



Co-creation of experiences in tourism: A conceptual perspective through a meta-review and thematic mapping

Cocreación de experiencias en turismo: Una perspectiva conceptual a través de una meta-revisión y un mapeo temático

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Abstract

Co-creation of experiences can be defined as the process through which customers and organisations collaborate to create experiences. There has been a notable lack of knowledge regarding tourism experiences and their interrelationship with the co-creation process. This article aims to systematically review the scientific literature on the co-creation of tourism experiences and to delve deeper into the discussion of the different perspectives on tourism experiences, seeking to understand their connection to the co-creation process. To this end, a meta-review, including thematic mapping and content analysis, is applied to 82 articles published between 2009 and 2021, a year that marked the end of a particularly challenging period for the tourism industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The main contributions of this study are the presentation of new definitions of tourism experiences and the systematisation of the co-creation process, considering the supply-side dimensions, given that much of the existing literature predominantly focuses on the tourist perspective. Furthermore, the study identifies existing gaps and proposes a future research agenda.

Keywords: Co-creation, Meta-review, Research agenda, Tourism experiences, Value-creation theories.

Resumen

La cocreación de experiencias es el proceso mediante el cual los clientes y las organizaciones colaboran para crear experiencias. Ha existido una falta de conocimiento sobre las experiencias turísticas y cómo se interrelacionan con el proceso de cocreación. Precisamente, el propósito de este artículo es revisar sistemáticamente la literatura científica sobre la cocreación de experiencias turísticas y profundizar en la discusión sobre las diferentes perspectivas del tema de las experiencias turísticas, comprendiendo su relación con el proceso de cocreación. Para ello, se aplica una meta-revisión que incluye un mapeo temático y un análisis de contenido a 82 artículos publicados entre 2009 y 2021, año que marca el final de un período desafiante para el turismo causado por la pandemia de COVID-19. Nuestras principales contribuciones son presentar nuevas definiciones de experiencias turísticas y una sistematización del proceso de cocreación de experiencias que toma en cuenta las dimensiones de la oferta, ya que la mayoría de la literatura analizada considera únicamente la perspectiva del turista. Además, nuestro estudio también identifica las brechas existentes y propone una agenda de investigación.

Palabras clave: Cocreación, Meta-revisión, Agenda de investigación, Experiencias turísticas, Teorías de creación de valor.

1. Introduction

There are various definitions of experiences, and multiple terms have been employed within tourism research, including "tourism of experiences", "tourist experiences", "tourism experiences", and "touristic experiences". Godovykh and Tasci (2020) argue that few definitions capture the holistic nature of experiences, defining tourism experiences as the "totality of cognitive, affective, sensory, and conative responses, on a spectrum of negative to positive, evoked by all stimuli encountered in pre-, during, and post-phases of consumption, affected by situational and brand-related factors, filtered through personal differences of consumers, eventually resulting in differential outcomes related to consumers". Creating a competitively strong customer experience has thus become a strategic objective (King et al., 2019), reinforced by the increasing relevance of tourism experiences in the aftermath of crises such as lockdowns and wars. Tiwari et al. (2023) further highlight human emotions as a critical factor influencing tourism experiences.

To the best of our knowledge, there remains a lack of recent articles examining the different types of experiences (Kim et al., 2021; Walls et al., 2011). Kim et al. (2021) identify four types of experiences—entertainment, aesthetic, escapist, and educational—concluding that travellers belonging to profiles characterised by high levels across all four types are associated with greater travel satisfaction. This finding supports the notion that traveller satisfaction is more likely to be achieved through diverse travel content and experiences. Moreover, memorable tourism experiences and tourist satisfaction significantly influence the intention to recommend a destination (Çevrimkaya & Zengin, 2023). Walls et al. (2011) emphasise the need to clarify the multidisciplinary use



and application of the concept of experience, offering a set of definitions and exploring the facets of consumer experience from a demand-side perspective.

The co-creation of experiences involves multiple actors and serves as a strategic approach to engage customers in the value-creation process, delivering personalised and memorable experiences (Mohammadi et al., 2021). Authenticity and involvement have been shown to positively influence destination image (Uslu et al., 2024), while Carvalho and Alves (2023) underscore the crucial role of tourist and guest involvement in value co-creation. Higher levels of involvement in co-creation are strongly associated with increased satisfaction and positively impact tourists' willingness to pay (Rita et al., 2024). In this context, the co-creation experience has supplanted product- and company-centric innovations as the foundation for value creation and the future of innovation (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). Given the current intense competitiveness within the tourism industry, companies are increasingly seeking innovation and differentiation in their services, while tourists are actively pursuing opportunities for greater involvement with the destinations they visit and with the local communities.

The study of experiences and the co-creation process has garnered significant scientific interest across various fields, particularly within the tourism sector, owing to the complexity inherent in the ecosystem services perspective (Richards, 2021; Lee et al., 2021). More broadly, co-creation has emerged as a transversal area of analysis, spanning multiple business sectors. Beyond tourism, it has been extensively examined by researchers in health care (Aghdam et al., 2020), coaching (Chatterjee et al., 2021), food studies (Rachão et al., 2020), technology (Belarmino & Koh, 2020; Mehraliyev et al., 2020), psychology (Adhikari & Bhattacharya, 2016; Hwang & Seo, 2016), and broader business contexts (Gallego et al., 2020).

According to Mohammadi et al. (2021), the study of co-creation in tourism began in 2006. Most research indicates that co-creation primarily takes place within the physical context of interaction between the consumer and the service provider. In the tourism sector today, co-creation is closely connected to the concepts of value creation and experiences, with all three notions being strongly associated with the theory of the experience economy (Zhang et al., 2021; Hernández-Ortega & Franco, 2019; Trunfio & Campana, 2019).

The academic literature on co-creation has predominantly focused on the perspective of customer–firm interaction (Freire & Veríssimo, 2021). However, other types of interactions—such as those between companies and residents, public agents, educational entities, or even the destination itself—are also relevant to the co-creation process and warrant further study. Tasci and Pizam (2020) highlight that the influence of different elements of the experiencescape on stakeholders' tendencies towards co-creation, co-production, or co-destruction has been largely overlooked and needs to be addressed in future research. It is evident that the co-creation of experiences in tourism requires deeper scientific investigation, as not all dimensions of the process have been studied with equal intensity, both prior to and during the coronavirus pandemic (Borges-Tiago et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). Technological factors, particularly digital and online tools, have gained increasing importance for organisations and tourists. For organisations, technology serves as a means of providing information and selling experiences at the destination. For tourists, it facilitates searching for and accessing information, supports personalised purchasing decisions, enables bookings and payments, and fosters the exchange of ideas and experiences through social interaction (Lee et al., 2021). Digital technologies, therefore, enhance value co-creation by enabling more personalised, immersive, and efficient tourism experiences (Dang & Nguyen, 2023).

Given the above, there remains a lack of understanding regarding the concept of tourist experiences and their meaning (Walls et al., 2011), as well as a need to analyse the interrelation between this concept and co-creation (Borges-Tiago et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). As previously noted, the co-creation of experiences in tourism requires deeper scientific exploration, with not all dimensions of the process having been studied in sufficient depth (Zhang et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is necessary to develop a research agenda to guide future investigations in this field (Esther & Teun Den, 2009).

From an updated and more holistic perspective, this article aims to explore the various definitions of experience and their relationship with the co-creation process through a systematic literature review. In this context, the central objective will examine the concept of tourism experiences and its connection to value co-creation. Thus, understanding the concept of tourism experiences and its relationship with the co-creation process will present a challenge that can assist companies and destinations in enhancing tourist satisfaction.

This article offers an original contribution by presenting a detailed thematic map of the existing literature on the co-creation of tourism experiences. This map not only organises the diverse approaches and themes that constitute this field of research but also provides a clear visual representation of the discipline's evolution, highlighting the most extensively explored areas as well as those where significant gaps remain. By coherently structuring the literature, the map serves as a valuable tool for researchers, enabling them to identify aspects that require further investigation with greater precision. Furthermore, by pinpointing emerging topics and under-researched areas, the map supports the development of a focused research agenda, helping to optimise resource allocation and concentrate efforts on themes with strong potential to advance knowledge in the field.



The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound negative impact on tourism activity. According to data from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2022), global tourism experienced declines in international arrivals of 73% and 72% in 2020 and 2021, respectively. Before the pandemic, digital transformation was not a strategic priority for some tourism companies despite the recognised benefits of enhancing customer experiences and fostering dynamic interaction and engagement. COVID-19 acted as a catalyst, repositioning digital innovation as a critical factor for resilience and recovery within tourism organisations (Lincényi & Bulanda, 2023; Sharma et al., 2024). By 2021, the sector had begun to emerge from its darkest period, with 2022 marking the initial recovery phase as international travel gradually rebounded. Recognising these dynamics, the present study focuses on analysing the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism up to 2021 while leveraging existing research to understand the transformative role of digital strategies in navigating this unprecedented crisis. In order to clarify, systematise, and relate the key concepts, this study seeks to answer the following general research question (RQ): what is the status of existing knowledge related to the co-creation of tourism experiences?

To this end, a synthesis of definitions will be presented based on a systematic literature review methodology and aimed at identifying new areas for future research. In addition, the authors propose a classification of tourism experiences, considering the fundamental dimensions of the co-creation process, to help structure the content of future investigations. This is particularly important, as the co-creation process may vary depending on the type of experiences sought.

