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Value-creation domain: events' function in a marketing paradigm centered on services

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Abstract

This work explores the potential of events from the perspective of service dominating logic, adding additional conceptual depth to our understanding of their worth. It assesses the increasing relevance of events in contemporary marketing via conceptual analysis, debate, and a small-scale exploratory empirical investigation employing semi-structured interviews. The notion of "value creation space" is introduced in the paper as a way to bring together a diverse range of organizational events that are crucial or have an influence on marketing. The underlying strengths of events are acknowledged and used to construct a conversation that may provide a consistent foundation for further conceptual growth. According to the results, there is a lot of harmony between the cooperative character of the events and the ideas of co-production and co-creation that are prevalent in the logic of service. Nevertheless, events cannot continue to be successful as locations for value creation without an intuitive and well implemented event marketing strategy.

Keywords: Service Dominant Logic; Marketing Events; Co-creation; Co-destruction; Qualitative Interviews

Introduction

The evolution of events as a marketing strategy has been facilitated by paradigm changes from a product to a service focus, as well as from transactional to relational methods. Events, in all its forms, are best understood as a part of the ever-growing family of experiential communications, which are based on and separate from one another (Schmitt and Rodgers, 2008; Schmitt, 1999). Because of this, they are more influential and relevant in modern marketing. According to many sources, such as Fahmy (2009), Gupta (2003), Heasley (2010), Wohlfeil and Whelan (2005), and Wood and Masterman (2007), the field is progressively using them in a diverse and sophisticated way, which supports this idea. Scholarly and professional commentary on marketing events is on the rise, yet there is still a lack of comprehensive literature on the topic. As a result, the impact of recent events on the field of contemporary marketing necessitates much more study and debate. Events have long been seen as a promotional tool for expressing ideas to stakeholders and creating connections with them;

however, this conventional knowledge is being challenged by changes in the marketing environment (Kotler, 2003). While correct, these explanations suggest an excessively tactical and limited function; as a result, such simplistic terminology is out of date and fails to convey the breadth and depth of their possible impact. Ramaswamy (2011) presents live events as one of the "engagement platforms" of an organization, which is a more progressive and broad viewpoint. These platforms allow for continuous engagement with all parties involved in an organization's value chain, whether they are internal or external, with the goal of generating mutually beneficial experiences and strengthening networks. It has pervasive representation is in line with the theoretical advances made in this article, and it helps to elaborate on the expanded scope and enhanced value of event-based marketing. The shift from Goods Dominant Logic (G-D logic) to Service Dominant Logic (S-D logic) provides a helpful framework for understanding the impact of recent marketing events.

This line of thought, first put out in a landmark article by Vargo and Lusch (2004), describes a change from a focus on products to more prevalent ideas of collaborative production, value at work, and operant resource primacy (Vargo and Lusch, 2008a:256). Organizations organize a wide variety of events every year, and these events have far-reaching significance—maybe even more so than marketers and event planners realize—according to the philosophy that underpins them. This study continues by examining the idea that events will always play a part in the co-creation of value, but it warns of a dangerous caveat in the form of Plé and Cáceres's (2010) co-destruction sentiment. They claim that the S-D logic literature has failed to sufficiently explain why co-creation and co-destruction are both valid outcomes of trade. All of the co-creation references in this work are based on the idea that events are high-risk, high-opportunity situations where poor planning and management might cause value to be co-destroyed. Using the S-D logic paradigm as a lens, this study aims to shed fresh conceptual light on the nature and possibilities of events as a venue for value creation. In particular, the article: (1) delves into a new vocabulary for

describing events, which signifies a departure from seeing them just as a means of communication and instead presents them as platforms for value creation; and (2) investigates when and why events provide a great chance to accomplish goals that are more in line with fostering relationships and creating value together. In order to find important insights and to elaborate on the value creation potential of marketing events, this study provides a comprehensive evaluation of the current literature. This study uses in-depth interviews with senior event and marketing managers to examine the present state of events and their use, with the goal of identifying the paradigm shifts that are necessary to promote events as platforms for value generation. This study is an early effort to conceptualize and place events within a marketing S-D logic perspective. Therefore, in order to thoroughly evaluate the claims made in this article, more, comprehensive empirical studies into the value co-creation capacity of events are required. In what follows, we'll go over the basics of S-D reasoning before diving into an analysis of events and their capacity to generate value.

