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Engagement and value cocreation within a multi-stakeholder service ecosystem

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ABSTRACT

While consumer engagement and value cocreation research proliferate, it is important to explore these concepts from an ecosystem-based multi-stakeholder perspective as, therefore, undertaken in this article. Specifically, this study marks a pioneering attempt in conceptualizing stakeholder engagement (SE) as a core foundation of stakeholder value cocreation within multi-stakeholder service ecosystems. SE's behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions are proposed to activate distinct outcomes, thus disentangling stakeholder value cocreation from the closely related constructs of cooperation and collaboration. The study adopts a qualitative multi-method approach integrating in-depth managerial interviews with observation, and secondary data analysis. The findings show that (1) when behavioral SE prevails, the activated process is cooperation, (2) when cognitive SE is also present, the activated process is collaboration, (3) when emotional SE integrates the behavioral and cognitive SE, the activated process is cocreation.

1. Introduction

In recent years, scholarly understanding of multi-stakeholder service ecosystems, which have been observed in sectors including tourism (Giannopoulos et al., 2020), social media (Ravazzani and Hazée, 2022), healthcare (Secundo, Shams, and Nucci, 2021), automobiles (Chirumalla, Reyes, and Toorajipour, 2022), and industrial marketing (Rusthollkarhu, Hautamaki, and Aarikka-Stenroos, 2020), has grown exponentially. In such ecosystems, value is cocreated through multiple interacting stakeholders (e.g., suppliers, service providers, commercial partners, technology, society, business associations, customers, etc.), thus extending beyond traditional dyadic (i.e., provider/customer-based) interactive processes (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008). Stakeholders are, therefore, resource integrators that collectively cocreate ecosystem-based shared value (Merz, He, and Vargo, 2009). Each stakeholder plays a key role: As (s)he creates and receives value, this value is "uniquely experienced and determined by the beneficiary" (Greer, Lusch, & Vargo, 2016, p. 3). However, at the same time, value can also be reduced, or destroyed, through stakeholders' interactions (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). Comprehending these complex service system-based processes is, thus, fundamental for managers in their role of integrating people, technology, processes, and information to optimize value cocreation in their organizations (Chandler & Lusch, 2015).

However, though the stakeholder perspective of value cocreation is rapidly gaining traction (e.g., Ravazzani, and Hazée, 2022; Siaw and Sarpong, 2021), it remains an emerging field of study due to the complexity of multi-stakeholder encounters and cocreation's highly abstract, metatheoretical nature (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). To unpack this complexity, scholars are increasingly adopting the stakeholder engagement (SE) concept to operationalize cocreation and make it "more tangible" (Finsterwalder, Kuppelwieser, and Fisk, 2022). To date, only a handful of studies has addressed stakeholders' engagement within service ecosystems (Ravazzani, and Hazée, 2022; Hollebeek et al., 2022a; Storbacka et al., 2016), exposing a pertinent literature-based gap. Relatedly, engagement has been predominantly treated at the individual (e.g., customer) level (Brodie et al., 2011), affording limited insight into

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the role of its specific (e.g., cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) dimensions in broader service system settings. Consequently, further investigation of engagement's dimensions in the multi-stakeholder context is warranted (e.g., by exploring the role of its specific facets in driving service system-based cocreation; Conduit and Chen, 2017).

The purpose of this article, therefore, is to explore SE as a foundation of value cocreation and delineate its boundaries from a multi-stakeholder ecosystem perspective. To explore this objective, we ground our analyses in the engagement and value cocreation literature, while also adopting a case study research design. Based on our analyses, we propose a conceptual framework that models the nature of multi-stakeholder engagement and cocreation processes. In line with the framework, we develop a set of six propositions exploring the relationships between behavioral, cognitive, and emotional SE, interaction type (i.e., cooperation, collaboration, and value cocreation), and value dimensions (i.e., social, innovation, and cultural value).

In doing so, this article makes several theoretical contributions. First, this study responds to calls outlining the need to move beyond static, dyadic supplier–customer service–cocreation to a process-based, multi-stakeholder, ecosystem-based service–value cocreation perspective (Ostrom et al., 2015). Specifically, this article answers calls for further work on how individuals, collectively, meet shared goals (e.g., through coordinated behaviors) and the development, and maintenance, of these actions in stakeholder groups (Koskela-Huotari & Siltaloppi, 2020). As such, we offer a refined perspective on value cocreation as an open, collectively creative process whereby stakeholders generate outputs by reciprocally transforming each input's contributions in the system. Moreover, this research pinpoints the distinct, unique characteristics of value from a multi-stakeholder perspective. By identifying three transformative value dimensions (i.e., social, innovation, and cultural value), our analyses contribute novel scholarly insight into stakeholder-based value cocreation, thus extending current customer-centric acumen of value (e.g., Merz, Zarantonello, and Grappi, 2018). From an SE perspective, we link engagement's dimensions to stakeholder relationships, thus answering calls requesting further research on stakeholders, engagement, and multi-actor service ecosystems (Sharma et al., 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2022a). In particular, we disentangle stakeholder-based value cocreation from the closely related constructs of cooperation and collaboration, thus yielding enhanced clarity regarding their theoretical association (Cabiddu et al., 2013; Fitzpatrick et al., 2013).

