
How Costumers' Way of Life Influence the Value Co-Creation

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Abstract:

Purpose: *This article is a contribution to the understanding of how value arises in well-established markets, and under which circumstances actors integrate resources from different service ecosystems to generate value. To understand this phenomenon, it is fundamental to consider which practices are performed by customers to co-create value and how they do so.*

Design/Methodology/Approach: *Using a qualitative approach, the study provides fresh empirical insight into well-established market processes of value creation. After a literature review an ethnographic approach was chosen in order to understand how co-creation processes occur in the empirical setting of an international restaurant chain. Several observations, conversations and semi-structured interviews were undertaken concerning the analysis of the topic under study.*

Findings: *The results show that even in a well-established market, a provider must consider individual customers' distinct needs, present in their daily practices, to be able to assist them in the value creation process. It is argued that the practice styles are the building blocks for prevailing ways of life that actors assume, according to the context in which they are, to integrate resources.*

Practical implications: *The study includes implications for service providers of a well-founded market for facilitating value co-creation along with customers and fulfils the need to better understand this phenomenon.*

Originality/Value: *Recent studies call for empirical evidence on co-creation processes in mature markets, accordingly, this study brings an additional understanding on how actors, depending on the context, adopt different ways of life that require unique resources, which activate to achieve what they want, in order to establish room for co-creation.*

Keywords: *Resource integration, practices, value co-creation, ways of life, service-dominant logic.*

JEL codes: *M10, M14.*

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1. Introduction

The hospitality field—which includes restaurants along with tourism—is one of the most important economic sectors in Europe; it is responsible for 10 million jobs directly related to this industry, and 6.4 million indirectly related jobs that depend on its good performance. Data from 2013 indicates that in 28 member states of the European Union (EU), this industry contributed to 7.8% and 3.7% of employment and gross domestic product (GDP), respectively (Ernst and Young, 2013). According to the US National Restaurant Association, this industry generates 4.0% of US GDP and around 15.3 million jobs (National Restaurant Association, 2019). Given its economic prominence, policymakers encourage research into this field.

In the West, eating out is a critical increasing trend (Warde, 2015). Assuming the importance of restaurants on consumers' lifestyles (Silveira, 2019; Muntean and Carmen, 2014) and considering the change in paradigm to a service-dominant (SD) logic, it is vital to understand how value formation takes place in a restaurant context. Nonetheless, as defended by Mencarelli and Riviere (2014), the phenomenon of value creation in a mass consumption environment is unclear. Ultimately, the possibility of collaborative value creation in these types of markets can be questioned. Restaurant atmosphere and food quality are considered traditional attributes used to observe consumers' ways of life. In light of all this, a fast food restaurant seems to be a good empirical setting to explore this matter; the chosen restaurant chain has been in the market for several years and is now a well-known example of a business that operates using SD logic.

The objective of this study is to comprehend—given a well-founded market context—how actors gain access to resources and integrate them for their own or others' benefit. The research question that drives the study is thus: *“How does co-creation occur in a well-established market, and under which circumstances do actors integrate resources, through their practices, from different service ecosystems for value creation?”*. By improving knowledge of this occurrence, the authors are addressing the call for future research suggested by other scholars (Akaka *et al.*, 2015; Mencarelli and Riviere, 2014). Furthermore, the study may help providers to understand how they can integrate their customers' value creation process by facilitating the resources they require.

To understand this phenomenon, it is fundamental to consider which actions customers use to co-create value and how they do so. Hence, the analysis of customers' practices becomes a worthwhile procedure (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2012). More than the actors' actions and activities—which any observer can see—it is crucial to gain insight into their underlying meaning. This will allow for deeper knowledge in terms of the actor's intentions in doing such activities, as well as the value pursued in order to achieve a certain goal. Certainly, the socio-cultural context in which the actors carry out their practices cannot be disregarded, as it also

influences the available resources that actors activate during the value creation process.

The literature has investigated the SD logic perspective and practice-based learning to understand the resource integration process for actors' value creation. Additionally, the literature has examined the consumer culture theory (CCT) research stream, as it focuses on the cultural aspects of influence, framed by a context, regarding the evaluation of a consumption experience. Both CCT and SD logic concentrate on value created collaboratively (Akaka *et al.*, 2015). As suggested by Akaka *et al.* (2013), blending CCT and SD logic may provide deeper insight into value co-creation in complex socio-cultural settings, allowing for a better comprehension of the customer's experience and how value emerges from it. The later sections of this paper scrutinise the conceptual framework that contains service ecosystem and value co-creation concepts grounded in SD logic. Subsequently, CCT practices and resource integration are investigated. Next, the methodology used to conduct the empirical study is explained, followed by the findings and discussion. Finally, conclusions and implications are presented.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Service Ecosystems

Value systems are networks, conceptualised in such a way that a multitude of identities overlap and interact, absorbing in relevant processes and dyadic relationships between customers and providers (Gummesson, 2006). 'Social actors' (or merely 'actors') are used for a more abstract, generic designation for these identities; the term is commonly employed in the social system approach to refer to sets of interacting social actors and their behaviours (Vargo and Lusch, 2011). Seeing the actor-to-actor (A2A) reference, together with the consideration that value is always co-created, we move away from the view that in markets, value is added sequentially by the provider and destroyed within the exchange process, toward the notion of an organised behaviour system. A system not only represents complex processes in which co-creation emerges through the actor's interactions, but also embodies the context in which value acquires its meaning. In this sense, as service systems, value networks are relationships (i.e. contexts), and they offer space for action in which governments, groups, organisations, and individuals jointly apply resources for their own benefit or for others to generate value (Nenonen and Storbacka, 2010; Maglio and Spohrer, 2008). Use of the A2A designation implies that the resources needed to deploy a service not only come from actors directly related to the network, but also from all others in the system.

