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Experiential value co-creation: what's the significance of the co-created value to providers?

F. O. Awuor¹, P. O. Hayombe², M. A. Ayieko³, S. G. Agong⁴

ABSTRACT

This study aimed at exploring the value providers derive from experiential value co-creation according to the sixth fundamental principle of the Service Dominant Logic. We use kayaking tour guides as cases and use data collected by means of questionnaires and in-depth interviews via content analysis approach. The result indicate that that tour guides co-consume the fun co-created with tourists and derive job satisfaction from experiential value co-creation.

Keywords: Experiential co-creation, job satisfaction, service dominant logic, value co-consumption.

JEL Codes: D46, L80, L83, L84.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The sixth fundamental principle (6FP) of the service dominant (S-D) logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) postulates that every participant in experiential value co-creation creates value for oneself and others. These participants in commercial tourism contexts are usually tourists and providers. Studies have shown that the value for tourists in value co-creation is extraordinary value (Arnould & Price, 1993). Tourists seek experiences that are different from their daily life (Hanefors, & Mossberg, 2003). They seek challenging activities from which they can have fun. However, what is the value for the other participant – the tour guide, - if the 6FP holds true? Do they also experience extraordinary value? Or is it just ordinary

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experiential value? At what point in the value co-creation process do they realize it, if they do at all? Of what benefit is this value to them? Additionally, what factors affect this value creation process? Whereas tourists get extraordinary experiences, what value is in the activity for providers' remains to be fully studied. The purpose of this study therefore is to explore the value tour guides derive from experiential value co-creation and what factors affect that process. This was achieved by answering the following research questions:

1. What value do tour guides derive from experiential value co-creation?
2. When do they realize this value?
3. What factors affect this value co-creation process?
4. How do they cope with the value co-creation process?

The researchers anticipated that the results would indicate that tour guides co-consume the experiential fun which would contribute to their job satisfaction. Consequently, this study is guided by the S-D logic by Vargo & Lusch, (2004) where co-creation is hinged and the goal-setting theory of motivation (Locke & Latham, 2002). Of interest to this study is the 6FP of the S-D logic which states that: "The customer is always a co-creator of value" (Vargo & Lusch, 2008:7). This has the implication that the provider is also co-creating value with the client. The goal-setting theory of motivation states that employees are able to perform well at assigned tasks if they have specific and hard goals to achieve.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 is a review of literature on the subject followed by the methodology in section 3. Section 4 gives the results and discussions and finally section 5 is the conclusions and recommendations.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.01 THE NATURE OF EXPERIENTIAL VALUE CO-CREATION

Value co-creation is the coming together of two parties to jointly create value. The tourist interacts with the provider and his facilities in order to create value. By its very definition, the value involved is experiential value or alternatively value-in-use (Gronroos, & Voima, 2011). Value co-creation is different from sole value creation for in the latter, the tourist does not interact with the provider in order to create experiential value (Prebensen & Foss, 2011). In sole value creation, the tourist interacts with the provider's resources or consumes purchased products to create value for oneself (Vargo, Maglio, & Akaka's, 2008). Another difference is that in value co-creation, the tourist also brings resources (in terms of time and involvement- physical, mental and emotional) for value co-creation. Thus experiential value co-creation in tourism is characterized by: 1) A physical, mental and emotional interaction between the provider and the tourist, 2) the provider and the tourist must pool resources together and 3) the value co-created must be value-in-use (Gronroos, & Voima, 2011; Prebensen, Woo, Chen & Uysal, 2012).

Since experiential value is emotional, physiological and psychological, thus subjective, no tourism entrepreneur can offer it for sale. All that the entrepreneur does is to provide the prerequisites for its co-creation. These conditions include elements of challenge and risk in an activity that will engage the tourist emotionally and challenge him/her mentally. The provider then hopes that the tourist will perceive some potential value in the set of conditions (context and content) offered to him/her. The context is the experience scape or the physical place where the co-creation activity is to take place (Karababa & Kjeldgaard, 2013; Mossberg, 2007). It must be unique and attractive to the tourist. The content refers to the set of stimuli that the tourist is to respond to (Poulsson, 2013). The perception of value in the context and content will draw the tourist to get involved in the activity inviting the partnership of the provider for value creation.

