

From Co-Creation to Value Actualization: A Service-Ecosystem Theory of Transformation in Platform-Mediated Experiential Contexts Introducing the CORE Model as a Mid-Range Theory of Value Actualization

Dr. Rasheed Bello¹, Yiu Fai Chan², Samina Gill³, Lawrence M. Ngoe⁴

¹QA Ulster University

² University of Salford Corresponding Author: y.f.chan@salford.ac.uk

³University of Greater Manchester, Greater Manchester Business School

⁴University of Greater Manchester, Greater Manchester Business School

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ABSTRACT

Experiential industries face a growing disconnect: while service-dominant logic (SDL) establishes value as co-created through resource integration (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2016), an increasing share of consumers, particularly younger cohorts, seek durable, transformational outcomes as the return on investment in premium experiences (Anderson & Ostrom, 2015; Zimbato & Russell-Bennett, 2025).

We introduce the CORE model (Content, Outlet, Relation, Effect) as a mid-range theory of value actualization. While SDL, TSR, and CCT each address components of transformation, none specifies the institutionalized, relational micro-foundations through which narrative-based co-creation becomes durable value actualization. CORE introduces a previously unarticulated causal sequence linking narrative scaffolding, access orchestration, and participatory institutionalization to measurable transformation.

We define value actualization as the institutionalized realization of experiential potential into durable identity, behavioral, or community change.

We propose that Relation mediates the Content–Effect link, while Outlet configuration—the platform-mediated orchestration of access—moderates this mediation. This mechanism is underspecified in, but complementary to, TSR and consumer culture theory (CCT; Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

We differentiate CORE from competing frameworks and outline a multi-method research agenda.

Keywords: service-dominant logic, value actualization, transformational experience, experiential marketing, platform ecosystems, CORE model, mid-range theory, transformative service research, consumer culture theory

INTRODUCTION:

The experiential landscape is undergoing a significant transformation, marked by a growing disconnect between the process-oriented view of value co-creation and the outcome-driven expectations of contemporary consumers. Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) has firmly established that value is co-created through the integration of resources by multiple actors in a service ecosystem (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2016). Yet an increasing number of consumers now seek durable, transformational outcomes, lasting shifts in identity, behavioral, or community change, as the primary justification for experiential investment (Anderson & Ostrom, 2015; Zimbato & Russell-Bennett, 2025).

We argue that a critical gap persists in current academic discourse: no framework adequately explains the institutional and relational mechanisms that convert co-creative processes into durable transformation in platform-mediated

experiential ecosystems. This theoretical void represents a significant limitation in our understanding of how temporary service encounters can generate lasting value that extends beyond the immediate consumption experience. The absence of such a framework hinders both academic inquiry and practical application in designing experiences that deliver meaningful, sustained outcomes for participants.

Our research contributes to marketing theory and practice in four distinct and interconnected ways. First, we extend Service-Dominant Logic by specifying value actualization as a distinct, institutionalized phase that bridges the gap between resource integration and lasting transformation. Second, we integrate Transformative Service Research, Consumer Culture Theory, and platform theory into a unified service-ecosystem lens that provides a comprehensive understanding of how experiences

generate enduring change. Third, we clarify the crucial distinction between Relation, understood as the ongoing process of interaction and engagement, and Effect, which represents the tangible outcome or transformation that persists beyond the service encounter itself within experiential marketing contexts. Finally, we outline a feasible, multi-method research agenda anchored in falsifiable propositions that can guide future scholarly investigation and provide actionable insights for practitioners seeking to design and deliver transformational experiences.

1. Theoretical Foundations: Bridging Process and Outcome

1.1 Service-Dominant Logic and the Emergence of Ecosystem Thinking

Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) provides the foundational lens for understanding value as co-created rather than embedded in goods or services (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016). Recent theoretical extensions emphasize that value co-creation is an emergent property of interactions among multiple resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutions (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2024; Vargo & Lusch, 2016). This perspective represents a fundamental shift from traditional goods-dominant logic, which viewed value as produced by firms and distributed to passive consumers, to a more dynamic understanding of value emergence through collaborative processes.

The advent of digitalization introduces considerable complexity to this framework, as technologies can simultaneously enable and constrain resource integration in unprecedented ways (Sklyar et al., 2019). As interactions become increasingly hybrid in nature, the process of resource integration necessarily involves physical, digital, social, and cultural resources, necessitating a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how value is actualized in durable form. This multi-dimensional integration creates new challenges for both scholars and practitioners seeking to understand the mechanisms through which temporary interactions generate lasting value outcomes.