According to SD logic, the authors suggest that a 'service ecosystem' be thought of as 'a relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through

service exchange' (Vargo and Lusch, 2015, p. 6). This is in line with the need for a more dynamic systems position due to the use of an A2A orientation, since each integration of resources transforms the nature of the network; furthermore, coordination mechanisms (institutions and institutional arrangements) must be present to facilitate this actor's resource integration. Hence markets, as service systems, contain interactions that can occur between any actors present in the system, and are ruled by institutional arrangements. These include formal and informal rules, values and beliefs, as well as symbolic signs or any other routinised path toward meaning (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). For everyday life, these rules can be observed through interrelated institutional arrangements.

In terms of frame service exchange within the social environment, institutions are the resources that we continually use and adjust to give us the properties that allow us to understand the context (Chandler and Vargo, 2011). In analysing these adjustments, we can consider—as an abstraction—different levels (i.e. the micro, macro-, and meso) of aggregation where value creation is framed (Akaka *et al.*, 2013). Although market relationships are fraught with complexity, this multilevel view should not lead us away from the fundamental issue, which is the comprehension of the encounter process and how to access it. We argue that the actors involved collaborate to perform the encounter process. This leads us to question whether there is room for co-creation in a well-established market, in which one of the actor's (service provider's) primary goals has historically been to achieve efficient gains based on a goods dominant logic. In other words, to what extent is such a provider willing to build a relationship with his/her customers in order to co-create value with them?

Social systems' shapes and contexts enable the creation of value as a social process; that is, a customer may apprehend a similar service in any other way contingent to the surrounding environment (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, by considering all social actors as resource integrators, we stress the importance of their roles and responsibilities within the context where the interactions take place (Akaka and Vargo, 2013). Thus, given that service systems' dynamics also depend on and operant resources exist in that context, there is a social logic (social structures, interactions, positions, and roles) that must be contemplated to understand it.

2.2 CCT

CCT is a growing research stream that examines the influence of cultural elements, framed by a context, on the evaluation of the consumption experience. Warde (2015) argues that sociological approaches to consumption tend to be either centred on the consumer or on consumption. When the former is the object of study, the focus tends to be on the process of exchange and the role of individuals therein. When the process of consumption is the object of analysis, attention is paid to practices in which objects or services are used, rather than to the process of selecting them.

According to Bagozzi (2000), consumer research has neglected to examine consumption in relation to the interactions between people, individually or in groups. This perspective belongs on the micro-social scale of analysis as identified by Cova and Cova (2002) in their levels of the observation of consumption. Consumer research has paid less attention to the micro-social scale in comparison to the individual and macro-social levels through which consumption can be analysed. At the micro-social level, consumption by specific actors is investigated through the lens of interactions observed in practices between people.

SD logic refers to the relational aspect of how value emerges over time due to the interactions and interdependence of the activities undertaken by the actors involved. CCT can be—but is not limited to—a natural ‘partner’ of SD logic (Arnould, 2007). As maintained by Arnould (2007), CCT literature points to the fact that a relationship does not simply consist of repeated exchanges over time, but rather implies interactions between resources (provided by someone) and existing norms, and cultural templates. As suggested by CCT research, cultures are not static, but continually evolve, and are composed of multiple standpoints and heterogeneous meanings (Akaka *et al.*, 2015).

Arnould and Thompson (2005) explored shared meanings, practices and beliefs as a collective, heterogeneous system that translates to a social arrangement made up of consumer culture. This arrangement allows all kinds of (tangible and intangible) social resources that are needed to realise different lifestyles to be brought together in the marketplace. CCT research focuses on four main areas:

- (1) From the angle of ‘symbolic and material resources’, marketplaces are spaces of interaction that make symbolic resources available to consumers. This enables them to build their own stories, through which they achieve a sense of unity and purpose in their lives.
- (2) The ‘social resources’ in the CCT stream centre on the importance of structures in evaluating consumer experiences, as well the social roles and positions assumed by the consumer’s practices.
- (3) ‘Consumer ideology’ is a fundamental component of culture that influences one’s experience regarding ‘systems of meaning that tend to channel and reproduce consumers’ thoughts and actions in such a way as to defend dominant interests in society’ (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 874). Such a perspective highlights how consumers deal with the market ideologies embedded in firms’ value propositions to realise how value can be reached via those premises.
- (4) ‘Lived culture’ refers to how emergent consumption practices re-configure ‘cultural blueprints for action and interpretation, and vice versa’ (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 873). This allows consumers, for instance, to form groups and communities associated with specific cultures shaped by the mutual sharing of meanings, practices and norms. Although CCT contemplates several facets of culture in appreciating consumption experiences and value creation, through the analysis of consumer practices and perceptions, some scholars suggest that CCT has paid less

attention to the role of other actors not directly involved in value relationships (Akaka *et al.*, 2015).