Literature review

S-D logic view

For decades, the dominant paradigm espoused by marketing academics was that of marketing management, popularised in texts by McCarthy (1960) and Kotler (1967), with a strong focus on the satisfaction of customer needs through decision making centred around the 4 Ps. Evolving from the proliferation of concepts such as services marketing (Shostack, 1977) and relationship marketing (Grönroos, 1994), calls were made for a shift in marketing paradigm to one which more accurately represented the „continuous nature of relationships among marketing actors“ (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2000:140). Vargo and Lusch's (2004) paper presents such a change in perspective, with the proposition of S-D logic as not only a functional marketing concept but an overarching organisational philosophy. This new logic espoused the customer as a co-producer of value, later modified to a co-creator of value (Lusch and Vargo, 2006a), with value not residing in products but being defined by and co-created with the consumer (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), and other value creation partners. A prominent notion is the primacy of the supplier assisting consumers in their own value creation process, with a particular emphasis on the concept of consumer learning through their experiences with the brand (Payne, Storbacka and Frow, 2008). Such learning, and its influence on the operant resources of all parties, becomes pivotal to the optimisation of

the core construct of value in use. Markedly, this learning is reciprocal with all participants being resources and therefore experiencing value creation or destruction through the interactive exchanges. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) chart an evolution towards proactive customer involvement, within the context of consumer-supplier relationships, opening up further possibilities for the augmentation of operant resources, as suppliers and consumers learn more about each other (Payne *et al.*, 2008). As such, we see the emphasis on interactivity in supplier-consumer, and more widely network participant, relationships espoused in a service-dominant perspective (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The relational emphasis is neatly captured by Gummesson (2008), who talks of a network view of marketing, with value created through a network of activities among many stakeholders, in what he terms many-to-many marketing. Building on Vargo and Lusch's (2008b) foundational premise that the customer is always a co-creator of value, Payne *et al* (2008) propose a conceptual framework for value co-creation. The key role of operant resources in Vargo and Lusch's (2004) S-D logic implies that consumers' ability to create value is contingent on the amount of knowledge, information, skills and other operant resources that they can use (Normann, 2001), with the role of the supplier becoming one of „providing experiential interactions and encounters which

customers perceive as helping them utilize their resources" (Payne *et al.*, 2008:87). The focus for marketers therefore shifts from one on products to one on value-in-use and the facilitation of relationships and experiences to enhance customer value-in-use (Payne *et al.*, 2008). The achievement of this aspiration impinges upon the ability of the supplier to effectively leverage their operant resources through the resource integration approach elucidated in Lusch and Vargo (2006b). We can clearly see, therefore, that the language of S-D logic

Value creation space

Events present themselves in various guises, which represents a difficulty in forging a coherent school of thought, as is evidenced by the fragmented approach in the extant literature. The ensuing discussion addresses this by proposing a new theoretical construct through which to interpret events in a modern marketing context. As suggested in the introduction, customary definitions of events as a communicator of messages and cultivator of relationships (Kotler, 2003) are accurate and relevant but fail to capture the multifaceted role of events in modern day marketing. Not surprisingly, the language used in recent years has been more expansive with progressive characterisations such as „brand hyperreality“ (Whelan and Wohlfeil, 2006), „live communications“ (Getz, 2007), „live the brand“ (Russell, 2007), and even fanciful phrases such as „artificial paradises“ (Wünsch, 2008). These characterisations, while disputable, are healthy as they advance the debate and more fully reveal the character of „experiential marketing events“ (Wood and Masterman, 2007). Such language lucidly articulates how a live event creates an interaction between the audience and a brand or product, as expressed by Jack Morton Worldwide (cited in Wood, 2009). Wood (2009) offers a detailed and useful typology of what Wood and Masterman (2007) term experiential marketing events. This includes conventional categories such as product launches, conferences, and exhibitions, but also less renowned forms such as created events and product visitor attractions. Each event type, or marketing event platform (Crowther, 2010a), has a distinct charm and challenge, therefore lending itself to the achievement of specific outcomes, and combinations of outcomes. This point is illustrated through two contrasting examples. Marketing objectives associated with intelligence and co-design through mobilising network actors in the value chain would be best accomplished through a smaller more intimate event space, a workshop or seminar environment. In contrast, the achievement of brand communication objectives, to reach, and develop dialogue with, new customers may be better

talks of interactivity (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), with value being seen as „idiosyncratic, experiential, contextual and meaning laden“ (Vargo and Lusch, 2008b:7) and embedded in notions of relationships and networks (Gummesson, 2008). As such, the descriptions of value co-creation echo to a large extent the language used to conceptualise marketing events. In this context, it is to the conceptualisation of marketing events that this discussion will now turn.

