A framework for dramatizing interactions for enhanced tourist experience value

Nina K. Prebensen

Published online on: 17 Dec 2013

Introduction

Tourists interact with people and natural or man-made elements. Consequently, interactions are core mediators of (and thus create an imperative for acknowledging) experience value in tourism. Interaction has traditionally been considered a core characteristic of tourism as a result of simultaneous production and consumption, described as ‘prosumption’ by Toffler (1967). Despite the importance of acknowledging how and why consumers visit places and exploring interactions between people including tourists, hosts and locals, the issue of interaction has scarcely been researched in tourism contexts. In tourism, interactions are more often performed for social and pleasure-seeking reasons affecting autotelic actions, i.e. actions performed here and now for instant enjoyment (Holt 1995), such as appreciating learning at a museum or having fun with fellow travellers. Interactions may, however, also reflect other goals or motives, e.g. instrumental, such as ordering a meal or questioning a guide to get information, with the aim of fulfilling other needs.

This chapter focuses on tourist interaction practices during a vacation journey and further indicates how these practices improve experience value for the tourists. The chapter ends with proposals for how a firm may facilitate, develop and motivate tourists to enhance experience value through interaction practices. Consumer practices (Holt 1995), customers’ value perceptions (Holbrook 1999; Sheth et al. 1991) and the dramaturgy metaphor (Goffman 1959) are utilized as theoretical frameworks to delineate the relationship between what tourists do and value and how interaction practices may be stimulated through staging, storytelling and involvement.

Tourism research has adopted theories from the service field, defining services as ‘a deed, a performance, and an effort’ (Rathmell 1966: 33). In doing so, tourism has more or less focused on the service provider as someone who produces valuable offers for the tourists to favour and buy in order to use and enjoy after the transactions. In the last decade, this perspective, separating the producers and the consumers, has been strongly debated and as discussed in the previous chapter, has resulted in the development of a new service-dominant logic (SDL) (e.g. Vargo and Lusch 2004, 2008). This logic conjectures that ‘co-creation is about joint creation of value by the company and the consumer’ (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004: 8). SDL holds that value cannot be extracted without customer interaction. The value for the tourist then lies in being at the
destination and partaking in and enjoying various experiences while staying there (Sandström et al. 2008).

The paradigm shift, from the customer as a passive receiver to an active agent in creating value, calls for a fundamental understanding of the customer’s role in partaking in value creation processes. Although S-D logic in marketing (Vargo and Lusch 2004, 2008) argues for a customer-centric perspective, as opposed to a product-centric perspective, few studies have empirically explored value creation processes from the customer’s perspective. An active patron needs knowledge and skills to partake in creating experience value. A journey cannot be undertaken (consumed as a product) or enjoyed if the customer chooses to stay at home, and tourists inevitably interact with numerous people, situations and places. Thus, tourism is an excellent example in terms of exploring value creation as part of interaction practices.

The level of perceived value depends to a great extent on the tourist’s need and ability to partake in the interactive creation process; this points to the importance of considering interaction practices before, during and even after the journey. Experience value is defined by Prebensen et al. (2013a: 5) as ‘… comprised of the benefits the tourist perceives from a journey and stay in a destination, including those assets or resources that the tourist, other tourists and the host bring to the process of co-creating experiences’. The present work adopts this definition and explores interaction processes from a value perspective, which is why and how customers interact. Further, in line with Moiso and Arnould’s (2005) research extending the dramaturgical framework, this work employs the components of a drama, namely the structure, interaction and content, in relation to tourist experiences. Then, the chapter sets out the process of interaction – before, during and after the journey – and suggests possibilities for enhancing value for the customer and the firm through facilitating, developing and staging the experience drama. Furthermore, examples are outlined.

**Interaction and value co-creation in tourism**

Interaction is about contact and participation which may be of a direct or indirect nature. Direct participation is when the individual is in immediate contact with another person or an object. Indirect interaction is when the individual is in contact with a person or an object through another party, such as a tour operator, or medium, such as the Internet. Bolton and Saxena-Iyer (2009: 92) define interactive services as ‘services that have some form of customer–firm interaction in an environment . . .’. A service experience is further delineated as comprising four components (Fisk et al. 2013: 21):

1. the service worker;
2. the service setting;
3. the service customer; and
4. the service process.

