The context of experience

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the social and cultural aspects of the context that frames service exchange to better understand how value and experience are evaluated.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors apply a conceptual approach to develop and propose a framework for deepening the understanding of the context of market-related experiences. The authors integrate two growing streams of research – consumer culture theory and service-dominant logic – that focus on phenomenological and experiential views on value and extend the context of experience with a culturally rich, service-ecosystems view of markets.

Findings – The authors broaden the context of experience by applying a service-ecosystems perspective and identify four social and cultural factors that influence experience from this extended context – sign systems and service ecosystems; multiplicity of structure and institutions; value-in-cultural-context; and co-construction of context. Based on this, the authors point toward directions for future research.

Research limitations/implications – The proposed framework points researchers and managers toward an extended context that is reproduced through the co-creation of value and influences evaluations of experience. Empirical research is needed to provide evidence of the proposed framework and further extend the understanding of dynamic social and cultural contexts.

Practical implications – The findings of this study provide a broader scope of context and identify additional social and cultural factors for managers to consider in their efforts to enhance customer experiences.

Originality/value – Traditional views of markets limit the context of experience to firm-customer encounters or consumer-centric practices and processes. This paper extends the context of experience to consider the practices and perspectives of multiple actors and various views on value.

Keywords Experience, Consumer culture theory, Service-dominant logic, Value co-creation, Value-in-context

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

Increasingly, managers seek to enhance customer experiences by better understanding how value is created and realized through markets. This emphasis on market-related experience is a central focus in an emerging body of literature regarding collaboration in value creation – that is, value co-creation (e.g. Helkkula *et al.*, 2012; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Ramirez, 1999; Schau *et al.*, 2009; Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Vargo *et al.*, 2008). Although the study of experience has generally focussed on "consumer"[1] evaluations of market offerings (see e.g. Holbrook, 1999), the notion of value co-creation suggests that the evaluation of experience is dependent on varying views and collective forms of value (Penaloza and Mish, 2011), past and anticipated interactions (Helkkula *et al.*, 2012), and broader social contexts through which value is derived (Chandler and Vargo, 2011; Edvardsson *et al.*, 2011; Vargo *et al.*, 2008). Thus, the consideration of

dynamic interactions and the nature of the context of value creation (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011) are dominant concerns for those wanting to better understand and enhance market-related experiences.

To gain deeper insights into the context of market experiences, we integrate two growing streams of research that focus on collaboratively created value – consumer culture theory (CCT) (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) and service-dominant (S-D) logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008) – explicitly shedding light on the experiential aspects of value and the dynamic contexts through which it is created. Importantly, CCT and S-D logic have been recognized as "natural allies" (Arnould, 2007) for studying value co-creation, based on complementary views on resources (Arnould *et al.*, 2006) and value (Penaloza and Mish, 2011). In particular, CCT research provides a perspective of markets that emphasizes the cultural richness of the context that frames experience. On the other hand, S-D logic focusses on the integration and application of a variety (both tangible and intangible) of resources within dynamic networks of actors, which underscores the social or relational nature of context (e.g. Chandler and Vargo, 2011; Edvardsson *et al.*, 2011). Recently, Vargo and Lusch (2011) introduced a service ecosystems perspective to elaborate social aspects of context and the importance of institutions in value co-creation. This dynamic approach aligns with the cultural view of CCT, but is grounded in S-D logic.

A service ecosystem is defined as a "relatively self-contained self-adjusting system of resource integrating actors connected by shared institutional logics and mutual value creation through service exchange" (Lusch and Vargo, 2014, p. 24). This approach highlights the role of institutions in markets and provides insight to how they influence the enactment of practices (Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2006; Schau *et al.*, 2009; Warde, 2005) in value co-creation. The consideration of service ecosystems provides a framework for further weaving together CCT and S-D logic. The integration of these research streams emphasizes the recursive relationship between interaction and value co-creation and provides added insight to the context through which experience is evaluated, and reevaluated, and value is derived (Akaka *et al.*, 2013). Importantly, this view draws attention toward different components of social and cultural context as a "dynamic conceptual map" (Arnould and Thompson, 2007) by shedding light on how higher levels of value (Penaloza and Mish, 2011) and context (Chandler and Vargo, 2011) – relational (e.g. norms) and collective (e.g. symbolic meanings) – influence the evaluation of experience and, ultimately, the determination of value.

This paper begins with a discussion of the co-creation of experience by highlighting cultural and social perspectives of value and value co-creation that are grounded in CCT and S-D logic, respectively. We also elaborate a service ecosystems approach, which helps to further integrate CCT and S-D logic. Based on this, we extend the context of experience to include sign systems and service ecosystems, multiplicity of structures and institutions, value-in-cultural-context and co-construction of context. We highlight directions for future research that can help to further investigate an extended context of experience and the processes by which social and cultural contexts (re)form through the enactment of practices and interaction (e.g. exchange) among multiple actors. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the implications, as well as limitations, of this current research.

