

How is the Customer Contributor and Interpreter of Value?

Opening the Black Box of the Linkages between Value Experience and Value Creation.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to open up the black box of the link between value experience and value creation through a phenomenological lens. We aim to explore distinct linkages between these two concepts and attempt to investigate what constitutes these linkages and how they relate to value outcomes.

Design/methodology/approach – We conducted an ethnographic study to investigate the “lived experience” of 25 Dutch amateur football teams in The Netherlands, playing on artificial grass pitches. During a three month time period, we held interviews with junior and senior football players and observed them during their trainings and matches in order to understand the various ways of value experience and value creation when playing on different artificial grass pitches, that is, in their own user “sphere”.

Findings – We found that the experience of the value of products and services is influenced by the experience of the value creation process and the other way around. Furthermore, we observed why the occurrence of breakdowns in ongoing value creation processes is important because they mediate value experience from unreflective to reflective. Although presented as a sliding scale, we identified three distinct links between value experience and value creation. At the extreme, we found that reflective experience oriented players to the features of artificial grass that block value creation whilst unreflective experience of artificial grass leads to an orientation on value creation and outcomes.

Research implications – By presenting these three distinct links, we contribute to the value discussion by posing a nuanced and contingency based view on value experience and value creation. This view challenges our current way of thinking about value experience and creation which so far has been largely considered as a temporal, fluid and processual phenomenon in which value creation is considered as implicit.

Originality – What it means to consider customers as both contributor and interpreter of value is an emerging topic in Service-Dominant Logic research. This paper is a novel contribution to this endeavour by examining the matter from a phenomenological view, taking micro processes of value experience and creation seriously and yet still interested to identify patterns in objective to serve as further theory development and improve marketing practices.

Key words – Service-Dominant Logic, unreflective/reflective experience, value creation, breakdowns, football players

Paper type – Research paper

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INTRODUCTION

Since the last decade, there is an increasing interest in the “how” customers value rather than “what”. Focusing on the how question implies a shift towards the way customers experience and create value in practice from a subjective point of view (e.g. Schembri, 2002; Gummesson, 2003; Goulding, 1999). This notion of customer value rest on the idea that “*value resides not in the object of consumption, but in the experience of consumption*” (Frow and Payne, 2007: 91). This way of thinking of customer value has particularly been advocated by scholars advocating the Service-Dominant Logic (hereafter S-D logic) (Grönroos, 2008; Gummesson, 2003; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2008). The S-D logic generally agrees on the idea that customer value is idiosyncratic, experiential, contextual, and meaning-laden (Vargo and Lusch, 2008) and recognise the importance the customer being an active participation in the creation of value, also known as value-in-use (Macdonald et al., 2016; Macdonald et al., 2011). In other words, customers are conceived as both contributor and interpreter of value (Gummerus, 2013; Norman and Ramirez, 1994) which suggests that value experience and creation must be closely related. Following Cova and Salle (2008: 271): “*by co-creating the function as well as the meaning of its experience, the customer co-constructs value for himself*”. Understanding how value is experienced and created by customers would then necessitate a focus on what customer do with services or products in value creation processes and for which purpose (Heinonen et al., 2010). In understanding this, scholars have advocated using phenomenological or interpretivists lens which necessitates the capturing of the “lived experience” of value and creation (Helkkula et al., 2012a; Schembri, 2006; Schembri and Sandberg, 2002). Also Vargo and Lusch (2004; 2008) note that the customer is always a co-creator of value and that value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary.

However, although value experience and creation are ontologically speaking placed on the same footing in the S-D literature and in fact presuppose each other, the link between both remain largely ambiguous. For instance, Ellway and Dean (2016: 5) define value experience as the “*the individual’s unique and context-bound, phenomenological interpretation of value creation activity*” and thus focus on th experience of the value creation activity rather than the activity itself wheareas (Grönroos and Gummerus, 2014: 209) consider value creation as “*the customer’s process of extracting value from resources*” and hence focus on the process of value creation activity and the products and services involved in this activity. Here, the role of experience itself remains underexplored and especially the object of experience. Our

observation is in line with Gummerus (2013: 32) who argues that “*experience is the missing link and the common denominator of value creation processes and value outcomes*”. Indeed, there is some uncertainty revolving the link between these two interlinked concepts and whether we should conceive of experience and creation as two parallel activities or as two sides of the same coin. Some clues have been presented in this regard. For instance, Payne et al. (2008) note that customer value creation processes are often non-linear and experienced unconsciously whereas Ellway and Dean (2016) remark that this stream of unconscious experience in value creating practices is sometimes interrupted by punctuated events or certain situations in which value is consciously experienced and assessed by users. These clues are specifically inspirational as a starting point for the present paper since it begs to further clarify the linkages between unreflective/reflective experience of value and value creation, and with implications for value outcomes.

Therefore, the research question of this paper is as follows: what constitutes the linkages between value experience and value creation and what are the implications for value outcomes?

We base our approach on a phenomenological perspective. Sandberg and Tsoukas (2011) point out the notion of entwinement logic of practice which presupposes that ways of value experience and creation must emerge from within a context which already is made intelligible to customers. This notion is built on the work of the German phenomenologists and philosopher Martin Heidegger (1962), supported by Hubert Dreyfus (1991). Heidegger's work describes a mode of being, called “*being-in-the-world*”, which represents a fundamental relationship between person and world and one that informs the logic of practice and highlights the role of practice breakdowns in mediating thought and action. We see this approach as useful to bring us closer to an in-depth understanding of the linkages between value experience and value creation.

Inspired by this alternative view, we approach value experience and value creation in an empirical setting in which we studied user experiences in a sportive and dynamic context. Due to the nature of this context, we are offered with a suitable case that is sensitive towards a user's “lived experience”. In a three month period, we studied 25 Dutch amateur football teams in The Netherlands. We examined in greater detail how individual football players create value through winning and enjoying a match by playing on artificial pitches, which they most of the time unreflectively experience but occasionally reflectively. We relied on ethnographic methods (Van Maanen, 2011; Visconti, 2010) in getting as close as possible to the “lived experience” of football players. We examined them under various weather conditions ranging

from heavy rain in the evening to nice sunny days which both influenced experience and creation of value. Our fieldwork consisted of 58 short interviews and 110 field notes made during the games and trainings. We triangulated our observations with those of the players after matches and trainings and thereby ensuring credibility of the findings.

