Value Co-Creation and Co-Destruction: Considerations of Spa Servicescapes

TOURISM PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT
L. BUXTON AND E. MICHOPOULOU
Louise Buxton Eleni Michopoulou

Centre for Contemporary Hospitality and Tourism, College of Business Law and Social Science, University of Derby, Buxton, UK

CONTACT Eleni Michopoulou e.michopoulou@derby.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT
Spas are places that enable mind, body and spiritual harmony, and are therefore inextricably linked to the pursuit of health and wellbeing, as one of the most prominent forms of wellness tourism. Recent growth in the global spa industry is fuelled by
increasing consumer interest in the pursuit of wellness. Concepts within the spa industry remain largely unexplored, thus, this conceptual paper aims to progress our understanding by considering opportunities for value co-creation and co-destruction in a spa context. In doing this, the paper unpacks the concept of the servicescape, explores the concept of authenticity and argues that understanding the consumption and production of experiences is central to understanding the creation of value in spa service settings.

**KEYWORDS**
- Value
- spa
- servicescape
- memorable experiences
- emotions
- authenticity

**Introduction**

Spas are places of relaxation and rejuvenation, uniting the world of aesthetic treatments with relaxation techniques and products derived from nature's elements (Loureiro et al., 2013). Synonymous with mind, body and spiritual harmony, spas are inextricably linked to the pursuit of health and wellbeing as one of the most prominent forms of wellness tourism (Huang et al., 2019; Loureiro et al., 2013; Tabacchi, 2010).

Spas are arguably an ideal context in which to explore value co-creation and co-destruction, as they are immersive, sensory rich environments, which involve extended human interactions (Bushell & Sheldon, 2009; Lin & Mattila, 2018; Reitsamer, 2015). Thus, this paper unpacks the concept of the servicescape and considers the potential for value co-creation and co-destruction, via consumer and provider interactions and opportunities to customise sensory aspects of the spa servicescape (Bolton et al., 2014; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Zatori et al., 2018). Furthermore, the paper explores the concept of authenticity and the notion that consumers desire unique encounters in order to generate experiential value and memorable experiences (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013; Lin & Mattila, 2018; Oh et al., 2007; Walls et al., 2011).

Research exploring co-creation and co-destruction in the context of spa, has both practical and theoretical implications. Practically, a greater understanding of the issue could help spa operators to redraft their service offerings, and create value not just for customers, staff members and the business owners, but for all stakeholders in the value chain. Theoretically, reviewing the processes of value co-creation within a distinct and different service context (in this case spa) may provide additional insights that could perhaps also be applicable to more traditional and well-established service contexts, such as tourism and hospitality.

The growth in the global spa industry, now estimated to be worth $119 billion, is fuelled by increasing consumer interest in the pursuit of wellness (Global Wellness Institute, 2018). Despite its growth, concepts within the spa industry remain largely unexplored. The identified growth provides impetus to respond to calls from authors to better understand unexplored concepts such as value co-creation, servicescapes and memorable experiences (Kucukusta & Guillet, 2014; Lin & Mattila, 2018; Loureiro et al., 2013; Reitsamer, 2015). Responding to these calls and to advance our understanding, this paper discusses the process of value co-creation and co-destruction and considers opportunities for value co-creation and co-destruction in a spa context. Hence, this paper contributes to the body of knowledge concerning value co-creation and co-destruction, by considering through the theoretical lenses of servicescape and authenticity how these processes occur within a setting that has been largely ignored by the tourism and leisure literature.

**The concept of value**

Value is considered a fundamental issue to be addressed in every marketing activity (Holbrook, 1996; Sanchez-Fernandez & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007) and despite wide interest in the concept; value is an ambiguous term (Sanchez-Fernandez & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). Ziehlani (1988) defined value as the consumers overall assessment of the utility of a product, derived from perceptions of what is received and what is given. However, Ziehlani’s (1988) definition positions value as a uni-dimensional construct, that can be measured simply by asking consumers to rate the value they received in making their purchases, hence, this could be deemed too simple a way of explaining value (Sanchez-Fernandez & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). Other definitions recognise value as multi-dimensional, such as Holbrook (1996, p. 138), who identified customer value as “an interactive relativistic preference experience”. For Holbrook (1996), value reflects three dichotomous dimensions: extrinsic versus intrinsic, self-versus other-orientated and active versus reactive, thus, providing a typology of value with eight categories: efficiency, play, excellence, aesthetics, status, ethics, esteem and spirituality. Multi-dimensional approaches to value, consider that intangible, intrinsic and emotional factors form part of the construct, which is lacking in uni-dimensional approaches (Sanchez-Fernandez & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). Furthermore, Holbrook’s (1996) typology is useful in progressing our understanding of how value may be co-created, as value is recognised as entailing interaction between consumers and products/services, being comparative, personal and situational, being judged in a...
variety of ways and lying not in the purchase but in the consumption (Holbrook, 1996).

