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Value co-creation and destination brand equity: understanding the role of social commerce information sharing

Long Hong Pham, Erisher Woyo, Trang Huong Pham, Dao Thi Xuan Truong

Abstract

Purpose: Widespread technology adoption in tourism enabled tourists to be active content creators, thus, influencing destination brands through co-creation. This study examines value co-creation, social commerce information sharing and destination brand equity.

Design/methodology: A quantitative approach was applied to analyse data collected from a global online survey. Hypotheses were tested using PLS-SEM analysis.

Findings: Results shows a positive effect of value co-creation on destination brand equity. Social commerce sharing information was found to be mediating on the relationship between value co-creation and destination brand equity.

Research implications: The article adds new insights to tourism marketing by investigating value co-creation, information sharing activities and destination brand equity. It also offers interesting implications for destination managers to improve Vietnam as a destination brand.

Originality: This paper is among the first to test the mediating role of social commerce information sharing on value co-creation and destination brand equity.

Keywords: value co-creation, information sharing activities, DART model, brand co-creation, destination brand equity, social commerce.

Introduction
Tourism plays an important economic development role in several destinations globally (Comerio and Strozzi, 2019). This explains why tourism destination development is the driving

force for competition between destinations (Molina *et al.,* 2010; Woyo and Slabbert, 2021a). To succeed in competitive environments, destination managers should ensure that destination brands are attractive and competitive (Pike and Page, 2014; Woyo and Slabbert, 2021b). Doing so requires a comprehensive understanding of how to enhance destination brand equity (Bastos and Levy, 2012; Šerić and Mikulić, 2020; Xu and Chan, 2010), specifically by ensuring that the tourist destination is uniquely differentiated (Kim and Lee, 2018).

Destinations are increasingly becoming differentiated because of "reduced barriers, in terms of investment, information generation and dissemination, travel accessibility and means of transport" (Giannopoulos *et al.,* 2021: 148). Competitive and attractive destination brands are crucial in enhancing destination choice by travellers (Fernández-Ruano *et al.,* 2022; Woyo, 2018), and provides destinations with the ability to compete globally (Giannopoulos *et al.,* 2021). However, the development of a competitive and attractive destination brand image is not an easy process.

Co-creation is characterised by the interactions of customers and organisations/service providers, specifically "for the purpose of creating value" (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Oertzen *et al.* (2018: 642) argues that co-creation is "rooted in the verb *create*, which is defined as bringing something into existence, causing something to happen as a result of one's actions, and in *co*, which means together with another or others". Kumar and Pansari (2016) argue that co-creation is a direct result of competitive market dynamics and the growing power of consumers which is causing organisations to increase social engagement. It is worth stating that the application and measurement of co-creation has predominantly been from the traditional marketing sciences perspective (Nambisan and Baron, 2009; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). However, it is beginning to gain traction in tourism research (Kim *et al.,* 2018; Liu *et al.,* 2022; Prebensen and Xie, 2017). Value co-creation was first introduced to hospitality and tourism literature in 2009 (Carvalho and Alves, 2022). The focus of value co-creation in tourism focused on "three thematic areas" that include the "dimensions, antecedents and implications of value co-creation" (Carvalho and Alves, 2022)

The way organisations interact with its consumers has been greatly altered due to technological advancement in recent years. Gensler *et al.* (2013) argue that this change in the way consumers is interacting with business is increasingly becoming an important source of brand value. This suggests that human and social experiences form the basis of value co-creation. Technological advancement also acts as a source of consumer (tourist) empowerment as they are able to easily engage with service providers (Al-Omoush *et al.,* 2022; Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2016), especially through social media applications (Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2016; Woyo and Nyamapanda, 2022). Social media is considered a valuable platform for disseminating information concerning tourist destinations, products, and establishments (Woyo and Nyamapanda, 2022). Because of its power, social media allows destinations to develop and share information to relatively large communities. Therefore, destinations will be able to disseminate tourism information, create destination awareness and interact with tourists (Cruz-Milán, 2021).

Tourists become co-creators of the tourism experience the moment they decide which destination to visit (Buonincontri *et al.,* 2017a; Prebensen *et al.,* 2013). Additionally, as

tourists are becoming more powerful stakeholders in a destination context, several destinations are becoming more involving, especially with the development and formulation of destination branding messages and strategies (Oliveira and Panyik, 2015). Tourist's involvement often happens through social media engagement further shows that tourists occupy a "significant role as co-creators" (Foroud *et al.,* 2022; Kim *et al.*, 2018, p.189). Furthermore, "online brand communities can impact all the four brand equity dimensions including perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness, and brand association" (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001; Šerić and Mikulić, 2020; Xu and Chan, 2010). This therefore shows that organisations (Gensler *et al.,* 2013; Simon and Tossan, 2018) and tourist destinations can develop and deliver their brands with incremental value through social commerce information sharing platforms.