This paper attempts to contribute to the value discussion by opening up the black box of the relationship between value experience and creation in a customers' lifeworld (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Grönroos, 2008; Heinonen et al., 2010). Our first contribution describes the link between value experience and value creation where we show that the former is closely related to the product or service and the latter is highly concerned with realising value through reaching a certain goal in mind. Second, we set out and analyse the different characteristics of the linkages between unreflective and reflective experience and creation in value creation processes. Third, we identify the key processes underlying each linkage including the implications for value outcomes. Finally, this paper also contributes to the calls of value researchers to introduce novel methods to examine value experience and creation in practice (Gummerus, 2013; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Bruns and Jacob, 2014; Grönroos and Voima, 2012; Heinonen et al., 2010).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. We first discuss the three key streams in customer value research. After that, we discuss the current state of the S-D logic literature on value creation and experience from an interpretivist/phenomenological perspective. In the subsequent section, we discuss an alternative view on value experience and value creation. In the method section, we introduce the research design of our study, the research site and techniques for data collection and analysis. After that, we describe our findings. In the discussion, we reflect on our findings and outline the contributions for theory development and practice. We close our paper with a conclusion including limitations of the study and opportunities for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The S-D logic literature underwrites that customers are both interpreter and contributor to their own value determination rather than an assessor of value alone (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006; Norman and Ramirez, 1994; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Following Lusch and Vargo (2006: 284): "*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*". Value-in-use highlights the phenomenological and experiential nature of value determination by the

beneficiary in value creation processes (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2008) and as such, goes beyond terms like “consumer perceptions” or “higher-order level” needs (e.g. Woodruff (1997). Indeed, Vargo and Lusch (2008) remarked that value experience is perhaps a better term to make the phenomenological nature of value clear and also to avoid any rationalistic overtones (Chandler and Vargo, 2011; Schembri, 2006). Following Schembri (2006: 388): “*the customer as the subject is inseparable from services as the object*” and note that all individuals are experiencing subjects in social experience networks.

Taking seriously the phenomenological determination of value-in-use implies the reliance on a subjectivist ontology understanding of customer value as grounded in the individual or collective “lived experiences” of customers in their own sphere (Schembri and Sandberg, 2002; Grönroos, 2008; Helkkula et al., 2012a). On this basis, various scholars have examined the “lived experience” of service quality (Schembri and Sandberg, 2002; Tumbat, 2011), or engaged in the characterisation of value in the experience (Helkkula et al., 2012a). Helkkula et al. (2012a) proposed that value in the experience also known by the acronym VALEX, can be individually or collectively experienced, is past laden, shaped by the present, and can even be imagined by customers apart from their involvement in value practices. Yakhlef (2015) deployed a phenomenological perspective – based on the work of the French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1962) – and examined how the body is an intrinsic part of the experience of customer value in a shopping environment, that is, a space in which value creation occurs. Yakhlef (2015: 558) maintains that body (including the mind) connects the social and material realm and in fact, reconfigure each other: “*customer experience is a synthesis between the physical, spatial features of the environment and customer’s bodily, perceptual capacities as congealed in the habitus*”. This implies that experience is a pre-conscious phenomena built through everyday habitual practices in which subjects experience the world instead of in a disembodied ‘social vacuum’ which would pertain to a theory of a bodiless mind (Gallagher, 2006).

While value determination refers to how customers *experience* value, value creation concentrates on what customers *do* with products or services to extract value from them through a series of activities (Gummerus, 2013; Payne et al., 2008; Heinonen et al., 2010). Indeed, value creation includes the customers’ physical, mental or possessive activities, practices and experiences in multiple individual or collective social contexts (Grönroos and Voima, 2012). However, the difference between the experience of value and the creation of it is that the former is considered as “an act of the mind” (in which value appears to a customer) whilst the latter focuses on the activities and interactions needed to create that value. In this regard, some refer

to value creation processes (Grönroos, 2004; Payne et al., 2008) to indicate the goal oriented nature of value creation (Gummerus, 2013) whereas others refer to value practices to indicate the oftentimes implicit and routinised actions involved in value creation (Helkkula et al., 2012a; Korkman, 2006; Holttinen, 2010; Helkkula et al., 2012b). The interest of this paper lies in the value experience and creation in the lifeworld context of the customer (Carù and Cova, 2003; Grönroos, 2008) as different forms of value co-creation between supplier and customers (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Grönroos, 2011).

So far, most research within the S-D logic literature foreground one concept whilst keeping the other implicit. Consequently, to date there is still little knowledge on how value experience and value creation are related. However, some important contributions have been made that provide the input for theory development. For instance, Payne et al. (2008: 86) remark that *“customer value creating processes should not be viewed in the traditional ‘engineering’ sense, but as dynamic, interactive, non-linear, and often unconscious processes”*. Others have adopted the perspective and conceptualised the differences between experience and practice from a practice perspective. Based on the works of practice theorists (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2002), Helkkula et al. (2012b) suggest that experience and the routine behaviours in value creation practices intersect but are nonetheless ontologically and epistemologically different. Whereas experience consist of iterative sense making processes concerning both conscious and unconscious levels, practices are dominantly considered as recursive routinised actions. However, Helkkula et al. (2012b: 563) note that they should not completely be viewed as separated from each other: *“our sense making in relation to value experiences from a phenomenological perspective cannot (and should not) be divorced from the experience of value-creation practice itself”*. Using Bourdieu’s (1990) recursive triad of practice, habitus, and field, Ellway and Dean (2016) show that what customers do and how they experience are inextricably linked and mutually constituting. They maintain that value creation is dependent upon the temporal intertwining of practice and experience. The difference between habitus and experience is that the former relates to instrumental value creation *“based upon attitudes, interests and dispositions to engage in certain practices”* (Ellway and Dean, 2016: 318) whereas the latter indicates that *“value can emerge through reflection upon experience and existing practices and , changed attitudes or interest”* (Ellway and Dean, 2016: 318). Hence, Ellway and Dean (2016) suggest that practice involves a habitual (unconscious) mode of engagement of customers. This leads to instrumental value creation and a conscious mode of customer engagement consisting of reflection upon experience of existing practices and even fields which creates value by new insights and change. These contributions make clear how