Still, there is consensus that value is determined by the beneficiary (Cannas, 2018; Skalen et al., 2015; Vargo & Lusch, 2017). As such, value is not an appreciative judgement and organisations cannot create value; nevertheless, they can make value propositions (Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014). Service-dominant logic holds that organisations offer value propositions, value is co-created during interactions and value is subjectively determined by the consumer (Skalen et al., 2015; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Value propositions support consumers value creation, thus, they create opportunities for the consumer to be better off when using the product or service (Skalen et al., 2015). Value propositions, therefore, should provide opportunities for co-creation of value such as efficiency, play, excellence, aesthetics, status, ethics, esteem and spirituality (Holbrook, 1996) or memorable experiences (Hemmington, 2007; Walls et al., 2011).

**Value within experiences**

Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999) highlighted the emergence of the experience economy, recognising experiences as the fourth step in the progression of economic value following on from commodities, goods and services before them. As such, consumers no longer buy service delivery and quality; they buy experiences and memories (Hemmington, 2007; Walls et al., 2011). The spa industry aims to create experiences for their consumers, hence, it could be argued that understanding the consumption and production of experiences is central to understanding the creation of value (Barnes et al., 2019; Wuttke & Cohen, 2008).

The emergence of the experience economy rendered a change in perspective of how marketing and economic activity is understood, thus, the theory of service-dominant logic evolved to shift thinking about value from an organisation perspective to a customer centric view (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2017). The customer centric view progresses beyond simply being customer oriented, it requires organisations to collaborate with customers, learn from them and adapt to their individual and dynamic needs (Bolton et al., 2014; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Service-dominant logic recognises that marketing and economic activity is best understood in respect of service for service exchange, rather than goods for goods or goods for money; it is the activities emanating from the service which represent the source of value not the services or the goods provided (Vargo & Lusch, 2017).

Fundamental to service-dominant logic is the relationship between the consumer, the organisation and other beneficiaries (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Consequently, value is co-created by a range of actors, not created by one actor and delivered to another (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). Moreover, the level of consumer engagement in a service, determines whether consumers are users, participants or co-creators (Bolton et al., 2014). Encounters between employees and consumers are important for experiential value creation, as employees must interact with, understand and creatively assist customers to create experiential value; however, little is known about how these encounters co-create experiential value (Barnes et al., 2019). The term value co-creation represents an evolution in marketing thought, as it positions consumers as active players in their experience, rather than passive audiences, thus, value is co-created for consumers, through their interactions and customisation of their experiences (Bolton et al., 2014; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Zatori et al., 2018).

However, there can be interactions whereby the exchange of resources between the collaborating parties may also result in negative experiences; often referred to as value co-destruction (Ple & Caceres, 2010). Corsaro (2020) explains that value co-destruction focusses on collective collaborations between consumers and providers, and that those actors can suffer different levels of co-destruction resulting from the interactional processes. Further explaining the concept of value co-destruction, Javri et al. (2020) suggest that consumers' previous experiences develop a specific cognitive script which identifies how providers and consumers are expected to behave. Thus, this shapes what they expect from consumption experiences. If either the provider or the consumer deviates from the script, value co-destruction, rather than co-creation may emerge (Javri et al., 2020). For example, if a consultation, prior to the guest having a spa treatment is not conducted thoroughly, when it has been on the guest's previous visit, value may be co-destructed.