The co-creation of experience
The discussion of jointly created value was reviewed by Ramirez (1999) and advanced by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2002, 2004) to emphasize the experiential nature of value and customers' roles in the creation of market-related experiences. Prahalad and

Ramaswamy (2002) argue, "In a market forum, consumers define value as experiences and push companies to see value the same way" (p. 5). The authors make an important shift from conceptualizing value as created by the firm, to the co-creation of experiences through the interaction between firms and customers, which are largely driven by customer needs and competences. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004, p. 7) further argue, "High-quality interactions that enable an individual customer to co-create unique experiences with the company are the key to unlocking new sources of competitive advantage." Thus, the co-creation of experience is a central source of value creation for both customers and firms.

In this view, value is co-created through the interaction between a firm and a customer and determined through the positive evaluation of an experience at a particular moment, or during a specific exchange encounter. In general, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) take a normative approach to exploring value co-creation by focussing on how firms can leverage the participation of a customer in a particular market-related experience. However, recent research suggests that experiences may be momentary, but also might be extended due to repeat use or interaction with a market offering or exchange partner (Helkkula et al., 2012). In addition, not every evaluation of an experience is positive, and thus, negative experiences might lead to negative value creation. Because of this, phenomenological views on value and the context of experience are critical components of value co-creation and, thus, need to be further explored (Helkkula et al., 2012). The following sections provide an overview on two emerging and evolving streams of research – CCT and S-D logic – that are dedicated to understanding experiential and phenomenological views on value and the social and cultural contexts through which value is continually created and experiences are (re)evaluated.

CCT
A growing body of literature draws attention toward cultural influences in markets and collaboratively created value and experiences, largely under the umbrella of "consumption." Arnould and Thompson (2005) label the research dedicated to studying cultural aspects of consumption "CCT". This area of research moves the study of market-related experiences beyond specific firm-customer encounters by extending the temporal and social scope of experience and situating it within a cultural frame. Importantly, CCT research conceptualizes culture as "the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader sociohistoric frame of globalization and market capitalism" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 869).

In this way, CCT research suggests that cultures are not pre-existing or static. Rather, within CCT, cultures are composed of heterogeneous meanings and multiple viewpoints, and are largely overlapping and continually evolving. Arnould and Thompson (2005) introduced the CCT perspective by recognizing an increasing amount of research dedicated to four major aspects of culture that contribute to the co-creation of experiences and are mediated through market interactions: symbolic and material resources, social resources, consumer ideologies, and lived culture. These cultural aspects of markets are based on an extensive collection of research that cuts across a "family" of theoretical perspectives (Arnould and Thompson, 2007), which center on understanding how signs and symbols (Venkatesh et al., 2006), structures (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) and practices (Schau et al., 2009) influence consumption. These interrelated streams of CCT research (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, 2007) underscore

the way in which consumers integrate various resources in creating value for themselves and for others and are discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

One of the primary aspects of culture that contributes to the evaluation of experience relates to how "the marketplace has become a preeminent source of mythic and *symbolic resources* through which people, including those who lack resources, participate in the market as full-fledged consumers, construct narratives of identity" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 871, emphasis added). Extending this view of symbolic resources, and emphasizing the importance of meanings in markets, Venkatesh *et al.* (2006) argue for the consideration of the market as a sign system. In this view, "signs of all types are conceived and exchanged in markets and each (type of) market is itself a category constructed in the context of a particular sign system" (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2006, p. 258). However, it is not the signs themselves that are most important in markets, but the meanings and values associated with them. Along these lines, Holt (2004, p. 36) emphasizes the symbolic nature of brands by suggesting that "a brand's value resides in the specifics of the brand's cultural expression: the particular cultural contents of the brand's myth and the particular expression of these contents in the communication."

Another, related component of experience explored through CCT research includes "social resources" or "the institutional and social structures that systematically influence consumption" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 874). This research points toward the importance of structures such as "class, community, ethnicity and gender" and suggests that consumer practices are driven by the social roles and positions they hold within a particular group or in a specific exchange encounter. In addition, Holbrook (1999) argues that evaluations of consumer experiences are influenced by social standards, rules, criteria, norms or ideals. In this way, social norms and standards (i.e. social structures) associated with particular groups of people drive interaction (e.g. Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) as well as consumption decisions (e.g. Ward and Reingen, 1990).

Arnould and Thompson (2005, p. 874) also recognize "consumer ideology" as a critical component of consumer culture that influences experience through "systems of meaning that tend to channel and reproduce consumers' thoughts and actions." This cultural aspect of context underscores the importance of mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and the interpretive strategies that individuals use to derive meanings from markets. The emphasis on the co-creation of experiences and varying interpretations of value underscores the heterogeneous nature of value in markets because, although some consumers adapt the meanings firms propose, many interpret their own meanings and "deviate" from the "idealized" messages firms communicate. This is especially evident in the research regarding meanings that were unintended by firms including oppositional characteristics of consumer groups, such as those dedicated to an abandoned brand (Muniz and Schau, 2005); hedonic, savage or leisure activities (Canniford and Shankar, 2007); and anti-market or corporate sentiments (Kozinets, 2002; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007).