2.3 Practices

Actors normally engage in sets of activities in order to get things done with a certain implicit or explicit objective. Depending on the context where an actor is involved, there can be different ways of performing certain tasks. Korkman, Storbacka, and Harald (2010) suggest that a practice becomes embedded in a context where actions occur. A practice can be an everyday activity or class of behaviour, and as such can be assumed to be part of an institution. Following Reckwitz' (2002, p. 249) conception of about practices, they include several elements interlinked as '*forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, "things" and their use, and background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge*'. Unlike some authors (Grönroos, 2008; Sheth *et al.*, 2000) that use the expression "'practices' as a term for doing or what is done, others (Reckwitz, 2002; Schau *et al.*, 2009) use it in a sense of doing something whereby implicit knowledge is associated with the activities performed. This research adopts the latter notion of practices, since it seems of utmost importance to grasp the reason and motives behind the simple act of doing things in a particular way.

Although they are set and shared at the collective level, on the individual scale, they might not be routinised in all settings (Helkkula *et al.*, 2012). Warde (2005) contends that practices are time-sensitive and might change over time, whereby joint meanings are challenged and become out-of-date. Reckwitz (2002) views a social practice as a demonstration of a particular behaviour and understanding, put into effect in a specific place and at a certain time by different bodies/minds. All activities carried out during social practices come about within social systems where actors are able to learn, adjust, and make decisions according to their beliefs (McCull-Kennedy *et al.*, 2012). Although different individuals might perform a practice differently, tacit knowledge is required to undertake it (Helkkula *et al.*, 2012). Each individual's implicit knowledge makes something look normal, and one does not even realise why something is done in a unique way. As asserted by Lobler and Lusch (2014), the act of doing something is implicit, routinised, and taken for granted since practices are embedded in culture and cultural knowledge. From all these angles, the context in which practices occur is crucial, since they are the actions, and the context is interlinked. In brief, this standpoint maintains that practices are influenced by the context's systemic nature (Akaka *et al.*, 2015).

According to Edvardsson, Skalén, and Trovoll (2012), service practices (against the background of value creation) provide the basis to examine the abovementioned, routinised activities carried out by actors. Actions and interactions not only shape practices, but can also outline social structures (resources, values, and rules) that define service systems (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, in SD logic, institutions are suggested as the most important element of the systems' structure,

showing how actors, within a context, perform a lead function in co-producing value, as the more an institution is shared by actors, the bigger the potential benefit of coordination for all of them (Vargo and Lusch, 2015). Service encounters are embedded in social structures, which in turn are placed within a social-historical framework where value is co-generated through daily practices (Chandler and Vargo, 2011). This view aligns with those of other authors (Koskela-Huotariab *et al.*, 2016; Altinaya *et al.*, 2016) who argue that practices can be designated as resource integration activities in value creation processes.

Edvardsson *et al.* (2012) affirm that structuration and action processes can be considered the groundwork for actors' resource integration. This is in line with Holttinen (2014), who contends that practices contextualise customers' value creation and resource integration. In other words, practice theory asserts that value is generated during normal activities that actors perform in their everyday lives. Actors perform such tasks, framed by their ways of life, in socio-cultural environments where several resources are available for value creation, and actors might make use of them. From this perspective, value creation does not occur through the action of a single actor or dyad, but rather in a service ecosystem where resources are provided by a multitude of (private and public) sources (Vargo and Lusch, 2016).

Korkman *et al.* (2010) believe that this position of value creation, in terms of interaction, goes further. They indicate that SD logic could incorporate a practice-based view in which value creation occurs when actors engage in practices and integrate socio-cultural resources. Value can be co-created when firms participate in customers' practices by delivering value propositions as promises of possible resource integration, and/or acting together to achieve shared outcomes. Thus, assuming that value creation emerges during social practices, in order to grasp how value appears, the focus should move away from understanding action at the micro level to comprehending the activities that take place in social systems (Koskela-Huotaria *et al.*, 2016). In a study where different consumptive moments in an online community were analysed, Hartmann *et al.* (2015) concluded that although value can be brought about during practices, in line with what has been previously described, the value engendered during the practices might differ, depending on how actors' participation is established in these practices and how they assess the type of value concerned. Customers can be engaged in valuable practices whether providers are present in their activities or not, meaning, that providers are only supporters of customers' value, rather than sources of it. In sum, value emerges in interaction when resource integration takes place in matching—yet different—practices (Caridà *et al.*, 2019; Hartmann *et al.*, 2015; Schau *et al.*, 2009).