experience aligns with the creation of value and identify distinct modes of experience ranging from unreflective to reflective in relation to value creation in terms of routinised behaviours and instrumental value creation to the production of new valuable insights. However, an important remark for the present paper is that value creation does not continuously flow, but is prone to events or certain situations where value is experienced explicitly (Ellway and Dean, 2016). This suggest that there are dynamics involved in value creation processes that lead to distinct experiences and hence outcomes for value creation. This observation is in line with Gummerus (2013) who argues that the nature of the links between routine activities – experience – and reflected experience – interpretation/determination of value deserves further research. This also pertains to the question if there are specific activities or processes underlying routine experience and reflective experience as a result of certain contingencies in value creation processes.

In finding answers on these questions, we found inspiration in the work of the German phenomenologists Martin Heidegger and management scholars who have made his work accessible for organisation studies (Chia & Holt, 2006; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011; Sandberg & Dáll alba, 2009). These contributions are helpful to potentially explore the link between unreflective/reflective forms of experience and breakdowns in value creation processes.

Heideggers phenomenological lens on Experience and Creation

Like the French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1962), Heidegger (1962) too was concerned with the idea that experience derives from our engagement with the world through everyday practices, rather than in a social vacuum. In other words, bare perception can never be the basic access to the world. Hence, both philosophers distanced themselves from the traditional view that presupposes a subject-object distinction and made it possible to look at this relationship in non-dualistic terms instead. However, while Merleau-Ponty (1962) drew attention to the body (including the mind) as mediator of the sensory experience of the world, Heidegger argued and emphasised that there are several modes of engagement with the world ranging from immersion to full detachment (Dreyfus, 1991; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011). The most primary one, immersion, is rooted in the everyday engagement with things and others in the various sociomaterial practices that constitutes social life. This implies that experience and meaning derives from being immersed in such practices and of which its means and ends are already made intelligible to those involved in it (Dreyfus, 1991; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011). Or as Sandberg and Tsoukas (2011: 343) remark *“the primary mode of existence means that for something to be, it needs to show up as something – namely, as part of a meaningful*

relational totality with other beings". Instead of seeing humans as subjects opposed to objects as maintained by the tradition, Heidegger considers humans as "doing subjects" who skillfully get along with others and things (i.e. equipment, appliances, technology, or even colleagues) in a meaningful and purposive way (Chia and Holt, 2006; Dreyfus, 1991). Heidegger (1962) thus has a strong "action oriented" view on the functionality of "things" in practice for they render meaning and experience. Furthermore, it is important to note that sociomaterial practices are teleological structured, that is, laid out towards attaining certain ends (Schatzki, 2005; Schatzki, 2002). Heidegger (1962) characterises this basic mode of engagement as *ready-at-hand*. Ready-at-hand implies that there is an unquestioned and logical coherence between the means and the ends of any given practice (see also Chia and Holt (2006). Consequently, the use of "things" and getting along with others in these practices and to attain the ends does not require deliberate thought or reflection. In other words, entwinement logic of practice involves routinised behaviours and to this belonging mental activities and processes which can be characterised as tacit (Helkkula et al., 2012a; Reckwitz, 2002) and hence, unreflective. Or to put it more extremely "*actors are immersed in practice without being aware of their involvement in it: they spontaneously respond to the developing situations at hand*" (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011: 344).

Entwinement logic of practice reflects the primary mode of engagement in which goals are realised without the need of reflective awareness. However, there are two elaborated modes of engagement in which the entwinement logic of practice is revealed and stipulates deliberate forms of reflection and thought. For Heidegger, this happens in case that ongoing practice breakdown for some or other reason. Examples of reasons are a malfunctioning of equipment, a missing part, or when ongoing practice is obstructed (Chia and Holt, 2006). Some other reasons are non-obvious situations, or even surprises (Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009). Either way, the logical flow of a practice is interrupted causing actors to deliberately interpret the situation and thus requires reflective experience. There are two distinct types of breakdowns namely mild and total. Heidegger labelled mild breakdowns as *un-ready-at-hand* situations. In such cases, actors are still concerned to "*get going again*" (Dreyfus, 1991: 84) for instance through finding a solution or by improvisation. In other words, what previously was unreflectively appreciated is now reflectively experienced as a thing that somehow blocks the attainment of goals. However, the character of the experience is nonetheless context-dependent since actors are still oriented to attain the practice goals. Dreyfus (1991: 155) – using Heidegger's favoured example of a carpenter – explicates this as follows: "*when a hammer is so heavy that the carpenter*

cannot use it, it is then experienced as too heavy. But since being-too-heavy is context-dependent, it still presupposes the equipment nature of hammers”.

Following Dreyfus (1991) and Sandberg and Tsoukas (2011), total breakdowns are different from mild breakdowns: they cause actors to become completely detached from practice. Rather than temporary *un-ready-at-hand*, the breakdown now has a more permanent character and therefore called *present-at-hand* as appears to actors. Total breakdowns too involve reflective experience but in contrast to mild breakdowns, must be viewed as context-independent. The reason is that the impact of a breakdown is so severe that actors can no longer make sense of the situation and must stop activity. Or as Sandberg and Tsoukas (2011: 345) remark: “*we bracket our immediate practical concerns, either being too paralysed to act (e.g., panicking) or aiming to find out the abstract properties of the situation at hand*”. Using the carpenter example again: “*all that is left in experience is a mere something – ‘just occurrent and no more’ (Heidegger, 1962: 103) – whose properties are not connected to its function in any intelligible way and are thus beyond understanding*” (Dreyfus, 1991: 155). However, it remains important to repeat that for Heidegger all meaning, experience, or knowledge derives from the routinised unreflective and purpose oriented behaviours that constitutes the entwinement logic of practice.

