



## Co-creating the tourism experience

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### ABSTRACT

Consumer-firm co-creation is increasing in the tourism industry. In light of the central role of customer experience in tourism, this research is motivated by the limited understanding of the effects that customer co-creations have on the tourism experience. We examine the importance of co-creation in terms of its influence on the tourism experience and the customer's intention to revisit the destination. Using three independent experiments, this study theorizes and establishes empirical support for three hypotheses: 1) Effect of customer experience on customer intention to return to the tourism service, 2) Effect of degree of co-creation on customer experience of the tourism service, and 3) Moderating effect of co-creation on the relationship between customer experience and intention to revisit. Our results suggest that co-creation influences the tourism experience. Co-creation is found to moderate the effect of the tourism experience on customer revisit intentions in high co-creation situations, but not in low co-creation situations. We discuss several implications of our research for a number of domains, such as novelty-seeking in tourism, collaborations between different stakeholders, employee motivation, and the antecedent effect of co-creation.

### 1. Introduction

“Tourists are more demanding than ever. We are thinking about involving them through co-creation but we wonder the effectiveness of this strategy”.

– A tourism manager

Many tourism managers are contemplating solutions through co-creation such as customized packages for interactive activities. For example, Qbic Design Hotel allows futuristic styles for rooms with the possibility of changing the room color according to the customer mood. Starwood Hotels launched a virtual product ‘Virtual Aloft’, through which customers can co-design their rooms. Recently, they added another initiative, ‘Travel Brilliantly’, through which they invite guests to submit ideas and vote on other people ideas. One fundamental reason for the felt need of firms to co-create the consumer experience is personalization of service. Personalization in the case of tourism services has gained managerial attention for at least two reasons. One, the service itself has usually a high level of uniqueness and novelty (Hinson, Osabutey, & Kosiba, 2018). Two, consumers arrive at the service with different identities and cultural backgrounds (Lugosi, 2014). The co-creation of tourism experiences acts as a good starting point to acclimatize consumers and set appropriate expectations for the service.

Apart from firms' interest in co-creation, there has been increased pull from customers to co-create. Many of these customer demands are facilitated by technology (Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2013). Extant research offers many allusions about customers' desire and demand to co-create their experiences with firms (Prahald & Ramaswamy, 2004). For Osram, customers are contributing lighting ideas. For Toyota, customers are helping to develop and modify a virtual car model. For Aloft, customers are building a hotel prototype (Kohler, Fueller, Matzler, Stieger, & Füller, 2011). Similarly, many models of co-creation are emerging within the tourism industry. For example, [Makemytrip.com](http://Makemytrip.com) allows consumers to co-design their own travel experiences by choosing different destinations, vacation days, type of stays, and activities. In the same way, Vythiri Resorts enables customers to maximize their experiences by choosing their activities and planning their holiday packages.

Therefore, creating a superior customer experience is emerging as an important goal for firms in the tourism industry. However, only a limited amount of mainstream tourism research has systematically examined the role of the customer in co-creation. Given that firms are increasingly realizing the important role that customers' co-creation plays in shaping their experiences, we try to unravel the theoretical and empirical linkage between customer co-creation and tourism experiences. We further test the effect of co-creation on the behavioural

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outcome of consumers returning to the service. The knowledge that our research generates will better enable firms to design interfaces that promote co-creation and effectively retain customers.

## 2. Co-creation and tourism experience

Co-creation is defined as customer participation in the creation of products or services by applying resources such as time, effort, or ability (Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Consumers are now armed with new connective tools and want to interact and co-create value (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Further, new age channels have enabled customer co-creation in tourism as well as other domains (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Cabiddu, Lui, & Piccoli, 2013; Rihova, Buhalis, Gouthro, & Moital, 2018). Within the tourism industry, a “system of social ruling is making way for communicative self-steering” (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009, p. 311) and co-creation is becoming an increasingly popular source of differentiation (Turner & Shockley, 2014). The tourism industry is burgeoning and its worth was pegged at 7.6 trillion U.S. dollars in 2016 (Aramberri, 2009; Seetanah, 2011). The relevance of co-creation in tourism is increasing due to three key reasons: 1) technological advances that have opened up firms' processes to facilitate easy consumer participation (e.g., (Neuhofer et al., 2013); 2) customers' empowerment and desire to actively control what they consume (Clarke & Raffay, 2015; Piller & Gülpen, 2016; Vargo & Lusch, 2004); and 3) firms' realization that consumers can be a relevant and useful co-producer in the creation, communication, and delivery of products and services.

Customer experience in tourism is defined as the subjective personal reactions and feelings associated with tourism activities (Chen & Chen, 2010). It is a central concept in marketing (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and a pivotal construct in the tourism industry (Li, 2000; Otto & Ritchie, 1996; Sørensen & Jensen, 2015; Wang, 1999; Zouni & Kouremenos, 2008). Creating memorable tourism experiences is the key to tourism firms' ability to attract and retain customers (Kandampully, Juwaheer, & Hu, 2011; Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013). However, consistent, quality customer experiences have remained a moving target for tourism firms due to various factors, such as heterogeneity in customer preferences; tourism types preferences, which are reflected in the emergence of niches such as medical tourism, honeymoon tourism, and overseas weddings (Hsiao, Lee, & Chen, 2015); uncertainties in destination choices; and contingencies related to group activities (Mei, 2014).

The co-creation of customers' service experiences portends a paradigm shift in the way the tourism industry creates and delivers experience (Neuhofer et al., 2013). The way in which tourism firms stage experiences has integrated notions of commercial intent, artificial concerns, and superficial engagement, and customers are looking for novel add-ons to enhance their service experiences (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009). Within this context, the co-creation of products and services has emerged as a means of engagement between customers and firms. Many tourism and hospitality firms adopt co-creation to boost their revenues as co-creation seemingly increases the customer's willingness to pay for services (Tu, Neuhofer, & Viglia, 2018). However, co-creation is not easy to implement and its implications are not well-understood. When it is ill-managed, it can destroy value and might result in dissatisfied consumers who never return to the service provider again (Camilleri & Neuhofer, 2017; Otto & Ritchie, 1996, 2000). Additionally, negative experiences can harm tourism firms because customers may harm their reputation through negative word-of-mouth and reviews.