executed through a roadshow, or outdoor event-based strategy. Event platforms are wide-ranging, but also the marketing space within any given platform is inherently pliable. The application of experience design principles (Berridge, 2007; Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010) enables the event space to be customised, or choreographed, to best achieve desired outcomes, but also to favourably connect with the underlying operant resources embodied by the event attendees. The prevailing literature, such as the typology discussed above, takes an exclusive approach to defining the scope of marketing events, which is problematic. In limiting the focus to only those events with prescribed marketing intent, the discussion overtly disregards the many and varied organisational events with secondary marketing purpose (Wood, 2009), and indeed impact. The approach is therefore inadequate, and incongruent, given that the interactive and experiential dimensions of all organisational events inescapably represent a co-creation or co-destruction of value among network actors. Indeed all organisational events represent a 4D communiqué of the brand regardless of whether the event has foremost marketing intent. Given the primacy of ongoing relationships (Grönroos, 1990), and the thinking around value creation and value exchange (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), a much wider range of organisational events, with secondary, indirect, or event latent, marketing significance need to be accounted for in theoretical development around events and marketing. This discussion validates an outcome-oriented viewpoint signifying that all organisational events are advantageously considered marketing events, or more accurately events with marketing resonance. While experiential marketing events is an apposite term to represent those „esteemed“ events with calculated marketing purpose, perhaps „latent marketing events“ is a purposeful phrase to recognise the marketing potential and risk of all other organisational events. This paper advocates a more significant departure from the established thinking, suggesting

that a progressive and pertinent characterisation would be to adopt the overarching terminology of „value creation space“ to incorporate all organisational events. Value creation space is thus characterised by the following core determinants: pre planned time and physical space; congregation and/or coalescence of internal and/or external network actors; and, a programme, distinct from day to day operations and processes, that would include core elements that may embrace learning, social, and entertainment. The terminology is a fusion of value creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), and the notion of marketing space, which is a term adopted to reflect the transient temporal and physical reality that events provide, as detailed in Crowther (2010a). Such terminology is inclusive and therefore reflective of the modern day democratisation of

Virtues of events

Noteworthy attributes of events include: experiential, interactive, targeted, and relational. The sentiment that consumers buy experiences (Schmitt, 1999) and, even, crave experiences, is palpable. Parsons and MacLaren (2009) chart the trend of hyperreality, which is an appreciable portrayal of some event spaces. Therefore a constructive point of departure is to view the customer as an active participant, or a co-creator of value (Vargo and Lusch, 2004); a perspective easily reconcilable with the value creation space of an event. These features prevail in the modern marketing landscape, yet of course these attributes are shared with other communication vehicles, especially those within the realms of experiential marketing. It is expedient to reflect upon the distinct characteristics of events that define their contribution as a modern marketing approach. Perhaps the distinction of events is underpinned by a fusion of the following five qualities that are not so readily replicated by other methods. Firstly, the attendees are typically voluntary and active in their physical attendance at the event. This is a point of difference with a whole range of other communication forms, where the attendee is characteristically involuntary and passive (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998). This willingness on the part of the attendee, and face to face characteristic, is noteworthy, facilitating a more intimate dialogue as opposed to a remote didactic communication. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) note that the market has become a venue for proactive customer involvement, therefore events can be conceived as an opportune vehicle through which to mobilise the customer as an operand resource (co-creator) rather than an operand resource (target).

marketing, and also the reality that event planning, delivery, and participation proliferate throughout an organisation. „Value creation space“ can be expressed as a designed intersection within an infinitely more fluid process of exchange between network actors. The use of the term intersection is deliberate and designed to suggest that these occasions should be purposeful and strategically informed and integrated.

Figure 1, below, depicts the pivotal notion of an organisations events as value creation spaces. Clearly for the activation of events as value creation spaces to be realised, all aspects of the event design must be optimised. Therefore, the following section will address the virtues of events as value creation spaces before critically appraising the challenges in harnessing that event space.

