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A conceptual framework for co-creating memorable experiences: the metaphor of the journey

Abstract

Purpose – This study proposes a conceptual framework to capture the essence of memorable experiences.

Design/methodology/approach – A conceptual framework based on the service marketing and tourism literature is proposed to understand how memorable experiences are co-created. A particular context is presented to test the hypotheses using structural equation modelling. The quantitative findings are further explained using qualitative data.

Findings – The findings show that co-creation, novelty, theming and storytelling serve as antecedents of entertainment, education, escapism, and esthetics, consequently resulting in positive memorable experiences.

Research limitations/implications – This study aids researchers and managers in understanding and co-creating memorable customer experiences.

Originality/value – The metaphor of the journey may help to rethink business models by implementing practices suggested by both marketing and tourism research.

Keywords Co-creation, Experience economy, Memorable experiences, Metaphor of the journey, Novelty, Theming and storytelling

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

A growing body of research suggests that customers are not primarily interested in goods or services but rather in how these products can be used for value creation. Kotler (1977) notes that the "importance of physical products lies not so much in owning them as in obtaining the services they render" (p. 8). Essentially, goods and services are bought if consumers perceive the value created for them (Gummesson, 1995). For instance, groceries are not bought for storage but rather to cook dinner and have, for example, a nice opportunity to bond with family (Grönroos, 2008). From a more realistic and holistic perspective, consumption is noted to occur in social contexts where interactions and shared experiences with others form a crucial part of the service experience. Hence, consumers can be considered co-creators of value along with service providers and other actors (Vargo *et al.*, 2020). Regarding the previous example, one could argue that the social practice of dining together is a vehicle for creating value and benefits not only *for* individual group members but also *with* group members.

However, firms are not always able to develop business and marketing strategies according to consumers' expected benefits. Hence, the crucial research question is: How can firms develop opportunities to co-create memorable experiences for and with customers? This study answers this research question by developing a more comprehensive and integrative framework for customer involvement in valuable experiences. The original idea behind this framework is that parallels could be drawn from the perspectives of service marketing and tourism.

A more holistic conceptual framework is required as tourism shapes the consumption habits and practices of resident populations far more than we think. Daily consumption has characteristics similar to those achieved by tourists, and the tourist experience is a robust technique for understanding everyday experiences (O'Dell, 2007). Richards (2002) states that not only is tourism increasingly becoming similar to the rest of our lives, but our everyday lives are also rapidly becoming comparable to tourism. The hedonistic proliferation of tourist spaces such as restaurants specialising in regional cuisines is merely a way of allowing citizens to experience holiday-like environments in their everyday lives (Ritzer, 1993).

Although the tourist is a consumer (Quan and Wang, 2004), it is also true that the consumer could be considered a tourist. Tourists search for a peak experience that provides them with something different from their daily lives (Wang, 2002). Therefore, if consumers are perceived and treated as tourists, the concern of a firm should be to provide them with extraordinary experiences, expecting that tourism recommendations may be used to redesign daily consumption practices. If tourist experience can be considered a particular type of gaze (Urry, 1990), then the tourist gaze can be stimulated in

everyday life by staging unique events and experiences, whereby consumption gains or regains new meaning and special relevance.

To argue this viewpoint, the reconceptualisation of a popular and traditional food, such as chocolate, is regarded as a benchmark to exemplify the common needs of consumers and tourists. In particular, the Shockino Mix Experience (hereafter, Shockino) is the name of the innovative chocolate produced by an Italian company, whose success can be largely attributed to the tourist-oriented vision of its founders. A tourist-oriented organisation is more likely to consider its clients as guests. Tourist-mindedness fosters organisations to meet the needs of new consumers by opening endless possibilities for personalised products and customer value. The company reconceptualised the consumption of chocolate by recovering the spatial-temporal perspective of journey experiences. When people are on holiday, they find themselves in a special spatial and temporal dimension, that is a "place out of place" and a "time out of time" respectively (Rihova *et al.*, 2014). Specifically, the spatial dimension of Shockino is figuratively linked to different geographical areas where multifarious flavours are sourced to ensure authenticity and uniqueness. Moreover, the temporal dimension is reproduced by presenting Shockino as an itinerary that requires a sequence of "activities which begin before (i.e., planning and preparation), during (i.e., at the destination), and after the trip (i.e., recollection)" (Tung and Ritchie, 2011, p. 1369).

Shockino's novel redesign of the classic chocolate involves decomposing food into three pieces, which can be recomposed by consumers based on their own preferences by choosing diverse flavours, each of which has its own territorial specificity. Therefore, the experience of chocolate consumption becomes more interesting and enjoyable. Moreover, the wide variety of flavours instils a sense of exploration, thereby providing an authentic learning experience reinforced by information about the geographic origin of the ingredients. Authenticity is a complex concept and has been associated with several terms, including real, trustworthy, genuine, tradition or origin (Antón *et al.*, 2019). A search for authenticity contributes to the essence of a memorable tourism experience (Tung and Ritchie, 2011), although authenticity is widely acknowledged to be intended "as an existential authenticity rather than the authenticity of objects" (Wang, 1999, p. 351), depending on visitor perception. More interestingly, by reconfiguring the product as a *journey into the flavours*, the company moulds customers' approach differently: chocolate consumption is replaced by chocolate experience. Experience, which has become an important area in marketing research (Ismail, 2011), is a concept that tourism studies first began to explore by suggesting that guest interaction can be considered a means to customise offers and ensure higher satisfaction levels (Cohen, 1979).

Accordingly, this study proposes a comprehensive conceptual framework to capture both the antecedents and dimensions of memorable experiences in the Shockino context. First, the service marketing and tourism literature was reviewed to identify a conceptual framework that captures the essence of memorable experiences. Second, structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test the validity of the hypothesised causal structure. Third, insights into the main constructs were gained through interviews with the company's managers. Finally, the findings of the study were discussed.

Thus, this study makes three theoretical contributions to marketing and tourism research. First, it features a parallel discussion on service marketing and tourism topics to stress their reciprocal influence and theoretical convergence in memorable experiences. Second, a conceptual framework is proposed to understand and shape memorable experiences by presenting the constructs of co-creation, novelty, theming and storytelling as antecedents to the four realms of experience (entertainment, education, escapism, and esthetics) theorised by Pine and Gilmore (1999). Finally, this study argues that some tourism concepts may be adapted to conventional goods and services to obtain consumer memorability.

Shockino Mix Experience
The particular context of Shockino is used in this study as it produces an enjoyable and unique chocolate experience invented and marketed by an Italian company. In some ways, the company broke traditional norms in chocolate consumption by introducing new rules to arouse consumer interest in its product. Although chocolate consumption habits have long been the subject of research (Chawla and Sondhi, 2016; Zarantonello and Luomala, 2011), the chocolate experience is a novel approach that comprises the business model behind Shockino, which looks like chocolate but is actually considerably different from typical chocolates. Shockino was patented and launched in 2014 after approximately 10 years of study and trials. Three-dimensional printing techniques were applied to fit a sophisticated and innovative design, wherein fresh food ingredients were incorporated with engineering precision and great attention to quality. Shockino has received several awards in the food design category for its elegant and functional geometry.

The term "Shockino" originates from the combination of two words, namely, "shock" (which refers to the surprise effect) and the suffix "-ino" (from the Italian "cioccolatino" which denotes a chocolate product in the size of a single mouthful). The key concept is simple: people should like preparing and customising their chocolate experiences by personally selecting their favourite mix of items. Hence, "Mix" and "Experience" accompanying the term "Shockino" were chosen to emphasise that the product engages consumers in an inherently personal way.

The surprise effect is created not only by the product's shape but also by the various combinations that consumers may discover. Shockino is the first modular and flexible chocolate that combines three elements: a base, an outer ring, and a cover pin. With a few steps, people can build their own Shockino owing to a wide variety of flavours and the perfect shape of the three pieces (Figure 1). The simple decomposition of an object, which typically assumes a compact form, into three components enforces the interaction with an object that must be rebuilt in its unity. This process enables consumers to regard classic food in a unique and enjoyable manner by focusing on how they can personalise their final product, given different options.

