

VALUE EVALUATION OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE USING CONSUMER GENERATED CONTENT

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ABSTRACT

The value literature has emerged from the fundamental notion of a trade-off between costs and benefits. This evolution supports the current understanding that value resides in experience from consumption. However, less is known about how customer experiences derived from their consumption can be translated into customer value components. This study delineates the models used in understanding the experience realm and customer value to provide insights on customers' experience based value. Consumer generated content in the form of blogs are used for analysis. These blogs provide textual artifacts of consumption experience. Using netnography as the main methodological tool, our results suggest two main findings. The first is related to the variation in value dimensions according to the realm of experience which supports the notion of value being idiosyncratic with different customers viewing the same experience differently. The second finding is related to the technical aspect of the study which suggests that consumer generated content or blogs can be used to examine the 'what of consumption.' However, it cannot be used to explain the 'why of consumption.' This suggests its potential as a preliminary research tool to complement other research methods.

JEL : M31; M39

KEY WORDS: Customer Value; Consumption Experience; Consumer Generated Content (CGC); Travel Blogs; and Netnography.

INTRODUCTION

Customer value emerged as one of the most important topics both in marketing research and practice during the 1990s. Holbrook (2003, p. 46) emphasizes the importance of value to today's marketers by stating "... if we accept the Kotler's definition of marketing as managerial activities that lead toward the facilitation and consummation of exchanges, and if we follow Kotler and Levy in regarding an exchange as a trading relationship between two parties in which each gives up something of value in return for something of greater value, it follows immediately that customer value is the basic foundation for everything we do in marketing". The current focus of value literature establishes that customer "value is now centered in the experiences of consumers" (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004b, p. 137), rather than embedded in goods and services. Consequently, customers' experience is crucial as value resides in the experience (Bitner, 1992; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004a, b; Woodruff and Flint 2006; Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Despite this shift in focus, there is very little evidence in the literature, of customer value evaluations being made based on experience.

Consumer generated content (CGC), also known as user-generated content (UGC) or user-created content (UCC) includes various kinds of media content such as blogs, wikis, e-review (www.pcmag.com) written by the general public and is publicly available on the web. The development of these technologies present today's customers as self-reflexive, narrative agents with a platform to tell their stories and explain their actions using their own words (Caru and Cova, 2008). Blogs are the most common CGC media, mostly used as online personal journals with reflections, comments and hyperlinks provided by the writer (Merriam Webster Online). Thus, blogs are naturally occurring data that can be regarded as textual

artifacts of consumption (Bosangit et al., 2009). While extant literature has looked at customer value evaluations usually through surveys and/or interviews (Williams and Soutar, 2000; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001), the use of CGC in customer value evaluations is extremely limited.

To demonstrate value evaluation using CGC, travel blogs or blogs relating to consumer travel experiences was considered most appropriate. These blogs are generally travel diaries that are posted by bloggers to update family and friends of their whereabouts, to keep a record of their travels and to share their travel experience with others. Blogs of ecotourist experiences in Sagada and Banaue, in the Philippines was chosen for this paper. Sagada and Banaue are one of the ecotourism destinations in the Philippines known for their rice terraces and its rich tribal culture. Like any other ecotourism destinations worldwide, these areas too experienced a surge in their tourism over the past few years (Eagles, 2002). Moreover, as the aim of ecotourism is to promote conservation and community development through provision of economic and social incentives to local communities (Chapman, 2003), ecotourist blogs seemed an appropriate choice for this study.

To summarize, the primary aim of this paper is to evaluate customer value based on customer experience. In addition the paper attempts to provide empirical support to the customer value and customer experience frameworks that will be used in this study, namely, Smith and Colgate's (2007) customer value typology and Pine and Gilmore's (1999) framework on experience realm. Further, taking inspiration from the rich accounts of consumer value experiences that consumer generated content (CGC) provides, the paper also attempts to demonstrate the use of CGC, particularly travel blogs, as a research tool for evaluating value based on customers' experience as published in customer's personal blogs. To this end the paper is organized as follows; a brief review of the extant literature on customer value and customer experience is presented. Next, the research method and the approach to the analysis are described. Finally, the findings and implications are reported and the research contribution and directions for future research are outlined.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Value

Customer value is an important concept in marketing and is an effective medium to understand customers (Durgee et al., 1996). An overview of the literature reveals that most research on perceived value has focused on definitions and operationalization of the concept (Woodruff and Flint, 2006). There are two approaches to the definition and operationalization of value. First, value is conceptualized as a uni-dimensional construct that can be measured by a self-reported item (or set of items) that evaluates the consumer's perception of value (e.g. Sweeney et al., 1999). Zeithaml's (1988 p.14) definition of product value - "consumers' overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given" - forms the basis of this uni-dimensional conceptualization.