This article offers a two-fold contribution. From a theoretical perspective, it reinforces the in-depth study of Experience Tourism, helping to clarify the concept holistically and illustrating its interaction with the co-creation process while presenting new opportunities for future scientific research. From a practical perspective, the study proposes a systematisation of the co-creation process of tourism experiences, encompassing all relevant dimensions. This approach supports a better understanding of experience co-creation, its digital automation, and the evaluation of its impact and tourists' satisfaction.

The remainder of the article is organised as follows. Section 2 conceptualises the key issues; Section 3 describes the methodology applied; Section 4 presents and discusses the results; and Section 5 outlines the conclusions and highlights the contributions of this study.

2. Key issues conceptualization

Understanding the different interpretations of the concept of experience in tourism is of great importance for subsequently assessing the best conditions under which the co-creation process can be developed and facilitated by companies and destination managers. Since several authors use different terminologies associated with tourism experiences, often without clear clarification, it may be difficult for future investigations to determine which conceptualisation of experiences is most appropriate for the context under analysis. Thus, developing a more holistic approach to tourism experiences is considered crucial.

2.1 Experiences in tourism

Several authors (Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Loureiro, 2014; Chen & Rahman, 2018) distinguish between tourism experiences and tourist experiences. The former, tourism experiences, refers to the overall experience of the tourist at the destination, encompassing the emotions and feelings generated by the total consumption of the trip. In contrast, tourist experiences represent businesses and services that tourists can consume independently, relating to the supply offered by companies and the individual experiences lived during the trip.

As Kandampully et al. (2018) affirm, experiences are unique and personal, as each consumer is unique and shaped by their background, making experiences difficult to define and manage. These authors highlight that, in hospitality, delivering superior customer experiences is essential for securing customer loyalty and that digitally advanced consumers now expect personalised experiences at every point of interaction. Similarly, Pezzi and Vianna (2015) argue that the personal and subjective nature of experiences makes their study even more complex and interesting but also challenging to frame.

In their seminal work, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) argue that the consumption experience must be understood from a holistic perspective, encompassing the pre-purchase, experience, and outcome phases and emphasising the importance of emotions and the crucial role of interaction. Later, Pine and Gilmore (1998) highlighted that 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. More recently, Godovykh and Tasci (2020) proposed a more holistic perspective of experiences, presenting an experience model with four main components—emotional, cognitive, sensorial, and conative—and suggest using a combination of several measures to capture the totality of the tourism experience across the pre-visit, on-site, and post-visit stages, which should be incorporated into products and services at destinations.

The concept of experience has been widely adopted in the tourism sector, driven by the intangible nature of the services offered and the need for organisations and destinations to develop innovative offerings that enhance brand positioning and effectively add value for tourists (Campos et al., 2015; Neuhofer et al., 2014). More recently, technological factors—particularly digital tools, services, and online access—have grown in importance, not only enabling organisations to operationalise and deliver experiences



at the destination, but also supporting tourists in their search for credible and secure information, facilitating social interaction, customisation, reservations, and payments (Lee et al., 2021).

2.2 Co-creation in tourism

Co-creation concerns actors collaboratively creating something with or influenced by others (Buonincontri et al., 2017; Jaakkola et al., 2015). Sugathan and Ranjan (2019) argue that co-creation significantly influences the tourism experience. In this context, co-creation refers to the process directly linked to creating value for the tourist, which is reflected in the experience gained. The experience itself can be developed before, during, and after the consumption of tourist services acquired during trips and is shaped by various factors, contexts, resources, and agents (Eletxigerra et al., 2018; Esther & Teun Den, 2009). Most authors agree that co-creation cannot occur without interaction. Moreover, digital tools are increasingly seen as drivers of success in the tourism industry by facilitating improved customer interactions (Dang & Nguyen, 2023).

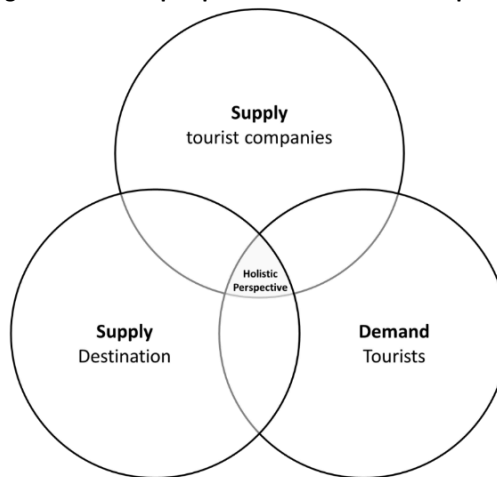
Several research gaps have been identified. Some authors highlight the need for a deeper understanding of the role of technology in enhancing customers' perceived value, experience, and engagement (Trunfio & Campana, 2019; Sharma et al., 2020). Carvalho et al. (2021) further emphasise the importance of exploring the dimensions of the co-creation experience: interaction, participation, engagement, and personalisation. Godovykh and Tasci (2020) point out that most customer experience research has failed to capture the different components that constitute the overall experience, while Phi and Dredge (2019) stress the necessity of better understanding co-creation from the perspectives of visitors, residents, destinations, organisations, and non-human actors. In light of the growing impact of customer value co-creation in the digital era on the tourism and hospitality sectors, Dang and Nguyen (2023) identified three primary areas for future research: technological, academic, and managerial. More recently, Jain et al. (2024) have further underlined the need to investigate value co-creation in digital transformations, including service robots, AI-enabled services, and machine learning.

Furthermore, the study of co-creation can also extend to its opposite concept, co-destruction. However, the literature addressing this theme remains scarce (Freire & Veríssimo, 2021; Mohammadi et al., 2021). Co-destruction is described as the failure of the resource integration process to co-create the expected value (Smith, 2013; Freire & Veríssimo, 2021). Tasci and Pizam (2020) emphasise that the influence of different elements of the experiencescape, connected to sensory elements and holistic participation, on various stakeholders' tendencies towards co-creation, co-production, or co-destruction has been largely overlooked and should be explored in future research. At the core of these concepts lies the value chain of the experience provider and its interaction with the tourist.

2.3 The co-creation of tourism experiences, a holistic perspective

The co-creation of experiences can be defined as the process through which customers and organisations collaborate to create experiences (Buonincontri et al., 2017; Mathis et al., 2016). Based on the previous understanding of tourism experiences, it can be said that the co-creation process is present in both perspectives of destinations and companies and operates across two distinct dimensions. One dimension is more social, relating to the construction of involvement with companies and destinations, while the other is more spatial, involving the enjoyment of everything the destination has to offer. In addition, a third, more holistic perspective can be proposed, where the approach to experiences and their co-creation process encompasses all players in the tourism system, integrating both supply and demand perspectives, whether referring to tourists, companies, or destination agents. Figure 1 illustrates this holistic perspective of the co-creation process.

Figure 1 - Holistic perspective of the co-creation process



Source: own elaboration.



3. Methodology: Meta-review and thematic mapping

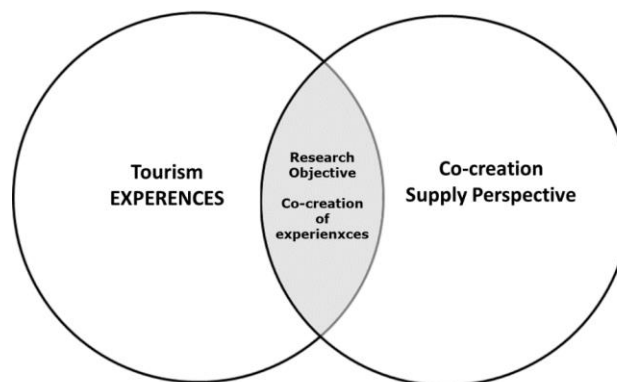
A systematic literature review methodology is employed to develop a holistic understanding of the co-creation of tourism experiences, following the approach outlined by Denyer and Tranfield (2009) and Tranfield et al. (2003).

According to Haddaway et al. (2022), reviews can be classified as either introductory or systematic. Introductory reviews are more illustrative, aiming to introduce concepts using selected examples. In contrast, synthetic or systematic reviews and maps seek to generate novel insights from an evidence base by combining studies or their findings through analytical methods. Considering the requirements of scientific research, a systematic review is considered more effective for summarising analyses on a specific issue (Snyder, 2019). It offers a synthesised and more transparent approach to research (Palmatier et al., 2018), used to identify, collect data, and critically assess the issues under investigation. The objective is to identify all empirical evidence that fits the pre-specified inclusion criteria (Snyder, 2019).

Several authors offer different suggestions regarding the methodology to be applied. Among these, the synthesis method proposed by Denyer and Tranfield (2009), Tranfield et al. (2003), and Garza-Reyes (2015) is particularly noteworthy, comprising five stages: (1) question formulation; (2) location of studies; (3) evaluation and selection of studies; (4) analysis and synthesis. In this context, the general aim of the data analysis in this systematic review is to analyse and examine the literature critically, identifying the main ideas, dimensions, and relationships between tourism experiences and the co-creation process.

With regard to the formulation of the research questions, corresponding to Stage 1, the main objective of this study is to explore the intersection between tourism experiences and the co-creation process. As illustrated in Figure 2, the focus is on scientifically examining the co-creation of tourism experiences from the perspective of the supply side, namely companies and destinations.

Figure 2 - Research objective area



Source: own elaboration.