This characterisation of the three possible links between value experience and value creation is important for the present paper since it would help us to identify the role of breakdowns in value creation processes and the various ways of experience that derive from that in relation to outcomes. However, how this occurs and what constitutes these links remains an empirical question that deserves to be answered.

METHODS

To explore the linkages between value experience and value creation, we conducted an interpretive case study. This section first explains our research design, we then describe the research site followed by a description of the procedures followed for data collection and analysis.

Research design

In striving to fulfil our research objectives, we adopted a phenomenological perspective which is sensible towards understanding the users’ “lived experience” of value and creation. In doing so, we attempt to come closer to a proper comprehension of the linkages between value

experience and value creation. Since we are mainly concerned with studying the “lived experience” of humans in their natural contexts, we chose to adopt an ethnographic approach that renders us a strong position in understanding the user’s “lived experience” (Herbert, 2000; Van Maanen, 2011; Visconti, 2010). Also other marketing scholars interested in an in-depth understanding of customer behaviour promote ethnographic approaches as an alternative qualitative research strategy (Arnould and Price, 2006; Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994; Lee et al., 2005).

Research site

Empirically, we focused on how football players experience and create value by means of artificial pitches during games and trainings. We studied these experiences and value creation processes on the basis of a sample of 25 Dutch amateur football players. In the Netherlands, artificial pitches gained increasing popularity especially amongst amateur football clubs because it only requires low maintenance and is robust enough for full utilisation throughout the entire year. Although largely considered as an attractive alternative for a natural grass pitches, artificial ones have been recently criticised by experts and therefore makes it topically to study. A few important reasons are the risk of injuries for players and the assumed hazardous effects of the necessary rubber particles on the pitch. Apart from these public opinions, we were mainly interested in the “lived experience” of the value of artificial pitches by amateur football players who play on it to create value in their weekly competitive games and trainings. We observed these games and trainings in different circumstances, ranging from windy weather conditions with heavy rainfall to dry weather conditions with high temperatures. To create a comprehensive view of the context in which players performed football, we also took into consideration the condition of pitches. Where some pitches contained flat yarns and were outdated, others were new and in good condition. These different settings contribute to a full comprehension of football players’ experiences.

Data collection and analysis

Within three months, we surveyed five games and 22 trainings of junior and senior male teams competing in different leagues and at different levels. We collected data through observations during the games and trainings combined with short interviews that we conducted with players during the breaks or shortly after the match or training. We followed Schembri and Sandberg’s (2002) suggestions to use unstructured interviews to obtain ethnographic data. In

order arrive at a point of saturation where no new insights emerged (Sandberg, 2000), we conducted 58 interviews and collected 110 field notes made during observations. We chose for this mixture of obtrusive and unobtrusive data collection techniques is common in ethnographic research as it represents both emic and etic data (Van Maanen, 2011; Visconti, 2010).

We subsequently formed a data set through transcribing our interviews and observations verbatim. To have some analytical hand hold, we relied Sandberg and Tsoukas' (2011) "Heideggerian" strategies for searching for entwinement logic of practice in practical situations. Our search for entwinement logic started with investigating the relational whole of the specific sociomaterial practice of football and how value is created in a for them customary unreflective way when playing on an artificial pitch. To this end, we also looked at the circumstances such as the weather conditions and the state of the artificial pitch itself. Minor breakdowns are marked by instances that in some way directly or indirectly interrupts the player's flow and thus the value creation process. Major breakdowns are defined as instances when the flow and value creation processes are fully stopped.

RESULTS

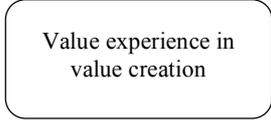
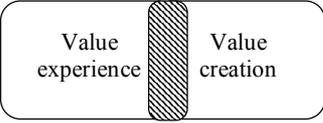
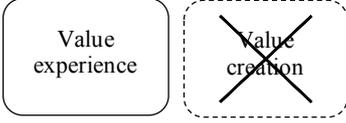
In the next section, we commence with putting forward the different modes that link value experience to value creation. After that, we illustrate each link separately and put forward our framework.

The different modes that link value experience to value creation

This section illustrates how value experience is linked to value creation in a threefold of modes in which each mode uncovers a separate link. First, we identified a link where value experience is embedded in the value creation process. In this, players unreflectively experience value creation and are thus not aware of it. They are accommodated by the product or service – artificial grass – to reach their end goals and thus are for instance able to perform well or show off their skills. Players are not interrupted from their flow in the value creation process and thus unreflectively experience artificial grass. Second, we found that players are able to consciously experience the product or service and at the same time realise value creation. Temporary breakdowns cause players to be interrupted from their flow and therefore are positioned in the situation where reflective value experience of artificial grass goes hand in hand with minor value creation. Players adapt themselves or find alternative ways in realising a certain goal in mind. In this case, there is an overlap between experience of artificial grass and value creation.

Thirdly, the final linkage illustrates a situation where value experience and value creation are not connected to each other. In other words, and put more general, subjects reflectively experience only the products or service and value creation does not take place because they are permanently blocked from their flow. Therefore, subjects are not able to for example perform well or enjoy the game and cannot reach the end goal in mind. This final linkage shows that value experience excludes value creation. We summarise the three linkages in Table 1 and discuss each linkage in the subsections below.