Finally, CCT research focusses on how experiences are influenced by "lived culture" or consumption practices that "reconfigure cultural blueprints for action and interpretation, and vice versa" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 873). This research stream centers on the way individuals continually (re)create lived experiences through the enactment of practices related to market exchange (Schau *et al.*, 2009; Warde, 2005). A number of studies emphasize this experiential nature of markets and the social structures that form as individual actors bond through common experiences, shared

norms and collective meanings (e.g. Cova *et al.*, 2007). These groups have been recognized, among other things, as "consumer tribes" (Cova *et al.*, 2007), "subcultures of consumption" (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), and "brand communities" (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). In general, they are identified as "a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of shared commitment to a particular product class, brand or consumption activity" (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995, p. 43).

It is clear that CCT research provides a richer and deeper view of context and collaboration in value creation, beyond specific firm-customer encounters. This field of study considers multiple aspects of culture and views of value as important factors in the co-creation and evaluation of experience. However, much of this research concentrates on the study of the practices and perceptions of "consumers" and pays less attention toward the participation and perspectives of firms and other actors in co-creating and evaluating cultural experiences. Arnould (2007) discusses a conceptual overlap between CCT and an evolving view of markets and marketing – S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008) – that may help to move a focus on consumers toward a "postconsumer" view. He indicates that a service-centered approach to value creation helps researchers to "stop thinking of consumers as passive reactors and instead think of them as proactive partners and cocreative acts" (Arnould, 2007, p. 66). S-D logic and its alternative approach to value and value co-creation are discussed below.

S-D logic
The development of S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008) has drawn on Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2002, 2004) work regarding value co-creation. However, S-D logic extends the concept of "co-creation" by shifting attention away from a normative view of how firms should engage in value co-creation with customers, toward a positive approach to exploring how value co-creation occurs within systems of service exchange. In general, S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008) provides a network-oriented view (Akaka *et al.*, 2012) on value co-creation in markets by considering service – the application of knowledge and skills for the benefit of another – as the basis of exchange, and by focussing on a phenomenological, or experiential, view of value. This view further blurs the distinction between "producers" and "consumers" in value creation, beyond a firm-customer encounter, by emphasizing the complexity of exchange relationships and an actor (e.g. stakeholder oriented) view of market interaction and value co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2011).

Importantly, S-D logic considers all social and economic actors (e.g. customers, firms and other actors) as resource integrators, and as both service providers and service beneficiaries. Furthermore, Vargo and Lusch (2004) argue for the primacy of operant resources – those that are capable of acting on other resources to create value (e.g. knowledge, skills, competencies) – over operand resources – those that are acted upon for value to be created (e.g. money, goods, etc.) – in markets. Recently, Vargo and Lusch (2011) elaborated the social aspects of resource integration and value co-creation by introducing a service-ecosystems view, which emphasizes the influence of institutions and institutional logics (i.e. social structures) within and among complex systems of value co-creation and service exchange. This view considers the participation and perspectives of multiple stakeholders in value creation (Akaka and Chandler, 2011; Vargo and Lusch, 2011) by focussing on: the integration and exchange of resources in dynamic ecosystems, institutions and institutional logics, phenomenological and contextual views on value, and multiple levels of interaction in value co-creation.

The emphasis on value co-creation within and across networks and service ecosystems (Akaka *et al.*, 2012) is based on the idea that these reoccurring interactions are primarily driven by interdependence among actors and service-for-service exchange. In this view, those who provide service (e.g. firms) cannot create value on their own; rather they propose value and service beneficiaries (e.g. customers or other actors) realize value through the evaluation of experience including the integration and application of a particular resource, or a firm's value proposition. Importantly, S-D logic underscores the importance of operant (dynamic and influential) resources, such as competences, in value creation, but also suggests that value creation is also mediated by operand (static) resources, such as goods and money. It is also important to note that whether or not a resource is considered valuable is based on shared institutions, or social structures that not only influence the evaluation of experience, but also guide actions and interactions (e.g. value co-creation) among actors (Vargo and Lusch, 2011).

Based on this dynamic perspective, an S-D logic approach to value co-creation suggests that all parties of exchange, and their extended networks, are part of the value creation process because each actor evaluates experience, and subsequently determines the value of experience, in its own social context (Vargo *et al.*, 2008). This multifaceted view on value has led to recent discussions of how markets are embedded within "value networks" (Akaka and Chandler 2011; Lusch *et al.*, 2010) and "service ecosystems" (e.g. Vargo and Lusch, 2011) that are continually reproduced relationships and structures, driven by ongoing efforts to integrate resources and co-create value. Vargo (2009, p. 376) draws on new institutional economics and economic sociology to describe the nature of relationships in service ecosystems and suggests that exchange transactions are actually bounded relationships within "larger institutional structures set up for mutual value creation." That is, a particular exchange takes place in the context of numerous other relationships, interactions and institutions, or "rules of the game" (Williamson, 2002), which influence and are influenced by a given exchange. Importantly, intersecting institutions or institutional logics (Thornton *et al.*, 2012) may converge or contradict, and, depending on the (mis) alignment of institutions, individual views on value, and experience, may vary.