**Value of emotions and memorability of experiences**

Connected to the evolution of economic value in the experience economy, the way consumers interact with offerings has changed. Whilst commodities, goods and services are external to the consumer, experiences are internal, created in the mind of the consumer, as they are engaged on an emotional, intellectual and often spiritual level (Bastiaansen et al., 2018; Oh et al., 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 1999; Pullman & Gross, 2004; Smith & Colgate, 2007). Using Holbrook's (1996) typology of value, it can be considered how intrinsic, self-oriented, active value categorised as "play" leading to "fun", could be co-created during a white-water rafting trip. To realise the value proposition, the organisation must co-create value with its consumers by direct interaction (Vargo & Lusch, 2008), which in this example could involve instructing the consumer how to use a paddle whilst white-water rafting (Skalen et al., 2015). It could even be a demonstration by spa staff of how to use a particular skincare product.

The focus on emotions in customer-employee encounters is argued to be central to experience value creation within tourism and hospitality (Barnes et al., 2019). Emotions are the core building blocks of experiences, thus, experiences are only memorable when they evoke emotions (Bastiaansen et al., 2018). In the experience economy, consumers want more than the delivery of services,
they seek unique consumption encounters to accompany the services, which create memorable experiences (Walls et al., 2011). Hence, it is no longer enough to offer a functional level of service; consumer demand for unique and memorable experiences requires organisations to develop value-added experiential provision which connects with individuals on a personal and emotional level (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013; Lin & Mattila, 2018; Oh et al., 2007; Walls et al., 2011).

Ample research has dealt with the concepts of satisfaction and emotions (Barsky & Nash, 2002; Bloemer & de Ruyter, 1999; McIntosh & Siggs, 2005). For instance, McIntosh and Siggs (2005) highlight that enjoyment for boutique hotel guests resonates within sensory and experiential aspects of their stay, which underlines the importance of emotions and personalised attention. Their findings also showed that travellers appear not to be concerned with just being “there” in the tourist setting, but are concerned with participating, learning and experiencing the “there” that they visit and concluded that more research emphasis needs to be directed at all integral aspects of the tourist experience.

Walls et al. (2011) identified that experiential research in tourism and hospitality settings had taken three directions: creating taxonomies of experiences, examining the cause of, or explaining experiences and comparing the relationship between experiences and other constructs. For example, Thorne (1963) explored the concept of peak experiences and provided a taxonomy of six main categories: sensual, emotional, cognitive, conative, self-actualisation and climax. Pine and Gilmore (1999) suggested there are four realms of experience: education, entertainment, escapism and aesthetics. This framework was later revisited by Oh, Fiore and Jeoung (2007), who confirmed the dimensional structure of the four realms of experience but suggested that further research could provide conceptual clarification regarding the relationship of experience economy concepts with general consumption evaluations such as memorable experiences.

Hence, creating experiential value is relevant to how organisations design appropriate experiences to include feelings and emotions (Smith & Colgate, 2007). This value-added experiential provision can be offered in the form of entertainment, education, an escapist or aesthetic experience (Oh et al., 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Examples of added value in hospitality and tourism include shopping centres offering concerts, a hotel cooking demonstration, themed guestrooms or restaurants with singing waiters, the added value for the consumer being the memorable experience (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Oh et al., 2007). It can be argued that added value in a spa setting takes the form of learning how to use skincare products through watching a demonstration, other educational programmes geared towards improving health or wellbeing, or in the form of themed spa treatments (Buxton, 2018; Lin & Mattila, 2018). Many spas also have beautiful surroundings, and value could be added through utilising the location to allow guests to take in the views and enjoy being in the destination, passively appreciating how the setting appeals to the senses.

**Value of authentic experiences**

At the broadest level, “authenticity is the concept aimed at capturing dimensions of truth or verification” (Newman & Smith, 2016, p. 610). Different uses of the term “authenticity” exist across many academic disciplines including aesthetics, philosophy, sociology, psychology, marketing and tourism and academics, within each discipline, have sought to construct typologies to define their focal phenomenon (Newman & Smith, 2016). Bruner (1994) and Reisinger and Steiner (2006), both noted challenges with the term authenticity. However, the term is still in use in tourism literature today, but it has evolved through reconceptualization and clarification (Checa-Gismero, 2018; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Tiberghien, 2019; Wang, 1999; Yang, 2019).

