# Emotions and social interaction through the lens of service-dominant logic

**Dissertation**

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*Für meine Familie*

**Geleitwort**

Wie lässt sich die Emotionstheorie mit der Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) vereinbaren, um neue Erkenntnisse zur Ko-Kreation von Werten im Servicekontext gewinnen zu können? Welche Rolle spielen beim gemeinsamen Erleben von Services (z. B. von Events) die Gruppenemotionen? Diesen wichtigen und innovativen Fragen geht Herr Doktor Stieler in seiner Dissertationsschrift nach. Seine Grundannahme ist dabei, dass erst die subjektive Erfahrung der Konsumenten das Entstehen von Werten ermöglicht. Dabei achtet Herr Doktor Stieler darauf, die Kontextbezogenheit solcher Erfahrungen zu berücksichtigen und in seinen empirischen Beiträgen zu modellieren. Mit seiner Arbeit erbringt Herrn Doktor Stieler zwei wichtige Leistungen: Er liefert einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Erforschung der sozialen Dimension von emotionalen Erlebnissen, und er bettet seine Forschungsergebnisse in einen Rahmen ein, der seine Befunde für weiterführende Forschungsarbeiten erschließt und sie an die Forschung zur Service-Dominant Logic anschließt.

Gerade die schlüssige Verbindung der Theorie der Emotionen und ihrer sozialen Dimension mit der SDL ist eine herausragende Leistung der vorliegenden Arbeit. Herr Doktor Stieler durchdringt die höchst heterogenen Literaturströmungen zu den beiden Aspekten seiner Arbeit klug, und er versteht es, die Verbindungslinien zwischen beiden Forschungsgebieten sichtbar zu machen. Dies ist keinesfalls eine Selbstverständlichkeit, weil es sich um Theorien bzw. Konzepte handelt, die aus zwei ausgesprochen unterschiedlichen, teilweise fast antagonistischen Denkschulen stammen (insbesondere, wo individuelle und soziale Verhaltenspsychologie auf die Theorie der Märkte mit typisiert betrachteten Akteuren trifft). Gerade deshalb leistet Herr Doktor Stieler mit seiner Arbeit einen besonders wichtigen Beitrag zur Weiterentwicklung der Erforschung der sozialen Interaktion auf Märkten. Hier ist insbesondere das zweite Kapitel über den Theorierahmen hervorzuheben: Doktor Stieler gelingt hier nichts weniger als die Verbindung der beiden Perspektiven, und das auf höchstem argumentativen Niveau. Er belegt, dass der die umfassende Literatur hinter seinen Aussagen nicht nur im Detail kennt, sondern sich auch sicher in ihr bewegen kann.

Herr Doktor Stieler hat sich mit seiner Arbeit aus konzeptioneller Sicht, aus methodischer Sicht und aus inhaltlicher Sicht einer großen Herausforderung gestellt. Diese Herausforderung hat er hervorragend gemeistert. Die bereits aus dem Promotionsprojekt heraus publizierten Artikel belegen, dass seine Forschungsbeiträge auch international Gehör finden, und dass er die Diskussion in der Fachcommunity mit seinen Erwägungen bereichern kann. Nicht zuletzt spricht für den internationale Impact seiner Forschung, dass der zentrale Beitrag “Fan Experi-

ence in Spectator Sports and the Feeling of Social Connectedness" mit dem M. Wayne DeLoizier Award for Best Conference Paper der 2015 Academy of Marketing Science Annual Conference ausgezeichnet worden ist, den Herr Doktor Stieler als erster Deutscher gewinnen konnte.

Zusammenfassend ist die Arbeit, die Herr Stieler vorgelegt hat, eine ganz besonders gelungene Arbeit. Herr Stieler hat mit seinem Theorierahmen und mit den drei Publikationen in der Arbeit überzeugend dargelegt, dass er zu herausragenden akademischen Leistungen auf dem Gebiet des Marketings in der Lage ist.

Der vorliegenden Arbeit und ihren zentralen Befunden ist zu wünschen, dass sie über die internationale Anerkennung in der wissenschaftlichen Fach-Community hinaus Eingang in die Praxis des Dienstleistungsmarketings finden. Ohne Zweifel ist gehört diese Arbeit auf den Schreibtisch aller Wissenschaftler und Praktiker, die sich mit Dienstleistungskontexten aus Marketingsicht befassen, in denen Konsumenten als Gruppen auftreten. Hier ist an Sportevents genauso wie an Konzerte, Ausstellungen, aber auch an Restaurants oder Einkaufszentren zu denken, in denen Gruppen von Konsumenten aktiv sind. Die Arbeit sei darüber hinaus auch allen Marketingwissenschaftlern und Marketingpraktikern ans Herz gelegt, die verstehen wollen, welchen Gewinn es bringt, zwei scheinbar unvereinbare Forschungsströme wie die Theorie der sozialen Emotionen und der SDL zusammenzubringen, um innovative und praxisrelevante Erkenntnisse zu gewinnen. Herr Doktor Stieler war der Pionier am Lehrstuhl, und er hat mit seiner Arbeit gezeigt, dass er zu wissenschaftlichen Pionierleistungen in der Lage ist. Dabei hat er bewiesen, dass er, wie man im Basketball sagt, seine Würfe selbst kreieren kann: Die vorliegende Dissertationsschrift ist ein Beleg dafür, wie Herr Doktor Stieler erfolgreich eigene Forschungskonzepte entwickeln und umsetzen kann. Es war mir eine Ehre, diese herausragende Arbeit begleiten zu dürfen.

Bayreuth, im Januar 2018

Prof. Dr. Claas Christian Germelmann

**Danksagung**

Diese Dissertationsschrift ist das Resultat meiner Zeit als wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter und Promotionsstudent am Lehrstuhl für Betriebswirtschaftslehre III – Marketing der Universität Bayreuth. Mit diesen Worten möchte ich allen Menschen danken, die mit ihrer Zeit und ihrer Hingabe diese kumulative Dissertationsschrift erst möglich gemacht haben.

In erster Linie möchte meinem Doktorvater und akademischen Lehrer Prof. Dr. Claas Christian Germelmann danken. Die fruchtbaren Diskussionen halfen mir nicht nur dieses Dissertationsprojekt voranzutreiben, sondern ebenso meine eigenen akademischen Fähigkeiten zu entwickeln. Beeindruckend für mich sind sein Optimismus, auch und insbesondere in Bezug auf meine Arbeit, seine innovativen Visionen und seine Fähigkeit, Menschen in seinem Umfeld voranzubringen. Antrieb und Leitmotiv sind für ihn aus meiner Sicht das mutige Angehen von neuen Herausforderungen, um den Status quo stets zu verschieben. Diese Denkweise war für meine Dissertationen sehr wertvoll.

Weiterhin möchte ich meinem Zweitgutachter Prof. Dr. Herbert Woratschek für seine Unterstützung beim Verfassen dieser Dissertationsschrift danken. Ich lernte Prof. Woratschek noch während meines Studiums der Diplom-Sportökonomie kennen und schätzen. Zudem trug sein inhaltlicher Input als Experte auf dem Gebiet des Dienstleistungsmanagements zur Verbesserung der Arbeit bei.

Prof. Dr. Torsten Eymann möchte ich für die Übernahme des Prüfungsvorsitzes meines Kolloquiums danken.

Ganz besonders möchte ich mich auch beim Team des Lehrstuhls für Marketing bedanken. Diese Menschen haben dazu beigetragen, dass die vorliegende Dissertationsschrift überhaupt so entstehen konnte. Zu diesem Team gehören Doris Tavernier, Pablo Neder, Sylvia Sprödhuber, James Madden, Philipp Laemmert, Markus Seufert, Johanna Held, Friederike Weismann, Alina Geiger und Larissa Diekmann. Sie haben mich auf vielfältigste Art und Weise und in sämtlichen Projektabschnitten unterstützt. Darüber hinaus möchte ich mich bei allen aktuellen und ehemaligen Kolleginnen und Kollegen des Arbeitsbereichs Marketing & Services, aber auch den Kolleginnen und Kollegen aus dem Institut für Sportwissenschaft und dem Fußballteam „Doktorspiele“ bedanken. Sie alle haben die tägliche Arbeit an der Universität Bayreuth freundvoll gemacht und das war ein wesentlicher Antrieb beim Anfertigen der Dissertationsschrift.

Schließlich möchte ich mich bei meiner Familie für ihre ehrliche und unbedingte Unterstützung danken. Meiner Frau Marleen möchte ganz besonders danken, weil sie nicht nur alle Höhen und Tiefen des Promovierens nachvollziehen kann, sondern gerade in mühsamen Phasen des Dissertationsprojekts immer ein Rückhalt war und weiterhin ist. Ich möchte meinen Töchtern Carla und Helene danken, da sie mit ihren Lachen unerschöpfliche Energiequellen für mich sind. Zudem danke ich meiner Mutter Cornelia Panthen, meinem Bruder Moritz Panthen, Wieland Lehmann und Großmutter Oma Irmgard Feyerabend, weil ihre Unterstützung weit über die Zeit der Dissertation selbst hinausgeht und sie mein Leben bereichern.

Bayreuth, Januar 2018

**Contents**

# 1 Introduction

"*Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced*."

John Keats

When the Romantic poet John Keats wrote these lines to his relatives, he may have pondered about the nature of reality for human beings. This dissertation is not about such a philosophical and fundamental question, but John Keats' words effectively summarize the underlying notion of how experiences create value for customers. Value is *not* embedded in tangible goods or determined by the provider of services, but is determined subjectively by the individual. Thus, value becomes *real* when it is perceived as such by the individual (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016).

In this dissertation, service-dominant logic (S-D logic) is used as a conceptual framework for analyzing various aspects of value co-creation in the context of services. Value co-creation is fundamental to understanding where and how S-D logic differs from goods-dominant logic (G-D logic). In their seminal article in 2004, Vargo and Lusch propose that the firm and the customer jointly create value, whereas the firm can only make value *propositions* (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The customer also integrates own resources to co-create value with the firm. The idea behind considering the nature of value is that value can only be created through the use of a product or service. Value co-creation means that a firm together creates value with the customer. In its current state of development, S-D logic illustrates the "*zooming-out*" (Vargo & Lusch, 2016, p. 5) direction of S-D logic, which means that value co-creation goes beyond the firm-customer dyad towards a more network-oriented view (Akaka, Vargo, & Lusch, 2012, 2013; Wieland, Polese, Vargo, & Lusch, 2012).

From an S-D-logic perspective, experience can be seen as an element of value co-creation (Ranjan & Read, 2016). Experiences have different characteristics on the basis of which they differentiate between commodities, goods or services (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The most prominent characteristic is that experiences are highly individual. Experiences only gain value at a subjective level. The concept of experience is directly linked with the conceptualization that value is "*phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary*" (Vargo & Lusch, 2008, p. 7) from an S-D logic perspective. Value is experiential in nature and cannot be meaningfully assessed externally. Moreover, past as well as future experiences are valuable for individuals (Arnould, Price, & Malshe, 2006). The concept of experience recently has been merged

with the S-D logic framework and resulted in *value in the experience* (Helkkula, Kelleher, & Pihlstrom, 2012).

Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) seminal article on experiential aspects of consumption paved the way for emotions to be a relevant construct in consumer experiences. Experiences not only have functional aspects, emotions are key components of experiences (Dube & Helkkula, 2015). The following quotes illustrate the role of emotions within the concept of experience, as well as the need to actively shape these components from a managerial perspective:

- "*Experience is defined as a subjective episode in the construction/transformation of the individual, with, however, an emphasis on the emotions and senses lived during the immersion, at the expense of the cognitive dimension"* (Carù & Cova, 2003, p. 273)"
- "*While prior economic offerings – commodities, goods, and services – are external to the buyer, experiences are inherently personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level"* (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 99).
- "*Companies must manage the emotional component of experiences with the same rigor they bring to the management of product and service functionality"* (Berry, Carbone, & Haeckel, 2002, p. 86).

Emotions have a *"phenomenological tone"* (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999, p. 184), which indicates the subjective nature of the construct. Research on emotions is interdisciplinary in nature. As we will see, it has a long and extensive history, strongly influenced by biology as a scientific discipline since the early 19$^{th}$ century. However, emotions also play an important role in everyday social life and determine how we communicate verbally and non-verbally with other human beings. In the field of consumer behavior, emotions impact on consumer evaluation and decision-making processes (Williams, 2014). Moreover, it is widely accepted that emotions determine customer value (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Holbrook, 1999; Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991). Advertising research is possibly the field that has yielded the most articles about the role of emotions in the marketing domain (Aaker, Stayman, & Hagerty, 1986; Agres, Edell, & Dubitsky, 1990; Batra & Holbrook, 1990; Batra & Ray, 1986; Batra & Stayman, 1990; Edell & Burke, 1987; Friestad & Thorson, 1986; Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1984). However, emotions are also investigated from many other perspectives, such as how specific emotions influence consumers (Decrop & Derbaix, 2010), the role

of emotions in decision-making (Han, Lerner, & Keltner, 2007) , discrete consumption emotions (e.g. Richins, 1997), emotional forecasting (Pham, Lee, & Stephen, 2012) and others. Back in 1999, Bagozzi, Gopianath and Nyer pose, in their overview article on the role of emotions in marketing, that "*Marketing relationships seem to be contexts where more social conceptualizations of emotions would be worth pursuing."* (Bagozzi et al., 1999, p. 202). To the best of our knowledge, there are still only a few attempts to integrate the social dimension of emotions at least to a certain extent (Raghunathan & Corfman, 2006; Ramanathan & McGill, 2007). Whereas the importance of the social dimension of consumer behavior is widely accepted (Dahl, 2013), research on the social dimension of emotions leaves considerable room for future research. As we will see in Chapter 2.1.2, the social dimension of emotions goes far beyond the communicative function of emotion.

The John Keats quotation at the beginning of this section has a second meaning which is central for the following chapters. We draw on this excerpt from the 19th century to illustrate that experiences only become real when they are perceived and thus create value for the individual. We took the words and simply applied them to another context, namely this paper. By doing so, we ignored the specific cultural and social meanings of these words in the early 19th century. Experiences, as well as value creation itself, are highly contextual, so that it is essential to understand how an experience is created, when it is created, what is created and where (Dube & Helkkula, 2015). The temporal and spatial boundaries of a setting also include social structures which exert an extensive influence on perceptions of value (Akaka, Vargo, & Schau, 2015). Beyond that, experience co-creation with respect to imagery as opposed to lived, dyadic and systematic, that describe the context of experience co-creation (Jaakkola, Helkkula, & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2015). The idea of context-dependent value co-creation is also fundamental to this text. It is crucial for managers to be aware of the different contextual components that shape individual experiences. There is a need to monitor contextual boundaries and to adjust service propositions in a dynamic manner, in order to co-create value with other actors.

One of the most relevant issues in marketing science seems to be understanding customer experience. The Marketing Science Institute proposed that "Understanding Customers and the Customer Experience" is one of the key challenges of marketing researchers and practitioners (Marketing Science Institute, 2014). This text aims to deliver a conceptual framework, as well as three articles that contribute to the discussion. The first part of this work deals with the foundations of emotions as fundamental personal functions of human beings. It presents a

short history of emotion research and concludes with major grand theories of emotion that incorporate the social dimension. This step is necessary to convey our view on emotions and why there is still a lack of research investigating the social dimension of emotions in a consumption environment. As noted above, emotions play a crucial role in consumption and experience in general. In turn, according to the S-D logic framework, value is phenomenologically determined by individual perceptions of well-being. In conclusion, emotions shape the individual experience and are thus a driver of value perceptions. Chapter 2.1.2 deals with the social dimension of emotions. The idea that our emotional state is heavily influenced by others broadly conforms to the notion of co-creation in an S-D logic sense. Individuals share emotions, stimulate each other and feel connecting bonds in hedonic setting, which in turn increases value for the individual.

Chapter 2.2 further elaborates on the notion of experience co-creation. Firstly, recent developments in S-D logic are presented in Chapter 2.2.1. Secondly, Chapter 2.2.2 conceptually links ideas from the social psychology of emotions with S-D logic. We elaborate on the question of what it means for human emotions to constitute operant resources in service experience. The paper closes with remarks on how value is formed at the micro-level of investigation.

Chapter 3 presents three articles that contribute to our understanding of the co-creation of experience of different actors. The first article introduces the concept of value co-destruction in the sport management literature. The second article aims to establish a taxonomy of how value co-creation can be analyzed in triadic constellations of actors. The focus of the first two articles lies on the social dimension of experience, which means that different actors integrate their resources to shape their servicescape. Chapter 3.1 shows that value co-destruction is also a possible result of resource integration from different actors in a social context. The third article (Chapter 3.3) investigates the role emotions in the co-creation of experience. In this respect, shared emotions play only an implicit role in the first and second article, whereas the third article explicitly investigates a certain type of emotion, namely *feelings of social connectedness*, and how people co-create their experience.

All three articles use the context of sports to illustrate different phenomena relating to the functioning of services. Because of its unique characteristics, the sports system is especially interesting and useful for researchers wishing to develop theoretical frameworks that build upon S-D logic.

# 2 Theoretical framework

## 2.1 Emotions as fundamental functions of human beings

### 2.1.1 *"What is an emotion?"* – More than 130 years of conceptual fuzziness

When William James wrote his influential article *"What is an emotion?"* in 1884, he could not have expected the term emotion still to lack conceptual clarity well over a century later. It was around the turn of the 20th century when many modern theories of emotions emerged (Table 1). The advent of psychology as an autonomous scientific field goes hand in hand with advancements in emotion research. At that time, psychology as a scientific discipline developed and challenged existing concepts such as '*affections*' or '*passions*' that were philosophical in nature. A crucial point was the development of emotion as a scientific term (Dixon, 2012). Historical, anthropological and philosophical influences 'met' an emerging field that relied heavily on experimental methods and scientific investigation of emotion. For this paper, McDougall is especially relevant, because his book contains the first approach to designing emotion from a social-psychological perspective. Unlike other emotion theories from that period, McDougall's approach clearly incorporated social dimension of emotion, at least implicitly. He views '*pseudo-instincts'* such as sympathy, as an enabler of social life (McDougall, 1908). Moreover, in his publication *The Group Mind* (McDougall, 1920), he theorizes on how emotions spread in collectives. Together with the works of LeBon (1896) and Durkheim (1912/1976), he presented groundbreaking research for the development of mass and collective psychology. These ideas play a major role in the third article of this compilation. Although this period might be relevant for emotion research, the concept was in fact used much earlier and went through various historical changes (see Dixon, 2012 and Ellis & Tucker, 2015 for profound reviews on the history of emotions). The history of emotions does not start with the modern age, but goes back to the ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, or the Stoics. They pioneered the domain of emotion theories with their thoughts about '*pathé*' (Konstan, 2006), and philosophers such as Aquinas, Descartes, Spinozas, Hobbes, Kant or Hume paved the way for further modern emotion theories (Ellis & Tucker, 2015).

