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The Role of Value Co-Creation, Delight and Satisfaction on Tourism Loyalty: An Empirical Study in Hospitality

<https://doi.org/10.2478/ejthr-2024-0016>

received February 21, 2024; accepted July 4, 2024

Abstract: This paper investigates the relationship between value co-creation, delight, satisfaction, and loyalty in the hospitality sector, considering the perceptions of hotel customers in Portugal. To gain deeper insights into hotel customers' perception of delight, developing and testing an integrated model was undertaken by examining the relationship between these variables to expand the theory of customer delight when related, as a novelty, with value co-creation, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. The data for this investigation was collected through a questionnaire administered to 178 hotel customers. The gathered data was then subjected to both descriptive and inferential analysis. To test the integrated model, the researchers used the partial least squares (PLS) technique and validated it using Smart PLS 4.0 software. On the one hand, the results show that value co-creation has a direct positive effect on customer delight and, subsequently, influences the effect of customer delight on customer loyalty. On the other hand, value co-creation has a direct positive effect on customer satisfaction, which, in turn, positively influences loyalty. All four proposed hypotheses are supported.

Keywords: Value co-creation; Delight; Satisfaction; Loyalty; Tourism

1 Introduction

Currently, one of the main challenges of the hospitality sector is delight, as customer satisfaction is not enough of an antecedent of tourist loyalty (Ali et al., 2018). Understanding delight as an independent construct separate from satisfaction and its potential to directly influence tourists' loyalty is of significant importance, as highlighted in the recent literature (e.g., Mangini et al., 2021). Knowledge about how satisfaction and delight affect loyalty is crucial to tourism, travel, hospitality, leisure, and events and remains theoretically and empirically ambiguous (Ahrholdt et al., 2019). In Portugal, research on value co-creation's association with customer delight in the tourism context is scarce despite its growing attention. To date, as far as our knowledge goes, no studies have explored this relationship, highlighting an important gap in the literature. Further investigation is needed to understand the potential impact of value co-creation on customer delight. Some studies have examined the impacts of value co-creation in the tourism and hospitality sector. For instance, research conducted at a destination resort demonstrated that inviting tourists to engage in co-creation led to stronger relational outcomes between customers and the company, fostering an engaged business relationship (Busser & Shulga, 2018; Ribeiro et al., 2021). It is proposed that the co-creation of mutual value through collaboration can potentially be another route to customer delight (Parasuraman et al., 2021). This observation emphasises the necessity for further development of research on customer value co-creation in the context of hospitality and tourism (Carvalho & Alves, 2023). Recently, Ribeiro et al. (2023) studied how value co-creation in tourism has been developed in regard to methodological, thematic, and theoretical perspectives, as well as the possible relationships between antecedents, consequences, mediation, and moderation involved in value co-creation.

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This study examines the growing importance of delight in hospitality, as satisfying customers might not be enough to engage customers on a deeper, more emotional level (Torres et al., 2020). It tests a conceptual model to assess the influence of selected antecedents of tourist loyalty and the effect of delight compared to satisfaction on hospitality. Moreover, this study connects these constructs with value co-creation as an antecedent of delight and satisfaction, considering that there are numerous outcomes resulting from customer value co-creation, but conceptual models about customer value co-creation in the hospitality and tourism industry that integrate empirical and conceptual knowledge are still unknown (Carvalho & Alves, 2023). This paper aims to explore the importance of customer delight as an antecedent of customer loyalty, necessitating an examination of what aspects customers find delightful. Additionally, it seeks to investigate how value co-creation influences this emotion and, consequently, customer loyalty. Satisfaction is also used as a traditional antecedent of loyalty. The research aspires to be relevant across industries while adding value to Portugal's hospitality and tourism sector. To achieve these objectives, the study develops and tests an integrated model, validating it with data collected from hotel customers in Portugal between May and July 2023. The partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modelling approach will be employed to derive various insights and findings from the research.

The objectives presented are applied to the article's structure. Firstly, it conducts a literature review on value co-creation, customer delight, satisfaction, and loyalty within the hospitality and tourism industry. Secondly, it presents a proposed model and methodology as a means to understand the roles of these variables and their impact on customer loyalty. Thirdly, the article discusses the primary findings, followed by the conclusions, managerial implications, and study limitations.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Value Co-creation

Value co-creation consists of the customers' active participation and engagement, using their skills and knowledge, in the process of service (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000), leading to more personalised and meaningful experiences (Solakis et al., 2022). To enhance visitor

satisfaction at tourism destinations, it is essential to provide activities that encourage customers' active participation, as visitors now tend to be part-producers of their experiences rather than mere consumers (Tunde-Ajayi, 2021).