The second approach conceptualizes value as a multi-dimensional construct. This perspective regards value as a highly complex concept with many components (e.g. Babin et al., 1994; Holbrook, 1999; Sheth et al., 1991a; Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007; Ruiz et al., 2008). Holbrook (1994) and Woodruff (1997) support this multi-dimensional view, suggesting that customer value incorporates both desired and received value and emphasizing that value stems from customers' learned perceptions, preferences and evaluations. The lack of agreement among researchers with respect to the definition and operationalization is a consequence of its somewhat abstract nature, which has been described as 'complex' (Lapierre, 2000), 'multifaceted' (Babin et al., 1994), 'dynamic' (Parasuraman and Grewal, 2000; Woodruff and Gardial, 1996), and 'subjective' (Zeithaml, 1988; Holbrook, 1999). Although the uni-dimensional approaches possess the merit of simplicity, they do not reflect the complexity of the value perceptions; in particular, they fail to account for the intangible, intrinsic, and emotional factors that

form part of the construct (Sanchez-Fernandez and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). The multi-dimensional constructs, on the other hand, provide a more holistic representation of the complex phenomena of customer value. There have been various attempts at the operationalization of the multi-dimensional value construct (Park et al., 1986; Sheth et al., 1991; Holbrook, 1994; Lai, 1995; Smith and Colgate, 2007). Although the construct proposed by Sheth et al. (1991a, b) and Holbrook (1994) are probably better known and most frequently used, the construct proposed by Smith and Colgate (2007) will be used in this paper. Smith and Colgate's (2007) framework integrates, amongst others, the categorization by Sheth et al. (1991a, b) and Holbrook (1999) and proposes clearly delineated benefit and sacrifice components of value (see Table 1). Moreover, Sheth and Holbrook's frameworks have been empirically tested by numerous researchers (e.g. Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Mathwick et al., 2001), so this paper provides an opportunity to empirically test the suitability of the Smith and Colgate framework.

Despite the growing body of research in the field of perceived value, there is a growing recognition and acceptance that there is more to value and that the existing knowledge base on value is not adequate and that the conceptualization of value still remains unclear (Woodruff and Flint, 2006; Sanchez-Fernandez and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). The current view in marketing literature is that value is a subjective process created and defined during use, the value-in-use notion, a view put forward by Holbrook (1994), Woodruff (1997), and more recently by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a, b) and Vargo and Lusch (2004, 2008), to name a few. This establishes that customer value is at the core of all marketing activities; and that customer "value is now centered in the experiences of consumers" (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004b, p. 137). Consequently, customers' experience is crucial as value resides in the experience (Bitner 1992; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004a, b; Woodruff and Flint, 2006; Vargo and Lusch, 2008). This paper thus aims to evaluate customer value perceptions based on customer experience.

Table 1: Comparison of Smith and Colgate (2007) Value Framework against Other Popular Customer Value Frameworks

Smith and Colgate (2007)	Park et al. (1986)	Sheth et al. (1991)	Heard (1993/94)	Holbrook (1999/2006)	Lai (1995)
Functional / Instrumental Value - Correct / accurate attributes - Appropriate performance - Appropriate outcomes	Functional	Functional	Product	Economic	Product benefits
Experiential / Hedonic Value - Sensory - Emotional - Social/ relational - Epistemic		Conditional	Orders		Logistic Benefits
Symbolic / Expressive Value - Self-identity / worth - Personal meaning - Self-expression - Social meaning - Conditional meaning	Experiential	Epistemic	Experience	Altruistic	
Cost / Sacrifice Value - Economic - Psychological - Personal Investment Risk		Social			
	Symbolic	Social		Social	Cost / Sacrifice Monetary costs, time costs, risk & human energy costs.