Table 1. Overview of modern emotion theories around the turn of the century (source: own categorization based on Ellis & Tucker, 2015; Meyer, Reisenzein, & Schützwohl, 2003; Meyer, Schützwohl, & Reisenzein, 2001; Schirmer, 2015; Ulich & Mayring, 1992).

| **Autor(s)** | **Year(s)** | **Theoretical background & key assumptions** |
|---|---|---|
| Charles Darwin | 1872 | Evolutionary approach:<br>• Changes in the central nervous system cause emotional activity<br>• Emotions are the subjective side of what goes on in the central nervous system<br>• Focus on facial expressions |
| William James<br>Carl Lange | 1884<br>1885 | Epiphenomenalist approach: James-Lange-Theory<br>• Emotions as by-products of bodily changes<br>• Bodily changes affect the mind<br>• Perception causes action which in turn affects emotional states |
| Wilhelm Wundt | 1896 | • Feelings are not only by-products of perceptions<br>• First dimensional approach to emotions (opposites like positive vs. negative) |
| William McDougall | 1923 | • Differentiation between feeling and emotion<br>• Feeling is the subjective component of an emotion<br>• Emotion is a component of instincts and influence motivation |
| Walter Cannon | 1927 | Neurobiological approach: Cannon-Bard Theory<br>• Challenged the James-Lange Theory<br>• Physiological responses and emotion simultaneously arise<br>• Later further developed by Schachter and Singer (1962) as an early cognitive theory |

Historians are interested in transitions of the word emotion throughout the centuries, because *emotion* words are reflections of societal change. The word '*emotion'* stems from the Latin word '*emovere*' which was imported into English from the French '*émotion*' in the early 17$^{th}$ century (Dixon, 2012). Political, social and industrial revolutions during that time enabled researchers from the natural sciences to study human life without fear of being punished by the church for empirical investigations, as was the case centuries before (Schirmer, 2015). This is the reason why emotion was studied from a biological and medical perspective, and the word itself described the visual signs of mental processes at that time. Early emotion theories were also colored by the natural scientific history of the emotion term. For example, the James-Lange Theory (James, 1884), as a representative of the epiphenomenalist view on emo-

tions, stated that bodily changes drive mental ones and not vice versa (Ellis & Tucker, 2015). Thus, emotions result from the perception of an object or person which elicits bodily movements accordingly. However, the question of what constitutes an emotion and how we understand it remains current. Societal and economic changes throughout different cultural settings constantly influence our understanding of the array of emotion terms. This has direct consequences for researchers who investigate human emotions. For instance, the semantic history of happiness illustrates that emotion terms constantly change their meaning and are thus quite dynamic (Wierzbicka, 2010). Therefore, emotion lexica (Storm & Storm, 1987) and verbal scales cannot be seen as stable and well-established, but they are also an object of constant change. Moreover, emotion terms vary from context to context (Jones, Lane, Bray, Uphill, & Catlin, 2005; Richins, 1997). A context-specific adaptation of pre-existing emotion terms seems to be appropriate (Lazarus, 2000).

Since the early 19$^{th}$ century, emotion research has been through many general transitions of psychology and re-framed its focus accordingly. Behavioral approaches (Watson, 1930), the cognitive revolution (Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Schachter & Singer, 1962), the debate about basic emotions (Ekman, 1992b, 1992a, 1999; Frijda & Parrott, 2011; Izard, 2007; Ortony & Turner, 1990) that is still in progress (Ekman & Cordaro, 2011), and appraisal theory (Arnold, 1960; Frijda, 1986; Roseman, 1991; Scherer, 1988; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985) are milestones of the history of emotion research. Within the latter stream of theories, there are various explanations as to how appraisals shape our emotional experiences. However, they all have in common that individual evaluations of a situation effect our emotions. The important thing about appraisal theory is that it allows for very fine-graded differences in appraisals and thus for a great variety of emotional experiences. The cognitive theories, especially appraisal theories of emotions, play a key role in the integration of social psychological thoughts in emotion research, because they have enabled theorists to design emotional experiences with action tendencies and specific social appraisals (van Kleef & Fischer, 2016).

Nowadays, research on emotions is ubiquitous in its original home of psychology. Four leading psychology journals focus exclusively on emotions as a key research subject, namely Emotion (Impact Factor: 3.082), Emotion review (Impact Factor: 4.730), Cognition & Emotion (Impact Factor: 2.418) and Frontiers in Psychology – Emotion Science (Impact factor:

2.463)[*]. In addition, other top-journals in the field of psychology regularly publish articles with a reference to emotions or closely related constructs (e.g. Trends in Cognitive Science, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology). Although emotions have such an impact on scientific discourse in various fields, the conceptual definition remains rather ill-defined (Dixon, 2012; Izard, 2010). As a scientific concept, emotion is described as *"over-inclusive"* (Dixon, 2012, p. 343). This makes it hard for researchers to distinguish between related constructs. Emotion and attitude, for instance, are two psychological constructs that play a major role in various social sciences, but they overlap to a certain extent. If we take the definition of Eagly and Chaiken (2007), we see that affective, cognitive and behavioral components constitute an attitude. The title of the publication already suggests a broad definition of attitude, namely *The Advantages of an Inclusive Definition of Attitude* (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007). Many definitions in emotion research also provide a multi-component view of the construct (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981). An extreme case of a broad definition also considers emotion as a long-term-oriented construct (Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 2014). By contrast, a standard textbook definition would view emotion as a state variable that is characterized as short in duration, behaviorally relevant, intense and directed towards and object (Meyer et al., 2001; Ulich, 1992). These characteristics can be seen as crucial to distinguishing emotions from more stable and subtly-operating constructs such as feelings, attitudes or even motives. However, the definition proposed from, Oatley and Johnson-Laird (2014), for example, also views such psychological disorders as depression and stress as emotions. So why is emotion still such an over-inclusive construct? One possible explanation is that current *grand theories* of emotion try to address many different aspects of the nature of emotions at the same time.

[*] Impact factors based on information from the webpages of the journals (Information retrieved on December 18th 2016).

Lazarus (1991) came up with five themes that emotion theories should address (Lazarus, 1991, pp. 820–825):

- Definitional problems: What are the emotions?
- Should physiological change be a defining attribute?
- Should emotion meanings be dimensionalized into a few basic factors or treated as discrete categories?
- What are the functional relations between cognition, motivation, and emotion?
- How can emotion theory reconcile biological universals with sociocultural sources of variability?

Modern grand theories of emotion deal with more or less all aspects that the abovementioned questions touch on, and come up with complex theoretical explanations. These theories aim to tackle emotion from various viewpoints and incorporate many perspectives of the theme. Strongman (2003) uses the term "*ambitious theory"* (Strongman, 2003, pp. 101ff.) for those theories which strive to provide an overarching framework in emotion research. The five questions posed by Lazarus (1991) are by no means easy to answer and many controversies in emotion psychology are concerned with these questions. For instance, the Zajonc-Lazarus controversy during the 1980s is about the relationship between cognition and emotion (Lazarus, 1982; Zajonc, 1980). As noted earlier, the debate about basic emotions and universal antecedents of emotions is still ongoing (Ekman & Cordaro, 2011; Izard, 2007; Levenson, 2011). This controversy is fueled by recent publications from behavioral ecology and the ethological approach that challenge the notion of basic emotions as being cross-culturally independent (Crivelli, Russell, Jarillo, & Fernández-Dols, 2016; Fernández-Dols & Crivelli, 2013). In a similar vein, there is empirical evidence (see Schirmer 2015, p. 58) that questions the dimensional approach to emotion (Russell, 1980), which is still commonly used. We will not present every ambitious theory in detail, but in Table 2, we illustrate how some incorporate the social dimension of emotions, as this is the connecting link to the next chapter. Again, note that appraisal theories of emotion (Frijda, 1986; Roseman, 1984; Scherer, Schorr, & Johnstone, 2001; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985) are well suited to incorporate the social dimension of emotions, because emotion depends on individual perceptions of the situation and environment, which are likely to include other human beings. Furthermore, goals and needs play a decisive role in appraisal theories (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2009) and human beings have a fundamental need to belonging (McClelland, 1961). The core appraisals that are common to all appraisal theories also allow for an extension to the social level. For example, the appraisal

dimension of normative significance evaluation can be relevant to the interpersonal context in general (general social norms) or at the intergroup level (salient in-group norms) (Garcia-Prieto & Scherer, 2006).

Table 2. Selected ambitious theories of emotion (source: own illustration based on Strongman, 2003).

| **Authors** | **Incorporation of social aspects of emotion** |
|---|---|
| Tomkins (1962) | Tomkins incorporated a process that he called '*affect resonance*', which is a basic principle of human communication. He describes the construct as the ability to affect and understand the emotional expressions of others, and is similar to what we label emotional contagion (see Chapter 2.1.2). |
| Oatley & Johnson-Laird (1987, 2011, 2014) | Oatley and Johnson-Laird place strong emphasis on the communicative function of emotions in a manner unequaled by other emotion theory. |
| Izard (1977, 2007) | Izard's theory supports the basic emotion view. However, he views basic emotional expression as fundamental social signals in human life (e.g. smiling of a newborn child as a communicative function). |
| Frijda (1986, 1988, 1994) | Frijda presents a functionalist view of emotions. He does not explicitly elaborate on the social functions of emotion (see Chapter 2.1.2), but his appraisal dimensions are clearly directed towards socially relevant emotions. |

### 2.1.2 The social dimension of emotions

The social dimension of emotions is worth investigating because "*emotions always have elements of the socially meaningful and discursive as they are embodied in specific situations*." (Burkitt, 2014, pp. 15–16). One way to target social emotion phenomena is to consider whether emotions shape groups or vice versa (van Kleef & Fischer, 2016). Both directions have led to extensive research in the field of social emotions. Building on Chapter 2.1.1, we start with the perspective that (individual) emotions have an effect on groups and how they work. Individual emotions not only provide information to the person who perceives the emotion, but also for others who observe the individual's emotional displays. Emotion as Social Information (EASI) theory posits that emotions play a decisive role in social life because they inform others about socially relevant information (van Kleef, 2009, 2016). Socio-emotional cues have a function for the individual (Keltner & Haidt, 1999), because emotions inform about socially relevant changes in the environment. Additionally, emotions prepare the individual to act socially appropriately. On a dyadic level, emotions help us to communicate and coordinate with other individuals more efficiently (Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Parkinson, 1996). Emotions further serve as means of communicating in order to coordinate socially meaningful relationships. Another indicator of the fact that emotions have a social dimension is the functional quality of emotions (Rudolph & Tscharaktschiew, 2014). As we usually have other individuals around us, we not only feel our own emotions, but also observe others who consciously and unconsciously send us emotionally relevant signals (e.g. body posture, smiling, crying etc.). Thus, we are actors as well as observers of emotionally relevant information. For instance, as a facial expression of joy, smiling occurs more often in interactive, than in individual settings. Note that smiling can have multiple social functions and meanings which foster adaption to different social contexts (Fernández-Dols & Crivelli, 2013). In a similar vein, crying can be interpreted differently with respect to the particular setting. Fernández-Dols and Ruis-Belda (1995) found that in extremely happy situations (gold medal win), individuals tend to express facial signs of sadness such as tears. An early ethnological study on the social foundations of emotion suggests that smiling has a strong social motivation and is less strongly correlated with the emotional experience itself (Kraut & Johnston, 1979).

Taking these examples to a more abstract level, the emotion of one individual can serve as a stimulus for another. Through this reciprocal process, we encode and decode information for and by others. An everyday life sentence such as "I am angry with my boss" illustrates the ubiquity of social stimuli around us. In this case, anger is a typical externally-directed and

failure-linked emotion caused by others (Weiner, 2014). Thus, emotions in the social domain are important, because our own emotions influence the emotional states of others. Some emotions are by definition pre-determined by social interactions. Gratitude, for example, is an emotion that is clearly directed towards other individuals and cannot be felt without any reaction from others (Weiner, 2014). Social appraisal theory argues that the emotional expressions of others influence the individual appraisals, which in turn influence the individual's emotional experience (Bruder, Fischer, & Manstead, 2014; Manstead & Fischer, 2001).

The abovementioned approaches to group emotions propose that emotions are individual adjustments, because of an external object or situation. Thus, social cues are viewed as stimulating emotional reactions. Intergroup emotion theory (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000) posits that the individual can feel emotions on behalf of a group when group membership is salient. Emotions at the group-level differ from individual emotions and can lead to different action tendencies (Smith, Seger, & Mackie, 2007). This second perspective on social emotions, namely how groups shape emotions, is interested in how group-level factors influence individual emotions. Group-based emotions are defined as "*emotional reactions that the group concerns*" (Yzerbyt, Kuppens, & Mathieu, 2016, p. 33). In contrast to classical appraisal theory, these approaches explain appraisals on the basis of group concerns. That is why this perspective is heavily influenced by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and group identification plays a decisive role in such approaches (van Kleef & Fischer, 2016). One can distinguish between the different levels of social identity theory, depending on the salient group membership (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). In extreme cases of collectivity, the boundaries between the personal self and the collective self blur. Identity fusion theory posits that individuals engage in self-sacrifice for their group, because identification with that group is so strong that they cannot distinguish between own and group level concerns (Gómez et al., 2011; Swann, Gómez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009; Swann, Jetten, Gómez, Whitehouse, & Bastian, 2012). Psychological closeness with fellow group members and perceived similarity with group members play a key role in forming group-based emotions. The third paper in this dissertation views emotional experiences from this perspective and investigates more deeply how similarity cues effect feelings of social connectedness.

People tend to share emotions with fellow group members (Rimé, 2009; Rimé, Paez, Kanyangara, & Yzerbyt, 2011). In groups, emotions may spread throughout the entire collective through the process of emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). In the domain of service management, emotional contagion has been highlighted in the social ser-

vicescape model (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003) as a key process for determining repurchase intentions. Empirical studies in the business, and especially in the service environment, reveal that employee displays of positive emotions influence customer affect in a positive manner (Argo, Dahl, & Manchanda, 2005; Du, Fan, & Feng, 2011; Hennig-Thurau, Groth, Paul, & Gremler, 2006; Howard & Gengler, 2001; Pugh, 2001). In the same manner, emotional displays of customers could also influence other customers in both positive and negative ways. The process of emotional contagion in groups might be influenced further by trait-like variables such as emotional intelligence (Kidwell, Hardesty, & Childers, 2008; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999), and susceptibility to emotions (Hatfield et al., 1994) or the ability to affect others' emotions (Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005). These variables determine how we perceive, process and manage emotional information that we receive from other individuals. One can well imagine that emotional contagion and related variables also play a crucial role in the work environment. The overall emotional climate of a working team or organizational unit might be influenced by emotional contagion between team members, as well as the emotional expressions the team leader conveys unconsciously or consciously (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Bartel & Saavedra, 2000; Ilies, Wagner, & Morgeson, 2007; Payne & Cooper, 2001). In this respect we can also demonstrate that emotions converge in groups over time (Totterdell, 2000; Totterdell, Kellett, Teuchmann, & Briner, 1998). Note that emotions are not necessarily a helpful adaption to the environment, so that individuals need to regulate emotions in certain settings and situations (Gross, 1999; Ochsner & Gross, 2005; Sheppes et al., 2014).

Emotions are also the subject of sociological approaches to emotion (see Flam, 2002; Gerhards, 1988; Turner & Stets, 2006). These theories view emotions from a macro-perspective and investigate their role in the formation of larger social systems, e.g. societies. One of the most prominent approaches in the domain of sociological emotion research is Hochschild's display and feeling rules (Hochschild, 1983). Social constructionists, such as Hochschild, claim that social structures are only constructed through and by the interaction of human beings. Thus, they ignore the laws of nature and, in our contexts, the psychophysiological dimension of emotions (Kemper, 1981). This view has been criticized by positivists in the sociological field (Kemper, 1978, 1981). In this paper, we do not elaborate further on this issue, but it should be noted that our view on emotions does not follow a sociological perspective. Instead, as consumer behavior is closely linked to psychology (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010), we follow a conceptualization of emotions that views emotions individual phenomena in the first place.

The theoretical underpinning of social emotions presented above helps us to understand the processes from a purely psychological perspective. However, these ideas might also help us to better understand how marketers and service operators should view their servicescapes, for instance, for event, sport and concert managers. We suggest that these ideas might enhance our understanding of how consumers co-create experiences. Mass hedonic services are characterized by large crowds where mechanisms such as emotional contagion can be studied. A deeper understanding of how these processes and variables might intervene can help us to address many commonplace outcome variables in marketing, like satisfaction, engagement, loyalty or purchase decisions. Paper 3 (Chapter 3.3) addresses this research gap by investigating the antecedents of feelings of social connectedness.

## 2.2 Service-dominant logic as a frame of reference

### 2.2.1 From micro to macro – theoretical advances of the service-dominant logic

Since their seminal article in 2004, Vargo and Lusch (2004) constantly developed the service-dominant logic into an all-encompassing "*theory of economics and society*" (Vargo & Lusch 2016, p. 6). They started off with the claim that *goods* are only special cases, and that *service* is the more general case. In their view, the so-called goods-dominant logic (G-D logic) seemed outdated, as it neglects the interactional facet of value creation. The shortcomings of G-D logic led to service-dominant logic, which in turn led with a framework of how value is created. With their second major update in 2016, the authors present five axioms (Vargo & Lusch, 2016), which represent the core assumptions of the theory (Table 3).

Table 3. Five axioms of service-dominant logic (source: adapted from Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Vargo, 2015).

| **Axiom** | **Explanation** |
|---|---|
| Service is the fundamental basis of exchange. | The application of operant resources (knowledge and skills), "service," is the basis of all exchange. Service is exchanged for service. |
| Value is always co-created by multiple actors, including the beneficiary. | Implies that value creation is interactional and combinatorial. |
| All economic and social actors are resource integrators | Implies that the context of value creation is networks of networks (resource-integrators). |
| Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary | Value is idiosyncratic, experiential, contextual, and meaning-laden. |
| Value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements | Institutions provide the 'glue' for value co-creation through service-for-service exchange |

Service-dominant logic has been integrated to various disciplines and sub-fields of research and adapted to the respective context:

- International marketing (Akaka et al., 2013)
- (Service) Innovation management (Ordanini & Parasuraman, 2010)
- B2B marketing (Vargo & Lusch, 2011)
- Logistics management (Yazdanparast, Manuj, & Swartz, 2010)
- Sport management (Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2014)
- Tourism (Shaw, Bailey, & Williams, 2011)
- Health care management (Joiner & Lusch, 2016)
- Brand management (Merz, He, & Vargo, 2009)

A key component of S-D logic is the abandonment of G-D logic. Vargo and Lusch (2004) no longer use the term goods, and define service as encompassing goods as well as services. Service is the application of skills and knowledge, which are operant resources, whereas goods are only transmitters of operant resources (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In conclusion, their first and core axiom states: "*Service is the fundamental basis of exchange.*" (Vargo & Lusch, 2016, p. 8).

A second theme of S-D logic that is relevant for this paper is the idea of value co-creation. Here, S-D logic broadened our understanding of the role of the customer over time. In the first S-D logic article (2004), the customer was labeled as a *co-producer* (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) and in the second (2008), *co-creator* (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). This update was intended to stress the interactional nature of co-creation between firm and customer. With their latest article, Vargo and Lusch (2016) placed the emphasis of the complexity of value co-creation by stating that "*value is co-created by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary*" (Vargo & Lusch, 2016, p. 8). This statement corresponds with the ecosystem view of S-D logic (Akaka et al., 2013; Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Frow et al., 2014; Vargo, Lusch, Horbel, & Wieland, 2011; Vargo, Wieland, & Akaka, 2015). Value creation does not take place within the boundaries of a firm, so that the firm can only make value propositions (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). Thus, value co-creation was initially conceptualized as a dyadic interaction between the firm and the customer, because both integrate their resources and value arises for both. The ecosystem view of S-D logic expands this notion and pushes co-creation towards a more network-oriented view. Many different actors jointly co-create value at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels (Chandler & Vargo, 2011). Actors are interconnected, and jointly co-create value through complex and reciprocal webs. For instance, customers have access to their private network of family and friends. Consequently, this network of private actors is connected to a firm via a single customer. If we move up to the meso- and macro-levels of investigation, networks overlap and form industries or markets.

The ecosystem perspective is closely related to the question of what constitutes the boundaries of value co-creation. As S-D logic in general becomes a more encompassing theory, the respective context of value co-creation does so too. This theoretical development can be summarized by the statement that "*value co-creation has no beginning or end*" (Akaka et al., 2013, p. 14). This view is supported by various publications that, for instance, not only emphasize the timely dimension of co-creation (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Heinonen et al., 2010; Jaakkola et al., 2015; Wieland et al., 2012). Value is not only co-created in a single service encounter, but past and future service encounters form the holistic value for the individual. For example, if a customer talks with her friend about a future hedonic experience (e.g. a festival visit), this might evoke positive emotions of joy (Pham et al., 2012). The second article in this compilation (Chapter 3.2) attempts to find a compromise between the infinity of value co-creation and applicable instruments for narrowing down the respective context by using triads.