"Choose, mix, and taste" are three simple steps that the company uses to explain how its product works. The set of chocolate pieces equips customers with a flexible solution. Particularly, each of the three components has different flavours. The standard box includes four trays: two are marked with gold stickers, and the other two are marked with red stickers. Divergent sticker colours correspond to the different flavours included in the trays, and each tray has nine different flavours: three each for the base, ring, and cover. Consequently, Shockino enables consumers to select the final mix by choosing from the 18 available flavours and their 216 combinations before tasting the chocolate.

The company's price strategy is also original. Buyers are charged according to the specific combination of flavours among a wide variety of potential combinations rather than according to simple weight measures, as is typical for chocolate products. This is because people are presumably willing to pay more for the flexibility offered by both the modular system and flavour mix. This pricing strategy is consistent with tourism practices, wherein travellers can pay an additional amount for ticket flexibility, thus allowing them, for example, to change flights (Gustafson, 2012).

Figure 1 about here

Literature review and hypothesis development
The experience economy
Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999) formulated the experience economy to highlight that experiences are a new economic offering that requires firms to engage customers at emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual levels. They further highlighted the need for organisations to create entertainment, education, escapism, and esthetics, also known as the 4Es, to attract and satisfy customers who need to be welcomed as guests (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

In the 4Es, entertainment is related to positive feelings of pleasure, enjoyment, fun, and excitement (Duman and Mattila, 2005; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Otto and Ritchie, 1996; Triantafillidou and Siomkos, 2014). Education refers to experiences that provide consumers with opportunities to learn something new and to widen their knowledge (Arnould and Price, 1993; Hosany and Witham, 2010; Tung and Ritchie, 2011). Escapism occurs when unusual experiences allow consumers to disconnect from reality and temporarily retreat from their daily routines (Getz, 2007; Triantafillidou and Siomkos, 2014). Finally, esthetics is connected to a sense of harmony and can be related to a pleasant physical environment, attractive design, and genuineness (Bonn *et al.*, 2007; Breiby and Slåtten, 2018; Manthiou *et al.*, 2014; Pullman and Gross, 2003). Essentially, guests partaking of an entertainment experience want to *enjoy*, those of an educational experience want to *learn*, those of an escapist experience want to *go* and *do*, and those partaking of an esthetic experience want to *be* in an environment (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).Companies integrating all four realms optimise their offering by providing an ideal experience forming a "sweet spot" (Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), organisations that are willing to compete and create memorable consumption experiences should shift their focus from delivering services to "staging" experiences. A product can be experienced by emphasising the sensations created by engaging with it, because experiences, defined as events that engage individuals in a personal way, comprise multiple elements, including sensory/physical, emotional/affective, cognitive/intellectual, and relational/social

dimensions. Given the multidimensional characteristics of experiences, firms should follow a more holistic and multisensory approach by involving customers through varied stimulation.

Oh *et al.* (2007) asserted that "tourism has been at the forefront of staging experience" (p. 119) as tourism was the first to sell staged experiences (Sternberg, 1997); the notion of experience was formulated in tourism literature even before the experience economy theory was established. Tourism "is a pioneering example of the experience economy" (Hosany and Witham, 2010, p. 353), and experiences are its core product (Prentice *et al.*, 1998; Williams, 2006). "The tourism industry is in the business of selling experiences … so that tourists will only be offered exciting and memorable experiences" (Ooi, 2005, p. 51).

Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999) also presented their general theory of the experience economy by deriving many examples and terms from the leisure and tourism industries. Words such as *welcome* (used to announce the new era in their milestone paper published in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1998), *hosts* (used to indicate how vendors should propose themselves), and *guests* (used to highlight how customers should feel within a culture of hospitality) reflect the typical terminology employed in tourism, from which the experience economy theory borrows several concepts to provide a general framework compatible with any industry.

Studies have investigated the essence of memorable consumption and tourism experiences separately. Conversely, this study aims to fill this gap by proposing a conceptual framework that reflects and unifies the key concepts explored in marketing and tourism literature. Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework and the underlying theories used in this study. The inner rectangle displays the conceptual framework, wherein the 4Es are investigated by including three antecedents (i.e. co-creation, novelty, and theming and storytelling) and one potential consequence (i.e. memory). The intermediate rectangle underlines the important role of customer engagement, which may support and strengthen the relevance of the conceptual framework, as explained in the discussion and interpretation of the results. The external rectangle highlights that the literature on service marketing and tourism is reviewed to explore memorable experiences in a structured whole by developing hypotheses and relationships between the key factors, as explained below.

Figure 2 about here

Co-creation
The expression of "second-generation" experience economy was coined to denote the relevance of the co-creation approach towards having meaningful experiences (Binkhorst and Dekker, 2009; Boswijk *et al.*, 2007). The literature on value co-creation is vast, and investigation of co-creation activities has become a top priority in marketing and tourism research (Grissemann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012).

The co-creation of value is an interactive and relational concept rooted in service-dominant (S-D) logic proposed by Vargo and Lusch (2008, 2011) in response to an inadequate or flawed goods-dominant (G-D) perspective. While G-D logic argues that the purpose of the exchange is firm profit, S-D logic maintains that the purpose of the exchange is value co-creation (Vargo *et al*., 2020). Notably, S-D logic is considered a major paradigm shift in marketing, with interactivity, integration, customisation, and co-production being its hallmarks (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

S-D logic proposes that enterprises cannot unilaterally create or deliver value, but only offer value propositions, while the customer is always a co-creator of value. Vargo and Lusch (2008) refer to the notion of value-in-use to highlight that value is created when customers use goods and services rather than being embedded in them. Therefore, value is not simply determined by the producer, but is also perceived and determined by consumers, who, by adding their own skills and additional resources, are active participants in the process of exchange and co-creation of value (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008). In particular, two broad types of resources are being integrated: *operand resources* (e.g. natural resources, which require action to be taken upon them to be valuable) and *operant resources* (e.g. knowledge, skills, and competencies, which are capable of acting on other resources to contribute to value co-creation). Moreover, value-in-use is always contextual. Vargo *et al.* (2008) propose the concept of value-in-context as an extension of value-in-use to highlight that value, which centres on use, is influenced by a specific context.

Over time, S-D logic has evolved by focusing on a phenomenological or experiential view of value, and it has embraced a more holistic, dynamic, and systemic perspective of value creation with an actor-to-actor orientation, wherein actors are resource integrators that contribute to value co-creation (Akaka *et al.*, 2015; Jesus and Alves, 2020) and *service* (a process typically expressed singularly) is the common

denominator of economic and non-economic exchange (Chandler and Vargo, 2011; Vargo and Lusch, 2017). According to this multi-actor configuration, economic and social actors interact and exchange across and through networks, and all actors are both providers and beneficiaries as they provide service to receive similar service from others (Vargo *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, value is co-created by the integration of resources and by the intersections of the activities of multiple actors within a service ecosystem, intended as a system of resource-integrating and service-exchanging actors connected by shared institutional arrangements (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). Institutional arrangements refer to sets of interrelated institutions, and institutions should be intended as humanly devised rules, norms, and beliefs that shape social life (Vargo and Lusch, 2017).

This systemic and institutional orientation of S-D logic entails a conceptualisation of value creation, which differs from those used in the service and customer-dominant (C-D) logics. The latter theories, along with service science, share with S-D logic the common goal of overcoming the limitations of G-D logic, which conceptualises the outcome of value creation primarily in terms of value-in-exchange and price (e.g. goods-for-money). Particularly, service logic is grounded on the value-in-use conceptualisation, but it argues that the customer, who is the user and integrator of resources, is a value creator whereas the service provider is only a value facilitator (Grönroos, 2008, 2011). Meanwhile, C-D logic recognises both the customer's and provider's value formation processes (Heinonen and Strandvik, 2015, 2018; Heinonen *et al.*, 2010, 2013), but it maintains the primacy of the former perspective, "emphasizing how customers *embed* service in their processes rather than how firms *provide* service to customers" (Heinonen and Strandvik, 2015, p. 472). Conversely, service science adopts a perspective much more closely aligned with S-D logic as it recognises that the unit of analysis in value creation relies on multi-actor configurations (Maglio and Spohrer, 2008; Maglio *et al.*, 2009). However, when compared with service science, S-D logic has a wider scope and is more holistic because "it accommodates all of the conceptualizations of value and different focal actors in value co-creation, incorporating the other perspectives" (Vargo *et al.*, 2020, p. 12).