Social commerce is a relatively novel type of electronic commerce emanating from consumers' online interactions with businesses, especially through social media technologies (Nadeem *et al.,* 2020). This form of electronic commerce "allows people to participate actively in the marketing and selling of products in online marketplaces and communities" (Stephen and Toubia, 2010:215). In a tourism context, online interactions include but not limited to exchanging and sharing information through reviews, ratings, and opinions regarding tourist destination brands. Information shared on these platforms is helpful in guiding consumers' decision-making process (Zhang and Benyoucef, 2016), future intentions (Shen, 2012) and enhances organisational performance (Lin *et al.,* 2019). Additionally, social commerce has also been identified as a crucial antecedent of positive customer relationships (Hajli *et al.,* 2014) which is important in enhancing destination loyalty and revisit intentions (Shen, 2012; Woyo, 2018). Though social commerce is imperative for promoting brands (Nadeem *et al.,* 2020), destination management organisations would need to do more in terms of investing in relationship management to realise the perceived benefits.

The Internet and social commerce platforms are important sources of information tourists use when planning tourism trips (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010; Woyo and Ukpabi, 2022). Additionally, tourists use social commerce platforms for social interactions like sharing travel experiences, research about the destination, and making reservations (Oliveira and Panyik, 2015; Rather, 2020; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Due to its importance, social media sharing is now increasingly being used by destination management organisations to communicate about their brands (Dedeoğlu *et al.,* 2020). Technological interactions empower consumers and make them to exert influence on brands through the co-creation process (Tajvidi et al., 2018). Based on this, there is a need for "new strategies in destination branding initiatives" (Oliveira and Panyik, 2015:54). To this end, there has been a growing stream of academic attention on brand equity, customer engagement (Kim and Ko, 2012; Molinillo *et al.*, 2022), "social media sharing, destination awareness and quality" (Dedeoğlu *et al.,* 2020). However, research examining the virtual context of the relationships between value co-creation, destination brand equity and social commerce information sharing remains relatively under-researched and under-theorised (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015), especially from an emerging tourist destination context of Vietnam.

Destination brand equity is also a construct that is yet to be fully investigated (Liu *et al.,* 2022), specifically from emerging tourist destination contexts (Giannopoulos *et al.,* 2021; Merrilees, 2016; Šerić and Mikulić, 2020; Xu and Chan, 2010). Theorisation of technology's impact on

destination brand equity is also considered limited regardless of its importance in the platformisation of value co-creation (Kennedy and Guzmán, 2017; Preko *et al.,* 2022) and engagement (Buonincontri *et al.*, 2017b; Lu *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, the experiences and reflections of tourists regarding a destination can affect its brand development, reputation, and image (Law *et al.,* 2014). Boes *et al.* (2015) argues that integrating brand management with co-creation of tourism experiences is critical for effective destination management. However, research investigating the application of co-creation in destination branding continues to be limited (Suntikul and Jachna, 2016**).** Given the complexity of destination branding (Rather *et al.,* 2020), research exploring the social commerce's role on value co-creation and destination brand equity is required. Based on these identified gaps, this study examines social commerce information sharing's mediating effect on value co-creation and destination brand equity.

Theoretically, the study extends literature on value co-creation and destination brand equity through unpacking the salient role of social commerce. Furthermore, it contributes to destination branding literature by interpreting the implications of value co-creation on destination brand equity from an emerging tourist destination context. Practically, the study's insights could help destination managers to comprehensively understand the complexity of destination branding in social commerce contexts. Thus, destination managers' understanding of how to use social commerce to build attractive and competitive destination brands is therefore enhanced. The online presence of tourist destinations is crucial for enhanced tourist engagement. Through this, destinations will be able to establish brands that are considered warm, intimate, and sociable by current and future travellers.