2.3 Resource Integration

Given that resources are 'things' that can be readily drawn upon by someone when needed, it is clear that this broad definition corresponds to numerous matters. One classical meaning of this term is related to tangible things that can be acted upon to

do or get something. However, with the advent of SD logic, Vargo and Lusch drew attention to operant resources, which are intangible resources and can act upon operand resources in order to obtain something. As a result, resources become dynamic (rather than static) and adaptable, depending on whom or what acts upon them and their capabilities. According to this logic, operant resources (namely skills, specific knowledge, emotions, experience, time, effort, networks, and socio-cultural resources) are central (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008a). Generally speaking, in service logic, ‘anything with the potential to create value’ can be considered a resource for all those involved (Wetter-Edman *et al.*, 2013, p. 7).

Vargo, Lusch and O’Brien (2007) assert that for companies to successfully compete through Service, they should take into account—as an operant resource—the environment where they function, as well as customers and partners. Service, through the lens of SD logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), consist of specialised knowledge applied to the well-being of those involved, or of others. This approach emphasises applying operant resources (the means) in order to bring a benefit to someone (the ends). This suggests that even though a resource may be available, if it is somehow not applied to derive a benefit out of its application, it loses its resource status. This is in line with scholars who believe that resources are basically carriers of capabilities (Fischer *et al.*, 2010), which, due to their usability, may lose/gain quality (Peters *et al.*, 2014). As Vargo and Lusch advocate ‘resources are not, they become’ (Vargo and Lusch 2004, p. 2); this implies that resources need to be ‘activated’ (integrated) so they can turn into something meaningful for someone, and value can be attained.

All actors are recourse integrators based on SD logic, so neither resources nor their integration serve a provider’s specific process (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). On the contrary, this suggests that all actors in a network can act upon operand resources, depending on their capabilities and availability and with a certain purpose in mind (the operant ones), which eventually culminates in value creation. Moreover, it is essential that the provider figures out how its resources can be combined with other resources, comprising its customers’ (Korkman *et al.*, 2010)—and that the provider be able to design resource constellations to support the latter; hence, value can be co-created (Vargo *et al.*, 2008). This standpoint extends resource integration by not only considering the provider, but also the customer (Heinonen *et al.*, 2013) and other stakeholders (McCull-Kennedy *et al.*, 2012), as they all might participate in the effort to activate resources for value creation (Caridà *et al.*, 2019; Wetter-Edman *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, this raises the domain of value creation to another level, wherein providers seek to incorporate customers’ resources into their own processes (Moeller, 2008).

According to Korkman *et al.* (2010), practices are meaningful resource integration activities carried out by customers, in turn leading to value creation. This conforms with the practice view of those who advocate that value creation takes place through actors’ daily lives. The use value that can emerge for actors depends on how well

resources fit their practices. These authors, by identifying customers as the primary resource integrators, imply that firms are the extensions of customers' activities, rather than the other way around, which used to be the most conventionally defended notion in goods-dominant (GD) logic. This reinforces the importance of understanding the consumption process from a customer-centric angle (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006). In this respect, Smith *et al.* (2014), in their work about product-service transition, adopting an SD logic of value creation as a lens to explore value proposition, suggest that this should be approached from the perspective of how resources can be optimally set up to collaboratively create value with others. In turn, this would allow actors to connect, with the aim of integrating and obtaining new resources from it.

SD logic value is context-driven and phenomenologically derived through those who benefit from the service (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). This means that different actors may choose to incorporate the same resource in different ways, either in the same or in a different setting. Additionally, in line with Chandler and Vargo (2011), resources might become resources depending on the context in which they are embedded. In sum, according to SD logic, resource integration is a critical prerequisite from which value emerges when different practices fit together (Caridà *et al.*, 2019). The way in which integration is carried out is actor- and context-dependent.

The above literature will frame this empirical research, undertaken in a fast food restaurant chain, to understand value creation processes in markets (such as the one in which the mentioned setting is inserted). CCT will help to shed light on the influence of cultural aspects that are present in an eating out experience in a mass consumption environment. Practice theory will contribute to the analysis of customer activities, and together with resource integration literature, will clarify whether the resources of the customer (such as family and friends), provider, or other service systems are activated by customers, so that value emerges for them. Additionally, the SD logic service ecosystem will facilitate comprehension of how the restaurant's customers re-configure these service systems in such a way that it leads to a meaningful event for them, and value co-creation is enabled.

3. Methodology

The methodology is drawn from the researcher's ontological stance and the adopted epistemology, while the phenomenon and field of study dictate the techniques to be employed (Blumer, 1969). Ontologically, the research was conducted based on the belief that there are multiple realities, which are socially constructed by subjects. The epistemological implication of this ontological angle is that the authors assumed that knowledge would be achieved by establishing common understandings of the diverse realities described by the subjects of the research.

Given the ontological and epistemological perspective taken by the authors, as well as the complexity of the phenomena under the scope of this study and its context, a qualitative research approach was chosen. An ethnographic study was conducted in the empirical setting of an international restaurant chain to answer the research question, ‘How does co-creation occur in a well-established market, and under which circumstances do actors integrate resources, through their practices, from different service ecosystems to produce value?’ This type of study seemed appropriate to follow in the chosen setting to answer the formulated research question as it regards meanings, processes, and social contexts in systems (Whitehead, 2005).