In the past few years, ideas about value co-creation proliferated. For instance, researchers have investigated the role of symbols (Akaka et al., 2014), social roles (Akaka & Chandler, 2011), signs (Löbler & Lusch, 2014), and practices (Löbler & Lusch, 2014; McColl-Kennedy, Cheung, & Ferrier, 2015; Uhrich, 2014) in the co-creation process. Others push the ideas of S-D logic to an extreme, such as the customer-dominant logic (Heinonen et al., 2010; Heinonen, Strandvik, & Voima, 2013) or the chaotic and uncontrollable facets of value co-creation (Carù & Cova, 2015; Fisher & Smith, 2011). Another connotation of the broad array of this sub-theme is the question of whether co-creation can also have negative effects. Some researchers have stressed that value creation can also have a downside, namely value *co-destruction* (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Plé & Cáceres, 2010; Smith, 2013). The first journal article of this compilation (Chapter 3.1) introduces this concept in the field of sport management, by showing that the same event (a silent protest) can lead to very different value outcomes.

### 2.2.2 The role of emotions in value co-creation

As noted above, emotions play a crucial role in personal and social life. From a S-D logic perspective, emotions can be seen as operant resources (Alves, Ferreira, & Fernandes, 2016). Given that individuals always act in social networks, they integrate their emotions as resources more or less consciously. The role of emotions in value co-creation can be understood by looking at a research stream that has not yet been mentioned, namely consumer culture theory (CCT). CCT investigates how consumers act in their cultural and group settings (e.g. brand communities). This research stream explicitly focuses on social experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Muñiz & Schau, 2005; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009), as "CCT and SDL are ready allies in understanding value as experiential and contextual." (Jaakola et al., 2015, p. 189). The word *'experience'* is nearly as fuzzy as emotion, but is clearly multi-dimensional and comprises emotions beside other aspects (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009; Tynan, McKechnie, & Hartley, 2014). However, there is still room to investigate emotions as key components of any experience (Jaakkola et al., 2015). This paper presents some directions from (social) psychology being the scientific 'home' of emotions.

In certain settings, customer resource integration through emotions is essential for the firm. An exemplary context is that of team sports, which we used as a setting for each of the three articles. In these contexts, social emotions are especially interesting to analyze, because they involve value *co*-creation as an elemental feature. The papers presented in Chapter 3 view value co-creation at the micro-level, as individuals integrate different emotions on which oth-

ers can build. Consequently, value co-creation cannot be seen as a linear process, in which one plus one equals two, but rather as non-linear. This is good news for managers, because they can expect multiplication effects in such contexts, through processes like emotional contagion or emotion sharing. On the other hand, emotional processes are difficult to predict and to steer, and thus remain unmanageable to certain extent. Accordingly the task of managers of services for which emotions play a major role would be to identify emotional patterns of customers and to shape them according to the social norms of this particular environment. Here, a fundamental claim of S-D logic comes into play; value is always context-dependent. Of course, many different services might involve emotions. Even relatively comparable services, such as mass hedonic services (rock concerts, sports events etc.) where a psychological mass of visitors is formed, might have completely different boundary conditions of experience value. Here, we do not refer to environmental and service quality factors such as venue, catering, staging etc., but to differences in emotional expressions. As noted above, managers should take these differences into account, but still realize scaling effects between contexts, so as to be more business-oriented (see Chapter 3.3).

The rise of S-D logic and related publications has, without doubt, broadened our view of value creation. Such creation through the lens of S-D logic is infinite (Akaka et al., 2012). This view is useful for researchers as well as for managers, in order to foster holistic thinking. It can help to structure business processes more efficiently with regard to where, when and how value resources are integrated by different actors, in order to create value. However, the theoretical underpinning of S-D logic also leads to difficulties regarding how to assess value in such complex service constellations. If value is so multifaceted, complex, and dynamic in nature, it is hard for us to assess value holistically. The problem is where to draw the line between the holistic meta-view of service-dominant logic and empirical feasibility that informs managers with insights they can truly implement. The second article of this contribution tackles this problem.

The combination of S-D logic with consumer culture theory leads to a more holistic understanding of how value is created in the social domain (Akaka et al., 2015), but does not help us to incorporate theoretical advances and empirical evidence from the domain of (social) psychology. One possible explanation is that the latter research stream mainly uses experiments as a scientific method, whereas CCT draws on qualitative methods. However, there are attempts to tackle value co-creation with quantitative measures and scale development (Ranjan & Read, 2016; Yi & Gong, 2013).

This dissertation is an attempt to deal with the complexity that is inherent in S-D logic on the one hand. The three articles investigate questions regarding resource integration and value co-creation at the micro-level. The advances in S-D logic are useful as strategic guidelines that managers of any platform should bear in mind. For example, it should be helpful to realize that a service ecosystem of a football club has many facets and interconnections between one individual actor and other actors. Also, the idea that value creation has no definite beginning and ending could be help in structuring the entire service experience and customer interaction points. That is, at different times, the focal firm should integrate resources differently and facilitate customer resource integration in different ways.

On the other hand, especially in Chapter 3.2, we argue that the continuous development of S-D logic towards a more-encompassing theory of marketing (Vargo & Lusch, 2016) makes it difficult to assess value creation processes empirically. As we argue, any researcher should choose an appropriate zoom factor, according to the relevant research question. We propose triads as a potential middle course between an excessively simplistic view of value creation and complexity which might not be realizable. For the investigation of emotions, this means assessing emotions in specific contexts and taking into account the act that individuals constantly influence each other through and over the course of consumption.

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# 3 Journal articles

## 3.1 Co-destruction of value by spectators: The case of silent protests

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**Abstract**

**Research question:** This exploratory paper aims to introduce the concept of value co-destruction in the field of sport management and research. We asked whether all groups of spectators at a sport stadium experienced value co-destruction in the same way. Moreover, we analysed how the prior expectations of the various stadium spectator groups influenced their experience of value. Our definition of value co-destruction comprises not only an actual decline in value experienced, but also the negative deviation from the expected enhancement of well-being.

**Research methods:** Value co-destruction was investigated at two German Bundesliga football games during the 2012/2013 season. Spectators of both games deliberately refused to cheer. As a result, the entire stadium remained silent for 12 minutes at the beginning of each game. We conducted qualitative interviews with different types of spectators. This allowed us to measure value co-destruction at the individual level, in line with service-dominant logic. Spectators were interviewed either before or after the game, or during half-time.

**Results and Findings:** Our results show that value co-destruction is one of many different possible outcomes of the interaction between actors in a sport stadium. Like co-creation, co-destruction mainly depends on the value expectation: interactions in the stadium that co-create value for one actor can co-destroy value for another. Our findings indicate that this holds true specifically for stadium atmosphere as one of the most important value dimensions of spectators.

**Implications:** For sport management practice, we thus recommend assessing the positive or negative value effect of the interaction processes that contribute to stadium atmosphere individually for each actor.

**Key words:** value co-destruction; service-dominant logic; stadium atmosphere; value co-creation, fan behaviour

**Introduction**

At live sporting events in sport stadia, spectators are an integral part of the entire service setting. Their behaviours and affective reactions to stimuli have a strong influence on the stadium atmosphere (Chen, Lin, & Chiu, 2013; Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2010). Sport managers aim to have a good stadium atmosphere at their venues, as it is considered to play an important role in the value creation of the entire event (Uhrich & Koenigstorfer, 2009). Through their actions (e.g. singing, waving flags, and performing choreographies) event spectators jointly shape the atmosphere that creates value for them as well as for others (Woratschek & Durchholz, 2012). This process of collaborative value creation between different actors has been described as value co-creation (Payne, Stor-backa, & Frow, 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). In line with service-dominant logic (SDL), we define value "in terms of an improvement in system [i.e., actors] well-being" (Vargo, Maglio, & Akaka, 2008, p. 149). However, stadium atmosphere cannot be viewed as a value itself, but rather as a value dimension (Woratschek & Durchholz, 2012). By value dimension, we mean a certain feature of the service that can potentially contribute to the overall value for the actors involved (Woodruff, 1997; Woodruff & Gardial, 1996). In the following, we focus on stadium atmosphere as a value dimension central to the spectators of a sport event. As such, the atmosphere cannot be provided by the stadium operator, but has to be shaped by the spectators. Therefore, spectators at sporting events are not just passive customers. Rather, they can be regarded as actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2011) and as co-creators of value from a SDL point of view (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). This interactional process between various fans, the service provider and other actors usually enhances the well-being of actors involved. These actors are part of service systems being described as "value-co-creation configurations of people, technology, value propositions connecting internal and external service systems, and shared information" (Maglio & Spohrer, 2008, p. 18). In a stadium context, actors can be the individual fan, fan groups such as home or away fans, or the stadium provider, for instance. It is worth mentioning that other actors than fans or spectators, among them athletes, officials, sponsors, media, etc. can also act as co-creators in a sport stadium setting. We focus on spectators to capture one specific aspect of the stadium service system in detail.

However, there may be situations in which supporters' contributions to stadium atmosphere do not enhance well-being with regard to this value dimension (Woratschek & Durchholz, 2012). Value co-destruction is also a possible outcome of collaboration between the different actors involved in the service process (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Plé & Cáceres, 2010;

Smith, 2013). Plé & Cáceres (2010) were the first to coin the term in a SDL context, and they define value co-destruction as "…an interactional process between service systems that results in a decline in at least one of the systems' well-being…" (Plé & Cáceres, 2010, p. 431). Since this concept has not yet been investigated in a sport stadium context, we ask whether certain spectator behaviours diminish the value that a beneficiary gets out of this value dimension. The relevance of value co-destruction for sport management was a key element of the debate in the workshops on value co-creation in sport management at the European Association for Sport Management EASM Conferences in 2012 and 2013. The idea that interactions in a service setting can also reduce the value outcome of sporting events can contribute to a significantly better understanding of the collaborative process of value creation in sporting event service settings. Sporting events without fan engagement would fundamentally change the 'sport stadium' service setting. Clearly, the concept of stadium atmosphere cannot be considered without the integration of spectator resources. Given the importance of stadium spectators for the creation of stadium atmosphere, a closer look at the value co-destruction rooted in fan behaviour is called for. To contribute to the understanding of value co-destruction, we investigated two questions in a qualitative empirical study among football spectators in a premiere league stadium:

1. Do all groups of spectators contribute to and experience value co-destruction in the same way?

2. How do the prior expectations of the various stadium spectator groups influence their experience of value co-destruction?

We start the following section with a literature review on value and value co-creation with an emphasis on the stadium context. We then give an overview of the downside of value creation. Here, we take a closer look at the literature that is closely linked to the notion that value creation may also have negative effects on some of the actors involved. We then introduce value co-destruction in the field of sport. Next, we present the design and results of our qualitative study and a discussion of the findings on value effects. The paper concludes by addressing some of the limitations of our study and suggestions for future research.

## Theoretical background

### *Value and value co-creation in sport stadia*

Traditional concepts of value creation in sport management state that the service provider (e.g. stadium operator) offers a service to the customer (e.g. spectator) (Eschenfelder & Li, 2007; Parks, Quarterman, & Thibault, 2011). Value is exclusively created by the firm and delivered to the customer in exchange for goods or money (Woodruff & Flint, 2006). In this value-in-exchange concept, which is rooted in goods-dominant logic (GDL), the seller of a service offers the customer a prepared service (Kotler & Levy, 1969). Considerable doubts about this view have been put forward by several researchers (Grönroos, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008), and this has led to an alternative view of economic exchange called SDL (Grönroos, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008).

It follows that the process of value creation in sport settings may also work in a different way. Woratschek, Horbel, and Popp introduced the sport value framework in this special issue on value co-creation in sport management which shows that the principles of the SDL can also be observed in sport management (Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2014). Their foundational premise no. 7 states that value creation in sport settings is the result of an interactional process involving different actors.

The debate on SDL has given rise to a new conceptualization of value and how it is created. First, value cannot be assessed on a global level, but can be determined individually by a concerned actor (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). Although value is co-created in a collective process, it is strongly linked to personal experiences (Helkku-la, Kelleher, & Pihlstrom, 2012; Holbrook, 1994; Vargo et al., 2008). It can be measured as the adaptability of the beneficiary (Vargo et al., 2008). Second, value in SDL cannot bet created by the firm only. Rather, value is created through an interactional process, where different actors (e.g. service provider, customers) integrate their resources (Vargo, 2009). This process is called value co-creation, indicating that value is formed jointly by at least two actors (Vargo, Lusch, Horbel, & Wieland, 2011). Moreover, service providers cannot create value independently; they can only make a value proposition that customers may accept (Vargo, Lusch, Akaka, & He, 2010). Hence, value co-creation means that all actors involved act so as to benefit from the interaction. For the sport stadium context, the stadium operator can only make a value proposition that includes the provision of catering, seating, security personnel, and so forth. While these features can be seen as good basic conditions, fans are the main creators of stadium atmosphere, which is a

very important value dimension. However, since there are also other actors involved in the value creation process, the stadium operator cannot fully control what happens inside the stadium. Following SDL, value in a sport stadium can only be created through a collaborative process called value co-creation. While the service operator and event spectators (viewed as passive customers in the old GDL paradigm) are the two basic actors involved, other actors can be the club, teams, the federation, media, sponsors, and more distant service providers such as public transport operators, etc. as these can also play a role in the collaborative process of value creation. In other words, spectators can use value propositions as they see fit to maximize their own well-being. It can thus be argued that the customer plays a crucial role in the process of value co-creation (Grönroos, 2012; Payne et al., 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). In contrast to the GDL, SDL views customers not as passive recipients of products and services created by the firm, but as resource integrators who co-create value through certain actions, or even simply as a result of their presence (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). The firm itself does not create the value or added value that can be sold to customers. Rather, the customer plays an important role in the value creation process (Vargo et al., 2011). In the case of sport management, it is obvious that customers co-create value. In sport stadiums, fans play a decisive role in the value of the experience by contributing to the atmosphere via the active support of their team (Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2012; Woratschek & Durchholz, 2012).

As we know from SDL, value can only be determined by the beneficiary. This means that the same offering may lead to a different level of value for different people (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). In a sport stadium context, fan chants may be very important to one spectator, all the while hindering the well-being of another.

***Downside of value creation***

The notion that value is something that can be both created and destroyed is not new in service research. According to GDL, the customer always diminishes or destroys value that the firm has created and offered to the customer. Here, the parts of value creation and value destruction are clearly assigned (Vargo et al., 2011). Past literature on SDL, however, has primarily focused on positive outcomes of the value co-creation process (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Nevertheless, interactions between service providers and customers might not necessarily enhance the well-being of the actors involved (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). Service management literature offers various starting points for an investigation of the downside of value co-creation.

Woodruff and Flint (2006) introduce the term devaluing, which is routed in decision-making literature (Brendl, Markman, & Messner, 2003), to describe that a service occasion between a firm and a customer does not necessarily enhance an actor's well-being (Woodruff & Flint, 2006). Devaluation may occur when consumers feel that a certain value dimension is not as important for their well-being as it once was (Woodruff & Flint, 2006). In their theoretical article, Plé & Cáceres (2010) picked up this idea to establish the construct of value co-destruction in SDL literature. From their point of view, the degree of value co-destruction may be different for the diverse actors involved (Plé & Cáceres, 2010) and cannot be measured on a global level (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008).

Echeverri & Skålén (2011) have carried out one of the few empirical studies investigating value co-destruction. They study the interaction between employees of a public transport enterprise and its customers (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011). In their view, value co-destruction occurs "when the elements of practices are incongruent – i.e. when providers and customers do not agree on which procedures, understandings and engagements should inform a specific interaction (…)" (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011, p. 367). From their qualitative group interviews, they derive five interaction value practices (informing, greeting, delivering, charging, and helping) that can either lead to value co-creation or value co-destruction. A key notion we adopt from this research is that value formation does not necessarily lead to value co-creation. However, value co-destruction is also a possible outcome of the same practice.

Smith (2013) examined how value co-destruction affects customers' resource integration. She used the critical incidents technique to study customers' resource loss (e.g. time, money, knowledge) or diminishment and its consequences for subjective well-being in a shopping centre context with customers. She showed that resource loss is directly linked to the loss of well-being. Smith (2013) further suggests that value co-destruction occurs even if only the potential enhancement of well-being hasn't been met (Smith, 2013) - a notion that is also important for our perspective on value co-destruction.

***Value co-destruction in sport stadia settings***

An important limitation of previous studies is the research context, which could hinder transferability to a sport stadium setting. The actors who interact in a sport stadium strongly differ from those in other service contexts. In a sport stadium, service provider(s), athletes, spectators, media, sponsors, etc. all need to be involved in the value formation process. Stadium atmosphere can only be created when these actors integrate their resources. Thus, the value

dimension atmosphere is strongly linked to actors' value co-creation in a sport stadium setting. This value dimension either does not exist in other service settings or is designed in a different way. Moreover, value is not only context-dependent, but depends also on the individual (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). This view is rooted in the perspective of Vargo & Lusch's (2008) foundational premise no. 10, which states that the decline (or enhancement) of well-being is experiential and contextual and thus can only be "determined by the beneficiary" (Vargo & Lusch, 2008, p. 7). Thus, we look at value phenomenologically on an individual level. Smith (2013) also argues that value co-destruction occurs when the desired value has not been created because prior expectations have not been fulfilled (Smith, 2013). Building on Plé & Cáceres (2010), Echeverri & Skålén (2011) and Smith (2013) we define value co-destruction in sport stadia as an interplay between actors in the sport stadium context. This process results in a diminishment of well-being compared to at least one service actor's expected enhancement of well-being. Here, we understand expectation as a broad concept that refers to an individual's perception of the probability of a certain state in the future (Coye, 2004; Robinson, 2012). Regardless of the importance of individual expectations, value co-creation or co-destruction is always a collective process involving different actors.

It is worth noting that value co-destruction may not only refer to a single value dimension (e.g. atmosphere). Co-destruction of one value dimension can easily cause another value dimension (e.g. physical skills & aesthetics of the game) to gain or lose importance for the individual. This point is important, as value co-destruction should not be viewed simply as the opposite of value co-creation. It follows that value does not need to have been co-created before it can be destroyed. Individuals expect a certain value dimension to be met. If the expected state does not occur, we define this phenomenon as value co-destruction. At sport stadia, fans may expect the stadium atmosphere to enhance their well-being. If the level of stadium atmosphere is below the level expected, this may result in value co-destruction.

Current research mainly investigates value co-destruction in dyadic provider-customer settings. As a result, the idea of a linear service profit chain is implicit and central to this research stream. Service settings, even customer-frontline employee interactions, are far more complex than this view might suggest. While the collaborative actions of one actor may be value creating for a second actor, they may also destroy value for a third actor. The same actions also have the power to provoke value co-destruction. Actions that are potentially value co-destructing do not necessarily need to be based on a misuse of resources, as Plé and Cáceres (2010) suggest. Actively withholding resources that contribute to the creation of value in

the stadium is another possibility. For fans in particular, withholding typical behaviour ultimately changes the value outcome of the service process. To our knowledge, previous research mainly focuses on the dyadic provider-customer interface. This linear and dyadic view seems to be more closely related to the GDL, which sees firms as 'providers' and customers as 'receivers' of operand resources (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 7).