C-D logic significantly contributes to the issue of co-creation by highlighting the need for "a more holistic understanding of the customer's life, practices and experiences, in which service is naturally and inevitably embedded" (Heinonen *et al.*, 2010, p. 533). In particular, C-D logic argues that value-in-use emerges not only in customers' interactive processes but also in non-interactive processes, and it includes factors contextually or temporally outside the service provider's input or activities (Heinonen *et al.*, 2013). This view implies observing customers in their own ecosystems and their diverse interactions in various groups and collectives (Heinonen *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, C-D logic highlights the importance of considering a broader customer's timeframe as the value is experienced before, during, and after the purchase of service, just as it occurs on holiday trips, wherein customer value emerges before the trip, during the holiday, and after the trip in terms of memories (Heinonen *et al.*, 2010). S-D logic extends this perspective by asserting that "the notion of value co-creation suggests that the evaluation of experience is dependent on varying views and collective forms of value, past and anticipated interactions, and broader social contexts through which value is derived" (Akaka *et al.*, 2015, p. 206). The social practices of customer-to-customer value co-creation have found a solid conceptualisation in tourism marketing research as "consumption of tourism experiences is often shared and collective" (Rihova *et al.*, 2014, p. 359).

Actor engagement is a micro-foundation of value co-creation, and it can be facilitated by platforms and engagement-related networks by yielding relational, informational, or motivational benefits (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Rossi and Magni, 2017; Storbacka *et al.*, 2016). Engagement platforms (e.g. social media and network sites) can provide multiple interactions through which value is co-created (Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2018; Shaw *et al.*, 2011). Actor engagement is a multidimensional concept that emphasises emotional, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions (Frow *et al.*, 2015) and further including connectedness. In particular, it has been recently defined as "a dynamic and iterative process, reflecting actors' dispositions to invest resources in their interactions with other connected actors in a service system" (Brodie *et al.*, 2019, p. 183). Similarly, customer engagement is a multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and social elements. Despite the existence of different theoretical definitions (Dessart *et al.*, 2016; Pansari and Kumar, 2017), customer engagement can be defined as "the intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organization's offerings and/or organizational activities, which either the customer or the organization initiate" (Vivek *et al.*, 2012, p. 127).

Companies may co-create value with customers throughout the value chain activities (Zhang and Chen, 2008), although this study employs the notion of customer co-creation, "which occurs during service delivery and consumption, and thus, focuses on later stages of the service process model,"

whereas "customer co-production only focuses on early stages within the service process model" (Handrich and Heidenreich, 2013, p. 9).

The value co-creation process entails that the experience of consuming a product or service varies from one consumer to another by preventing standardised, commoditised, and commercial solutions. Consumers are generally willing to pay more for individualisation (Franke and Piller, 2004), although customers' favourable attitude towards value co-creation is necessary (Shamim *et al.*, 2017). The degree of value co-creation is positively influenced by a consumer's novelty-seeking behaviour, which consequently depends on an individual's desire to explore novel stimuli (Morosan and DeFranco, 2016). Consumer co-creation is becoming increasingly essential in new product development, and co-created products are often shown to possess novelty, leading to better product differentiation and ultimately increasing commercial attractiveness (Hoyer *et al.*, 2010).

By using a buyer-centric business model which is focussed on co-creation and consumer preferences, new products and services may be developed with close customer involvement (Shaw *et al.*, 2011). Through interaction, firms obtain relevant knowledge of customers' needs to improve their innovation performance, customer satisfaction, and competitiveness (Mahr *et al.,* 2014). Companies that are able to detect customers' latent needs and combine them with their core skills in developing new products or attributes can create successful new products (Füller and Matzler, 2007). Customer co-creation positively impacts a firm's ability to facilitate the rapid development of new products (Morgan *et al.*, 2018). Previous considerations suggest the following hypothesis:

H1. Co-creation positively affects novelty.

The outcome of co-creation refers to individual/collective well-being (Vargo and Lusch, 2011, 2017; Vargo *et al.*, 2017) or memorable experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), depending on the underlying theory. Co-creation is the basis of unique value for individuals (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2013) who benefit from customisation by actively constructing their consumption experiences through personal involvement and interaction (Handrich and Heidenreich, 2013). Co-creation is crucial in the tourism context for offering unique and memorable experiences. Indeed, when tourists can co-create a travel package, customer satisfaction, loyalty, and service expenditures increase as travellers assign more value to a self-designed service (Grissemann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012).

People experience more enjoyment when they have a variety of options to choose from than when they are given a single choice (Iyengar, 2010). Hence, co-creating one's own products tends to be rewarding, fun, and interesting (Yim *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, studies have found that co-creation may support customer learning (Payne *et al.*, 2008), enjoyment (Franke and Schreier, 2010), happiness (Buonincontri *et al.*, 2017), emotional and hedonic experiences (Busser and Shulga, 2018), and an escape from boredom (Ji *et al.*, 2018). Based on these arguments, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2. Co-creation positively affects the entertainment dimension.
H3. Co-creation positively affects the education dimension.
H4. Co-creation positively affects the escapism dimension.
H5. Co-creation positively affects the esthetics dimension.

Novelty
Novelty can be defined as the uniqueness and newness of a product and can be linked to the rarity or infrequency of product design (Horn and Salvendy, 2009). Generally, novelty "indicates that an invention is new, original, unexpected, and surprising" (He and Luo, 2017, p. 4) and refers to "an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption" (Rogers, 2002, p. 990). New products or product functionalities are often neither known nor expected; thus, they are likely to generate excitement factors that surprise and delight customers (Füller and Matzler, 2007).

From a service-ecosystem perspective, new product development or processes cannot be understood without considering the market relationships and roles of multiple actors in innovation, including users. Indeed, S-D logic has also impacted innovation studies to the extent that "innovation is not about inventing things but about developing systems for value co-creation" (Vargo and Lusch, 2017, p. 54), by focusing on how actors integrate resources derived from multiple sources to create new resources for value co-creation (Michel *et al.*, 2008). Within S-D logic, innovation is conceptualized as the co-creation or collaborative recombination of practices that may provide novel solutions for new or existing problems (Vargo *et al.*, 2015). Following S-D logic, Lusch and Nambisan (2015) define service

innovation as the rebundling of diverse resources that create novel resources, which are beneficial to some actors in a given context, mostly involving a network of actors, including the customer.

As an active agent in the service ecosystem, information technology can foster service innovation by influencing other actors and their choices (Barrett *et al*., 2015; Lusch and Nambisan, 2015). However, new technologies always possess institutional components that are key to service provision, and thus are foundational to markets. Therefore, when S-D logic is adopted, technological and market innovations are considered more similar than different as they are both driven by a single, common, and ongoing process of institutionalisation involving maintenance, disruption, and change of institutions (Vargo *et al*., 2015). In particular, based on S-D logic, innovation is defined as "a process of breaking, making and maintaining institutionalized rules of resource integration results in institutional reconfigurations within or across service ecosystems" (Koskela-Huotari *et al*., 2016, p. 2969). Such institutional reconfigurations, which allow actors to co-create value in novel and useful ways, may occur by including new actors, redefining the roles of engaged actors, and reframing resources.

Interactions with novel products or services evoke customer interest and attention. Novelty is key to both learning and memory formation as the driver of contemporary consumption is "an *abstract orientation to constantly new, innovative and changing experiences*" (Wang, 2002, p. 289). For regular customers, the real excitement comes from discovering something new to themselves (Morgan, 2006). Conversely, traditional objects and repetition result in a pattern of decreased attention (Moscardo, 1996). Consumers are often attracted to uncommon and alternative products/services that arouse curiosity, provide novelty, and/or satisfy their desire for knowledge (Sheth *et al*., 1991). The variety-seeking aspect favours unexpected memory-driven effects for the same reason that vacationers "may anticipate that the pleasure from the overall vacation, when looking back, may be greater if there is some variety" (Schmitt, 2011, p. 78).