Literature review

Value co-creation and DART model
In the past, the organisation or the seller was solely involved in designing and creating value for its customers. However, due to several market dynamics this approach has been modified, giving rise to a process where multiple systems of service participate in creating value through resource integration and resource application (Vargo *et al.,* 2008). Based on this, it is important to highlight that creating superior value for customers is an important aspect of business operations (González-Mansilla *et al.,* 2019; Javed and Awan, 2022). However, achieving this requires reciprocal engagement between customers and the organisation (González-Mansilla *et al.,* 2019; Vargo *et al.,* 2008). This engagement should involve "customers' shared inventiveness, co-design, or shared production, co-innovating new products/services and providing feedback" (Rather *et al.,* 2022: 551).

Value co-creation theorisation is gradually becoming an established construct in several research fields including tourism and is predominantly shaped by the new service-dominant (S-D) logic perspective (Chathoth *et al.*, 2016; Font *et al.*, 2021; Liu *et al.,* 2022b; Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2016). Under this approach, "the customer is always at the heart of the value co-creation process" (Chathoth *et al.*, 2016; Font *et al.*, 2021; Liu *et al.,* 2022b; Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2016), resulting in a unique form of engagement. Thus, value co-creation is more concerned with how organisational activities are designed with the customer than for the customer (Foroud *et al.* 2022; Rather *et al.,* 2022; Taghizadeh *et al.,* 2016). Unlike the goods-dominant logic, S-D value co-creation logic value enables organisations to personalize

products and services (Taghizadeh *et al.*, 2016; Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008), thus making it a valuable aspect for business competitiveness.

Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) study is of great importance to destination managers because it provides a holistic investigation of co-creation. It also provides "a roadmap for firms to engagement customers in value co-creation". We employed the DART model to understand the mediating influence of social commerce information sharing activities on value co-creation and destination brand equity. It was chosen for this study because it is a practical and appropriate framework that provides managers with an easy method to understand value co-creation (Mukhtar *et al.,* 2012; Skaržauskaitė, 2013). DART model is made up of four dimensions that are pertinent in managing value co-creation process: (1) dialogue (D), (2) access (A), (3) risk (R), and (4) transparency (T).

There is need for comprehensive understanding of the DART dimensions for tourist destinations to achieve optimal results (Solakis *et al.*, 2022). Though the DART model is increasingly being tested in several studies (Becker and de Brito Nagel, 2013; Chen *et al.,* 2017; Van Limburg, 2011), the mediating effect of social commerce on value co-creation (using the DART dimensions) and destination brand equity is less studied, and this informs our point of departure in this study. Relatively limited scholarship on this area has been informed by the DART model (Albinsson *et al.,* 2016; Solakis *et al.*, 2017; Taghizadeh *et al.,* 2016) despite its theoretical importance (Zhang *et al.,* 2015). Studies from an emerging destination context are also limited (Chathoth *et al.,* 2016; Morosan, 2018). Our study is a response to the call for further studies examining DART scales in tourism (Giuseppe *et al.,* 2022).

Dialogue is required between several tourism stakeholders to manage relationships in tourist-to-tourist and tourist-to-tourism supplier value co-creation process (Giuseppe *et al.,* 2022; Taghizadeh *et al.,* 2016). The dialogue between stakeholders is important because it enhances the destination's market performance and competitiveness (Woyo and Slabbert, 2021a). We argue that achieving this requires stakeholders to have access to resources including information. Access to information is therefore easily facilitated by social commerce platforms including social media technologies (Albinsson *et al.,* 2016; Rather, 2021). Sharing of information, thus, is the best way for organisations-to-customers interaction (Taghizadeh *et al.,* 2016).

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2001) argue that "deep engagement and propensity to act on both sides of the value co-creation process" is crucial for effective dialogue. Through social commerce platforms tourists can engage and share information concerning a destination's value chain (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019). Consequently, destinations should provide tourists with access to information regarding tourism products/services. This is critical in ensuring that tourists effectively participate in co-creating the design, developing, and setting of prices along the tourism value chain (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019). Therefore, tourists would not only experience tourism, but influences the "what, where, when, and how" the tourism product is developed (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2001).

Taghizadeh *et al.* (2016) argues that the effective participation of consumers as value co-creators requires enough information about risks that are "involved in production,

consumption, and delivery of goods and services". Central to this dimension, managers have a responsibility to inform consumers of the potential risks about their products (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2001; Ramaswamy, 2005). For instance, during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, destinations, destination management organisations and tourism establishments have been informing travellers on how they were handling the pandemic, and interventions in place to make tourism and travel safe. The provision of *transparent* information, is thus, critical for establishing a trustworthy organisation-to-consumer relationship (Ramaswamy, 2005; Tanev *et al.*, 2011), which leads to destination brand loyalty in a tourism context (Woyo, 2018). Additionally, it also enhances the willingness of consumers to accept the quality of products that are on offer (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2001).