1.2 Transformative Service Research: The Outcome Imperative

Transformative Service Research (TSR) investigates how services foster personal growth and well-being (Anderson & Ostrom, 2015; Inoue et al., 2025). This research stream distinguishes between the transformation economy and the experience economy, where the latter stages memorable interactions (Sklyar et al., 2019). As interactions become hybrid, lasting shifts in self or worldview become increasingly central to service value propositions (Zimbulu & Russell-Bennett,

2025). The transformation economy represents a higher order of value creation, moving beyond mere satisfaction or memorable experiences to generate fundamental changes in consumers' lives, identities, and capabilities.

TSR highlights the critical role of psychosocial resources, including trust and shared purpose, as mediators linking consumer identification to social well-being (Inoue et al., 2025). Despite paying considerable attention to formally specified causal architectures to explain how these outcomes are achieved, Nijhawan, Chakrabarti, and Roy (2025) observe that TSR needs more granular, causally specified models of how transformation occurs. This theoretical gap limits our ability to design and implement interventions that reliably produce transformational outcomes, as the mechanisms connecting service interactions to lasting change remain insufficiently understood.

1.3 Consumer Culture Theory and Identity Work

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) examines how consumption shapes identity formation and expression (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Recent scholarly work explores how digital platforms mediate identity performance, including discovery, discussion, and value derivation processes (Caliandro et al., 2024). This body of research reveals the increasingly complex ways in which consumers use consumption experiences and marketplaces as resources for constructing and projecting their identities in both physical and digital contexts.

Group identification allows consumers to access psychosocial resources that contribute to well-being (Inoue et al., 2025). While CCT provides rich insights into identity projects and the cultural dynamics of consumption, it offers limited guidance on how these identity constructions become institutionalized and durable over time. The CORE model adds process specificity to this outcome focus, bridging the gap between the cultural analysis of identity work and the institutional mechanisms that enable temporary consumption experiences to generate lasting identity transformations.

1.4 Platform Ecosystems and Digital Mediation

Digital platforms function as architected ecosystems that guide behavior, datafy experience, and capture value in ways that fundamentally reshape traditional market dynamics (Gawer & Cusumano, 2022; Goertler et al., 2025). These platforms shift value creation from linear chains, where firms produce and consumers receive, to dynamic networks characterized by multiple interdependent actors who co-create value through complex interactions. However, power imbalances within these networks can generate

reverse-value effects and present significant challenges to equitable value distribution (Zuboff, 2019; Anderson & Ostrom, 2024). These power asymmetries raise important questions about who benefits from value co-creation processes and how platform governance structures influence the sustainability and fairness of ecosystem outcomes.

The platformization of consumer culture means that experiences are increasingly mediated through digital infrastructures that shape how value is created, distributed, and experienced. This fundamental shift suggests that Outlet configuration, defined as platform-mediated orchestration of access, may moderate the relationship between co-creative processes and transformative outcomes. As platforms become the primary intermediaries through which consumers access experiential offerings, understanding how these digital architectures influence value actualization becomes essential for both theoretical development and practical application.

1.5 Narrative, Engagement, and Relational Dynamics

Narrative transportation, the phenomenon of "losing oneself" in a story, can influence attitudes and beliefs in lasting and profound ways (Irimiaş et al., 2021). This psychological mechanism demonstrates how symbolic consumption through storytelling can generate durable cognitive and emotional effects that persist well beyond the immediate consumption experience. Transmedia storytelling (TMS) encourages active participation over passive consumption, creating deeper engagement through distributed narrative experiences across multiple platforms and touchpoints (Song et al., 2025). By requiring audiences to actively piece together story elements from various media, transmedia approaches foster a sense of ownership and investment that enhances the transformational potential of narrative experiences.

Consumer engagement operates as a multidimensional construct and serves as a stronger predictor of loyalty than satisfaction alone, especially in emotional relationships between consumers and brands (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019). This finding challenges traditional marketing assumptions that prioritized satisfaction as the primary driver of customer retention. While satisfaction mediates the relationship between engagement and loyalty, this effect is moderated by relational context, suggesting that the nature and quality of the consumer-brand relationship fundamentally shapes how engagement translates into lasting loyalty (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019). Understanding these contextual factors becomes

crucial for designing experiences that not only engage consumers in the moment but also generate enduring relational bonds.