The act/process of discovery is inherently linked to tourism, even when tourists are explorers of artefact places, such as those staged by Las Vegas and Disneyland (Ryan, 2000). Novelty has been consistently mentioned as an important component of the tourist experience and a prevalent motivation for travellers (Mitas and Bastiaansen, 2018). Recent studies have confirmed the importance of novelty in shaping memorable tourism experiences (Skavronskaya *et al*., 2019). Novelty is often a means to start a conversation as it provides people with unique opportunities to connect and tell the story of unexpected experiences.

Products that exhibit novelty and appropriateness elicit arousal and pleasure (Horn and Salvendy, 2006). According to Wang (2002), when objects or modes of consumption are innovative, unusual, and distinct from daily routines, they produce high levels of surprise. People like being surprised by unusual events, leading to high levels of emotional intensity. Experiences that trigger surprise tend to be recalled with greater accuracy. Moreover, surprises may generate exploration/curiosity and cognitive/learning processes (Vanhamme and Snelders, 2001). Therefore, this study hypothesises the following propositions:

H6. Novelty positively affects the entertainment dimension.
H7. Novelty positively affects the education dimension.
H8. Novelty positively affects the escapism dimension.
H9. Novelty positively affects the esthetics dimension.

Theming and storytelling
Resource integration is key to the value co-creation processes of consumer experience, which can be understood as the journey that consumers wish to make together with other actors over time and at various points of contact (Jesus and Alves, 2020). Hence, marketers must study diverse consumer journeys and touchpoints to develop and deliver the right narrative to customers (Kotler, 2017). The customer journey perspective has attracted growing interest across a range of fields (e.g. design, management, and marketing), where the term has been used with different meanings and approaches (Følstad and Kvale, 2018).

Beyond these differences, the customer journey perspective is often associated with the use of a "journey map" (Howard, 2014), also known as a "customer journey map" (Rosenbaum *et al*., 2017). A customer journey map aims to develop a better relationship between an organisation and its customers and is principally reported "as a visual representation of the sequence of events a user is experiencing through his journey with a product or a service" (Alvarez *et al*., 2020, p. 5). In particular, customer journey mapping is often considered the description of a story or a set of interactions of various actors with the service system by presenting not only their points of contact before, during, and after the entire

value co-creation process but also the qualitative motivations and meanings (Jesus and Alves, 2020; McColl-Kennedy *et al.*, 2015).

The sequence of touchpoints included in the journey map should tell a coherent story (Stickdorn, 2014). Moreover, a unified storyline that completely captures the customer should be developed around a theme, which must drive all design elements and staged events (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). As perception is reality, how customers interpret purchased objects is essential (Chase and Dasu, 2001). In reality, people buy products for storytelling and experiences (Jensen, 2001). Consequently, companies attempt to exert control by building not only individual relationships but also parasocial relationships using certain symbols, such as brands and storytelling (Gummesson, 2007).

Staging memorable experiences fundamentally implies developing a comprehensive and thematic design entailing the execution of the 4Es (Quadri-Felitti and Fiore, 2012). The theme forms the foundation of an experience; hence, it should render the experience with indelible and clear impressions. Themes serve as vehicles to suggest alternative shapes and substances of objects, and the power of storytelling and other narratives should be used "as a vehicle to script themes" (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. 51). Using a theme allows firms to turn a service into an experience automatically (Gilmore and Pine, 2002). An experience can be thematised by relating it to activities, geographic regions, populations, and myths (Carù and Cova, 2007; Triantafillidou and Siomkos, 2014).

A product or service can be structured around the theme of a symbolic journey. The journey metaphor provides an alternative story or theme for perceiving and understanding the consumer's role, and this supports the claim that an experience framed as a journey can increase consumers' attention and engagement, with a sequence of actions necessary to build their own consumption experience (Jesus and Alves, 2020). The metaphor of the journey may be used to differentiate companies and products/services by leading customers to feel that they are protagonists and co-protagonists within the co-creation process.

The use of themes, stories, and narratives has a long tradition in tourism research (McCabe and Foster, 2006; Moscardo, 2010). Tourism has traditionally exploited an extensive representation of graphics and a variety of communication media to provide tourists with a tangible image and anticipation of intense pleasures that visitors can encounter at destinations (Buhalis and Law, 2008). When congruent with the experience, the narrative and storytelling aspects help tourists shape, structure, and strengthen their memory of a trip or event. "Good themes are also those that can be used to build meaningful stories that have personal significance for the tourist" (Moscardo, 2009, p. 112). "Stories enhance attention, create anticipation, increase retention" (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. 146). Theming and storytelling tools contribute to generate "wow" moments, enhance positive emotions, and sustain engagement and the flow state at an individual level (Neuhofer *et al.*, 2020). Accordingly, the theming and storytelling element has been recognised to have long-lasting implications for memorable experiences. Assuming the influence of theming and storytelling on the experience dimensions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H10. Theming and storytelling positively affect the entertainment dimension.
H11. Theming and storytelling positively affect the education dimension.
H12. Theming and storytelling positively affect the escapism dimension.
H13. Theming and storytelling positively affect the esthetics dimension.

Memory
Providing memorable experiences is key to creating superior value, a competitive advantage, and long-term success (Manthiou *et al.*, 2014). Services can be specifically designed and engineered to enrich customer experiences and recollection thereof. "Memorable experiences are particularly associated with excellent design, marketing and service delivery" (Shaw *et al.*, 2011, p. 209). Well-staged experiences lead to enhanced memory, which positively shapes consumers' attitudes towards the company's offering. The more effective experiences engage the senses, the more memorable they are (Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010). Moreover, infusing elements of surprise is a powerful means of creating positive and memorable experiences. Surprise is key to understanding and enhancing customer satisfaction (Kim and Mattila, 2010; Vanhamme and Snelders, 2001). Unexpected and extraordinary events create more vivid and long-lasting memories in people's minds than ordinary experiences (Chandralal *et al.*, 2015).

The essence of tourism is to provide tourists with high-quality experiences and memorable impressions (Ritchie *et al.*, 2011). Memory processing is so crucial that a tourist experience has been defined as "a past personal travel-related event strong enough to have entered long-term memory" (Larsen, 2007, p. 15). According to Otto and Ritchie (1996), perhaps "more than any other service

industry, tourism holds the potential to elicit strong emotional and experiential reactions by consumers" (p. 168). Memorable experiences tend to be associated with both personal and shared emotions (Wood and Kinnunen, 2020). Studies have assumed that Pine and Gilmore's 4Es are essential components of creating positive memories (Ali *et al.*, 2014; Hosany and Witham, 2010; Manthiou *et al.*, 2014; Oh *et al.*, 2007). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are postulated:

H14. The entertainment dimension positively influences memory.
H15. The education dimension positively influences memory.
H16. The escapism dimension positively influences memory.
H17. The esthetics dimension positively influences memory.

Methodology
This study used both quantitative and qualitative methods to address the same research problem. A quantitative approach was adopted to collect data from consumers in order to develop and validate the measurement model. The quantitative findings were used to plan the qualitative phase, which helped better explain and clarify the conceptual framework (Creswell, 2014).

Quantitative method
To test the hypotheses, an SEM method based on maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) was applied. SEM is particularly appropriate for examining multiple dependence relationships between independent and dependent variables, and allows for the development and refinement of concepts and theories (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

The hypotheses on the measurement of latent constructs were tested before examining the structural model. The measurement items for the constructs were adopted from previous studies. Specifically, the degree of co-creation (COCR) was derived from the works of Grissemann and Stokburger-Sauer (2012) for COCR1 and COCR2, Sugathan *et al.* (2017) for COCR3, and Handrich and Heidenreich (2013) for COCR4 (Table I). The novelty (NOV) construct was based on Prebensen and Xie's (2017) study, supplemented by the items proposed by Bello and Etzel (1985) for NOV2 (Table I). The theming and storytelling (T&S) construct was based on the scale suggested by Kolar and Čater (2018). The T&S items were adjusted to fit the context of this study and specifically refer to the *journey into the flavours*. The measures for entertainment (ENT), education (EDU), escapism (ESC), esthetics (ESTH), and memory (MEM) were operationalised using the scale items proposed by Oh *et al.* (2007).