Secondly, the congregation of people at an event is significant, affording the potential to create a sense of community, or *communitas* (Getz, 2007), which can heighten the experience. A secondary facet of this congregation is the opportunity it provides to maintain a frequency and intensity in relationships (Gummesson, 1999). Many organisations and their clients experience ad hoc transaction patterns, therefore particularly in business to business marketing, there is an issue around maintaining the relationship. Events present a conduit to achieve more frequent and consistent „conversations“ with customers. Equally, from a network perspective, planned events offer those many to many marketing opportunities advocated by Gummesson (2008), acting as a platform through which organisations can consult, engage, and build fruitful relationships with a wide range of important stakeholders, including, among others, future employees, suppliers, and influencers (Christopher *et al*, 1991). Aligned to the previous point are the participative and interactive qualities of events which are highly relevant given the growing sentiment of doing things „with and for“ customers (Gummesson, 2002; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Dissimilar to many other communication forms, events provide opportunity for dialogue and intimacy between their respective actors.

A fourth stark reflection is that events provide a space within which to leverage manifold communication outcomes from awareness right through to action (Strong, 1925). The interactivity of marketing events presents the opportunity for consumers to gain direct experience of the product's value in use. This is reinforced by Nancy Niepp, Senior Director at Cisco (Fahmy, 2009) who, referring to technical products, emphasises the value

of events in satisfying many of their customers who want to „dig in, ask questions and put their hands on the products“. As such, event-based marketing is the antithesis of a structured monologue between marketers and consumers, presenting a much more reciprocal environment for value co-creation. A final distinguishing feature is the pre planned nature of events which provides notable distinction from other experiential communication platforms. The fluid and reciprocal vehicle of an event as a value creation space presents considerable challenges to

All communication forms have their own makeup; likewise events have a distinct DNA, which underpins their relevance to modern marketing. The marketing space framework (Crowther, 2010a) is a constructive lens through which to conceptualise the resonance of marketing events as expressed in this above discussion. The conception, and associated marketing space framework, is inspired by the thinking of Belk *et al* (1989), with the proposition that event space can be characterised by a blurring of the boundaries between the sacred and profane,

Harnessing the event space

It is striking that while events comprise inherent qualities that are aligned and favourable with S-D logic thinking, the degree to which these qualities are roused is situational and impinges upon the design and execution of the event. The manifestation of an event is the core space, physical time and location, which can be strategically infused through experience design.

The requirement for experience design to be optimal is conspicuous in the context that all interactions, certainly planned interactions, such as events, involve notable input, or sacrifice (time, effort, money, opportunity cost) on behalf of the attendee (Monroe, 1991). This reality places a heightened emphasis on the facilitation of positive experience, with events positioned as noteworthy touch points in the value creation (or dilution) journey.

Furthermore, fully realising the diverse marketing possibilities demands a management approach that incorporates an integration and leveraging of the augmented space, pre and post event (Crowther, 2010a). The connection between events and the wider integrated communications is integral to their success in realising defined outcomes. At the heart of the design is a coherence with the specific, or combination of, marketing outcomes. This purposeful process is in contrast to findings in some of the existing research which suggests a fracturing of the strategic and tactical with events being more of an informal adjunct to marketing strategy, lacking required integration and strategic intent (Crowther,

planning and management. Palpably, however, the certainties of time, location, audience, and so forth provide a greater locus of control to the organisation in choreographing an event (performance) that is premeditated and practiced. Event management, as expressed by Bowdin *et al* (2006) is an art as well as a science, which permits the design of the time and space to be deliberate. Aligned with S-D logic, this design should seek to harness and communicate the operant resources appropriate to the desired outcomes and audience.

