. Wheaton et al. (1977) suggest a ratio of approximately five or less 'as beginning to be reasonable. The measurement model had CMIN/DF =3.161 which is to be considered a reasonable fit.

According to Arbuckle (2005), the RMSEA value of about 0.05 or less would indicate a close fit of the model in relation to the degrees of freedom. In this measurement has a RMSEA=.073 which again shows a reasonable fit. The CFI value should be between 0 and 1. A value close to 1 indicates a very good fit. In the measurement model CFI=.801. The TLI value lies between 0 and 1, but is not limited to this range. A value close to 1 indicates a very good fit .A value greater than 1 indicates an over-fit of the model. Here TLI=.768. The GFI value is always less than or equal to 1. A value close to 1 indicates a perfect fit. The GFI for the measurement model was .736. Since the indices were close to the cut off and the model was a reasonable fit, it was considered for further analysis. The structural model present appropriate values in general for the goodness of fit indices(CMIN/Df=3.958, GFI=.666 , CFI=.713 , RMR = .219 , RMSEA=.078 , TLI=.682) Table 2 has the correlation coefficients which is a statistical measure that calculates the strength of the relationship between the relative movements of two variables. The values range between -1.0 and 1.

Table 2: Correlation coefficients.

	Involvement	Perceived ease of use	E-Wom	Interaction	Active Participation	Sharing	Co creation
Involvement	1	.425**.	.488**	.244**	.467**	.262**	.467**
Perceived ease of use	.425**	1	.143	.183*	.285**	.343**	.269**
E-Wom	.488**	.143	1	.436**	.462**	.262**	.425**
Interaction	.244**.	.183*	.436**	1	.514**	.343**	.270**
Active Participation	.467**..	.285**	.462**	.514**	1	.552	.576
Sharing	.262**.	.343**	.262**	.343**	.552	1	.501
Co creation	.467**.	.269**	.425**	.270**	.576**	.501**	1

** All the values are significant.

The correlation coefficients among the antecedents of co creation were significant. There was a need to assess the impact of each antecedent on co creation and also explain the level of variation each antecedent has on co creation. The impact of each antecedent is reported in table 3. The antecedents are independent variables and co creation is the dependent variable.

Table 3: Impact of antecedents on co creation.

Result of regression analysis.

Independent Variables.	Regression Results
Involvement	R^2= .218, $F(1,184)$=51.234, $p<.01$
Sharing	R^2= .251, $F(1,184)$=61.580, $p<.01$
E-WOM	R^2= .073, $F(1,184)$=14.398, $p<.01$
Perceived ease of use	R^2= .181, $F(1,184)$=40.570, $p<.01$
Interaction	R^2= .073, $F(1,184)$=14.425, $p<.01$
Active participation.	R^2= .331, $F(1,184)$=91.137, $p<.01$

VII. FINDINGS

The main aim of this study was to analyse the antecedents of co creation . The research model had contemplated six antecedents of co-creation : involvement as an exponent of individual characteristics that affect customer processes, and two variables that are specific of the online context – perceived ease-of-use of the online co-creation platform and e-WOM quality – that refer to the supplier's value-creating processes and to additional sources of value co-creation, respectively., the consumer related antecedents being interaction, active participation and sharing. Taking into consideration the above mentioned antecedents of co creation, it was found that involvement in planning and designing the whole trip had a significant impact on value co creation. Involvement in planning explains 21.8% variation in co creation. Other antecedents that explain major variation in co creation are sharing (explaining 25.1% variation in co creation), active participation by the consumer in deciding the intricacies of the trip was also significant(explain 33.1% variation in co creation). There were three antecedents where the impact was significant but they were not explaining much variation in co creation. Electronic word of mouth (explaining hardly 7.3% variation in co creation) , perceived ease of use (explain only 18.1% variation in co creation), interaction between tourist and tourism service provider.(could only explain7.3% variation in co creation) The structural model specifying the direction of the relationship among the variables gave a reasonable fit of the model. However when the regression coefficients are to be considered, electronic word of mouth and interaction among tourist and tourism service providers were not able to explain the variation in co creation and hence hypothesis 3 and hypothesis 4 are not contributing to the robustness of the model.

The relationships between "active participation of the tourist during the experience" and "interaction between the tourist and tourism service providers", between "active participation of the tourist during the experience" and "sharing the tourism experience with others during the trip", and between "interaction between the tourist and the tourism service providers" and "sharing the tourism experience with others during the trip". These relationships were not hypothesized in the proposed model but arose to obtain a more adequate model. This is an important finding because it highlights that the three antecedents are strictly related to each other and that they collectively influence co-creation in tourism The respondents surveyed mobile applications to design their holiday package and get the best deal. The mobile applications used by most of the respondents were make my trip, Goibibo, trip advisor, tripito, bookings.com.

7. Implications

This study has relevant implications for firms that are interested in developing and managing online co-creation activities with customers. The results also provide managers some hints on how to stimulate co-creation behaviours. First of all, they should design a user-friendly cocreation platform as perceived ease-of-use is explicating online co-creation to a high degree; then, they should communicate how easy it is to perform co-creation online as a low perceived ease-of-use is a barrier that may be related to poor design or a lack of customer familiarity with the online co-creation task. The active participation of tourists is the main antecedent of co-creation in tourism. The degree of co-creation has improved due to tourists' decision to challenge their skills and abilities during travel, adoption of a hands-on approach, and active involvement in the activities provided by the destination. The mobile applications surveyed by the respondents were not necessarily used to make payments, as 71 respondents(38%) did not buy the package online but got the package designed. So the marketers can use this information to persuade consumers to make online payments as well.

VIII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION.

Although this study offers considerable insights into co-creation in a tourism service context, it entails a few limitations that should be acknowledged. The research was purposely limited to the travel and tourism sector as this is one of the leading sector that uses digital communication channels and, thus, is also a good exponent of online co-creation. Notwithstanding, future research could explore additional sectors to increase the validity of the results. This study was conducted with data only from a similar type of population that is the young travellers. This study can be taken forward to compare the results among different age groups to comprehend as to which age group is more

inclined towards co-creation. This current model was designed to be parsimonious, to create a core theoretical foundation that can be easily operationalised in various value co-creation contexts. Further research could construct more complex models in order to explain the complex relationships leading to the co-creation and assessment of value in hospitality.

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