This network-oriented view highlights one of the central premises of S-D logic: value is always co-created in markets because value is phenomenologically derived and determined by a service beneficiary (e.g. customer) through the use of a market offering (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008). This view on value differs from traditional economic measures of value. In particular, Vargo *et al.* (2008) discuss two measures of value that have been deliberated since the time of Aristotle – value-in-exchange and value-in-use. Whereas value-in-exchange represents the nominal amount for which something can be exchanged, value-in-use represents the value derived through integration and use, or application, of an available resource (Smith, 1776/2000). Vargo *et al.* (2008) point toward the need for conceptualizing "value-in-context," which they propose as an extension of value-in-use because it centers on value derived through use, but influenced by a particular context (e.g. time, place and social setting). In this way, value is always contextual because it is based on a phenomenological perspective and influenced by time, place and social surroundings, as well as other environmental factors, including access to other internal and external resources. Edvardsson *et al.* (2011, p. 334) extend this view of value-in-context and propose the consideration of "value-in-social-context," which "recognizes that an individual's value perceptions are, at least in part, dependent on the relative position of the individual within the wider social context."

In general, an S-D logic, service-ecosystems view provides a lens through which the routine practices of individual actors and their phenomenological views on value can be

studied in the context of intersecting and overlapping institutions, within and across systems of service-for-service exchange (Akaka *et al.*, 2013; Vargo and Lusch, 2011). This view on value co-creation enables researchers to consider multiple levels (micro, meso and macro) of interaction (Chandler and Vargo, 2011) and institutions simultaneously, as well as the interconnectedness of these levels, in any given context. Importantly, S-D logic's conceptualization of all social and economic "actors" as "resources integrators" views individuals (e.g. customers) in the same light as organizations (e.g. firms) and suggests that the actions and interactions (e.g. practices) of all actors continually contribute to the co-creation of value, as well as the context through which value is derived (Akaka *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, this view allows for the consideration of interaction across different levels (e.g. micro, meso and macro) of analysis (Vargo and Lusch, 2011) and evaluations of experience from multiple points of view. This ecosystems view on value co-creation underscores the networked nature of markets and the multitude of institutions that influence phenomenological and experiential views of value.

S-D logic's emphasis on interaction among multiple actors (Vargo and Lusch, 2011) broadens the scope of market-related experiences beyond the firm/customer dyad and consumer-centric views, to a multi-level network or constellation of value co-creation and articulates the dynamic ecosystems – systems of systems – through which value is collaboratively created (Lusch and Vargo, 2014). Research regarding S-D logic and its ecosystems view has discussed the social context of value (e.g. Akaka *et al.*, 2012; Chandler and Vargo, 2011; Edvardsson *et al.*, 2011) and the connection between reciprocal relationships and institutional structures (Vargo and Lusch, 2011). However, the current literature on S-D logic has only begun to explore the nature of these institutions or the cultural meanings that guide and are guided by value co-creation (see Akaka *et al.*, 2013). Thus, whereas S-D logic provides a framework for conceptualizing the way in which market-related experiences are co-created through the actions and interactions among multiple stakeholders or actors, CCT research offers a more in-depth understanding of cultural aspects of experience.

This view of dynamic social and cultural contexts underscores the complexity of ecosystems composed of symbols and service exchange, the influence and multiplicity of structures and institutions, as well as phenomenological views on value, and the co-construction of this extended context of experience. Applying a service-ecosystems view on culturally rich contexts helps to extend the scope of experience and points toward a need for developing an understanding of "value-in-cultural-context" (Akaka *et al.*, 2013). Table I highlights the central aspects of consumer culture that influence experience, as discussed by Arnould and Thompson (2005, 2007), and extends each component of culture with a more abstract S-D logic, service ecosystems view.

CCT	S-D logic	Extended context of experience
Symbolic and material resources	Integration of resources in service ecosystems	Sign systems and service ecosystems
Social resources	Institutions and institutional logics	Multiplicity of structure and institutions
Consumer ideologies	Phenomenological and contextual views on value	Value-in-cultural-context
Lived culture	Multiple levels of action and interaction in value co-creation	Co-construction of context

Table I.
Extended view of social and cultural context

This extended scope of cultural context emphasizes the social complexities of markets and points toward a richer and more dynamic context from which experiences emerge and are evaluated. This is elaborated in the discussion below.

Extending the context of experience

The intersection of CCT and S-D logic has the potential to provide deeper insights into the evaluation of experience, and co-creation of value, within complex social and cultural contexts (Akaka *et al.*, 2013). Although CCT research provides a rich and elaborate understanding about cultural aspects of markets, an S-D logic, service-ecosystems approach extends these cultural views with a multi-level view of context that emphasizes the embeddedness of various levels – micro, meso and macro – of value (Penaloza and Mish, 2011) and interaction (Chandler and Vargo, 2011). These actions and interactions include social practices and processes (i.e. institutions) among a variety of actors that contribute to the co-creation of value and co-construction of markets (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2011; Vargo and Lusch, 2011). Chandler and Vargo (2011) also articulate a meta-layer of analysis that enables researchers to consider relationships among micro-, meso- and macro-levels of interaction and how service ecosystems evolve and transform over time.

Notably, the recent discussion of service ecosystems (e.g. Vargo and Lusch, 2011) has begun to integrate and extend the work regarding cultural aspects of markets with service-centered exchange, by emphasizing the importance of institutions (Vargo and Lusch, 2011) and complexity of social and cultural contexts (e.g. Akaka *et al.*, 2013). Figure 1 illustrates multiple levels of interaction and embeddedness of networks and institutions in service ecosystems, which is continually co-constructed through the actions and interactions among multiple actors.