It is important to stress that 'sport fans' constitute a group of actors that cannot be viewed as a homogenous group of spectators that has only one way of using its operand resources, and has only one perception of created or destroyed value. From sport management, we know that fans can be divided into many sub-groups (Hunt, Bristol, & Bashaw, 1999; Stewart, Smith, & Nicholson, 2003). We suggest that individual fans have their own value expectations. Home and away fans, for instance, strongly differ in what use of operand resources they would regard as value creating. The chants that create value for home fans may have a value destroying effect on away fans (Woratschek & Durchholz, 2012). These interactions are governed solely by spectators, as service providers can hardly intervene and 'manage' these processes. Still, an SDL perspective, home and away fans in our examples integrate their resources. This shows that research on value co-destruction has to go beyond the consideration of dyadic interactions between firms and customers. Indeed, we must take a closer and more individual look at different subsamples of the 'fans' as actors.

Furthermore, the current literature views value co-destruction solely as a risk of the interactional process, and thus as the purely negative outcome of a collaboration. This notion shines through in the terminology used, with words like 'misuse' and 'sabotage behaviour' (Plé & Cáceres, 2010). This perspective may be based on the dyadic provider-customer relationship that has been central to prior studies. Here, one actor – typically the firm – strives to create value, and one actor sabotages this goal by misusing resources. We, however, adopt a different perspective. Co-destruction for one actor may be co-creation for another. Many service settings are not limited only to two opposing actors (provider-customer). For this reason, many different constellations of value co-creation and value co-destruction may occur. A network of actors involved in the service process could be used as a metaphor to describe this setting (Chandler & Vargo, 2011). Due to the networked design of the process, we suggest that value creation and destruction cannot be fully captured by assessing the value outcome on the global level of one actor in the process: There is no "average fan" in a stadium who experiences an "average value outcome". Instead, all groups of actors must be considered individually. To investigate whether co-creation or co-destruction is dominant for one actor in the

stadium service process, an examination of each individual fan is necessary: in a sport stadium, one can imagine two fans sitting next to each other, but noisy fan actions may have completely different effects on the individuals.

Service quality literature has long stressed the importance of consumer expectations in determining the level of satisfaction with a service (Bateson, 2002; van Leeuwen, Quick, & Daniel, 2002). In line with this premise, earlier contributions on value co-destruction have indicated that actors' prior expectations can have a major impact on value formation (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Plé & Cáceres, 2010). The outcome of the interactional process is thus predetermined by actors' expectations of different practices (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011). Echeverri & Skålén (2011) empirically show that greeting someone in a service encounter context is generally considered a friendly, co-creating behaviour. However, it can also be perceived as annoying when the other actor is in a hurry (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011). The same actions that create value for one actor may destroy value for another, and this merely depends on consumers' expectations and their perception of the situation.

Summing up, we see the stadium as a place where many resource integrators come together and integrate their resources. Stadiums cannot be seen as dyads where two actors come together. Rather, they are platforms where many actors integrate their resources.

**Method**

We chose a qualitative approach to address our research questions as we are just beginning to understand the different facets of value co-destruction in our academic field. Sport management issues regarding value co-destruction might differ from the same issue in another context because of the unique nature of sports (Parks et al., 2011; Trenberth, 2012). Qualitative research is generally well suited for research in sport management (Downward, 2005; Frisby, 2005), and this is especially true for a new research topic such as value co-destruction. Our research design is thus mainly exploratory in nature: we chose a qualitative research method to gain a deeper understanding of how individuals behave in a certain situation (Amis, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Considering interindividual perspectives of spectators is essential for our research design. Past empirical research on value co-destruction has focused on dyadic employee-customer interactions (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011) or on customers' decline in well-being in a shopping center research context (Smith, 2013). Value co-destruction in sport stadia may differ from the aforementioned findings, as the context is very different. The service

provider's value proposition differs, as does the environmental setting. Moreover, other actors are involved. Following Vargo and Lusch (2008), value is strongly dependent on the context (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). For this reason, we try to introduce value co-destruction in a sport stadia setting. Qualitative methods may be best suited to our research context because of the exploratory nature of the study. As Smith (2013) did, we asked respondents what they expected from the service and how this expectation was met.

***Sample and data collection***

In our qualitative research design, we selected two German Bundesliga football games during the 2012/2013 season. We chose these two games because fans of football clubs in Germany's top two divisions had planned a silent protest (in German: 'Stimmungsboykott') against tighter security guidelines. The Deutsche Fußball Liga's (DFL) draft of these guidelines, called 'Safe Stadium Experience', was put to vote in the league assembly on December 12, 2012. For this reason, a majority of fans throughout Germany collaboratively expressed their annoyance by remaining silent for the first 12 minutes and 12 seconds on three match days leading up to that date. With this action, they aimed to demonstrate how the football experience would change without fan support. Philipp Markhardt, spokesman of the 'pro fans' fan network, explained the reach of this fan movement: 'At each stadium of the German Bundesliga's first and second divisions, active fans will remain silent for the first 12 minutes and 12 seconds of matches on three game days in a bid to remove the atmosphere from the stadiums' (Ruf, 2012). The proposed new security guidelines would have a major impact on fans, as they comprised several changes regarding video surveillance at the venues, security checks at the entrances, and ticket allocation. The protests were organized by the fan clubs of different football clubs of the German Bundesliga. The movement aimed to bring the supporters of different teams together in a collaborative effort with a common aim – and these were fans who would normally not interact as a 'team'. This fan movement presented an ideal opportunity to answer our research questions: Firstly, it is almost impossible to create a positive stadium atmosphere without the collaboration of the fans. Withholding this contribution can thus be considered co-destructive behaviour. Furthermore, with the stadium being a platform for value creation, we were able to observe the effects of value co-destruction beyond the levels of the fans as actors. Second, the silent fan protest is a good example of the 'co' in co-creation. Irrespective of their affiliation to a specific group, virtually all fans throughout Germany decided not to collaborate in value creation, but to destroy the stadium atmosphere by

refusing to engage in any fan activities (e.g. singing or cheering) during the symbolic first 12 minutes and 12 seconds of the games.

Finally, we conducted 32 qualitative interviews (either with one or two fans) with open-ended questions and a total of 40 spectators. Open questions were used to avoid stereotypical answers. The mean duration of the interviews was 3 minutes and 10 seconds, and all interviews were conducted by trained interviewers. Based on the literature on stadium experience as well as on our preconceptions about the relevant aspects of the service process and value co-destruction in the stadium, we prepared an extensive interview manual with key guiding questions. However, we ensured that the interview manual did not contain interview questions dealing with the topic of silent protest: such questions may have biased the respondents' answers, as the topic of stadium security was high on the media and public agendas at the time of the interviews. If the topic had been actively brought up in the interviews, the salience of the issue would have been inflated artificially. By using different interviewers, we tried to ensure diverse results, as this criterion is particularly important in exploratory research (Amis, 2005). To capture short-term value co-destruction effects, we conducted the interviews not only after the game (14 inter-views), but also during the half-time (10 interviews). In addition, we conducted eight interviews just before the match began in order to get an idea of the different fans' expectations. We chose to use different phases of the games for the interviews in order to minimise the impact of the matches themselves (e.g. goals, fouls, cards) on responses. Furthermore, we conducted interviews at different stands inside the stadium, as we aimed to capture the views of as broad a range of fans as possible (e.g. away fans, families, hardcore fans, etc.). This also had a positive impact on the range of opinions regarding the silent protests. For the purpose of our research, conducting interviews with different groups of spectators was indispensable, as value perceptions can also differ between these heterogeneous subgroups (Woratschek & Durchholz, 2012). In selecting the qualitative interview method, we intended to establish consistency between the research aim and method. Value co-destruction is a new concept in sport management and therefore needs to be investigated in an exploratory manner.

**Data analysis**

Two researchers independently conducted a content analysis with MAXQDA®. They reached complete agreement on the main codes and the set of subcodes. The few inter-coder disagreements on specific codings were resolved by consensus.

In a first step, four main codes were created:

1. characteristics of the stadium experience
2. factors influencing the stadium atmosphere
3. the meaning of fan actions
4. opinions on the silent protest

We then went through each interview and assigned the text according to the different codes (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Once this was done, each of the two researchers created subcodes on the basis of the selected text. After matching these subcodes, the text out of the main codes was assigned to the subcodes. Examples of subcodes for code 1 included atmosphere, other fans, and live effect. Subcodes of the stadium atmosphere (code 2) were fan actions, game, stadium, etc. We were able to further define the meaning of fan actions with the second-level subcodes, which included sense of community, is part of the game, support for the team, and others. Opinions on the silent protest were segmented mainly into the positive, negative, or neutral positions that our informants had expressed.

Next, we analyzed the fourth silent protests code to gain insights into the value destructing/creating aspects of the protest. We then mirrored fan statements to their prior expectations regarding stadium experience (codes 1-3). In so doing, we created a table that served to link each fan's quotes across code 1-3 to her/his opinion of the protest (code 4).

**Results**

Our findings on the co-destruction of value indicate that five groups of spectators can be identified based on their opinions of the protest. We juxtaposed spectator opinions with their perception of the well-being that they usually feel as a result of the stadium atmosphere. Results show that fans' experience of value co-destruction (or creation) does not depend solely on the fans' collaborative behaviour (withholding fan activities), but also on their prior expectations. This key finding was consistent at both games and at the different points in time during the games we analyzed.

The first value co-destruction group we identified consisted of spectators who missed the atmosphere during the silent protest. Prior to going to the stadium, these fans expected to experience the great stadium atmosphere. These spectators missed the usual atmosphere and thus described the first 12 minutes as ‘horrible’ (F8), ‘boring’ (F12), ‘crap’ (F18), and ‘strange’ (F14). They said that ‘watching football like this is no fun at all’ (F8). Such negative emotions indicate that their well-being was significantly reduced. They thus experienced value co-destruction.

The second group included fans who felt they were not allowed to support their team during the silent protest. These fans came to the stadium to support their own team as well as to share the team’s feelings of suffering and joy (which of course is an example of value co-creation at a football stadium). As a result, these fans also experienced a kind of value co-destruction when the hardcore fans stopped them from supporting their team. They were ‘annoyed’ because they ‘actually come to a football game to support the team and not just to stand there like a stuffed dummy (F10).

In contrast to these two groups of fans, both of which experienced value co-destruction due to the protest, we found two other groups that experienced value co-creation during the first few minutes of the game. As expected from our individual conception of value effects, the reasons we identified were quite different for both groups. The third group of fans experienced value co-creation because they were able to concentrate better on the game during the protest as a result of the silence. Prior to coming to the stadium, they expected to watch a game live. They described the silence during the protest as ‘pleasant’ (F12/F24), ‘something different’ (F24) and ‘a new experience’ (F24) which allowed them ‘to concentrate better on the game than usual’ (F21).

The fourth group experienced value co-creation because they felt that they could display their ‘supporter power’ by not supporting their team. Members of this group came to the stadium to demonstrate a position of power. Their aim was to show the German football authorities that there was no atmosphere without fans. They wanted to set a signal ‘against the anti-fan culture’ (F37) and ‘to show them what a stadium is like without any fans’ (F5). This value effect appeared already before the kick-off. Here, we can see that fans’ expectations and value effect (value co-creation) go together.

A fifth group did not care about the protest and its consequences on the atmosphere, and thus experienced neither co-creation nor co-destruction. They did not miss the fan actions because

they ‘do not need this’ (F3), as they reported. Prior to coming to the stadium, these fans expected only to watch the game. For fans with this prior experience pattern, whether or not the other fans remained silent during the protest did not matter. As a result, for this group of fans, value was neither co-created nor co-destroyed.

Table 1 provides an overview of the five groups mentioned above.

Table 1. Overview of the indicated groups.

| **Group No. 1:** | **Spectators who missed the atmosphere during the silent protest** |
|---|---|
| Expectations | Great stadium atmosphere<br>*Exemplary quote:* “Yes, simply the atmosphere. You get that all live” (F18). |
| Adaptive response | Angry because the special stadium atmosphere was manipulated<br>*Exemplary quote:* “Well, at first it was really crap: 12 minutes and 12 seconds of silence wasn’t at all a nice thing to experience. If the fans don’t create a good atmosphere, it’s really pretty simple: I might as well stay home” (F18). |
| Value-effect | Value co-destruction |
| **Group No. 2:** | **Spectators who felt that they were not allowed to support their team during the silent protest** |
| Expectations | Supporting their own team<br>*Exemplary quote:* “Well, you feel the same emotions as the team: you suffer with them, and you’re happy for them. This creates a sense of community. That’s what the atmosphere in the block creates” (F10). |
| Adaptive response | Angry because of the hard-core fans’ position of power<br>*Exemplary quote:* “In the first 12 minutes, some people tried to support (their team) a little. But the hard-core fans immediately stopped them. I thought that was out of order” (F10). |

| | |
|---|---|
| Value-effect | Value co-destruction |

| **Group No. 3:** | **Spectators who concentrated better on the game during the protest** |
|---|---|
| Expecta-tions | Watching a game <u>live</u><br><br>*Exemplary quote:* "That's something completely different from watching the game at home" (F21). |
| Adaptive response | Satisfied due to the silence that enabled them to concentrate better on the game<br><br>*Exemplary quote:* "But I have to admit that it was actually kind of pleasant (…) I was able to concentrate better on the game than usual" (F21). |
| Value-effect | Value co-creation |

| **Group No. 4:** | **Spectators who felt that they could demonstrate their 'supporter power' by <u>not</u> supporting their team** |
|---|---|
| Expecta-tions | Demonstrating a position of power<br><br>*Exemplary quote:* "We are going to create the (right) atmosphere, of course. I'm not able to do this on my own. I need other people too" (F30). |
| Adaptive response | Satisfied because of the power they exercised over the atmosphere<br><br>*Exemplary quote:* 'Today there will be nothing in the first 12 minutes. And then *they* will see what this means' (F30). |
| Value-effect | Value co-creation |

| **Group No. 5:** | **Spectators who did not care about the protest and its consequences on the atmosphere** |
|---|---|
| Expecta- | Live event |

| | |
|---|---|
| tions | *Exemplary quote:* “The experience of seeing a game live, the event” (F27). |
| Adaptive response | No adaptive response because they felt no difference<br><br>*Exemplary quote:* “Actually, I don’t care at all. Whether or not they are silent in the first twelve minutes is all the same to me” (F27). |
| Value-effect | Neither co-creation nor co-destruction. |

**Discussion**

Results from our exploratory qualitative study indicate that not all fans are equal when it comes to value co-destruction in a stadium context. Our findings show the different patterns that lead from the same fan behaviour via different prior expectations to different value co-creation or co-destruction outcomes. However, value co-creation or value co-destruction would never happen without the integration of resources of various actors at a football stadium which has been outlined by the sport value framework. We find value co-destruction to be the result of an interplay of collaborative activities of fan groups and the prior expectations of the individual spectator. Thus, a further finding of our study is that value co-destruction as result of social processes between different groups in a stadium can be measured on an individual level. These findings are in line with the suggestions of the SDL and have consequences for sport stadium management. If we view the stadium as a service setting within which the atmosphere is the main driver of value, then its value also changes for other actors, such as players, trainers, or broadcasters, when the atmosphere is manipulated.

Group four is a special case. After we conducted the interviews, we saw that these fans must have been the initiators of the silent protests because they had an exact idea of how the boycott would impact stadium atmosphere in the first 12 minutes. Moreover, these fans are at the heart of the clubs' fan communities and they normally start singing, roaring, or waving flags long before the kick-off. As a result, when we conducted the interviews with this group, their expectation had already been partially fulfilled before the game started. These fans were very experienced and knew what to do to get something that they considered to be good stadium atmosphere. They were able to foresee quite well how their boycott would affect stadium atmosphere. If we take a closer look at group four, we see that value is strongly linked to prior experiences. Creating the stadium atmosphere enhances the fans' self-esteem and provides them with a sense of power, or helps improve their own status in the fan scene (Plé & Cáceres, 2010).

Group five was the source of another very important finding. Here, we see the essentials of value co-creation or co-destruction in sport stadia settings. For this group, the silent protest had no consequences at all. For them, the value dimension atmosphere is simply not relevant and does not change anything in terms of value co-creation or value co-destruction. Moreover, these results support the premise that value is generally multidimensional. Otherwise, the well-being of these spectators would not be enhanced by their stadium attendance.

If the atmosphere as a main driver of value is manipulated, this may lead to a co-destruction of the value that can be achieved in a sport stadium service process. Our findings show that the resource integrators' perspective (in our case, their different prior expectations) determines whether co-destruction occurs or not. These results match with one of the foundational SDL premises (FP10), namely that "value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary" (Vargo & Lusch, 2008, p. 7). The results of our investigation suggest that this does not only apply to value co-creation, but also to value co-destruction.

From a conceptual perspective, our research cautions against describing value co-destruction as a dyadic linear process analogue to GDL. Rather, destroying one person's value may create someone else's. Furthermore, the findings illustrate the need to draw a distinction between individual actors in the 'sport stadium' service process. Spectators at a sport stadium are by no means a homogenous group when it comes to either value co-destruction or value co-creation. Rather, the value effect is highly individual since it depends on the actors' experiences. This result corroborates the normative statement of Cova, Dalli, & Zwick (2011), who said that "the experience of consuming a product or service must vary from one consumer to another because it is, by definition, non-standardized" (Cova, Dalli, & Zwick, 2011, p. 233).

**Limitations and future research**

Due to the exploratory nature of our research, we must concede that our study is burdened with some limitations. For instance, we only looked at the short-term effects of value co-destruction. We asked respondents before and after the game as well as during the half-time and only captured value co-destruction effects at these times. Future research should investigate long-term effects of value co-destruction, as these effects may be important for serial sport events such as football matches. Value formation effects could last over time, or they could be (over) compensated by other events and drivers of fan well-being throughout the game. The question is, do fans remember such incidents after a period of time, or does such a protest lead to value co-creation after a while?

Another limitation of our research relates to the period between the silent protests at the beginning of each game and the interviews with the spectators (half-time or after the game). Due to the fact that the protests were of a relatively short duration of 12 minutes and 12 seconds, maybe spectators evaluated them in a positively biased way ex-post.

Future research should investigate the value co-destruction process and its individual and social aspects itself more deeply as it is a very important issue in sport stadia. Focus groups, retrospective thinking aloud-techniques and other research methods may enable spectators to relive the stadium experience. These methods may help researchers to gain a better understanding of the underlying group dynamics of value co-creation and value co-destruction.

Although we investigated a unique fan protest at two matches, value co-destruction induced by the audience is by no means a singular phenomenon in sport stadia settings. Recent events in European football stadia have shown that such incidents have a major influence on shaping the value propositions of service providers. Extreme incidents such as fan riots, games behind closed doors, pitch invasions, crowd trouble, or burning off flares are no longer uncommon and should be considered by sport managers. Besides such extreme incidents, value co-destruction may be an inherent part of the audience. 'Naturally' occurring value co-destruction may include aggressive chants by home fans that reduce away fans' well-being (Woratschek & Durchholz, 2012).

Another limitation is that we only looked at spectators as a very important group involved in the value formation process. However, since we assessed value at the individual level, future research should look more deeply into this heterogeneous group of actors. As we can see from our results, the same event can have very different effects on value co-creation or value co-destruction. Other actors, such as athletes or sponsors, should be taken into account. The interactional process of co-creation or co-destruction must also be further investigated.

Our results show five groups that can be distinguished from one another based on the value experienced. However, we wish to emphasize that the groups we described based on expectations and value effects should not be understood as a representative fan classification. Rather, we show how prior expectations can influence the value that people perceive when such a situation arises and thus determine whether fans experience value co-destruction or value co-creation.

We responded to Echeverri & Skålén's (2011) call to study value co-destruction in another field than they did. Our findings confirm that value co-destruction in a sport stadium setting is indeed different from value co-destruction in a face-to-face service occasion. Here, our results are in line with the notion of SDL that the context plays a major role when it comes to value co-creation and value co-destruction. This study further shows that value is co-created and co-

destroyed in a social process, but can be assessed on the individual level of each beneficiary involved.