Destination brand equity

Brand equity first appeared in literature more than four decades ago. It is predominantly applied in measuring the brand's financial value (González-Mansilla *et al.,* 2019). Keller (1993) defines brand equity as "a construct that measures the knowledgeability of consumers about a brand. This awareness is generally prompted by their ability to recall and recognise brands as well as their association with the brand". Measuring brand equity in a destination context is imperative because it provides destination managers with insights that can be used to influence positive travel behaviour and perceptions of the destination brand (Woyo, 2018). This makes it a strategic intangible asset that should effectively manage, improve, and optimize (González-Mansilla *et al.,* 2019). This is because it provides added value and experiences through value co-creation (Acikgoz and Tasci 2021). Therefore, understanding how destination managers could leverage social commerce platforms in developing marketing communication strategies aimed at promoting attractive destination brands is imperative.

Branding in a destination context is unique and complex given the nature of the tourism (Acikgoz and Tasci, 2022). Consequently, destination marketers must carefully think about the marketing strategies that a destination can employ to strengthen its brand equity. Destinations brands with higher equity are competitive and capable of attracting repeat visitors (González-Mansilla *et al.,* 2019; Woyo and Slabbert, 2021). However, the conceptualization and theorisation of destination brand equity is still in its infancy (Šerić *et al.,* 2017). González-Mansilla *et al.* (2019) argues that there is need for research to unpack more concerning the elements that defines and measures equity. On the one hand, destination brand equity has been investigated using traditional elements of brand perception, brand awareness, image, and associations (González-Mansilla *et al.,* 2019; Keller, 1993). On the other hand, it has also been investigated from a predominantly consumer behaviour perspective by using elements such as loyalty and willingness to pay (González-Mansilla *et al.,* 2019). The current study, however measured destination brand equity by employing the traditional and consumer behaviour elements to achieve the research objective.

Social commerce

Social commerce is a new development of electronic commerce "that has transformed commercial interactions, information accessibility, and the shopping experience" (Lin *et al.,* 2019). It "integrates Web 2.0 tools, social media, and networking technologies into commercial features" that enables customers to have online social and commercial

interactions (Al-Omoush *et al.*, 2022). Information that customers disseminates in these interactions include their electronic commerce transactions, networking strategies, social activities, and experiences (Al-Omoush *et al.,* 2022). Tourism is more of a social experience and tourism are bound to share information about their experiences in online environments. Doing so helps tourists to know the opinion of others concerning their experiences (Esmaeili *et al.*, 2020) and these opinions influences purchasing (Esmaeili *et al.*, 2020; Hajli *et al.*, 2017) and travel decisions (Woyo and Nyamapanda, 2022).

The sharing of information on social commerce platforms allows "businesses and consumers to co-create value" through cooperation "in branding, marketing, and production" (Bugshan and Attar, 2020; González-Mansilla *et al.,* 2019). Sharing of information creates economic value for tourism business (Esmaeili *et al.,* 2020), and businesses and destinations should leverage several platforms when sharing information with current and potential travellers. The social information sharing platforms that can be leveraged in a destination context include online ratings, reviews, referrals, online community, recommendations, and e-WOM. Rather (2021a, p.3) argues that "when tourists identify a high level of interaction, a positive influence on their resulting co-creation is anticipated". For instance, social commerce information sharing particularly online reviews are critical factor that influences trip planning (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008).

There is need to holistically study tourist destinations to enhance our knowledge about social commerce's role in co-creation. Using the socio-technical theory which supports the features of social commerce (Bostrom and Heinen, 1977; Walker, 2015), we argue that understanding the systems and sub-systems is imperative for business to derive brand equity from social platforms. This is because the "technical sub-system empowers users to transform inputs to outputs, and complete certain activities using several tools and technologies" (Tajvidi *et al.,* 2020). Based on this it is clear that social commerce enables tourists to be content creators when they share information (Liang *et al.*, 2011) through online reviews (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008). Additionally, social commerce offers a collaborative platform that enhances the quality of the interactions and relationship within the system (Liang et al., 2011; Wang and Yu, 2017). These aspects of the social perspective have also been applied in the value co-creation literature to explain factors that affects the consumers' co-creation intention (Esmaeili *et al.,* 2020).