Several scales on value co-creation have been developed. The scale of value co-creation developed by Busser and Shulga (2018) is grounded in the principles of the theory of value (Hartman, 1967) and service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). It aims to evaluate the axiological aspects of value co-creation involving five dimensions: meaningfulness, collaboration, contribution, recognition, and emotional response. It is essential to note, however, that while the scale is used to assess value co-creation, it is primarily focused on customer value assessment, as highlighted in the study by Ribeiro et al. (2021). Another commonly used scale is the DART model (dialogue, access, risk, and transparency) (Albinsson et al., 2016), considered practical and interesting as a core framework of value co-creation, applied by academics and companies like Nike® (Solakis et al., 2022). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) introduced the DART model as a key set of requirements for understanding value co-creation. Scale development and validation of the DART model were conducted by Albinsson et al. (2016) and refined by Taghizadeh et al. (2016).

The active involvement of tourists in value co-creation appears to influence their behavioural intention and satisfaction with tourism resources and activities. Recent studies have examined the effects of value co-creation in the tourism and hospitality sector, such as those conducted by Solakis et al. (2017), Tunde-Ajayi (2021), Solakis et al. (2022), and Ribeiro et al. (2023). Inviting tourists to participate in co-creation and fostering an engaged business relationship leads to stronger relational outcomes between customers and companies (Busser & Shulga, 2019; Ribeiro et al., 2021). This emphasises the positive impact of value co-creation on customer-company interactions, possibly on delight and satisfaction in the tourism industry. According to Sweeney et al. (2015), co-creating value contributes to consumer satisfaction as well as other behavioural characteristics. Accordingly, hypotheses H1 and H2 are presented:

- Hypothesis 1: Value co-creation has a positive and significant impact on delight.
- Hypothesis 2: Value co-creation has a positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction.

2.2 Customer Delight

Foroughi et al. (2019) state that prior research has (implicitly) conceptualised delight as a nonlinear and

positive response to satisfaction and neglected it as a distinct concept. Even though delight and satisfaction share common characteristics, however, satisfaction and delight are two separate constructs (Finn, 2005; 2012). The concept of consumer satisfaction is based on comparing expectations and the performance of a service, whereas the concept of delight is based on positive experiences and surprises (Berman, 2005). In addition, satisfaction is linked to utility, while delight has a hedonic and emotional orientation (Chitturi *et al.*, 2008). In entertainment services, Oliver *et al.* (1997) developed a seminal work with a structural model of the antecedents and consequences of customer delight, acting in parallel with satisfaction. Thus, delight was originally conceptualised as a profoundly positive emotional state generally resulting from having one's expectations exceeded to a surprising degree (Oliver *et al.*, 1997). Simply stated, "delighted customers are those whose expectations have been exceeded by the service provider" (Elias-Almeida *et al.*, 2016, p.13). Parasuraman *et al.* (2021) recognise that pleasant customer experiences can be a combination of multiple delight properties with more or less weight in different settings or even within the same service encounter. So, a broader and recent conceptualisation of how customer delight can be defined is proposed by Parasuraman *et al.* (2021, p.1) as follows: "Customer delight is associated with various combinations of six properties including the customer experiencing positive emotions, interacting with others, successful problem-solving, engaging customer's senses, timing of the events and sense of control that characterise the customer's encounter."

Researchers analysed the drivers of customer delight in the hotel industry and concluded that while some universal service elements exist, tourists from different cultures can also be delighted by various services and amenities (Torres *et al.*, 2014). Also, in tourism, some previous research has worked to explain the significance of customer delight as an antecedent of customer loyalty, for instance, in five-star hotel spas in Portugal (Elias-Almeida *et al.*, 2016) or in hotels, restaurants, retail and theme parks (Torres *et al.*, 2020). Empirical findings from Mangini *et al.* (2021) reveal the favourable impact of delight and satisfaction on tourists' loyalty. The study also confirms the convergent and discriminant validity between the delight and satisfaction constructs, adding depth to the discussion surrounding these variables. Delight is suggested to be a greater predictor of loyalty than satisfaction (Ahrholdt *et al.*, 2019; Mangini *et al.*, 2021). Torres *et al.* (2020) also confirm the impact of customer delight on loyalty, suggesting

that this variable can be used in addition to the current satisfaction measures to gain a deeper view of emotional and motivational relationships between customers and service organisations. Kim *et al.* (2015) propose customer delight as an emotion or affective response, and extend support for the conceptualisation of customer delight as one of the antecedents of loyalty, specifically showing that customer delight has significant relationships with cognitive, affective, and conative loyalties. Thus, the following hypothesis (H3) is proposed:

- Hypothesis 3: Customer delight has a positive and significant impact on loyalty.

2.3 Customer Satisfaction

Customers' perceptions of actual service encounters are compared to their expectations (Oliver, 1999) to determine customer satisfaction. Fornell (1992) elucidated that satisfaction stems from the comparison between a consumer's expectations and the perceived performance of a product or service. When customers experience high satisfaction, it enhances the likelihood of repurchasing, ultimately contributing to the formation of loyalty (Santos & Fernandes, 2008). This highlights the crucial role satisfaction plays in building lasting relationships with customers and fostering loyalty to a brand or service provider, with consumer satisfaction having future consequences for profitability (Gupta & Zeithaml, 2006). In the hotel industry, satisfaction is derived from the quality of service experienced by the consumer by directly influencing their expectations and perceptions (Shah *et al.*, 2018). Tourism service providers must continuously enhance their service quality, focusing on the perceived quality of performance based on evaluating services and facilities to boost customer satisfaction and thereby increase loyalty (Huddin *et al.*, 2024). Ali *et al.* (2018) proposed that various dimensions of customer experience, such as the physical environment, interaction with staff, and interaction with other customers, served as antecedents of customer experience, while satisfaction and loyalty were their consequences. Therefore, the following hypothesis (H4) is proposed:

- Hypothesis 4: Customer satisfaction has a positive and significant impact on loyalty.