Experience generates value-in use in the consumer consumption process and firms have facilitated consumer experiences in the pre-acquisition, acquisition, and post-acquisition stages of co-creating a product or service. In general, and within tourism, consumption is being increasingly driven by interventions in all these stages as well as by consumers' self-development (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Boswijk,

Thijssen, & Peelen, 2007; Neuhofer et al., 2013). Studies on the experience of co-creation have investigated its multi-dimensional character (Kohler et al., 2011); the frameworks within which it occurs (Aho, 2001; Neuhofer et al., 2013; Rihova et al., 2018; Sfantla & Björk, 2013); and how consumers have coped with unmet expectations of experiences (Prebensen & Foss, 2011). Although there is an apparent positive linkage between co-creation and the customer experience, it is at best debatable in light of recent studies on the co-destruction of value that have revealed co-creation to have negative effects such as shame and withdrawal (Becker, Aromaa, & Eriksson, 2015; Plé & Cáceres, 2010; Sugathan, Ranjan, & Mulky, 2017a). Furthermore, prior examinations of the co-creation-customer experience linkage in the tourism literature were mostly conceptual and focused on developing insights, classifications, and frameworks related to the emerging notion of co-creation and uses of technology, as well as on identifying different facets of experience (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Cabiddu et al., 2013; Neuhofer et al., 2013; Rihova et al., 2018; Aho, 2001; Sfantla & Björk, 2013). Given the relevance of co-creation to the tourism experience, this study examines how levels of co-creation and different types of customer experiences influence customer behaviour. Furthermore, we examine the effect of co-creation on customers' intentions to return to the service because customers' repeated usage of services saves firms some of the high costs of new consumer acquisition (Payne et al., 2008).

In sum, we try to answer the following questions. 1) How does degree of co-creation in tourism influence customer experiences? 2) How does degree of co-creation influence the effect that customer experience has on customer intention to revisit a service?

## 3. Hypotheses development

Tourism services are complex and experiences of tourism therefore differ from consumption experiences in general (Chen, Prebensen, & Uysal, 2014) in that they are strongly driven by service and hospitality. Concurrently, tourism services differ from general service environments or commonly examined traditional experiential goods, and studying them can generate novel insights for various reasons (Campos, Mendes, Valle, & Scott, 2018). First, tourism services are highly experiential and their utility is not easily observable (Chang, Backman, & Huang, 2014). Second, tourism firms presume that they have a better knowledge of destinations and associated activities than customers, and therefore have the expertise to maximize customer experiences. Customers' evaluations of firm's decisions and intentions to revisit the service are not readily apparent, and tourists are rarely approached to co-create a tourism experience (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009). Importantly, when consumers are not co-creators, they are not able to attribute their experiential outcomes to themselves, which results in black-box behavioural outcomes. Third, the tourism experience usually occurs in distinct stages: planning the event *at home* with family and friends; experiencing the service and activities *at the destination*, and; constructing narratives *after returning*. The role of a tourism firm and the experience of a consumer differ at each of these stages (Chatterley, Linden, & Javernick-Will, 2013; Cohen, 1979; Harrington, Ungson, Chan, & Chathoth, 2016). For this reason in part, tourism consumers have a diverse set of classifications (McKercher, 2002) and their experiences are derived from both everyday life and complex tourism services. Fourth, co-creation in itself is a multi-dimensional and complex process (Ranjan & Read, 2016) and can also impede value creation, leading to dampening of customer experiences and adverse customer evaluations of tourism services (Filiari, 2015; Heidenreich, Wittkowski, Handrich, & Falk, 2015). Fifth, the pursuit of novelty is a primary motive for tourists, so they may not want to return to the same place even if they have had a good experience there (Cheng & Lu, 2013).

Given these attributes, it is pertinent to examine the effect of co-creation and experience within the context of tourism. Prebensen, Vittersø, and Dahl (2013) examine the role that individual tourists' resources play in creating the tourism experience. We extend this

stream of research by examining the impact of the tourism experience on tourists' intentions to return to the service, thereby connecting the consumer experience to firm level implications. Researchers have highlighted that the tourism experience is not monolithic or static, but rather evolves in an open servicescape – at home (family, friend), during travel (internet, travel agency), and at the destination (inhabitants, accommodations) (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Chen et al., 2014). Marketing literature often cites examples of the linkage between customer experiences and future consumer behaviours (Frank, HerbasTorrico, Enkawa, & Schvaneveldt, 2014; Grace & O'Cass, 2004; Hoch, 2002), including consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). Positive experiences have higher subjective value due to their pleasurable outcomes and their authentic and pseudo-diagnostic character (Lu, Chi, & Liu, 2015). Consumers who have such experiences expect to repeat them in the future, causing them to repeat their consumption behaviours (Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). In addition to its subjective value, the expectancy of the experience influences consumer motivations to revisit tourism services (Bandura, 1997; Eccles, 1983; Vroom, 1964). Within the tourism context, experience has a positive effect on tourists' levels of satisfaction (Björk, 2014), levels of expenditures, and levels of happiness (Buonincontri, Morvillo, Okumus, & van Niekerk, 2017) because it entails active participation, interaction and dialogue; pleasant memories, and; affective reactions (Buonincontri & Micera, 2016). Therefore, we hypothesize a positive linkage between customer experience and the decision to return to a tourism service.

**H1.** An increase in a positive customer experience of a tourism service will have a positive effect on customer intentions to return to the service.

We explain the positive effect of co-creation on the tourist experience from the perspective of multiple theories. Co-creation results in a sense of accomplishment and at times is a source of extrinsic economic benefits that enhance consumer satisfaction (Chan, Yim, & Lam, 2010). Economic value generated through customer participation adds to the benefits of customization and the customer's ability to control the service. A greater sense of control due to co-creation ultimately results in higher customer delight (Dabholkar, 1990).