Literature also identified relationship quality and social support as important drivers influencing participation, engagement (Esmaeili *et al.,* 2020; Gretzel and Yoo, 2008) and purchase intention (Liang *et al.,* 2011). With the ubiquitous of social media technologies, tourists are now able to share more information concerning their tourism experiences (Gensler *et al.,* 2013; Rather, 2021b; Woyo and Nyamapanda, 2022). The information has potential to influence destination choice (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008) and several aspects of travel behaviour. Based on this, enhancing tourist-to-business relations for enhanced value co-creation and destination brand equity becomes key. Regardless of the benefit of sharing information via social commerce to businesses (Esmaeili *et al.,* 2020), tourists (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008) and destinations, research is yet to sufficiently examine social commerce' role on value-creation and destination brand equity.

Research model and hypothesis

This paper examines the relationship between value co-creation using the dimensions of the DART model, social commerce information sharing and destination brand equity. Our research model is shown in Fig. 1. Building competitive destination brands require destination managers to ensure that stakeholders are provided with adequate resources (Giuseppe *et al.,* 2022). It also requires an effective implementation of the DART dimensions using the social commerce information sharing platforms. These dimensions are useful in guiding emerging tourist destinations like Vietnam to build attractive and competitive destination brand through value co-creation on social commerce platforms (Shen *et al.,* 2018; Taghizadeh *et al.,* 2016).

Effect of value co-creation on destination brand equity
Brand co-creation occurs in two major ways. Firstly, brand co-creation occurs when there is exchange of information between the customer and the organisation (Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013). The second approach to brand co-creation, according to Healy and McDonagh (2013) occurs "when the customer experiences the brand". However, in social commerce, brand co-creation requires "consumers to be more engaged with the brand" (Hajli *et al.,* 2017). This engagement is often achieved through online social interactions, enhanced relationship quality and brand loyalty (Bazi *et al.,* 2019). When these engagements are managed properly, they increase the value of the brand, in this case, destination brand equity. Based on this, we hypothesised that:

H_1: *Value co-creation positively affects destination brand equity*

Value co-creation, social commerce information sharing and destination brand equity
Sharing information through social networking sites is becoming useful and less risky for customers (Bai *et al.,* 2015; Lin *et al.*, 2019) to engage with peers and service providers. In a destination context, it has proved to be useful for influencing destination choice and trip planning (Bai *et al.,* 2015; Gretzel and Yoo, 2008). Reviews, recommendations, ratings, and referrals that are posted on social media provides important source of information for tourists (Bai *et al.,* 2015; Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Hajli *et al.,* 2017) to evaluate a destination brand and make travel decisions (Hajli *et al.,* 2017; Sotiriadis and Van Zyl, 2013). Through these platforms, tourists are able to communicate stories concerning a destination brand with several people including friends and family, thus, making them co-creators of brand values (Tajvidi *et al.,* 2020) that influences the success of the destination. This makes social commerce platforms like social media to be powerful. Consequently, tourism businesses and destinations, can therefore use social media to strengthen interactions with tourists (Gensler *et al.,* 2013).

Tourist destinations provide market-generated content while tourists provide user-generated content. User-generated content is often in the form of personal information, comments, asking questions, asking recommendations, and sharing experiences regarding a particular destination. Literature shows that "brand values are co-created through sharing of information about brand experiences" (Tajvidi *et al.,* 2020:479). This shows the value of user-generated content in value co-creation which has been found to be critical in enhancing brand loyalty and trust (Hajli *et al.,* 2014; Laroche *et al.,* 2012; Rather, 2017). Trust and loyalty are

evidence of high-quality interactions that occurs on social commerce platforms (Tajvidi *et al.,* 2020; Yoon *et al.,* 2008).

Social networking sites are interactive virtual platforms which allows several stakeholders (Singaraju *et al.,* 2016) to "share their experiences, knowledge, advice, and recommendations" (Hajli *et al.,* 2017). Due to the power that consumers have due to social commerce platforms, businesses are now involving consumers into several aspects of value co-creation including idea development and new product development (Martini *et al.,* 2012). This shows that when "consumers are committed to an ongoing relationship with social commerce community, they try to maintain that relationship" (Chen and Shen, 2015, p.57). Therefore, it is imperative to ensure that managers in tourist destinations effectively engage tourists on social commerce platforms. This can be achieved by turning them into brand ambassadors. Doing so enhances brand value co-creation and increases the destination's equity, as tourists will be committed to the relationship. Tourist engagement thus increases destination brand equity through the intention to recommend and recruit friends and family.