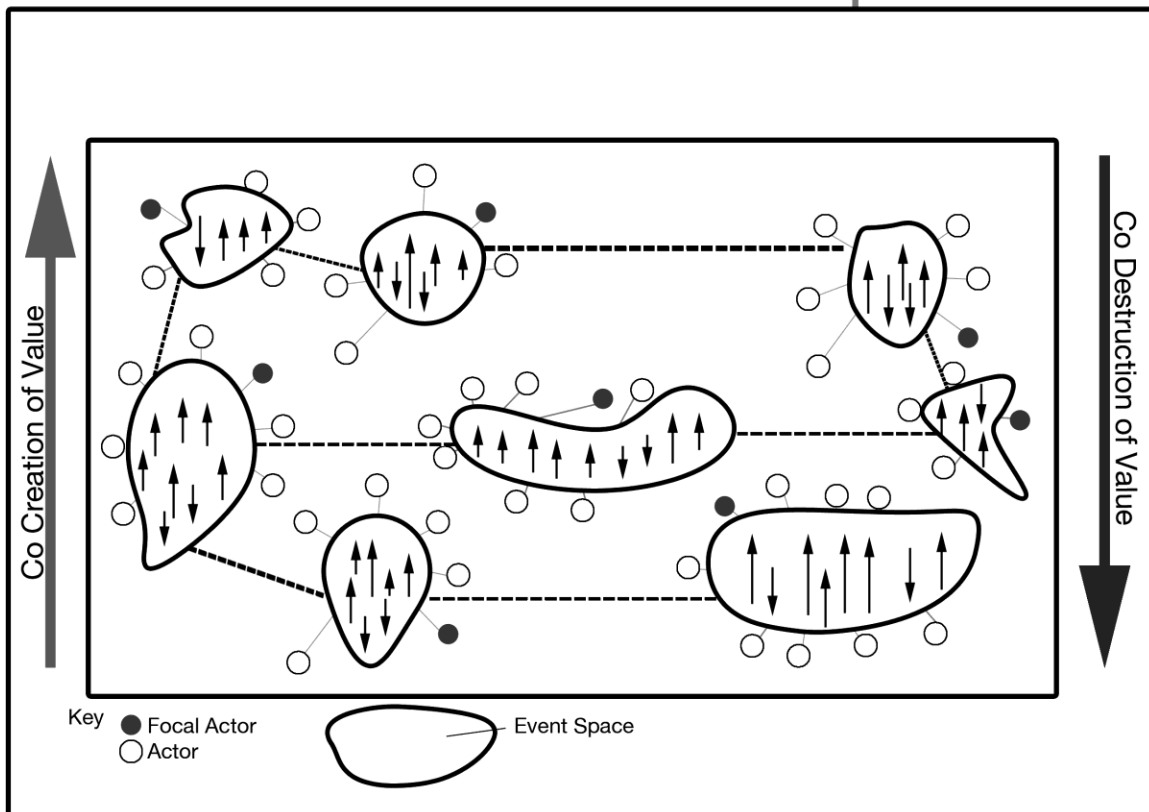
which can be expressed (for business to business) as the commercial and the social, or (for business to consumer) the everyday lived experience and the stimulation and escapism of the event. Implicit within this thinking is that such a reality can conceivably create a heightened experience with attendees more relaxed, uninhibited, and open to new ideas (Getz, 2007). The discussion now turns to the realisation, or activation, of the virtues discussed.

2010b; Pugh and Wood, 2004). Consequently an underlying narrative is the importance of an integrated and strategic approach to the leveraging of event based marketing, in contrast to an overly myopic and operational reality. The ambition is that the value creation spaces facilitated through staging events foster co-creation. However as soberly promoted by Plé and Cáceres (2010), the inescapable extension of this logic is that co-destruction is equally prominent, with the interaction proving suboptimal for one or both parties. Therefore inapt integration and/or application of resources or lack of alignment with expectations could result in co-destruction. Given that events are complex and demanding vehicles to successfully employ, such co-destruction through „accidental misuse“ (Plé and Cáceres, 2010:432) is conceivable. Misuse is a term used to reflect a failure to integrate or apply resources in a manner that is appropriate or expected by the other service system. Prevalent service characteristics, including inseparability, heterogeneity, inventoriability, and perishability (Lovelock and Gummesson, 2004), create palpable tensions and difficulties in seeking to optimise the event space. The challenge is augmented when adding in composite factors such as: experiential communication of the brand, attendee incongruity, and the management of diverse tangible and intangible cues. Such a reality takes the marketer outside of their core competence and into the realms of event designer, event