The effect of psychological ownership also comes into play when tourism services are co-created. Psychological ownership is “a state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership is theirs” (Asatryan & Oh, 2008, p. 362). When consumer participate in co-creating a product or service they (Jussila, Tarkiainen, Sarstedt, & Hair, 2015) get a sense of control and ownership (Karahanna, Xu, & Zhang, 2015) that ultimately results in positive affective outcomes such as relationship intentions (Asatryan & Oh, 2008).

Co-creation also helps customers to set realistic expectations, thereby reducing the chances that their expectations will be disconfirmed. On the other hand, co-creation helps the firm and the service provider sense consumer needs and better meet those needs. A higher quality of service and realistic expectations support a better customer experience. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

**H2.** The degree of co-creation has a positive effect on customer experiences of a tourism service.

Technology has enabled consumer participation in tourism services in several ways, such as motivating consumers to shop online for tourism services (Kim, Woo, & Uysal, 2015) and utilize social media (Yüksel & Yanik, 2014); enabling them to engage in 3D virtual reality interventions that change their perception and consumption of tourism services (Huang, Backman, Backman, & Chang, 2016); and allowing them to co-create value by playing different roles in the use of self-service technology (Kelly, Lawlor, & Mulvey, 2017). Given the critical role of technology in enabling co-creation between the customer and the firm, we focus on the customer expending operant resources such as time, effort, knowledge, and prior travel experience in order to co-

create a tourism package. Such an application of customer resources has an important influence on future customer behaviours (Sugathan et al., 2017a; Sugathan, Ranjan, & Mulky, 2017b). Therefore, we explain the influence of the tourism experience on the intention to revisit a destination and utilize expectancy-value theory (Atkinson, 1957) to hypothesize the possible effect of co-creation on this intention. Expectancy-value theory posits that “individuals' expectancies for success and the value they have for succeeding are important determinants of their motivation to perform different achievement tasks” (Wigfield, 1994, p. 50). The theory explains actions in several settings and we borrow the explanations to understand the behaviours of co-creators. When consumers co-create, they are more certain of the attributes of the products or services that are being created (Higuchi & Yamanaka, 2017). If they have a positive experience, they have an understanding of what has contributed to that experience. As a result, they expect to have similar positive experiences in the future and therefore they would return to a service in order to attain such experiences.

As per our first hypothesis, a positive customer experience leads to an increase in customer willingness to revisit the tourist destination. This is mainly due to the increased subjective value gained from the tourism experience and the expectancy of a similar experience in the future (Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Subjective value is the intrinsic value or enjoyment one gains from doing an activity. Expectancies measure one's belief about how well a task is going to be performed in the future (Eccles, 1983). Within our context, expectancy of experience implies a belief about how good an experience is going to be. These two concepts interplay in an additive manner and consumers become positively oriented to expect a good experience in the future because their past experience of co-creating their travel was a good one – positively influencing the customer's motivation to return to the service (Bandura, 1997; Eccles, 1983; Vroom, 1964).

### 3.1. Low co-creation context

Within a low co-creation context, visiting the same tourist destination again will have less subjective value because the customer has already experienced that destination. Novelty-seeking has been found to be the key motive for engaging in tourism activities (Bello & Etzel, 1985; Lee & Crompton, 1992; Leiper, 1984). This explains why the tourist's needs and desires often cannot be satisfied by taking vacations in their home area (Pearce, 1987). Having more experiences at the same destination will reduce novelty and repeat experiences may be uninteresting to the customer. Therefore, repetitive exposure to the same tourist destination may only lower its subjective value. However, customers will also have a higher future expectancy of the experience because they are already familiar with it, even in low co-creation contexts. Due to these two opposing factors, the effect of customer experience on intentions for future visits is reduced.

### 3.2. High co-creation context

In contrast, we expect the effect of customer experience on intentions for future visits to be different when tourism services are co-created. Similar to the case of low co-creation, the future expectancy of experience will be high. We expect future expectancy in the co-created state to be even higher than in the non-co-created state because customers have already used their efforts and skills to co-create the tourism experience (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Sugathan et al., 2017b; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Customers would further believe that they know what needs to be done to enhance their customer experience, and that they could achieve this enhancement by using their resources in future. Therefore, the customer who has co-created within the context of tourism would have a higher expectancy of future experience.

We expect subjective value to be higher in the high co-creation situation than in the low co-creation situation. In the case of the former, customers have used their resources in co-creation and would have fond

regard for their co-creation experiences (Franke & Schreier, 2010; Franke, Schreier, & Kaiser, 2009). Co-creation was also found to increase customer engagement and the customer's sense of owning the experience (Füller, Hutter, & Faullant, 2011; Voorberg, Bekkers, & Tummers, 2015). The customer's use of resources thus increases the subjective value of the experience. Thus, co-creation results in a higher expectancy of experience and at the same time, enhances the subjective value of the experience. Therefore, within co-creation, the high subjective value of experience gets reinforced through a higher expectancy of experience in influencing the effect of the tourism experience on motivation to revisit the service (Weiner, 1986; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Therefore, we hypothesize that the effect of customer experience on the intention to revisit in future will be higher in high co-creation contexts than low co-creation contexts:

**H3.** The degree of co-creation will moderate the influence of customer experience on intention to revisit.

#### 4. Methodology

We tested our hypotheses through three independent vignette-based experiments. Vignette-based experiments are suitable to the manipulation of varying levels of experience and co-creation, as they offer researchers more control (McCullough, Berry, & Yadav, 2000). Study 1 offered support for H1 and H3. While we utilized a student sample in Study 1; in Study 3, we used a normal consumer sample and took a more stringent analytical approach to replicating the findings. In both Study 1 and Study 3, we manipulated co-creation and experience and measured customer intention to return to the tourism service. Study 2 was designed to test H2 because we needed to measure experience and test co-creation's influence on it.

#### 5. Study 1

##### 5.1. Setting and data collection

In a vignette-based experiment, we asked participants to assume the role of a customer planning a tourist vacation. We manipulated co-creation situations at two levels (low and high) by allowing customers to customize various options, such as inter-city travel, accommodation, local sightseeing and travel, other activities, and food (Appendix A). Similar approaches to manipulating co-creation have been used by Heidenreich et al. (2015) and Sugathan et al. (2017b). We also manipulated the experience condition by telling participants that the overall experience with regard to above travel elements was either good or bad.