Relationship quality theory and the social sub-system of social commerce provides managers with valuable insights concerning motives and drivers for using online communication platforms among tourists (Chung *et al.,* 2017). Social commerce is a supportive online environment that encourages tourists to act as co-creators of brand value to share their experiences. Information sharing enhances perceptions and knowledge (Tajvidi *et al.,* 2017) regarding a destination brand. We argue that the value/equity of the destination is thus increased through tourists sharing, particularly positive experiences and reviews of the destination through social commerce platforms. Based on this, we propose that:

H$_2$: *Social commerce information sharing activities mediates the relationship between the value co-creation process (DART) and destination brand equity.*

H$_{2a}$: *Value co-creation process positively affects social commerce information sharing activities*

H$_{2b}$: *Social commerce information sharing activities positively affect destination brand equity*

<<<INSERT Figure 1: Proposed research model HERE>>>

METHODOLOGY
Questionnaire design and measures
Data were gathered using a structure questionnaire and it was designed based on a comprehensive literature review. It had two major sections. We first gathered data on respondents' demographic characteristics, while the second section collected information on value co-creation, destination brand equity and social commerce. 38 items were used to measure 9 constructs that formed the basis of this research (Fig. 1). Value co-creation was measured using the four DART model dimensions: dialog (DIA), access (ACC), risk (RIS), and transparency (TRA). The items that were used in measuring value co-creation were borrowed

from previous studies (Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2016; Shen et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2015). We also measured social commerce sharing information activities (SCIS) using items that were borrowed from previous research (Hajli and Sims, 2015; Hajli *et al.*, 2017; Tajvidi et al., 2018). Lastly, destination brand equity is used in this paper as a second-order measurement. This construct was measured using items that focused on destination brand awareness (DBA), destination brand image (DBI), destination brand quality (DBQ), and destination brand loyalty (DBL). These aspects were borrowed from several studies (Boo *et al.*, 2009; Pike and Bianchi, 2016; Pike *et al.*, 2010; Rather and Camilleri, 2019; Woyo, 2018). All the items used in the second section of the instrument were measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree).

To improve the composition and the instruments' content validity, we pilot tested it with 20 expert academics in Vietnam. We also used the pilot test to determine the measuring instrument's reliability. This was achieved by analysing the Cronbach's alpha coefficient and the pilot test results showed high levels of reliability. Additionally, we also revised the wording of certain questions so that they could read better for an average respondent. This was followed by data collection for the main study. We distributed the questionnaire using a mailing system through the help of several tourism enterprises in Vietnam where we targeted international tourists on their databases. The distribution of the questionnaire was also extended to the partners of Vietnamese tourism's partners abroad using social media networks. The instrument's internal consistency and reliability were assessed using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and the final analysis showed that the recommended threshold of >0.70 was exceeded (Table II).

Sample and procedure
The participation of respondents in the study was on them being (1) of legal age and (2) have been visitors to Vietnam in the last five years. 700 questionnaires were distributed to a convenient sample between January and May 2021 and 490 questionnaires were returned. From the 490 questionnaires, only 471 responses from international tourists were complete and thus considered for further multivariate analysis. Convenience sampling was considered suitable for the study because of the lack of a suitable sampling frame for the study (Bornstein *et al.*, 2013; Jager *et al.*, 2017). Respondents were ensured of their anonymity and participation was voluntary. Slightly more female respondents participated in the study (52.3%) (Table I). Majority of the respondents were holders of a college/university qualification (77.1%) suggesting that users of social commerce are relatively educated. In comparison, 43% indicated that their continent of residence is Asia while 35.7% indicated they reside in Europe.

<<<INSERT Table I: Descriptive statistics HERE>>>

Common method variance
The designing and collecting of data in this study was informed by measures and processes that ensured common variance bias was minimised (Podsakoff *et al.,* 2003). We sought respondents' consent and the protection of the respondent-researcher anonymity was guaranteed (Podsakoff *et al.,* 2003). Furthermore, common method variance was evaluated using statistical measures (MacKenzie and Podsakoff, 2012; Podsakoff *et al*., 2003). The single factor extracted using Harman's single factor test was less than 50% (Harman, 1976;

Podsakoff and Organ, 1986), indicating that data collected was not affected by high common method bias. Secondly, we conducted variance inflation factors analysis (Table II), and the analysis generated factors that were below the threshold (Hair *et al.,* 2011). Thus, we concluded that data collected were not affect by common variance bias.