To achieve the proposed objective and address the research questions, it is necessary to clarify the topics under investigation and identify the literature to be included (Linnenluecke et al., 2020). Accordingly, several reference articles on the topic were reviewed prior to developing the research. The aim was to clearly understand the topics under analysis and identify which dimensions and aspects of tourism experiences and the co-creation process should be further explored. The outcome of this preliminary analysis led to the development of the section on conceptualising the key issues.

In addition to the overarching research question (what is the status of the existing knowledge related to the co-creation of tourism experiences?), other more specific ones were also considered, namely:

- RQ1. What are the terms used to define experiences in tourism?
- RQ2. What is co-creation, and how does it relate to experiences?
- RQ3. How do the definitions presented fit into the perspectives of the co-creation process?
- RQ4. What are the theoretical frameworks used to analyze the co-creation process?



RQ5. How has the topic of the co-creation of tourism experiences been investigated?

RQ6. Can new definitions of experiences be presented from the different perspectives of the co-creation process?

Regarding Stage 2 (location of studies), an exhaustive search was conducted using the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases. Both databases are considered the most relevant sources in the fields of tourism and management due to their comprehensive coverage of rigorously peer-reviewed journals, citation analysis capabilities, and advanced search functionalities, including article quality indexes such as JCR and SJR respectively. According to data from the WoS platform, approximately 75% of researchers recommend its use, recognising it as one of the principal references for scientific research and a leading global citation database.

Using two databases helps to eliminate the biases associated with relying on a single source (Thome et al., 2016). Therefore, to understand the different interpretations of the concept of experiences in tourism and to subsequently assess the best conditions under which the co-creation process can be developed, in-depth research was conducted simultaneously in both the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection, using the "TS" (Topic) field tag, and the Scopus database, considering all fields.

The research was carried out between May and November of 2021 and pilot tests were done with these terms: "tourism experiences"; "tourist experiences"; "experiences and tourism"; "co-creation"; "co-creation process"; "tourism co-creation"; "tourism co-creation experiences" and "tourism co-creation experiences". Due to the high number of results of the first search referring only to tourism experiences (14,608), the authors chose to explore a new, more specific search, considering the relationship between the two topics of co-creation and experiences. The research analyzed documents published between 2009 and 2021. The starting point, 2009, corresponds to the publication of the first review article on the topic under study, as identified in the databases consulted. The endpoint, 2021, was chosen because it marks the conclusion of the most critical phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the tourism sector beginning its recovery in 2022, as discussed in the Introduction. This timeframe provides a comprehensive historical perspective on the evolution of the topic while capturing the significant disruptions and transformations brought about by the pandemic. To avoid excluding relevant articles, the authors opted for a more comprehensive search using the terms "co-creation OR co-creation process" AND "*tourism*" OR "tourist" OR "tourism". Apart from selecting the Web of Science Core Collection, no additional filters were applied, allowing for an initial global overview of the number of articles potentially related to the central theme.

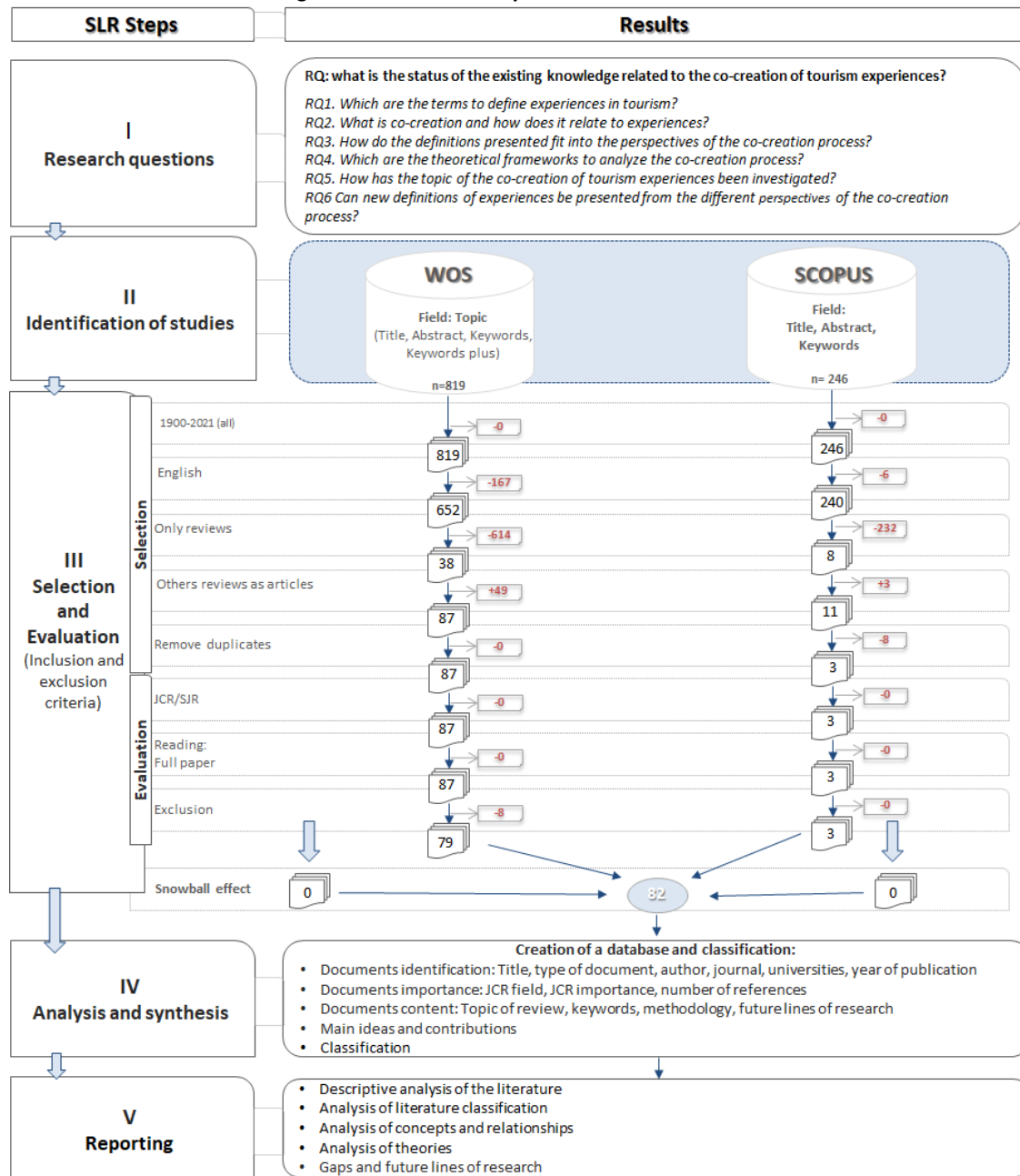
For the evaluation and selection of studies (Stage 3), it was decided to include only review articles, as these, by their nature, tend to explore the state of the art and the conceptual foundations of the topics under study while also identifying research opportunities to address existing gaps. In this context, a systematic literature meta-review was applied.

Since some review articles were not initially classified as reviews, an additional search was performed using the keywords "systematic" and "review". After applying the English language filter, 49 additional records were identified in WoS and three more in Scopus. Duplicate articles were excluded. To ensure that the search results aligned with the general research question, the titles, abstracts, and, when necessary, the introductions, conclusions, or full texts of the studies were reviewed. Following a complete reading, eight articles were excluded for being unrelated to tourism. To minimise any potential gaps, the research was further strengthened using a snowballing method: the term "meta-analysis" was added to the search, and the results were compared with the previously identified articles. However, this additional search did not yield any new review articles beyond those already selected.

In the final stage, the authors selected 82 papers related to the main topic. Figure 3 illustrates the entire process, showing the documents excluded at each step and those selected after applying the filters, presented through a PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) diagram.



Figure 3 - PRISMA of the Systematic Literature Review



Source: own elaboration.

In Stage 4 (analysis and synthesis), 82 documents were reviewed, with particular emphasis placed on the abstract, keywords, introduction, methodology, results, conclusion, and implications. An Excel database was created to record several associated fields, and a thematic mapping analysis was subsequently applied.

In the context of bibliometrics, thematic mapping is used to analyse large volumes of scientific literature and allows the thematic structure of a research field to be visualised through a topic map. This technique is based on community detection algorithms, such as the Louvain algorithm, which is widely recognised for its effectiveness in identifying communities within large and complex networks (Blondel et al., 2008). The Louvain algorithm groups related terms into "communities" or clusters of keywords, identifying topics with a high density of internal connections, thereby suggesting a close conceptual relationship between them. This study employed Bibliometrix, an R package designed for comprehensive bibliometric analysis (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Authors' keywords extracted from the articles were used to build a co-occurrence network. From this network, the Louvain algorithm detected keyword subgroups, creating clusters representing specific topics within the study area. These topics are projected onto the thematic map based on two dimensions: density (the degree of development of the topic) and centrality (its importance or



relevance within the field). Accordingly, themes are distributed across four quadrants (Cobo et al., 2011; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017): Motor, Basic, Niche, and Emerging or Declining.

This methodology has been applied across various research areas to identify emerging trends and consolidated themes, providing a structural view of knowledge within a particular field. For example, Cobo et al. (2011) demonstrate how thematic mapping enables researchers to identify and classify themes based on their evolution and relevance within the scientific field. This technique is particularly useful for guiding future research and strategic planning in emerging areas of study.