However, a growing nomenclature exists within tourism literature, with some terms overlapping with each other. To provide clarification, attempts have been made to explain authenticity in tourism based on many factors, including the type of tourist experience (Cohen, 1979), the nature and existence of what is being judged authentic (Laing et al., 2014; Wang, 1999), the interplay between different dimensions (Belhassen et al., 2008) or ideological perspectives of authenticity (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999).

Authenticity is a recent addition to the study and language of spa (Laing et al., 2014; Lin & Mattila, 2018; Michopoulou, 2017; Poluzzi & Esposito, 2020); however, it has existed as a concept, in the area of tourism for several decades. Almost half a century ago, MacCannell (1973) introduced the concept of authenticity to sociological studies of tourists’ motivations and experiences. Subsequently, authenticity became a key concept in an emergent sociological paradigm for the study of tourism (Belhassen et al., 2008; Cohen, 2007; Wang, 1999). The term authenticity was originally used in reference to the genuineness of objects in museums, whilst it has also been used to refer to the human condition (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). Two decades on from MacCannell’s seminal work, Wang (1999) proposed that the issues of authenticity in tourism could be divided into two separate issues: the authenticity of toured objects and of experiences. These two issues can both be applicable to spa, in relation to the authenticity of the physical environment, its location, spa facilities and décor and the authenticity of the spa experience (Poluzzi & Esposito, 2020).

Highlighting further the complex nature of authenticity, Wang (1999) described three different types of authenticity: objective, constructive (or symbolic) and existential, the latter was divided into two dimensions: **intra-personal** and **inter-personal** authenticity. At the turn of the century, there was a shift in the discourse of authenticity, way from the much-contested objective
and concrete view of authenticity towards the more subjective and abstract view (Belhassen et al., 2008; Cohen, 2007). Cohen (2007) recognised that this shift had been in part initiated by the theoretical difficulties of the discourse of objective authenticity and by the emergence in tourism studies of postmodern ideas, such as those of Baudrillard (1983) regarding the disappearance of “originals”. The concept of existential authenticity has been the most enduring in the study of experience consumption, due to its applicability to the multi-dimensionality of experiences (Belhassen et al., 2008; Cohen, 2007; Wang, 1999). A recent illustration of this shift is provided by Le et al. (2019) who note that authenticity has been used to as a feature to lessen the homogeneity of mass produced, commoditised goods, services and experiences.

With the existent focus on the experience economy and the recognition for potential transformation through experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 2011; Pizam, 2010; Sipe & Testa, 2018), understanding authenticity in consumption experiences such as dining out (Le et al., 2019), board and lodgings (Mody et al., 2019) and even spa (Lin & Mattila, 2018; Poluzzi & Esposito, 2020) has become increasingly important. Existing conceptualisations of authenticity have largely been developed in a tourism context, therefore, there are gaps in our understanding of how authenticity applies in other experience settings. There is, in particular, limited understanding of the concept of authenticity as it applies to spa (Le et al., 2019; Lin & Mattila, 2018).

**Objective (intrinsic) authenticity**

Objective authenticity (also referred to as intrinsic authenticity) applies the museum-linked usage of authenticity to describe the toured objects as perceived by tourists and it follows that the authentic experience is a result of the recognition by tourists that the toured objects are authentic (Wang, 1999). Representing the modernist/realist/objectivist ideological view of authenticity (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006), the criterion to be authentic or inauthentic was objective, in that it was whether, the tourist object was made or the experience was enacted by local people according to custom and traditions (Sharpley, 2018). As such, authenticity denotes a sense of the genuine, real or uniqueness (Wang, 1999). Michopoulou (2017) suggests that intrinsic authenticity is potentially associated with spa tourism experiences, in particular spa treatments, rituals and therapies that are linked to the country of origin and culture. The sense of intrinsic authenticity in a spa might arise from tangible factors such as heritage features or décor or intangible factors such as traditions and stories linked to the spa and/or its treatments (Laing et al., 2014). For example, Rosewood Hotels and Resorts describe their spas’ designs and concepts as being inspired by purity, authenticity, and focused on a sense of place (Kitchen, 2019). Furthermore, Rosewood Hotels and Resorts research local traditions and employ local healers and practitioners to develop spa treatments and rituals, which they offer as “Lost Remedies” in their spa menus (Kitchen, 2019). Similarly, two Chable resorts in Mexico use indigenous resources in their treatments which are linked to Mayan traditions (Megson, 2019).