Table 1 shows how the Smith and Colgate framework compares with the other available customer value frameworks (Iyanna, 2009).-

Consumption Experience

Customer experience was first addressed by Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999) in their article "Welcome to the experience economy" (1998) and consequently in their book "The Experience Economy – Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage" (1999). However, more than a decade later, research on customer

experience still appears to be in its infancy (Johnston and Kong, 2011). Further, there is evidence in literature that the conceptualization of “experience” has always remained a fundamental issue (Caru and Cova, 2003). There have been numerous attempts at defining experience in terms of its elements, stages, or perspectives. These are seen in the works of Arnould et al. (2002), Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), and Pine and Gilmore (1999), to name a few. The most common interpretation however is that, customer experience is the personal interpretation of a service process and the customer’s interaction and involvement with the process during their journey or flow through a series of touch points, and how the interactions and involvement make them feel (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Ding et al., 2010; Johnston and Clark, 2008; Meyer, 2007; Pullman and Gross, 2004; Shaw and Ivens, 2002). The experience (and value, Vargo and Lusch, 2004) is perceived purely from the point-of-view of an individual customer and is inherently personal, existing only in the customer’s mind. Thus, no two people can have the same experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

The importance of “experience” to individuals and society is reflected in the concept of “experience economy” put forward by Pine and Gilmore (1999) that has attracted the attention of scholars from different fields over the past decade. The literature on this concept is abundant and is continuously evolving capturing changes in the society. Though the experience economy concept has been defined differently by scholars, it has been widely accepted in marketing and consumer research (see work of Kotler, 2003; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004b). Experiential consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) and experiential marketing (Schmitt, 1999) are manifestations of how businesses acknowledged the existence of experience economy, i.e. how experience is a source of value creation and an economic offering (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

Pine and Gilmore (1999) proposed four experience realms and is the most widely used framework for conceptualizing experience in the experience economy. The experience realms are based on the intersection of two dimensions: (1) customer’s participation in the experience (weak/passive or active/strong); and (2) individual’s connection with the environment of the experience or environmental relationship (from absorption/weak to immersion/strong). They posit that the coupling of these two dimensions results in four realms of mutually compatible experience domains that often combine to form uniquely personal encounters. The four realms are: entertainment, educational, esthetic and escapist.

The educational realm occurs when consumer absorbs the events unfolding before him (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). It involves active participation of the individual and usually an engagement of the mind and body. Consumers typically enhance their skills and knowledge either through general or specific educational experiences (Oh et al., 2007). Customers are engaged in this realm by acting on their desire to learn (Jurovski, 2009). Within the entertainment realm, consumer passively absorbs the experiences through their senses such as viewing performance, listening to music, and reading for pleasure (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). It includes momentary entertainment that make people smile, laugh or otherwise enjoy themselves (Jurovski, 2009). The escapist realm, on the other hand, involves greater immersion from individuals (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Consumers are completely immersed in their environment and actively involved physically. This realm requires the consumers to affect actual performances or occurrences in the environment (Oh et al., 2007). Hence, individuals in this realm become actors who also interact with others (Jurovski, 2009). In the esthetic realm, individuals immerse themselves in an event or environment but they have little or no effect on it; leaving the environment or event essentially untouched but themselves (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Consumers passively appreciate a destination and are influenced by it without affecting or altering the nature of the environment presented to them (Oh et al., 2007). Interests in Pine and Gilmore’s concept have led research to focus on ways in which experiences are produced, narrated and mediated (Lofgren, 2008). Though it has been adopted in many contexts (Ek et al., 2008), it has recently been introduced to the tourism and hospitality literature (e.g. Gilmore and Pine, 2002; Oh et al., 2007; Jurovski, 2009; Morgan et al., 2009), as it adds dimension to interpreting tourist experiences (Oh et al., 2007). Having acknowledged that value is now in the experience, there is a need to understand experience from the perspective of the consumer. The use of CGC in evaluating customer