Taken together, these empirical and theoretical findings reinforce the compelling need to distinguish between relational process, understood as the ongoing interactions and engagement mechanisms that connect consumers to offerings, and transformative outcome, defined as the durable effects that persist beyond the immediate service encounter. This distinction between Relation as process and Effect as outcome represents a critical conceptual clarification that enables more precise theorizing about value actualization in experiential contexts.

Synthesized Gap: The Need for a Mid-Range Theory of Value Actualization

Service-Dominant Logic explains resource integration as the foundational process of value co-creation, Transformative Service Research prioritizes well-being outcomes as the ultimate purpose of service systems, Consumer Culture Theory illuminates identity work as a key mechanism of value derivation, and platform theory reveals ecosystem dynamics that shape how value is mediated and distributed. However, none of these theoretical perspectives specify the causal architecture linking institutionalized co-creation to durable transformation in platform-mediated experiential ecosystems. A mid-range theory of value actualization is needed to bridge this gap, providing the conceptual tools necessary to understand how temporary service interactions generate lasting outcomes through institutionalized processes within digitally mediated contexts. Such a theory would integrate insights from these diverse streams while offering actionable guidance for designing experiences that reliably produce transformational effects.

2. The CORE Model: A Mid-Range Theory of Value Actualization

2.1 CORE Dimensions and Micro-Mechanisms

We define value actualization as the institutionalized realization of experiential potential into durable identity, behavioral, or community change. This conceptualization moves beyond the immediate co-creation process to focus on how temporary interactions generate lasting transformations that persist well beyond the service encounter itself. Value actualization represents the critical bridge between resource integration activities and the enduring outcomes that justify experiential investment from consumers' perspectives.

The CORE model operates at the meso level, specifically at the service ecosystem level,

mediating between micro-level individual consumer experiences and macro-level institutional structures. This positioning allows the framework to capture the complex interplay between individual agency and institutional constraints that shape how experiential potential is

realized. By focusing on the ecosystem level, CORE illuminates how multiple actors, resources, and institutional arrangements combine to transform co-creative processes into durable outcomes that extend across individual, relational, and community dimensions, as shown in Table 1.

Dimension	Anchor	Micro-Mechanisms	Role
Content	Jenkins (2006); Irimiás et al. (2021)	<i>Narrative transportation, possible-selves activation, moral imagination scaffolding</i>	Antecedent: Enables cognitive framing of transformational potential
Outlet	Gawer & Cusumano (2022); Lorenz et al. (2024)	<i>Experiential density, creation, access, sequencing, platform-mediated affordance alignment</i>	Moderator: Amplifies or attenuates transformation via integration depth and power asymmetry
Relation	Muniz & O’Guinn (2001); Inoue et al. (2025)	<i>Psychosocial resource activation, norm internalization, collective intentionality, shared script development, identity convergence, behavioral reinforcement, habit formation</i>	Mediator: Converts Content potential into relational commitment, enabling Effect
Effect	Anderson & Ostrom (2015); Zimbato & Russell-Bennett (2025)	<i>Identity shift, behavioral adoption, community contribution</i>	Outcome: Realized, durable value justifying premium investment

Table 1 Conceptual Model of the CORE Framework

Within the CORE framework, Content influences Effect indirectly through Relation, establishing a mediated pathway through which experiential offerings generate lasting outcomes. Outlet depth moderates both the Content-Relation path and the Relation-Effect path, demonstrating how the configuration and accessibility of delivery mechanisms shape the effectiveness of relational engagement and transformational outcomes. Furthermore, Effect feeds back to reinforce Relation, creating a virtuous cycle where successful transformations strengthen ongoing engagement and loyalty, thereby enabling sustained value actualization over time.

Core Propositions: Causal Architecture

To formalize the theoretical mechanisms within the CORE model, we advance four core propositions that specify the causal relationships among the framework’s dimensions:

P1 (Mediation). Relation mediates the relationship between Content and Effect.

Rationale: Content provides narrative potential

(Irimiás et al., 2021), but only institutionalized participation (Relation) converts this into sustained meaning via psychosocial resources (Inoue et al., 2025). Without relational embedding, even compelling content fails to generate durable transformation.

P2 (Moderation). The strength of the Relation → Effect path is positively moderated by Outlet integration depth—and negatively moderated by platform power asymmetry.

Rationale: Multi-platform engagement creates experiential density (Lorenz et al., 2024); yet platform dominance can undermine co-creative equity (Latinovic & Chatterjee, 2024). Deeper outlet integration amplifies transformational potential, but extractive platform governance attenuates it.