The article unfolds as follows. In Section 2, we review the study's conceptual underpinnings, define the main concepts – SE, stakeholder relationships, and value cocreation – and identify a set of key gaps in the existing literature. Section 3 presents the adopted case study method in this study, which draws on the Universal Expositions 2015, hosted in Milan, Italy, and 2020, hosted in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. These mega-events were selected given their complex social and economic interactions that characterize multi-stakeholder service ecosystems more generally (Merz et al., 2009; Vargo and Lusch, 2011). In these systems, stakeholders' engagement occurs through self-adjusting service-exchange relationships. Through observation, interviews, and secondary data analysis, this study explores the relationship of SE dimensions, stakeholder relationships and cocreated value characteristics. In Section 4, we document the key findings, from which we derive a conceptual framework and an associated set of propositions. In Section 5, we conclude by outlining key implications that arise from our analyses.

2. Conceptual underpinnings

2.1. Engagement in multi-stakeholder ecosystems

Engagement has been primarily studied from the perspective of customers' dyadic interactions with a focal object (e.g., a brand/firm; Alexander et al., 2018; Viglia et al., 2018). However, recent studies argue that engagement occurs within and across multi-actor ecosystems (Hollebeek et al., 2022a; Storbacka et al., 2016), thus shifting its perspective from a dyadic, to a service ecosystem focus (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012; Vargo et al., 2015). Here, *service ecosystems* are defined as "complex, self-adjusting system[s] of resource integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation" (Vargo and Lusch, 2016, p. 18). This broadened perspective, therefore, connects engagement to network research (e.g., Kowalkowski et al., 2016), including by highlighting the development of such ecosystems and the role of actors therein (Vargo et al., 2015; Scott et al., 2021). Engaging actors are, thus, viewed to be part of broader systems that can impact their respective engagement (e.g., through system-based social/institutional roles; Hollebeek et al., 2022b; Storbacka et al., 2016).

Marketing-based engagement research has stressed individual customers' interactive, experiential relationships with brands or brand-related objects (e.g., products/brand communities; Morgan-Thomas et al., 2020; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). As noted, customer engagement is typically viewed to comprise cognitive, emotional, and behavioral facets (Viglia et al., 2018). While cognitive engagement refers to a customer's level of thought and mental elaboration in his/her brand interactions (Hollebeek, 2011), emotional engagement highlights the customer's brand-related affect during an interaction (Vivek et al., 2014). Finally, behavioral engagement refers to the customer's time, effort, and energy spent on interacting with a brand (Mirbagheri and Najmi, 2019).

Existing research has tended to view engagement's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral facets to occur in an arbitrary order. For example, cognitive engagement may follow behavioral engagement, or vice versa. However, we argue that for SE, behavioral engagement precedes cognitive and emotional engagement. That is, stakeholders will first spend time, energy, or effort on their role-related interactions, in turn setting the scene for their subsequent cognitive and/or emotional engagement in multi-actor ecosystems. In other words, stakeholders' ecosystem-based roles dictate their role-related behavior, only subsequently triggering their cognitive and affect-based engagement; implying SE's behavioral focus (Viglia et al., 2018). Consequently, the adoption of a broadened focus, beyond customers' engagement alone, is required (Hollebeek et al., 2022a; Alexander et al., 2018). In particular, while prior literature has addressed customer- and employee engagement, little remains known regarding the engagement of other firm stakeholders (Jonas et al., 2018).

While prior studies have also addressed external stakeholders' engagement in cooperative, collaborative, and cocreative processes (Evers et al., 2012), the theoretical distinction, or potential overlap, between cooperation, collaboration, and cocreation, however, remain hazy (Cabiddu et al., 2013; Fitzpatrick et al., 2013; Getz and Jamal, 1994), thus warranting further scrutiny, as discussed further below.

2.2. Cooperation, collaboration and cocreation in stakeholder relationships

As noted, the linguistic nuances characterizing stakeholder cooperation, collaboration, and cocreation require delineation and clarification (Gotz, 1981).

First, *cooperation* derives from the Latin *cooperationem* (working together to the same end). That is, when they cooperate, people jointly perform a task that advances their own, and the others', interests. Cooperation, therefore, reflects the processes by which individual or grouped stakeholders come together, interact, and form relationships to meet common objectives. Prior research has commonly focused on inter-organizational cooperation characterized by a specific hierarchy (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994; Smith, Carroll, and Ashford, 1995), where central stakeholders (e.g., managers) coordinate relevant others (Driessen et al., 2013).