2.4 Loyalty

Achieving customer loyalty remains one of the main challenges for organisations. According to Ahrholdt

et al. (2019), conceptualising the parallel roles of satisfaction and delight as antecedents of loyalty draws on Oliver et al. (1997). Loyalty is “a deeply held commitment to re-buy and re-patronise a preferred product or service constantly in the future” (Oliver, 1999, p. 34). Loyalty in the context of consumer behaviour involves repurchase behaviour and brand commitment (Oliver et al., 1997). It is not solely determined by the repurchase process but is also influenced by cognitive and affective factors (Larán & Espinoza, 2004). A strong relationship between the customer and the company leads to increased customer loyalty (Sashi, 2012), which is vital for business growth and success in the market. Delighted customers are more likely to be retained, and retained customers are poised to transition into loyal customers, necessitating marketing programs to enhance their experiences and foster customer loyalty (Aityassine, 2022). Terrah et al. (2022) demonstrate a robust connection between experiential context (service quality, physical environment, and authenticity), positive emotions, and surprise as precursors to delight, with behavioural intentions, satisfaction, and loyalty as outcomes of delight. According to Ali et al. (2018), in a study focusing on theme parks, customer delight and satisfaction have a significant influence on customer loyalty. Therefore, the capability to guarantee customer delight and satisfaction through the development and provision of appropriate customer experiences can serve as a competitive advantage, potentially leading to customer loyalty.

3 Methods

3.1 Model and Hypotheses

In this research, a quantitative study sought to develop and test relationships among the key variables relying on the literature review. Figure 1 displays the conceptual model illustrating the relationship between exogenous and endogenous latent constructs. Accordingly, delight is influenced by value co-creation, and value co-creation also influences satisfaction. Moreover, both delight and customer satisfaction have a positive impact on loyalty. The study hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Value co-creation has a positive and significant impact on delight.

H2: Value co-creation has a positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction.

H3: Customer delight has a positive and significant impact on loyalty.

H4: Customer satisfaction has a positive and significant impact on loyalty.

3.2 Research Instrument and Construct Measures

The survey instrument’s measurement items were derived from validated research instruments and adjusted to fit

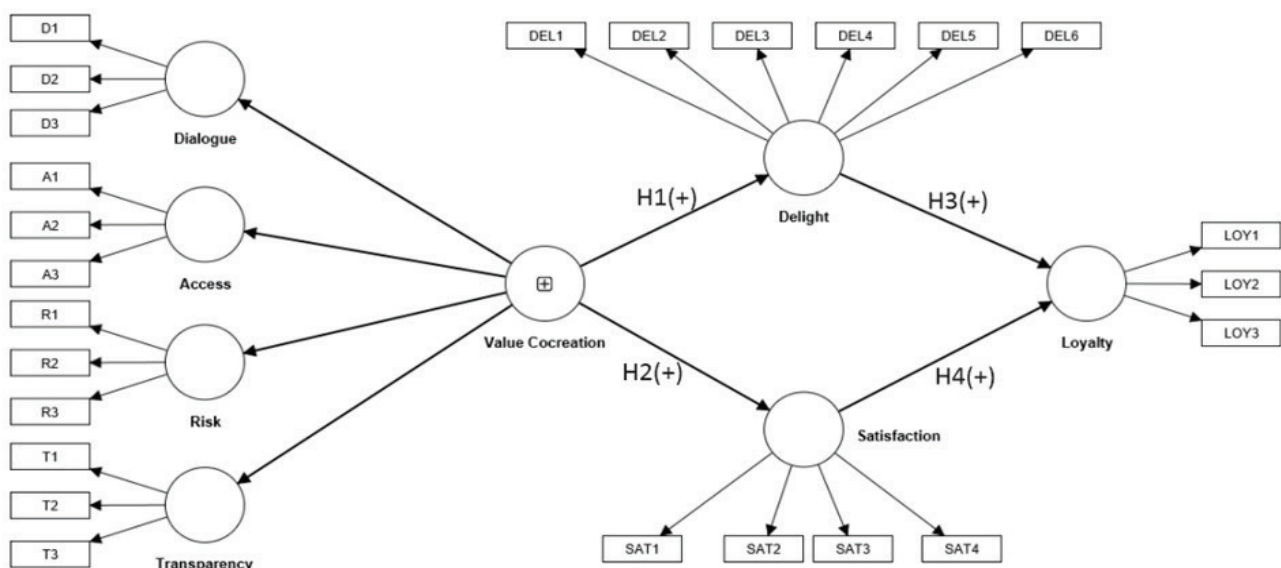


Figure 1: Conceptual model

Source: Research data

the specific context of this study. In all instances, latent variables were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated 'strongly disagree' and 7 indicated 'strongly agree'. To investigate the impact of value co-creation processes on the tourist experience, this research employs the DART model proposed by González-Mansilla *et al.* (2019), which utilises the buildup method based on the four DART dimensions: dialogue, access, risk assessment, and transparency, with three indicators each. The scales also covered delight (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Finn, 2005; Kim *et al.*, 2015), customer satisfaction (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991), and customer loyalty (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Kao *et al.*, 2008).