P3 (Boundary Condition). The Content → Relation link is stronger when content exhibits narrative coherence + open-endedness (Jenkins, 2006).

Rationale: Coherent but unresolved narratives

invite co-creative closure, fueling community participation. Content that is either too prescriptive or too fragmented fails to activate the identity work necessary for relational engagement.

P4 (Directionality). Effect reinforces Relation, but Relation is typically a necessary precursor for initial Effect formation.

Rationale: Post-experience transformation deepens community ties—but without prior relational embedding, durable transformation is unlikely (Zimbatu & Russell-Bennett, 2025). This bidirectional relationship creates a virtuous cycle where realized transformations strengthen ongoing engagement.

These propositions establish the causal architecture of the CORE model, specifying not only the primary pathways through which value actualization occurs, but also the boundary conditions under which these mechanisms operate and the feedback loops that sustain transformation over time.

2.2 Defining Value Actualization Formal Definition

Value actualization is defined as the institutionally anchored, relationally embedded process through which experiential potential is converted into measurable, durable change in identity, behavior, or community contribution. This conceptualization distinguishes value actualization from related but distinct constructs that have been central to consumer research and service scholarship.

Value actualization differs fundamentally from satisfaction, which represents merely a transient affective state occurring immediately following consumption (Oliver, 1997). While satisfaction captures momentary emotional responses, it provides no indication of lasting impact or transformation. Similarly, value actualization extends beyond loyalty, which is characterized by repeat patronage driven by habit or inertia rather than fundamental change in the consumer (Guo et al., 2009). Loyalty may reflect behavioral consistency without necessarily indicating that any meaningful transformation has occurred in the consumer's identity, capabilities, or worldview.

The construct also transcends traditional notions of value-in-use, defined simply as utility realization during consumption (Holbrook, 2006). Value-in-use focuses on functional benefits derived in the moment, whereas value actualization emphasizes enduring changes that

persist long after the consumption episode concludes. Furthermore, value actualization goes beyond well-being, which represents general life satisfaction without necessarily requiring transformational outcomes (Anderson & Ostrom, 2015). While well-being improvements may result from value actualization, they do not capture the full scope of identity shifts, behavioral changes, and community contributions that characterize actualized value. Value actualization is also distinct from empowerment, which denotes perceived agency without necessarily requiring behavioral change or institutional embedding (Zhang & Wang, 2023). Consumers may feel empowered without translating that perception into durable action or identity transformation. Similarly, identity resonance, while important, represents symbolic alignment without institutional embedding (Caliandro et al., 2024). Consumers may identify with brand meanings without experiencing the institutionalized, relationally-embedded transformations that define value actualization. Finally, the construct differs from social capital, which involves network access without necessarily producing transformational output (Latinovic & Chatterjee, 2024). Social connections alone do not guarantee the conversion of experiential potential into lasting change.

Comparative Analysis of Related Constructs

To further clarify the distinctive nature of value actualization, we can examine how it differs from related constructs across multiple dimensions. Satisfaction operates on a temporal horizon of minutes to days, requires low institutional anchoring, produces no behavioral output requirement, and relies on self-report measures for assessment. Well-being extends across a longer temporal horizon of months to years and demonstrates moderate institutional anchoring, with optional behavioral outputs that can be measured through multi-item scales.

In contrast, value actualization operates across an extended temporal horizon of months to years, requires high institutional anchoring to ensure durability, mandates behavioral output as evidence of transformation, and demands measurement through both behavioral indicators and identity metrics. This multidimensional measurement approach reflects the complex, multilayered nature of value actualization, which encompasses changes in observable behavior, subjective identity, and patterns of community contribution, as shown in Table 2.

Construct	Temporal Horizon	Institutional Anchoring	Behavioral Output	Measurability

Satisfaction	Minutes–days	Low	None required	Self-report
Well-being	Months–years	Moderate	Optional	Multi-item scale
Value Actualization	Months–years	High	Required	Behavioral + identity metrics

Table 2 Concept of Value Actualization

Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for Value Actualization

For value actualization to occur, four critical conditions must be met simultaneously. First, narrative coherence combined with open-endedness must be present (Jenkins, 2006). This condition requires that experiences provide scaffolds for transformational identity work, offering both structural guidance and creative freedom for consumers to construct meaningful personal narratives. The scaffolding function enables consumers to make sense of their experiences within coherent frameworks, while open-endedness allows for personalized interpretation and application that resonates with individual circumstances and aspirations.