Second, *collaboration* derives from the Latin *collaborare* (working together on an activity or project). When they collaborate, people work

together on (a) shared goal(s) (vs working alone), revealing their beliefs and values in some salient respect. Collaboration is a process by which (semi-)autonomous actors interact (e.g., by jointly creating structures that govern their relationships). Collaborative arrangements differ from cooperative relationships in that the former do not contain a hierarchy (Thomson et al., 2007). Moreover, cooperation reflects each party's individual interest, while collaboration assumes stakeholders' shared interests (Weinberg et al., 2013). Relatedly, while hierarchical cooperation implies a focus on a central stakeholder's (convener's) goals, in collaboration goals tend to be more jointly determined (Hall and McArthur, 1998).

Finally, *creation* – derived from the Latin *creationem* (creating) – denotes to bring forth, produce, generate, or beget, thus implying a level of physical activity, or activity having a physical, observable (e.g., innovative, original, or creative) result (Runco and Jaeger, 2012). Though originality is vital for creation, it is not sufficient (e.g., ideas that are merely original might be ineffective or be deficient in value). Using the creation concept as a pillar for value cocreation, thus, implies a generative process involving original ideas that have value in context (Akaka et al., 2013).

2.3. Value co-creation in a multi-stakeholder system

Fueled by Vargo and Lusch's (2004) seminal service-dominant (S-D) logic, scholarly interest in value cocreation has grown in recent years. However, the rapid growth and dissemination of S-D logic have incurred a risk of what has been referred to as a "black-boxization" of cocreation (Leroy et al., 2013). For example, conflicting cocreation-based findings may stem from the concept's differing, or inconsistent, theoretical formulations (Ranjan and Read, 2014), which have variously included individuals' active participation (e.g., Droge et al., 2010), engagement (Auh et al., 2007), collaboration, cooperation (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012), co-production (Arvidsson, 2011), or interaction (Grönroos, 2011).

While the literature has predominantly addressed cocreation as perceived by customers or consumers (e.g., Grönroos, 2011; Füller, 2010), recent studies evidence the concept's shift to a broader stakeholder perspective. For example, Lusch et al. (2016, p. 2958) state: "Value cocreation occurs through (social and economic) actors, involved in resource integration and service exchange, enabled and constrained by institutions and institutional arrangements, establishing nested and interlocking service ecosystems of value cocreation, which serve as the context for further value cocreation activities," reflecting contemporary recognition of the importance of stakeholder-oriented marketing management (e.g., Kazadi et al., 2016; Hillebrand et al., 2015; Hult et al., 2011).

Here, cocreation is viewed as a creative association of stakeholders' resources, where novel, effective outcomes may arise from stakeholders' homopathic (vs heteropathic) resource integration (Peters, 2016). While homopathic resource integration reflects an aggregate, or summative, effect which represents the sum of their respective separate effects, heteropathic resource integration refers to resource integration that exceeds the sum of its parts. For cocreation to occur, heteropathic resource integration is required, which may involve emerging or transforming resources (Pels et al., 2009).

Value cocreation occurs through ecosystem-based interactions, which integrate and utilize actors' resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2011). However, interactivity alone provides an insufficient foundation for understanding resource integration (Peters, 2016). That is, though interaction represents a necessary condition for resource integration, it may only yield cooperation or collaboration (vs cocreation). Cocreation results from stakeholders' integrative, creative enactment of resources, implying the existence of manifold value perspectives. Overall, the reviewed literature suggests resource integration as a foundational process for cocreation, which extends beyond the scope of cooperation and collaboration. We next outline our case study-based research approach.

3. Case study

3.1. Data collection

To explore our objective, we drew on case study data from the Universal Expositions 2015, hosted in Milan, Italy, and 2020, hosted in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). We collected the data through in-depth, semi-structured face-to-face interviews conducted with internal stakeholders, including Technology, Social Media, Communication, Marketing, and Digital executives, directors, and managers, and selected external stakeholders (e.g., Commercial Partners, Residents, Government, and Business Associations; Freeman, 1984).

Through the interviews, we explored the processes of cooperation, collaboration, and value cocreation by using a prespecified interview protocol that was adapted based on the particular interviewed stakeholder. The questions included such items as: How do stakeholders contribute to achieve joint objectives? How do they create value with or for one another? Which other stakeholders do they interact, and create value, with? How do stakeholders interact and form relationships? What (if any) initiatives did Expo2015 (2020)'s organization offer to integrate stakeholders' resources (e.g., knowledge)?

To ensure the robustness of the findings, we collected the data from April 2015 and August 2021, thus covering the period before, during, and after Expo2015 and the period prior to Expo2020. We collected a total of 47 in-depth interviews, which took around 30 min each, with these stakeholders, as shown in Table 1. Interviews were recorded and after each interview, the data was transcribed.

One of the researchers also participated in stakeholder meetings and debates to observe stakeholders' interpersonal interactions. Moreover, we also integrated secondary data, including internal company documentation, reports, information sourced from municipal archives, newspaper articles, social media posts, official World Expo documents, and media interviews to further boost the robustness of the data (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2014).