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## 3.2 Value-influencing practices and triadic co-creation in team sports ecosystems

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**Abstract**

**Research question:** The aim of this paper is to reveal which and how certain practices in the team sports sector unfold their co-creative nature in triadic actor constellations. We propose triads as a middle course between the various complexities of a team sports ecosystem, without losing the benefits that go beyond a mere dyadic interaction.

**Research methods:** We conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with 22 experts of various kinds in the German Bundesliga. In this context, market-facing (e.g. firms), public (e.g. clubs) and private resource (e.g. individual spectators) integrators come together to create value collaboratively and form a team sports ecosystem.

**Results and findings:** The study reveals four different value-influencing practices that actors in a team sports ecosystem employ to co-create value in triadic constellations. Our results show that actors engage in *implementing, informing & discussing, performing* and *signaling* to integrate their resources. We find that actors may have different roles in triads, and that mutual resource integration among actors can be designed as triadic interactions through *simultaneous, sequential*, and *actor-led* triadic value co-creation.

**Implications:** Our study contributes to the theory of value co-creation in team sports, as we identify four broader categories of interactional practices in which actors from different domains engage to co-create value, as well as three different types of triadic value co-creation. This framework should help managers of team sport entities to more effectively manage the relationships among actors and focus on the main value-influencing practices.

**Key words**

team sports ecosystems, triadic value co-creation, value-influencing practices, resource integration

**Introduction**

It is generally accepted that phenomena in sport management can be explained accurately through the lens of service-dominant logic (S-D logic). Using the sport value framework, ideas rooted in S-D logic have been applied to sports management (Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2014). The authors argue that, in sport, various actors such as event organizers, customers, volunteers, federations, public bodies, form networks and co-create value. The *service ecosystem* perspective of S-D logic further expands the notion of a dynamic and interactive value co-creation among various actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2011). This approach builds on the foundational premises of S-D logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008), but incorporates a sociological perspective (Giddens, 1984) to study relationships and interactions among various actors. This perspective emphasizes the embeddedness of micro-structures (e.g. dyads) within more complex meso- and macro structures (Chandler & Wieland, 2010). Vargo and Lusch (2016) describe this development of S-D logic towards more interconnections between market actors as "*zooming out"* (p. 5). Team sports are characterized by a multitude of social groups of actors that are embedded in larger systems, which leads to increased complexity. Value co-creation can also be studied from a service ecosystem perspective in the field of team sports (Tsiotsou & Vargo, 2015). There are complex structures of relationships, practices and institutions that frame exchange among actors in this context.

Value in the field of sport cannot be created by a single actor (e.g. an event organizer), being created by various actors who integrate different resources. Event organizers only make value propositions; customers play a decisive role in this framework as they are core resource integrators in many sport settings (e.g. creating stadium atmosphere). This shifts the focus away from the firm's output towards many different actors. No one actor has all the resources so that value-creation through networks is important to overcoming the problem of incomplete resources (Akaka, Vargo, & Lusch, 2012). This actor-to-actor orientation automatically leads to a more dynamic and network-oriented view of value creation, because various actors rely upon the resource integration of other actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2011). We believe that S-D logic's ecosystem view can be beneficial for researchers, as well as for managers in sport management, as a meta-theory that guides us towards a more holistic, interactive, dynamic, interconnected, multi-faced and reciprocal understanding of value creation.

However, these theoretical advances of S-D logic towards more-encompassing theory of marketing (Vargo & Lusch, 2016) lead to a very complex set of actors and practices. The result is a complexity of service ecosystems that is difficult to handle for both managers and for researchers. One explanation of these challenges is S-D logic's inherent philosophy that value

creation is not limited to a single service encounter, but continues over multiple ones (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). The scope of value co-creation is thus open-ended (Ballantyne & Varey, 2006). As this claim is theoretically important for our understanding of value creation, it is also a major challenge in research and managerial practice. Closely linked to the idea of infinite value creation is the fact that ecosystems themselves are also infinite to a certain extent (Akaka, Vargo, & Lusch, 2013). Each individual actor in a network (e.g. a football spectator) serves different social roles and thus is connected to many different social networks (e.g. fan club, family, workplace, local sports club) where resources of the individual can be integrated. As Akaka et al., (2012) sum up: "*Like a service ecosystem, the process of value co-creation has no definite beginning or end.*" (p. 44).

This leads to the question of the boundaries of a particular context, as value is always context-dependent. The context of value co-creation is an integral part of value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2008) and especially time and space have been found to constitute key determinants of any context (Helkkula, Kelleher, & Pihlstrom, 2012; Jaakkola, Helkkula, & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2015). Service ecosystems are not limited to any temporal or spatial boundaries (Lusch, Vargo, & Tanniru, 2010; Vargo & Lusch, 2011). However, transactions are bounded, and represent temporary resource exchanges (Vargo & Lusch, 2011), so there is a need to investigate single relationships and practices of value co-creation. In this paper, we propose a triadic view on value co-creation that bridges the micro-level and the meso-level of team sports ecosystems. Thus, we propose a middle course between the complexity of ecosystems and the simplicity of dyadic relationships. Triads go beyond the mere dyadic interaction between actors, as it is the simplest form of social network (Simmel & Wolff, 1950). The basic unit of such a network is a triad, which builds a link between three actors (Choi & Wu, 2009a, 2009b). Triads provide insights at the micro level that can be generalized to the larger ecosystem (Chandler & Vargo, 2011). In the team sports ecosystem, triadic constellations of actors are ubiquitous. For example, a sponsor, the sponsored entity (e.g. an athlete) and the sponsor's target audience form a triad (Dalakas & Levin, 2005). As value co-creation does not follow a linear value chain, but is structured as a branched network of connections between actors (Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998), the triad may be the basic unit of value *co*-creation analysis. Thus, the triad is the connecting link between the micro-level of analysis, which refers to value creation between different individuals or organizations, and the meso-level of analysis, which has a broader perspective on the network of relationships. We believe that this might help both empirical researchers and managers to reduce complexity without losing much of the benefits of S-D logic's ecosystem perspective.

With our exploratory study, we investigate value-influencing practices in triadic constellations of actors. We analyze triads through an S-D logic ecosystems lens in order to better understand the dynamic realities and underlying mechanisms of micro-level interactions (Akaka et al., 2012). The aim of this paper is to design a framework of triadic constellations of different market-facing, public and private actors in the team sports sector which co-create value. We consistently incorporate the view that neither the firm nor the customer alone can create value. We offer a framework for managers to assess the co-creative nature of relationships between various actors. We propose that the triadic view, which is already part of social network analysis (Wasserman & Faust, 1994), may provide insights into whether actors outside the triadic relationship are also affected. We derive theoretical as well as practical implications that managers in team sports ecosystems can implement.

## Theoretical background

### *Value and value co-creation in team sports ecosystems*

Recent publications in the field of sport management acknowledge the highly interactive nature of value co-creation (Gerke, Desbordes, & Dickson, 2015; Uhrich, 2014; Woratschek et al., 2014). According to this notion, sport cannot be 'produced' in linear manner and simply 'offered' to customers. Value cannot be created inside the boundaries of a single firm; rather, the customer plays a crucial role in the co-creation of value. In the context of team sports, multiple actors co-create value as stated in FP10 of the sport value framework (Woratschek et al., 2014). Following the S-D logic and the sport value framework, value is created within a network of actors.

A shift from a relatively static value *chain* to a more dynamic value *network* seems appropriate for analyzing value co-creation with many actors (Cova & Salle, 2008; Peppard & Rylander, 2006). In networked structures, value is created through a complex process of interaction between firms, customers and other stakeholders (Allee, 2000; Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998). Given that no roles are specified in the co-creation process, the S-D logic literature has established the term 'actor' for those entities that integrate their resources. Value co-creation is not limited to the boundaries of the firm. Instead, 'value-in-exchange' takes place beyond the boundaries of a single firm (Vargo & Lusch, 2011). The value of relationships and interactions among actors has been referred to variously by researchers in the field of marketing (Frow & Payne, 2011): value network (Akaka & Chandler, 2011; Allee, 2000; Lusch et al., 2010; Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998), value net (Parolini, 1999), value constellations (Normann & Ramírez, 1993), service ecosystems (Frow et al., 2014; Vargo, 2009; Vargo & Lusch, 2016;

Wieland, Polese, Vargo, & Lusch, 2012). What all conceptualizations have in common is that they move away from a linear value chain to a more complex system of multiple actors who create value collaboratively.

The service ecosystem perspective of S-D logic goes beyond other approaches, because it views networks as embedded in a broader ecosystem (network-to-network-approach) (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Chandler & Wieland, 2010). A service ecosystem is defined as a '*relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors that are connected by shared institutional logics and mutual value creation through service exchange*.' (Lusch & Vargo, 2014, p. 161). The approach extends specific components and assumptions of S-D logic towards socially constructed contexts (Akaka & Vargo, 2015; Vargo & Lusch, 2011). The service ecosystem approach more strongly incorporates the idea that the co-creation of value is dependent on relational and social contexts (Vargo & Akaka, 2012). Several conceptualizations of value such as *value-in-context* (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Woratschek et al. 2014), *value-in-social-context* (Edvardsson, Tronvoll, & Gruber, 2011), *value-in-the-experience* (Helkkula et al., 2012) and *value-in-cultural-context* (Akaka, Schau, & Vargo, 2013) reflect this development. Value-in-context incorporates the idea that value not only emerges from the direct use of a resource ('value-in-use'), but imagined value, stories and narratives also determine actual and future value. The value-in-cultural-context concept places a strong emphasis on symbols and social components as essential for value co-creation (Akaka et al., 2014; Akaka, Schau et al., 2013; Akaka et al., 2012). The later conceptualization is clearly inspired by Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). Recent publications stress the similarities between CCT and S-D logic regarding the conceptualization of value and experience: "*CCT and S-D logic are ready allies in understanding value as experiential and contextual*" (Jaakkola et al., 2015, p. 192).

This conceptualization applies well to the context of team sports. Especially the notion that cultural and social resources can play a significant role is important for understanding team sports at the national and global levels. Moreover, signs, symbols and social roles have been found to be essential in value co-creation (Akaka & Chandler, 2011; Arnould, Price, & Malshe, 2006; Löbler & Lusch, 2014). For instance, fans draw on these resources when they wear team merchandising, play a social role as a supporter of a team, or use context-specific sports language. Beyond that, the service ecosystem stresses the socio-historic aspect of contexts in order to better understand how social and cultural structures develop (Akaka, Vargo et al., 2013). Referring to the above example, the history of a club and its associated wins and losses, championship victories, and suspenseful matches with rival teams may be valuable

resources for fans. Imagined value and relived experiences come into play. Thus, actors in a team sports ecosystem rely on the resources of other actors on various levels. Clubs and teams need opponents to create a competition or a league system. Team sports are characterized by so-called coopetition, which means that teams and clubs collaborate although, they are opponents on the pitch (Woratschek et al., 2014). This is evident when it comes to competitive balance (Horowitz, 1997; Zimbalist, 2002) or internationalization of leagues (Ratten & Ratten, 2011).

In this paper, we adopt this broad conceptualization of value with all its facets. This also takes into account that value creation through the lens of S-D logic has "*no definite beginning or end*" (Akaka et al., 2012, p. 44). Service encounters are preceded by other encounters, and more will follow in the future, which raises the issue of the timely boundaries of value co-creation (Heinonen et al., 2010; Jaakkola et al., 2015). Fans have being visiting a stadium for 20 years surely integrate resources in a different manner to first-time visitors, because they have experienced a variety of matches, know the social rules of the team sports setting (e.g. specific shouts or activities) and are more attached to the club. Adding to this notion, a 90-minute football match is associated with many other services and occasions. From a temporal perspective, it seems obvious that away fans, for example, often have a long journey before and after the match. As a social activity, however, their travel creates value for them and reinforces bonding with the club.

When we think about the spatial dimension of value co-creation, the sport ecosystem may be regarded as a globally unbounded entity at the macro-level (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Tsiotsou & Vargo, 2015). Each actor is loosely coupled with any other actor through more or less distant links (Vargo & Lusch, 2010). That is, a fan in the US who is blogging on Premier League's match day and is temporally and spatially separated still integrates his own resources and co-creates value in the network of his favorite club. Note, again, that the context of value co-creation is not limited to time and space as key dimensions, but is extended by relational, socio-historic, institutional, and imagined aspects of context (Akaka & Vargo, 2015; Akaka, Vargo, & Schau, 2015).

Although the S-D logic in its original form does not incorporate the idea of value co-destruction (Plé & Cáceres, 2010), the notion of negative outcomes of interactive value creation has indeed been picked up by a few researchers in the field of service management (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Plé & Cáceres, 2010; Prior & Marcos-Cuevas, 2016; Smith, 2013) and has also been applied to sport management (Stieler, Weismann, & Germelmann, 2014). There are interaction practices that can lead either to value co-creation or value co-destruction (Ech-

everri & Skålén, 2011). That is, the same practice, situation or stimulus may result in different outcomes (Carù & Cova, 2015; Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Stieler et al., 2014).

***Resource integration and practices in team sports ecosystems***

In the investigation of relationships and interactions through the lens of service ecosystems, *practices* play a major role (Akaka, Schau et al., 2013). Practices are reoccurring behaviors which are employed by individuals to shape their environment*: 'A practice is thus a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood.'* (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). Practices play a major role in consumption (Holt, 1995). Recent developments of S-D logic step towards social constructivism and incorporates reoccurring practices as important means of value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). For example, practices play a major role in the formation of markets, as certain activities reoccur and thus shape the market environment (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2007). In a service ecosystem, individuals construct, shape and transform their social environment through practices in a given framework constituting various institutions (Akaka, Vargo et al., 2013). In team sports ecosystems, actors with very different kinds of operant resources come together and integrate their resources through practices. Actors come from different domains (private, public and market-facing) all are needed to co-create value. No actor alone has all the resources to create value and actors' resource integration is reciprocal (Vargo & Lusch, 2010). Fans, for example, employ their own set of practices to create value together (Uhrich, 2014). Firms, such as stadium operator or sponsors surely integrate other resources.

Value co-creation is influenced by institutions and resource-integrating practices (Akaka et al., 2012). Institutions in this context can be seen as rules, norms, laws and contracts that are created and negotiated between various actors in the service ecosystem. Resource integration itself is regarded as the key practice in which actors engage to co-create value (Vargo & Akaka, 2012). Through practices and evaluations in a specific context, resources are transformed into value (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012). In this respect, Vargo and Lusch (2016) propose that practice theory is related to S-D logic, because it shifts the focus from an output orientation to processes and social activity. What practice-theory approaches have in common is that they try to reveal how individuals and a social structure interfere with each other (Warde, 2005). Thus, practices help to demonstrate how value is formed under the assumption of a complex service ecosystem environment (Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

The service ecosystems view of S-D logic goes hand in hand with a broader conceptualization of context. In the recent past, research on practices in market environments has contributed to

our understanding of value co-creation in different contexts (Carù & Cova, 2015; Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Frow et al., 2014; McColl-Kennedy, Cheung, & Ferrier, 2015; McColl-Kennedy, Vargo, Dagger, Sweeney, & Kasteren, 2012; Uhrich, 2014). For example, Carù & Cova (2015) show that queuing, as a collective practice, can have a positive effect when it is regarded as a shared ritual. On the other hand, customers might view it as annoying, because of the time wasted.

***Triads as fundamental components of team sports ecosystems***

Previous researchers in sport management acknowledge the importance of a networked view of relationships between actors in a sports market (Quatman & Chelladurai, 2008). They emphasize that it is useful to view sport as a conglomerate of relationships between different entities and that the network perspective has '*a focus on concrete social structures rather than isolated individual entities or dyads*' (Quatman & Chelladurai, 2008, p. 342). Service ecosystems consist of multiple layers of networks (Chandler & Vargo, 2011). From a sociological perspective of network structures, the dyad is the simplest way to constitute a relationship between actors. The focal actor ('ego') is connected to another actor ('alter') through a direct link (Prell, 2012). At the next level of relationship formation, the connecting link between a dyad and the other actors is the triadic analysis. Such triads are the simplest form of social group (Moody & White, 2003). Moving from a dyadic to a triadic perspective takes into account indirect ties between three actors (Simmel & Wolff, 1950). The role of triadic constellations among individuals in the group formation process was outlined by Simmel (1950), who argued that '*the triad as such seems to me to result in three kinds of typical group formations. All of them are impossible if there are only two elements.*' (p. 145). Heider (1946) also reported a triadic view of interconnected entities (Person X – Another person O – Object Z) in an intrapersonal context of cognitive balance. This view was later adapted and extended into a more general conceptualization of interpersonal connections (Cartwright & Harary, 1956; Newcomb, 1953). Social network analysis is an instrument for identifying the actors within a network and their relational bonds, in order to design the entire system (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Possibly the most straightforward way to analyze the relationship between three actors is graph theory, which builds on nodes and ties (Holland & Leinhardt, 1970). These linkages among actors are often graphically illustrated in a complex web of lines and nodes to show how the network is constructed (Love & Andrew, 2012; MacLean, Cousens, & Barnes, 2011; Quatman & Chelladurai, 2008). Simmel (1950) argues that the change from a dyad to a triad

not only means a quantitative change, but also influences how the actors interact with each other qualitatively.

These combinations of three actors are also deemed relevant in the business environment (Choi & Wu, 2009a, 2009b) and extend the classical dyadic relationship between firm and customer to a more holistic approach to value co-creation (Akaka, Vargo et al., 2013). Triads allow for generalization from a micro level to the entire network (Choi & Wu, 2009a). The analysis of triadic constellations of actors has been applied in several studies outside the context of team sports (Nätti, Pekkarinen, Hartikka, & Holappa, 2014; Vedel, Geersbro, & Ritter, 2012; Wuyts, Stremersch, Van den Bulte, Christophe, & Franses, 2004) such as service triads (Modi, Wiles, & Mishra, 2015; Wynstra, Spring, & Schoenherr, 2015; Zhang, Lawrence, & Anderson, 2015). The prototypical *service triad* consists of a buyer, a supplier and the customer, so that each actor has a direct or indirect connection with any other actor (Wynstra et al., 2015). This constellation requires other management strategies than dyadic firm-customer interaction, because the firm regularly communicates through a third-party service provider with the customer (e.g. call-center or maintenance services) (Wynstra et al., 2015). Other triads involve firms only, such as the *buyer-supplier-supplier* triad in a firm's supply chain (Choi & Wu, 2009b; Wu, Choi, & Rungtusanatham, 2010). In this triad, the coopetition aspect we know from team sports also plays a central role between two supplying firms and negatively influences suppliers performance (Wu et al., 2010). Triadic analysis has been found to deliver additional insights that go beyond the dyadic level, especially in the business-to-business context (Choi & Wu, 2009a, 2009b; Vedel et al., 2012). Research on triads in the business environment has focused on various aspects, such as structural balance among actors (Choi & Wu, 2009b), the principal-agent problem (Zhang et al., 2015), different types of triads (Zhang et al., 2015), processes in triads (Salo, Tähtinen, & Ulkuniemi, 2009), and also value co-creation (Nätti et al., 2014) (see Wynstra et al., 2015 for an extensive review of research on triads in the operations management and supply chain management literature). Nätti et al. (2014) identify specific practices that facilitate value co-creation in a triad consisting of a property housing firm, a property manager and a customer.

Regarding interaction between actors as prerequisites for value co-creation in triads, there are two conceivable options. The first is that value co-creation requires direct interaction between actors, which excludes indirect interaction through mere presence, for example (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). The second view is inspired by the communication theory that claims "one cannot *not* communicate" (Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967, p. 5). Transferred to the field of value co-creation, indirect interaction can also result in co-creation. In this paper, we

adopt the latter view. Two actors who do not have a direct link between each other can be connected via a third actor (a mediator) and create value together. For example, two firms sponsor the same club, but they use the same type of communication with the audience (e.g. banner advertising inside the stadium). Although they do not interact directly with each other, the club has to coordinate the promotional and leveraging activities of the two firms. Taking this further, as they act on the same platform, they have to share the attention of the audience.

