

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

# CO-CREATIVE PROCESSES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE IMAGE OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS: INFLUENCERS AS ACTORS IN CO-CREATION

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

This article finds its theoretical origin in the early 2000s, when, in the wake of the paradigm shift (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004) from a supplier-centric to a demand-centric market, various actors became involved in the provision of products and services (Brandsen and Honingh, 2018). In this context, the service-dominant logic of Vargo and Lusch (2004) was also derived, which assumes that value creation arises precisely from this co-creation between customers and providers.

This co-creation can also be applied to tourism (Vasil *et al.*, 2024), where joint value creation contributes to a higher degree of personalisation, satisfaction and differentiation of a destination, making it more competitive in the long term (John and Supramaniam, 2024).

One of the most important elements for differentiating a destination, which contributes significantly to the desire to visit it, is the destination image (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2010). This is defined as the totality of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a travel destination (Crompton, 1979). Whereas photographs used to serve as a representation of these ideas about a destination in the sense of Urry (2002) hermeneutic circle, technological developments and the emergence of social media have created a digital space (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010) in which numerous actors can be found engaging in a continuous, multidirectional exchange of information (Govers *et al.*, 2007).

These include, among others, destination management organisations (DMOs) (Hays *et al.*, 2012), which try to market their respective destinations; social media influencers (SMIs), who act as role models for their followers, who in turn develop a parasocial bond with them

(Gretzel, 2018); and finally, users who upload their user-generated content (UGC), which is perceived as particularly authentic (Burgess *et al.*, 2009; Marine, 2019; Munar, 2011).

Here, the various actors find themselves in a constant dual role as consumers, but also as co-creators in this digital space (Mkono and Tribe, 2016), which results in a constant exchange of information (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015).

The academic literature contains a number of systematic reviews on co-creation in the context of tourism (John and Supramaniam, 2024; Ribeiro *et al.*, 2023; Vasil *et al.*, 2024), although there appears to be a gap in relation to the co-creation of destination image in connection with influencers, which the following research questions aim to close:

RQ1: What are the antecedents, decisions and outcomes of value co-creation in the context of destination image and SMIs?

RQ2: What are the theories, context and methods related to value co-creation in the context of destination image and SMIs?

RQ3: What are the prospects for research on value co-creation in the context of destination image and SMIs?

## 2. OBJECTIVE

This research aims to provide a systematic overview of the research literature on co-creation of destination image in the context of influencers. By analysing antecedents, decisions and outcomes (ADO framework) as well as theories, contexts and methods (TCM framework), it is possible to answer the research questions and draw theoretical conclusions for academic literature and practical conclusions for destinations. Here, it shows how collaboration with influencers can contribute to the targeted co-creation of destination images and thus to more efficient destination management.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used was the SPAR-4-SLR protocol for systematic literature analysis according to Paul *et al.* (2021), which comprises three phases:

1. During the assembling phase, a search for the keywords ‘Cocreat\*’ AND ‘Influenc\*’ AND “Destination” AND ‘Image’ was carried out in the Web of Science, Scopus, Redalyc, Dialnet, Publicações de Turismo and Scielo databases without any time limit on the year of publication, which yielded a result of 151 documents.

2. During the arranging phase, the 151 documents were filtered sequentially. After applying the language filter, i.e. only originals in English and Spanish, 133 documents remained. After filtering by document type and thematic match, 3 remained, 10 of which were duplicates, leaving 28 documents, 4 of which were unavailable. This left 24 documents (20 articles and 4 book chapters) from the years 2011-2024 available for analysis.

3. During the assessment, the documents were examined using a content analysis based on the ADO-TCM framework, i.e. ADO (antecedents, decisions, outcomes) and TCM (theory, context, method).

#### 4. RESULTS

The analysis of the documents yielded the following results:

Social developments such as paradigm shifts, but also technological developments such as the internet and the emergence of social media, serve as antecedents for co-creation.

Another factor is the characteristics of a destination, which, as a collection of largely intangible services in a market flooded with offerings, must assert itself primarily through authenticity. Furthermore, the actors play a major role with their personal motives and characteristics and their degree of collaboration and interaction. This interaction depends above all on multidirectional communication, using storytelling and emotions to lead to greater engagement and thus co-creation.

Co-creation can be viewed from various perspectives, such as the process, value creation, experience or even the players involved. Language and context, as well as content type, frequency and emotionality, act as mediators of this joint creation.

It has been shown that, in addition to providing information about its target group, co-creation can help destinations become more attractive and competitive. Influencers can further enhance the image of a destination and become ambassadors for it through their credibility and perceived closeness to their followers.

For tourists, co-creation can lead to the personalisation of services and thus greater satisfaction, which can be expressed in the long term in the form of destination loyalty.

For residents of a destination, this participatory approach can contribute to a sense of belonging and, by integrating them into the processes, can also turn them into ambassadors for their destination.

In summary, interaction is also the key factor for co-creation here, which is both the trigger and the result of co-creation, suggesting a co-creation cycle.

This topic has been examined primarily using quantitative approaches, although some qualitative and mixed approaches can also be found. Here, the topic is examined in the context of service-dominant logic.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

From these findings, it can be concluded that the co-creation of destination image is a multidirectional process that can be influenced by various actors. Influencers can act as catalysts for interaction, engagement and co-creation, thereby influencing destination image on a cognitive, affective and conative level. Collaboration with influencers thus offers the opportunity to co-create the destination image efficiently and in a targeted manner, thereby making destinations permanently competitive.

On a theoretical level, the dual role of various elements such as interaction as both the cause and result of co-creation, or of actors such as influencers, tourists and locals as creators and consumers of the destination image, was demonstrated.

On a practical level, DMOs are advised to actively integrate other actors into the co-creation of the destination image and, for example, to cooperate with influencers who are suitable for the destination. The focus here should be on storytelling and emotions,

within a coherent overall strategy, to project a harmonious destination image and thus contribute to long-term competitiveness.

These results were limited by the low number of documents examined.

Future research could investigate which elements of the content on digital platforms trigger which reactions on a cognitive, affective and conative level and to what extent they affect engagement and co-creation. Various types of influencers and destinations and the associated content could be analysed comparatively in order to obtain an overall overview of this structure.

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