A pre-test of the questionnaire was carried out with six customers, and some modifications were implemented. Additionally, academic specialists in tourism planning and management reviewed the modification of items to ensure content validity. The pre-test, the analysis conducted by the specialists and the literature review, resulted in the measurements presented in the Appendix.

3.3 Data Collection and Sample

A self-administered survey was utilised to gather data from individuals who had visited a tourism destination within the past 12 months, either during a weekend or an extended vacation, and stayed in collective tourism accommodations. Given the limitations in time and resources, a convenience sampling method was used. The questionnaire was distributed through online social media platforms, and it was available in an electronic format using the LimeSurvey platform.

A total of 178 valid responses were obtained from May 17th to July 17th, 2023, after removing incomplete answers. The data obtained were analysed using the Jamovi statistical program (version 2.2.5) with univariate analysis. Additionally, for this study, the researchers tested the hypotheses outlined above using structural equation modelling, employing the partial least squares (PLS) method with Smart PLS M3 Version 4.0. The sociodemographics are in Table 1.

The gender distribution of respondents indicates that 28.1% are male, while 71.9% are female. The participants' average age is 41.7 years, with a median of 44, and the age data ranges from 20 to 69, with a standard deviation of 10.5. Regarding education, 2.2% completed ninth grade, 13.5% finished secondary school, 44.9% hold a bachelor's degree/undergraduate degree, and 39.3% pursued post-graduate studies/MBA/master's degree/doctorate. Marital status reveals that 64.6% are married/common-law, 6.2%

are divorced, 28.7% are single, and 0.6% are widowed. The survey encompasses individuals with various occupations, including 7.9% students, 0.6% retired individuals, 77.5% employees, and 14.0% self-employed. As for monthly net income (individual), 4.4% earn less than 760 euros, 20.3% earn 760-999 euros, 24.1% earn 1000-1249 euros, 22.2% earn 1250-1499 euros, 8.2% earn 1500-1749 euros, and 20.9% earn 1750 or more euros. The respondents are from diverse districts, with Vila Real having the highest percentage at 27.5%, followed by Bragança at 23.6%, and Braga and Lisbon both at 11.2%. Other districts such as Coimbra, Guarda, Leiria, R. A. Açores, Santarém, Évora, Castelo Branco, Viana do Castelo, Faro, R. A. Madeira, Viseu, Setúbal, and Aveiro show lower percentages, ranging from 0.6% to 2.8%. Out of the 178 respondents, a significant number enjoyed the tourist experience with their families (34.8%) and spouses/partners (48.3%). Additionally, a smaller portion chose to share the experience with friends (11.8%), while a few preferred to explore alone (3.4%). There were also a few instances where the respondents were accompanied by others (1.7%).

In the tourism experience that the respondent had during a vacation destination, concerning the type of accommodation (Table 2), respondents chose to stay in a hotel, aparthotel, or inn, which was the most popular choice, representing 59.6% of the stays. Rural tourism options, such as country houses, agrotourism, and rural hotels, were chosen by 9.0% of the tourists. Meanwhile, 8.4% of people preferred local accommodations, and 7.9% opted for home tourism. Other alternatives, like tourist apartments, tourist complexes, resorts, camping, and caravan parks, had a smaller share of choices, ranging from 1.7% to 6.7%.

Regarding the hotel classification, from a 5 to 1-star rating system, the 106 respondents were divided into 2 stars - one respondent, 3 stars - 21 respondents, 4 stars - 65 respondents, and 5 stars - 15 respondents (four respondents couldn't remember).

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

Measurement model evaluation revealed that adjustments need to be made. As part of the value co-creation construct, item R3 was removed due to a factor loading below 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2017). As a second-order variable, value co-creation is composed of dialogue, access, risk,