An ecosystems approach also broadens the scope of lived experiences, beyond those associated with consumption (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), to an actor-to-actor (A2A)
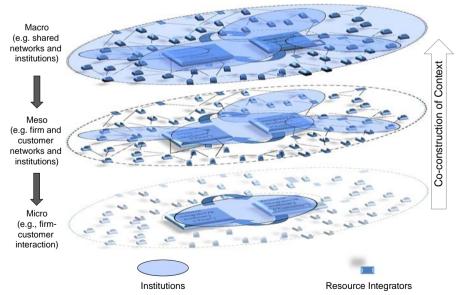
Macro
(e.g. shared
networks and
institutions)

Meso
(e.g. firm and
customer
networks and
institutions)

Micro
(e.g., firm-
customer
interaction)

Co-construction of Context

Institutions

Resource Integrators

Source: Adapted from Akaka *et al.* (2013)

Figure 1.
An extended context
of experience

view of markets (Vargo and Lusch, 2011). This extended view of context removes the producer/consumer distinction and sheds light on how value is co-created through the integration of resources in systems of symbols and service exchange. It also provides insight into how value is phenomenologically determined or evaluated by individual actors (i.e. resource integrators) in dynamic social and cultural contexts. This view allows researchers to conceptually oscillate among different levels of analysis within a particular ecosystem and investigate the multiplicity of institutions, phenomenological views of value-in-cultural-context, and the co-construction of context itself. The following sections more closely integrate components of culture, from CCT research, with a S-D logic, ecosystems perspective, to frame an extended view of context.

Sign systems and service ecosystems

Within CCT research, the cultural meanings that guide the interpretation of "signs and symbols" are also influenced by lived experiences (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) and value-creating practices (Schau *et al.*, 2009). In this view, symbolic meanings, experiences and practices are all embedded within "sign systems" (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2006). Venkatesh *et al.* (2006, p. 258) argue, "what is more important than skills and knowledge, or products and services, are the meanings and values underlying these two sets or levels of market symbols, which together constitute the micro elements of the life world." However, changes in meanings and resources suggest that understanding changes in symbols is equally as important as understanding their meanings within a particular cultural context.

Within the CCT literature, these shifts often occur through the interaction among customers and markets (Schouten *et al.*, 2007) and as marketers learn and adapt to customers' cultures (Penaloza and Gilly, 1999). In this way, just as consumers' interpretations of a firm's proposition change the meaning of a product or brand for consumers, the value proposition of a firm is susceptible to change through the interaction of firms with customers as well. Arnould, Price and Malshe (2006) integrate a CCT focus on signs and symbols with S-D logic's emphasis on the integration of operant (and operand) resources in systems of service exchange. The authors explore how consumers draw on various resources to create value for themselves and elaborate how the integration of resources and interpretations of symbolic meaning are central to applying cultural approaches to markets.

A service ecosystems view extends this approach to resources with a systems-oriented, A2A perspective. Importantly, this consideration of (eco)systems of service exchange emphasizes social aspects of value co-creation, such as the influence of dynamic networks of actors, as well as shared institutions and practices (Vargo and Akaka, 2012). For example, a customer's experience at a fine-dining restaurant depends not only on the quality of food and customer service provided by the firm, but also on the customer's past experiences and expectations of the quality of food and customer service. Furthermore, these expectations are influenced by a multitude of actors, including friends and family, as well as restaurant reviews, television shows, magazines, online ratings, etc. Because of this, researchers and managers can gain a better understanding of the context of experience by considering the perspectives of multiple actors (e.g. firms, customers, restaurant reviewers, restaurant associations, food television networks, etc.) within a service ecosystem related to any given fine-dining experience.

In essence, this service ecosystems approach suggests, "we must move toward a more macro, systemic view of *generic* actors in order to see more clearly how a single, specific actor (e.g. a firm) can participate more effectively" (Vargo and Lusch, 2011,

p. 182, emphasis added). In other words, rather than focussing on specific resources of firms or customers, this ecosystems view recognizes all actors as integrators and generators of infinite combinations of operant and operand resources. Thus, in order to better understand the experiences of individual consumers, which is at the heart of CCT research, a broader macro-level perspective is needed (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011). The following section elaborates this systemic approach to value creation by emphasizing the multiplicity of the social structures and institutions that influence and are influenced by the evaluations of experience.

Multiplicity of structures and institutions

Social structures have been recognized as a collection of "unifying consumption patterns that are governed by a unique ethos or set of common values" (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995, p. 48), which guide the co-creation of experiences in subcultures of consumption. This area of CCT research makes salient the influence of social structures in markets (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Although recent work points toward consumers as agents of structural change (e.g. Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013), most of the research in this field implies that social structures are pre-existing and that the roles and positions of particular actors in a given social system are somewhat fixed (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). This view suggests that firms have specific roles and positions in markets dedicated to "production," whereas consumers' roles and positions are focussed on "consumption" and that these roles and positions are distinct.