Data analysis
Descriptive analysis and PLS-SEM were employed to analyse the data. PLS-SEM analysis of hypothetical relationships (Fig. 1) was performed using the SmartPLS 3.3. PLS-SEM was preferred because of its ability to work under non-normality when testing complex models (Ali *et al.*, 2018). We used loadings, AVE, CR, CA, and rho-A (Table II) to measure the convergent validity of the measurement model.

Results

Measurement model assessment
We used composite reliability (CR) to examine reliability and internal consistency (Hair *et al.,* 2011), along with the Cronbach co-efficient. Reliability and internal consistency were achieved and exceeded the 0.70 threshold. The average variance extracted which must be > 0.50 was used to measure convergent validity. These findings are summarised in Table II shows that the constructs had an acceptable convergent validity (Dijkstra and Henseler, 2015; Hair *et al.*, 2011). Multicollinearity was not a concern in this study based on the analysis of the variance inflation factors (Hair *et al.,* 2011).

<<< INSERT Table II: Measurement properties HERE>>>

Discriminant validity was evaluated using two major statistics. Firstly, we used the Fornell-Lacker criterion (Fornell and Lacker, 1981). Secondly, Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations was analysed (Table III) (Henseler *et al.,* 2015). The AVE square root of constructs is greater than the correlation values (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Further analysis using the HTMT ratios also confirmed the discriminant validity (Table IV) because the coefficients were below 1 (Garson, 2016). HTMT is considered a conservative and better test for measuring discriminant validity.

<<< INSERT Table III: Fornell and Larcker Discriminant validity HERE>>>

<<<INSERT Table IV: HTMT Discriminant validity HERE>>>

Structural model and hypotheses testing
All hypothesised effects were tested through bootstrapping using SmartPLS 3.3. We estimated the structural model using the consistent PLS bootstrapping option of 5,000 resamples with 471 examples in this study (Henseler *et a*l., 2009). Results in Fig. 2 shows a direct statistically significant relationship between value co-creation and with destination brand equity ($\beta = .590; t = 12.991; p < 0.000$), thus, supporting H_1 (Table V). Value-co-creation was also found to positively affect social commerce information sharing activities ($\beta = .689; t = 20.324; p < 0.000$), thus, supporting H_{2a}. Furthermore, social commerce information sharing activities significantly predicts the destination's brand equity ($\beta = .268; t = 5.612; p < 0.000$), suggesting that H_{2b} was supported in this study (Table V).

<<<INSERT Figure 2: PLS validated model HERE>>>

<<< INSERT Table V: Hypotheses model testing HERE>>>

Mediation analysis

Mediation analysis in this study was measured using product-of-coefficients approach "by 5000 bootstrap samples at 95% confidence interval" (Hayes, 2013). Percentile bootstrapping and confidence intervals were employed to examine the indirect and direct effects (Hair *et al.,* 2016; Ringle *et al.,* 2015). The study found that H_1, which measures the direct effect of value co-creation on destination brand equity was statistically significant (β_{direct} = .590, p =0.000, 95% CI [.720; .822]). A statistically significant indirect effect of social commerce information was found ($\beta_{indirect}$ =. 185, 95% CI [.169; .358]). Before mediation analysis, the direct path was (β_{direct} = .775, p =0.000), and when mediation analysis was applied, the path was shortened (β_{direct} = .590, p =0.000), suggesting that mediation as stated in H_2 was supported (Table VI). Therefore, a mediating effect of social commerce information sharing on value co-creation and destination brand equity was found. Overall, findings confirm that value co-creation indirectly increase the destination's brand equity through social commerce information sharing activities (Table VI).

<<<INSERT Table VI: Mediation efect HERE>>>

Discussion and conclusions

Conclusions

The study analysed the relationship between value co-creation, social commerce information and Vietnam's destination brand equity. The empirical findings showed a significant statistical relationship between the three major constructs of the study. This study also established that value co-creation leads to increased destination brand equity, confirming conclusions of González-Mansilla *et al. (*2019)'s research on hotel branding. An indirect effect of value co-creation was found on destination brand equity via social commerce information sharing activities. Furthermore, the study found that social commerce and value co-creation significantly influence destination brand equity, thus supporting conclusions of previous studies, though in different contexts (Laroche et al., 2012, Liang et al., 2011, Tajvidi *et al.*, 2021). Tourists, thus, perceive the destination's brand value better "when service providers in the tourism sector are innovative in their service delivery using technology" (Preko *et al.,* 2022). Therefore, we conclude that social commerce plays a crucial role in destination management.