Table 1: Sample sociodemographics

	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	50	28.1
Female	128	71.9
Age		
18–24 years	17	9.6
25–34 years	30	16.9
35–44 years	47	26.4
45–54 years	69	38.8
55–64 years	14	7.9
65 or more years	1	0.6
Highest Level of Education		
Ninth grade completed	4	2.2
Secondary school completed	24	13.5
Bachelor's Degree/Undergraduate Degree	80	44.9
Postgraduate Studies/MBA/Master's Degree/Doctorate	70	39.3
Marital Status		
Married/Common-law marriage	115	64.6
Divorced	11	6.2
Single	51	28.7
Widowed	1	0.6
Occupation		
Student	14	7.9
Retired	1	0.6
Employee	138	77.5
Self-employed	25	14.0
Monthly Net Income (individual)		
Less than 760 euros	7	4.4
760- 999	32	20.3
1000 -1249	38	24.1
1250 -1499	35	22.2
1500-1749	13	8.2
1750 or more	33	20.9
District of residence		
Braga	20	11.2
Bragança	42	23.6
Lisboa	20	11.2
Porto	19	10.7
Vila Real	49	27.5
Others	28	15.7

Source: Research data

Table 2: Type of accommodation

Accommodation	Frequency	%
Hotel, aparthotel, or inn	106	59.6
Rural tourism (country house, agrotourism, rural hotel)	16	9.0
Local accommodation	15	8.4
Home tourism	14	7.9
Tourist apartment	12	6.7
Tourist complex (resort)	8	4.5
Tourist resort	4	2.2
Camping and caravan park	3	1.7

Source: Research data

Table 3: Internal consistency, AVE, and Fornell Larcker criteria

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	Latent Variable				HTMT
Latent Variable	>0,70	>0,70	>0.50	Delight	Loyalty	Satisfaction	Value co-creation	HTMT confidence interval does not include one
Delight	0,91	0,93	0,69	0,831				Yes
Loyalty	0,93	0,96	0,88	0,750	0,937			Yes
Satisfaction	0,96	0,97	0,89	0,773	0,879	0,944		Yes
Value co-creation	0,95	0,95	0,65	0,737	0,649	0,686	0,808	Yes

Source: Research data

and transparency. After these adjustments, it is possible to affirm that there is internal consistency in the scales, with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability greater than 0.7, the minimum reference (Ringle et al., 2014). These indicators are shown in Table 3, as well as those referring to convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In Table 3, the AVE values support the convergence of the Conceptual Model constructs.

Table 3 also presents the discriminant validity that indicates the distinction of one construct concerning another (Hair et al., 2009); that is, each construct is unique without being represented in another construct of a model (Hair et al., 2017). Two criteria were employed: the Fornell Larcker index and the heterotrace–monotrace matrix. Table 3 shows the square root of the AVE (Fornell-Larcker criterion) and the confidence interval of the HTMT matrix (values less than 1). Therefore, it is possible to affirm that there is discriminant validity in the adjusted model.

Table 4 shows the VIF (variance inflation factor) of each latent variable, which indicates the degree of

multicollinearity between variables (Hair et al., 2009). The highest VIF is 2.486 (relationship between delight and loyalty and between satisfaction and loyalty). The value for this index should be below the 3.0 threshold (Hair et al., 2019), which suggests that the model presents low collinearity between the constructs of the model. Pearson's coefficient of determination (R^2) expresses the predictive accuracy of a model (Hair et al., 2017). In social and behavioural sciences, an R^2 of up to 2% is considered a small effect, R^2 around 13% as a medium effect, and R^2 above 26% as a significant effect (Ringle et al., 2014). The coefficients of determination of the Conceptual Model, reported in Table 4, show high explanatory power of the regressions because the values of adjusted R^2 are between 46.8% and 78.3%. Cohen's d (f^2), for effect size, serves to assess the usefulness of each construct for the adjustment of a model, 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate, respectively, weak, medium, or substantial influence of an exogenous latent variable on an endogenous latent variable. For the Conceptual Model, in Table 4, most of the f^2 are high. The

Table 4: Values of PLS Algorithm

Hypothesis	Structural Path	VIF	f ²	R ²	R ² adjusted
H1	Value Co-creation → Delight	1.000	1.186	0.543	0.540
H2	Value Co-creation → Satisfaction	1.000	0.889	0.471	0.468
H3	Delight → Loyalty	2.486	0.057	0.785	0.783
H4	Satisfaction → Loyalty	2.486	1.038		

Source: Research data

only low effect is between Delight and Loyalty ($f^2 = 0.057$). These values were possible due to the use of the PLS algorithm in the SmartPLS software.

Figure 2 shows the adjusted model, with the path coefficient between latent variables, the R^2 of each endogenous variable, and the factor loadings of each item measured in the respective latent variable.

Bootstrapping was used in SEM, a nonparametric procedure that extracts several subsamples and estimates models for each of them, and, finally, estimates parameters from the set of models (Hair et al., 2018). The relationship between the constructs is measured with Student's t-test, whose coefficients assess the relationship between constructs at an adopted significance level. The values generated by bootstrapping, with 10,000 resamples for the overall sample, are shown in Table 5 and Figure 3. All hypotheses are supported.

4.2 Discussion

According to goods-dominant logic, value creation is the main outcome (Blocker & Barrios, 2015), and the process of delivering value encompasses selection, supply, and communication (Zeithaml, 1988). Nevertheless, the customer is a highly passive actor in the exchange of goods, and the purpose of the exchange of value is only to deliver benefits to the customer (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a; 2008). A service-dominant logic, on the other hand, plays a fundamental role in the process of generating value, where both customers and service providers are involved (Vargo & Lusch, 2004b). In fact, services, especially hospitality, have a high degree of interactivity between customers and service providers. According to Vargo and Lusch (2004a), such interaction is the basis for the value co-creation process that leads to satisfaction, delight, and loyalty.