Similar to the emphasis on social structures in CCT research, Vargo and Lusch (2011) specify the importance of institutions in value co-creation. However, the authors provide a more dynamic view of social structure, by explicating a recursive relationship between actions and institutions. Here, institutions not only guide, but also are guided by the interaction among actors (cf. Giddens, 1984), as well as the determination of value or the evaluation of experience. S-D logic's view of value as phenomenologically determined by a service beneficiary (e.g. a customer, firm or country) suggests that value differs depending on the multiplicity of shared institutions and availability and accessibility of resources. In addition, the roles enacted by each actor are not fixed or static (Akaka and Chandler, 2011), as in traditional producer/consumer models. Rather, changes in roles, and related practices, influence evaluations of experience. As mentioned, this conceptualization of value co-creation emanates from and advances views of Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) who argue that value is created through a lived experience with a given offering.

Akaka *et al.* (2013) elaborate the complexity of context in value co-creation, from a service-ecosystems view, by articulating the way in which interactions and institutions are embedded within intersecting and overlapping institutions or social structures. In the fine-dining example, each customer's experience is also influenced by overarching social norms and symbols (i.e. institutions) that reflect a variety of perceptions and practices associated with eating in a fine-dining establishment. These institutions are shaped by the views of multiple actors, as discussed above, such as service providers, media (e.g. television and magazines), restaurant reviews, etc. In many cases these institutions are largely influenced by broad national or regional cultures and customs for formal dining. However, fine-dining etiquette is also influenced by more meso- or micro-level cultural contexts, such as dining at a beach resort restaurant verses a black-tie affair. Furthermore, in some fine-dining encounters the roles of service providers and beneficiaries change. For example, rather than customers ordering from a set menu, chefs will dictate the meals that patrons will be served.

Extending the context of experience beyond an individual customer's perceptions or firm actions, one can better consider the broader consumption perspectives and practices associated with eating in a fine-dining context, as well as the symbols of status, quality and luxury that might be associated with this type of experience. In this view, multiple structures (Sewell, 1992) or institutions converge and diverge as different actors enact practices and interact with other actors to integrate and exchange resources to create value.

Value-in-cultural-context

CCT research provides insight to the context of experience by moving beyond particular firm-customer encounters and exploring the lived culture that emerges through the interaction among consumers in particular market-related subcultures (e.g. Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Schau *et al.*, 2009; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). In this research, experiences evolve through changes in a person's role (Akaka and Chandler, 2011) in a particular subculture or through transitions in the subculture itself (Schouten *et al.*, 2007). In other words, value co-creation is not limited to one point in time, and evaluations of experience draw on past experience, present encounters and anticipated interactions (Helkkula *et al.*, 2012) with various actors. Widening the scope of value co-creation beyond individual "consumers," Schouten *et al.* (2007, p. 74) argue, "meaning is negotiated by all participants in subculture, whether from the consumer side or the marketing side."

This cultural context of experience is extended with a service-ecosystems view, in that all social and economic actors are resource integrators. This service-centered view points toward phenomenological perspectives of value among diverse actors and the evolutionary and ongoing nature of lived experiences. Based on this, Akaka *et al.* (2013) introduced the concept of value-in-cultural-context to emphasize cultural aspects of value (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) but also include a view of social context (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2011) that focusses on how the enactment of value-creating practices influences and is influenced by interaction and exchange. Ultimately, interactions among various actors influence the value determined by a particular actor at a given place and time. In this view, it is an evaluation of experience that determines whether or not value is created through the actions and interactions of individual actors. However, from an ecosystems view, at the same time experiences are evaluated, individual actors learn what works and what does not work (Lusch and Vargo, 2006) and repeat or discontinue particular actions or interactions depending on their individual views on value.

In the case of fine dining, customers learn how to dress, what to eat, and how to order, eat and converse in these specific contexts as they repeatedly interact with multiple firms and other actors. Although one might read about fine-dining etiquette in a book or magazine, until he or she engages in a particular encounter there will likely be some level of uncertainty as to what the proper behavior is in a particular context (e.g. which fork to use for the salad or how to order different courses of a meal). Based on this, we suggest that as individual actors interact with other actors (e.g. engage in exchange) to create value for themselves (and for others) they react to experiences, and subsequent actions contribute to the co-creation of social norms and collective meanings (Penaloza and Mish, 2011). In this way, the co-creation of value occurs through multiple levels (micro, meso and macro) of interaction (Chandler and Vargo, 2011), which all influence the determination of value or evaluation of experience.

Co-construction of context

Connecting the different components of consumer culture with the co-creation of value, Penaloza and Mish (2011) draw on Holbrook's (1999) distinction between "value"

(singular), the evaluation of an experience with a market offering, and "values" (plural), the social norms that influence and are influenced by the evaluation of a particular experience. The authors argue that value (singular) can be considered as a micro level of value because it is based on individual evaluations of experiences (Penaloza and Mish, 2011). They also identify values (plural) as a meso level of value that is based on social norms and how they influence and are influenced by micro-level experiences. In addition, the authors introduce a macro-level of value, which includes meanings or "cosmological principles" that contribute to the context through which value is created and experiences are evaluated. In their view, different levels of value are nested within each other and evaluations of experience (micro-level value) inevitably influence and are influenced by higher (meso and macro) levels of value(s).