Considering the methodology exposed previously, the results (stage 5) will be described sequentially in Section 4.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive analysis of the research

The years 2019 and 2020 were particularly prolific in the production of scientific content for literature reviews. Considering the 82 review studies identified in the tourism sector, the research preferences of the authors predominantly fall into the subsectors of hospitality, general tourism, and destinations. Most articles relate dimensions of the tourism sector to other areas of analysis, such as management (57%) and technology (31%—information systems and online tools). Only 17% of the articles demonstrate a concern with constructing an agenda or mapping research related to the topic under analysis.

Regarding the type of scientific documents, the overall results surprisingly show that reviews constitute the majority, although they represent only 50% of the sample. This is followed by other types of research articles, which, despite including the word "review" in the title, were not classified as reviews in the databases. The publications span 48 scientific journals, reinforcing the importance of the topic, with contributions from 34 different countries. The *Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* is the leading contributor to literature review research in this area, accounting for 10% of the sample. The top five contributing countries are the USA, Portugal, England, Spain, and Australia.

Regarding the methodology of the literature reviews, a significant proportion of the authors opted for either basic literature reviews or systematic methods. However, only two studies employed a systematic methodology combined with bibliometric analysis, suggesting that future investigations could benefit from greater use of this latter approach. In addressing the topic, 23 papers present theoretical framework proposals, while 13 propose models, such as the competitiveness model for a creative tourism destination (Dias et al., 2021), a conceptual model depicting the dynamic system of consumer, technology, and co-creation behaviour (Zhang et al., 2020), and a model on co-creating tourism experiences through a traveller's journey (Zhang, 2020). Other papers present findings aimed at informing future research directions or offer critical perspectives on existing literature reviews (Lee et al., 2021).

4.2 Content analysis

The results presented address the specific research questions outlined in the Introduction. The three authors of this study independently conducted the coding process. Krippendorff's alpha was calculated to assess intercoder reliability, yielding a value of 0.76, which indicates an acceptable level of agreement.

4.2.1 Terms used to define experiences in tourism

This subchapter specifically answers the RQ1. What are the terms used to define experiences in tourism?

Regarding the experiences in the tourism sector, different but related terms have been used, which can create confusion not only from a theoretical point of view but also from practitioners' perspective. At least six different terms are used: tourism of experiences, tourist experiences, tourism experiences, touristic experiences, co-experiences, and experiencescape, which are defined as follows:

- i) *Tourism of experiences*. This global term refers to a market trend linked to the experience economy, representing the entire economic system of tourism and its broader context. From a perspective of holistic enjoyment, the tourism of experiences encompasses the supply provided by companies or institutions within the destination territory, as well as the contributions shared by all tourism agents and the tourists themselves. These contributions may take various forms, with differing levels of intensity and involvement.
- ii) *Tourist experiences*. This concept refers specifically to the tourist consumer, although it considers only the experiences provided by companies, not those created by the destination itself. According to Vergopoulos (2016), the study of experiences must account for several contextual variables: (i) space, (ii) time, and (iii) tourist sociability, noting that space and time should not be considered independently. Tung and Au (2018) were among the first researchers to explore consumer reviews involving robotics based on five dimensions for evaluating user experiences. These dimensions are embodiment, emotion, human-oriented perception, feeling of security, and co-experience, all derived from research in human-robot interactions



(HRI). Their findings suggest that users and robots can co-create novel experiences, with some guests proactively seeking new opportunities to interact and communicate with robots to develop a certain level of relationship.

- iii) *Tourism experiences*. This term refers to the experiences of tourists provided by the territory and agents who facilitate the development of the destination, such as public entities. According to Tussyadiah (2014), the concept of tourism experience has evolved into a meta-concept, representing the value propositions of tourism destinations that facilitate desired experiences. Aragonez and Alves (2012) argue that governments, whether at the central or local level, must consider the following differentiating factors for cities: (i) valuing the specific attributes of the territory, (ii) guaranteeing the organisational dynamic coherence of the business fabric, and (iii) strengthening the innovation capacities of the business fabric. They also state that this objective can only be achieved through innovative policies supported by knowledge networks and oriented towards the market. According to Kotler et al. (1993), as cited by Briciu (2013), places must be organised as businesses and must promote themselves in order to respond adequately to global competition, technological change, and urban decay. Tourism destinations must provide satisfactory experiences for visitors, encouraging a positive image and leading them to recommend the place to others who may be potential visitors with a favourable impression (Qu et al., 2011). The way tourism experiences are developed at the destination will undoubtedly influence the tourist's perception. It is not sufficient to merely provide satisfactory experiences, as highlighted by the previous authors; instead, destinations must aim to create memorable experiences that remain in the consumer's mind. Therefore, understanding both primary and associated preferences becomes a critical success factor.
- iv) *Touristic experiences*. This general term includes the set of all the experiences made available to tourists, regardless of whether they are provided by the destination/territory or by companies.
- v) *Co-experiences*. The concept is related to the value co-creation process. According to Kijima and Arai (2016), the co-experience is one of the four phases of the value co-creation process: co-experience, co-definition, co-elevation, and co-development. For Yang and Mattila (2016), the concepts of value and experience are closely related. Customers add value to experiences, and the main results derive from the co-creation of experiences created between customers and companies, regardless of the services created. Co-experiencing could also be presented as learning, maintaining, and modifying meaning in social interaction (Battarbee & Koskinen, 2008). Considering the research carried out, it was observed that this term is not widely used in the tourism sector since most researchers prefer to resort to the co-creation of experiences.
- vi) *Experienscape*. This term is defined by Tasci and Pizam (2020) as a set of sensory, functional, social, natural and cultural stimuli of a product/service environment which can result in positive or negative cognitive, affective, and behavioural reactions toward products, services, brands, and firms. Thus, the concept is related to a holistic perspective of experiences and simultaneously from a psychological view and connected to sensory elements and multi-stakeholder participation (Chen et al. 2020).

Some studies explored concrete experiences, such as cultural (Seyfi et al., 2020), healthy water-based activities (Campón-Cerro et al., 2020), eco-cultural (Tiberghien et al., 2020), dark tourism (Iliev, 2020), events and tour settings (Richards et al., 2020), food and wine (Rachão et al. 2020), creative tourism (Wang et al., 2020), indigenous tourism (Wu et al., 2020), night cultural tourism (Chen et al., 2020), augmented reality experiences (Park & Stangl, 2020), sports (Peric, 2010), car tourism (Cudny, 2018), among others.

4.2.2 Understanding co-creation in tourism experiences

Responding to RQ2 (What is co-creation and how does it relate to experiences?), five concepts associated with and explored by the authors were observed. The concepts explored were co-creation, the co-creation of experiences, experiences of co-creation, experience co-creation and co-destruction.

All the authors of the selected articles agree that co-creation is an interaction process, although their views differ regarding the dimensions of this mechanism. Some authors adopt broader perspectives of the process, while others prefer to emphasise more specific aspects related to the supply side. In other cases, the discussion is associated with perspectives drawn from the psychology and behaviour of tourists.

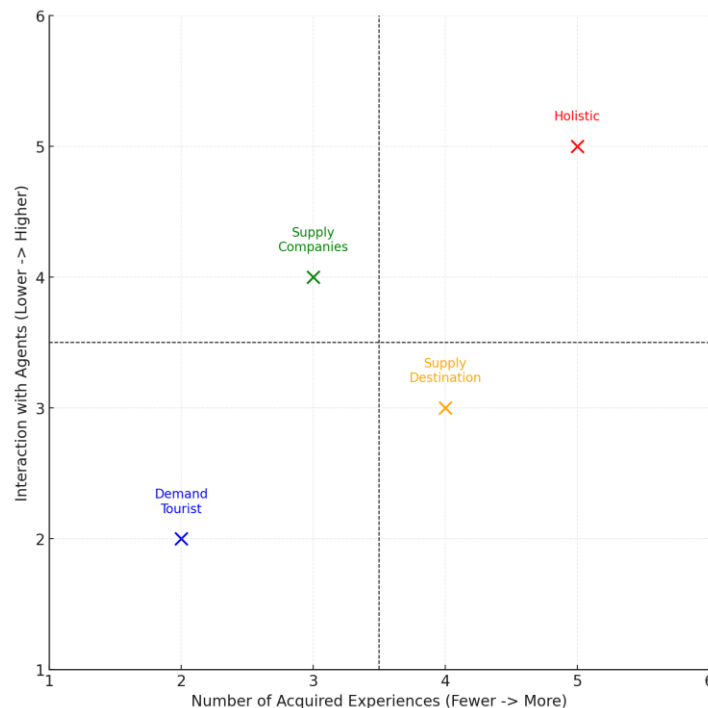
Focusing solely on the supply perspective, different dimensions of experience co-creation were identified (Appendix A): Supply—Business and Destination, Supply—Business, Supply—Destination, and a Holistic dimension encompassing both Supply and Demand. The concepts of the co-creation of experiences and experiences co-creation are understood similarly by most authors, with the latter term being used by three authors (Dias et al., 2021; Trunfio & Campana, 2019; Buonincontri et al., 2017). The concept of experiences of co-creation refers to the result acquired through the co-creation process and is found to be related to the concept of experiencescape (Richards, 2021; Tasci & Pizam, 2020), a multidisciplinary approach that strengthens the participation of multiple stakeholders. When the interaction process generates negative impacts, the concept of co-destruction emerges (Freire & Veríssimo, 2021; Laud et al., 2019).