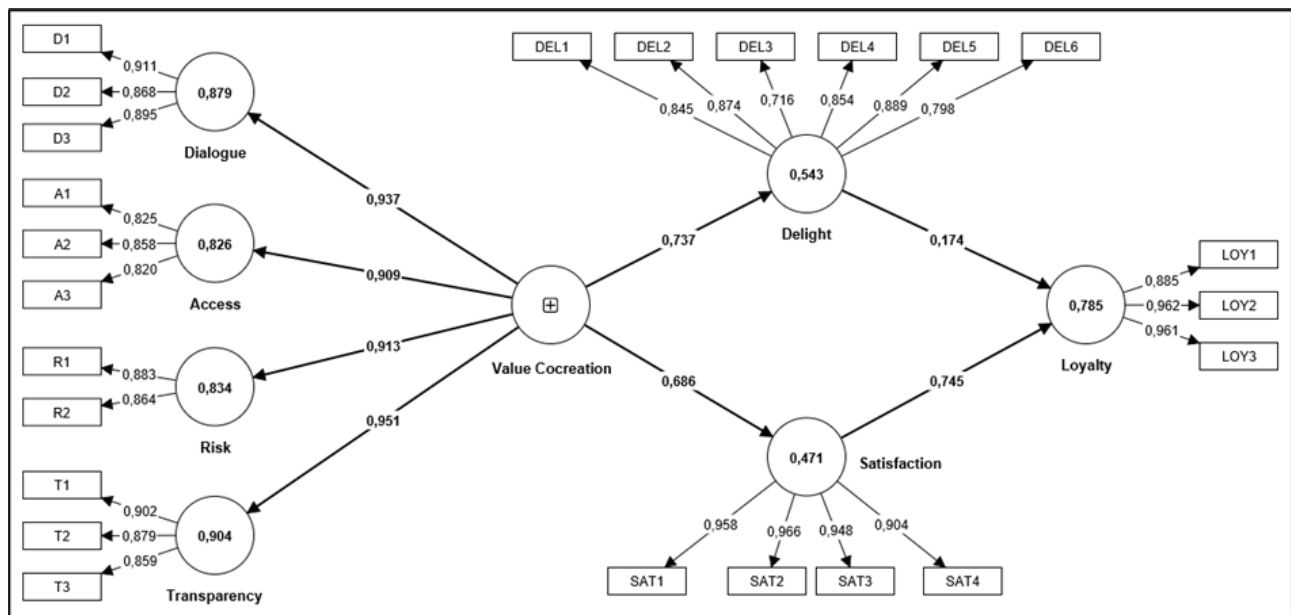


Figure 2: Adjusted model

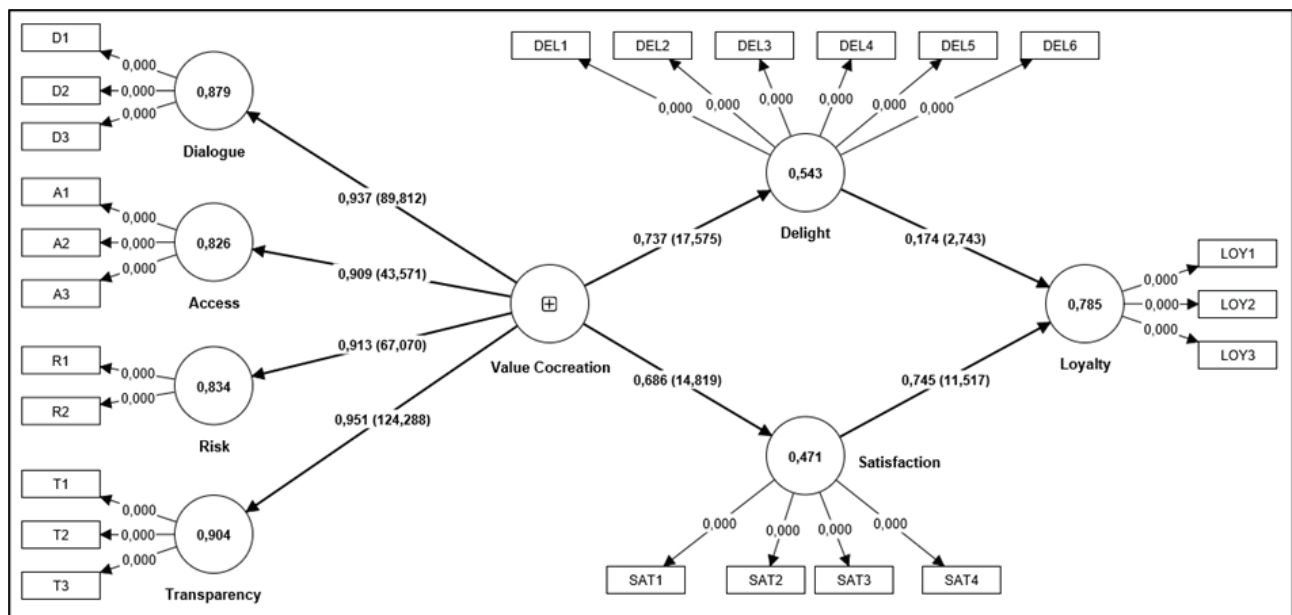
Source: Research data

Table 5: Hypotheses test and general model values

Hypothesis	Structural Path	Structural Coefficient (β)	Standard deviation	t-test	P value	Hypothesis test
H1	Value Co-creation \rightarrow Delight	0.737	0.042	17.575	0.000	Supported*
H2	Value Co-creation \rightarrow Satisfaction	0.686	0.046	14.819	0.000	Supported *
H3	Delight \rightarrow Loyalty	0.174	0.063	2.743	0.006	Supported **
H4	Satisfaction \rightarrow Loyalty	0.745	0.065	11.517	0.000	Supported *

Critical values to $t(178) = *p < 0.1\% = 3.29$; $**p < 1\% = 2.57$.

Source: Research data

**Figure 3:** Validated model

Source: Research data

Ribeiro et al. (2023) suggest that interaction, engagement, and service innovation are the most studied antecedents of value co-creation, while satisfaction, perceived value, and loyalty are the main consequences. The results presented in this article show the importance of value co-creation, measured by the DART model (Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Albinsson et al., 2016; Gbandi & Oware, 2023), in which there is a positive and significant relationship with delight (H1) with $\beta = 0.737$, $t(178) = 17.575$ and $p < 0.001$. Delight formation was found to be positively influenced by consumer experience in this study, which is similar to the findings of Hao and Chon (2022). It is important to note that Finn (2005) has already highlighted the importance of surprise with a positive effect on the formation of delight, and with this in mind, the study's results confirm the importance of transparency and dialogue in the value co-creation process, as illustrated by the DART model. The concept of

communication was previously explored by Lee (2019) as a factor that generates delight in health care, as well as by Pera (2017) when evaluating the practice of storytelling in tourism. It is important to emphasise that dialogue, access, and transparent communication are the basis of the value co-creation model used in this research.

According to Table 3, the value co-creation process positively correlates with satisfaction levels. Consequently, when the customer participates in the service provision as an active agent, the tendency is to generate customer satisfaction, as previously demonstrated by Sweeney et al. (2015). This can be explained by the fact that the consumer becomes an active co-creator (Grönroos & Voima, 2013), and this directly affects his/her perception of service performance and how it compares to their expectations (Oliver, 1980). As a result of presenting the four dimensions of value co-creation, the DART model

produces a series of benefits that contribute to the development of satisfaction (Vega-Vazquez et al., 2013).