In tourist consumption, the customer interacts with a host, often represented by the service worker, in addition to other guests and physical elements within a firm or as part of a destination. These interactions happen because they are valued or expected to provide future value (or hinder events, thereby diminishing value) for the customer. The actors in the service encounter, i.e. the participants in value creation, include all the individuals involved, whether customers or workers (Booms and Bitner 1981). The environment includes all aspects that facilitate or communicate the nature of the experience, before, during or after its performance. Subsequently,
tourists and hosts are part of an experience process in which both parties – more or less willingly and actively – partake for the purpose of creating value (experience value for the customers, economic value for the firm, and social, economic and sustainable value for the destination).

The level of interaction, i.e. interactivity, is described by Bolton and Saxena-Iyer (2009) in terms of two dimensions, namely the extent of customer participation and the extent to which the service is technology enabled or delivered, which points to the idea of service as instrumental (solving a problem for the customer). Other researchers suggest that the dimensions of interactive experiences include passive versus active participation and absorption versus immersion (Pine and Gilmore 1999), and suggest four realms of experience: entertainment, educational, aesthetic and escapist. This perspective reflects the notion of actions as autotelic, indicating that the customer values being present and enjoying the moment. Despite these efforts to acknowledge interactive experiences, few studies have actually explored interaction from the customers’ viewpoint, which is tourist participation as a resource in enhancing value for the tourist and the firms in the service encounter. As Ramirez (1999: 49) puts it:

... value co-produced by two or more actors, with and for each other, with and for yet other actors, invites us to rethink organizational structures and managerial arrangements for value creation inherited from the industrial era. But it also invites us to rethink value creation itself.

Hence, interaction practices can be inputs for firms to develop and facilitate enhanced value for the various interaction parties.

Hedonism is a foundational idea for tourist travel whatever the underlying motivations are, i.e. relaxation, learning, or socializing. Tourist travel is thus fundamentally different from traditional services purchased to solve a problem, e.g. due to lack of knowledge or because one does not have the time, energy or desire to perform the activity oneself. Tourists visit other places, events and people because they want to be present during the production, and more or less actively involved in the production or creation of the experience. Consequently, tourist experiences may differ from other services bought because of lack of motivation, time or knowledge to perform the service oneself. Research shows that tourists who are more motivated are more involved in the tourist trip (Prebensen et al. 2012). Prebensen et al.’s study also shows that both motivation and involvement positively affect tourists’ perceived value of the trip experience. In a follow-up study, Prebensen et al. (2013b) show that tourists’ knowledge, in addition to motivation and involvement, also affects the customers’ perceptions of value, which in turn has a positive effect on evaluation and future intentions, such as word-of-mouth recommendations and intention to return to the destination. Thus, tourist motivation, involvement and knowledge are vital antecedents in value creation processes.

S-D logic embodies a move in the logic of exchange signifying a shift from a focus on products and results to a process and service-centric orientation (Vargo and Lusch 2008). The dichotomy between co-creation versus co-production is outlined in a tourist context by Chathoth et al. (2013), where the degree of involvement defines customization and co-creation. Co-production is delineated as comprising lower and more sporadic involvement, whereas co-creation is described in terms of a higher degree of involvement from both host and guests and being a continuous process. Further, the literature describes co-production as focusing on how to make the customers become ‘partial employees’ (e.g. Wickström 1996) and thus the firm should aim to co-opt customer competence (e.g. Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). In contrast, co-creation always considers the consumer as a vital agent in value creation processes; ‘value can
only be created with and determined by the user in the consumption process and through use or what is referred to as value-in-use’ (Lusch and Vargo 2006: 284).