**Constructive authenticity**

Wang (1999) asserts that constructive authenticity is the result of social construction, not an objective measurable quality of what is being visited, thus, there are various versions of authenticities regarding the same objects. Constructive authenticity is largely affiliated with academic schools of constructivism (Belhassen et al., 2008). From a constructivist perspective, the ontological assumption is that there is no real world that is independent of human mental activity, thus, pluralistic and relativist epistemologies and methodologies hold (Wang, 1999).

Constructivists assert that there is no absolute and static original on which the authenticity of originals relies; origins and traditions are invented and constructed. This construction involves power and is a social process. Knowledge of authenticity is created, not discovered by the mind; it is pluralistic and relative to individuals. Authenticity is a label attached to the visited people or cultures in terms of stereotyped images and is a projection of the tourists own beliefs, expectations and consciousness of those (Wang, 1999). Those stereotyped images, expectations and consciousness are all are subject to influence from mass media, movies and word of mouth from friends and family, thus, the constructivist approach to authenticity identifies that individuals perceptions coagulate into a socially constructed recognition of the authenticity of the phenomenon (Le et al., 2019).

Tourists are indeed in search of the authentic, however, what they seek is not objective; it is symbolic authenticity, which is the result of social construction.

For example, spa treatments and rituals have become globally transportable (Laing et al., 2014; Michopoulou, 2017), with experiences such as Thai massage, Swedish massage and hammam treatments appearing ubiquitously on spa menus. Nonetheless, Laing et al. (2014) suggest that many consumers believe an authentic spa experience can only be gained in the country of its origin. Lin and Mattila (2018) similarly, note that many spas offer a hammam treatment and have the required tiled steam room in which to provide it, however, they cannot deliver the true essence of a hammam as delivered in Turkey, Morocco or Tunisia. It is acknowledged that consumers perceptions of authenticity will be influenced by their own culture and experiences (Lin & Mattila, 2018; Michopoulou, 2017) and the interpretation of authenticity can be multifaceted and personal (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006), so simply offering a tiled steam room may be enough for some consumers to deem the experience authentic. However, those who have experienced a hammam in Turkey, Morocco or Tunisia may not be satisfied with this, and will only view the experience authentic, if they are experiencing it in Turkey, Morocco or Tunisia (Laing et al., 2014; Lin & Mattila, 2018).
Existential authenticity

The differentiation of the issue of the “authenticity of experiences”, from the issue of the “authenticity of objects”, was central to the introduction of the concept of existential authenticity (Wang, 1999). Distinct from both objective and constructive authenticity, which focus on whether and how toured objects are authentic, existential authenticity involves personal feelings triggered by the liminal processes of tourist activities (Wang, 1999). The surroundings and environment of a travel experience can serve as a catalyst for existential authenticity (Brown, 2013). Wang (1999) argued that objective and constructive authenticity, as object related concepts, have limited application to a number of tourist activities, whereby, existential authenticity is fitting to explain more tourist experiences. Hence, if existential authenticity is important to examine within the realm of experiences, it is pertinent to consider it also within spa experiences.

Intra-personal authenticity

Wang (1999) further divided the concept of existential intra-personal authenticity, developing a framework, which differentiates between two aspects, “self-making” and “bodily sources of authentic self” (Laing et al., 2014). The first aspect of the intra-personal dimension of authenticity, Wang (1999) described was self-making or self-identity, through tourism experiences. For many people, the constraints and routine of everyday life make it difficult to achieve self-realisation; thus, self-making is an implicit motivation for engaging in tourist activities, in particular those which provide challenge or adventure (Wang, 1999). For the spa tourist, a spa experience may provide them with the time to contemplate who they really are (Laing et al., 2014). Alternatively, it may provide an escape from everyday life by allowing the guest to feel pampered or celebratory (Laing et al., 2014). Loureiro, Almeida, and Rita (2013) in their study of the effect of atmospheric cues and involvement on pleasure and relaxation on spa, assert that the extent to which consumers express their self-concept through involvement in spa experiences cannot be overlooked. Whilst there are many motivations to engage in spa experiences, an overarching theme exists in the desire to transform the self, for example, through engaging in wellness activities or spa therapies, whereby the consumer may feel they are a more authentic version of themselves (Laing et al., 2014; Wang, 1999). Akin to this, Rosewood Hotel and Resorts have recently introduced a spa retreat in Mexico called “Marry One Self” which they purport is a “true journey of self-acceptance and self-love” (Kitchen, 2019, p. 48). The experience includes a consultation with the resort’s resident shaman followed by a tamazcal session (indigenous sweat lodge), massage and skincare (Kitchen, 2019).