The study shows both the classic relationship between satisfaction and loyalty generation (H4) as well as the relationship between delight and loyalty generation (H3). Both satisfaction and delight are based on the consumption experience (Sarstedt et al., 2014). In this study, the relationship between delight and loyalty was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.174$, $t(178) = 2.743$ and $p < 0.01$) and corroborated the studies of Ahrholdt et al. (2019), Lee and Park (2019), and Torres et al. (2020), because similar to satisfaction, delight is linked to the positive experience perceived by the consumer that exceeded his/her expectations (Silva & Júnior, 2016). As Kim et al. (2015) proposed, customer satisfaction is more strongly related to loyalty than delight. The stronger relationship between satisfaction and loyalty in this study than between delight and loyalty contrasts with the study of Mangini et al. (2021), where delight appears to have a stronger influence on customer loyalty when compared to satisfaction. Hypothesis 4 presents a $\beta = 0.745$, proving the positive relationship with a t-test (178) of 11.517 and a p value of less than 0.1%, which shows a high relationship between constructs, as reported by several researchers such as Oliver (1999), Chen and Wang (2016), and Bernardes et al. (2018), among others.

5 Conclusions

Value co-creation, although before the service-dominant logic, gained awareness with the research of Vargo and Lusch (2004a, 2004b, 2008, 2014; 2017). The concept of value co-creation refers to the collaborative process that results in value from dialogical interaction, as opposed to co-production, which requires significant resources and capabilities (Ballantyne & Varey, 2006). There is no doubt that customer participation is becoming increasingly important for companies as a result of its impact on their financial performance (Chan et al., 2010). Although there are several scales for measuring the value co-creation process, this study adopted the DART model (Albinsson et al., 2016). The study, conducted with customers of hotel services, pointed out and corroborated previous research that analysed the value co-creation process and its relationship with aspects of consumer behaviour. It was possible to observe that the value co-creation process, with the adoption of the DART model, has a predictive effect on delight and satisfaction. The results show that value co-creation has a direct positive effect on customer delight and, subsequently, influences the effect of customer

delight on customer loyalty. Moreover, this study concludes that value co-creation has a direct and positive effect on customer satisfaction, which, in turn, positively influences loyalty. In other words, by ensuring direct communication between the service provider and the consumer and by placing the consumer in an active role as co-creator and co-producer, the generation of satisfaction and delight is stimulated. It should be noted that the research adopted delight as an independent construct of satisfaction, as postulated by Berman (2005), Finn (2005), Chituri et al. (2008), and Ahrholdt et al. (2019).