The provision of the prerequisites does not guarantee that the tourist will find in them a potential for experiential value. The prerequisite conditions must first be evaluated in the mind of the tourist to see if they have potential value. Some of the factors that come to play in this evaluation are mood, personal image, possessed skills and abilities, past experiences, individual personalities and the level of risk

involved (Poulsson, 2013). These factors are stored in the mind and vary from person to person. The intangible gauze through which these prerequisites are sieved to judge whether they pose some value is referred to as the “subjective membrane” by Poulsson, (2013).

2.02 THE TOURIST: FOCUS OF MOST EXPERIENTIAL VALUE CO-CREATION STUDIES

Most studies in experiential value co-creation have focused on tourists probably because they bring in the money. Investigations have focused on how they create value and what factors affect the co-creation process. For instance, Prebensen & Foss, (2011) have researched on how tourists cope with challenges during co-creation; Prebensen, Woo, Chen & Uysal, (2012) have identified motivation and involvement as antecedents for experiential value co-creation by tourists; Prebensen, Vittersø and Dahl (2013) have investigated the importance of tourist resources; Yi and Gong (2013) have investigated customer value co-creation behaviour; Poulsson, (2013) has investigated what constitutes content and context as antecedents of experiential value co-creation while Heidenreich, Wittkowski, Handrich, and Falk, (2014) have studied the consequences of failed customer co-creation episodes. Studies on the other participant – the tour guide- have mostly dwelt on their roles (Howard, Thwaites, & Smith, 2001; Black, & Ham, 2005). Not many have had experiential value co-creation as their main interest. This remains scarcely explored creating a need for this study. This study fulfils this gap.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.01 STUDY AREA

This study took place at Dunga beach in Kisumu County of Kenya. The organization of interest was Dunga Ecotourism and Environmental Youth Group (DECTA), which was started in 2003. It is a local youth initiative whose objective is to economically empower the youths through ecotourism while protecting their delicate environment. The beach is located at 01°10’S, 34°47’E and is about 1,130 m a.s.l. (BirdLife International (BLI), 2014).

The beach is an important bird area (BLI, 2014) attracting many bird watchers and students from primary, secondary and tertiary learning institutions in the region. The lake and its biodiversity are the major attractions at the site, besides the rich culture of the Luo natives and surrounding tribes. The group receives between 500 - 1000 visitors on a weekly basis, a majority of whom are students.

Dunga beach is closely connected with other touristic attractions in and near Kisumu city. Such include Impala wildlife sanctuary, Kisumu branch of the National Museums of Kenya, and Ndere Island in Lake Victoria. Others include Kogelo, the ancestral homeland to the current U.S.A president Barack H. Obama, Kakamega forest, Mumias cultural Centre and Riat hills from where one can have a sweeping view of Kisumu city and the airport. The beach is also Kisumu city’s major fish landing site and market.

3.02 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data was collected through structured questionnaires combined with in-depth interviews. The interviews gave room to probe for more details on issues and to give explanations on concepts unclear to the interviewees. Notes of the interviews were taken and used in content analysis (Holsti, 1969). The questionnaires enabled a systematic collection and recording of data. Questions related to their experiences and objectives during kayaking, when they realized their value, of what benefit the value is to them, what factors affected their value co-creation and how they coped with them.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Six kayaking tour guides were interviewed from DECTA. This comprised all the kayaking guides in the organization. The results and discussions on the research questions are appropriately combined and discussed as follows.

4.01 ON THE VALUE DERIVED FROM CO-CREATION AND ITS BENEFITS

The benefits providers derive from experiential value co-creation are summarized in table 1. The results indicate that the interviewed guides experienced fun during their first kayaking. This is further corroborated by the fact that they could discern the difference in the intensity of the fun when compared with subsequent co-creation episodes. The evidence is further strengthened by the fact that the guides could sometimes not enjoy their kayaking experiences. The refutation by all that they have never experienced fun during kayaking confirms that providers do co-create value for themselves during experiential value co-creation. One guide responded:

"Kayaking is a total fun to me." Tour guide 6

		SD	D	N	A	SA
		Percentages (%)*				
1	How would you describe your kayaking experience?					
	My first experience was extraordinary. I experienced fun					100
	My subsequent experiences are increasingly extraordinary. The intensity of fun has generally been increasing.					100
	Some of my subsequent experiences are extraordinary. Sometimes I have fun, sometimes I don't.		50			50
	My subsequent experiences are ordinary. I no longer experience fun.	100				
	My subsequent experiences are ordinary. I have ordinary fun.					100
	I do not experience fun during kayaking. I have never experienced fun.	100				
	My fun has increasingly reduced over the years	67	33			
2	At what point during kayaking do you usually experience fun?	SD	D	N	A	SA
	I usually experience fun when I see my clients enjoy					100
	I usually experience fun at the end of kayaking					100
	I usually experience fun just before my clients do have theirs	100				
	I usually get fun irrespective of whether my clients do enjoy	100				
3	Which of these best describe your objective(s) when you take tourists to kayak?	SD	D	N	A	SA
	My objectives is usually to help tourist have fun and to have fun with them					100
	My objective is usually never to have fun with tourists but to help them have fun	100				
4	What in your opinion is/are the benefit(s) of the fun you enjoy during kayaking?	SD	D	N	A	SA
	The fun makes me satisfied with the job					100
	The fun does not affect my satisfaction with my job in anyway	100				
	Any other. Specify: None					

Key: SD = strongly disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neither, A = Agree and SA = Strongly Agree. *N=6, Percentages represent the number of guides who responded with the given answer.

These evidences support the 6FP of the S-D logic (Vargo, et al., 2008) that all participants in experiential value co-creation create value for themselves and other participants. Gronroos and Voima (2013) in attempting a theoretical explanation of the co-creation process expound that since the tourist's and the guide's value co-creation spheres interact, coupled with the fact that they are exposed to the same stimuli, it is inevitable that both parties will create value. This study's empirical evidence supports this theoretical explanation.

Since value is only recognized when it is consumed and with the additional fact that experiential value cannot be stored for later consumption (Gronroos & Voima, 2013); it follows that co-created experiential value is jointly consumed or co-consumed. The actual benefit rather than the fact of consumption is what may differ between participants because “value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary” (Vargo, et al., 2008:148). Consequently, studies show that if tourists have value, they often determine it as extraordinary or memorable (Arnould & Price, 1993). The findings of this study indicate that if guides experience fun, it may be extraordinary or just ordinary fun. Not every kayaking episode heightens to an extraordinary experience. It is here advanced that tourists who repeat the consumption of an experience may also have ordinary fun. This may be attributed to experience satiation (Alba & Williams, 2013).

On the benefit of the fun they enjoyed in kayaking, all guides said that it made them satisfied with their kayaking jobs. None could think of more reasons even though they were invited to do so. Since kayaking can be a vigorous activity, participants may come to also enjoy physical fitness (Bammel & Burres—Bammel, 1992; Dube & LeBel, 2003). However, job satisfaction is unique to the guide. This is the other value providers derive from the co-creation process.

4.02 WHEN GUIDES REALIZE THEIR VALUE

At what point in the process then do guides realize their extraordinary and ordinary fun? Results indicate that providers create their value when they see their clients have fun and at the end of the co-creation process when they have successfully completed their work. They create their value after their clients have created theirs. Two guides remarked:

“I cannot have fun when my client is not having fun.” Tour guide 1

“During kayaking, the happiness of the tourist is what gives me happiness.” Tour guide 4

These remarks are in consonance with their objective to help the clients have fun and to have fun with them. They are in concert with the goal-setting theory of motivation (Locke & Latham, 2002). Guides as they engage in a value co-creation process give themselves a goal to satisfy the tourist. The achievement of this goal motivates them to perform. They bear in mind that it is the task they have been hired to do. One guide responded:

“The tourist paid money to have fun. I therefore must work hard to make him have fun.” Tour guide 5

When they see their goal being realized, they are delighted. The realization of providers’ experiential value after that of the tourist helps keep things in perspective. Even though all participants are to create value for themselves and others, tour guides’ value co-creation is subject to that of tourists’. In spite of the fact that experiential value co-creation removes the distinction between the producer and the consumer that which exists between the seller and the buyer remains (Poulsso, 2014; Vargo, et al., 2008).

4.03 ON FACTORS AFFECTING PROVIDER VALUE CO-CREATION AND THEIR COPING MECHANISMS

Results on factors affecting provider value co-creation are summarized in table 2. Of these factors, skills ranked first, followed by customer cooperation, prevailing weather (wind and rain), condition of kayaking gear, language barrier and lastly mood. From this ranking it is evident that factors directly linked to guides (guide factors) came first followed by those linked to tourists (tourist factors), then to weather (environmental factors) and lastly kayaking gear (equipment factors). Guides are expected to be skilful in their tasks. Their performance at these tasks largely determines tourists’ satisfaction with the activity. In kayaking, the satisfaction of customers in turn impacts on the value realization of the guides thus on their job satisfaction. Competence is known to impact on Job satisfaction (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca,