Table 1. Illustrating the threefold of linkages between value experience and value creation

	Linkages between value experience and value creation		
Linkages	<i>Unreflective value experience in value creation</i>	<i>Reflective value experience of the product/service in value creation</i>	<i>Reflective value experience of the product/service only</i>
			
Explanation	A player's unreflective value experience of artificial grass is fully embedded in maximum value creation. Players are satisfied and are able to perform well.	A player's reflective value experience of the product/service is partly covered in minor value creation. Due to a minor breakdown, players adapt themselves and learning takes place.	A player's reflective value experience of product/service becomes fully detached from value creation – no value creation takes place. Due to a major breakdown, players are not able to perform.
Value experience	<i>Unreflective</i> : players are not aware of value experience of artificial grass	<i>Reflective</i> : players are aware of value experience of artificial grass	<i>Reflective</i> : players are aware of value experience of artificial grass only
Breakdown	<i>Not applicable</i> : players are in their flow	<i>Minor breakdown</i> : players are temporarily interrupted from their flow	<i>Major breakdown</i> : players are permanently blocked from their flow
Value creation	<i>Full value creation</i>	<i>Limited value creation</i>	<i>No value creation</i>

Linkage 1: unreflective value experience in value creation

We observed how football players unreflectively experience artificial grass in several situations in value creation processes. In various observations, we witnessed that these players have a general desire to play football and complete a shipshape match. Players perceive feelings of joy when they are allowed to demonstrate skills and competencies with passion and play attractive football with their team to get higher ranked in their league. Also, our observations

during trainings point out that there is a collective drive for performance and competition, yet less noticeable. Either way, sophistication, control and passion for football goes hand in hand with performance reflected in a sportsman mentality. These values must be considered as ends in themselves and jointly contribute to a player's end goal: winning a match and enjoying football. Artificial grass seems to accommodate this. Players conduct actions like dribbling, turning, or passing, on artificial grass and therefore are subject to value creation. We illustrate this below with the most important examples.

The following player captured the mentioned unreflective experience of value creation in the one sentence below.

"... Being a sportsman, I just want to play football. This is my sport and passion and artificial turf enables me to play football."

We further asked him about the enabling qualities of artificial turf. He continues:

"Artificial pitches are flat and contain hardly any irregularities such as the bumps that you often encounter on natural turf. Because of that, our team is better able to develop our own game strategy from the beginning. You know exactly in which direction the ball moves when it hits the turf because there are no irregularities. It helps to perform better."

Another player confirmed this experience by saying that:

"Playing on artificial turf leads to quicker football and also more precise because there are no irregularities on the turf. Controlling the ball is easier on an artificial pitch as opposed to natural turf."

It seems that artificial grass is an enabler of player's sport and allow them to show off their qualities. Despite players were able to point out these positive aspects, their experience of the artificial grass (i.e. *how* they experience artificial grass) remained unreflective. The product or service, in this case artificial grass, thus accommodates value creation. Ironically, the latter player was able to point out that natural turf contains irregularities which players need to take into account. The absence of such irregularities on artificial grass helps to assure an uninterrupted flow, and thus yields value creation. The smoothness of the turf enables a context of action for players to excel and realise the overall teams' strategy and performance by preciseness and improved control. Some other players indicated that artificial turf also enables them to demonstrate their technical skills and how this allows a fast-pace game in greater detail. As one player remarked:

“For technically skilled players it is very pleasant and enjoyable, of course. The ball travels fast and smoothly. You can just do you your thing! The ball travels a lot faster on artificial grass and passing goes quicker. It becomes a bit like the 1995-AJAX tikki-takka football, yes a lot faster.”

Another player expressed his experience as follows:

“When playing on artificial grass, I am assured that I can perform a lot of dribbles which my game really benefits from. Like me, I am a left winger which means dribbles and defeating the other team’s defence is very important in order to win the match.”

Again, value creating actions like passing and dribbling contribute to an end goal in mind (‘1995-AJAX tikki-takka football’, winning the match). Still, the unreflective value experience is fully embedded in the value creation process and remains implicit.

Beside the development of players’ technical skills and precision, our data reveals that players also experience artificial turf as a mean that allows an uninterrupted competition throughout the season even when it rains extremely hard. Again, the value experience remains unreflective in the value creation process and but the end goal in mind (i.e. playing football) is present. As one player remarks:

“We can always do the trainings and play the matches on an artificial pitch under all-weather circumstances so the league competition will not be interrupted throughout the year.”

This is confirmed by a player who expressed this experience as follows:

“There are no rainouts or cancellations or so and thus we can always play football. I just want to play football and on an artificial grass pitch this goes very well. The fields are flat and the ball rolls nicely. Artificial grass allows teams to play throughout the year, even if it rains.”

Ironically, players also experience a kind of competence pressure when playing on artificial turf. Due to its absence of irregularities, weaker technical skills can no longer be masked by blaming it on the turf as one could when playing on natural turf pitches. As a player remarked:

“On natural turf pitch, you suffer from uneven patches which is not the case over here and thus you cannot blame the turf anymore. Therefore, a wrong pass must then be the fault of the player because there are no irregularities or bumps that might bend the ball as you frequently experience when playing on natural turf pitches”.

Rather than experiencing this as a shortcoming of artificial grass, players overall consider the disclosure of weaker competences as an opportunity to improve the technical skills of players because it contributes to the overall performance of a team.

“... It [artificial grass] really improves my technical capabilities such as: quickly turning, dribbling, fast handling etc. I am sure this also counts for my team mates. So, our team will perform better.”

The emergence performing actions on artificial grass is also present in the quote above. Because players are allowed to improve technical capabilities (i.e. own resources), they are supported to perform better individually and collectively and therefore helped to reach their end goal. As such, artificial grass positively influences the value creation process. However, the value experience of the artificial grass remains implicit and is totally covered by a player's own actions stimulating and empowering value creation towards reaching individual or collective end goals.

Linkage 2: reflective value experience of the product/service in value creation

Rather than enabling experiences, we also found that players can experience artificial grass as constraining. We termed them as negative experiences since they take the form of impediments in the realisation of the ends that we just discussed. In other word, they are detrimental to the value experience of artificial grass and the value creation process. We found that such experiences vary from minor constraints to substantial ones that really spoil their joy in playing football.