value based on experience as published by consumers in their blogs, provides an ideal platform to analyze personalized consumer experiences. Thus, the present study aims to analyze consumer experience using Pine and Gilmore's four realms of experience.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a new qualitative research methodology called netnography that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study consumer experiences through computer-mediated communications (Kozinets, 2002). Netnography is an interpretive method devised specifically to investigate the behavior of consumers present on the internet. Online communication between consumers has been studied by using netnography (Kozinets, 1998; Kozinets, 2002) for understanding their attitudes, perceptions, imagery, and feelings. Moreover, netnography as a research methodology is particularly useful to analyze communities where access based on conventional methods is difficult (Langer, 2003; Pires et al., 2003). Netnography as a methodological tool seemed most appropriate for our research as one of the aims of this paper is to demonstrate the use of CGC, particularly travel blogs, as a research tool for evaluating value based on consumers' experience as published in their blogs.

To select travel blogs for analysis, the most visited travel blog websites were identified, and subsequently, all the blogs on Sagada and Banaue published since 2007 to December 2010 were selected. Travelblog.org, travelpod.com and travbuddy.com are the most popular travel blog websites and receive maximum visitor traffic according to Alexa.com, a traffic monitoring website (Bosangit, et al., 2009). Alexa's ranking is considered to be a measurement of websites "relative popularity among the internet community". The measurement is based on data from over ten million Alexa toolbar users (www.homebizpal.com). A review of these websites showed that travelblog.org has more blogs published on the destination in the selected time frame and their narratives more detailed. A total of seven travel blogs, produced by bloggers of varying profiles, were downloaded and analyzed in this study. Two blogs were joint authored (one male, one female author) and the remaining five were single authored (one female bloggers, four male bloggers). Most bloggers were Europeans and North Americans, this is in line with the fact that the top three groups of travel bloggers are from English speaking nationalities (e.g. British, Americans, Canadians) (Bosangit et al., 2009). On an average, each blog had three pages of written text (approximately 1500 words). Permissions to use the blogs were requested and received from bloggers through emails. The profile of bloggers based on what they disclosed in their profile page is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Profile of Bloggers and Their Blogs

Blogger	Nationality	Gender	Blog Ownership	Number of Words Per Blog Analyzed
Bem	Filipino	Female	Single	591
Dan and Kelsey	Canadian	Male/Female	Joint	1,187
Ed	British	Male	Single	1,319
James and Hannah	British	Male/Female	Joint	3,137
John	British	Male	Single	1,178
Josh	American	Male	Single	733
Ian	Undisclosed	Male	Single	570

Table 2 provides a brief summary of the data analyzed in this study

As prescribed by Kozinets (2002, p. 64), content analysis was used to expedite the coding and analyze the value perceptions embedded within each experience realm. The coding method chosen for this study was the "template analytic technique" (Miller and Crabtree, 1992), in which researchers use someone else's code or framework to process and /or analyze information. Thus, priori codes (Miles and Huberman 1994) identified and specified in the literature review was applied in this study. Two layers of coding were conducted - first, experience realms; and second, value perceptions. A coding manual was developed with codes defined and contextualized from tourism literature (e.g. Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Oh et al., 2007; Jurowski, 2009; Williams and Soutar, 2000; Smith and Colgate, 2007). Each layer of

analysis was coded by a team of two coders independently. The text was 98% completely coded. Value codes were 98.1% comparable and appropriately labeled. Experience realm codes were 91.3% comparable and appropriately labeled. Overlaps were seen in coding educational and escapist realms, however, differences were resolved through discussion and joint agreement.

Findings and Implications

Results of the analysis confirmed previous work (Morgan et al., 2009 and Oh et al., 2007; Jurowski, 2009) on how Pine and Gilmore's four experience realms are evident in tourist experiences. The analysis of travel blogs indicated that the value perceived by bloggers differ by realm of experience. Empirical evidence in support of the realms of experience and the corresponding value dimension is provided in the following sections.

Educational Realm: Analysis indicated that this realm occupies a dominant part of tourists' narratives. Seven bloggers produced narratives that incorporated references to educational experiences. The content varied from advice regarding travelling, stories regarding the destination, for example, rice terraces, hanging coffins and indigenous cultures. Within the educational realm, the functional/ instrumental dimension and experiential/hedonic dimension of value were seen to be most dominant. This perhaps is not surprising as the educational realm concerns sharing of information about places of interest and/or individuals giving advice based on their experience.