In order to grasp the socio-cultural context and meanings that are pertinent to the topic of analysis, several observations, conversations and semi-structured interviews were undertaken. Whitehead (2005) refers to several attributes of human interaction that underlie ethnographic studies on various kinds of social contexts, and amongst others, the author indicates that any social situation may contain interactions, routinised activities, norms, and behaviours. Furthermore, they can provide clues concerning broader socio-cultural contexts, as well as deep structural and surface functioning. Taking this into account, several observations were carried out of customers’ activities within the restaurant. These served as inputs to subsequent interviews in order to discern how the activities were meaningful to the customers that performed them. Once the observations were made and the customers’ activities, interactions and resources (both of the customers and provider) used were identified, the interviews helped to provide insight into the reasons customers had for what they did in the restaurant. Furthermore, the interviews led to the identification of other activities and resources used, which were not possible to verify or comprehend during the observation period.

Data obtained through observation were categorised for interpretative purposes, and then linked to the results obtained from data gathered in the semi-structured interviews. The respondents were chosen at random from amongst people who knew the restaurant chain or were at the restaurants that are part of it. Nevertheless, theoretical sampling was performed when choosing the respondents ‘randomly’ in order to capture representativeness (Corbin and Strauss, 2014) in terms of the activities seen in the restaurants. Out of the 30 interviews, 10 were recorded; for the remaining ones, notes were written by hand for later examination. The semi-structured interviews allowed customers to tell their stories, shedding light on their perspective of reality. To codify the interviews, inductive content analysis was carried out; the phrase was the record unit of analysis used in the coding process. Next, the content was scrutinised, and the results were interpreted.

The investigation of the data from the interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of the customers’ practices. Boland (1985) argues that if someone tries to comprehend reality, it is better to ask actors about the meaning of the activities performed. Both the observations of customers’ activities in their context, as well as the interviews with the customers, were carried out until saturation was reached and

an explanation for the phenomenon was derived. By combining the two methods described above to obtain data, it was possible to understand the customers' practice styles undertaken in a fast food restaurant context.

In qualitative research, the validation procedure is critical due to the subjectivity involved and the risk of researcher bias (Enz and Lambert, 2012). To enhance the construct validity, multiple sources of information (interviews and available documentation) were considered to ensure triangulation. Internal validity was not addressed since there was no intention of finding causal relationships between any variables in the study. Regarding external validity, this empirical study has some limitations, as it was conducted in a limited number of restaurants belonging to a chain in a unique context, and the interviews were carried out with a randomly chosen sample of customers in order to comprehend the phenomenon. Consequently, not only are statistical inferences not suitable; generalising conclusions across different service settings is problematic as well. Finally, for reliability purposes, a protocol to conduct the semi-structured interviews and observations was followed and maintained.

4. Findings

During the observations made in the restaurants, the activities and resources used by the customer (either alone or in a group) were determined and sorted, as shown in Table 1. The resources identified were the ones for which the observer could clearly confirm what the customer was using. Afterwards, during the interviews, the respondents described other resources that could not be directly pinpointed during the observations. In Table 1, these 'hidden' activities were labelled under 'socialising with others not physically present'. The observations revealed that in the kind of restaurant studied, the level of interaction with the employees is quite low compared to 'traditional' restaurants, where a high number of interactions with employees can be seen.

The interactions that were witnessed with the restaurant staff were basically when customers chose to order at the counter. The easy order machines that permit customers to fulfil their own order without interacting with employees was an important factor in this low level of interaction. In contrast, the highest levels of customer interactions noticed during the observations occurred between people that went together to have a meal, or with other people not present in the restaurant through smartphones and those belonging to the customer's network. Younger customers, mainly teenagers, interacted more through their smartphones than adults did. Kids interacted very much with the adults they were with, or with other kids they got to know on the playground, where they could easily make some friends to play with.

Table 1. *Activities, interactions and resources observed in the empirical setting*

Activities	Interactions	Resources	
		Customer's	Provider's
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting at the restaurant - Ordering at the counter - Ordering through an easy order machine - Waiting for the order to be prepared - Choosing a place to sit - Eating - Socialising with physically present friends - Socialising with others not physically present (email, social networks, SMS, phone calls...) - Going out with friends after the meal - Choosing the restaurant - Driving to the restaurant - Socialising with family - Entertaining kids - Kids playing - Socialising with colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interactions with: - Present individuals of the customer's sphere - Non-present individuals of the customer's sphere - Customer's personal objects - Restaurant's staff - Restaurant's objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People belonging to the group - Communication skills - Socialisation skills - Technology skills - Device to listen to music (mobiles and iPods) - Mobile and smart phones - Email - Internet - Social networks - Network of friends and acquaintances - Transportation - Present family members - Network of friends and acquaintances - Kids' social skills to make friends to play with - Playing skills and imagination - Mobile and smart phones - Present friends - Non-present people (via mobile phones, social networks) - Knowledge skills (how to use the Internet, social networks, rules and norms, idioms, country culture) - Music - Present colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skills of restaurant employees (e.g. idioms) - Restaurant space and furniture - Easy order terminals - Restaurant atmosphere - Space layout, lighting, music, and decorations - Food, trays, cups, napkins, and straws - Other restaurant facilities (Wi-Fi, email, music, toys, playground, tablets) - Toys - Playground - Tablets - Parties' organisation skills

Regarding resources used by customers, the observations confirmed that some were used more often than others. The restaurant area chosen by customers to have their meals seemed to depend on the time of day, space available, and occasion. The customers could select different areas of the restaurant such as quieter zones, the terrace when available (if the weather was good) or even differentiated areas with different table layouts for bigger or smaller groups. Other resources that seemed quite sought after were the Wi-Fi connection, the easy order machines, tables with tablets and the playground for children.