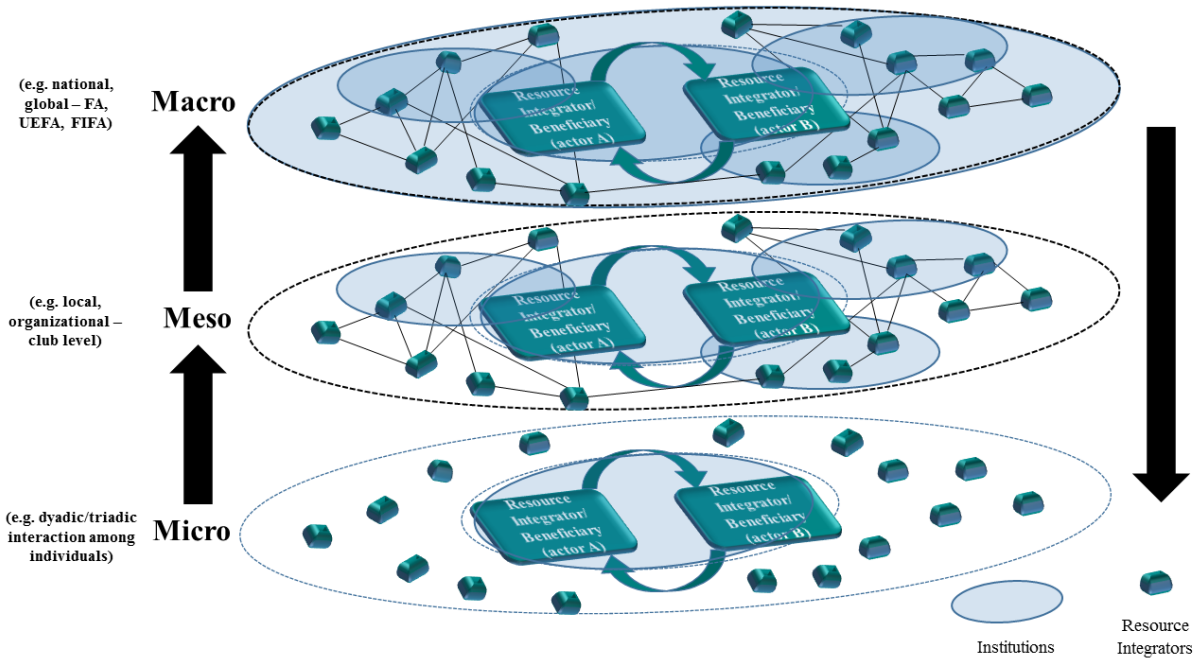
Triadic analysis among individual actors seems to be more appropriate in a service ecosystem with regard to their role in the value co-creation process. First, the service ecosystems perspective within S-D logic stresses the importance of viewing value creation as an interactive process between multiple actors (Vargo, Wieland, & Akaka, 2015). In team sports ecosystems, there are multiple actors or groups of actors from various backgrounds that integrate diverse resources. Thus, triads in team sports ecosystems can assume multifaceted shapes and relationships. It should be noted that, from an S-D logic point of view, this relationship is reciprocal rather than unidirectional, which means that firm and customer create value jointly (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Value in that sense does not result from a transaction from one actor to another, but from the relationship between at least two actors (Normann, 2001). Second, the firm-customer relationship is not isolated from other actors in the ecosystem, but actors are tied together through both closer and more distant links (Vargo & Lusch, 2010). In team sports ecosystems, a limited firm-customer perspective would be inappropriate, because any relationship among actors is embedded in a larger network and actors rely on the resources of others. Thus, the dyadic perspective is limited in that it neglects the embeddedness of interactions at the meso- and macro-levels (Chandler & Vargo, 2011).

In the case of professional football, the club's network of stakeholders is embedded in a larger league system, which is in turn embedded in a football association's network at a national (e.g. FA) or international level (e.g. UEFA or FIFA). Figure 1 illustrates the different levels of analysis (micro, meso, and macro); At the micro-level, the analysis refers to the direct interaction between individuals who integrate resources and co-create value. The meso-level of analysis takes into account that these interactions occur within a larger network inside and outside the organizational boundaries of the club. It should be noted that the club itself can be regarded as a value network, because it consists different sections and might be non-profit (e.g. mass sports) or profit-oriented (e.g. professional football team) at the same time. The macro-level is the spanning team sports ecosystem at the national or even global level, where different club networks overlap and create value in a complex environment such as a sports league. Triads

can be viewed as the basic form of a larger network, as they build a tie between a dyad and the third actors, which represents the larger collective (Choi & Wu, 2009a).

In this paper, we argue that the triadic level is a promising way to incorporate the ideas form the service ecosystem view of S-D logic, so as to analyze value co-creation in team sports ecosystems.

Figure 1. Embeddedness of actors in the team sports ecosystem from a club perspective (adapted from Akaka, et al., 2013).



## Methodology

### *Research context*

We chose a football match day in the German Bundesliga as a research platform, because many market-facing, private and public actors come together at such an event to integrate their mutual resources. Furthermore, it is not a dyadic firm-customer interaction, but increases value co-creation for multiple actors who integrate their resources. The setting fitted the criteria of a service ecosystem for various reasons. Value co-creation does not take place within the boundaries of a single firm (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) and this is especially true for match day occasions which involve customers as well as firms, namely fans, players, coaches, sponsors, journalists, media, associations among others. Spectator sports are viewed as collective hedonic services (Ng, Russell-Bennett, & Dagger, 2007), which enables spectators of a sport event to interact in various ways and create value jointly (Holt, 1995).

Our research focused on a single match day, as is a typical service encounter where reoccurring interactions take place and where these actors integrate their resources. We focused specifically on how co-creation takes place in triadic relationships between actors who integrate their resources during a day football match. By doing so, we looked into the relational practices to identify their value-creative nature. In this study, we want to explore which general practices various actors in the professional football team sports ecosystem in Germany employ, in order to create value through interaction. We then link these practices to the idea of triads as essential building blocks of team sports ecosystems.

### *In-depth interviews*

Qualitative research methods have been deemed useful in the field of sport management, as a means of delivering useful insights that go beyond quantitative approaches (Amis, 2005; Frisby, 2005; Shaw & Hoeber, 2016). Studies within (Stieler et al., 2014; Uhrich, 2014) and beyond (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012) the field have employed qualitative methods to explore multiple facets of value co-creation more deeply. In this paper, we use qualitative semi-structured interviews to address our research goal. Although semi-structured interviews seem to be a standard method that is very frequently used (Shaw & Hoeber, 2016), we believe that they enable us to find out more about the structure of the service ecosystem and to gain deeper insights into how different actors interact. Firstly, the open-ended interviews enable us to talk about prepared topics without losing the flexibility of this approach to incorporate and discuss issues the respondents come up with. Secondly, re-

spondents talk about their personal view and experiences which conform to the S-D logic notion that value is highly individual and can only be determined by the beneficiary (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). Thus, we intentionally accept that answers are individually colored and that respondents talk about issues they find personally relevant. Thirdly, in our context, interviews with experts (Trinczek, 2009) enable us to explore settings and issues that we could not access through participatory observation (e.g. security meetings of the police that are highly sensitive).

The interviewing procedure followed the guidelines proposed by McCracken (1988). We conducted 22 qualitative semi-structured interviews with various actors in the ecosystem, and the average interview duration was 51 minutes. The actors and their affiliations are listed in Table 1. We selected individuals from different job domains who integrate their resources differently. The assumption behind this selection was that these individuals serve as social hubs and have many interaction points with other actors. As fans and spectators play a crucial role in value co-creation in team sports (Uhrich, 2014; Woratschek et al., 2014), our sample comprises individuals from this domain, such as two fan-relationship managers of a club or an executive board member of a fan club. In addition, we interview three different types of fans (ultra-fans, supporters, and normal fans). In our study, supporters differ from fans, as these spectators are organized in fan club, whereas normal fans are just followers of the game. The fan groups are characterized by different levels of identification with the team, as well as by their supporting engagement. Note that our study intentionally incorporates experts from firms and organizations, as well as customers, so as to investigate broad interactional practices in team sports ecosystems that are not limited to a certain group of actors (e.g. fans). The respondents were contacted via email or at the stadium directly (fans).

The procedure followed an interview guide with a broad initial stimulus question to *'break the ice'*, as these individuals are generally not used to answering interview questions. This was done to start the interview with something familiar for the responded to talk about to create a pleasant interview situation (Trinczek 2009). The initial stimulus question was: '*Please tell me about how a normal match day looks like for you?*' The respondents were then asked with *whom* they interact during a match day and *how* they interact with these people. The interviewer asked then deeper questions concerning interactions with other people and how the respondents interact with other actors, until redundancy was achieved. This section was followed by a section about what works well and what does not, in order to explore the interview partner's evaluations about their relationships with other actors. The interviewing guide was adjusted slightly to the specific context of the respective interview partner. We did not talk

Table 1. Background criteria of respondents

| Expert | Actor | Organization | Position/Responsibility |
|---|---|---|---|
| E1 | German Football Association Representative | German Football Association | German Football Association Cup |
| E2 | German Football League Representative | German Football League | Consultant |
| E3 | Club-Management Representative | Bundesliga Club (1st German Professional Football League) | Sales Manager |
| E4 | Agency Representative | Sports-Rights Agency | Marketing Consultant |
| E5 | Journalist | Regional Newspaper | Sports-Journalist |
| E6 | Sponsor | Sponsor of a Club of the Bundesliga (1st German Professional Football League) | Employee Marketing |
| E7 | Player | Bundesliga Club (1st German Professional Football League) | Player |
| E8 | Catering Representative | Catering Partners at Several League Clubs | Food & Beverage Operations Manager |
| E9 | Moderator | Sports Television Channel | Moderator |
| E10 | Stadium Operator Representative | Stadium Operator | Management of Stadium Boxes, Special Events, Customer Relationship |
| E11 | Policeman | Preservation of Evidence & Arrest Unit | District Officer |
| E12 | Policeman | Fan Subculture Expert Team | Member |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| E13 | Security personnel | Security service firm | Employee |
| E14 | Representative of a Fan Club | Fan Club | Executive Board Member |
| E15 | Fan Relationship Manager | Bundesliga Club (1st German Professional Football League) | Fan Relationship Manager |
| E16 | Fan Relationship Manager | Bundesliga Club (2nd German Professional Football League) | Fan Relationship Manager |
| E17 | Ultra-fan | Ultra-fan club | Capo (=leader of an ultra-fan club) |
| E18 | Ultra-fan | Ultra-fan club | Member |
| E19 | Supporter | Fan Club | Member |
| E20 | Supporter | Fan Club | Member |
| E21 | Normal Fan | *no affiliation* | - |
| E22 | Normal Fan | *no affiliation* | - |

explicitly with the interview partners about triads, but more generally about their relationships with other actors in the ecosystem, to avoid biased answers.

**Data analysis**

The data was transcribed and coded by two researchers with MAXQDA®. The general procedure of the data analysis followed the fundamental steps of categorization, abstraction, comparison, and integration, as proposed by Spiggle (1994) and McCracken (1988). The researchers coded and categorized interactional practices in the first step. At this stage, researchers coded independently and focused on practices that involved more than one actor indirectly or directly. Secondly, researchers formed higher-order practices with a specific focus on those that involve three actors. This was a necessary step, in order to find overarching practices that are not tied to specific situations or actors. The practices were discussed until agreement on practices and triadic pattern was achieved. The overall aim of the procedure was to find general practices and how they create value in triadic actor constellations. Integration ("mapping of relationships between conceptual elements" (Spiggle, 1994, p. 495) was an important step in the data analysis, in order to reveal the triadic constellations and associated practices within the team sports ecosystem.

## Findings

The qualitative data revealed four general and overarching value-influencing practices in team sports. Firstly, our results show that actors engage in *implementing, informing & discussing, performing* and *signaling* in triadic constellation. Secondly, we found that the practices described have different effects from the triadic perspective. We found *simultaneous*, *sequential,* and *actor-led* co-creation to be present in team sports ecosystems. The data reveals both that actors or groups of actors have different roles in triadic constellations and how they interact with others. Sometimes, an actor alone initiates value co-creation through resource integration (actor-led triadic value co-creation). This actor engages in a certain practice (e.g. performing) and influences other actors to integrate their resources actively or passively. Other forms of resource exchange can only occur when three actors integrate their resources together (simultaneous triadic value co-creation).

### *Value-influencing practices*

*Implementing* is a practice that includes a variety of activities that are carried out on the match day. This practice involves a variety of different actions that have been planned before the actual event, and is employed by many actors in the team sports ecosystem. Implementing stresses the fact that the match day is a platform in team sports where actors actively want to integrate their resources to stimulate exchange. Some actors also integrate their resources through implementing outside the temporal frame of the match day (e.g. a sponsor's photo shooting with players of the club). We found that implementing can take shape in various forms, and various actors engage in this practice:

- Implementation of sponsor's leveraging activities
  E6: "Well this was, yes, it was awesome, because of the idea that we came up with and planned ourselves, and everything worked out as we expected. And that the fans liked it and also acknowledged a little that it was an awesome idea. One gets a bit more known through all this."
- Implementation of choreographies from fans
  E15: "There are many examples, well I'll put it this way, the fans are responsible for creating choreographies for example. Then some clever company had the idea that we should try choreography in the business area one day. Well, no… I just say no, they shouldn't, let the fans do the choreographies, it is not an advertising medium, it won't work, it's just counterproductive."

- Implementation of special events at the VIP boxes.

  E10: "And there are match days when we have to engage more strongly in coordination, because our catering firm plans a special event, a unique catering experience for the clients […]."

*Informing & discussing* involves the transfer of information between two or more actors. We add 'discussing' to the practice of informing, to stress the reciprocal interaction between the actors. In the case of a match day, informing & discussing involves a majority of actors in place, including the stadium operator, catering team, sponsors, players and others. Informing & discussing is not only relevant on the match day, but also before and after the service encounter (match day) when actors align their activities or when they build up routinized ways of exchange. Note that informing is a value-influencing practice that has also been proven relevant in other settings (Carù & Cova, 2015; Echeverri & Skålén, 2011). The following encounters involve informing & discussing in the team sports ecosystem:

- Security staff and police meetings before the games

  E13: "Depending on the risk category of the respective match, members of the security staff coordinate their activities."

- New guidelines or rules implemented by the football federation

  E1: "I have to be prepared for all the questions that could be asked. I have to find a good way to communicate with all those involved, with clubs, TV companies, broadcasting companies, and marketers. That way, I make everyone feel that their concerns are taken seriously."

- Information flow from the stadium operator to the sponsors (e.g. about the schedule of an activation activity)

  E10: "It's good to know what they plan at an early stage, so that we can align our own activities. This involves promotion, giveaways, and display material, so our facility managers can do their staff planning properly. These issues are really important."

Many actors inside and outside the stadium engage in *performing.* As a practice, performing has been identified as fundamental in collective service settings (Carù & Cova, 2015). They describe it as "*presenting an artistic work or other entertainment*" (p. 286). However, in our context, presenting is not limited to customer performances. Probably, the most conspicuous practice inside a football stadium is the athletic performance of two teams at the center of the entire service setting. Of course, as one of the main actors, the individual player also engages in a certain type of performance. Performing also involves the football fans who engage in

joint activities, singing, chanting, or dancing around. For these fans, collaboratively jubilating clearly creates value. Mostly customers who want to enjoy the hedonic collective experience engage in a type of performance.

- Performance of players on the pitch

  E7: "Of course, when we play well, the atmosphere at the home games is much better than when we perform poorly. When we are behind, the atmosphere will probably not be that good."

- Performance of the fans on the stands (e.g. collective activities)

  E6: "From a sponsor perspective, I'd say it's important that the fans create a good atmosphere. Especially when they support and cheer on their team, when they perform choreographies, because that is important for the all the people we bring to the match. We usually do not bring our own staff to the matches, but business clients or lottery winners, and for them, it is really impressive to see what's going on."

- Performances of other groups of actors during half-time shows, before the whistle, or in the VIP boxes

  E6: "The match starts at 3:30 pm, but the fans come to the venue at 1:30 pm, because they know that something is being offered, also by the sponsors. And they like the event that surrounds the match."

*Signaling* is a practice that is intended to show others something through symbols, gestures, behaviors or mere presence. We found that policemen with their helmets, bullet-proof vests, batons etc. signal security on the on hand side, but can also be provocative for die-hard fans. Through their security signaling practice, they show that this is a safe stadium for visitors. On the other hand, signaling is an important practice in the domain of the fans, such as merchandising articles (e.g. jerseys, flags, or scarfs) of the club, as well as self-made fan equipment (e.g. banners in the stands), because they show belonging to a certain group and strengthen team identification. Beyond that, some items are designed to transport a specific message and target a certain group of other fans (e.g. rival fans). The following examples illustrate how actors engage in signaling in team sports ecosystems:

- Police signaling security outside and inside the stadium

  E4: "They [police] try to demonstrate presence. In fact, that is a double-edged sword, because, as I've just said, many fans feel provoked by the martial appearance and impression."

- Fans clothing and merchandising articles signaling belongingness to the club

E20: “A flag is an ‘eyecatcher’ and others see what’s on it [e.g. the club’s logo]. You will be more recognized as a group of fans.”

- Ultra-fans signaling superiority over rival fan groups
  E17: “Members of normal fan clubs do not value fan equipment so much as ultra-fan organizations. If one ultra-fan club steals fan equipment [e.g. captures the flag of the other organization], the item will be presented in the stands.”

***Triadic patterns of value co-creation***

*Simultaneous triadic value co-creation* describes all actors of a triad engaging in the same practice and jointly co-creating value at the same time. The focal actors affect each other reciprocally and concurrently. The key characteristic of this triadic pattern is that they create something on a meta-level they were not able to achieve alone. The result is something that two actors alone could not achieve. Actors gain from each other when the others also integrate their resources through practices. For example, a thrilling stadium atmosphere is created through at least three different actors (home fans, away fans, players) that engage in performing. In this case, through reciprocity of simultaneous resource integration, actors are directly affected by the action of focal other actors, so that they might encourage each other (e.g. through the process of emotional contagion). Three actors or group of actors jointly engage in the same practice during a particular period of time.

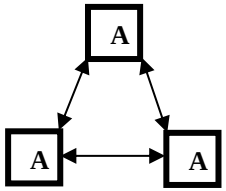
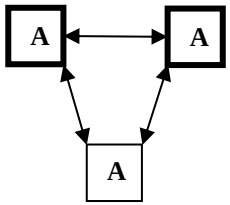
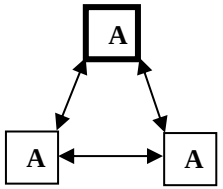
*Sequential triadic value co-creation* starts with the interactional practice between two actors in a dyad. This interaction of both actors has an effect on a third actor accordingly. Two actors in a dyad engage in practice and the result automatically affects a third actor directly or indirectly. Sequential triadic value co-creation is thus a two-step process. The third actor is not directly involved in the initial value co-creation practice. For example, police and security personnel engage in informing and discussing, so as to align their activities and responsibilities inside the stadium. The group of fans is only affected passively, because they are not directly involved in the interactional practice between the actors. Still, the fans are an important part of this triad, as police and security personnel ensure security for the fans inside the stadium.