manager, and even service recovery manager. It also, as Gummesson (2002) postulates, propels a wide range of part time marketers to the fore. Realising the value co-creation possibilities of events is therefore palpably high in risk and opportunity. This challenge is compounded when one considers that organisations will likely engage with a range of event platforms and event episodes each year. Previous empirical research has revealed that there exists a host of events that receive no, or negligible, marketing focus but nevertheless are occasions where an organisation's stakeholders come together as an audience and interact with the product or brand (Crowther, 2010b). Notably, in this research, such events far outnumbered those receiving direct marketing focus, including such platforms as workshops, learning events and charity fun days. Notably, the basis for the suggestion of an absence of marketing focus was the non-existence of marketing department involvement, and also disconnect between event managers and marketing strategy. Clearly, and particularly given the proliferation of events, and event management, throughout an organisation, the suggestion that marketing purpose is synonymous with marketing department involvement is fallacious and out-dated. However the risk is that such events lack strategic congruence and therefore become informal adjuncts, or even mavericks, that in the first instance represent missed opportunities, and more pessimistically, lead to eclectic brand communications and incongruous relationship management. Of course, the organisation's aspiration would be that actors' participation in event spaces positively impacts upon their experience, so sustaining value in use. The planned cultivation of such space is consistent with Vargo and Lusch's (2004) pivotal notion of co-creation, but also co-production, emphasising the participative and reciprocal behaviour on behalf of all actors. Given the physical act of event attendance and participation, it could be argued that events by their very nature are synonymous with co-production, as co-production is defined as a task undertaken prior to, or during, experience (Hilton and Hughes, 2008). All actors can be seen as operant

resources and therefore event space is an apposite tool to realise this co-production potential of engaging customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders in joint collaboration. However, the design of the event determines to what degree, beyond their physical attendance, attendees are active (or passive) in their role within the event space. The activation of the attendee in the experience is contingent upon a variety of factors. Equally, the emphasis on an attendee to be actively collaborative in the event space changes the dynamic of the value creation process. The degree of co-production to embed in the event design is a key decision in choreographing the event. The theoretical framework of value creation put forward by Payne *et al* (2008) argues that an outcome of relationship experiences between suppliers and consumers is consumer learning. If such learning is positive (via positive experiences), consumers may develop a preference for that brand over competitors (Payne *et al.*, 2008), representing a valuable outcome for suppliers. Given the characteristics of events, such as seminars, trade shows and conferences, well designed events of this nature can act as a service delivery process through which to facilitate the leveraging of such operant resources as knowledge, skills and expertise. This argument meshes with a pivotal notion in Grönroos and Ravald's (2011:8) paper that value facilitation is a pre requisite in supplier consumer relationships, recognising that value facilitation processes only prevail when „the customer becomes better off in some respect, as subjectively judged by the customer“. As such, event organisers are challenged to consider the apposite design to facilitate value creation within the event space, harnessing events as a positive contributor to value creation. Figure 1, below, provides a visual summary of the amalgam of organisational events as value creation spaces that have the potential for co-creative and co-destructive outcome. Having reviewed the extant literature, the following section will outline the methodology adopted for the empirical research component of the study, before moving to a comprehensive discussion of the value creation potential of events.

Events as Value Creation Spaces



Methodology

This paper provides a new conceptual contribution to our understanding of the value of events through the lens of S-D logic, as evidenced by the preceding critical review of existing literature. This conceptual analysis and discussion is augmented by a small scale and exploratory empirical study, based on a series of ten semi-structured in-depth interviews with marketing, sponsorship and event practitioners. Interviewing was selected as the means of collecting

data as the researchers were interested in eliciting individuals' experiences, allowing for the ability to pursue specific lines of enquiry as issues were raised. The authors acknowledge the small sample size; however the inclusion of empirical data is viewed as integral to the development of understanding by adding a practitioner's voice to this primarily conceptual paper.

Conclusion

The paper has provided an early attempt to conceptualise the role of events within a service dominant paradigm. Significantly, the notions and rationale introduced in this paper, are readily reconcilable with progressive thinking in the area of service logic. Of particular note is Grönroos and Ravald's (2011) discussion of value creation processes, with an emphasis on the virtue of organisations creating interactions to influence the process of value creation. Logically this paper proposes events as one such value facilitation process. The term "value creation space" is

introduced as an overarching lexicon to coalesce the otherwise disparate range of organisational events that have marketing imperative, and/or impact. This is underpinned by the integral conviction that all organisational events have, to some degree, marketing resonance, and therefore extant focus on „experiential marketing events“ was inadequate given the primacy of value creation processes. In so doing this paper has provided a new and progressive lens that provides a coherent basis for further conceptual development.

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