By partaking in value creation, the tourists’ capabilities are converted into value for both parties (guest and host). Woodruff (1997) claims that consumers’ perceptions of value are based on an evaluation of the trade-off between ‘what they get’ (perceived benefits, quality and performance) and ‘what they give’. Value is not what the firm produces, but the perceived benefits over the costs, i.e. perceived benefits over sacrifices (Eggert and Ulaga 2002). However, a recent study by Prebensen et al. (2013b) contends that sacrifices and costs, such as time and effort, within one empirical setting (visiting a dentist or a lawyer) may be viewed as a benefit in other settings, e.g. a tourist trip. Their study outlines and tests various experience-relevant resources, such as service quality, price, effort, time spent and customer involvement, on overall experience evaluation. The study shows that the time spent and effort made, normally viewed as costs or sacrifices in the consumer behaviour literature, have a positive effect on overall experience value. Therefore, resources such as time and effort should not only be treated as costs for the customer, but as providing value through partaking in value creation.

How people interact

In order to understand consumption practices, Holt (1995: 1) asks ‘what do people do when they consume?’ Founded on participant observation at baseball games, Holt explores and classifies consumption practices based on the structure (how) and the purpose (why) of actions. Holt’s (1995) model has been discussed in other empirical settings, e.g. investments (Allen and McGoun 2000; Prebensen 2007) and in networks (Prebensen 2012). Viewed from the perspective of these works and in relation to the theoretical discussion above regarding customer participation in creating value, Holt’s (1995) model provides a framework for analysing tourist interaction activities and processes. The focus is on the action of the actors in creating experience value. The Holt (1995: 3) model includes a typology of consumption practices, labelled as ‘experiencing, integration, play and classification’, which are based on the purpose and the structure of the action. The purpose of the action deals with ‘autotelic’ and ‘instrumental’ actions, while the structure of the action includes actions towards objects (object actions) or people (interdependent actions).

The model can be described within a tourism framework. When tourists make sense of and respond to an object at the destination or the destination in itself (autotelic/object action), Holt describes them using a ‘consuming-as-experience’ metaphor. The tourists use various interpretive frameworks to experience a certain object at the destination, through accounting, i.e. summing up incidences, evaluating and appreciating the object or event. In contrast with consuming-as-experience, ‘consuming-as-integration’ (instrumental/object action) is about the spectators’ use of the object as an instrument to enhance their identity. Integrating practices, i.e. assimilation, production and personalization, are used to break down distances between the consumer and the object. When an object at the destination is used as a resource to interact with fellow tourists, the metaphor ‘consuming-as-play’ (interpersonal/autotelic) is utilized. Among tourists, two types of play are prevalent, that is communing and socializing. The fourth metaphor, ‘consuming-as-classification’ (interpersonal/instrumental), refers to situations in which the tourists use the object to classify themselves. Classifying practices provide the means to build affiliation and to enhance distinction, and the tourists do so through objects or through actions. Tourists often use symbols, e.g. clothing and stories, in order to classify themselves.

Tourists represent their own (and maybe their family’s) goals and purposes (e.g. learning about and experiencing novel places, socializing, enjoying life, gaining friends and acquaintances, relaxing). Discovering why and how tourists act in the way they do would generate new
knowledge in relation to value creation theories and practices. Literature on customer participation focuses on the activities of customers during service delivery and the customer experiences in relation to these activities (e.g. Bendapudi and Leone 2003). This way of thinking reflects a traditional perspective on value. In tourist experiences, other types of value may readily come to mind, e.g. mental activities such as thinking, identity building and dreaming (Belk 1988). Consequently, combining customers’ structure and purpose of travel in relation to their vacations with the firm’s potential in dramatizing experiences, the present work suggests a framework to understand and enhance experience value through interactions during the whole experience process.

What people value in tourist settings

Customer perception of value is viewed as interactive between customer and offering, relativistic between people and situations, preferential and based on a holistic experience (Holbrook, 1999). Bradley and Sparks (2012) follow the lead of Holbrook (1999) and Woodall (2003) in perceiving value as a benefit or advantage, something consumers regard above other things. Based on similar ideas, Vargo and Lusch (2004) highlight the interactive, relativistic and experiential nature of customer value in relation to the topic of value co-creation, and further the concept of value propositions. Ballantyne and Varey (2006) note that value propositions are reciprocal promises of value, operating to and from suppliers and customers seeking an equitable exchange.