The S-D logic view on phenomenological and contextual value (Vargo and Lusch, 2008) falls in line with the concept of value (singular), or evaluation of experience, as discussed by Penaloza and Mish (2011) and Holbrook (1999). However, in their recent discussion of service ecosystems, Vargo and Lusch (2011) elaborate their views on contextual value. The authors propose that value can be considered as an increase in the viability or wellbeing of a system. Thus, value can be both experiential and beneficial, but is always determined from the viewpoint of a particular referent (actor). What might be considered valuable to a particular actor, in a specific context, may not be considered valuable to a different actor or to the same actor in a different context.

In this way, it is the positive or negative evaluation of an experience, situated within a particular socio-historic context, that determines whether value is created or not. However, this evaluation is not limited to a temporary exchange encounter, and can be evaluated and reevaluated depending on increases or decreases in wellbeing of an individual or social system (e.g. society) over time. Here, the ongoing (re)evaluation of experience and learning that occurs through interaction and exchange contributes to the co-creation of value as well as the social and cultural context through which it is derived. In this view, as practices are enacted, actors draw on and contribute to the institutions (social structures) that influence the evaluation of experience, but also contribute to the viability or well-being of an actor or a system.

Importantly, value creation cannot occur in isolation. It requires the interaction (direct or indirect) of at least two, if not more, actors. Because of this, the context of value co-creation can be scalable to any level of interaction and provides a comprehensive view for exploring multiple levels of value. According to Chandler and Vargo (2011), the social contexts through which value co-creation occurs must be considered from multiple levels. In line with Penaloza and Mish's (2011) multiple views on value, the context that frames exchange and value co-creation is reproduced, or recontextualized, at micro, meso and macro levels as well (Chandler and Vargo, 2011). In other words, relationships and institutions are nested within broader levels of institutions and interaction, and these multiple, nested levels are continually co-created through the actions and interactions of multiple actors responding to (positive or negative) evaluations and reevaluations of experience. Table II outlines the extended, ecosystems view on the context of experience and more explicitly threads together the restaurant example discussed above.

Future research directions
An extended view of experience (Helkkula *et al.*, 2012) and articulation of the context that frames value co-creation (Chandler and Vargo, 2011) points toward the need to further investigate the social and cultural factors that frame value and value creation.

Context of experience	Fine-dining restaurant example
Symbol systems and service ecosystems	Macro: conventional price, service and quality expectations for this type of food and dining experience that establish ecosystems of resources and relationships among multiple actors (i.e. service providers and service beneficiaries) continually driven by exchange.
	Meso: customer's former experience eating similar types of food or in similar types of restaurants and reason for dinner (e.g. birthday, business meeting, anniversary) form expectations. Competences of restaurant staff, corporate culture of organization and understanding and commitment to value proposition influence firm actions. During the exchange encounter, the presence of other dinner guests and personal customer network influence social interactions and perceptions of value
	Micro: fine-dining restaurant exchange encounter includes interactions with host(ess), server, ambiance, food quality, price, wait time, or, more generally consideration of benefit over (time, money, effort) cost
Social structures and institutions	Macro: social norms and symbols reflecting perceptions and practices associated with eating at fine-dining restaurants or both. These may be influenced by media, such as televisions and magazines, customer reviews, and industry awards, as well as recommendations from friends and family. These social structures also establish certain restaurants in a fine-dining category and others in different categories (e.g. fast food, casual dining, etc.)
	Meso: in certain local areas or for different types of food dining etiquette may be different from others. These particular perspectives establish social structures for specific types of restaurants and influence expectations and meanings associated with those dining experiences
	Micro: specific restaurants may have particular dining etiquette (e.g. tie required, no jeans, etc.) and unique eating rituals (e.g. allowing the chef to dictate the menu) that influence experience
Value-in-cultural-context	Experiences are dependent on multiple aspects of culture – social systems and institutions – and all levels of interaction and institutions – micro, meso and macro. These aspects of culture and interaction form multi-level cultural contexts that consist of embedded networks of actors as well as nested levels of value and interaction. Social norms for fine dining, as well as symbols of luxury, quality and pleasure, frame expectations and guide particular firm-customer interactions.
	Institutions and practices vary from actor to actor and, thereby, context to context. Thus, each experience is uniquely evaluated, and often reevaluated over time
Co-construction of context	Positive or negative evaluations of a dining experience influence future interactions, other customers' expectations (e.g. through word-of-mouth) and overarching norms for related industries (e.g. attire for fine dining in some areas has become less formal over time). In other words, evaluations of experience contribute to the ongoing co-construction of the context through which future experiences are evaluated and reevaluated

Table II.
Extended context of experience

This present research brings together two emerging and growing areas of research – CCT and S-D logic – and provides an integrative framework for considering multiple dimensions of social and cultural context through which experience is evaluated and value is created. This integration of CCT and S-D logic highlights how collaboration in value creation and heterogeneous viewpoints influence the ongoing (re)evaluation of any given experience.

A service ecosystems approach further integrates these bodies of literature, by emphasizing the importance of institutions, and establishes an extended view of context that allows perceptual oscillation among micro, meso and macro levels of context involved in the systemic co-creation and evaluation of experience. In this view, it is the interplay between the evaluation of experience and the influence of social and cultural contexts that recursively contributes to the co-creation of value (i.e. a positive evaluation of experience or the viability of a system), as well as context (e.g. relationships, institutions, symbolic meanings).