& Malone, 2006; Ko, 2012). Knowledge of a foreign language was less important because most kayaking tourists who visit DECTA speak English. On the question of mood, one guide was of the opinion that it shouldn't be mentioned among guides. He posited:

"Moodiness in kayaking should not even come about. You leave it behind when you go kayaking with the tourist. Otherwise you will spoil the activity for him." Tour guide 6

Table 2: Results on the factors affecting provider's value co-creation and coping mechanisms

		SD	D	N	A	SA	
1	Factors affecting tour guide experiential value co-creation	Percentages (%)*					
	My skills affect my enjoyment of kayaking with tourists					100	
	Customer cooperation affects my enjoyment of kayaking		33			67	
	The prevailing weather affects my enjoyment of kayaking with tourists					100	
	My mood determines whether I will enjoy kayaking with tourists			17		83	
	The working condition of equipment affects my kayaking enjoyment with tourists					100	
	Language barrier negatively affects my kayaking experience with my clients			17		83	
2	How would you rank the importance of the factors that affect your kayaking experience?	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th
	My skill	√					
	Tourist cooperation		√				
	Prevailing weather			√			
	My mood						√
	Condition of gear/equipment				√		
	Language barrier					√	
3	How to you cope up with these obstacles?	Explanation of coping strategy					
	My skill	Competitions, learning from tourists, training					
	Tourist cooperation	Persuasion, lightening of effort, shortening kayaking time,					
	Prevailing weather	Go early before weather becomes bad, abort activity					
	My mood	Leave it behind, try not to be offended,					
	Condition of gear/equipment	Buy new ones, repair					
	Language barrier	Learn the necessary language, use sign language					
Key: SD = strongly disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neither, A = Agree and SA = Strongly Agree. *N=6, Percentages represent the number of guides who responded with the given answer.							

Moodiness has been identified to negatively affect experiential value co-creation (Eladhari, 2012; McColl-Kennedy, & Tombs, 2011). Consequently, guides ought to be always cheerful in order to orchestrate value for themselves and tourists.

Tourist's cooperation came second in affecting provider's value co-creation. If all participants' value co-creation spheres interact with each other, it follows therefore that they inevitably impact on each other (Gronroos & Voima, 2013). Prebensen et al., (2013) note the importance of ensuring full customer participation as an antecedent for experiential value co-creation.

Prevailing weather (wind and rain) ranked third. This is probably because kayaking is often planned to avoid bad weather. Consequently, its impact is less felt. Otherwise, bad weather has been known to impact negatively on tourism activities if they pose tremendous risk to life (Dolnicar, 2005; Tang, & Jang, 2010). Condition of kayaking gear was the last in ranking. This can be attributed to the deliberate measures by the guides to safeguard their lives and those of their clients and to lighten their work. Good condition gear is easy to work with.

DECTA guides coped with the challenges posed by the above factors in various ways. Kayaking skills were sharpened by organizing competitions with other guides and interested locals, inexperienced guides working closely with experienced ones and occasionally learning from experienced clients during co-creation. Experienced guides training less experienced ones has been recommended by Prakash and Chowdhary (2010) as a means of improving guide competence. Uncooperative clients were encouraged to cooperate by lightening effort for them or shortening the duration of the activity. Bad weather was similarly managed by shortening the activity or aborting it all together. Worn out or faulty gear were repaired or replaced.

Law, Pearce and Woods (1995) have suggested that it is important that tourism employees learn coping strategies to the stressors at their works places. This will improve their task performance and job satisfaction. With improved task performance, they will be better placed to orchestrate high quality value-in-use, which is of consequence with tourists (Gronroos, 2008). High quality value-in-use will improve their business, thus revenue, with the likelihood of improving their living standards. Thus the value of coping strategies cannot be underestimated by providers.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the empirical evidence in this study supports the 6FP of the S-D logic that all participants in value co-creation create value for themselves and others. The values for providers in co-creation are extraordinary and ordinary fun, physical fitness and job satisfaction. While fun may be regarded as a personal benefit to the tour guide, his/her physical fitness, job satisfaction and co-creation coping strategies may be of financial benefit to the firm. Since physical fitness can be regarded as a co-creation coping mechanism, and that job satisfaction is also impacted upon the same; it is recommended that providers lay emphasis on coping strategies. This can be achieved by 1) deliberate identification of solutions to challenges associated with guide roles in value co-creation, 2) on job training of less experienced co-creation guides by experienced ones, and 3) creation of platforms where guides can freely share their co-creation experiences thereby passing on their tacit knowledge to others.

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