Dan and Kelsey (2008) highlighted things they learned about rice terraces saying: *"here are a few interesting "tid bits" that we discovered about the rice terraces and local people ... I should note however that this is all hear say from our local guides and whether or not there is a little fiction mixed in with the facts, it all added to our experience"*. The quote indicates that the experience relates to functional/instrumental value. This value dimension is concerned with the extent to which a service has desired characteristics, is useful or performs a desired function. In this instance, the commentary or interpretation of the tour guide added to the overall experience of Dan and Kelsey. Interpretation is not simply about informing people about the place; it requires creativity and skill (Newsome et al., 2002) and provides a crucial link between the consumer and the product (Williams and Soutar, 2000). Thus, encounters between the tour guide and customer are a key component of value, a fact that has been acknowledged by many (Williams and Soutar, 2000).

James and Hannah (2009) described their journey to the area as *"... was the (very long) day that will always be remembered as the time we experienced haphazard Filipino transport, and the substandard tourist infrastructure at its very worst."* This account relates to both functional costs, in terms of substandard facilities, and cost/sacrifice value, in terms of personal time, effort and inconvenience. From a marketing perspective, this may influence consumer choice behavior regarding tourism destinations. However, considering that most bloggers are from North America and Europe, this may have added novelty to their experience as Dan and Kelsey (2008) state *"I must admit the crazy bus ride was definitely worth it"*.

Edward (2009) writes, *"We had come here expecting to find the most diverse and colorful tribes of the Philippines but in reality found that the local people had preserved the visible aspects of their culture such as houses and clothing less than almost anywhere we had been in the country."* The quote here relates to experiential/hedonic sacrifices as the novelty of their experience was lost as a result of lack of conservation. Edward goes on to say *"My heart sank. So this tradition had died out too. What we were looking at was no more than a museum."* Considering Banaue and Sagada are marketed as eco-destination, conservation of local indigenous cultures and traditions is an important aspect to entice tourist to visit the destination.

Entertainment Realm: This experience realm relates to activities that make people smile, laugh and enjoy themselves. Text from four blogs was coded into this realm. Most bloggers merely enumerated their activities and did not describe it as richly as they described aspects of their trip within the educational realm. Within this realm there was strong evidence that experiential/hedonic value element such as fun, entertainment and recreation (Holbrook, 1994) are the only dominant perceptions. There was no evidence of other dimensions of value being present within the entertainment realm.

Bem (2008) talks about enjoying her dinner and mentioned how much a glass of red wine “*was perfect and the smell was just soothing*” and that after dinner everybody just needed to get to bed as they were dead tired from the trip. Here, entertainment is seen as something relaxing after a strenuous activity. Other activities that were included in this realm are: *watching band, drinking, listening to western music* (James and Hannah, 2009); *watching beauty parade and going through a street market* (Josh, 2009). The above mentioned quotes and reflections are indicative of experiential/hedonic value derived from appropriate experiences, feelings and affection for the customer in relations to the physical surrounding and activities they were involved in. As such this may involve epistemic value in the form of novelty as well as emotional value in the forms of pleasure and fun. It is clearly evident that apart from the extrinsic cues such as excellence and efficiency of the tourism products described in the educational realm as functional/instrumental value, intrinsic attributes (affective) such as play (fun) and entertainment are of equal importance too. Being an ecotourism destination, tourists may not expect Banaue and Sagada to provide them with a wide range of entertainment activities. From a marketing perspective, the contribution of this realm to the overall experience of the tourists may be seen as an opportunity for destination managers to offer more activities that will enhance the tourists’ experiential/ hedonic value. This is important as experiential/hedonic value may be regarded as one of the key dimensions for post-consumption value perceptions (Williams and Soutar, 2000).

Escapist Realm: This realm is characterized by getting-away, immersing-into-destination, and partaking-a-different- tourism behavior. Banaue and Sagada are areas known to be remote and require tourists to be ready for inconveniences and adventure, thereby adding novelty to their experience. This is seen in their blogs, as activities that could be classified into this realm had the longest narratives as compared to other experience realms. Within this realm, it was seen that experiential/hedonic value dimensions, particularly the epistemic sub-component was most dominant, followed by functional/instrumental value.