Theoretical implications

This study extends knowledge by examining the relationship between value co-creation, destination brand equity and social commerce. Social commerce's mediating effect on value co-creation, and destination brand equity is rarely investigated. Thus, we advance the theory of co-creation in this study by measuring the construct using the dimensions of the DART model, which is lacking in tourism value co-creation research (Solakis et al., 2017; Solakis *et al.*, 2022; Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Our study, therefore, fills this gap using data from an emerging

tourist destination context (Chathoth *et al.,* 2016; Morosan, 2018). Furthermore, our study contributed to an under-researched perspective in literature by examining how co-creation could be facilitated through social commerce. Therefore, the findings of this study advance our current thinking regarding social commerce in a destination context by providing a foundational model and insights that are useful for understanding value co-creation and destination brand equity. We developed a destination brand equity model that incorporated service marketing perspectives through value co-creation and tourist engagement via social commerce. This expansion is critical in helping managers to understand the investment that is required to ensure the growth of the destination's brand value. The findings of the study through the model extends our understanding into how tourism business could build mutual understanding that helps to increase brand acceptance and preferences (Tajvidi *et al.,* 2020).

Managerial implications
The findings of our study are of interest to destination management organisations, managers and tourism enterprises. To achieve long-term development, destination managers should establish competitive destination brands. This can be achieved by ensuring that travellers are able to engage with the destination brand using social commerce platforms including social media networking site (Rather, 2020; Tajvidi *et al.,* 2020, 2021). This requires managers to invest and develop an efficient social commerce platform in the destination so that tourists are able to provide their reviews, recommendations, and opinions about the destination with ease. Given the importance social commerce information sharing has on destination choice and trip planning (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Woyo and Ukpabi, 2022), destinations that operates user friendly websites, and social media pages for information sharing platforms are likely to have higher equity. Increased brand engagement using social media is imperative for destinations to attract more travellers and improve the competitiveness of the destination (Woyo and Slabbert, 2021a).

Value co-creation's importance in building competitive destination brands and enhancing destination brand equity cannot be overemphaised. Furthermore, tourists are critical players in value co-creation (Foroud *et al.,* 2022) and destination brand building through their sharing of travel experiences, reviews, recommendations, and opinions of the destination. As a result, destination managers must also be able to respond to information that is shared through these platforms and improve destination brand engagement perceptions (Rather, 2020; Rashid *et al.,* 2019). This shows that the destination considers the input of tourists and further enhances brand engagement and destination brand equity. For instance, managers can easily interact with tourists online and answer queries, especially those that involve travel guidelines during the pandemic.

Information exchange between the destination and tourists is critical for enhancing destination brand engagement (Bazi et al., 2019; Rather, 2020). Through social commerce, destination managers can also share information about incentives that could be available in a destination for first time visitors and packages for repeat travellers. These packages may be shared using social media pages, national tourism organisation's websites. Effort should also be made to ensure that the destination stakeholders such as government agencies and service providers are active in terms of sharing information with tourists. This can be achieved through providing an open platform for them to share and exchange their ideas, listens to

others, and interacts with others and service providers through multiple communication channels to develop and improve service quality.

By monitoring the validated aspects of value co-creation and brand equity and value co-creation dimensions as proposed in this study, destination management organisations and managers can (a) identify the primary activities that enhances the brand value of the tourist destination; (b) implement effective destination brand development strategies; (c) understand the importance of interactions between online tourist communities, destination and tourism enterprises; and (d) better evaluate and upgrade marketing messages aimed at attracting tourists and manage those that are loyal to the destination.

Limitations and future research
The study is not without limitations. Firstly, respondents of this survey were international tourists who visited Vietnam in the last 5 years. Bazi *et al.* (2019) argue that "cultural variation does play a role in social media and social commerce", and therefore, future studies would need to also collect data from domestic travellers. Additionally, future research could also be done with travellers from big tourist markets such as the US, China, and India. This is crucial in increasing generalizability of the findings. Collecting data from tourists who used social commerce when choosing destinations and making trip decisions could also generate more useful insights that destination managers could use to build attractive destination brands post-pandemic. These future studies would also need to further investigate aspects of destination brand engagement using "cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions" (Bazi *et al.,* 2019; Hollebeek *et al.,* 2014). These could be used together with aspects such as culture, age, and place of residence, as these have significant bearing on the use of social commerce platforms.

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