Campos et al. (2018) identified two major perspectives on co-creation: an organisation or destination perspective and a tourist perspective. In tourism, co-creation is often presented as the participation of the tourist consumer in developing products or services. Thus, both perspectives (supply and demand) should be considered. On the one hand, tourists can contribute several of their own resources to this participation, such as time, effort, knowledge, skills, and technological tools, among others (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Companies can similarly leverage multiple resources to enable engagement or co-construction with tourists during the co-creation process, including technology, employees, knowledge, the territory or destination, tourist resources, attractions, the destination's personality, the environmental context, and the involvement of the local population. These authors assert that it is necessary to create an experience environment in which consumers can design their own unique and personalised experiences; consequently, co-created experiences cannot be commoditised. According to Femenia-Serra et al. (2019), smart destinations play a key role in facilitating the co-creation of technology-based smart tourism experiences. Considering this experience environment, companies can also contribute critically to the co-construction of the context. The careful planning of variables on the business side can be one of the key success factors in the co-creation of experiences. According to Buonincontri et al. (2017), the interactions between tourists and tourism service providers, as well as the active participation of tourists, are important antecedents of experience co-creation in the tourism industry. They also argue that the strongest influence of experience co-creation in tourism relates to tourists' happiness.

The analyses enabled the authors to contribute a matrix that systematises the different levels of interaction within the co-creation process. In this sense, Figure 4 presents a cross-reference between the interaction of tourists with various agents and the number of experiences lived during the trip. As shown in the matrix, the X-axis (number of experiences, such as accommodation, restaurants, nature activities, tours, monuments, etc.) ranges from fewer to more, while the Y-axis (interaction level with agents, such as tourist guides, digital platforms, local communities, public entities, etc.) ranges from lower to higher. Each square is represented by one of the four dimensions of co-creation: Tourist-Demand, Corporate-Supply, Destination-Supply, and Holistic. Regarding the four quadrants, the lower left (Tourist-Demand) focuses on the tourist's individual choices, with low interaction with agents and fewer acquired experiences (for example, tourists using self-service tools with minimal engagement with the destination). The upper left (Corporate-Supply) represents high interaction with tourism firms, such as hotels or travel agencies, but limited diversity of experiences (for example, a structured holiday package managed by a travel operator). The lower right (Destination-Supply) includes experiences tied to the destination, such as heritage sites or local events, with moderate interaction and a broader range of activities (for example, tourists exploring local resources, using public transport, and engaging with some locals). Finally, the upper right (Holistic) represents an integrated co-creation process involving high interaction across all agents and a wide variety of acquired experiences (for example, a tourist blending cultural, gastronomic, and creative activities, with strong engagement across all players).

Figure 4 - Matrix for Co-creation of Tourism Experiences: Agents, Experiences and Dimensions



Source: own elaboration.



Considering the previous Matrix for Co-creation of Tourism Experiences and the professional experience of the authors, it is recognized that:

- i. Perspective: "Demand - Tourist": Low interaction and a low number of acquired experiences result in limited differentiation, with tourists having a low emotional attachment to the experience. An example could be a tourist who books an all-inclusive holiday at a resort where all activities, meals, and entertainment are standardised. The experience is enjoyable but lacks personalization. Another example could be a large tour operator that sells the same sightseeing package to all tourists visiting a city without customization or a tourism destination manager who organizes airport transfers and hotel bookings but does not facilitate local cultural experiences.
- ii. Perspective: "Supply - Businesses": Moderate interaction and a moderate number of acquired experiences result in tourists receiving more customized services and increasing engagement, but they are not fully involved in the experience design. An example could be the tourist who chooses a themed hotel (e.g., eco-lodge, wine hotel) that offers unique in-house activities like wine tastings or guided nature walks or a restaurant offering a "design your tasting menu" experience based on customer preferences. A tourism destination manager provides a curated list of boutique hotels and experience-driven packages tailored to different tourist profiles.
- iii. Perspective: "Supply - Destination": Moderate interaction and more acquired experiences result in destinations gaining a stronger identity and tourists' experiences being more meaningful, with culturally rich interactions. An example could be a traveller who joins a community-led tour where locals showcase their traditions and crafts, allowing hands-on participation. Another example can be found in a hotel that collaborates with a local cooking school to offer guests a traditional cooking workshop with regional chefs. A tourism destination manager creates a "live like a local" package that includes homestays, local transport, and participation in daily village activities.
- iv. Perspective: "Holistic": High interaction and a high number of acquired experiences result in maximum differentiation, stronger emotional connections, and higher tourist loyalty. An example could be a digital nomad who uses an interactive app to choose local experiences daily, booking spontaneous meetups, workshops, and adventure activities or a smart tourism platform offering an AI-driven itinerary generator based on a tourist's preferences, behaviour, and local weather conditions. From the perspective of a tourism destination manager, this could be a destination-wide app that allows tourists to modify their plans instantly, book a last-minute private tour, find a nearby pop-up event, or engage with locals through community-led experiences.

4.2.3 Framing the definitions of tourist experiences in the dimensions of co-creation

In this process of discovering the concept of experiences, the authors understood that it would be interesting to classify the definitions of tourism experiences according to the three different but related perspectives of the co-creation process: demand (tourists), supply (business and destinations) and a more holistic one (tourism marketplace), as previously shown in Figure 1.

Answering RQ3 (how do the definitions presented fit into the perspectives of the co-creation process?), the following Table 1 shows this approach and presents the different definitions of the concepts related to experiences in tourism, respecting the various terms used by the authors of the articles consulted: tourism experiences; tourist experiences; touristic experiences; and experiencescape. This comparative view clarifies the terms used and a systematization so that, in future investigations, the authors can resort to the definitions that best fit their research contexts.

Table 1 - Definitions of concepts related to experiences in tourism

Authors	Definition of tourism experiences	Perspectives
Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982	Consumption experience must be seen from a holistic point of view, covering the pre-purchase experience and outcome phases. Emphasized the importance of emotion in experiences and the crucial role of interaction.	Holistic Perspective
Pine & Gilmore, 1998	Inherently personal, existing only in an individual's mind engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level. Experiences are co-created between the company and the consumer.	Tourist Perspective
Tussyadiah, 2014	Represents the value propositions of tourism destinations. An operational concept that allows for the orchestration of design elements within tourism destinations to allow for and facilitate desired experiences. The operational concept of tourism experience should pay attention to interactivity, which includes interactions between tourists and the physical elements of the destinations, interactions with the social elements and other social networks and interactions with the media.	Holistic Perspective
Ellis et al., 2019	Experience is the quintessential product of the recreation and tourism industries. Structured experience is a planned invitation extended by an experienced provider (i.e., a 'manipulated framework') for a heightened subjective state of motivation, attention, and emotion to occur.	Supply Perspective Companies



Hernández-Ortega & Franco, 2019	Experiences offer a solid platform to understand outcomes such as satisfaction and loyalty. Presents experience as both the starting point and the cornerstone of value creation. The concepts of experience and value are related by three processes: formation, transformation and co-creation.	Tourist Perspective
Godovykh & Tasci, 2020	The totality of cognitive, affective, sensory, and conative responses, on a spectrum of negative to positive, evoked by all stimuli encountered in pre-, during, and post-phases of consumption affected by situational and brand-related factors filtered through personal differences of consumers.	Holistic Perspective
Mason & Cheyne, 2000	The tourism experience involves many actors, not only tourists and firms but also local communities, which can be strongly affected by the presence of the former.	Supply Perspective Destination
Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004	Introduced the concept of co-creation into the experience literature and definition. Value is embedded in the personalized experience generated through the active involvement of the consumer, who adopts the role of experience co-creator alongside the producer.	Tourist Perspective
Jaakkola et al., 2015	Are derived not only from interactions in employee–customer dyads and broader networks of actors, stakeholders, customers, suppliers, managers, frontline employees and brands.	Holistic Perspective
Carù & Cova, 2015	These are the results of co-creation during interactions among customers, employees, and other stakeholders.	Holistic Perspective
Tung & Ritchie, 2011	An individual's subjective evaluation and undergoing of events related to his/her tourist activities begins before, during and after the trip.	Tourist Perspective
Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004	Introduced the concept of co-creation into the experience literature and definition. Value is embedded in the personalized experience generated through the active involvement of the consumer, who adopts the role of experience co-creator alongside the producer.	Tourist Perspective
Vergopoulos, 2016	Three major trends define the notion of the tourist experience. The first consists of apprehending it as a kind of equivalent of "the tourist life of the tourists". Experience is the presupposition of travel, which defines how to understand everything that happens to the tourist because of its practice elsewhere. The second, more restricted, is procedural. The tourist experience becomes available when there is learning. The third definition considers the tourist experience as a strictly commercial dimension: the experience is the moment that starts from the moment when tourism is considered as a market.	Tourist Perspective
Adhikari & Bhattacharya, 2016	Experience is a differentiator in delivering products and services. Experience products can be of two types: pure experience and mixed experience. Consumption of experience could be sensory or participative.	Supply Perspective Companies
Radde, 2017	The guest experience trajectory in the hotel industry has three distinct stages – pre-stay, in-stay and post-stay stages.	Tourist Perspective
Eide et al., 2017	Experience concept innovation is the development and realization of multi-dimensional experiences that are connected coherently and communicated to relevant target groups.	Supply Perspective Companies
Olsen, 2017	Experiences could be an epiphany. A much deeper, life-altering experience that affects a person to the point that their self-identity is shifted in dramatic ways.	Tourist Perspective
Jamilena et al., 2017	Destinations constitute a fundamental aspect of the tourist experience. They have a variety of stakeholders interested in effectively managing the tourist experience to benefit all the participants at the destination. This includes the public agencies responsible for managing tourism resources, suppliers of services, and other tourists already at the destination or who have prior experience with it.	Holistic Perspective
Femenia-Serra et al., 2019	Tourist experiences have been partly mediated and reshaped by new technologies. Toward the smart experience, smart tourists employ smart technologies and use them intensively for many dimensions of their experience.	Supply Perspective Destination
Esther & Teun Den, 2009	The experience environment in tourism is made up of all the people and things that surround the human being.	Holistic Perspective
Tasci & Pizam, 2020	Experienscape is the sensory, functional, social, natural, and cultural stimuli in a product/service environment, surmounted with a culture of hospitality, all of which accrue to an experience for different stakeholders and result in positive or negative cognitive, affective, and behavioural reactions toward products, services, brands, and firms.	Holistic Perspective
Chen et al., 2020	The experiencescape encompasses a fuller range of sensory elements and multi-stakeholder participation.	Holistic Perspective

Source: own elaboration.