Data were collected through a survey questionnaire comprising of three sections. The first section collected information on general consumption behaviours to understand whether respondents were chocolate lovers, used to eating chocolate alone or with others, and what their habits were in terms of consumption frequency and brand loyalty. Data on brand loyalty and consumption behaviours were collected to understand whether participants' preferences influenced their attitudes towards Shockino. The central and second section comprised 28 statements designed to understand how consumers perceived Shockino. Responses to these items were captured using a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The third section included questions to gather information on demographic data (e.g. respondent age, level of education, and income).

Consistent with other studies that operationalised Pine and Gilmore's four realms of experience by involving university students (e.g. Manthiou *et al.*, 2014; Sadachar and Fiore, 2018; Triantafillidou and Siomkos, 2014), the survey questionnaire (either in paper or electronic format) was distributed to university students and fair/exhibition visitors in different Italian cities. By the end of January 2020, 398 respondents had completed the survey questionnaires. In particular, 124 (31%) were respondents from Italian universities located in Campobasso, Rome, and Milan, where Shockino was presented in a workshop format, while 274 (69%) were visitors to exhibitions and fairs in Bologna, Parma, and Milan.

The sample used in this study to examine the proposed hypotheses comprised 189 men (47.5%) and 209 women (52.5%) with an average age of 37.4 years. Most respondents had at least a bachelor's degree (77.8%), and an annual income ranging from €20,000 to €75,000 (62%). Most of them were chocolate lovers (85.7%), had no preference for branded chocolate products (66.8%), and were accustomed to consuming chocolate alone (63.8%).

The collected data were analysed using SPSS version 26.0 and AMOS version 26.0.

Qualitative method
The quantitative phase was followed by the qualitative phase. Some Delphi techniques were used to conduct in-depth interviews with two founders and managers of the company as experts who developed Shockino (Gordon, 1994; Linstone and Turoff, 1975). In particular, semi-structured interviews were conducted by collecting detailed views from the company's managers to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the conceptual framework. Seven in-depth interviews were conducted with them: three were face-to-face interviews and four were conducted over telephone. The interviewees received oral information regarding the aim of the study and theoretical background. All interviews were conducted by the researcher.

Interviews with the managers were preceded by a preliminary analysis of various external sources. General information on the company was gathered from press articles, TV clips, the company's website, social media comments, videos, and pictures (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter, and YouTube).

Results
Quantitative data
Appropriate appraisal of the measurement model is a prerequisite for evaluating the structural model (Blunch, 2012). Therefore, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to test how well the measured variables represented the constructs. Items identified with factor loadings higher than 0.70 were used for the analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Consequently, only one of the 28 items was deleted. The remaining 27 items were gathered under the following eight factors: co-creation, novelty, theming and storytelling, entertainment, education, escapism, esthetics, memory. Table I reports the mean, standard deviation, and significant standardised factor loadings for each construct. The reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the constructs were assessed before testing the structural model (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Table II presents the results, which indicate a high level of reliability and validity. Therefore, the hypothesised measurement model was considered reliable and meaningful for testing the structural relationships between the constructs.

Table I about here

Table II about here

The goodness-of-fit statistics revealed that the proposed model fit the data reasonably well (GFI = 0.909, NFI = 0.966, RFI = 0.961, IFI = 0.985, TLI = 0.982, CFI = 0.985, RMSEA = 0.045), with values falling within the range reported in the literature (Blunch, 2012; Hu and Bentler, 1999). Figure 3 presents the estimates of the structural coefficients and adjusted R^2 for the model. Overall, 16 of the 17 hypotheses were fulfilled, thus providing support for the conceptual framework.

The results suggest that entertainment, education, escapism, and esthetics are all critical in determining memorable experiences (adjusted $R^2 = 42.7\%$). However, the findings demonstrate that, for customers of an experiential product such as Shockino, entertainment and escapism are more determinant than esthetics and education in memory outcome.

Additionally, the empirical results show that co-creation positively affects innovation. Moreover, the analysis enabled the validation of some of the antecedents of the 4Es as co-creation, novelty, theming and storytelling had significant and positive effects on almost all dimensions. In particular, co-creation positively influenced the entertaining, escapist, and esthetic dimensions; however, it had no significant effect on education. Novelty positively impacted entertainment, education, escapism, and esthetics. Similarly, the theming and storytelling construct positively influenced all the four experience dimensions. Conversely, chocolate consumption habits did not significantly affect consumers' attitudes towards Shockino.

Interestingly, these results allow to answer the research question by suggesting how firms can develop opportunities to co-create memorable experiences for and with customers. Businesses should use co-creation, novelty, theming and storytelling to shape memorable experiences. These levers can not only be used to design classic food (e.g. chocolate) but can also be translated into other contexts by creating opportunities to enjoy, learn, escape from the daily routine, and benefit from an attractive design.

Qualitative data

Qualitative semi-structured interviews based on quantitative findings were conducted with the company's managers, who were asked a series of questions related to some of the constructs investigated in this study. To illustrate the nature of the questions, the SEM results were considered as input for the interviewees. They were asked if and how Shockino was related to aspects of co-creation, novelty, narrative, and memorable experiences. Specifically, in the final phase of the Delphi inquiries, the two experts were asked the following questions: To what extent was co-creation applicable to Shockino? How did the company work with novelty? How did they develop the dimension of theming and storytelling? Why did they believe that Shockino could trigger memorable experiences?

Concerning co-creation, the two managers stated that customers' experiences are shaped by their interaction with the object as well as with others, especially because the design of Shockino allows both the co-creation of personalised chocolate and socialisation with other consumers, thereby elevating the experience. They added that Shockino's design is particularly suitable for this purpose as it facilitates social and relational interactions. This fact is also evidenced by social networks wherein consumers like sharing their Shockino experiences and promoting positive word-of-mouth (WOM).

Regarding novelty, the managers stated that tourism experiences also inspired them to renew their chocolate by leading the company to change its processes, products, and services to achieve and exceed customer expectations. In particular, the company mainly aimed to involve consumers in sampling authentic local ingredients, rather than standardised products, by allowing customers to decide and personalise their *journey into the flavours*. Owing to its wide variety of components and innovative formula, Shockino can justify its use of chocolate as a tool for interactively entertaining and actively involving consumers in their sensorial and cultural experiences.

Regarding narrative, the interviewees answered that they typically define Shockino as a form of a multi-sensorial journey to discover flavours and aromas from different lands. Consistently, Shockino includes a map that meticulously describes different types of territorial excellence. Similar to a tourist guide, the map highlights the types of chocolate and their geographic origin, which guests can personally combine to obtain their final Shockino with high-quality local ingredients. Raw materials are produced in specific territories covered by geographical quality designations to ensure their typicity and excellence (e.g. Piemonte hazelnuts, Guatemala coffee beans, Sardegna myrtle, Sicilia orange, and Madagascar cinnamon). Moreover, Shockino provides a brochure that indicates which combinations should be tasted to achieve certain emotional sensations (relaxation, energy, nature, passion, and wellness).

Furthermore, according to the managers, Shockino can create a memorable experience owing to its surprise and novelty. This surprise factor is crucial for engaging and stimulating consumers by contributing to their enjoyment. For example, to ensure the surprise effect, some famous chocolate producers equip their primary products with something additional that changes with each purchase. Kinder eggs and Perugina "baci" (kisses) are emblematic. New small toys (hidden in each Kinder egg) or new romantic messages (wrapping the Perugina kiss) are designed to encourage people to repurchase a product that is essentially the same with the same shape and ingredients. Hence, the novelty that consumers often seek when buying is artificially provided by an ancillary or secondary component whose purpose is to provide new, unique, and unrepeatable emotions that are otherwise difficult to obtain. Conversely, Shockino can ensure surprise and novelty with the primary product itself (i.e. the chocolate), owing to the different combinations of flavours that customers can *explore* by themselves.

Discussion and conclusions
Discussion

Customers want to be entertained, stimulated, emotionally affected, educated, and creatively challenged (Schmitt, 1999). Co-creating unique and memorable customer experiences is paramount for service providers. Building on knowledge from different research perspectives, this study provides a comprehensive and unifying framework that captures the key dimensions of memorable experiences. The findings support the proposed hypotheses and indicate that co-creation, novelty, and theming and storytelling have mostly significant effects on the 4Es that contribute to memorable experiences.