3.2. Data analysis

3.2.1. Analytical overview

First, two of the investigators analyzed the data to boost its (e.g., internal/construct) validity and reliability, thus enabling data triangulation. Then, to interpret the data, we drew on Yin's (2014) three-step analytical framework comprising: (i) analysis of the individual interviews and transcripts, (ii) identification of shared themes, and (iii) analysis of the shared themes. We adopted the constant comparison method, allowing us to analyse the interview text line-by-line, from which we derived provisional themes that were, then, compared with the other transcripts to ensure thematic consistency (Goulding, 2005).

3.2.2. Analysis of individual interviews and secondary data

We analyzed the individual interviews and secondary data by using within-case analysis, initial coding, and categorization (Creswell, 2013).

Table 1
Stakeholder composition in in-depth interviews.

Stakeholder	Expo 2015 Milan	Expo 2020 Dubai
1.Expo Directors/Managers	10	7
2. Commercial Partners	5	3
3. Residents	3	4
4. Academics	1	1
5. Government	3	3
6. Civil Society	2	1
7. Business Associations	3	1
Total Informants	**27**	**20**

Transcripts were analyzed individually to understand each stakeholder's experience and identify emerging themes from the interview (i.e., within-case analysis). The adopted coding scheme was open, unrestricted, imaginative, and non-content-specific (Miles et al., 2014). Though the lead author undertook the initial coding, the deployed coding scheme was useful to each of the researchers in terms of reflecting on the proposed categories without restricting the scope of the other progressively emerging codes.

3.2.3. Analysis of shared themes

We next analyzed the data through categorical aggregation and a search for emerging thematic patterns across the interview transcripts. To facilitate this process, we organized the data into increasingly abstract informational units by inductively developing theme categories and patterns, allowing us to extract meaning from these and facilitating our theory development process (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). The data was, then, revisited to search for relationships among the shared themes and their emerging constituent concepts and ideas. We also uncovered patterns and relationships within and across the shared themes vis-à-vis our core research topic of stakeholder value cocreation, which were examined to determine their impact on the shared aspects of the informants' lived experience. Consequently, our search for meaning comprised scouting patterns and consistency within certain conditions (Yin, 2014).

4. Discussion of findings

Based on the findings, we next develop a conceptual framework and an associated set of six propositions that explore multi-stakeholder engagement and value cocreation processes (Fig. 1), thus contributing novel insight to the engagement/cocreation interface (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2019; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Following Hollebeek et al. (2022a) and Kleinaltenkamp et al. (2019), we conceptualize SE as a three-dimensional (i.e., behavioral, cognitive, and emotional) construct. Behavioral engagement implies the focal stakeholder's role-related actions and activities (e.g., by spending energy/effort) in interacting with the engagement object (e.g., customers: a brand), which may also influence other stakeholders' perceptions or behaviors toward the object (e.g., Brodie et al., 2013). Behavioral engagement contains a key stakeholder compliance aspect (e.g., with stakeholders conforming to their role-related expectations; Hollebeek et al., 2022b).

Second, cognitive engagement refers to a stakeholder's level of thought processing and mental elaboration in his/her role-related interactions (Hollebeek et al., 2014, 2022a), which derives to an important extent from stakeholders' shared (e.g., cultural) beliefs and value systems. Third, emotional engagement reflects a stakeholder's investment of affective resources in his/her role-related interactions (Hollebeek et al., 2022a), which we posit is conducive to stakeholder creativity (Harmeling et al., 2017).

Based on the framework, these SE dimensions are predicted to activate different interactional types of interactions (i.e. cooperation, collaboration, and cocreation, respectively). Specifically, it posits that when (i) behavioral SE prevails, which is conducive to stakeholder compliance (Hollebeek et al., 2022b), the activated process is *cooperation*, (ii) cognitive SE is also present, which stimulates the individual's conformity to shared values and beliefs, the activated process is *collaboration*, and (iii) emotional SE prevails, which stimulates stakeholder creativity, behavioral and cognitive SE will be integrated with one another, in turn triggering *cocreation* and activating social, innovation, and cultural value. Cocreation, therefore, reflects the deepest interactive form, where stakeholders creatively integrate resources to create value. This is also a prescriptive framework, enabling managers to trigger different stakeholders' creative resources, in turn permitting cocreation's emergence.

4.1. Effect of behavioral/cognitive SE on stakeholder cooperation and collaboration

The findings first indicate that when behavioral SE prevails, stakeholder interactions are predicted to be of a cooperative nature. Here, stakeholders perceive a top-down approach to generate solutions and tend to comply with what is asked from them. Through implicit or explicit norms, stakeholders contribute by offering solutions, while the focal organization's (i.e., Expo 2015 and 2020, respectively) role is to diagnose issues and map and coordinate the required skills. Encounter mapping visually depicts the organization's touchpoints with its stakeholders, thus offering an effective mechanism to identify and organize micro-specialized competencies toward the development of relevant solutions (Lusch et al., 2007). Both Expos have successfully cocreated value with relevant stakeholders. To illustrate, one of the Directors of Expo2015 [Technology Director] states: "*We needed to map the needs and required resources and create a very complex Tetris. It is a huge jigsaw where it is all about compatibility*.".