Perceived value has previously been operationalized using a single item scale such as ‘value for money’; however, a single item scale does not address the whole concept of perceived value (Gallarza and Saura 2006; Sweeney et al. 1999). Bolton and Drew (1991: 377) draw on social judgment theory (e.g. Brunswick 1952) when they propose that value is the key link between the cognitive elements of perceived quality or performance, perceived monetary sacrifice and behavioural intentions, in that they claim that perceived value is a ‘richer measure of customers’ overall evaluation of a service than perceived service quality’. Measuring multiple components of perceived value has therefore been recommended by many researchers (e.g. Gallarza and Saura 2006; Sweeney and Soutar 2001). A comprehensive theoretical framework of perceived value has been developed by Sheth et al. (1991). Sweeney and Soutar (2001) utilize Sheth et al’s (1991) framework in studying retail purchasing. To measure the on-site perceived value, the researchers proposed four distinct dimensions: emotional, social, quality/performance and price/value for money. The results indicated that these multiple value dimensions perform better than a single value item such as ‘value for money’.

Holbrook (1994) employs the traditional extrinsic–intrinsic conceptualization of experiences as a foundation for his work on value perception and additionally includes a dimension of activity in the concept. As the consumer is assumed to be more or less active (active versus passive) in the experience, Holbrook supports the idea of the consumer as a participant in co-creating experience value. Based on the dichotomy between intrinsic/extrinsic and active/passive behaviour, Holbrook (1994) recommends that value elements include efficiency, excellence, status, esteem, play, aesthetics, ethics and spirituality. Gallarza and Saura (2006) use Holbrook’s scale, adding time and effort spent (as costs for the tourist), and test the relationships between value perception, satisfaction and loyalty in tourism. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) base their work on Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) and further on the framework delineated by Sheth et al. (1991). Sweeney and Soutar (2001) view the consumer as a participant in creating experience value – both hedonic and utilitarian – for the customer.

Within this perspective, the consumer makes a choice based on many value dimensions dependent on the choice situation (Sheth et al. 1991). Functional value is defined as the ‘perceived
utility acquired from an alternative’s capacity for functional, utilitarian or physical performance’ (Sheth et al. 1991: 160). These authors assess the functional value as the primary driver of consumer choice and as more often including value for money, quality, reliability, durability and price. The emotional value echoes the product’s ability to arouse feelings or affective states (Sheth et al. 1991) and is of particular interest in tourist experience settings (Williams and Soutar 2009) in that emotions to a great extent affect satisfaction evaluations (Otto and Ritchie 1996). A social value is defined as ‘perceived utility acquired from an alternative’s association with one or more specific groups’ (Sheth et al. 1991: 161), which not only reflects conspicuous consumption (e.g. Bagwell and Bernheim 1996) but also reflects the need to bond and socialize (Arnould et al. 2002). Epistemic value, reflecting novelty and learning, is of great importance in experience-related contexts (Weber 2001) and mirrors consumers’ curiosity and the need to learn and to experience variety within consumption (Sheth et al. 1991). This value scale has been tested in tourism contexts, such as adventure tourist experiences (e.g. Williams and Soutar 2009) and special interest tourism/historical sites, e.g. war-related sites (Lee et al. 2007), and in tourist experience settings (Gallarza and Saura 2006; Prebensen et al. 2012, 2013; Sánchez et al. 2006; Williams and Soutar 2009). The results from these studies reveal slightly different support for the value scale, indicating that further testing should be performed in a tourist experience setting.

Dramatizing for enhanced experience value

Goffman (1959) employed a theatrical metaphor in studying individual behaviour in public settings resulting in a theory of impression management. The theatrical metaphors, i.e. staging, roles and play, have been adopted in consumer research and the literature. Impression management is about the presentation of self or management of the impression of oneself. The fundamental idea is that the individual wants to develop congruence between his or her self-concept and feedback from the social groups to which he or she belongs. Impression management theory describes the process of forming and stabilizing one’s identity. People participate in this process of identity building when they enter a social setting.

Bitner’s (1992) servicescape framework, demonstrating the atmospherics in service encounters, articulates the effects of the servicescape – or service setting – on customers’ behavioural responses, such as approach/avoidance, spending money and repatronage intentions, etc. In tourism research, the interaction between the servicescape provided by the management and the personal drama in the dining room, and the ‘superobjectives’ of the customers is discussed (Morgan et al. 2008). From this perspective, the tourist becomes an actor on or off stage, and the firm and service provider’s roles become that of providing the space in which the experience is co-created (Morgan et al. 2008).