##### 5.2. Measures

We used established measures for all our constructs (see Appendix B). The experience measure was adapted from Dong and Siu (2013). Measures for co-creation were adapted from Heidenreich et al. (2015). Multi-item constructs were averaged to get the final measure of the constructs.

##### 5.3. Pre-test

We conducted a pre-test to improve the face validity, clarity, and strength of the manipulations. Customers were asked to recall and describe previous situations in which they might have co-created similarly. They were also asked to describe good/bad tourism experiences similar to the ones mentioned in the vignettes. Such descriptions are often used to help respondents internalize the contexts of experiments and reflect on the situations provided in the vignette. We found that the manipulations were stronger after we made changes based on the pre-test.

#### 5.4. Sample

One hundred and four students in a business management program at a leading university (15% female and 85% male,  $M_{age} = 25$  years) participated in the study. A 2 (experience: bad vs. good; manipulated)  $\times$  2 (co-creation: low vs. high; manipulated) between-subjects design was employed (the two factors were not significantly correlated;  $r = 0.13, p > .10$ ).

#### 5.5. Manipulation

We tested for the success of the manipulations employed in stimulating the experimental conditions. Participants in the good experience scenario rated higher (mean = 6.08) on the experience scale than those in the bad experience scenario (mean = 3.88,  $F(1, 102) = 79.73, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 3.61$ ). Similarly, we found that the co-creation manipulation was also successful. Participants in the high co-creation scenario gave higher scores (mean = 5.66) on the measure of co-creation than those in low co-creation scenario (mean = 3.98,  $F(1, 102) = 54.98, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 4.03$ ).

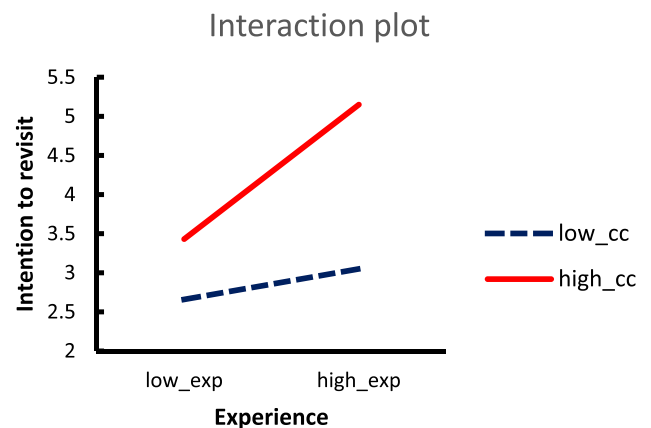
#### 5.6. Results and discussion

A two-way between-subject analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test the hypotheses. The analysis revealed a significant interaction effect (Fig. 1) between customer experience and degree of co-creation, supporting H3 ( $F(1, 100) = 3.27, p = .074, \eta^2 = 0.032$ ). This implies that an increase in degree of co-creation increases the positive effect of customer experience on future intention to revisit. Further, the test for simple effects was carried out in the low and high co-creation states. In the low co-creation state, the effect of customer experience on intention to revisit was found to be not significant,  $M_{low\_exp} = 2.66$  vs.  $M_{high\_exp} = 3.05, F(1, 52) = 0.55, p > .4, \eta^2 = 0.01$ . The direction of the effect was found to be as hypothesized. In the high co-creation state, the effect of customer experience on intention to revisit was found to be significant, supporting H1, ( $M_{low\_exp} = 3.43$  vs.  $M_{high\_exp} = 5.15, F(1, 48) = 11.29, p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.19$ ).

Taken together, the results suggest that co-creation plays a strong role in influencing customer intention to revisit.

#### 6. Study 2

Study 2 tested the hypothesized influence of co-creation on



low\_cc = low co-creation context; high\_cc = high co-creation context

Fig. 1. Interaction plot presenting the effects in Study 1.

customer experience. Since Study 1 manipulates experience, it is unsuitable to test the effect on customer experience. Therefore, we manipulated only the degree of co-creation and measured customer experience. Similar to Study 1, respondents were asked to imagine planning a vacation. Then, they were made to read through a description of both positive and negative customer experiences (Appendix C) and a detailed description of the activities in which they would participate. The descriptions included real reviews at <https://www.tripadvisor.in/in> order to replicate reality. Respondents were then asked rate their experience on the customer experience scale. We used the same measures as in Study 1.

### 6.1. Method-sample

We used a different sample profile for Studies 2 and 3. Participants for the studies were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk is generally regarded as a reliable sample source for marketing and psychology research. It has been found to provide a good representation of the American population that is well-balanced across gender and is especially suitable for instruments designed in the English language (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Mason & Suri, 2012). Our intention to cross-test our results in another context also motivated the choice of MTurk, as its audience is generally considered to be a different profile than the student respondents used in the first study. A task approval rating of more than 95% was used to further qualify the MTurk participants for Studies 2 and 3. Ninety-eight MTurk participants (48% female and 52% male,  $M_{age} = 37$  years) participated in Study 2. Degree of co-creation was manipulated while customer experience was measured using Dong and Siu's scale.

### 6.2. Manipulation

The co-creation manipulation was successful because the participants in the high co-creation scenario rated higher (mean = 4.66) on the measure of co-creation than those in the low co-creation scenario (mean = 2.42,  $F(1, 93) = 68.28$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 2.36$ ).

### 6.3. Results and discussion

ANOVA was performed to test the hypothesized effect of co-creation on customer experience. The analysis revealed that degree of co-creation had a significant effect on customer experience, supporting H2,  $M_{low,cc} = 4.11$  vs.  $M_{high,cc} = 4.49$ ,  $F(1, 93) = 2.83$ ,  $p = .095$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ . Though the effect is weakly significant, it can be inferred that enabling customers to co-create can enhance their experiences. Even if such an enhancement is marginal, it is important for firms considering the influence of customer experience on customer loyalty and intention to revisit.

