

Reducing value co-destruction in Tourism

An exploration of consumer strategies to detect fake online service reviews

Möhring Michael, Dacko Scott, Gehrig Sophie, Keller Barbara, Lutz Annika, Schmidt Rainer, Winkler Theresa

Purpose – Value co-creation is a *multi-actor* phenomenon and often on a massive scale, albeit with the referent beneficiary at the center (Vargo & Lusch, 2016, p. 6). A consumer's use of reviews for any service is no exception. The use of service-dominant logic (SDL) in tourism has been investigated in (Buonincontri et al., 2017). When this phenomenon is expanded to include “bad actors” who intentionally leave fake reviews - consumers who believe any such reviews become party to *value co-destruction* (Plé & Chumpitaz, 2010). A investigation of value co-destruction in tourism has been done by Neuhofer (2016), for instance. With such theoretical underpinnings, this research aims to explore how consumers seek to identify fake reviews and avoid value co-destruction.

Design/Methodology/approach – Drawing upon SDL (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; 2016), this study further adopts a mixed method quantitative and qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2007) to understand how consumers seek to identify fake reviews in the hospitality sector. Additionally, we conduct a two-step online survey on differing consumer approaches for detecting fake reviews. Drawing upon a sample of $n=236$ German consumers and performing analyses for statistical significance, we further establish findings on consumer-based approaches.

Findings – Qualitatively, our findings show that consumers adopt a range of strategies in their efforts to identify fake reviews. Specifically, besides “intuition,” qualitative analyses show that consumers adopt strategies including comparisons of individual reviews with others on the same review site, similarity of the review content on different review sites, suspicions regarding the reviewer's background/profile, the use of staff names in the review, and language style (including use of “catalogue language”). Additionally, quantitative research revealed that certain review characteristics are perceived by consumers to be associated with fake reviews including the presence of many reviews in a very short time period ($p=0.00$), reviews being totally different from others ($p=0.00$), widespread use of “catalogue language” ($p=0.00$), the absence of visual evidence (e.g., photo) to support the views expressed ($p=0.021$) and the inclusion of incorrect information about the hotel ($p=0.00$).

Research implications – Knowledge on practices of consumer actions that lead to value co-creation versus co-destruction in a large-scale multi-actor phenomenon enables an expanded theoretical contribution to the SDL literature and practice.

Originality/value – Our research findings demonstrate the importance of SDL for researchers and practitioners to investigate fake reviews.

Key words – value co-destruction, fake reviews, service evaluations, online services

Paper type – Research paper

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