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The results suggest that service providers must adopt a holistic, collaborative, and innovative approach to co-create engaging and memorable experiences (Taheri *et al.*, 2021). "In moving toward higher levels of co-creation, it is imperative that the firm engage and support the customers during the co-creation activities by providing relevant information and necessary resources, as well as obtaining information on their preferences" (Chathoth *et al.*, 2016, p. 228).

For Shockino, the customer co-creation process develops over the course of the chocolate experience, starting from the scrutinising of the information provided by physical and virtual marketing materials and culminating in the tasting and sharing of the chocolate with others. In the first stage, co-creation relates to consumer knowledge, involvement, and planning before consumption. In the second stage, consumers co-create through interactions with the object, company, friends, family, and other consumers or actors. In the third stage, co-creation occurs when consumers intensify their experiences by seeking further information on the company's products/services and by participating in social networks to share their experiences, memories, and recommendations. Positive customer-to-customer interactions represent a core aspect of memorable experiences (Taheri *et al.*, 2021), and engagement platforms such as social media have become essential facilitators of actor engagement and value co-creation (Breidbach and Brodie, 2017).

The wide variety of flavours offers the novelty advantage, which stimulates greater engagement in the exploration process. Baltas *et al.* (2017) assert that firms should provide consumers with a greater variety of sensory attributes when the product is considered hedonic (e.g. chocolate) and functional attributes when the product is perceived as utilitarian (e.g. toothpaste). The importance of variety as a strategy for innovation and engagement is also highlighted by tourism experience theories. Ooi (2005) explains that many cities marketed as places that overwhelm tourists with choices are attractive owing to the many potential activities that the visitors could engage in. Informing tourists that they can choose from a wide range of activities gives the impression that exciting things will always occur. Ooi (2005) considers certain cities, including New York, London, and Shanghai, as places offering numerous choices to tourists and using the "supermarket" approach for selling themselves. In these places, tourists can freely pick and mix products and construct their own itinerary.

The narrative of travel is used to illustrate the process through which consumers can envisage themselves as protagonists in their *journey into the flavours*. The company's website is designed to provide the best support for favourable engagement practices. Shockino's platform features an interactive interface that allows users to customise their personal box by selecting the number and flavours to include and by personalising the text to be printed on the box cover for gift packaging. For each flavour, the platform provides a meticulous description of nutritional properties, high-quality standards, and the country/town of origin of the raw materials by supporting engagement mechanisms (e.g. scrutinising the options, learning, sharing). The variety of flavours encourages a fresh interpretation of consumption and drives consumers to reengage with the product by *exploring* new combinations. Thus, customer knowledge sharing and learning are conducive to customer engagement (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019).

These considerations underline the importance of customer engagement in underpinning the conceptual framework. Owing to its iterative, dynamic, and multidiple dimensions, customer engagement underlies and pervades the conceptual framework (see Figure 2). Customer engagement and its measurement have become key in marketing and service research. Considerable efforts have been made to measure customer/consumer engagement. However, its understanding remains incomplete as numerous studies have developed different scales to operationalise this important construct (e.g. Cheung *et al.*, 2011; Dessart *et al.*, 2016; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Kumar and Pansari, 2016; Vivek *et al.*, 2014).

As there is disagreement on the definition and operationalisation of its construct (Baldus *et al.*, 2015; Dessart *et al.*, 2016; Vohra and Bhardwaj, 2019), customer engagement was included in Figure 2 as a theoretical term rather than as a factor. Some studies have reported that particular concepts/factors may act as either antecedents and/or consequences of customer engagement owing to its highly interactive nature (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Islam and Rahman, 2016). In accordance with these studies, the eight factors (included in the conceptual framework) could emerge as antecedents and/or consequences of customer engagement (which was included in the intermediate rectangle of Figure 2 as its potential role was not experimentally observed but derived from the literature review). A brief review of the rapidly expanding body of research on customer engagement indicates two distinct but closely intertwined ways wherein the factors of the conceptual framework can come into play: as antecedents and/or as consequences of customer engagement.

Co-creation modalities encouraging interaction and facilitating personalisation and differentiation enhance customer engagement (Chathoth *et al.*, 2016; Schau *et al.*, 2009). Customer engagement, in turn, contributes to value co-creation (Bolton, 2011; Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014).

Innovation and new product/service development are effective ways to engage customers (Leckie *et al.*, 2018; Vivek *et al.*, 2012; Zhang *et al.*, 2018), as well as customer engagement plays an important role in innovation (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Kumar *et al.*, 2010; Sawhney *et al.*, 2005; Van Doorn *et al.*, 2010).

Storytelling can be a powerful tool for customer engagement (Kemp *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, engaged customers are likely to recommend services or products to others, such as by WOM, social networking, blogs, comments on websites, and even add value by generating content (Sashi, 2012). "Whether intentional or unintentional, if a firm receives repeated endorsements by positive WOM, the communication among customers can grow beyond sharing direct experiences, to become storytelling" (Kandampully *et al.*, 2015, p. 396).

The multidimensional manifestation of customer engagement, comprising cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and social dimensions (Islam and Rahman, 2016; Gambetti *et al.*, 2012; Vivek *et al.*, 2012), can be linked to the 4Es. Studies have found associations between customer engagement and entertainment (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012; Vander Schee *et al.*, 2020), education/learning (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019; Junaid *et al.*, 2019), escapism (Junaid *et al.*, 2019; Vander Schee *et al.*, 2020), and esthetic design (Bloch, 1995; Hashmi *et al.*, 2021).

Finally, memorable experiences "influence customers' engagement for more feedback and recommendation to others" (Truong *et al.*, 2020, p. 534), and "engagement can be a predictor of a positive memorable experience" (Kesgin *et al.*, 2021, p. 3610). Customer engagement is a concept strictly intrinsic to memorable experiences, defined by the founders of the experience economy as "events that engage individuals in an inherently personal way" (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, p. 46).

The relationships of customer engagement with the factors of the conceptual framework should support its relevance by highlighting that "continued engagement of the customers with varied engagement strategies before, during, and after a purchase transaction can enhance positive word-of-mouth, customer loyalty, and advocacy, as well as relationships that stand the test of time and competition" (Vivek *et al.*, 2014, p. 416). Exploiting co-creation, novelty, and narrative enables firms to move customer relationships towards a process of cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and social engagement throughout the customer journey within a service ecosystem where various actors interact, exchange, and integrate resources, not only during the consumption stage but also in the pre- and post-consumption phases (Kandampully *et al.*, 2018; Sigala, 2018).

Theoretical implications

This study demonstrates the contribution of both service marketing and tourism research to creating memorable experiences. Shockino provides a valuable context for investigating the essence of memorable experiences as it not only captures the evolution of service marketing literature but also incorporates dynamic elements of tourism. Specifically, this study contributes to the experience economy literature by developing a conceptual framework based on a review of marketing and tourism literature. This convergence strengthens the relevance of this study. The analysis focuses on the effect of co-creation, novelty, and narrative, as these factors have been widely reported to be extremely helpful vis-à-vis the mindfulness of experiences in both service and tourism literature, although no studies have shown their statistically significant relationships as a whole. This research fills this gap by demonstrating the significant effects of co-creation, novelty, theming and storytelling in determining memorable experiences.

This study also has theoretical implications for the customer engagement literature. Figure 2 emphasises the ubique and central role of customer engagement, which should be considered a multi-phase process, rather than a state, to achieve memorable experiences. Therefore, the conceptual framework may also be extended by including the construct of customer engagement for which a variety of measures exist. The existence of various measures to capture the engagement construct depends on the view of customer engagement not only as a multifaceted and multidimensional concept but also as a dynamic and iterative process that may extend beyond individual transactions (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). Customer engagement can change over time (Van Doorn *et al.*, 2010). This could further explain why "there is no agreement on the best way to represent engagement, nor is there consensus on the meaning of the dimensions" (Dessart *et al.*, 2016, p. 402). Defining a comprehensive multidimensional construct for customer engagement is difficult as customer engagement may change during the consumption process. Accordingly, the development of scales capable of capturing the customer engagement process

over time is recommended. Researchers could benefit from developing different and distinct customer engagement constructs depending on the stages of consumption: before, during, and after consumption. This approach would be more aligned with the consumption process and should facilitate the understanding and sharing of multifarious factors that contribute to customer engagement in a more dynamic and realistic way.