*Actor-led triadic value co-creation* entails one actor engaging in a certain practice alone and this might affect two other actors. Thus, the focal actor is the initiator of interaction and value co-creation. The focal actor actively integrates his own resources. For example, public authorities pass new regulations about financing the police during the match day (informing and discussing). If clubs have to cover the costs for this service, this also affects fans, because the

ticket prices may rise. If one actor engages solely in one practice, co-creation at the triad level is a result of indirect resource exchange. This could result in further interactions between the other two actors that the focal actor initially did not intent. The focal actor starts with resource integration and the other actors are affected indirectly.

Table 2 illustrates examples from our data on how the four value-influencing practices create value in triads. The bold lines surrounding an actor means that this actor plays an initial role in the triadic value co-creation. The double-headed arrow between the squares illustrates reciprocal interaction between actors.

Table 2. Value-influencing practices and triadic value co-creation

| Value-influencing practices | Triadic constellations of actors | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Simultaneous triadic co-creation   | Sequential triadic co-creation   | Actor-led triadic co-creation   |
| Implementing | The resources of three actors are needed at the same time to implement a pre-designed activity.<br><br>Example: Stadium operator, the catering firm and the club implement a special VIP event. Resources from three firms are needed to carry out the event. | Two actors jointly implement an activity and influence the third actor accordingly.<br><br>Example: Two fan clubs protest against the football federation (e.g. because of rising ticket prices). | One single actor implements a pre-planned activity mainly with his own resources and the other two actors are influenced passively.<br><br>Example: Sponsoring activities (e.g. free drinks in front of the stadium) |
| Informing & discussing | Simultaneous triadic co-creation occurs when three parties share and exchange knowledge at the same time. | Two actors exchange information in a dyadic constellation and the result affects a third actor. | One actor informs two other actors about a certain regulation, activity etc. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Example: Meeting before the game with police, security personnel and club representatives to discuss security issues and inform each other. | Example: Clubs and football association discuss new ticket price regulations and fans are affected respectively. | Example: New regulations approved by the public authorities that affect clubs and firms. |
| Performing | A triadic constellation is present when the resources of three actors are needed at the same time to stage a performance | Sequential triadic performing refers to two actors that co-create a game. | One actor engages in performing and thus influences two other actors. |
| | Example: Fan groups jointly create a choreography and show, for example, a large cover with the logo of the club in the stands. | Example: Two fans groups (opposing or allied) perform chants with reference to each other. This could mean that the fan group in one stands shouts and the other response to this. | Example: A player on the pitch engaging in athletic performance (e.g. penalty kick) |
| Signaling | Individual actors jointly engage in signaling to convey a message through signs and symbols. | Two actors engage in signaling and either explicitly or implicitly refer to each other through signs and symbols. | One actor engages in signaling and influences two other actors through signs and symbols. |
| | Example:<br>Sport fans and groups of fans constantly engage in signaling to differentiate themselves from each other. This not only refers to home and away fans, but also to different fan clubs. | Example: Two fan groups with specific symbols that refer to each other (e.g. crossed out club logo) | Example: Presence of a group of policemen standing in front of the stands. |

## Discussion

### *Theoretical implications*

The service ecosystem approach of S-D logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2011), as well as the sport value framework (Woratschek et al., 2014) stress the highly interactive nature and dynamic value co-creation among various actors. However, team sports are characterized by a variety of elements such as coopetition, volunteerism, profit vs. non-profit orientation, or highly engaged customers (e.g. ultra-fans) that induce multifaceted interactions among actors in the ecosystem. However, a framework is lacking that highlights how value co-creation between three actors constituting the triad, is the fundamental component of any network. Research on triads from other research streams focuses on specific triads, such as the buyer-supplier-supplier triad (Choi & Wu, 2009b). Our framework proposes four overarching practices that describe value co-creation in the team sports ecosystem, regardless of the actor's background.

This study contributes to the theory of value co-creation in team sports ecosystems in several ways. It is the first study which refers explicitly to triads as an integral component of team sports ecosystems. We specifically designed our sample heterogeneously, in order to incorporate interactional practices from fans, firms, organizations and other actors that are often deemed relevant in team sports (e.g. sponsor, media). Of course, these actors do very different things, but their re-occurring activities aggregate into four value-influencing practices in triads: *implementing*, *informing & discussing*, *performing* and *signaling*. In this respect, our study is in line with other research that offers broad categorizations of practices on how value-in-use is co-created (Ballantyne & Varey, 2006) or how markets are formed (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2007).

We show how market-facing, public and private actors co-create value in a triadic constellation. Our data reveals that there are different broader categories of practices regarding how value can be created in triadic constellations of actors. Furthermore, we present value co-creation in triads as a middle course between the complexity of ecosystems and the simplicity of service interaction in dyads. Triads are the simplest form of a larger network. So any practices that can be found in triads are also likely to be found in more complex structures.

The focal actor in actor-led triadic co-creation also serves as the connecting entity between two other actors. As such, this actor has a mediating role between actors who may not even know each other. On an abstract level, this actor could represent various ones, so that any actors is connected with any other actor of the ecosystem. Only value co-creation analysis beyond dyads can reveal such interdependencies. We contribute to a more holistic understanding of value co-creation in the team sports sector, as our study highlights triads as a middle course

between complexity and simplicity. In addition, the analysis of triadic interaction offers a useful way to understand interdependencies between actors.

***Practical implications***

Our framework suggests that there is a variety of possible constellations of resources integration in triadic constellations. This refers not only to different practices of how interactions between actors create value, but also that actors have different roles in such a triadic setting, with regard to resource integration. Managers have to determine what role certain actors play in a triad to understand how they can create value collaboratively. Actor-led co-creation is a prominent form in the sense that one actor initiates value co-creation through a certain practice, mainly alone. An advantage of this form is that one actor decides when and how his own resources are integrated. However, the actor has only limited control over the interaction between the second and the third actor in the triad. The focal actor in actor-led triadic co-creation also serves as the connecting entity between two other actors. As such, this actor serves as mediator between resource-integrating actors.

Sequential triadic co-creation starts with an interactional practice between two actors. Actors in this constellation should take into account the consequences for the third actor, as he is not directly involved in the initial interactional practice. The question arises as to who the third actor in the triad is, and who is actually affected by the practice. Sometimes, this is not clear and management efforts should identify actors who might be affected and determine whether it is beneficial to integrate these actors at the initial stage. Simultaneous triadic co-creation requires the most coordination efforts in a triadic setting, because resources have to be aligned and coordinated to co-create value.

Stieler et al. (2014) show that the same practice, activity or stimulus may affect different actors in unexpected ways. Extending this notion, focal actors in triadic value co-creation should think about their own role as an initiator of value co-creation, in terms of how their practices affect relationships between the two other actors. As Uhrich (2014) highlights, some activities fans engage in cannot be controlled by the management of a team sport entity, because they take place on platforms that cannot be accessed. However, from a team sports ecosystem perspective, actors are connected with each other, potentially through a third actor (e.g. a fan relationship manager or a social group). Management activities should then focus on the role of an actor, in order to target this group and potentially collaborate with or influence them.

A potential approach to dealing with complexity in service ecosystems is to employ a network orchestrator (Velu, 2015) to coordinate resource integration in team sports, through the prac-

tice of informing and discussing. The stadium operator or the club itself usually comes close to this role, as they have many interactions with various actors. However, according to our framework, this would also incorporate indirect value co-creation effects through a third actor. As actors and resources are often widespread throughout a team sports ecosystem, it is important to constantly monitor the relationships and interactions in the entire ecosystem.

***Limitations and future research***

We believe that the four practices identified in this study are well-suited to explaining value co-creation between various actors from the ecosystem. The universal nature of the practices may indicate that they are also basic interaction forms between actors in other networks. A limitation of our study is that we focused on a specific time of measurement. Thus, we did not incorporate the dynamic nature of interactions and how relationships and interactional practices evolve over time. However, this might be beneficial to better understanding how team sports ecosystems develop.

As with any qualitative study, we selected a specific research setting, so that it might be worth investigating whether these practices occur between actors in other settings as well, and how cultural and social differences influence these practices. Another potential limitation is the selection of respondents. Although they were carefully selected to ensure heterogeneity of the answers, one could argue that we omitted important ecosystem actors.

We identify three types of triadic constellations of actors. Future studies might further investigate how triads are formed and how value is created in these constellations. In this respect, we did not focus much on the co-destructive nature of practices, so that this aspect could be a future research endeavor. To expand our framework, future research might incorporate elements of triads, such as the balance among actors, actor power, or interaction frequency. As our analysis is still at the micro-level, the next step would be to show how different triadic constellations are connected with each other, and how triads are embedded in the meso-level of the network.

A useful topic for future research would be to investigate the institutional arrangements that govern resource integration and practices in triads and ecosystems in general, as they are an integral component of the value-in-cultural-context concept and S-D logic in general (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Especially team sports ecosystems consist of many soft and hard contracts (Vargo & Lusch, 2010) that are ideal bases for analysis. For instance, in team sports, social norms of fans (e.g. unwritten laws or moral codes of fandom) meet the requirements of profit-oriented firms (e.g. contract between the club and the sponsor comprising specific rights).

These institutions do not necessarily co-exist peacefully, but might conflict with each other, for instance, in the case of ticket prices for football throughout Europe.

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## 3.3 The ties that bind us together: Feelings of social connectedness in socio-emotional experiences

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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** This paper focuses on similarity cues that may strengthen bonds among crowd members, and that serve as "glue" between individual group members, in the context of collective football-viewing events.

**Design:** Study 1 is a qualitative field study that focused on the subjective socio-emotional experiences of event visitors, whereas Study 2 tested the hypotheses quantitatively.

**Findings:** The qualitative pre-study revealed a variety of discrete emotions that consumers experienced through the course of consumption. Apart from individualistic emotions, respondents reported feeling common bonds with fellow crowd members. Respondents employed a variety of emotion terms to express this experience. Moreover, we found different types of similarity cues which strengthen feelings of connectedness among crowd members in a football-watching scenario. Collaborative actions and team identification, as a sports-specific variable, foster a feeling of social connectedness that in turn directly positively affects consumer enjoyment.

**Research implications/limitations:** Experiencing a feeling of social connectedness may serve as a starting point for a long-term relationship with the service itself, or with associated brands. Future experimental studies might isolate the antecedents of a feeling of social connectedness and thus enhance our understanding of consumers' emotional states during the course of hedonic consumption.

**Practical implications:** Service providers should encourage consumers to perform collaborative actions, as consumers potentially infect others and start a ripple effect.

**Originality:** This paper differs from existing work on crowds, in that we focus on similarity cues as antecedents of feelings of connectedness among group members.

**Key words**

feelings of social connectedness, social emotions, similarity cues, sport marketing

## Introduction

> "The color, noise and entertainment that accompany the celebration of Holi bear witness to a feeling of oneness and sense of brotherhood. The festival brings home the lesson of spiritual and social harmony!!"
>
> *www.festivalofcolorsusa.com*

Collective events such as music concerts, festivals or sport events are manifestations of social life. The Holi Festival of Colors mentioned above is a worldwide series of collective music and running events that borrow from the Hindu tradition. Members of such crowds experience strong collective emotions and the socio-emotional experience unites them. In his classic and influential work on collective behavior, LeBon (1896) noted the overwhelming emotional power of such crowds by stressing the "*exaggeration of the sentiments of crowd*" (p. 54). His view of crowd settings was rather negative, arguing that the individual gets carried away through a loss of awareness and that primitive forces take control of feelings and behavior. By contrast, (Durkheim, 1912/1976) emotional collectives have strong in-group bonding ("*collective effervescence*" – p. 216). In his work on ritualistic gatherings, he proposed that symbols and expressions foster a shared emotional state. Accordingly, there is a need for managers of mass hedonic services to understand how members of a crowd perceive certain social cues and that these cues may lead to hedonic value. Research on socio-emotional experience in crowd setting is sparse in the field of consumer and service marketing, with one notable exception, namely Drengner et al. (2012).

In this research, we focus on similarity cues that may strengthen bonds among crowd members, and that serve as "glue" between individual group members. We draw on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and its derivates, namely self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987; Turner et al., 1994) and crowd behavior theory (Reicher, 1984, 1996, 2001) to explain how similarity cues foster a feeling of social connectedness among members of collective gatherings. This paper differs from existing work on crowds in that we focus on similarity cues as antecedents of feelings of connectedness among group members. In the first of the two studies comprising this project, we explore the emotional experiences of visitors of different collective emotional gatherings in the sports sector. We focus on how individuals express their emotions verbally and on which similarity cues might serve as antecedents of a

shared emotional state. The hypotheses derived from the qualitative study and the existing literature were then tested in Study 2 in the same setting.

**Theoretical background**

Since Holbrook & Hirschman's seminal article of 1982 (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982), understanding hedonic experiences is one of the key foci of consumer marketing (Jaakkola et al., 2015; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). The social dimension of hedonic experiences is a vital aspect of consumption (Arnould & Price, 1993; Holt, 1995), particularly bearing in mind that emotions have social causes and consequences (Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Parkinson, 1996). Yet, little is known about collective occasions at which individuals gather, in order to experience a period of their lives jointly for hedonic purposes (Ng et al., 2007).

Early approaches to crowd behavior stress the intense emotional spirit of such collectives, as well as their primitive functioning (LeBon, 1896; McDougall, 1920). Collectives of individuals are not equivalent to a psychological crowd. An external observer might view a gathering as a homogeneous group of people, but individuals inside the crowd only become a unit when they share a common social identity. In crowds, members do not lose their own identity, as LeBon (1896) suggested. Rather, as social identity theory notes, members of the crowd shift from their personal to a more social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). That is, the individual does not become "*mindless*" (LeBon, 1896) or extremely deindividualised (Zimbardo, 1970). Instead, crowd members tend to share values and beliefs with other members of group.

In larger collectives, individuals do not lose their identity, but shift their existing identity towards a new one (Reicher, 1984, 1996, 2001; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, & Reicher, 1987). Self-categorization theory proposes that similarity among people leads to in-group cohesiveness through a salience shift from personal to social identity (Turner et al., 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). The process of self-categorization leads to feelings of the connectedness, as individuals make judgments about similarity and dissimilarity, especially with reference to a potential out-group. Similarity and synchronization in crowd settings have been described by Durkheim (1912/1976) as key determinants of group formation outcomes. Through self-categorization, individuals bring themselves into line with others. Environmental cues may stimulate such an in-group bonding (Diener, 1980). In turn, similarity among group members is a strong predictor of group favoritism (Brewer & Silver, 1978).

As social identity theory is often regarded as cognitively-oriented (Brown, 2000), intergroup emotion theory states that emotions experienced in social groups are different from individu-

ally experienced emotions, and are a function of group identity (Mackie et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2007). Emotional experience in group settings is influenced by how the individual perceives similarity among individuals. Group level emotions and emotional ties among group members are important social functions for ensuring group stability (Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Parkinson, 1996).

Research on collective gatherings in Durkheim's tradition has shown that intensive in-group bonds have numerous positive effects. Intragroup unity leads to empowerment and a positive overall affect (Drury & Reicher, 2009; Hopkins et al., 2016), sense of relationality (Neville and Reicher, 2011), well-being (Tewari et al., 2012), proximity towards other group members (Novelli et al., 2013), identity fusion (Swann et al., 2009; Swann et al., 2012), and emotional effervescence (Páez et al., 2015). The positive effects of social gatherings often occur together and reinforce each other (Páez et al., 2015; Tewari et al., 2012). Additionally, reciprocal processes such as emotion sharing (Rimé, 2009), emotional contagion (Hatfield et al., 1994) or social appraisals (Manstead & Fischer, 2001) strengthen the emotional bonds within a group.

As shown above, a shared identity is not salient per se in collective gatherings, but can be established through acts of self-categorization. Similarity cues might enhance a feeling of social connectedness among consumers and serve as emotional ties that bind together consumers who share a joyful episode.

Authors in the field of collective emotions propose that sport settings are excellent examples for illustrating the subject of crowd emotionality (van Kleef & Fischer, 2016; von Scheve & Salmella, 2014). To the best of our knowledge, however, with just one exception (Neville & Reicher, 2011), studies about collective gatherings as mass hedonic services in the field of sports are rare. Therefore, we conducted both studies in the context of collective football-viewing events. Study 1 is a qualitative field study that focused on the subjective socio-emotional experiences of event visitors, whereas Study 2 was conducted to test our hypotheses quantitatively.

Sports and other events are platforms for brands and sponsors to present themselves. Moreover, customers are not only passive recipients of brand messages, but also engage actively at these platforms and interact with other actors (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011; van Doorn et al., 2010). Table 1 gives an overview of research from the fields of (sport) event marketing and sponsorship (see Grohs, 2016) for a comprehensive overview of studies that investigate the effects on sport sponsor image) and customer engagement. These research streams are interconnected with the context of our research, in that they used a similar setting

for their empirical investigation where a crowd plays a major role, either because brands address the customers or because individuals show customer engagement. In contrast to the studies in the table (with the notable exception of Drengner et al., 2012), we focus on the causes and consequences of customers' socio-emotional experiences in crowd settings.

Table 1. Overview of selected studies in the fields of (sport) event marketing, sponsorship, and customer engagement that relate to our research

| **Author(s)** | **Domain** | **Research context** | **Empirical approach** | **Independent variables** | **Dependent variables**<br>**Intervening variables** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Close et al. (2006) | sponsorship<br>event marketing | Tour de Georgia (professional cycling event) | on-site questionnaire (n=1,741) | knowledge of sponsors' products<br>sports attractiveness<br>sport enthusiasm | community involvement<br>positive brand opinion<br>purchase intention of sponsor's product(s) |
| Close et al. (2009) | sponsorship<br>event marketing | promotional fashion shows | on-site questionnaire (n=535) | event self-congruity<br>knowledge about sponsor | event entertainment<br>attitude towards the promotion<br>event persuasiveness<br>shopping likelihood |
| Cornwell & Relyea (2000) | sponsorship | university basketball game | on-site questionnaire (n=222) | enthusiasm | involvement<br>experience<br>clutter<br>unaided recall of sponsors<br>aided recognition of sponsors |
| Crowther & Donlan (2011) | event marketing | *no specific context* | qual. approach: semi-structured interviews (n=10) | three main analytical themes:<br>- eclectic value creation potential of events<br>- activating the space<br>- pre- and co-destruction | |
| Dees et al. (2008) | sponsorship | elite intercollegiate football program | web-based questionnaire (n=351) | attitude toward the sponsor<br>goodwill<br>fan involvement | purchase intention |
| Drengner et al. (2012) | event marketing | music festival | on-site questionnaire (n=444) | psychological sense of community<br>satisfaction with core attribute | emotional experience<br>overall satisfaction<br>loyalty |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| France et al. (2016) | customer engagement | small service brands | web-based questionnaire (n=358) | brand interactivity<br>brand quality<br>brand self-congruity | brand involvement<br>customer-brand engagement<br>brand value<br>brand loyalty |
| Grohs et al. (2004) | sponsorship | Alpine Ski World Championships 2001 | on-site questionnaire (n=132) | brand prominence<br>event-sponsor fit<br>event involvement<br>exposure<br>pre-event sponsor image<br>event image | sponsor awareness<br>post-event sponsor image |
| Han et al. (2013) | sponsorship | FIFA World Cup (2002 & 2006) | web-based questionnaire (n=300) | Image congruence (between World Cup and sponsor) | sponsor motive<br>cheering event fit<br>sponsorship response |
| Harwood & Garry (2015) | customer engagement | brand community (Samsung nation) | qual. approach: netnography participant observation | model of a gamified customer engagement experience environment:<br>- gamified CE mechanism<br>- customer engagement behaviors<br>- customer engagement emotions<br>- customer engagement outcomes | |
| Herrmann et al. (2016) | sponsorship | 2nd league football | 2x2 experiment with 2,540 fans (direct mailing campaign) | fan vs. non-fan group<br>sponsor's communication in the direct mail vs. no communication | recall of sponsored entity<br>store patronizing |
| Lacey & Close (2013) | sponsorship event marketing | Tour de Georgia (professional cycling event) | on-site questionnaire (n=998) | event-sponsor fit<br>event entertainment<br>sports activeness<br>product knowledge of sponsor | attitude toward the event<br>sponsor's CSR<br>band commitment to sponsor<br>purchase intent |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Martensen et al. (2007) | event marketing | golf tournament | on-site questionnaire (n=pre:162/ post:156) | brand involvement<br>event involvement<br>fit between brand and event | positive brand emotions<br>negative brand emotions<br>negative event emotions<br>positive event emotions<br>event attitude<br>brand attitude<br>buying intention |
| Olson (2010) | sponsorship | professional football club<br>professional team-handball league<br>national art and music festival<br>national opera company | cross-sectional web-based questionnaire (n=1,149) | sponsor attitude<br>object attitude<br>sponsor involvement<br>object involvement<br>fit | sincerity<br>sponsorship attitude<br>object equity<br>sponsor equity |
| So et al. (2016) | customer engagement | privacy law–compliant online consumer panel | web-based questionnaire (n=496) | customer engagement | service brand evaluation<br>brand trust<br>brand loyalty |
| Taheria et al. (2014) | customer engagement | museum | on-site questionnaire (n=625) | prior knowledge<br>multiple motivations<br>cultural capital | level of engagement |
| Tsuji et al. (2007) | customer engagement | Gravity Games (action sports event) | on-site questionnaire (n=2,297) | core service quality<br>peripheral service quality | satisfaction<br>future intentions |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yoshida et al. (2014) | customer engagement | J.League (football) | on-site questionnaire (n=493) | positive affect<br>team identification<br>BIRGing | fan engagement<br>purchase intention<br>referral intention |
| Zarantonello & Schmitt (2013) | event marketing | city marathon trade fair | on-site questionnaire (n=354) | pre-event brand equity | brand experience<br>brand attitude<br>post-event brand equity |

## Study 1

### *Method*

We employed a qualitative approach to understanding the unique feelings visitors experience at collective gatherings. Each crowd setting can have different norms, vales and behaviors. A music festival certainly has different crowd constructive mechanisms than mass pilgrimages (Hopkins et al., 2016; Tewari et al., 2012), folkloric marches (Páez et al., 2015) or political campaigns (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Páez et al., 2015; Páez et al., 2007). Thus, the qualitative study was conducted to find out more about the specific setting regarding similarity cues that elicit a certain feeling of belongingness among group members. Richins (1997) suggests that research on emotions or feelings may start with the collection of emotional terms that may also be context-specific.