Many of such experiences are related to the weather conditions. It seems that wet or dry weather conditions are both critical to the way the value of artificial turf is reflectively experienced by players. It is above of all an ambiguous relationship as some players expressed below:

“For a nice quick technical football play, you need a wet turf but not too wet because then it becomes slippery.”

“Sure, an artificial pitch allows for a more sophisticated and technical football match. However, I prefer a natural pitch especially when it is a bit wet. I cannot really tell why that is the case.”

Another player was able to illustrate this omission explicitly:

“Personally, I am not very fond of artificial grass because when it rains, it extremely influences the game. When receiving a pass, the ball travels too fast and may bounce

unpredictable. So, you expect to get the ball on one place, and it ends up somewhere else. That's something you really have to take into account."

However, another player adds something positive:

"An artificial pitch just needs to be wet because it allows for a quick uninterrupted match. Our team performs a lot better when the pitch is wet, especially because it allows for short distance play within a range of 10-15 meters."

Apart from this exception, it seems that in general weather conditions causes players to change their way of playing a game by adapting themselves throughout the match or training. This is part of a negative value experience of artificial grass and therefore negatively influences the value creation process. Rather than playing their game with sophistication, control and precision as desired, they now have to hold back and be careful because pitches are too slippery. In other words, players cannot perform normally that help them reaching a certain end goal, and therefore adjustment takes place. Although weather conditions are always a part of football, players nonetheless consider this as a shortcoming of artificial turf since it prevents them in the realisation of the ends that we discussed above. However, also dry weather causes players to experience artificial turf as a constraint in various ways. First, players experience that they are far more prone to injuries when pitches are dry. A player remarks:

"Playing football becomes complicated if the pitch is too dry, then quick moves are complicated and can even lead to injuries when you fall on the ground."

His team mate adds:

"If you know that when performing a tackle or sliding, a skin abrasion will be the result, you will more prudent to perform a sliding next time. So in my opinion, the player adapts his game to this problem."

"You must be careful not to tackle on artificial grass. You will scrape the skin around your thighbone."

Another player puts it even more extremely:

"I prefer to do slidings, so I dislike artificial pitch."

Thus, players dislike dry weather as it forces players to adjust their game for self-protection and make the best out of it. We also encountered another constraint that players experience under dry weather conditions. Rather than the risk of an injury, these experiences are related to moods that players have shortly before a match, and thus shape the value experience and creation process in a negative way. One player was very clearly on this as he noted:

“Especially when the sun starts to shine stronger, the pitch feels hotter and this affects the mood negatively.”

“This grass gets really warm when the sun shines, and you feel the heat in your feet.”

In comparison to wet weather conditions, players are more aware of what it is that causes them to experience artificial grass negatively when it is dry weather and the sun is shining.

Some other players expressed that it is particular the infill that bothers them when playing on artificial grass. While pitches vary on the extend infill, it apparently distracts players from experiencing this uninterrupted flow needed to realise a sophisticated level of football.

We recorded the following answers:

“There is nothing beyond natural turf. You get a dry mouth on an artificial pitch especially when it doesn’t rain. You almost taste the rubber particles on the pitch.”

“There are artificial pitches where you can see from a distance that they contain a lot of rubber particles. For me this immediately characterises a bad pitch. The pitch also appears less green which gives you the idea that you are not playing on a pitch anymore.”

“I prefer to play on artificial grass during the winter. In the summer the pitch is too hard to play on and all these rubber particles slip into your shoes and this irritates.”

These experiences typically deal with the mood, a general sense of loss of motivation, when players experience artificial grass in such weather conditions or when the pitches are worn out or badly maintained. However, despite these negative experiences that clearly distracted them in realising the ends that they desire, they are with some grumbling still concerned to realise them. In these cases, and put more generally, subjects reflectively experience the product or service at hand and adapt themselves – due to a temporary interruption – attempting to find alternative ways to reach individual and/or collective goals. Accordingly, minor value creation takes place.

Linkage 3: reflective value experience of products or services only

We observed that negative experiences of artificial grass vary between minor constraints which players can overcome to major ones which prevents them from realising ends. Major breakdowns however imply that players express their experience in a more dramatic way in relation to the impossibility perform and use the product or service at hand and therefore are hold back from realising value. Some typical expressions of players are:

“Playing on this pitch is a drama, the ball goes in every direction, there are too many rubber parts and you will seriously injure your knee if you do a sliding.”

Although expressed in a more milder sense, another player remembered a match played elsewhere and pointing out his experience:

“We were playing a match on an artificial pitch and my foot got stuck while my upper body moved. Because of that, I had a severe knee injury. So in my opinion, artificial grass makes players more prone to injuries since it can be tough sometimes.”

Another player expressed a certain anger in sharing his experience with artificial pitches:

“Some pitches are like concrete. Too hard to play and very risky too because one can easily injure himself. It is a shame.”

It seems that the experience of artificial pitches substantially influences the mood and interests of players in attaining end goals in a reflective manner. Players are uncovering emotions of frustration and anger because they consciously experience that they are held away from enjoying football, performing well and reaching their end goal in mind. Stated differently, the reflective value experience of the product or service points out they perform or use the product or service at hand and therefore no value creation takes place. Merely value experience of artificial grass (in general: the product or service) shows up. So, we show that in this third linkage value experience excludes and value creation.

Illustrating the continuum that links value experience with value creation

We conclude our findings section with Figure 1 that illustrates the different linkages between value experience and value creation. The continuum shows how the three categories are linked to reflective and unreflective experience on the one hand, and no value creation and value creation on the other hand. The slope depicts that breakdown intensity – ranging from major to minor breakdowns – determines the first two modes and the third mode exemplifies the case where users are in the flow. We discuss each of the modes. First, major breakdowns cause users to be blocked from value creating activities and therefore purely and solely reflectively experience features of the product/service. In this case, there is no value creation but fully reflective experience is present. Second, minor breakdowns cause users to reflectively experience features of the product/service, yet still realising and concerned with value creating activities. In this mode, depending on the intensity of the minor breakdown, users adapt themselves to the situation (in case of a mild form of a minor breakdown) or learn from the situation (in case of a stronger form of a minor breakdown). In the third and final mode, users

are unreflectively experiencing the product/service and merely focus on realising maximum value through value creating activities.