The company can thus only facilitate tourists’ experience value. However, the planning, enabling and dramatizing of the interaction scenes are of vital importance for the customer to be motivated, involved and informed to partake in value creation processes. The change in focus on production and consumption practices from exchange to use includes acknowledging that the customer has valuable resources in partaking in the value creation process. Not only does the customer have a chance to partake in the value creation process, but also the host depends on the customer to partake in order to create value. Partaking in value creation not only requires motivation and drive to be present in the situation, it also requires some sort of knowledge and skills, defined as operant resources (Vargo and Lusch 2004). These resources are considered capable of ‘purposefully’ acting on other resources (Vargo and Lusch 2008: 257). Viewing beautiful scenery or hiking includes the customer in terms of using his or her senses and/or physical resources in order to enjoy the experience. Consequently, it is the application of
resources that enables exchange. Furthermore, it is the benefits that the actors experience in partaking in co-creation that determine the level of value achievement.

The ultimate tourist experience happens on site, in a specific situation often together with other tourists and hosts. However, parts of the tourist experience start before and end after the journey takes place, often enabled by technology (Kohli and Grover 2008). Before the journey, the tourists talk to friends and family, and learn from them what to experience and which places to visit. The company should therefore ensure that existing customers bring home a toolkit (e.g. von Hippel and Katz 2002) of experiences promoting their destination and firm, as well as providing attractive and manageable homepages linked to various social media. Staging and dramaturgy is thus of great importance before the journey. However, the experience starts when people arrive at the experience scene, although the transportation from home to the destination also has an impact on the tourists’ mood, energy and motivation. The tourist experience is filled with numerous minor experiences adding up to an overall experience, affecting evaluations and future intentions. The experience could therefore be compared to a theatre and a play, where the tourists are introduced to, involved and immersed in the drama (Goffman 1959).

Moiso and Arnould (2005) used the dramaturgical framework to explore shopping experiences, distinguishing between drama structure, drama interaction and drama content. The extended dramaturgical framework provided a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which cultural resources, active consumer agency and the formal components of performances in consumption situations contribute to customer experiences. The components of the framework, i.e. the drama (drama structure), the narrative resources that organize performances in shopping contexts (drama content) and the active roles that consumers can take in drama performances (drama interaction), are outlined in Table 3.1 below. Drama structure denotes the set of theatrical components: setting, actors/audience and performance, or the formal components of drama (Grove and Fisk 1992). Drama interaction denotes the level of consumer involvement or activities, ranging from active to passive, which can shape, redirect and structure the unfolding of the drama performance (Firat 1977), thus focusing on customer involvement experiences. The drama content denotes the cultural resources that ‘infuse . . . activity with signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure’ (Goffman 1959: 30).

Based on an idea of what constitute core customer values, i.e. functional, social, emotional and/or epistemic, the message and the content should be founded on these premises. Tourists attracted by functional value should receive information regarding standards of quality and value for money, perhaps even compared to other facilities. If the core segment is more concerned about social experiences, the firm may promote and facilitate elements augmenting the customers’ positive feeling of self and social acceptance, for instance focusing on a certain type of customer and fitting their own lifestyle or the lifestyle they seek. Customers seeking emotional value should receive information about and experience the sensations and emotions of the experience, e.g. excitement and enjoyment. For risk-takers climbing mountains, a film produced to evoke the emotions of experiencing heights would probably be of significance, while a person in need of relaxation would be more likely to appreciate calm and tranquil environments. For those tourists who value epistemic qualities, promotion material and actual experiences focusing on authentic stories and learning might be expected to be more effective in attracting tourists to search for more information and to choose the actual destination and activities. In these situations, the guide is often a key player in communicating and co-creating valuable experiences for the customers (Arnould et al. 2002). Below, Table 3.1 outlines the dramaturgy (structure, interaction and content) of a tourist experience and what the tourist values during an experience process. The table exemplifies how the firm may facilitate enhanced value creation processes by dramatizing a range of experience value elements.
Interaction and value creation in tourism are core issues in terms of attracting the right customers and making their trip valuable and worthwhile. Thus, the focus of interaction in tourism is gradually shifting towards integrating the tourist as a co-creator to build value-in-use, before, during and after a journey. The tourism companies and destinations therefore have to put their efforts into attracting, facilitating and involving tourists in partaking in value creation in the whole process of a tourist experience. In particular, the firm needs to be active and creative in order to motivate the customer to engage in value creation before the journey takes place. A particular challenge is the fact that the destination, the place of enjoyment, cannot physically be transported to the customer. Accordingly, the firm has to propose value enhancement situations, i.e. staging value propositions, not only during the trip, but also before and after the journey. The tourist continues to evaluate and remember the experience after the journey, sometimes for a very long time. The company should therefore ensure that the customer has something valuable to recall and remember, and to tell others when arriving back home. People tend to travel for a variety of motives (body- and mind-related motives), but it seems that they are more likely to tell others about their mind-related experiences, such as learning and authentic experiences (Prebensen et al. 2010).