The second aspect of the existential intra-personal dimension of authenticity involves bodily feelings such as relaxation, rehabilitation, recreation, excitement, sensual pleasure and play, all touristic contents (Cohen, 1979; Wang, 1999). Furthermore, Wang (1999) asserts that “bodily concern” consists of two aspects: sensual, bodily feelings and symbolic, the culture and sign system of the body. With the former, the body is not just a corporate substance but also the “feeling subject” (Seamon, 1979 cited in Wang, 1999, p. 362) with the latter, the body becomes a show of personal identity of health, beauty, fitness and youth (Wang, 1999). Laing et al. (2014) note that the bodily form of authenticity is particularly interesting in the spa context, given the appeal of spa treatments to the senses. However, the symbolic aspect is also applicable; for example, spa experiences may provide symbolic evidence, to demonstrate that the guest is engaging in an aspirational lifestyle, whatever the reality of their social status and financial circumstances may be (Laing et al., 2014).

Inter-personal authenticity

The inter-personal dimension of existential authenticity, explains the tourists’ quest for authenticity through connections with others (Wang, 1999). This applies to spa experiences, as the consumer may gain a sense of authenticity via their interactions with other people; for example, travel companions, other spa guests and in particular, interactions with spa staff, through learning about their culture and heritage (Laing et al., 2014). Considering consumers’ interactions with spa professionals, a spa treatment requires one-to-one interaction between the service provider and the guest; thus, the spa industry relies extensively on its employees. The nature of the spa service requires employees to demonstrate meticulous grooming, gentle gestures and communication and the skilled delivery of treatments (Lin & Mattila, 2018). If the spa professional does not appear sufficiently engaged physically and emotionally during the experience, a lack of inter-personal authenticity may be perceived (Laing et al., 2014). The service providers’ and guests’ cultural backgrounds may also influence the perception of authenticity (Öznalbant & Alvarez, 2020). For instance, if a Hawaiian lomi-lomi massage is delivered by a spa professional who is Hawaiian, the perception of authenticity could be increased, particularly for a guest who is not Hawaiian (Lin & Mattila, 2018).

Experiences within servicescapes

The servicescape has been widely conceptualised (Bitner, 1992; Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011; Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003). Servicescape is the term coined to describe the environment in which a service process takes place (Bitner, 1992). More than just the physical surroundings, servicescapes include anything observable that affects consumers’ perceptions and behaviours (Kim et al, 2016). Servicescapes act as the packaging of the service (Mari & Poggesi, 2011). Many
stimuli within a servicescape can influence the consumer’s emotional state, and these can be both tangible and intangible factors (Yang & Namkung, 2009). Holbrook (1996) explains one dichotomic dimension of value as active, when it involves some physical or mental manipulation of the tangible or intangible, thus, it could be argued that allowing consumers to customise an aspect of the servicescape, for example choosing the colour of lighting in a room could be a value proposition.

To explore opportunities for value co-creation with a spa context, it is important to first unpack the servicescape concept and then consider the aspects within the spa servicescape which could provide value propositions. The servicescape is the context for service, containing physical, sensory and social dimensions essential to the creation of service experiences (Bitner, 1992; Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014). Servicescape factors have been identified as: ambient conditions, functionality, and signs, symbols and artefacts, service staff (Bitner, 1992) and other consumers (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003). Ambient conditions and sensory factors such as sound, sight, smell, taste and touch have all been shown to effect consumer behaviour (Abhishek et al., 2013; Ballantine et al., 2010; Decre & Pras, 2013; Krishna et al., 2010). Effects include increasing intentions to buy (Decre & Pras, 2013), attracting consumer attention (Ballantine et al., 2010) and increasing memory (Krishna et al., 2010). Features such as, decorations, signs, symbols and artefacts, are designed into the service environment and provide cues about the service provision to the consumer (Kim et al., 2016; Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014). Additionally, factors such as layout and functionality facilitate the ease of the provision of service (Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014).