The organization's proactive role entails its deciding, selecting, delegating, and allocating tasks, which are, then, communicated to its compliant stakeholders (Breidbach and Maglio, 2016). As such, the organization's role is to direct, or channel, value cocreative processes, revealing its role as conductor or task allocator. The Director one of the interviewed Regional Tourism associations states: "*We worked with the organization taking charge of a specific theme (chocolate) of the event. We did our part and everything worked out despite we would have preferred more collaboration*." The value offered by the organization is to assemble stakeholders' resources and coordinate relevant value-creating processes. Cooperation reflects stakeholders' self-interested participation in relevant activities, where they are bound by formal agreements with a shared purpose (i.e., the Expo's success; Weinberg et al., 2013). To

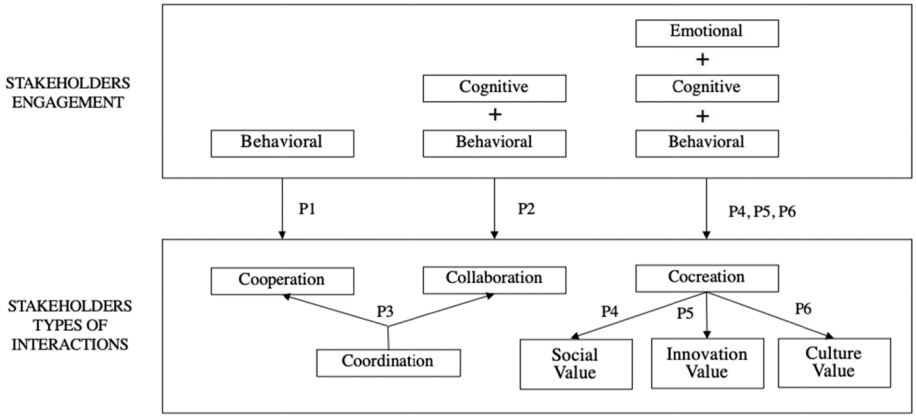

Fig. 1. Conceptual framework and propositions.

achieve this result, compliant stakeholders adhere to their commitment with the Expo, as the Director of one of the interviewed Regional Tourism Associations further explains: "*We just had to do things as expected*" (vs their deep engagement with the activity *per se*). Consequently, only limited levels of stakeholders' cognitive or emotional engagement were required. The findings also show that cooperation tends to occur in the context of a pre-specified norms and expectations. That is, clearly structured tasks imply prespecified parts that can be put together in a predetermined manner. Drawing on these findings, we postulate:

P1: When behavioral SE prevails, stakeholders' compliant cooperation ensues, which comprises a prespecified problem that has a predictable, reliable solution.

While the value offered by stakeholder cooperation stems from homopathic resource aggregation (Peters, 2016), that offered by the organization resides in the coordination of value cocreating processes (e.g., by defining, assembling, and applying the required resources).

When behavioral SE is supported by stakeholders' shared beliefs or opinions (e.g., cognitive SE), collaboration is detected. The findings suggest that stakeholders' shared interests are key, leading participants to conform to (a) shared goal(s), as pointed out by a representative of the Chamber of Commerce: "*Working for a common purpose was key. The countdown to the event meant that we were all more united as we all had to fight failure and attacks from the media and public opinion.*" This illustrative quote shows that stakeholders' collective, or team-based, attitude emerges by interpreting success as a joint effort. An employee of Milan Polytechnic further suggests: "*Without sharing a common purpose no effort by Expo2015 in providing opportunities to connect would have been successful. With our partners, we worked day and night calling, texting, and meeting. If I had an idea, I would call who I believed could be useful for the development of it, and start working on it straight away. There was so much energy! So many people contributing in very effective but at times unexpected ways*."

In these collaborative processes, facilitated by face-to-face or virtual meetings, the organization's representatives are not present *per se*. Outside their meetings, stakeholders also worked independently toward common goals (Hollebeek et al., 2022a). Here, the organization orchestrated and aligned relevant stakeholders, creating stakeholder synergies, while also ensuring their adequate understanding of project-related value propositions and objectives. Both Expos, therefore, acquired an *engager* role to help coordinate relevant stakeholders and nurture a collaborative environment. Collaboration, thus, sees a higher level of resource integration (vs cooperation), as it not only entails stakeholders' compliant behavior, but also, the fusion of their shared beliefs and goals. Based on this rationale, we propose:

P2: When behavioral SE is supported by cognitive SE that sees stakeholders' shared beliefs, values, and/or goals, collaboration emerges as a conformity-inducing process starting with ill-defined issues and concluding with a jointly devised solution.