Based on theoretical frameworks, such as customers’ actions (Holt 1995), customers’ value perceptions (Holbrook 1999; Sheth et al. 1991) and the dramaturgy metaphor (Goffman 1959), the present work focuses on how tourism firms, by acknowledging what tourists value before, during and after a journey, may develop, facilitate and accommodate processes for the tourist to partake in value creation and co-creation processes through dramatizing interaction processes. Consequently, a dramaturgical framework is used to help firms provide tourists with the right motivation, involvement and skills to partake in and create valuable experiences in the tourism drama. The chapter outlines and exemplifies how tourist companies can enhance experience value for the tourist by dramatizing the experience value throughout the whole experience. As researchers outline (e.g. Vargo and Lusch 2004; Grönroos 2008) customers are the real creators of
value because by combining different resources, such as goods, services or skills, they alter the firms’ value propositions into real value (value-in-use; partake in fishing activities, showing the catch, taking pictures of the fish, telling others about the fishing trip etc.). Hence, a tourist buys into a potential value which will come to existence thorough being present (on or off stage), taking or adopting roles (more or less given to them), within a certain environment. The action or behaviour in the tourist experience will be different based on what the tourist value, i.e. quality standards, degree of socialising, learning orientation, search for passion etc. Further, the tourist acts differently at the destination or within a tourist activity framework based on their motivation (purposes) and with whom or what they interact (structure) of the action (Holt 1995).

In managerial terms, the chapter offers a framework for tourist companies to facilitate enhanced value creation through motivating, involving and teaching the customer to partake in value creation processes before, during and after the journey through employing the dramatizing framework. Based on what and the level of experience value the tourist prefer, the tourist company may develop value propositions for the tourist to realize. They will do so dependent of the purpose of why they participate, i.e. sunbathing to have a good time here and now, or if they act for instrumental reasons, i.e. get in shape or nice tan to show friends back home. The structure of the action, i.e. alone with an object such as enjoying a nice beach or being together with friends, family, other tourists or the host will also influence on the way experience value is created and co-created (Prebensen and Foss 2011). For tourist firms then to fulfil the tourist needs in a satisfactory way is through acknowledging and dramatizing for the right experience dimension to be fulfilled.

Theoretically, the chapter supports existing conceptualizations of the value-in-use perspectives by integrating various theoretical perspectives, i.e. consumption practices, consumer value perceptions and the dramaturgical metaphor. As research has acknowledged the perceived value as the leading predictor of satisfaction and behavioural intention (Cronin et al. 2000; Parasuraman and Grewal 2000; Woodruff 1997), further research on the imperative of the conceptualization, measurement and application of tourist value is needed. Additionally, due to the importance of servicescape (Bitner 1992) and dramaturgy (Goffman 1959) on consumption practices, different special dramaturgy effects, e.g. storytelling, role-play, acting, sound, smell etc., effects on motivation, involvement and partaking in value co-creation, should be further studied. Drawing upon the perspectives, the chapter suggests a new framework to acknowledge, structure and support interaction processes in order to enhance tourist experience value.

Acknowledgement

This research is a part of the research programme ‘Service Innovation and Tourist Experiences in the High North: The Co-Creation of Values for Consumers, Firms and the Tourism Industry’, financed by the Norwegian Research Association, Project No.: 195306/140.

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