Evidence of the importance of ambient and sensory conditions in a servicescape is available across different service industries (Ballantine et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2016; Loureiro et al., 2013). For example, Ballantine et al. (2010) investigating the role of atmospherics in the creation of a hedonic retail experience, found that colour, lighting, music and noise all have moderate positive effects on attracting consumer attention. Abhishek et al. (2013) assessing the role of touch in shopping, found that consumers in a retail setting judge product quality through haptic touch. Similar findings have been recorded within hospitality and tourism settings, as Kim et al. (2016) found that in leisure centres, design aspects such as decoration, accessibility and signage are important features of the service encounter. In hospitality, design, space, lighting, colour and music are also important stimuli which may influence consumer behaviour, i.e. purchase intentions or how long a consumer spends in the restaurant setting (Milliman, 1986; Yang & Namkung, 2009). Expectedly, the importance of Consumers considers the social relationships built with focal employees as a relational benefit (Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011). Social facilitation theory draws attention to the effects on the consumption experience, of the presence of other consumers within the servicescape (Clendenen et al., 1994; Lovelock, 1996; Nakata & Kawai, 2017; Turley & Milliman, 2000) and consumers are influenced by social density (Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011). Tombs and McColl-Kennedy (2003) explain that consumers’ approach/avoidance behaviour towards crowds, was driven by their desire for private or group consumption. In hospitality, for example, the performance of service staff is essential to consumer perceptions of the service offering (Yang & Namkung, 2009), and in restaurants, staff behaviour and image can positively influence customer loyalty intentions (Harris & Ezeh, 2008). Perhaps even more crucial are the findings by Hanks and Line (2018), who suggest that the mere presence of others in the hospitality servicescape can influence the perception of consumers. In a spa context, the guest experience could be adversely impacted if a spa pool or sauna were occupied by other guests; when a guest wanted to experience them in seclusion.

**Experiential value co-creation and co-destruction within spa servicescapes**

Empirical investigation of the servicescape has taken place in many service settings such as leisure centres (Kim et al., 2016), restaurants (Hanks & Line, 2018; Harris & Ezeh, 2008) and retail (Abhishek et al., 2013; Ballantine et al., 2010; Decre & Pras, 2013). Despite extensive research of the impact of the servicescape on consumer behaviour (Decre & Pras, 2013; Krishna et al., 2010; Nakata & Kawai, 2017; Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011), investigation of the servicescape concept in spa is limited and there is a lack of research which addresses the issue of the servicescape’s impact on value co-creation. Thus, exploring the concept of the servicescape and process of co-creation in a spa context could shed some light into this largely unexplored area.

Many factors within the spa servicescape arguably provide opportunities for value co-creation, for example, spa consumers spend an extensive amount of time with spa service staff during their service encounter, therefore, it could be contended that the interactions they have and relationships they build with focal employees are fundamental to the co-creation of experience value (Barnes et al., 2019; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011). Furthermore, customised choices of massage oil, music, room scent and lighting colours could position consumers as active players in their experience, co-creating value through customisation of the experience (Bolton et al., 2014; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Zatori et al., 2018).

However, value co-destruction arguably could occur if there is an absence of information for a consumer to understand the spa facilities [sauna, steam room, spa pool] or lack of signage for a consumer to navigate through the environment, for example, to find the changing rooms or relaxation area. If relationships with service staff do not build sufficient levels of trust, value may be co-destructed (Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011). If the spa consumer has previous experiences of consuming spa, thus, has a cognitive script for what they expect, value may be co-destructed, if that script is not followed by the provider (Javri et al., 2020).
Likewise, spa experiences are rarely consumed in isolation from other consumers; if the spa setting is more crowded than consumers expected (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003) or if other consumers misbehave, value may be co-destructed (Corsaro, 2020).