4.2.4 Main theories for framing the co-creation of tourism experiences

This subchapter presents the main theories associated with co-creation, answering RQ4 (Which are the theoretical frameworks used to analyze the co-creation process?).

The perspectives of involvement and interaction among all tourism players can be analysed through the recent evolution of the main theories of value creation associated with the co-creation of tourism experiences. It appears that the theoretical approaches to co-creation are not always clearly defined, and several of these theories represent evolutions of earlier frameworks. Nevertheless, not all attribute the same level of importance to the previously identified dimensions.

The theories are relevant for understanding the best scientific frameworks to support the strategies companies, and public entities can adopt to enhance tourists' experiences and identify the dimensions in which they can act. These theories include, on the one hand, the perspective where companies are primarily focused on production and marketing, namely the Good-Dominant Logic (GDL) (De Larrea &

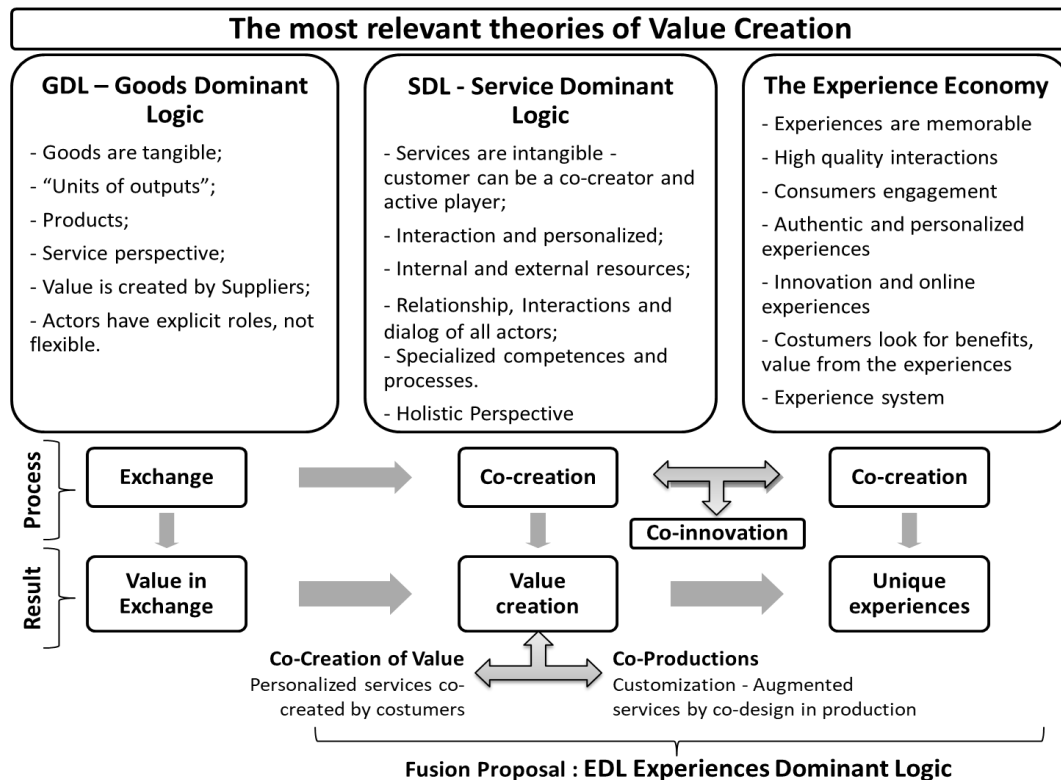


Gregory, 2020; Vargo, 2008), and, on the other hand, a context of strong involvement among all agents, particularly consumers and their satisfaction, namely the Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) (Hernández-Ortega & Franco, 2019; Mohammadi et al., 2021; Buhalis, 2020; Line et al., 2020). Given the particular features of the tourism sector, in which services are transformed into experiences, the perspective of the Experience Economy (EE) theory should also be considered since it emphasises engagement between consumers and companies and focuses on consumer satisfaction through experience innovations (Richards, 2021; Mohammadi et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Bharwani & Mathews, 2021).

Co-creation is an interactive and demand-centred process in which two parties collaborate to create mutual value (Buonincontri et al., 2017). Within Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) theory, tourist involvement creates opportunities for value creation and leads to new scenarios where value is co-created during experiences based on consumer characteristics (Tregua et al., 2020). From the Experience Economy (EE) perspective, value is embedded in the personalised experience generated through the active involvement of the consumer, who adopts the role of experience co-creator (Freire & Veríssimo, 2021). The consumer's contribution to the outcome of experiences is considered even more significant within Customer-Dominant Logic (CDL) since this theory emphasises C2C (consumer-to-consumer) interaction as an important mechanism for co-creating and co-producing service experiences (Sharma et al., 2020).

Considering the analysis of the theories portrayed in the articles studied and the holistic perspective of the co-creation of tourism experiences, the authors constructed an evolutionary synthesis of the main theories, contributing to a deeper understanding of the topic. Figure 5 illustrates the evolution of the most relevant theories, taking into account the growing importance of a holistic perspective and the emergence of Experience Dominant Logic (EDL), a term introduced by the authors to refer to a fusion of the principles of Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) and the Experience Economy (EE) theories. This fusion offers a more systemic view of the co-creation process in tourism experiences. Fourteen different perspectives or theories related to the co-creation of experiences were identified, some of which represent the evolution of earlier theories. Figure 5 also identifies these theories and frames proposals for co-creation strategies according to each perspective. SDL theory served as the foundation for developing the Value Co-Creation theory. In 2009, Binkhorst and Den Dekker reinforced the role of the Experience Economy in the co-creation process, originally introduced by Pine and Gilmore (1998). Subsequently, Heinonen et al. (2013) proposed the Customer-Dominant Logic theory, emphasising the significance of consumer-to-consumer (C2C) interaction in the co-creation of services. Tregua et al. (2020) strengthened the conceptual evolution from SDL theory towards value creation in SDL and, subsequently, to value within experiences. Buonincontri et al. (2017) also address SDL theory and the development of the Experience Economy in the context of co-creation.

Figure 5 - Evolution of the most relevant theories



Source: own elaboration.



The personalisation of services has gained considerable attention from companies due to the need to make offerings unique in the eyes of tourists. In this context, co-creation can add significant value to the service (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Sugathan & Ranjan, 2019). Knowledge contribution is also relevant to developing innovation and personalising service experiences (Sørensen & Jensen, 2015; Ma et al., 2017). Co-creation acts as a key ingredient that adds value to the supply distinguishes it from competitors, and contributes to the sustainability of business tourism companies (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Chen et al., 2017).

No theory disregards the role of companies or their relevance within the process, although some adopt more holistic perspectives that interpret these actors as part of a broader group of stakeholders involved in the co-creation of experiences. These theories include Experience-Driven Logic, Service Logic, General Service Management, Value Co-Creation, Stakeholder Theory, and Actor-Network Theory.

Bearing in mind the foundations of each theory, the authors propose a more practical perspective to support tourism organizations, identifying the underlying strategies arising therefrom. The following Figure 6 summarises these strategies.

Figure 6 - Priority strategies according to co-creation theories

(GDL) Good Dominant Logic
• Companies focused on production and marketing.
(ANT) Actor-network Theory
• Companies focused on actors, actions, processes and relationships.
(SS) Service Science
• Companies investing in smart technologies for experience creation.
(EE) Co-creation as phenomena in the Experience Economy
• Consumers and companies engagement. Focus on consumers satisfaction by experiences innovations.
(SDL) Service Dominant Logic
• Consumers and Companies engagement. Consumers satisfaction by service innovations.
(TEE) Technology Enhanced Experience
• Companies investing in smart technologies for experience creation.
(SL) Service Logic
• Consumers and multi-stakeholders full engagement.
(GSM) General Service Management
• Interaction of relevant stakeholders in the service experience.
(ST) Stakeholder Theory
• Stakeholders engagement.
(SET) Structured Experience Theory
• Investing in co-creation of four subjective experiences: immersion, absorption, engagement, and deep structured experience.
(VCC) Value Co-Creation
• Built co-creation as an holistic relationship. Collaborative development and management of consumers, providers and stakeholders.
(EDL) Experience Driven Logic - Experiencescapes
• Full engagement and consumers are at the center of the experience management.
(CDL) Customer Dominant Logic
• Consumers and companies engagement. Focus on customer autonomy, technologies and C2C engagement.
(SE) Co-creation as a result of the Sharing Economy
• Consumer and owner autonomy. Focus on a Peer-to-peer relation.