Ian (2009) describes the road he biked through on his way from Banaue to Bontoc saying “*The road was awful! Rocks everywhere, deep mud, huge deep puddles stretching right across the “road”, crazy!! ... I took the bike right to the summit of the peak .. I think it was the toughest ride yet. Big, sharp rocks everywhere. How I made it to the summit without getting a puncture or two just amazed me!*” Dan and Kelsey (2008), on the other hand, perceived it differently, and had this to say “*On the few occasions I did wake up it was enough to scare the living shit out of me... the gravel, washed out, single lane road (if that's what you want to call it but personally I thought it was more like a trail for moving livestock) snaked back and forth, over, around and through the mountains. Seeing a flipped over tour bus very similar to ours down the steep embankment around half way through the trip did nothing to ease my concerns... Though, I must admit the crazy bus ride was definitely worth it.*” The concluding sentences in both quotes indicate that the overall ride was worth it. Though these quotes have relatively different perceptions towards the situation, they still share similar value perceptions. As such, they clearly indicate the existence of functional/instrumental value associated with the trip. In this instance, the evidence points towards features sacrifice or inappropriate performance of the physical surrounding. Bloggers showed their dismay mainly due to the condition of the road. However, despite the ‘shocking’ accounts they encountered at the beginning of the journey, such sacrifices were seen to have changed to feelings of pleasure - “worth the hassle” in getting through the hassle. Moreover, such experiences enhance symbolic/expressive value perceptions (self-worth or personal meaning) as James and Hannah (2009)

state “*We collapsed in bed, after a long, hard day of obstacle-strewn travelling, we had made it against all the odds and were very chuffed not to have given up!*”

Caving activities in Sagada also required physical efforts from tourists. Josh (2009) writes “*It was amazing. We squeezed through holes that I had to twist and turn and scrape my head to get through. We walked barefoot up 45 degree rocks because they were just that "grippy"... There were also a lot of bats, but they didn't bother us. We did remember to close our mouths when we looked up at them though.*” The presence of purely experiential/hedonic value stemmed from the feeling of adventure, pleasure, epistemic and humor, seemed to dominate in the caving activities. Trekking, caving and travelling to Banaue and Sagada demonstrate what Oh et al., (2007) described as a type of escape where tourists’ active involvement in specific activities at the destination become instrumental in orchestrating an escapist experience. In addition to nature conservation and culture preservation, activities that provide an opportunity to do “something different” might be a major attraction that pulls tourists to destinations like Banaue and Sagada.

Aesthetic Realm: This experience realm relates to how tourists enjoy being at the destination, i.e. they passively appreciate or are influenced by the destination. Within this realm, the experiential/hedonic dimension of value was most predominant. A notable pattern that emerged was that the sensory and emotional sub-components within this dimension seemed to occur simultaneously. Though there is evidence of other dimensions and sub-components of value, they almost always relate to sensory or emotional sub-components.

Rice terraces of Banaue were the main attraction with six blog narratives providing evidence for this experience realm. They were described as “*beautiful*” (Josh, 2009), “*centuries old terraces rise majestically hundreds of feet high, forming a stunning amphitheatre of giant, bright green steps*” (James and Hannah, 2009), “*the engineering of the ancient Filipino genius*” (Josh, 2009) and “*stunning*” (Ian, 2009). Bloggers expressed the feeling of “being there” by using words as “*wow*”, “*overwhelming*” and “*awesome*”. For example, Ian (2009) writes “*and wow you are confronted with an overwhelming view! Rice terraces covering every face of the surrounding hills. Simply awesome.*” Dan and Kelsey (2008) echo a similar sentiment when they say “*... on numerous occasions I had to stop and gain my composure because the vastness and beauty of the terraces was simply overwhelming.* These quotes clearly indicate that value perceptions are based on sensory sub-components (such as aesthetics, ambiance, feel/tone), and emotional sub-components (such as pleasure/enjoyment; play/fun, excitement, adventure, and humor) of the experiential/hedonic dimension of value. The sensory and emotional sub-components are a key dimension to tourist value-in-use experience and contribute towards the post-consumption value perceptions of tourist experience (William and Soutar, 2000).