Like for cooperation, the value offered by stakeholder collaboration stems from homopathic resource aggregation (Peters, 2016). Conversely, the value offered by the organization resides in coordinating the process, aligning its stakeholders towards a shared purpose. In collaborative activities, coordination entails a cultural, relational characteristic that managing stakeholders' needs and expectations (Freeman, 1984). The Expo 2020 Director illustrates: "*There was a lot of psychological understanding of stakeholders' contexts!*" Moreover, the Expo 2015 Director adds, regarding the importance of stakeholders' goal achievement: "*Setting goals for stakeholders and Expo2015, and evaluating whether current moments are achieving these goals*." Building on this rationale, we propose:

P3: While the coordination of cooperating stakeholders focuses on collating stakeholders' respective contributions, the coordination of collaborating stakeholders centers on aligning stakeholders toward shared (e.g., cultural/relational) goals and purposes.

4.2. Effect of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional SE on stakeholder cocreation

The findings also show that when emotional SE (e.g., passion, excitement, pride, or joy) entails behavioral and cognitive SE, the activated process is value cocreation, as outlined. A volunteer for Expo 2020 illustrates: "*I am both excited and proud to work at Women's Pavilion. Highlighting the impact women of all cultures have had across time, focusing on both known and lesser-known achievements, the Women's Pavilion weaves a strong inspiration for generations to come*." Collectively, multiple stakeholders are, thus, able to cocreate perceived value, which is uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary (e.g., visitor) in his/her context that entails a specific resource availability (Vargo and Lusch, 2007; Hollebeek et al., 2022a). Value, therefore, reflects a stakeholder's overall personal assessment of Expo's utility. While value resides in cooperation and collaboration, as noted, it assumes unique characteristics when it is cocreated. Specifically, we identified the emergence of three value dimensions from our data, as discussed further below.

4.2.1. Social value

The data revealed the creation of social value, thus benefiting specific stakeholders. One of the members of the Chamber of Commerce of Milan illustrates: "*Different partners independently from Expo2015 have launched events that helped to create a real collective effervescence. A super example is the social world football cup, where 64 teams played for 45 days*." This initiative was self-generated by employees from different pavilions. That is, over 1200 stakeholders deployed relevant operant and operand resources to become football players, thus creatively transforming professional relationships into social ones. One Expo employee shared: "*The goals, emotions, support, friendship,* [and] *competition were possible because so many of us took the field: This is what Expo means to me*. [The project goal is to] *unify …the world under the same flag, the football one. The claim: Expo 2015: Feeding the planet, energy for life is represented by a healthy lifestyle of* [those] *who practice sport*." Overall, by launching self-generated social events, stakeholders were able to build Expo2015's brand identity.

Several studies show that social support, friendship and intimacy developed through social relationships are at the core of customer cocreation (e.g., Pera and Viglia, 2015; Cuomo et al., 2020). However, multiple stakeholders' cocreation is more strategic and task-oriented (Altinay et al., 2016). An example from Expo2020 shows that social value can also be created through the meaningful, substantive collaboration of the private sector, civil society, and stakeholder commitment. For example, Expo2020 Dubai is the first to dedicate a space for visitors to learn about women's crucial roles. A volunteer in Women's Pavilion 2020 states: "*We definitely had a chance to do something radically different*." Correspondingly, we postulate:

P4: Interacting stakeholders cocreate social value by creatively transforming heteropathic resources into social value. Conversely, the organization offers value through its connections and social encounters.

4.2.2. Innovation value

The data also shows that the Expos are able to create innovation value (e.g., by developing new products or solutions). For example, an Expo2015 employee illustrates: "*Many innovative solutions are ideated, generated, developed, and promoted thanks to Expo2015. They are opportunities to be pioneers in a specific sector*." Relatedly, the President of one of the Regional Fashion Districts [CGModa] discusses the multilateral

learning processes the expo generates: "*With the exposition 'Food Scraps and Ecology for Denim & Co,' six fashion companies from the Abruzzo Region with very different DNAs have realized new products by integrating their experience and experimenting new treatments with denim and leather that recycle the olive and grapes production scraps*.".

To realize innovation value, resources are integrated, linked, and transformed in new ways to create solutions. In the case of the Expos, the atypical food-fashion connection implied that each of these sectors learned new processes, in turn impacting their engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2019). One of the fashion company Directors states: "*The oil and grape treatment has given a new and different print to the leather highlighting pinkish shades typical of the Region. This was something that we* [had] *never experimented with* [before] *and that will need further trials beyond Expo as we normally produce denim. By proposing a new but vintage outfit that takes inspiration from the hard work of the grape picker, the traditional profession of the Abruzzo Region, our company learned new ways to treat denim and use leather and grape scraps*," thus exposing sustainable, recycling-based innovation value.

Expo, thus, offers a platform for stakeholder collaboration and progress. Specifically, resource integration through and stakeholder/technology collaboration yields strong event-based networks. Inspired by Stephen Hawking's Breakthrough Listen and Message initiatives, artist Es Devlin collaborated with brand agency Avantgarde to deliver the Expo's web-based collective message interface using Google Art and Culture. To bring the collective message to life, visitors are invited to offer a word describing humanity. Using artificial intelligence (AI), poetic couplets will be generated from these words, which are, then, combined to build a unified collective event-related message. The General Director notes: "*Computer-generated poetry has a long history. However, what makes this project so unique is the collaboration between a large number of developers and poetry experts working over an extended period to iteratively refine the output, as well as the number of contributors expected to donate their words to the Collective Message itself*." Based on these analyses, we propose:

P5: Interacting cocreate innovation value by developing, producing, and promoting new product/service offerings by transforming heteropathic resources. Conversely, the organization creates value by facilitating stakeholder encounters and cross-pollination opportunities.