3. Illustration: Mapping CORE to Transformational Travel

We treat Placecinmaking (Bevolo & Di Polito, 2024) as a rich and compelling illustration of the CORE model in action, demonstrating how all four elements work in concert to generate value actualization in real-world contexts.

Content: Narrative Scaffolding for Identity Work

The Content dimension manifested through "political fables," specifically the projects Mirafiori Luna Park and Le Mille Notti, which provided narrative scaffolding through open-ended stories addressing immigration, labor, and identity concerns. These narrative frameworks served to activate possible-selves imagination among Turin residents, enabling them to envision alternative futures and identity configurations. By presenting compelling stories that resonated with local concerns while remaining open to multiple interpretations, the content created space for residents to project their own aspirations, fears, and values onto the narrative structure, thereby facilitating meaningful engagement with complex social issues.

Outlet: Multi-Nodal Access Architecture

The Outlet dimension was realized through Mille

Prodezze, which orchestrated access across mosques, schools, parliaments, and factories, thereby creating experiential density and enabling cross-group dialogue. This platform governance structure ensured participatory, non-extractive design that empowered multiple stakeholder groups to contribute meaningfully (Latinovic & Chatterjee, 2024). Rather than concentrating access through a single channel, the multi-nodal outlet configuration allowed diverse community members to engage through venues and contexts most relevant to their daily lives, significantly lowering barriers to participation while enriching the overall experiential ecosystem through multiple perspectives and touchpoints.

Relation: Institutionalized Practices for Sustained Engagement

The Relation dimension emerged through institutionalized practices including participatory research, local casting, and policy forums, all conducted through norm ritualization and collective intentionality. Through these structured yet flexible engagement mechanisms, residents developed shared scripts for community action that transcended individual interactions to become embedded patterns of collaborative behavior. The institutionalization of these relational practices ensured that engagement was not merely episodic or transactional, but rather became integrated into the ongoing social fabric of the community, creating sustainable pathways for continued participation and collective decision-making.

Effect: Measured Value Actualization Outcomes

The Effect dimension manifested in concrete, measurable value actualization outcomes that demonstrated durable transformation at multiple levels. These tangible results included €4.9M in real estate transactions stemming from the abandoned factory conversion into Spazio MRF, urban gardens and children's parks built by residents themselves, parliamentary screenings that led to substantive immigration policy dialogue at the governmental level, and sustained

NGO formation coupled with ongoing cultural programming. These outcomes represent not merely temporary improvements or momentary satisfaction, but rather institutionalized changes in physical infrastructure, governance processes, and community capacity that persist independently of the original intervention.

Critical Insight: The Necessity of All Four Conditions

A critical insight emerges from this case analysis: transformation materialized only when all four CORE conditions aligned in mutual reinforcement, supporting the proposed causal logic of the framework. Without institutionalized Relation, exemplified through passive film viewing that lacks ongoing engagement mechanisms, no durable Effect emerged despite the presence of compelling Content and accessible Outlets. This finding underscores that value actualization

requires the complete integration of all CORE elements, each performing its distinct function while reinforcing the others. The absence or weakness of any single element compromises the entire value actualization process, preventing the conversion of experiential potential into lasting transformation.

4. A Multi-Method Research Agenda

A Multi-Method Research Agenda

To comprehensively validate the CORE model and advance our understanding of value actualization in platform-mediated experiential ecosystems, we propose a systematic, multi-method research agenda consisting of four complementary studies. Each study addresses a specific theoretical component while contributing to the overall falsifiability of the framework through empirically testable propositions, as shown in Table 3.

observation, process tracing, and comparative case analysis examining contexts where institutionalized relational practices are present versus contexts where engagement remains episodic and unstructured.

Falsifiability Criteria:

- **For P1:** If Relation is not institutionally embedded in observable, repeatable patterns that transcend individual interactions, then Effect will fail to emerge as a lasting transformation. Evidence of failed value actualization in settings lacking institutionalized relational practices would support the theoretical necessity of this mediation mechanism.

- **For P4:** If Effect does not demonstrably feed back to strengthen Relation over time, then the proposed bidirectional relationship is falsified. We expect to observe that consumers who experience transformation exhibit deeper subsequent relational engagement.