Source: own elaboration

4.2.5 Study approaches to the co-creation of experiences

The results presented below answer RQ5. How has the topic of the co-creation of tourism experiences been investigated?

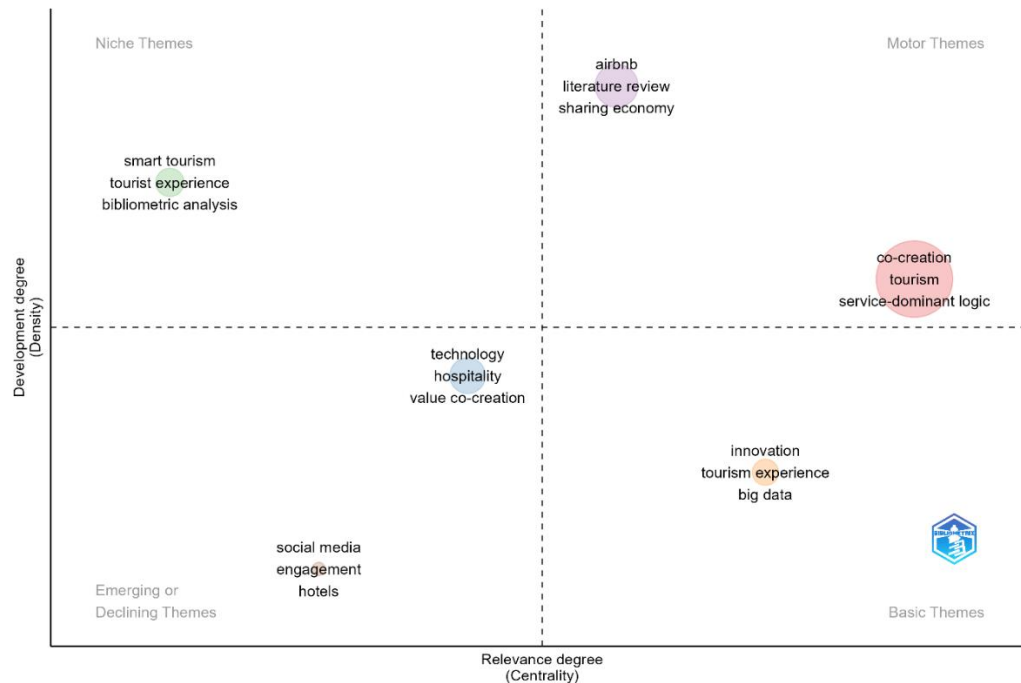
Taking into account the dimensions of the co-creation process of tourism experiences, 11 articles specifically analyse the topic from the perspective of demand, 25 focus exclusively on the supply perspective, and another 25 are only partially related to the supply



side. The remaining studies address one of the two topics under study, either co-creation or tourism experiences, with greater intensity, although they place less emphasis on the intersection between the two.

Considering the thematic map shown in Figure 7, each quadrant helps to locate the relevance and development status of the topics investigated concerning the co-creation of experiences in tourism.

Figure 7 - Thematic map about co-creation of tourism experiences literature



Source: own elaboration.

In the Motor Themes quadrant (high development and high relevance), two sets of key themes are identified that act as drivers of knowledge in the field of co-creation in tourism. The first set includes co-creation, tourism, and Service-Dominant Logic. These terms represent central and well-developed concepts in the academic literature, forming a consolidated theoretical framework. Service-Dominant Logic promotes co-creation as an essential tool to add value to the tourism experience, positioning these topics as fundamental in discussions about the sector (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Campos et al., 2018). For example, platforms such as TripAdvisor enable tourists to actively engage in co-creating value by sharing their experiences and recommendations, influencing future visitors' decisions, and prompting service providers to refine their offerings based on user-generated feedback.

The second set of themes, comprising Airbnb, literature review, and the sharing economy, reflects the recent and growing interest in peer-to-peer platforms and their role in co-creating experiences. Airbnb, for instance, has become a key player in the tourism industry by enabling hosts and guests to co-create personalised and localised experiences, which are an essential part of the evolving tourism landscape. These themes suggest a growing focus on how the sharing economy fosters new forms of consumer engagement within the tourism experience, thereby expanding opportunities for co-creation (Cheng, 2016; Sigala, 2017).

In the Basic Themes quadrant (low development and high relevance), the terms innovation, tourism experience, and big data stand out for their importance in the research of co-creation in tourism, although they have not yet achieved a high degree of development within the academic literature. This suggests significant opportunities for further study on how innovation and big data can enrich tourism experiences and enable more personalised, co-creation-oriented approaches. For example, platforms like Booking.com utilise big data to analyse past traveller preferences and provide tailored recommendations, facilitating co-created experiences. Further research on these topics could generate valuable insights into applying new technologies to enhance customer experience (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015; Mariani et al., 2018).

The Niche Themes quadrant (high development and low relevance) includes the topics of smart tourism, tourist experience, and bibliometric analysis. These areas are well-developed but display lower centrality in the context of co-creation in tourism. This suggests that, although these aspects have been extensively researched and possess a solid theoretical basis, their direct relationship with the co-creation of experiences is not predominant. For example, smart tourism technologies, such as the Internet of Things (IoT), enhance the co-creation process by providing real-time data on tourism trends, although their connection to co-creation remains more peripheral. Research on smart tourism and bibliometric analysis contributes to the field from a more specific



angle, acting as a niche that indirectly supports the broader literature on the co-creation of experiences (Gretzel et al., 2015; Donthu et al., 2021).

Two distinct groups are identified in the Emerging or Declining Themes quadrant (low development and low relevance). The first group, comprising social media, engagement, and hotels, represents emerging topics. Recent data from the Web of Science (WoS) shows a notable increase in the number of publications on these themes, reaching approximately 45 papers in 2024, which is triple the number published in 2018. Social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have become essential tools for engaging tourists, enabling them to actively participate in the tourism experience by sharing their stories and influencing others' experiences. Although this area is not yet central in co-creation research, it is gaining traction due to its potential to influence how tourists engage with hotel services through social media (Leung et al., 2013).

In contrast, the second group, which includes technology, hospitality, and value co-creation, reflects declining themes. Since 2018, publications on these topics have decreased by 58.33 per cent, with only five papers published in WoS in 2024. Although these topics once held a central position in tourism co-creation research, they have become less prioritised, indicating a shift in research focus within the field (Neuhofer et al., 2015). For instance, while augmented reality once generated significant interest within the hospitality sector, its application in co-creating experiences has declined as new trends, including social media engagement, big data, and the Internet of Things (IoT), have taken precedence.

This framework provides valuable insights into the current trends in the co-creation of tourism experiences. Identifying key themes and their stages of development serves as a guide for researchers aiming to explore and contribute to this evolving field. As the research landscape continues to advance, scholars are encouraged to consider well-established concepts, such as Service-Dominant Logic and the sharing economy, alongside emerging technologies, including the Internet of Things (IoT), big data, and social media engagement. Understanding how these elements intersect and influence the co-creation process will be crucial for advancing both the theoretical and practical applications of co-created tourism experiences. Researchers should focus on high-relevance topics, such as innovation and tourism experiences, while also exploring niche areas that offer unique opportunities for further investigation, such as smart tourism technologies. This approach will help generate new knowledge and shape the future of tourism experience co-creation.

4.2.6 New definitions of experiences according to the dimensions of the co-creation process

Answering RQ6 (Can new definitions of experiences be presented from the different perspectives of the co-creation process?), it is the authors' opinion that it is possible to clarify the existing concept and definitions, presenting new definitions according to the dimensions of the co-creation process previously identified.

These definitions promote a better and faster understanding of tourist experiences for professionals working in the area to enhance interactions within the dimensions of co-creation and simultaneously define satisfaction assessment processes with greater objectivity.

In this sense, the following definitions are proposed:

- i. **Tourism of Experiences (Holistic Perspective):** Tourism of experiences, as an Experiences Dominant Logic, refers to a market trend related to the economy of experiences and represents the overall result of all interactions arising from the fruition of the tourist context, including the entire economic system of tourism, its natural dynamic, the macroeconomic factors, agents, community, public entities, tourists, resources and attractions.
- ii. **Destination Experiences (Supply Perspective):** Destination experiences refer to all experiences made available to tourists regardless of whether they are provided by the territory or by the agents that facilitate the destination development, such as private, public, locals and educational entities. The result is unique and personalized experiences co-created with the participation of any of the elements of the tourism system.
- iii. **Touristic experiences (Supply Perspective - Companies):** Touristic experiences refer to the set of all services, activities, conditions and information made available to tourists by companies, taking into account the tourists' expectations and wishes regarding the final result and their availability to interact during the co-creation process. These augmented co-experiences result from permanent innovation, a fusion of co-production and co-creation, adding extra value for tourists and companies.
- iv. **Tourist experiences (Demand Perspective):** Tourist experiences refer to how tourists interpret, live and feel the idealized experiences sought-after or consumed during the travel process, which can range from the idea or planning to the post-consumption phase. These experiences result from the tourist's state of mind, their preferences, their ability and availability to interact with the tourist environment and those who accompany them, and the experiences can generate different feelings and be more or less positive depending on the emotions enhanced by the context and the tourist's behaviour.