The interviews (after the observations) facilitated an understanding of the main reason(s) the interviewees chose to go to the restaurant. The idea was that by understanding their thoughts, one could determine why actors do what they do in

their practices, and which resources they need to integrate in order to accomplish what they want. The primary motives that customers gave for visiting the restaurant were grouped and categorised under five main topics: (1) food, (2) socialising, (3) entertainment, (4) comfort, and (5) access (Table 2).

Table 2. Categories of reasons for visiting the restaurant

Reason Category	Reasons
Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possibility of having a fast meal - Trusting the food safety - Tasty food - Cheap meal
Socialising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spending time with friends - Spending time with family - Celebrating special occasions
Entertainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nice place for kids to have fun - Children like to play on the restaurant's playground and tablets
Comfort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Restaurant atmosphere (informal and relaxed) - Layout, lighting, music, and decoration - Cleanliness
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easy access - Well known locations - Wide range of hours that it is open

The respondents described motives involving the food's characteristics. The need to have a meal was categorised as 'food'. The cost of the meal, when the respondents mentioned it, was also placed under this category, as it is directly related to the food itself. Below are some quotes that illustrate the types of discourses labelled under 'food'.

'The food is cheap and there are several options to choose from'.

'It is fast, and as I don't have too much time to have lunch, I go there. And the food is tasty'.

'The price is not so relevant. Confidence in the product and food safety are more important'.

The above quotes make clear references to the price of food, and to some respondents' lack of time, which leads them to look for places where they can eat something quickly. On the other hand, there are other motives, such as concerns about food quality. When the motive for visiting the restaurant was referred to only as having a meal, this clarified if the respondent's true reason was to fulfil a basic need or if, on the other hand, this was mentioned as an 'excuse' to meet someone in the restaurant for a social aim. In Western societies, it is quite normal for an individual to have a meal with others for social reasons (e.g. to celebrate something or to meet someone for business purposes). Hence, when the motive for visiting the restaurant was to spend some time with someone, the respondents were grouped

under ‘socialising’. The term ‘socialise’ here refers to taking part in social activities. In the context of this study, someone is considered to be socialising when he/she is interacting with others. Some examples of respondents’ quotes that reveal this motive are presented below.

‘It became a routine among our group of friends to go there’.

‘I have developed a habit of going to such restaurants (it has always been like that). At the time, the option is that restaurant, and the others are not even considered. It is a given fact’.

‘I go there to have lunch and a snack with friends’.

The second quote comes from a respondent who indicated that the use of such restaurants became a routine activity that he does in a group after going out at night with friends. This can be seen as an activity that became part of a practice of this respondent in a particular context. In contrast, other respondents go to these restaurants when they are alone or want to be alone. Examples include the following.

‘The ordering machine is a factor that pleases me and contributes positively to my decision of going there because I don’t have to justify or explain what I want to anyone’.

The category of ‘entertainment’ was defined as a group of reasons having to do with activities that provide pleasure and delight to those participating in them, and are not directly related to food. Mostly, the reasons grouped under this category were linked to the possibility of kids being able to play games on tablets provided by the restaurant, or to play on the restaurant’s playground. Additionally, the toys available in the restaurants, belonging to some collection (e.g. Smurfs, hot wheels), were also mentioned as a reason for kids to ask their parents to go to those restaurants. On the other hand, from the parent’s perspective, a visit to these restaurants allowed them to spend time with family, and also to relax while their kids were entertained with the resources available. The quote displayed below demonstrates the type of speech grouped under this category.

‘I use the restaurant’s tablets to play games when I have time’.

The ‘comfort’ category encompasses motives that the respondents said brought them a physical or psychological sense of ease. This could be achieved by any event, or something that allowed them to be in a relaxed state and to avoid physically unpleasant feelings. Some examples of interviewees’ quotes that reveal these feelings are as follows.

‘When it rains, or it is cold, late at night, it is better to go to these restaurants. These restaurants offer better conditions compared to others that are open at this time at night. I can sit, and the environment is pleasant’.

‘It is an informal space that you almost consider you own’.

The above quotes show the value of the sense of comfort these restaurants provide to customers, as well as the importance of being in a secure environment. Moreover, it is possible to understand from some respondents' speech that, depending on the context (going out with friends at night, having dinner with family or alone), they seek different areas of the restaurant. All reasons listed that relate to the restaurant's accessibility, or to the ease of finding it, were placed under 'access'. As shown below, the respondents mentioned accessibility—in terms of the ease of finding the place, getting there, distance, and availability (i.e. the hours the restaurant is open)—as important in determining their choice.

*'It is easy to get to those restaurants and there are restaurants in several locations'.
 'I go to such restaurants because they are one of the few places open at the time'* (early in the morning after going out with friends).