The low effect of co-creation on experience could also be due to unintended effects being triggered by attempts to manipulate co-creation or due to various individual level factors related to willingness to engage in co-creation and the subjective value derived from it<sup>1</sup> (Büttgen, Schumann, & Ates, 2012; Cheung & To, 2011; Füller, Faullant, & Matzler, 2010). We tested for such effects in moderating the influence of co-creation on customer experience. Specifically, we tested for the moderating effects of the service locus of control (relative consistency in people's perceptions of control over service quality across co-creation situations), prior co-creation experience, the subjective value of co-created products, and willingness to engage in co-creation.

<sup>1</sup> We are thankful to the anonymous reviewer for suggesting this improvement.

### 6.4. Results of moderation effects

One hundred and one participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (36% female and 64% male,  $M_{age} = 32.42$  years) to test the moderation effects on H2. A small reward was offered for participation. As advised by Dawson (2014), we tested the moderation effects using the interaction effect in a regression. We found that the service locus of control negatively moderates the effect of co-creation on the tourism experience ( $\beta = -0.14$ ,  $p < .1$ ). This effect was also found to be moderated by prior co-creation experience ( $\beta = -0.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and consumer willingness to co-create tourism ( $\beta = -0.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ). We also tested for the effect of the subjective value of co-creation – how much respondents liked things they had created themselves. Our results indicated that self-creation increased the subjective value of things, in turn increasing the positive effect of co-creation on experience ( $\beta = -0.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

The results of testing the moderation effects indicated that various individual-level effects influence H2. This explains the weak effects observed from testing H2. Future research needs to examine these important effects closely in order to determine how they contribute to consumer experience after co-creation.

## 7. Study 3

Study 3 was designed to test the results of Study 1 by using a more inclusive and representative sample drawn from MTurk. This study also used a rigorous form of experimental data analysis to test the hypotheses.

Many manipulations in experimental research are confounded by various extraneous effects, making it difficult to ascertain the true effect of the construct of interest. Mackenzie (2001) devised an analysis strategy to distil the true effect of experiments by controlling for unintended effects. Experimental analyses formulated by Mackenzie (2001) suggest that the true effect of interest is represented by the indirect effect from the treatment manipulation mediated through the conceptual measurement, and that the direct effect includes all the other non-hypothesized effects of the manipulation. Path models specified by Mackenzie (2001) were used for this purpose. We needed to manipulate the independent variable along with its conceptual measure to control for any confounding due to the manipulation. Conceptual measures are included in the analysis by specifying the path model shown in Fig. 2, which was reproduced from Mackenzie (2001). The indirect effect seen through the conceptual independent variable will represent the true relationship after controlling for the other unintended effects, which will be captured by the direct effect of manipulation on the dependent variable.

### 7.1. Sample

One hundred and fifty-four respondents recruited through MTurk participated in this study (62% female,  $M_{age} = 38$  years). A 2 (experience: bad vs. good; manipulated)  $\times$  2 (co-creation: low vs. high; manipulated) between-subjects design was employed (the two factors were not significantly correlated;  $r = 0.13$ ,  $p > .07$ ).

### 7.2. Manipulation

Measures and manipulations were similar to those utilized in Study 1. We tested for the success of the manipulations employed in stimulating the experimental conditions. Participants in the good experience scenario rated significantly higher on the experience scale (mean score of 6.19) than participants in the bad experience scenario (mean score of 2.74) ( $F(1, 152) = 401.8$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 2.72$ ). Similarly, the co-creation manipulation was also successful. Further, participants in the high co-creation scenario rated their experience significantly higher (mean = 5.23) than participants in the low co-creation scenario

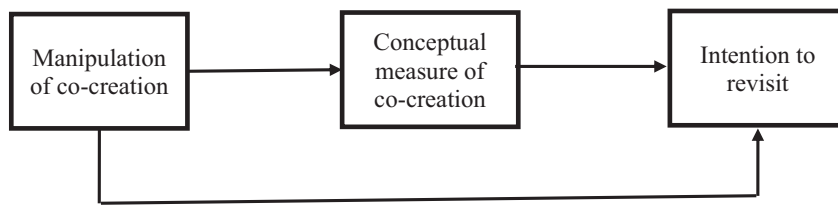


Fig. 2. Mackenzie's procedure used in Study 3.

(mean = 2.17,  $F(1, 152) = 222.9$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 2.18$ ).

### 7.3. Results and discussion

We used the analysis method described in Mackenzie (2001, Fig. 1D) to test the interaction effect between co-creation and customer experience. This required estimating the path model to separate the hypothesized effect from the unintended effects of the manipulation. We estimated the path model using Smartpls 3. The interaction effect between co-creation and customer experience was found to be significant and in the expected direction ( $\beta = 0.62$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Therefore, the results supported H3 – that degree of co-creation will positively moderate the influence of customer experience on intention to revisit. A similar analysis procedure (Mackenzie, 2001, Fig. 1A) also confirmed H1 – that an increase in a positive customer experience will positively influence customer intention to revisit ( $\beta = 0.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The unintended effect of treatment manipulation on intention to revisit was not significant ( $\beta = 0.1$ ,  $p > .4$ ), implying that there may not be any alternate explanations for the results.

Then, we examined the simple effects between low and high degrees of co-creation. We found that the influence of customer experience on intention to revisit was significant only for a high degree of co-creation ( $\beta = 0.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ), not for a low degree of co-creation ( $\beta = 0.33$ ,  $p > .1$ ). This confirms the results from Study 1 using a more rigorous analysis method.

## 8. Discussion and conclusion

Service transactions vary among traditional production, co-production and co-creation. In a tourism service, when creating experiential value for consumers, firms should consider several aspects extant, in-situ and ex-post of the change and during the change process (Chathoth, Altinay, Harrington, Okumus, & Chan, 2013). While experience in general is important to all services (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Shaw, Bailey, & Williams, 2011), the need for the tourism experience to be unique and memorable each time is of paramount importance. Therefore, the concept of co-creation – which “involves both customer participation and a connection which links the customer to the experience” – is particularly relevant for tourism services (Grissmann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012, p. 1483). The advent of the internet and its integration with other technologies has affected tourism in unique ways. Co-creation is one example of this and is considered to effectively enable tourism intermediaries to ‘re-intermediate’ by assuming novel roles as co-creators of value (Grissmann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012; Shaw et al., 2011).