Expected Findings: We anticipate discovering ritualized practices, community norms, and formalized engagement mechanisms that distinguish contexts where transformation occurs from those where it does not. The study should reveal temporal sequences showing how initial relational engagement precedes transformation, which then reinforces continued participation.

Study	Target Proposition(s)	Goal
Study 1	P1, P4	Process discovery
Study 2	All propositions	Scale development (VAS)
Study 3	P1, P3	Causal testing
Study 4	P2	Archival validation

Table 3 A Multi-Method Research Agenda

Study 1: Process Discovery Through

Qualitative Investigation Target Propositions: P1 (Mediation) and P4 (Directionality)

Research Goal: The first study pursues process discovery as its primary goal, employing qualitative methods to uncover the mechanisms through which value actualization occurs in naturalistic settings. This investigation seeks to identify the specific practices, interactions, and institutional arrangements that convert experiential potential into durable outcomes.

Methodology: Longitudinal ethnographic

Study 2: Scale Development and Psychometric Validation Target Propositions: All propositions (foundational measurement)

Research Goal: The second study focuses on scale development for the Value Actualization Scale (VAS), creating a rigorously validated measurement instrument that operationalizes the multidimensional nature of value actualization as distinct from related constructs.

Methodology: Multi-stage scale development following Churchill's (1979) paradigm and

contemporary psychometric best practices, including item generation, expert review, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and nomological network testing across multiple samples.

Falsifiability Criteria:

- **Discriminant Validity Test:** If Effect does not load separately from related constructs (satisfaction, well-being, empowerment, loyalty) in confirmatory factor analysis, demonstrating discriminant validity, then the theoretical claim that value actualization represents a distinct phenomenon fails empirical scrutiny.
- **Construct Dimensionality:** The VAS must demonstrate adequate internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and convergent validity with theoretically related outcome measures while maintaining discriminant validity from process measures (engagement, satisfaction).

Expected Findings: We anticipate a multidimensional scale capturing identity shift, behavioral adoption, and community contribution as distinct but correlated facets of value actualization. The scale should demonstrate strong discriminant validity from satisfaction and engagement measures, supporting the proposition that Effect represents an outcome distinct from relational process.

Study 3: Causal Testing Through Experimental Manipulation Target Propositions: P1 (Mediation) and P3 (Boundary Condition)

Research Goal: The third study employs experimental methodology to examine the core theoretical mechanism proposed by the CORE model, specifically investigating whether Relation serves as a necessary mediator in the pathway from Content to Effect, and whether this mediation is moderated by narrative characteristics.

Methodology: Multi-factorial experimental design with random assignment across conditions that systematically manipulate:

- **Content characteristics:** Narrative coherence (high vs. low) × Open-endedness (high vs. low)
- **Relational mechanisms:** Presence vs. absence of institutionalized engagement practices
- **Measurement:** Pre-test and post-test assessment of identity shift, behavioral intention, and community identification using the VAS developed in Study 2

Falsifiability Criteria:

- **For P1:** If Relation does not mediate the

Content to Effect pathway in mediation analysis (using bootstrapping techniques), then the core theoretical mechanism of the CORE model fails empirical validation. Evidence of direct Content to Effect pathways that bypass Relation would challenge the fundamental architecture of the framework.

- **For P3:** If content exhibiting high narrative coherence + high open-endedness does not produce significantly stronger Content→Relation effects compared to other narrative configurations, then the boundary condition specified in P3 is falsified.

Expected Findings: We anticipate significant indirect effects of Content on Effect through Relation, with the strongest Content→Relation pathway occurring in the high coherence + high open-endedness condition. Direct effects of Content on Effect should be non-significant or substantially weaker than indirect effects, supporting the necessity of relational mediation.

Study 4: Archival Validation and Moderator Testing Target Proposition: P2 (Moderation)

Research Goal: The fourth study pursues archival validation, leveraging historical data and naturally occurring variations in outlet configurations to test the proposed moderating role of Outlet depth and platform power asymmetry in the value actualization process.

Methodology: Analysis of archival data from multiple experiential contexts (e.g., entertainment franchises, cultural institutions, educational programs) with varying outlet configurations. The study employs moderated regression and multi-level modeling techniques to examine how outlet integration depth and platform governance structures influence the Relation→Effect pathway.