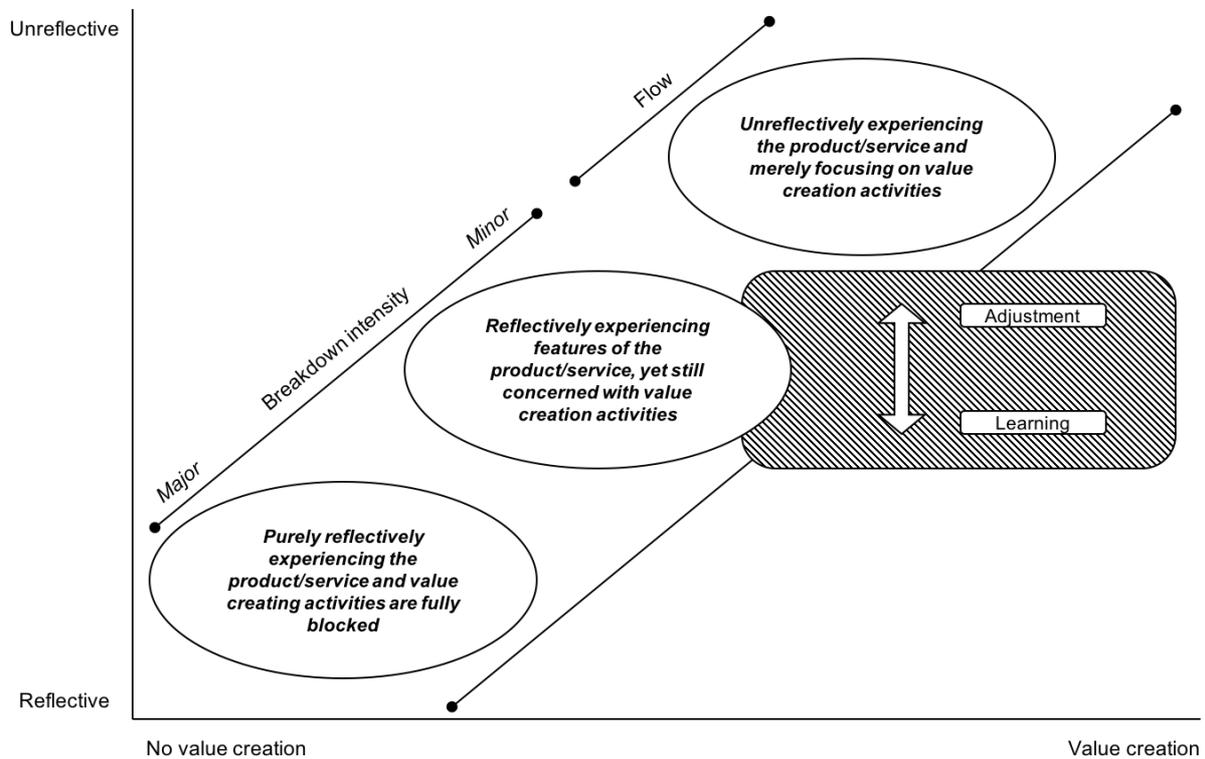


Figure 1. Continuum that links value experience with value creation

DISCUSSION

This research, through the use of ethnographic data, demonstrates there are fundamental differences in the characteristics of the linkages between value experience and creation. Within the context of this research, we conclude that value creation is at a peak when customers/users unreflectively experience the quality aspects of products or services that enable the creation by their involvement in value creation processes. Reflective experience in turn directs attention to those aspects of products and services that constrain the related activities in value creation processes in case of a minor breakdown. In this regard, we observed that there distinct yet interdependent processes at work: one relates to the thinking process and the other to the performance of activities in the value creation processes. We also observed how these key processes lead to adjustment and even learning aimed to proceed the value creation process. In other words, we can suggest that minor breakdowns as they occur in value creation processes can also be considered as important drivers of change as they spur the circular relationship between customer experiences and perceptions of value (Helkkula and Kelleher, 2010). Major breakdowns in value creation processes also lead to reflective experience although the outcomes

vary radically from the previous ones because customers tend to cease or avoid value creation. In this case, the customer reflectively experiences the product or service only.

Based on the use of our phenomenological perspective and the empirical findings, a few contributions can be made especially to the literature interested in the view that places value creation in the lifeworld of the customer (Grönroos, 2008; Heinonen et al., 2010; Cova and Dallı, 2009). We have the following contributions.

First, we identify three different linkages between value experience and value creation. We demonstrate that value experience and value creation are intimately connected with each other and yet sometimes even mutually exclusive. Our findings show that value experience is closely affected to the product or service and value creation is highly concerned with value creation and outcomes.

Second, we contribute to literature by demonstrating how and when unreflective experience rise to the surface in value creation process, which was previously pointed out as a gap in current literature (Ellway and Dean, 2016; Gummerus, 2013). On the one hand, value experience remains unreflective when maximum value creation takes place. Payne et al. (2008) observe that customer value creation processes are often non-linear and unconscious. In this case, speaking in terms of the S-D logic, the customer is the contributor of value. Customers are in the “flow” and they value the value creation process itself and the outcomes associated with this process. On the other hand, value experience becomes reflective in case of limited or no value creation and therefore customers are seen as interpreters of value. In case of the former, customers reflectively experience the product or service due to a minor breakdown. Examples of such situations can be surprise (discovering unexpected features), malfunctioning (does not work properly), obstruction (something is standing in the way), or absence (something is missing) (a few common examples in everyday business or consumer practices are delivery delays, machine breakdowns, reading manuals to install a device, long waiting cues, etc.). The example of reading a manual illustrates that the learning is linked to reflective experience of the product/service and to-be-created value in the future (what Helkkula et al. (2012a) call imaginary value experience). In such context-dependent instances where incremental learning and altering perception of value and preferences take place (Woodruff, 1997), customers are still motivated to “get going again”. Hence, we suggest that minor breakdowns as they occur in specific value creation processes in relation to reflective experience of value, can be considered as important drivers of change in, what Helkkula and Kelleher (2010) call, the circular relationship between customer experiences and perceptions of value. In case of the latter where no value creation takes place, a major breakdown causes customers to become fully detached