Co-creation is becoming increasingly important in offering avenues for customers to interact with other elements in the service system – which is in itself a source a value – and apply their resources in the development of services. However, the role of co-creation in tourism, which is an interactive industry, is underexplored. Specifically, how co-creation generates value in the tourism experience needs further examination. We examined this open question and the ensuing effect of co-creation on customer intention to revisit a destination. The key relationships in this research were examined through experiments in multi-country, multi-sample, and multi-analytic procedures.

The study results suggest that co-creation increases the customer

experience and positively influences the impact of customer experiences on revisit intentions. The results also suggest that revisit intention was higher in the high co-creation situation than the low co-creation situation. Our results have several implications for tourism, co-creation theory, and the practice of co-creation.

### 8.1. Implications for tourism research

Research in tourism has generated several interesting and broad frameworks of customer experience. Co-creation a relatively new concept in the literature, has been increasingly adopted as a practice and has been found to have significant impact. Extant research on co-creation has primarily focused on theory development and been predominantly conceptual in nature (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Cabiddu et al., 2013; Neuhofer et al., 2013; Prebensen & Foss, 2011; Rihova et al., 2018; Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003). Current research needs to take the next leap in theory in order to test the important relationships that characterize co-creation. Our results were derived from an experimental approach that meets the rigours and robustness tests, including contemporary analytical approaches. These results help to root the tourism experience in consumer co-creation and suggest several important directions in tourism.

It is important to note that the tourism context is complex and different from other consumption contexts. This is because tourism is highly experiential and its utility is not readily observable (Chang et al., 2014). For example, while customer experience is usually regarded as an important predictor of future behaviour, our results suggest that this perspective needs to be applied with caution within the tourism context. We explained the reasons for the differences in tourism and other contexts in our conceptual development sections and noted the importance of customer novelty. Drawing from the view regarding expected subjective value, we show that the relationship between customer experience and favourable intentions to revisit a service holds in high, but not low co-creation manipulations. The results held across multiple methods as well as multiple samples. In low co-creation contexts, tourists expect repeat visits to have lower subjective value due to reduced novelty. This explanation seems tenable, given that novelty-seeking is the key motivation for customers to engage in tourism activities (Lee & Crompton, 1992; Leiper, 1984). However, it still warrants further empirical examination.

Our finding that a positive customer experience results in future revisit intention only in high co-creation contexts has further theoretical implications. This finding may not be supported by extant literature because it only examines the high-co-creation context. In light of our new evidence, major relationships should be further examined in order to delineate how they are affected by contingency factors such as degree of co-creation. Specifically, we suggest that a meta-analysis focusing on the relationships that characterize the tourism experience will be helpful in delineating such effects.

Though our results are based on co-creation between the consumer and the firm, the results might be observable in other types of collaborations that occur in tourism environments. For example, collaborations between tourists and local communities, between tourists themselves, and between tourists and gamified environments – all lead to different types of co-creation (Pearce, 2005). Our results related to co-creation may explain the results of previous studies on other interactive

environments, such as tourist-to-tourist interactions (Huang & Hsu, 2010). As we have studied co-creation at a specific stage of the tourist experience, our study offers enough scope to be replicated in studies on other stages of tourist experience, for e.g., tourists' co-created experience with residents at the destination and its impact. Studies such as Björk and Sthapit (2017) have hinted at the positive effect of such co-creation on the wellbeing of the residents, and empirically testing such theories would advance the field of co-creation in a new direction.

Prebensen et al. (2013) recently examined how individual tourists' resources create the tourism experience. We extend this stream of research by examining the impact of the tourist experience on intention to return to the service, thereby determining the firm-level implications of the consumer experience. Considering the emergence of co-creation as an important marketing concept, our amalgamation of tourism experience with co-creation is a worthwhile new area of research that merits further examination. For example, it is salient to examine the joint effect of novelty and co-creation on customer experience. Novelty carries a high risk and may actually dampen customer experiences. Firms can reduce customers' reluctance to revisit a destination by enabling them to co-create the tourism service. This happens because customers may bring the experience of self-creation to co-creation, which counters the impending monotony of repetition.

We further extend the implications of our results to extant literature (see Table 1). The table links our hypotheses and findings to other important themes that are relevant to tourism and co-creation research. For the sake of brevity, we do not duplicate the contents of the table in the text.

### 8.2. Implications for co-creation research

Several fundamental questions still remain unanswered in the extensive body of research on co-creation. For example, value is co-created in a system by the customer, the firm, the supplier, and other entities, though the beneficiary remains the determiner of value. Is the co-created value appropriated? If yes, how? If no, why should commercial enterprises engage in co-creation? In addressing these questions, this study provides the co-creation debate with a micro-foundation. Our results showcase how co-creation creates value for customers by enhancing their experiences and brings value to firms by increasing customer intentions to revisit. In addition, the outcomes of the use of customer resources are another specific area that has not been well-researched. While technology has eased the process of co-creation, co-creators still need to expend effort and skill. The outcomes of co-creation are contingent on the different types of resources that customers apply during co-creation. For instance, within the service failure context, Sugathan et al. (2017a) found that the customer who expends effort may feel guilt. Also, the customer who expends ability may feel shame. Our study does not look into this specifically, so there is a call for future research to manipulate tourism co-creation across resource types and to examine outcomes such as experience, which will bring more theoretical rigour to co-creation research.

In exposing the interface of co-creation and novelty-seeking, we invite peer researchers to explore a new area of research in future. We found that the influence of experience on intention to revisit was only significant in high co-creation contexts. We speculate that customer novelty-seeking is the mechanism through which this influence occurs, and that co-creation influences customers' needs for novelty. Further empirical research can look into the boundary conditions of this important relationship between co-creation and novelty seeking.

Given the part that stress and ambiguity play in service roles, motivating frontline staff is an uphill task for managers. This study indicates that the tourism experience and intentions to revisit can be enhanced through co-creation, which has a positive effect on employees' morale because engaging with a higher proportion of familiar customers reduces stress. We speculate that our study findings reveal a relevant and effective source of employee motivation and call for more

research in this area.