Another theoretical contribution of this study is the use of the generic construct of T&S to represent the specific domain of the journey metaphor. Research has suggested using the journey metaphor as a tool for shaping narratives or consumer experiences. As emphasised by C-D logic, the customer experience should be understood as something that transcends direct and visible interactions, as value emerges not only in interactive processes but also in customers' non-interactive processes. In fact, the value also emerges from invisible and mental activities before and after interactions, similar to the non-exclusive confinement of the value of travelling to the trip itself, as it also emerges during activities before and after the trip, for instance, through planning, remembering, and talking about a holiday trip (Heinonen *et al.*, 2010). Although the importance of the journey metaphor is widely accepted and acknowledged in the literature, little has been done to investigate its measurement or its structural relationships with memorable experiences. This study explores this notion by presenting the journey metaphor as a construct that influences memorable experiences.

Hence, this study holds that the theme of a journey may help shape memorable experiences beyond tourism. The journey metaphor better highlights the role of consumers as explorers of multisensory experiences. The result is that even a standard product (e.g. chocolate) can be converted into an experience when the metaphor of a journey is well incorporated into its design, development, and image. Specifically, Shockino can be considered a journey for several reasons. First, the product is accompanied by marketing material, where information is conveyed in narrative form and supported by vivid pictures, so that consumers are explicitly instructed to imagine their *journey into the flavours* (Tung and Ritchie, 2011). Second, the reference to territorial excellence helps individuals interpret their experiences as unique and original (Smith Maguire, 2018). Additionally, the variety of flavours facilitates not only the personalisation of the final experience but also social interaction, which explains the product's success, despite most respondents (63.8% of the sample) reporting that they generally consume chocolate alone.

The theme of the journey reveals that some tourism concepts can be transposed from their original contexts to other contexts wherein they can contribute to customer engagement. Each consumption experience should remain fresh and surprising as a rewarding and enjoyable experience engages customers and leads to repeat purchase intentions (Joy *et al.*, 2018). This entails providing experiences directed towards the pursuit of fantasies, feelings, and fun, with emphasis on "symbolic meanings, hedonic responses, and esthetic criteria" (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, p. 132). This study confirms the theory of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) on the importance of grounding in entertainment, the arts, and leisure activities, where esthetic stimuli, symbolic meanings, variety seeking, hedonic responses, and play mentality are essential in consumption experiences through the prompting of high levels of interest, involvement, and excitement. Additionally, this study extends earlier research by highlighting that tourism can also offer useful insights into incorporating sensory, emotional, cognitive, and social components to de-routinise ordinary products and services.

Practical implications
Business and marketing managers can use the proposed framework (Figure 2) to co-create memorable experiences by rethinking and reconfiguring their current service business. This study provides important suggestions for practitioners from a managerial perspective by identifying the levers marketers can use to create memorable experiences. By designing services and products that meet the needs of co-creation, novelty, theming and storytelling, companies can generate special and out-of-the-ordinary experiences and enhance customer engagement during consumption. Co-creation is required to allow customers to determine and model what creates value for them (Chathoth *et al.*, 2016). Novelty is essential as products and services must often be updated and refreshed to remain attractive (Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010). Themes and stories can convey information in a more effective manner to provide meaning to costumers' experiences and connect consumers to others (Moscardo, 2010).

Regarding co-creation, this study offers insights into how firms can shift the role of the consumer from that of a passive purchaser to an engaged actor in product/service co-creation. Shockino achieved this by making traditional products enjoyable and interactive for consumers. Customers often enjoy using products or services with friends or family members. Opportunities for interaction can affect the consumer's own experience and that of fellow consumers. Thus, the social environment is relevant to the process of redesigning and profiling consumer experiences.

Moreover, marketers should be aware that novelty can considerably affect memory by making experiences more enjoyable and by facilitating interaction. Novelty originating from service changes can cause surprise or shock and thus become a point of discussion. Surprising consumers with unexpected attributes can ensure a memorable experience. The surprise or shock of the audience can be associated with an appreciation of the esthetic aspects of products/services, a rewarding learning experience, a fun activity, and a sense of escape from the ordinary. Each of these experiential dimensions was affected by Shockino's surprise. Moreover, the wide variety of components and their potential combinations helped Shockino surprise and engage their consumers. Similarly, companies should offer a wide variety of products and services to generate excitement among, and gain the attention of, the public.

Finally, this study provides marketers with practical insights into the integration of the journey metaphor. The tourist experience represents an ideal example of value co-creation processes because value is created and co-created during the process of planning, buying, enjoying, recalling, and sharing a tourist journey (Prebensen *et al.*, 2014). Similarly, the chocolate experience described here is built gradually, such as a journey following a temporal process from the pre-information stage to the post-consumption stage. Similar to a tourism setting, Shockino's configuration helps consumers learn about the different kinds of chocolate and related regions, triggering greater customer engagement and attention in identifying, crafting, experiencing, recalling, and sharing their personal and unique trips.

Marketers and managers should attract and hold consumers' attention by stimulating their five senses, challenging them intellectually, and making use of their imagination, similar to that recommended for tourist experiences. While most differentiations of products/services stem from modifications of items within existing product categories, novel consumption experiences could arise from implementing business and marketing strategies that go beyond the needs of conventional market research (Grönroos, 2008). Therefore, marketing practitioners would benefit from a more thorough and systematic understanding of the customer's life and experiences, wherein service is inherently rooted (Heinonen *et al.*, 2010), as memories are shaped before, during, and after the service or good experience. Perhaps the most straightforward way to apply a more holistic marketing perspective is to reorganise business activities and processes using the journey metaphor. Therefore, many ordinary consumption experiences may be rethought and regenerated to ensure that people's experiences are meaningful.

Limitations and future research
This study contains limitations that largely arise from the attempt to provide a conceptual framework that captures the essence of memorable experiences by interweaving both service marketing and tourism perspectives with potentially overlapping theories. Moreover, the generalisability of the results in this study must be qualified considering the several limitations of quantitative findings. The first limitation of this study relates to respondent profiles. Most participants surveyed were people living in the same country; however, cultural factors and backgrounds may influence consumer journeys (Shavitt and Barnes, 2020). Future studies should expand the framework to other countries to assess its generalisability. Moreover, this study recognises the importance of customer engagement, which was not presented as a construct in the framework as literature defines it in numerous ways. Future studies might address the dynamic process of customer engagement by identifying different and alternative constructs to better reflect the various stages of the entire customer journey. Additionally, the co-creation construct should be further developed and tested to explicitly capture the social and relational dimensions that emerged from qualitative data. Another limitation lies in the sample size, which impeded the testing of other constructs that may be instrumental in understanding possible further antecedents and consequences within the experience theory (Prebensen *et al.*, 2014). A more comprehensive framework is required to reflect the causes and effects of Pine and Gilmore's dimensions by including further antecedents (e.g. authenticity, surprise, and customer/actor engagement) and consequences (e.g. customer/actor engagement, arousal, satisfaction, and loyalty). Moreover, further studies should consider the mediating and moderating effects. Finally, the structural model was tested according to Shockino, which incorporates elements of surprise and novelty. Before any generalisation, further research is required to affirm that a product or service, when grounded in co-creation, novelty, and theme/story, can positively influence memorable experiences.