The qualitative pre-study was conducted in Germany during the 2012 UEFA European Championship. We interviewed sports spectators who jointly watched the games of the German national football team in front of huge screens in public. Such collective gatherings (FIFA Fan Fests®) had been established during the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany, as there were not enough tickets for all who were interested. However, the phenomenon is not locally or regionally bound, because football fans around the world form crowds to watch football games jointly.

We focused explicitly on the subjective component of emotional experience that respondents can access consciously. Respondents were interviewed at various venues in a medium-sized town and a medium-sized city in Germany. In total, 97 semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with one or two respondents at four collective gatherings, varying from 300 to 10,000 participants. Furthermore, we interviewed visitors of the events prior to the game, during the halftime and after the game, at five games of the German national football team. Spectators of these events saw three wins, a draw, and a loss against Italy in the semi-final. The respondents were asked how they felt at this particular moment before the game, after it and during the half-time. We attempted to ensure sample heterogeneity in terms of age, sex and football involvement. This was important, as we wanted to assess a large variety of emotion terms and experiences.

### *Analysis and results*

The interviews were transcribed and coded by two coders independently, with inconsistencies being resolved by discussion. The qualitative pre-study revealed a variety of discrete emotions that consumers experienced through the course of consumption. Positive emotions such as

joy, excitement, pride, optimism and hope could be found. These emotions are often connected with incidents such as a goal for the German team, a victory after the game or are socially induced. Beside negative emotions, we found sadness, anger, frustration and dejection to be relevant in this consumer context, especially after the loss of the German team against Italy in the semi-finals.

Apart from individualistic emotions, respondents reported feeling common bonds with fellow crowd members. Respondents employ a variety of emotion terms to express this experience. They reported feelings of *affiliation, oneness, unity, belongingness, togetherness, team spirit, cohesion* and a *sense of community,* when asked how they had felt. The answers indicate that visitors of such a sports event feel a certain degree of closeness towards, mostly unknown, others. Despite the fact that there might be slight differences in meaning, they all describe a degree of connectedness towards other individuals. This experience differs not only semantically from standard emotion sets, but it confirms the emotional bonds that consumers of a mass hedonic service feel towards each other. The qualitative data also indicates that individual enjoyment is fostered by emotional ties among the event visitors: "*That is the feeling of community. You see that the others feel as happy as you do*." Moreover, we found three different types of similarity cues, namely *collaborative actions*, *group symbols* and a *shared goal*, which might strengthen feelings of connectedness among crowd members in a football-watching scenario. Table 2 shows how this feeling of connectedness may be influenced by these similarity cues.

Table 2. Similarity cues and quotes

| ***Collaborative actions*** |
|---|
| Manifestation in the crowd context through *singing, chanting, roaring, clapping, standing jointly.* |
| *"This elicits a sense of communion. People start singing and clapping. Fans are chanting."* |
| *"Standing together creates a feeling of togetherness, that is, you are somehow connected more intensively with others and you stand with the team literally."* |
| *Respondent: "People let themselves go and join in singing, jumping, cheering."*<br>Interviewer: "What does this mean to you? How does this affect you?"<br>*Respondent: That is a feeling of communion. You recognize that the others enjoy the event just as you do. I mean, why do I watch such a game? Because I'm interested in it and I enjoy it. I do not want everyone to become addicted, but a certain amount of clapping and joining in is much appreciated."* |
| Interviewer: "What does this mean to you: 'Being part of the group?' What does 'group' mean to you?<br>*Respondent: "Well, you really feel like part of the group. Personally, I feel part of the collec-* |

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|---|
| *tive if extreme emotions arise. That is a nice and positive feeling. I cannot describe it better."* |

| ***Group symbols*** |
|---|
| Manifestation in the crowd context through *visual signs such as flags, jerseys, clothing, national colors, fan accessories.* |
| *"Jerseys? Yes, that is more or less a feeling of cohesion. That we all belong together at the same time, when the World Cup or Euro take place."*<br><br>Interviewer: "What do you think: Why do people do this?"<br>*Respondent A: "Because they want to show that they stand behind the team."*<br>*Respondent B: "Also because of the feeling of connectedness."*<br><br>Interviewer: "Is it important for you that the others wear a jersey or have a flag with them?"<br>*Respondent: "That increases the positive atmosphere and sense of belonging."*<br><br>*"People are around who usually don't care about football, but suddenly, they stand here with their jersey and cheer with us. That is a nice feeling."* |

| ***Shared goal*** |
|---|
| Manifestation in the crowd through *supporting the German national team and the wish that the German team wins the game.* |
| *"Just the community. It's nice to see how so many people support the team and celebrate together."*<br><br>*"If you are here, you want to get carried away. If you are at home, it's boring anyway, people say. Here, you experience 'the feeling', you can cheer more and all the people have a shared goal that everyone supports the German national team. We feel united, we have a common goal, we want to win together and I think that is unique about the atmosphere at this venue."*<br><br>*"It's a community, it's cohesion. Everyone supports the German team and that is good."*<br><br>Interviewer: "What do you mean when you say 'shared identity'?<br>*Respondent: "Although you haven't met these people before, or had anything to do with them, you are a community at this time and place. You are united for Germany and for football."* |

The results of our qualitative study indicate that individuals employ a variety of different terms to describe the bonds they feel with others at the gathering. What all expressions have in common is that individuals describe them as *feelings*, which means that they attach emotional value to having common ties with others. In fact, research on collective gatherings has proposed a variety of different constructs, such as perceived emotional synchrony (Páez, Rimé, Basabe, Wlodarczyk, & Zumeta, 2015), relatedness (Neville & Reicher, 2011), collective identity (Hawkley et al., 2005) or a psychological sense of community (Drengner, Jahn, &

Gaus, 2012) that describe this socio-emotional experience of '*oneness*'. What the verbal measures of these constructs all have in common is that they include the word *feel* (e.g. "*A felt a strong emotional bond between us*." from Páez et al., 2015 p. 729), and thus, as mentioned above, indicate an emotion at the level of subjective experience. In this paper, we condense these constructs into the subjective feeling that an individual feels common bonds with others as a *feeling of social connectedness*.

Study 1 was explorative in nature and reveals that a feeling of social connectedness in social gatherings may increase the hedonic value of an experience. Similarity cues may foster such a feeling of oneness among event visitors. The objective of study 2 was to investigate the role of similarity cues in hedonic mass services and how they contribute to a feeling of connectedness, which in turn increases individual enjoyment.

## Study 2

### *Hypotheses*

A key element of the perceived similarity of group members is coordinated behavior (McNeill, 1995). Coordinated actions have a critical effect on the process of group shaping. Numerous positive effects of the coordination of actions among groups members are reported: pro-social behavior (van Baaren et al., 2004), cooperative behavior (Valdesolo et al., 2010; Wiltermuth & Heath, 2009), alignment of goals (Sebanz et al., 2006), and rapport (Lakens & Stel, 2011; Vacharkulksemsuk & Fredrickson, 2012). Feelings of cohesiveness are also elicited in ritualistic actions, which makes individuals feel connected and which enhances also hedonic value (Ehrenreich, 2006; Olaveson, 2004). In hedonic services, behavioral synchrony is achieved when consumers perform collaborative actions. They classify themselves as group members through these actions, which in turn lead to increased feelings of connectedness. People who engage in collective behaviors perceive positive affect (Valdesolo & Desteno, 2011). Consequently, when social motives are salient, these collaborative actions ultimately lead to enhanced enjoyment (Raghunathan & Corfman, 2006). From a social identity perspective, shared actions serve as a signal of in-group belongingness. Our pre-study revealed that in a football context, joint singing, chanting, clapping and even mere standing together, might bond the group together. We argue that collaborative actions in crowds might lead to an increased level of enjoyment, when feelings of connectedness are evoked, which our qualitative study also reflected. Thus:

**H1:** A feeling of social connectedness mediates the relationship between collaborative actions and the individual enjoyment consumers experience in collective emotional gatherings.

Besides collaborative action, visual cues may also serve as socially relevant information for group membership (Frank & Gilovich, 1988; Johnson & Downing, 1979). Similarity in appearance is reflected in clothing and common signs that members of a group share. Group signs and symbols build group bonds among individuals (Durkheim, 1912/1976). Group symbols signal distinction from other groups and foster an in-group sense of community. Visual uniformity enables stereotyping so that members distinguish quickly between in-group or out-group members, because they view themselves as part of a larger collective. In our preliminary study, we found a variety of visual signs that may serve as group symbols. These cues encompass clothing such as jerseys or fan shirts, other fan accessories such as flags, clap banners, national colors etc. In our framework, we argue that group symbols at a collective gathering may elicit feelings of connectedness, although members may not even know each other and although group stability is temporally limited. Therefore, we propose:

**H2:** A feeling of social connectedness mediates the relationship between group symbols and the individual enjoyment which consumers experience in collective emotional gatherings.

Similarity among consumers is also reflected in a common goal (van Kleef & Fischer, 2016). A shared goal may foster in-group cohesion and an orientation towards achieving this particular goal (Barsade & Gibson, 1998; Kelly & Barsade, 2001; Spoor & Kelly, 2004). In a collective gathering, individuals share a common time-space frame and the mere presence of others may be viewed as a common fate (Reicher, 2011). When a service encounter constitutes a collective gathering of consumers, a feeling of social connectedness may arise in this spatially and temporally limited setting. Individuals might share a common interest and have a focal object as a reference point (e.g., spectator sports, concerts, festivals) and thus form a psychological crowd (Hopkins et al., 2016). Common beliefs are also essential for establishing long-term oriented ritualistic behavior (Durkheim, 1912/1976, Turner, 1969). For example, at a rock concert as a hedonic experience, visitors all favor a certain type of music or performer. A shared common goal should therefore foster feelings of connectedness among service consumers and thus enhance hedonic value. We propose:

**H3:** A feeling of social connectedness mediates the relationship between a shared goal among consumers and the individual enjoyment consumers experience in collective emotional gatherings.

As our context is a team sport setting, team identification may play a role in forming the level of individual service enjoyment. Affect and identification are seen as integral parts of the uniqueness of sports compared to other services, products or leisure-time activities (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2014; Pedersen & Thibault, 2014). The positive relationship between team identification and emotional reactions is well established (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Robinson et al., 2005; Sloan, 1989; Wann & Dolan, 1994; Wann et al., 1994; Wann et al., 2002). High-identification spectators experience strong emotional reactions, whereas low-identification fans show only small changes in emotional response (Wann, Dolan, McGeorge, & Allison, 1994; Wann, Royalty, & Rochelle, 2002). We hypothesize:

**H4a:** The higher the level of team identification, the more enjoyable the hedonic episode for the individual.

Rooted in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), team identification refers to the degree to which individuals view the team as a representation of themselves (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). High-identification individuals who share the same passion for a team form a social group. In the team sports context, this becomes particularly relevant when opposing fans are regarded as an out-group. Sports spectators gain enjoyment on the one hand, by watching their team perform well and on the other hand, also gain satisfaction by watching the rival team perform poorly (Zillmann, Bryant, & Sapolsky, 1989). With this perspective, individuals who have a high level of team identification may also experience stronger feelings of social connectedness in a sports-crowd setting. Thus:

**H4b:** The higher the level of team identification, the more the individual feels common bonds with others (feeling of social connectedness).

***Method***

To test our hypotheses, we used the same context as in Study 1 and conducted online research during the 2014 FIFA World Cup. A total of 365 visitors (59% male, $M_{age}$ 26.2, *SD*=6.43) of Fan Fests throughout Germany participated in the study. These gatherings were characterized

by spectators who watched football together in front of big screens. All events had more than 500 participants, so as to ensure a collective-gathering situation. We chose Fan-Fests for the lack of potential out-group influence (e.g. fans of other teams), thus reducing in-group/out-group interdependencies. Consequently, collaborative actions can be attributed to similarity, instead of dividing fans into a potential in-group and out-group.

The respondents were recruited via online event forums and through Facebook event groups. Administrators of such online platforms were asked for their permission to post the survey link during the group stage phase of the 2014 FIFA World Cup. Respondents were asked to rate the last collective football watching they had experienced. We chose the procedure as it is very likely that the members of these groups had recently visited such an event.

The feeling of social connectedness was measured on a 3-item scale, based on those used by Drengner et al. (2012), Hawkley et al. (2005), Neville & Reicher (2011), and Páez et al. (2015). The results of the qualitative study were used to adjust these scales to the context of a football viewing event. The scales for similarity cues were developed from the qualitative study. Team identification was measured on a 3-item scale developed by (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Our dependent variable of individual enjoyment was measured as a discrete emotion on a 3-item subscale of the Consumption Emotions Set (Richins, 1997) (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely). (Harman, 1976) single-factor test suggests a lack of significant systematic variance common to the measures.

***Results***

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to validate our measures that we developed partly from the qualitative data. The model indicates a good fit ($\chi^2$ (94) = 153,26; $p < 0.001$; *RMSEA* = 0.042; *CFI* = 0.981, *GFI* = 0.951). The model included the measures for similarity cues (collaborative actions and group symbols), as well as team identification, feelings of connectedness and enjoyment. We did not integrate ‘shared goals’ due to the low Cronbach’s alpha of the scale.

Subsequently, we used a path model to test our hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 is supported and shows that collaborative actions positively influence feelings of social connectedness ($\beta$ = 0.43, $t$ = 6.35, $p < 0.001$), whereas collaborative actions do not directly influence individual enjoyment ($\beta$ = -0.09, $t$ = -0.54, $p$ = 0.22). We have to reject Hypothesis 2, as group symbols neither significantly influence a feeling of social connectedness ($\beta$ = -0.02, $t$ = -0.27, $p$ = 0.79) nor enjoyment ($\beta$ = 0.09, $t$ = 1.36, $p$ = 0.17). Hypothesis 4b is supported; team identification

positively influences feelings of connectedness ($\beta$ = 0.41, $t$ = 6.60, $p$ < 0.001). Team identification has also a positive direct effect on enjoyment ($\beta$ = 0.30, $t$ = 4.96, $p$ < 0.001) which indicates partial mediation (H4a). As we predicted, feelings of social connectedness positively influence the individual enjoyment in a collective-gathering situation ($\beta$ = 0.38, $t$ = 6.15, $p$ < 0.001).

## Discussion

This research takes a first step in explaining how members of crowds establish a feeling of social connectedness through shared similarity cues. The results of the Study 1 reveals that similarity cues are present in mass hedonic services, because members of the crowd establish such cues during the course of consumption. Study 2 shows that collaborative actions and team identification foster a feeling of social connectedness in the sports setting, that in turn directly positively affects consumer enjoyment.

## Implications

### *Theoretical implications*

In this research, we show that consumers in a rather anonymous crowd establish a "we-feeling" during the course of the event. This emotional state is distinct from other emotion terms in the standard emotion inventories. The shift from a personal to a social identity in crowds is accompanied by emotional bonds. Individuals *feel* common bonds with other crowd members. Similarity cues, especially collaborative actions, accelerate the process of self-categorization. Environmental and psychological signs of similarity, strengthen emotional ties among group members. As social identity theory proposes, strong in-group bonds foster differentiation of other groups and strengthen own group identity. Our research indicates that this process still prevails when an out-group is not a substantial object of differentiation.

### *Practical implications*

Event providers are constantly looking for opportunities to engage their customers during the course of the service. Collaborative actions, which might well be influenced by event providers, lead to increased hedonic value when a feeling of connectedness is elicited. Service providers should therefore encourage consumers to perform collaborative actions, as consumers potentially infect others and start a ripple effect. These actions might be stimulated by the service provider's staff (e.g. moderator) or can be facilitated by accessories provided at the

venue (e.g. giving away clap banners). Furthermore, experienced consumers, particularly those with high team identification who are familiar with performing collaborative actions, and might influence others, can be integrated into the implementation of the service. However, service providers must accept that crowd dynamics and customer engagement are also unmanageable to a certain degree (Carù & Cova, 2015; Stieler *et al.*, 2014).

**Limitations and future research**

As any other empirical study, this research is not free of limitations. Although we tried to ensure heterogeneity of the sample in Study 1, one could argue that we do not capture the full range of emotional experiences in such a setting. Study 2 was a correlational design and lacks a clear cause and effect relationship. Future research might tap into this gap by investigating how similarity cues influence consumer enjoyment, and use experimental designs to better understand the underlying mechanisms of the proposed model. Experimental studies might isolate the antecedents of a feeling of social connectedness and thus enhance our understanding of consumers' emotional states during the course of hedonic consumption. As the concept of effervescence (Páez et al., 2015) suggests, socio-emotional effects in a crowd setting may co-occur, so that an experimental manipulation of each single effect remains a challenge. Other underlying principles like an optimal distinction between group members (Brewer, 1991), flow state (Walker, 2010) or identity fusion (Gómez et al. 2011) in crowd settings remain to be explored. These issues are also practically relevant, because service managers strive for tools to influence individual psychological states or at least channel collective emotions. Our studies are only snapshots of single events, and future research might investigate how consumers establish long-term relationship with the service itself, with associated brands or sponsors. Some mass hedonic services such as concerts recur, so that similarity cues may become ritualistic. Follow-up research should assess the discriminant validity of the shared goal construct, as our study indicates that more than one shared goal is salient during the course of consumption. To investigate the relevance of social connectedness beyond the realm of sports and team identification, further research could also usefully investigate other mass hedonic services, such as rock concerts or music and arts festivals or even online environments.

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