Key Variables:

- **Outlet Integration Depth:** Operationalized as number of touchpoints, physical-digital integration, and cross-platform coordination (measured objectively from historical records)
- **Platform Power Asymmetry:** Assessed through governance structure analysis, revenue sharing arrangements, and user autonomy metrics
- **Control Variables:** Content quality, marketing expenditure, competitive intensity, temporal trends

Falsifiability Criteria:

- **For P2:** If Outlet integration depth shows no significant positive moderating effect on the Relation→Effect pathway, then the proposition that outlet configuration systematically amplifies value actualization is falsified.
- ****If platform power asymmetry shows no**

significant negative moderating effect, then the proposition that extractive governance undermines transformation is falsified.

Expected Findings: We anticipate that contexts with deeper outlet integration (multi-platform, hybrid physical-digital) will demonstrate stronger relationships between relational engagement and transformational outcomes. Conversely, contexts characterized by high platform power asymmetry should show attenuated Relation→Effect pathways, even when outlet integration depth is high.

Integrated Research Strategy and Cumulative Knowledge Building

Collectively, these four studies constitute a comprehensive research agenda that addresses process discovery, measurement validity, causal mechanisms, and boundary conditions for the CORE model through complementary methodological approaches. The progression from qualitative discovery (Study 1) to measurement development (Study 2) to experimental manipulation (Study 3) to archival validation (Study 4) enables triangulation of findings across multiple empirical contexts and methodological paradigms.

Each study provides independent falsifiability criteria that, if met, would require theoretical revision or rejection of specific propositions. This multi-method approach combining qualitative discovery, psychometric development, experimental manipulation, and archival analysis ensures that the CORE framework undergoes rigorous empirical scrutiny, thereby advancing both theoretical precision and practical applicability in understanding value actualization in experiential ecosystems.

The cumulative knowledge generated through this agenda will not only validate (or falsify) the CORE model's core propositions but also provide actionable guidance for practitioners seeking to design experiential offerings that generate durable, transformational outcomes for consumers and communities.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

The CORE model makes three distinct and significant theoretical contributions to marketing scholarship and service ecosystem research. First, CORE extends Service-Dominant Logic by formalizing value actualization as a distinct phase in the value creation process, moving beyond well-being outcomes emphasized in Transformative Service Research or identity resonance highlighted in Consumer Culture Theory to emphasize institutionally anchored, behaviorally manifested change. This conceptualization

recognizes that value co-creation represents only the beginning of the value realization journey, and that the conversion of experiential potential into durable outcomes requires specific institutional arrangements and relational practices that extend well beyond the immediate service encounter. By theorizing value actualization as a separate phase, CORE provides a more complete account of how temporary interactions generate lasting transformations.

Second, the framework clarifies the Relation to Effect distinction with theoretical precision. While engagement and satisfaction are necessary but insufficient preconditions for transformation (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019), CORE specifies how Relation's micro-mechanisms enable Effect through institutionalized practices, formalized rituals, and sustained community embedding. This distinction resolves conceptual ambiguity in the literature by separating the ongoing processes of relationship building from the durable outcomes that those processes generate. Understanding this differentiation enables more precise theorizing about which aspects of consumer-brand relationships drive immediate satisfaction versus which generate lasting identity shifts, behavioral changes, and community contributions.

Third, CORE integrates platform theory without zero-sum assumptions that characterize much of the critical platform literature. Rather than viewing platforms solely as extractive infrastructures that appropriate consumer value, CORE positions platforms as orchestration mechanisms that can facilitate genuine value actualization when properly designed and governed. The model demonstrates that it can be coupled with Transformative Service Research's outcome measures and Consumer Culture Theory's identity frameworks, functioning as a complementary process theory rather than a replacement for existing perspectives. This integrative approach enriches our understanding by showing how platform mediation, narrative engagement, and transformational outcomes interconnect within contemporary experiential ecosystems.

5.2 Boundary Conditions

The CORE model demonstrates differential applicability across consumption contexts, with clear boundary conditions that delineate where the framework provides maximal explanatory power. The model applies most effectively when consumers engage in high-stakes investment, hybrid consumption that blends physical and digital elements, and narrative-driven content that invites identity work and self-transformation. In these contexts, the stakes justify the relational investment required for value actualization, the

hybrid nature creates opportunities for multi-nodal outlet orchestration, and the narrative richness provides scaffolding for durable identity transformation.

Conversely, CORE proves less relevant for transactional services characterized by discrete exchanges with minimal relational continuity, passive consumption that requires no active participation or co-creation, and purely utilitarian services where functional performance rather than identity or meaning drives value assessment. In these contexts, traditional service quality frameworks, satisfaction models, or utility-based value assessments provide more parsimonious and appropriate theoretical lenses. The absence of narrative content, relational continuity, or identity implications reduces the relevance of value actualization as a meaningful construct.