4.3 Gaps and future research

Based on the literature review performed, relevant gaps were identified that represent opportunities for future research in the academic literature as explained as follows:

1. No review analyses have been identified that consider the different types of experiences in tourism from a global, objective, and up-to-date perspective. Although recent articles address various types of tourism (Aminudin & Jamal, 2020), they do not specifically focus on the different types of experiences. Thus, to address this gap, it would be valuable to create a ranking of experiences in order to identify which areas of tourism have not yet been explored and to deepen understanding of how different levels of experience are related and may influence one another (Richards, 2021).
2. Several future research directions have been identified based on the findings regarding the various research themes in the co-creation of tourism experiences. First, greater attention should be given to emerging themes such as social media, engagement, and hotels, analysing how these areas can shape user interactions and influence the co-creation process. This could be particularly valuable when considered alongside established themes, including co-creation and Service-Dominant Logic. Niche topics such as smart tourism also merit further exploration to better understand their role in co-creation and to elevate these themes in future studies. Established research has demonstrated how sharing economy platforms, such as Airbnb, facilitate collaboration between consumers and businesses, offering a foundation for investigating the dynamics of these interactions. In addition, the recent decline in focus on technology, hospitality, and value co-creation should be examined to understand this trend and identify potential revitalisation areas. Research should explore how innovative technologies can be effectively integrated to enhance the personalisation and adaptability of tourism experiences. Together, these research directions can provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding co-creation in tourism and foster innovative collaborations between consumers and companies.
3. Taking into consideration that the co-creation of experiences process results from different interactions depending on the spaces, times, acts and agents involved, it is important to explore in the future the co-creation process of the different types of experiences bearing in mind these differences.
4. Another relevant issue is understanding whether companies should develop different co-creation processes depending on the types of experiences that tourists want to enjoy. For example, Kim et al. (2021) present four types of experiences (entertainment, esthetical, escapist, and educational) and conclude that travellers belonging to profile groups pertaining to the high level of all four types of experiences were associated with higher travel satisfaction. This supports the fact that travellers' satisfaction is more likely to be obtained with various types of travel content and experience.
5. Alternatively, it was found that several authors chose to address the topic of tourism experiences in a more specific way. In future studies, researchers can also examine, through qualitative and quantitative research, the tourism experiences according to the reason for the visit and the stage, whether pre, during or post.
6. Experiences are also related to innovation and must lead to collective practices that could be reproduced later; therefore, the process should be maintained in the future (Eide et al., 2017). Future investigations should consider the importance of digital contexts, innovation, and technology in organizations and destinations, improving the supply of experiences and facilitating the co-creation process.
7. As Alcoba et al. (2017) state, people value experiences remarkably. Thus, opportunities for future research also lie in understanding other stakeholders' contributions to the result of experiences co-created with tourists, as will be the case for populations, employees, educational and tourist training entities, public entities, and destination managers.
8. Testing new models of the co-creation of experiences would be very beneficial, especially if they include new digital technologies and help measure co-creation's impact on all the agents involved, including tourists. It is relevant to investigate how technological platforms and social media influence the experiences and interactions between customers, employees, firms, tourism resources, and locals (Lee et al., 2021).
9. Finally, further research is also needed to study the negative aspects (Freire & Verissimo, 2021) of tourism experiences and the impacts on the brands of destinations and companies.

5. Conclusions and implications

This study offers a comprehensive view of experience co-creation in tourism, addressing both tourist and business perspectives. The findings reveal that co-creation is a multifaceted process, in which the interaction between actors within the tourism ecosystem plays a decisive role in value generation. In particular, digitalisation and technological platforms have been identified as key catalysts for tourists' active participation, enabling greater personalisation and adaptability of experiences. Furthermore, co-creation has proven crucial in building memorable experiences and strengthening the emotional connection between tourists and destinations. This study not only synthesises existing research on experience co-creation in tourism but also proposes a future



research agenda to guide the development of more effective strategies within the industry. The integration of technology and user engagement is expected to remain crucial for the continued evolution of this field and for the creation of innovative and meaningful tourism experiences.

From a theoretical perspective, this study expands co-creation knowledge by highlighting the importance of integrating models that consider tourists' cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions. The level of tourist participation directly influences the perception of the experience's value, reinforcing the need for personalised strategies. Furthermore, the existing literature tends to fragment the study of co-creation, indicating the need for interdisciplinary approaches that address the interconnectivity between technology and social interaction. It is crucial to incorporate theories of consumer behaviour and the experience economy to develop a more holistic framework. Moreover, the thematic map presented acts as a comprehensive resource to guide researchers, offering a solid foundation for the development of new lines of inquiry that contribute to the growth and consolidation of the co-creation of tourism experiences as a relevant and multidisciplinary field of study.

On a practical level, the findings present relevant implications for the tourism industry. It has been demonstrated that effective co-creation strategies require a combination of digital tools, user-centred design, and collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including tourists, businesses, and local communities. This study highlights that tourism companies adopting participatory approaches in designing their services improve customer satisfaction and generate greater loyalty and competitive differentiation. Furthermore, the results show that incorporating emerging technologies such as big data and the Internet of Things (IoT) can enhance co-creation, facilitating interaction and the personalisation of experiences. This study represents a valuable opportunity for tourism destination managers to innovate by integrating emerging technologies into their services, aligning with new trends, and ensuring that experiences are personalised, inclusive, and enriching for all stakeholders. As the industry evolves, the key lies in maintaining flexibility and embracing technological advancements while prioritising value creation for tourists and local communities. In addition, tourism companies are urged to continue exploring innovative strategies to foster active tourist participation, adapt to shifting trends, and enhance the overall experience.

Tourism managers can use this study to select the most effective strategies to enhance the co-creation process of the experiences they offer to the market and develop new solutions to improve tourist satisfaction and achieve competitive advantages. Specifically, the research shows that it is possible to enhance the outcomes of tourism experiences, making them more intense and adding value for tourists if companies and destination managers adopt a more holistic and integrative perspective of the co-creation process. This includes developing offers that actively involve the participation of the destination, tourists, former tourist clients, residents, and other agents who collaborate in developing and promoting the destination, such as digital tourism sales and communication platforms.

As a concluding remark, holistic co-creation emerges as the most effective strategy for fostering innovation, preserving cultural authenticity, and generating long-term value in the tourism industry. As the most valuable dimension, this delivers the greatest added value for all stakeholders: (1) For tourists, it provides dynamic, highly personalized, and interactive travel experiences, enhancing overall satisfaction; (2) For tourism businesses, it enables the creation of unique, differentiated products, boosting customer retention; and (3) For destination managers, it shifts their role from logistical managers to experience curators, creating a significant competitive advantage.

Nevertheless, this study also has certain limitations. The literature review focused primarily on academic sources, which could underestimate the practical evolution of co-creation in business settings. Future research could explore how macroeconomic and socio-political factors can influence the implementation of co-creation strategies. It would also be valuable to investigate how co-creation can be integrated with regenerative tourism models, promoting more sustainable and responsible experiences with local communities. Additionally, expanding the analysis period from 2021 to 2025 would provide insights into more recent developments in the field.

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Andrade Cunha Marta: Writing - Original draft preparation, Writing - Review & Editing, Conceptualization, Visualization, Data Curation, Formal analysis, Methodology and Investigation; Irimia-Diéguez Ana: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Writing - Review & Editing, Methodology, Supervision, Validation and Reviewing; Perea-Khalifi David: Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Software, Visualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review and editing.

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Appendix A. Supplementary information

Table A1. Authors approach the topic of co-creation of experiences

Authors	Perspective: Offer / Demand / Holistic
Sarasvuo et al. (2022); Golestaneh et al. (2021); Freire & Verissimo (2021); Mohammadi et al. (2020); Eletxigerra et al. (2018); Melis et al. (2015); Dougali et al. (2015); Binkhorst & Den Dekker (2009)	Supply - Business and Destination
Richards (2021); Lee et al. (2021); Pasca et al. (2021); Bharwani & Mathews (2021); Zhang (2020); Line et al. (2020); Sharma et al. (2020); Serravalle et al. (2019); Hernández-Ortega & Franco (2019); Ellis et al. (2019); King et al. (2019); Laud et al. (2019); Eide et al. (2017); Alcoba et al. (2017); Lugosi (2014); Chathoth et al. (2013)	Supply - Business
Dias et al. (2021); Buhalis et al. (2020); Jamilena et al. (2017); Del Vecchio et al. (2015); Tussyadiah (2014)	Supply - Destination
Carvalho et al. (2021); Zhang et al. (2020a); Zhang et al. (2020b); Rachao et al. (2020); Belarmino & Koh (2020); De Larrea & Gregory (2020); Tasci & Pizam (2020); Tregua et al. (2020); Trunfio & Campana (2019); Altinay & Taheri (2019); Sigala (2018); Campos et al. (2018); Kandampully et al. (2018); Femenia-Serra & Neuhofer (2018); Ma et al. (2017); Buonincontri et al. (2017); Chathoth et al. (2016)	Holistic - Supply and Demand
Stankov et al. (2019); Phi & Dredge (2019); Galvagno & Giaccone (2019)	Not Specific

Source: own elaboration.