Some respondents pointed out several reasons belonging to different categories. Moreover, depending on the respondent's age, the reasons varied, as expected. It was possible to identify the interactions in which the customers were involved. Taking this into account and adding the motives claimed by customers for visiting these restaurants, the following practice styles emerged (displayed in Table 3).

Table 3. *Customers' activities, reasons and practice styles*

Value co-creation practice styles	Reasons	Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting with friends Set of activities performed by a group of people (known to each other but not belonging to the same family) that take advantage of the restaurant to meet and socialise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having a cheap meal - Having a meal and knowing what to expect - Having a meal in an informal restaurant - Nice place to meet and socialise - Tasty food - Restaurant location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting at the restaurant - Ordering at the counter - Ordering through an easy order machine - Waiting for the order to be prepared - Choosing place to seat - Eating - Socialising with physically present friends - Socialising with others not physically present (via email, social networks, SMS, phone calls...) - Going out with friends after the meal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having a meal with family Set of activities performed by a group of people belonging to the same family that take advantage of the restaurant to spend time together outside their home and socialise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having a cheap meal - Having a meal in an informal restaurant - Entertainment for kids (games, toys, and playground) - Tasty food - Safe food - Restaurant location - Enjoy time with family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choosing the restaurant - Driving to the restaurant - Ordering at the counter - Ordering via an easy order machine - Waiting for the order to be prepared - Choosing a place to sit - Eating - Socialising with others not physically present (via email, social networks, SMS, phone calls...) - Socialising with family - Entertaining kids - Kids playing

Value co-creation practice styles	Reasons	Activities
<p>- Time for parents to relax</p> <p>Set of activities performed by parents that stay at the restaurant with their kids to take advantage of time to relax by doing other activities (like talking to other parents, reading, or just thinking) while their kids are entertained.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having a cheap meal - Having a meal and knowing what to expect - Entertainment for kids (games, toys, and playground) - Safe food - Known worldwide standards - Restaurant location - Suitable spaces for kids - Clean facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choosing the restaurant - Driving to the restaurant - Ordering at the counter - Ordering via an easy order machine - Waiting for the order to be prepared - Choosing a place to sit - Eating - Socialising with family - Entertaining kids - Kids playing
<p>- Celebrating an event</p> <p>Set of activities performed by a group of people that choose the restaurant to celebrate an event, such as a birthday.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having a cheap meal - Having a meal in an informal restaurant - Nice place to meet and socialise - Tasty food - Restaurant location - Space, decoration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choosing the restaurant - Driving to the restaurant - Meeting at the restaurant - Ordering at the counter - Ordering via an easy order machine - Waiting for the order to be prepared - Choosing place to sit - Eating - Socialising with physically present friends
<p>- Having a meal with work colleagues</p> <p>Set of activities performed by a group of people (work colleagues) that take advantage of the restaurant's good accessibility and availability to have a meal when they are busy and lack time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having a fast meal - Having a meal in an informal restaurant - Known worldwide standards - Restaurant location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choosing the restaurant - Driving to the restaurant - Meeting at the restaurant - Ordering at the counter - Ordering via an easy order machine - Waiting for the order to be prepared - Choosing place to sit - Eating - Socialising with others not physically present (email, social networks, SMS, phone calls...) - Socialising with colleagues
<p>- Having a meal alone</p> <p>Set of activities performed by someone who goes to the restaurant alone to eat something.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having a cheap meal - Having a fast meal - Having a meal without being bothered - Tasty food - Safe food - Restaurant location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choosing the restaurant - Driving to the restaurant - Meeting at the restaurant - Ordering at the counter - Ordering via an easy order machine - Waiting for the order to be prepared - Choosing place to sit - Eating - Socialising with others not physically present (email, social networks, SMS, phone calls...)

Value co-creation practice styles	Reasons	Activities
Having a meal in a foreign country Set of activities performed by a group of people or someone individually when in a foreign country, and choosing to go to these restaurants to eat something.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having a cheap meal - Having a meal and knowing what to expect - Having a meal in an informal restaurant - Tasty food - Safe food - Known worldwide standards - Restaurant location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choosing the restaurant - Ordering at the counter - Ordering via an easy order machine - Waiting for the order to be prepared - Choosing place to sit - Eating - Socialising with physically present friends - Socialising with others not physically present (email, social networks, SMS, phone calls...) - Socialising with family - Socialising with colleagues

5. Discussion

The results show that in a well-established market in which this restaurant chain operates, a provider must consider customers' distinct needs to be able to assist them in the value creation process. Certain available resources are more valuable to some customers than to others in terms of who uses them, and how they are used. An example is the possibility of having free Internet access, which is quite important for teenagers and young adults, but not so much for other groups, such as kids.

We argue that the practice styles are the building blocks for prevailing ways of life that actors assume, according to the context in which they are, to integrate resources. This is in line with the results, which demonstrate that actors might assume different practice styles and thus, unique ways of life depending on the context in which they use the restaurant. For instance, a mother, when going to the restaurant with her kid, expresses a different 'behaviour' from when she goes there with her work colleagues. Hence, the way actors use the resources of the service systems they access depends on the time and place. This implies that given a particular context, they adopt specific ways of life that require special resources (either internally from their own personal sphere, or externally from a provider), which must be activated in order to achieve their aims. This will lead to the possibility of providers supporting actors in performing the practices they undertake, framed by institutions, in roles assumed by the actors in a determined context.