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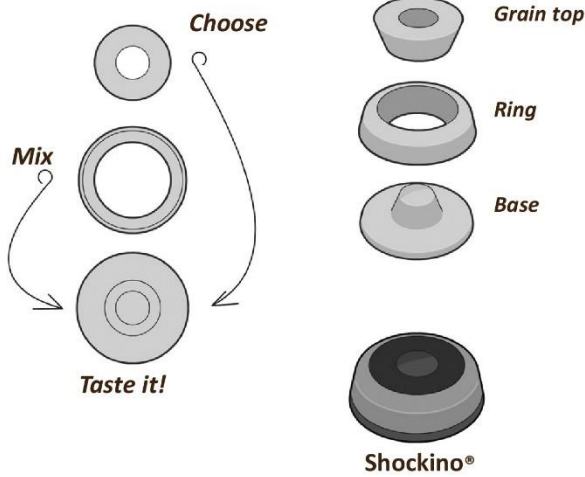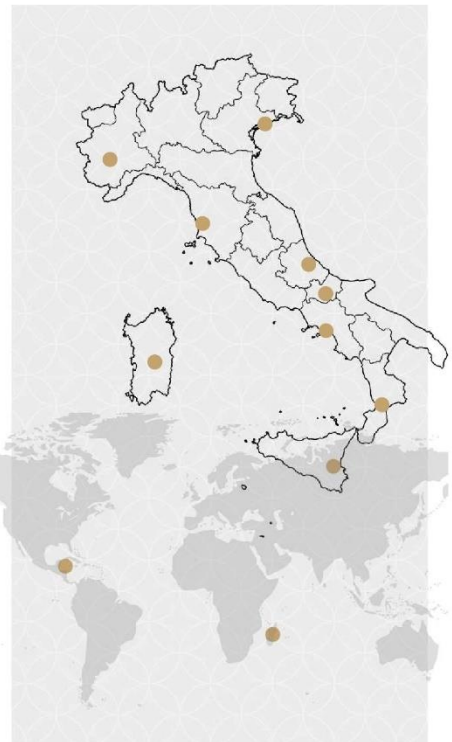
Figure 1 Shockino Mix Experience

Figure 2 Conceptual framework and underlying theories
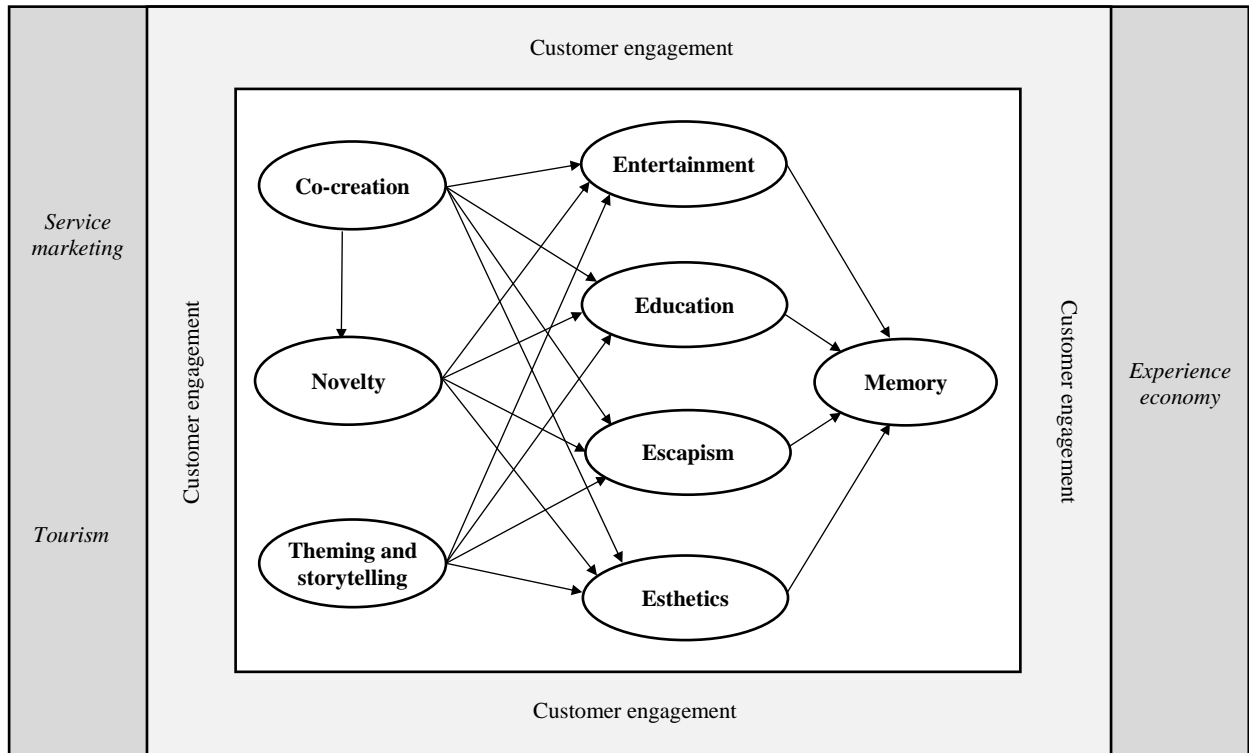
Table I Descriptive statistics and measurement items

Constructs and items	Mean	SD	Std. F. load.
Co-creation			
COCR1: I have been actively involved in composing my Shockino	4.495	1.827	0.984
COCR2: The way to compose my Shockino was predominantly decided by myself	4.477	1.804	0.970
COCR3: The availability of several options allowed me to customise Shockino to my tastes	4.437	1.808	0.975
COCR4: Compared to standard chocolates, Shockino could better meet my personal preferences	4.442	1.847	0.941
Novelty			
NOV1: Shockino was a unique and novel experience to me	5.628	1.518	0.932
NOV2: Most people would describe Shockino as something out of the ordinary	5.704	1.512	0.945
NOV3: Shockino satisfied my curiosity	5.583	1.510	0.935
NOV4: Shockino provided me with an authentic/genuine experience			
Theming and storytelling			
T&S1: The theme of the "journey into the flavours" facilitated an escapist moment	4.671	1.687	0.975
T&S2: The narrative (map/brochure/pictures) supported my identification with different places	4.666	1.676	0.972
T&S3: The theme (story) of the "journey into the flavours" made my escape more vivid	4.643	1.660	0.964
T&S4: I felt like the protagonist in my "journey into the flavours"	4.761	1.717	0.967
Entertainment			
ENT1: Activities of others were amusing to watch	5.950	1.759	0.933
ENT2: Watching others perform was very entertaining	5.701	1.755	0.890
ENT3: I really enjoyed watching what others were doing	5.854	1.790	0.945
Education			
EDU1: Shockino made me more knowledgeable about different kinds of geographic excellence	5.736	1.545	0.956
EDU2: Shockino stimulated my curiosity to learn new things	5.852	1.562	0.971
EDU3: Shockino was a real learning experience	5.759	1.562	0.975
Escapism			
ESC1: Shockino stimulated my imagination	5.982	1.619	0.959
ESC2: Shockino provided me with an escapist opportunity	6.028	1.611	0.979
ESC3: During the experience of Shockino, I totally forgot about my daily routine	5.987	1.616	0.958
Esthetics			
ESTH1: I perceived a real sense of consistency and harmony in Shockino	5.990	1.545	0.959
ESTH2: The esthetic features of Shockino were very pleasant	5.965	1.551	0.902
ESTH3: The way Shockino looked was very attractive	5.962	1.555	0.923
Memory			
MEM1: I was very positively surprised by Shockino	6.359	1.507	0.976
MEM2: I will have wonderful memories about Shockino	6.291	1.526	0.927
MEM3: I will remember many positive things about Shockino	6.299	1.509	0.942
MEM4: I will not forget my experience related to Shockino	6.339	1.550	0.921

Notes: All standardised factor loadings of items are significant ($p < 0.001$); the italicised item (NOV4) was dropped to refine the measurement model

Table II Validity and reliability

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	EDU	COCR	T&S	NOV	ENT	ESC	ESTH	MEM
EDU	0.978	0.936	0.136	0.979	0.967							
COCR	0.983	0.936	0.308	0.987	0.190	0.968						
T&S	0.984	0.940	0.136	0.985	0.369	0.149	0.970					
NOV	0.956	0.879	0.156	0.956	0.243	0.388	0.153	0.937				
ENT	0.945	0.852	0.253	0.950	0.116	0.262	0.322	0.366	0.923			
ESC	0.976	0.932	0.304	0.979	0.110	0.381	0.187	0.366	0.199	0.965		
ESTH	0.949	0.862	0.308	0.956	0.198	0.555	0.259	0.395	0.264	0.551	0.928	
MEM	0.969	0.887	0.253	0.975	0.262	0.385	0.360	0.338	0.503	0.482	0.453	0.942

Notes: CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; MSV: Maximum Shared Variance; MaxR (H): Maximal Reliability (usually referred to as H). The square root of the AVE is on the diagonal. The lower diagonals show the correlation coefficients between the variables

Figure 3 Structural model