John (2007) writes that he found “*the best accommodation so far in Sagada – bright airy room with a great view of the surrounding countryside*”. Though John’s quote relates to functional/instrumental dimensions, value perceptions are enhanced by the sensory sub-component of the experiential/hedonic dimension of value. This highlights the fact that by focusing on functional or technical aspects of tourism only, marketers may overlook other nuances of value perceptions that are equally or more important. As manifested in the above discussions, value dimensions vary according to the realm of experience, with some dimensions being more dominant than others. Table 3 shows the dominant value dimensions within each realm of experience. Moreover, there was evidence of value perceptions being idiosyncratic with different customers viewing the same experience differently. However, knowledge of the experience realms and the perceptions of value within each realm offer valuable marketing information to destination marketers and tour operators.

Table 3: Dominant Value Dimension within Each Realm of Experience

Realm of Experience	Functional/ Instrumental Value		Experiential/ Hedonic Value			
	Features		Epistemic	Social	Sensory	Emotion
Educational		√	√	√		
Entertainment						√
Escapist		√	√			
Esthetic		√			√	√

Table 3 shows the dominant value dimensions within each realm of experience.

CONCLUSION

Customers cherish unique experiences; hence, market offerings that generate such experiences have sustainable competitive advantages over most other competing products/services (Gilmore and Pine, 2002). Acknowledging that value resides in customers' experience (Bitner, 1992; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004a, b; Woodruff and Flint, 2006; Vargo and Lusch, 2008), this paper makes three contributions. First, this paper makes an important theoretical contribution by evaluating value perceptions based on experience realms. Second, the potential of using CGC in the evaluation of value perception based on consumer experience narratives was illustrated in this study. Third, this paper adds to prior research by providing empirical evidence in support of Pine and Gilmore's experience realms and Smith and Colgate's value framework in the context of tourism.

The study demonstrated that the most dominant value dimensions within the four experience realms were functional/ instrumental and experiential/ hedonic value implying the importance of these two to destination marketers. The identification of value created in various experience realms may contribute to experiential marketing issue of understanding how to create emotional ties with consumers. Customers' emotional attachment is central to experiential marketing and has been explored for its full potential as a core element of business strategy (McCole, 2004). The analysis of CGC shows evidence of how specific experience realms may be used to create emotional attachments among consumers with respect to the consumption of the tourist destination. Likewise, it also shows those realms of experience that may need some input from the experience provider or destination managers to assist customers in creating emotional ties with the consumption experience associated with the destination.

Further work is needed to validate findings in other consumption contexts. Symbolic/expressive value has generated the least amount of attention in the discussion. However, marketing strategies that focus on the most dominant dimensions may result in overlooking other important perceptions that could provide sustainable competitive advantage. Thus research needs to examine strategies that could enhance value perceptions relating to symbolic/expressive value. It was demonstrated that CGC or blogs can be used to analyze the "what of consumption" (e.g. types of experiences and type of value perceived); however, it cannot be used to explain the "why of consumption" as there is little scope for probing. Suffice to say that for now CGC can be used as a preliminary research tool that can complement other research methods.

A limitation of the study was that it used blogs on a particular destination to analyze value and experience. This experience differs greatly from an everyday consumption; hence this study needs to be replicated to other contexts of consumption. There are consumption-oriented blogs such as trips to the mall, clothes, purchases and dinner in a fancy restaurant, that offer rich retrospective accounts of the blogger's everyday consumption (Zhao and Belk, 2007). Another area worthy of further research would be to focus on the photos and videos posted in the travel blogs which are rich sources of information on how tourists perceive the destination and re-present it to their audience, and are yet to be explored. The use of netnography for analysis of these blogs is merely one of the many ways blogs could be analyzed. Content analysis and narrative analysis are the most commonly used methods in studies on travel blogs

(Banyai and Glover 2011); blog analysis using other methods may provide interesting insights on the concept customer value and experience. Acknowledging that more work is required to understand the full potential of CGC, it is hoped that this study can be viewed as an important step in a long campaign.

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