Tourism services bring destinations and users together to form a natural servicescape in which environment, natural psychology, and sociology are interconnected (Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011). Quantitative research that improves our understanding about the positive implications of experience in servicescapes is much needed. This is particularly true with respect to co-creation, which is a naturally restorative dimension of the servicescape and can save firms the cost of other expensive mechanisms to promote consumer satisfaction and well-being (Bock, Folse, & Black, 2016). Thus, institutions of tourism can actually offer co-creation-driven, convenient servicescapes in which positive experience has an easily available restorative capacity. As rural destinations are gaining relevance in destination tourism, Kastenholz, Carneiro, and Eusébio (2016) emphasize the need to use endogenous resources to pursue the goal of sustainability. This study suggests co-creation as one such resource that firms can use to generate superior value.

### 8.3. Implications for managers

New technologies and consumer demand have enabled the tourism industry to rapidly adopt co-creation in different ways. However, the tractable implications of co-creation practices remain ambiguous at best for tourism managers. The uncertainty associated with the positive effect of co-creation interventions is a major challenge to designing the co-creation landscape. We have shown that co-creation enhances customer experience. In order to meet the key criteria of value for customers, tourism firms can include co-creation elements in the design of interfaces for tourism services. Marketing research has proven that there are many avenues through which co-creation creates value, such as increased satisfaction, loyalty and intention to spread tourism recommendations by word-of-mouth (Rajah, Marshall, & Nam, 2008; Sugathan, Rossmann, & Ranjan, 2018). Though the present research does not examine all of these avenues, we expect these benefits to transfer in case of co-creation in tourism.

As has been demonstrated, there are multiple ways for firms to facilitate co-creation in tourism. For example, [Makemytrip.com](http://Makemytrip.com) allows consumers to co-design their own travel experiences by choosing different destinations, vacation days, type of stays, and activities. Similarly, Vythiri Resorts enable customers to maximize their experiences by choosing their activities and planning their holiday packages. Co-creation can also be facilitated through other processes such as involving other tourists (Prahald & Ramaswamy, 2004). We expect all these types of co-creation to increase the tourism experience and thereby increase revisit intentions.

Intention to revisit is an important factor for firms participating in the tourism space. However, novelty-seeking was found to be a primary motivation for customers engaging in tourism activities. Intention to revisit might be adversely affected in the tourism space, as repeated exposure to same tourism destination might lead to less novelty. Importantly, each revisit is likely to result in a diminished rate of consumer spending, which lowers revenue streams for the firm. We highlight that by establishing co-created interfaces for the tourist consumer – from the time they first contemplate using a service until the time they use it – firms can actually create elements of novelty and surprise. Specifically, customer experience and co-creation combine positively to increase customer intention to revisit.

Tourism and hospitality is a vibrant industry worldwide and managers and organizations would do well to establish protocols and processes for sensitizing consumers to evade service stressors and motivating them to be active co-creators in the service experience. Managers therefore have a critical role to play in managing their teams and resources to provide superior service experiences and our experiments provide a way to achieve this. Moreover, managers need to understand the drivers of customer co-creation to effectively influence them, including: 1) personal characteristics such as technological readiness,

**Table 1**  
Implications of this study at the interface of tourism and co-creation.

Citation	Key findings from extant research	Connect with the findings of this study
H1: Linking customer experience with intention to return to the tourism service Lin, Chen, & Filleri, 2017	Show that the economic and social-cultural benefits tourists perceive to gain from tourism development have positive effects on both value co-creation and life satisfaction, while perceived costs have negative effects.	Our investigation is more proximal to consumer behaviour and firm performance. Pertinent in light of the criticism of SL logic put forth by Grönroos and Voima (2013), who call for less metaphorical and more implementable examinations.
Higuchi & Yamanaka, 2017	Co-creation is largely related to embeddedness and also related to trust, long-term partnerships, and the creation of win-win situations for all sides.	
Buonincontri et al., 2017	Find that the experience of co-creation has several positive effects on tourists, tourists' attitudes towards sharing their experiences with others does not influence the experience.	Extant research findings are not completely without conflict. We reaffirm some key findings about the tourism experience and improve generalizability.
Grisseemann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012	Find that company support significantly affects the degree of customer co-creation.	This study could be further extended to investigate firm level drivers of co-creation
Schmidt-Rauch & Schwabe, 2014	Propose a mobile service and system design that provides a travel customer with continuing support on the trip, facilitating a lively, ongoing customer-firm interaction which enables the co-creation of value.	
H2: Linking degree of co-creation with customer experience of the tourism service. Prebensen et al., 2013	Tourist resources, in addition to personal services, environments and other visitors, enhance the experiential value of a trip significantly.	The examination of experience is important as researchers are still navigating fundamental relationships pertinent to co-creation in tourism research.
Santos-Vijande, López-Sánchez & Pascual-Fernández, 2018	Customer co-creation exerts a direct impact on the market outcomes of new services and the speed and quality of new service developments. Top management support can enhance customer co-creation. The main barrier is finding customers interested and knowledgeable to co-create.	
Navarro, Garzón & Roig-Tierno, 2015	Successful factors for co-creation relate to the sequential stages of the relationship between hotels and disabled customers. The paper highlights the principal factors affecting the value of co-creation when hotels and disabled customers interact, engage in dialogue, and collaborate.	
H3: Co-creation will moderate the influence of customer experience on intention to revisit. Sarmah, Kamboj & Rahman, 2017	Examine the mediating effect of guests' willingness to co-create on the innovativeness of new developed services and the intention to co-creatively adopt those new services.	Co-creation may not unpack in the same manner for all types of consumers or consumption situations. Moderation studies have yet to be conducted in co-creation research and experimental investigations are rare.
Tseng & Chiang, 2016	The relationship between customer co-creation and new product performance hinges upon the moderating effects of organizational cultures and the quality of communications.	
Ma, Gu, Wang, & Hampson, 2017	Find that the service climate reduces the negative effect of customer involvement and enhances its positive effect. In contrast, customer complexity intensifies the negative effect of customer involvement.	Individual attributes such as involvement and capability are also interesting moderators to examine.
Discussion at the interface of multiple hypotheses together: though not directly related to the focal hypotheses, the debate on several counts Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009	Explain co-created tourism experience from a network perspective, mapping consumer's tourism experience at different stages – at home, during travel, and when away from home destination, and in association with other entities.	our examination aligns with other contributions in the field and extends
Sfandla & Björk, 2013	Propose a three-stage framework – Added value (primarily between F: Actor/tourist firm/organization/facilitator and O: Other actors), Value-in-exchange (F and C: Consumer/tourist) and Value-in-Use (C and O).	A general examination of co-created experience opens up possibilities for similar examinations to unravel whether any stage contingencies improve managerial action and to develop theoretical insights
Chen, Kerr, Chou, & Ang, 2017	Examines the relationship among six co-creation dynamics, service innovation, competitive advantage and two three antecedents: technology adoption and environmental change and the moderating effects of trust.	As the nomology of co-creation is adding interesting relationships, we further contribute to these efforts by examining the three hypotheses, which can be further investigated along nuanced stages of co-creation.
Rihova et al., 2018	Identify 18 C2C co-creation practices. Four value-outcome categories are discussed: affective, social, functional and network value. The authors also highlight the importance of the value formed when tourists co-create with each other and participate in specific opportunities for facilitating this process.	
Chathoth et al., 2013	Offers several propositions around co-production – co-creation matrix: (1) co-production and co-creation concepts create a continuum rather than a dichotomy; (2) customization lies somewhere in between on this continuum, and (3) each of the typologies includes the primary value-creation driver and customer involvement/dialogue type.	It might be insightful to replicate the study for different loci on the co-creation continuum.

