ABSTRACT

Purpose –

This paper studies the function of customer ecosystems in service by viewing them through the concept of rituals. Rituals are extraordinary, highly involving experiences of value creation that customer tend to be separate from ordinary life. Customers’ rituals activate a particular form of temporary (i.e. liminoid) customer ecosystems, wherein the elements involved in cocreation reach beyond the scope of the service as defined by providers.

Design/Methodology/approach –

We apply an ethnographic approach to study rituals within the context of wine consumption. The data was collected in Sweden and Italy by means of participatory studies of consumer’s private and public wine consumption rituals.

Findings –

We argue that customers drive cocreation of value within their rituals, and that rituals bring certain parts of the customer's existent ecosystem into focus, in terms of artifacts, scripts, roles and audience. Thus, parts of the customer’s ecosystem become "actualized" within the ritual.

Research limitations/implications (if applicable) –

The paper clarifies and further develops the concept of the “customer ecosystem”, which has been characterized as customer-centered systems that involve service providers, other customers and actors, as well as various physical and virtual structures that are relevant for the customer’s use of a particular service.

Practical implications (if applicable) – Since rituals can entail greater customer satisfaction, the theoretical framework may be useful to managers to identify rituals and in so doing, feed the customer’s needing for rituals. Another important managerial contribution refers to the temporal dimension of rituals. We illustrate how the ritual unfolds along three stages. As such, managers should be aware that rituals are dynamic as they change value of service offerings before, during and after rituals.

Originality/value – The paper contributes to research on customer ecosystems by problematizing the current "static" view of the ecosystem. Instead of customers operating in static, pre-determined ecosystems, the paper illustrates the dynamic character of customer ecosystem and how customer ecosystems unfold along the temporal dimension of value formation (i.e. before, during and after). In addition, the paper identifies the key element constituting the customer ecosystem in a ritual event. Since rituals are claimed to be extraordinary (i.e. detached) events in customer’s life and thus linked to high levels of customer satisfaction, the paper identifies key elements of customer ecosystems at the core of customer value creation.

Key words (max 5)

Customer ecosystem, rituals, service logic, liminoid, wine consumption

Paper type – Research paper