4.2.3. Cultural value

Culture represents a set of shared values, ideas, meanings, and symbols that facilitate individuals' communication, interpretation, and evaluation, thus prescribing acceptable behavior in society (Davis, 1984). The conduction of an Expo shapes, and transforms, the host city's identity through multiple stakeholders' value cocreating processes. The Head of the future-focused start-up ecosystem states: "*We have witnessed a noticeable shift in the Emirati mindset in recent years. With the worldwide influence that programmes like the Dubai Future Accelerators create, we have seen a more daring and ambitious attitude from young, enterprising Emiratis keen to include solving tomorrow's issues into their nation's cultural fabric. Expo 2020 …provide*[s] *an opportunity to demonstrate this transformation in cultural ideas and objectives*."

Expo2015, thus, provided a platform for creative storytelling, yielding a collective narrative. The Expo2015 Logistics Director illustrates: "*Our job was to give them all the necessary tools to do it properly*." That is, through effective communication, stakeholders were able to tell Expo 2015's story and persuade others to get on board. The Director proceeds: "*Stakeholders create a story. We had no idea what kind of story that would be. Thanks to their resources and their narrative abilities, we were able to create a vision and engage other partners. They have been the true ambassadors. I believe the most important issue has been the positive message towards other stakeholders*." Correspondingly, one of the internal documents refers to Expo 2015's success being contingent on "*storytelling, which is built upon in-house stories, stories in partnership and third parties' stories*.".

To disseminate event-related narratives, social media are key in generating a multi-stakeholder-based event voice and identity. In other words, stakeholder narratives, based on their expectations, experiences, and resources, continually formulate and establish Expo 2015′s value proposition, without any interaction with the organization. The event-related social media page represents an important touchpoint, as one of our residents points out: "*Expo2015… has been effective in animating an external narration of the event, mainly through social media*."

Stakeholders' perception of the cultural value, as facilitated by event-related social media communications and discussions, was found to be high. One of our brand managers illustrates how the transformation of stakeholders' heteropathic resource integration yields cocreated cultural value: "*We can tell the story of the evolution of humankind only thanks to our ability to record our memories through painting and writing. We then helped develop a book of poetry (Le Opere dell'Uomo, i Frutti della Terra). Poetry teaches us to value and enjoy beauty, which is also the mission of our brand*." In other words, the notion of beauty is creatively transferred from writing to food, infusing it with aesthetic meaning. We, thus, postulate:

P6: Interacting stakeholders cocreate cultural value by infusing meaning and symbolism in their event-related narrative, thereby engaging other stakeholders. Conversely, the organization offers its stakeholders the tools to create stakeholders' event-related narratives.

4.3. SE and cocreation DNA

Expo2015 and 2020 offer a conducive environment to the exploration of multiple stakeholders' engagement. Our data shows that this mega-event requires the three processes of cooperation, collaboration, and value cocreation, each of which reflect unique SE dynamics, resource integration, and value facets.

First, in cooperation, SE occurs by virtue of prespecified constraints, or limits, outlined and managed by the organization. As shown, in cooperation, the organization recognizes that its stakeholders primarily require homopathic resources that they tend to integrate individually (Peters, 2016), revealing its organization-centric nature. The value of homopathic resources, thus, resides in their "being" (vs "becoming"). That is, the organization plays a central role in assembling different stakeholders' individual (i.e., partial) results into final solution, exposing its top-down nature. Consequently, value is created through summative resource aggregation.

Second, though collaboration reveals stakeholders' shared purpose, it may be limited in terms of generating creative or novel outcomes or value. In collaboration, stakeholders work together (e.g., to resolve an issue), which may, or many not, involve interactivity with the organization. Consequently, the value that is produced results from summative resource integration. Overall, cooperative and collaborative processes require organizational coordination of stakeholders, resources, and activities, which is necessary to adequately engage stakeholders (Hollebeek et al., 2022b). In cooperation, stakeholder coordination is direct, with strong hierarchical relationships and processes. However, in collaboration, stakeholder coordination transpires more flexibly, and is characterized by a looser hierarchy.