motivation, inherent novelty-seeking, and the need for interaction; 2) organizational efforts such as shared process development efforts, joint strategic planning exercises, improved working relationships, and knowledge from past co-creation efforts; and 3) circumstances such as previous exposure to co-creation, the presence of other individuals,

perceived crowding, and experience with space design (Johnson, Bardhi, & Dunn, 2008; Minkiewicz, Evans, & Bridson, 2014; Narasimhan, Swink, & Viswanathan, 2010).

We conceptualize co-creation as happening at the level of the consumer's interaction with the firm/service provider. This position is



clearly seen in our manipulation and measurement of co-creation. The fact that we do not consider co-creation at the consumption level does not change the results or their implications because any effect leading from the level we chose would be identical across the manipulations. Further, in this paper, we are only conceptualizing and measuring the intention to revisit the destination. This is because we are primarily

interested in the consumer experience of tourism and how it benefits from co-creation. Additionally, as our study did not involve field experiments, our results are applicable as behavioural intentions and not actual behaviours. Future studies can be designed as field experiments in real setting by suitably partnering with tourism firms implementing co-creation.

## Appendix A. Manipulation used in Study 1

Imagine yourself to be a customer in the situation described below. Answer the questions from the customer's viewpoint, based on your true feelings.

**High co-creation:** You are planning a vacation this summer. You have decided to visit a tourist destination. XYZ.com is providing an option to make your own travel package. *You can customize various options like inter-city travel, accommodation, local sightseeing and travel, other activities, and food.* Using these options from XYZ.com, you arrived at your own travel package.

**Low co-creation:** You are planning a vacation this summer. You have decided to visit a tourist destination. XYZ.com is providing a travel package. In the package the company offered no options to customize the inter-city travel, and predetermines accommodation, local sightseeing and travel, other activities, and food. *You cannot customize the package.* You used this travel package from XYZ.com for your vacation.

*Describe a similar situation (in real life) in which you were able to participate in creating the final product.*

**Good experience:** You liked your vacation at the tourist destination. The overall experience with regard to travel, accommodation, sightseeing, other activities, and food was very good. You had a memorable and enjoyable tourism experience.

**Bad experience:** You did not like your vacation at the tourist destination. The overall experience with regard to travel, accommodation, sightseeing, other activities, and food was not good. You could not have a memorable and enjoyable tourism experience.

*Describe a similar real-world situation in which you had a good experience in a tourist activity.*

## Appendix B. Measures

### Intention to revisit (Um, Chon, & Ro, 2006)

How likely are you to return to the destination for your next trip?

### Co-creation (Heidenreich et al., 2015)

XYZ.com offered me several options to customize the travel package to my taste.

I had to spend lot of time and energy in designing the final travel package.

### Experience (Dong & Siu, 2013)

Overall evaluation about the whole experience.

The total experience was memorable.

The total experience was enjoyable.

## Appendix C. Review used in Study 2

Stayed here for 2 nights in month of \_\_\_\_\_. Staff here is very courteous and helpful. View from the top of the resort is also excellent. You can have breathtaking view of KeyJeyLake and mountains from this resort situated on top of a hill. But this view is not available from all the rooms - you must be staying in the Lake View Romantic rooms or would need to climb up to the topmost part of the resort if you are staying in other types of room. Rooms are spacious, well maintained and neat and clean.

Don't expect high-end resort facility here, though prices are very high. Food tasted average at the best, with limited choices in breakfast and dinner, most of the items were cold. However, one night on our request the restaurant manager got the local dish Fish masala prepared exclusively for us, and it was the most delicious dish from all other items available in the buffet. Room service was very slow.

Activities are very limited, just fishing and archery. Fishing is not much enjoyable, with primitive fish rods, that have hooks tied to one end of the rope, tied to a thin bamboo stick! You will not catch a single fish, small kids might get little bit excited. Did not try archery. Morning nature walk is also there, which is just ok. There are no other activities (no bonfire or no other activities for kids). They have two ostriches and swans in a small enclosure and a playground which will excite kids. Indoor activity has one snooker table, a carrom board, a TT table, a chess board, and a foosball table. Small gym is also there. A lone fountain in the garden was not working and there is no facility to take shower before venturing into the swimming pool, people were entering the pool without taking shower. Dress code for pool also not enforced strictly. There is a skywalk and a watch tower facing the lake which was really nice. You can climb to the roof of the reception building to get better views of the landscape. If you are interested only in good view, then this resort is worth visiting, but that's it. Overall enjoyable stay and had a nice relaxed time at the resort.

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