Despite the popularity of the experience economy, there is a scant research specifically in a spa context. One notable exception is Lin and Mattila (2018, p. 42) who created a conceptual model which proposes that, in a spa setting, the components of “natural environments, the servicescape, service encounters, spa treatments: culture and rituals, and spa educational programmes geared towards health and wellbeing, combine to provide psychological, emotional and social benefits” could co-create experiential value. However, this model has not been subject to empirical testing. Empirical research in a spa setting has focused on the effects of atmospheric cues (Loureiro et al., 2013), consumer preferences (Kucukusta & Guillet, 2014), sensorimotor perceptions on consumers cognitive and behavioural responses in servicescapes (Reitsamer, 2015). Furthermore, all studies have identified the need for further research (Kucukusta & Guillet, 2014; Lin & Mattila, 2018; Loureiro et al., 2013; Reitsamer, 2015). Exploration of experience economy constructs in a spa setting could respond to these calls and those from tourism and hospitality (McIntosh & Siggs, 2005; Oh et al., 2007) to provide a greater understanding of this growing area of experiential consumption.

This research has several managerial implications that are divided into three main areas: redrafting of service offerings, training, and value chain co-creation. In respect of redrafting service offerings, this could include assisting managers to develop best practice in redesigning servicescapes, by providing spa operators with a better understanding of the signage and information guests require to know how to use the spa facilities or navigate through the different spaces (Kim et al., 2016); scheduling of guest bookings, via discovering the maximum number of guests to allow into different spaces at one time so that they are not too crowded that value is co-destructed (Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011); offering opportunities for customisation through identifying which customised choices contribute to greater value co-creation (Bolton et al., 2014), so that efforts can be focused effectively. The research could have an impact on the advancement of appropriate training for service personnel, to creatively assist them to develop the skills required to build effective relationships with their guests, which lead to value co-creation (Barnes et al., 2019; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011). Moreover, managers should not think narrowly in respect of value co-creation, instead of focussing purely on consumer and staff perspectives, they should take a broader, view paying attention to the entire value chain and on bringing value to all relevant stakeholders.

**Conclusion**

In summary, it is evident that there is growing demand for spa experiences (Global Wellness Institute, 2018) and research in a spa context could help to better understand the process of value co-creation and co-destruction for spa consumers (Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014). There is consensus that situational, environmental and human factors contribute to the customer experience (Bitner, 1992; Corsaro, 2020; Lin & Mattila, 2018; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011; Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003; Walls et al., 2011). Despite the important conceptual works on value co-creation, the servicescape and memorable experiences, empirical examination of the subjects in a spa context, is particular limited, with several authors calling for further research (Buxton 2018; Corsaro, 2020; Kim et al., 2016; Lin & Mattila, 2018; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Michopoulou, 2017; Oh et al., 2007; Walls et al., 2011).

More than a decade on from its inception as a lens through which to view service, Vargo and Lusch (2017) suggest that to move service-dominant logic forward, the development of more mid-range theory and evidenced based research is required. Spas provide immersive, sensory rich environments, and spa services involve extended human interactions (Bushell & Sheldon, 2009; Lin & Mattila, 2018; Reitsamer, 2015). Thus, it can be argued spas provide ripe opportunities to explore value co-creation and co-destruction. Mid-range theory could take the form of developing a framework of factors in a spa context that may impact on value co-creation and co-destruction. The development of such a framework may provide a structure to enable empirical investigation of value co-creation and co-destruction in a spa context. This would have practical implications as it can be shared with spa operators to inform the design of spa offerings, development of training and the enhancement of value propositions. Furthermore, the development of a framework could help to better understand value co-creation and co-destruction in the context of spa and provide opportunities to test methods of investigation that have been applied in other contexts, such as tourism and hospitality, in a new context.

This research has limitations which could be addressed with further research. Although the conceptualisation provides a good understanding of factors which could contribute to co-creation and co-destruction of value in a spa context, it has not been tested and therefore lacks empirical data, which would provide greater insight. The research addresses the issue of value co-creation and co-destruction through the lens of the servicescape and authenticity; in further research, this view could be expanded to include other perspectives. Attention is given specifically to value co-creation and co-destruction for consumer and spa operators, further studies could delve deeper to understand this for a broader range of actors across the whole value, supply and distribution chain. The research was developed with hotel, resort and destination spas in mind, research exploring how value is co-created on co-destructed in different spa servicescapes such as mineral spring spas or medical spas would provide insights
into co-creation and co-destruction in different settings.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s) [Q3].

## ORCID

Eleni Michopoulou http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1857-4462

## References