from their previous engagement in usage situations. Full decontextualised theoretical reflection of properties of products and services takes place and value creating activities are fully blocked. This second contribution, show that breakdowns in value creation processes are central to the changeover mentioned from unreflective to reflective experience of value. How exactly this happens is an empirical question but likely at moments when users are somehow frustrated or constrained by dysfunctional properties of the products or services in use. We note however that it should not necessary be by dysfunctional qualities, obstruction or absence only. Yanow and Tsoukas (2009) for instance, argue that non-obvious situations in ongoing practices also count as breakdowns because it temporarily or permanently disturbs the value creation process and stipulates deliberate thought. This can also be something external to the value creation process, for instance the varying weather conditions that influenced the condition of the pitch, and hence, triggers experience.

Third, we expand on Ellway and Dean (2016: 319) refer to as “*zooming in and out on the individual and contextual*”. Whereas zooming in concerns the unconscious subject in value practices, zooming out deals with the objective and anticipated/foreseen nature of practice and experience. Although ours zoomed into the micro processes of experience and creation, our research provided insights in the phenomenological process underlying the change over from “*habitus mediated experience of practice*” to the objectivation of the context through full reflective experience, which is a form of de-contextualisation.

Our fourth and final contribution is that we show the role of goods and services in value creation processes. The S-D logic literature argues that goods and services are transmitters of value in value creation processes (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Our results give rise to an ontological discussion of this role since we identified that in case of unreflective experience in ongoing value creation processes, goods or services are only “silently” available in this process as they are enabling the transmission of value creation. This is different from reflective experience where goods or service aspect become subject of scrutiny and appear as a “thing” with properties. In this final contribution, we see a link to the concept of resource integration proposed by Vargo and Lusch (2016). The argument made is that when users are able to integrate resources with each other, value is created. This would suggest that in case of unreflective experience, users are creating value through fully integrating resources with the firm’s resources. Contrarily, users are partly or not able to integrate resources in case of reflective experience. Despite we did not investigate resource integration’s role in value creation processes, we see overlap between this concept and the fact that goods or services are seen as transmitters of value creation.

Managerial implications

Previous conceptions of marketing theory and practice were centred around the idea that understanding what goes on in the mind of the customer is pivotal. However, since the emergence of the S-D logic, primacy has been given to co-creation of value viewing the customer as both interpreter and contributor of value. In other words, understanding the link between value experience and value creation is vital for developing stronger value propositions and supplier engagement in value creation processes. This paper contributes to the practice of marketing by introducing a view that links customer value experience to the value created in value creation process within the lifeworld of the customer. In understanding this, there is a certain irony however that value experiences are difficult to grasp when customers are well engaged and doing their part in value creation processes. While companies are mainly focused on improving their products and services for greater use and value, our research indicates that a great deal of value is accomplished by customers without deliberate reference to the products and services. In this case, supplier companies can only support the value creation process. This activity is different from those that we would recommend in breakdown situations. Although associated with disapproval, we argue that such situations form nevertheless the opportunity to identify the dysfunctional aspects of products or service dimensions captured through the reflective experience of customers. This however would require a proximity to the customer “sphere” (Grönroos, 2008) which is not always feasible. To remedy, we suggest using second order breakdown approaches (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011). Practitioners can actually create a temporary breakdown in the value creation process they investigate. For example by breaching taken-for-granted ways of doing things (see Garfinkel (1963) and Lok and De Rond (2013)) in value creation process or by the use of thought experiments (Folger and Turillo, 1999), for instance used in specific customer workshops aimed to evaluate existing or new products or services. The idea is that these approaches lead to a reflective experience of the product or service aspects as linked to existing or future value creation processes.

Concluding remarks, limitations and areas for future research

The main contribution generated by the empirical findings of our phenomenological approach is what that we have identified the various characteristics of the links between value experience and value creation. Through theorising three distinct modes of customer engagement in value creation processes, we were able to identify the key processes underlying each of these links in an empirical setting.

However, some remarks can be made that count as limitation. First, as much we were interested in the lived experience of value and value creation, we still had to rely on interviews held during the breaks and after the matches or trainings. This type of secondary breakdown approaches was to some extent useful as they assume some proximity. However, closer proximity for instance by participant observation research, would yield more in-depth insights in the lived experience of value and creation, for instance by auto-ethnography (Visconti, 2010) Second, we focused on the experiences of all the players without discriminating football experience. We assume that making such distinctions would lead to a nuanced view on unreflected/reflected experience. For instance, more experienced players might better adjust to the various qualities of artificial pitches and learned over time probably through minor breakdown in the past. After all, the reflective experience through breakdowns is at first an individual subjective experience which likely leads to a collective /shared experience.

There are some noteworthy areas for future research to be explored. First, we would call for further examining the linkages between value experience and value creation in other empirical settings such as B2B, in which group interdynamics and usage situations are different and more complicated than in this case. Second, following work of Grönroos and Voima (2012), we open up avenues for future research to study how the user's value experience in the customer sphere relates to value co-creation in the joint sphere and how value outcomes for both the beneficiary and the provider are affected by this. Third, building further on the latter, we see challenges for scholars to conceptualise and investigate micro dynamics in the value co-creation process on the basis of unreflective and reflective value experience. Finally, we are interested to involve the role of resource integration in value creation processes in relation to value experience. This concept plays a key role in value co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2016) and has the chance to bring us to a closer understanding of how customers act and cope in the three different situations identified and therefore explains how value is created.

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