The service provider turns the restaurant into a platform, whereby its customers are allowed to interact with the provider and other actors to integrate the resources they need in adopting a specific way of life. Thus, even in a well-established market (such as the one under study), there is indeed room for co-creation through the construction of spaces that facilitate it. The redefinition of resources that are made available, to be activated by an actor, could in certain situations lead to new practices, which in this case was confirmed by some respondents. With new offerings of snacks and breakfast products, together with the refurbished areas of the restaurant to create

more comfortable and suitable spaces for such occasions, customers sometimes used the restaurant not just for main meals (lunch and dinner), but also for other practices at other times of a day.

The practice styles obtained imply that although it might seem, at first glance, that many customers are doing similar activities, in-depth analysis revealed that the interactions made and the resources used by customers differed; their reasons also varied. This is in line with the fact that customers were able to do so by using the restaurant as a platform, with several ecosystems from which they could integrate the resources they needed during their practices. Hence, different co-creation spaces co-existed via this platform. Additionally, the data obtained verified that customers, besides using some of the provider's resources, also made use of their own, including internal and external ones. Internal resources correspond to the customer's personal characteristics (e.g. motivation, willingness to do something, creativity, knowledge and skills), whereas external resources are the ones the customer has access to through knowledge, skills, and friends; in other words, via his/her sphere of influence.

Considering the above classification of resources, it was possible to note that when a customer is undergoing a certain practice, he/she might use the three types of resources identified with different levels of interaction, depending on what he/she wants to get from them. This is consistent with the judgement that value creation emerges in socio-cultural contexts through a network of resources from which they can be activated (Koskela-Huotaria *et al.*, 2016). These findings also indicate that the customer's interactions happen when he/she is performing certain activities with a given goal, and realises that some resources may facilitate the process to achieve it, which supports Holttinen's claim (2014) that practices contextualise the actor's resource integration activities and value creation processes. Building on this idea, the authors of this study affirm that practices are embedded in ways of life assumed by customers.

Considering the results, we maintain that customers choose to integrate resources from different service ecosystems available in their networks to generate value, depending on whether their way of life is dominant in specific settings. In sum, the outcomes suggest that providers should focus on facilitating customers' integration of resources in order to differentiate their value propositions from their competitors.

6. Conclusions and Limitations

This empirical study drew the following conclusions based on the observations of customers and the interpretation of the interviews conducted with them:

(1) The context in which a customer was involved influenced the resources he/she had available, as well as his/her ability to activate some of them;

(2) A customer activates a resource due to his/her need to perform a practice, which in turn he/she executes to become better off. We assert that practice styles are the building blocks for prevailing ways of life that actors assume, according to the context in which they are, in order to integrate resources. Actors use the resources of the service systems they have access to, depending on the time and place; hence, depending on the context, they adopt different ways of life that require unique resources, which actors activate to achieve what they want. The findings imply that even in a well-founded market, there is room for co-creation. As such, the results contribute to the literature on this topic.

In this case, the restaurants were used as platforms through which customers were able to trigger different service ecosystems and integrate the resources they needed for their practices. Through these platforms, different co-creation spaces were formed, adapted to the way of life assumed by the customers. The outcomes showed that value emerges for a customer when he/she is able to employ a resource available in a service ecosystem; this eventually allows him/her to engage in a specific way of life. Thus, customers incorporate latent resources (of their own or supplied by the provider) into their activities via interactions in order to attain a goal.

The main reasons customers gave for visiting the restaurants were categorised under five topics: (1) food; (2) socialising; (3) entertainment; (4) comfort and (5) access. From a managerial perspective, the findings indicate that from a well-established market service provider's standpoint, this has an impact. The provider should no longer look at a 'static' customer segmentation, but instead at the different ways of life customers adopt (depending on the context they are living in), and in turn recommend different service systems from which customers can integrate resources accordingly. By doing so, service providers will eventually be able to involve their customers in co-creation processes by assisting them in performing their practices, and therefore fostering their way of life in a specific context.

By understanding customers' ways of life and practices, it is possible to identify which resources are more used – and eventually given more value – because of the dominant logic assumed by customers. Theoretically, this study contributes to the SD logic view of how resources are integrated as affirmed by Korkman *et al.* (2010) and other scholars, according to whom this topic is in an initial phase of elaboration (Caridà *et al.*, 2019; Peters *et al.*, 2014). This study uses practices as a framework to grasp how value emerges for customers, and how providers can increase value co-creation in a well-founded market. Furthermore, this research goes in the direction pointed out by the literature, which calls for empirical investigations about resource integration (Caridà *et al.*, 2019).

Finally, regarding this study's limitations, it was only conducted in one country through a qualitative approach and in a limited number of similar restaurants, belonging to a specific restaurant chain in a well-established market of the food sector. Hence, generalisation to other contexts should be cautiously considered.

Future research in this area, especially in other well-founded markets, is encouraged to understand the implications of different lifestyles adopted by customers in unique settings, and how their choices translate into value creation processes in diverse service ecosystems.

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