The present research reinforces other studies (e.g., Elias-Almeida et al., 2016; Torres et al., 2020), stating that competitors in the hotel industry need to go beyond what is expected in order to satisfy the visitors with an unpredictable positive experience.

The limitation of the research is concerned with the type of sample, which was non-probabilistic, and accessibility, which does not allow extrapolation of the results to other services or categories of hospitality businesses. Another limitation that the research presents is the fact that there is no measurement of the profitability of services with which the customer was delighted. With this limitation, it is suggested that the customer's willingness to pay for complementary services that generate delight be investigated, as well as how delight influences the costs of changing the service provider.

Finally, the theoretical contribution of the study is in the understanding of delight as an independent construct of satisfaction and its relationship with value co-creation. It is important to note that delight is not simply a comparison between expectation and performance, as is the case with satisfaction. This construct is highly influenced by factors such as consumer experience, tangible aspects of the hospitality and tourism offerings, as well as relationships with service providers. This directly influences the managerial aspects of supply, value co-creation, and service quality assessment, as companies that know how to properly exploit this construct can gain a competitive advantage and improve the profitability of tourism services. Customer delight is considered important for service providers seeking to obtain higher levels of customer engagement (Torres et al., 2020). Investment in hedonic experiences is necessary for companies in this sector to ensure customer loyalty. This can be explained by the fact that delight is associated with positive emotions like surprise, happiness, and joy. Additionally, the article emphasises the importance of creating a positive and friendly work environment. Front office staff should receive training to provide personal service. The outcomes of this research

may facilitate the design or improvement of the service, as well as the value proposition of hospitality players.

Future research in tourism and hospitality is encouraged to examine the value co-creation as a mediating or moderating variable since research about this seems scarce, as suggested by Ribeiro *et al.* (2023). In this industry, relationships between value co-creation, delight, satisfaction, behaviour intentions, and loyalty are now opening a wide set of future research avenues.

Funding

This paper is financed by national funds from the FCT Foundation for Science and Technology through Project Ref. UIDB/04470/2020 CITUR.

Data availability statement

The data set for this study is available upon request and careful consideration.

Acknowledgements

We thank all the people who have contributed to the article, namely the survey's respondents.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Variable Item	Item description	Based on
DART (Dialogue, Access, Risk, Transparency)		
Dialogue		Albinsson et al. (2016); González-Mansilla et al. (2019); González-Mansilla et al. (2023); Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004)
D1	The hotel communicates with and listens to guests in order to improve its service	
D2	The hotel interacts with guests in order to develop and provide quality service	
D3	The hotel facilitates the communication of ideas and suggestions about the service	
Access		
A1	The hotel allows guests to personalise the range of services they wish to receive	
A2	Guests have numerous service options in order to adapt them to their needs	
A3	It is easy to receive information about hotel service when, where and the way guests wish	
Risk		
R1	The hotel offers comprehensible information that allows the advantages and disadvantages of the services to be assessed	
R2	The hotel offers many possibilities to present complaints regarding any problems that may arise during the service	
R3*	<i>The hotel repeatedly urges guests to familiarise themselves with the possible risks involved in using the services (fire prevention, slips in the swimming pool, wet floors, no glass in wet zones)</i>	
Transparency		
T1	Guests have access to all the information that may be of use in improving the service	
T2	The hotel and customers share information on equal terms to improve service	
T3	The hotel offers public and transparent information regarding the prices associated with the various services	
Customer delight		Finn (2005); Kim et al. (2015)
D1	I felt delighted at some time during this tourist experience	
D2	I felt joyful at some time during this tourist experience	
D3	I felt euphoric at some time during this tourist experience	
D4	I felt positively surprised at some time during this tourist experience	
D5	I felt very happy at some time during this tourist experience	
D6	The tourist accommodation had experiences and services that were unexpected and enchanted me	
Customer satisfaction		Ali et al. (2018); Westbrook & Oliver (1991)
S1	I am satisfied with my decision to stay at this tourist accommodation	
S2	My choice of tourist accommodation was smart.	
S3	I think I made the right decision in staying at this tourist accommodation	
S4	I feel that my experience at this tourist accommodation was enjoyable	

Customer loyalty

Ali *et al.* (2018); Kao
et al. (2008)

- L1** In the future, I would like to return to this tourist accommodation
- L2** I will tell my friends about this tourist accommodation.
- L3** I will recommend this tourist accommodation to others

Likert scale used to evaluate all items except Satisfaction: (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Highly disagree; (3) Somewhat disagree; (4) Intermediate agree-disagree; (5) Somewhat agree; (6) Highly agree; (7) Strongly agree.
**Items in italics were removed.*