This discussion of the intersection of CCT and S-D logic highlights an ongoing effort to understand broader contexts of experience that has already begun. Whereas CCT researchers are diligently exploring various components of culture in markets and continue to provide important insights to the depth and dynamics of experience, S-D logic research is further extending the scope of value creation to include multiple levels of interaction and institutions. However, future research at the intersection of these two growing bodies of literature can potentially provide deeper insights to the relationships among varying levels of interaction and a more comprehensive approach for studying how value (as the evaluation of experience or the viability of a system) is created through interaction and derived through social and cultural contexts.

This development of a conceptual framework represents a beginning step in extending the social and cultural context of experience by taking a broader, systemic approach to understanding how experiences emerge and evolve. Thus, future research, both conceptual and empirical, is needed to better understand cultural and social aspects of markets and how they influence the creation of value at multiple levels – micro, meso and macro. In particular, future research on extending the context of experience from this ecosystems perspective may focus on more deeply understanding how various combinations of resources (both operant and operand) are integrated and applied by diverse actors in their efforts to create value for themselves and for others. Along these lines, researchers can explore how interconnected systems of symbols and service relate, and how, together, they influence evaluations of experience.

Furthermore, the consideration of multiple and nested structures and institutions suggests that overlapping and sometimes conflicting institutions (e.g. cross-cultural differences) influence the evaluations of experiences, such that similar experiences are often evaluated differently by different people, or even by the same person at a different place or time. Based on this, future studies might explore how multiple institutions converge and diverge and how both positive and negative experiences might emerge through the intersections of these dynamic structures. This avenue of research, focussed on the co-creation of value-in-cultural-context, can potentially advance the understanding of how higher levels of value such as cultural meanings and values or norms influence the way in which individuals evaluate experiences. In addition, the exploration of how individual evaluations change over time in a wider cultural context will also provide added insights to the co-creation of value-in-cultural-context.

Importantly, this recursive relationship between the co-creation of experience and higher, collective levels of value (e.g. norms and meanings) draws attention toward the multiplicity of structures and institutions that continually (re)constitute the context of market-related experiences. Thus, applying this framework in future studies of market-related experience can aid in understanding how individual-level evaluations of experiences are nested within meso- and macro-levels of action and interaction, and how the micro-level experiences can contribute to the co-creation of meso- and macro-levels of context as well.

Conclusion

This extended view of context – based on symbol systems and service ecosystems, multiplicity of structures and institutions, co-creation of value-in-cultural-context, and co-construction of context – suggests that value co-creation occurs at multiple levels of interaction, and value is evaluated and reevaluated through multiple viewpoints. Based on this, the micro-level of value, or evaluation of experience, is influenced by, but also influences, higher levels of value (i.e. values) that include multiple structures and institutions, sign systems and service ecosystems.

Although many signs have common symbolic meanings (e.g. brands) the intersection of differing viewpoints and interactions among multiple actors in markets draw attention toward the underlying presence of dynamic ecosystems of service exchange. From a service ecosystems perspective, each experience relies on, but also contributes to, extended social and cultural contexts. Thus, the same market-related experience can be evaluated in starkly different ways (e.g. two people watching the same movie at the same time may each evaluate the experience differently) and these differences generate change in the wider ecosystem. Managers need to be aware of the social and cultural contexts that influence evaluations of experience, as well as the need for being adaptable and responsive to change.

This integration of CCT and S-D logic provides a starting point for conceptually exploring an extended context of experience. Whereas CCT draws attention toward the cultural richness of the context that frames experience, S-D logic and its ecosystems view opens the understanding of value creation to multiple viewpoints and varying views on value. Moving beyond a B2C or B2B or C2C perspective, S-D logic's A2A approach (Vargo and Lusch, 2011) increases opportunities for cross-fertilization across distinct marketing subdisciplines (e.g. services marketing, B2B, etc.) and research streams (e.g. CCT and S-D logic), and even different disciplines (e.g. management, information systems, etc.). It also helps to advance an initiative toward developing a market culture theory (Penaloza and Mish, 2011), which centers on understanding the social and cultural aspects of both value and markets.

The conceptual development of the framework proposed in this paper is limited by a lack of empirical evidence. Thus, future research is needed extend the exploration of resources and relationships and value co-creation, among different "types" of actors (e.g. firms and customers). This could be done through empirical investigations of heterogeneous viewpoints of a similar experience and/or a closer look at how intersecting institutions influence the evaluation of experience, as well as the (re) formation of context. These are important considerations for researchers and managers who are striving to better understand individual evaluations of experience, as well as the social and cultural contexts through which these experiences occur. Finally, more in-depth and empirical studies of the movement of practices, institutions and symbols across distinct service ecosystems, and the (re)interpretation of their meanings over time and space can help to provide a more dynamic understanding of how experiences are evaluated and value is created.

Note

1. Consistent with CCT and in spite of the S-D logic stance to move away from the terms "producer" and "consumer", we are using the term "consumer" this paper, to refer to what would be an individual service beneficiary in S-D logic.

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