5.3 Explicit Scope Conditions for CORE

To ensure theoretical precision and appropriate application, we specify four explicit scope conditions under which CORE demonstrates maximal explanatory power and practical utility.

First, experiences must offer narrative-based content that provides symbolic, open-ended narratives rather than purely functional offerings. This condition requires that consumption experiences engage consumers' identity projects, personal narratives, and meaning-making processes. Without narrative scaffolding that invites interpretation and self-projection, the mechanisms through which content influences effect through relation cannot operate effectively. Purely functional services, regardless of quality, lack the symbolic richness necessary to activate the identity work that characterizes value actualization.

Second, high symbolic value must be present, meaning that investment must be justified by

identity or meaning considerations rather than utility alone. Consumers must perceive that the experience contributes meaningfully to who they are or who they aspire to become, transcending mere functional benefits. This condition ensures that consumers have sufficient motivation to engage in the sustained relational work required for value actualization. When decisions are driven purely by utilitarian calculations, the depth of engagement necessary for transformation typically does not emerge.

Third, platform mediation must be present, with Outlet involving orchestrated access across two or more touchpoints spanning both physical and digital modalities. This multi-nodal access architecture creates the experiential density and varied engagement opportunities necessary for institutionalizing relational practices. Single-touchpoint services, regardless of quality, lack the spatial and temporal distribution that enables the ritual formation, community building, and norm development central to value actualization. The platform serves as the coordinating mechanism that transforms isolated interactions into coherent experiential ecosystems.

Fourth, institutional scaffolding must characterize the Relation dimension, requiring that engagement involves formalized practices rather than ad hoc, spontaneous interactions. This condition recognizes that durable transformation emerges from repeated, structured engagement patterns that become embedded in social routines and community norms. Without institutionalization, relational engagement remains ephemeral and fails to generate the sustained behavioral changes and identity shifts that define value actualization. The formalization of practices creates predictability, reinforces commitment, and enables the accumulation of relational capital over time.

6. Conclusion

The CORE model advances marketing theory by specifying how co-creation becomes transformation in platform-mediated contexts, addressing a critical gap in our understanding of value realization processes. While existing frameworks have illuminated the mechanisms of resource integration and the desirability of transformational outcomes, they have not adequately explained the institutional and relational architectures through which temporary service encounters generate lasting change. CORE fills this theoretical void by demonstrating that value actualization represents not merely an extension or refinement of existing concepts, but rather a distinct and necessary final stage in the value creation journey.

By formalizing value actualization as the critical final stage and bridging Service-Dominant Logic, Transformative Service Research, Consumer Culture

Contexts Where CORE Does Not Apply

To further clarify the model's boundaries, we explicitly identify consumption contexts where CORE provides limited explanatory value. The framework does not apply to hedonic consumption with no narrative component, such as amusement park rides that deliver sensory excitement without engaging identity or meaning-making processes. Similarly, CORE offers minimal insight into low-involvement services such as fast food or dry cleaning, where transactions are discrete, stakes are minimal, and consumers seek efficiency rather than transformation. Finally, purely functional B2B exchanges, including SaaS procurement or commodity purchasing, fall outside CORE's scope, as these contexts prioritize operational performance over identity work and typically lack the symbolic richness and relational continuity necessary for value actualization to occur.

Theory, and platform theory, CORE offers a generative framework for scholars navigating what are no longer separate theoretical domains but rather interconnected dimensions of contemporary consumption. The integration of these previously disparate perspectives recognizes that modern experiential consumption operates simultaneously across multiple levels: the micro-level of individual resource integration emphasized by SDL, the meso-level of platform-mediated access highlighted by platform theory, the relational level of ongoing engagement central to consumer research, and the outcome level of durable transformation prioritized by TSR and CCT.

This synthesis enables researchers to examine how institutional arrangements, technological infrastructures, relational practices, and narrative content combine to convert experiential potential into measurable, lasting change in identity, behavior, and community. Rather than choosing between competing theoretical lenses, scholars can employ CORE as an organizing framework that clarifies how these different perspectives illuminate complementary aspects of the value actualization process. The model thereby provides theoretical coherence to a fragmented literature while generating actionable insights for practitioners designing experiences intended to produce meaningful, enduring outcomes for participants and communities alike.

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