Third, in value cocreation, heteropathic resources are integrated. Here, unpredictable, novel, original, and open solutions result from stakeholders' assimilation and/or transformation of heteropathic resources. Stakeholders integrate and exploit ecosystem-based resources through interactivity. The value that is cocreated, therefore, exceeds the sum of its parts (e.g., owing to its transformational characteristics). Stakeholders self-organize these cocreative processes, with the organization acting as a facilitator of these processes. Our results highlight how, at the end of the spectrum, cocreation penetrates, and extends beyond, ecosystem borders, taking place without stakeholders' direct

collaboration. Accordingly, one of our stakeholders comments: "*Expo2015 belongs to whom wants to take it.*" That is, Expo represents an open service ecosystem in which any stakeholder may encounter, or cocreate, value that may extend beyond the scope of the event (e.g., by creating event-related innovation value). Overall, Table 2 summarizes our findings, which show how stakeholders' transformational, creative engagement builds cocreation's DNA in multi-stakeholder service ecosystems. The table also offers managerial recommendations (e.g., regarding how to leverage, or benefit from, the proposed framework, in their organization).

5. Implications, limitations, and further research

5.1. Theoretical implications

SE has gained considerable attention in recent years (e.g., Viglia et al., 2018; Hollebeek et al., 2022a/b), highlighting engagement's core role in multi-stakeholder ecosystems (Pera et al., 2016). In such ecosystems, value is cocreated through multiple interacting stakeholders' creative resource integration (Vargo and Lusch, 2016).

Contrary to the majority of cocreation- and engagement literature, which takes a consumer perspective (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2021), this study contributes to the current stock of knowledge in this area by defining cocreation's boundaries from a multi-stakeholder perspective. First, this study offers a novel perspective on multi-stakeholder ecosystem-based cocreation. In line with Loureiro et al. (2020), the current study's conceptual underpinnings and empirical results suggest multi-stakeholder value cocreation as an open process of collective creativity, in which stakeholders generate innovative outputs by reciprocally transforming each input's contributions in the system. Cocreation, thus, entails stakeholders' collaborative, interdependent, and self-organized behaviors that distribute and share responsibilities among relevant stakeholders, without the focal organization having a pre-set notion of the issue at hand, nor its solution. The organization's role is to facilitate, and communicate, a shared vision among its stakeholders, and to provide the tools and opportunities (e.g., open communication encounters) to realize its objectives, thus allowing stakeholders to self-organize within relevant boundaries or constraints. Cocreation often stems from unintended processes, in which the organization's role is to design open, creativity-boosting platforms. Creativity not only acts as a transformative resource integration process deployed to solve existing issues. Instead, it triggers stakeholders to define issues or set goals in new ways, often independently from the organization, thus helping them identify novel or untapped opportunities, thus benefiting themselves and the organization (Hollebeek et al., 2022a).

This research also disentangles stakeholder cocreation from its closely related constructs of stakeholder cooperation and collaboration, thus making a pertinent literature-based contribution. We used the proposed framework, and its accompanying six propositions, to explore the relationships between stakeholder engagement, cooperation, collaboration and cocreation in multi-stakeholder service ecosystems. Our analyses suggest that SE's specific (i.e., behavioral, cognitive, and emotional) facets are conducive to yielding distinct stakeholder-based processes, including cooperation, collaboration, and cocreation, respectively.

Contrary to Viglia et al.'s (2018) contention that stakeholder's cognitive and emotional engagement trigger behavioral activation, we argue that for SE (vs customer engagement), stakeholders are bound by specific role-related institutions (e.g., rules, norms; Hollebeek et al., 2022a). We, therefore, argue that stakeholders' behavioral engagement *precedes* their cognitive and emotional engagement. Simply put, cooperation occurs when individual stakeholders' interests align. Collaboration, then, assumes the existence of stakeholders' shared interests or goals (e.g., community members jointly working to overcome a shared problem), often by leveraging stakeholder creativity and yielding social, innovation and cultural value, as discussed. In these value-creating processes, the sum total of the attained value tends to exceed the sum of each of its resource-integrative parts, thus implying transformational value. Therefore, while collaboration is a necessary precondition for cocreation, cooperation represents an aggregative process that unfolds based on stakeholders' self-interest.

Table 2
Value cocreation DNA in multi-stakeholder ecosystems.

Stakeholder relationship	Cooperation	Collaboration	Cocreation
Stakeholders attitude	**Compliance: *"Divide and conquer"***	**Conformity: *"Together we achieve"***	**Creativity: *"Creation through transformation"***
Goals/approach	Different goals, individualistic approach	Shared purpose and goals, collectivistic approach	Shared vision, individualistic and collectivistic approach
Creativity locus	Organization-centric creativity: Bilateral interactivity	Organization led creativity: Multilateral interactivity	Multi-stakeholder led creativity: Open interactivity
Organization role	Conductor	Engager	Facilitator
Organization's main mission	Delegate of sub-tasks to stakeholders and coordinate of the required skills	Engage stakeholders to work together towards a common purpose	Create dynamic interactions and enhance stakeholder creativity to work independently from the organization
Sample tasks	Design clear mapping activities with instructions and deadlines.	Develop a collectivistic attitude and climate within the stakeholders. Align stakeholders and stimulate synergies. Develop stakeholder autonomy and responsibility.	Create open dialogue and social encounter moments. Facilitate stakeholders' cross-pollination of ideas/solutions through encounters. Offer stakeholders tools to create collective meaning.
Level of prediction of process realization	Predictable process and solution	Expected but "messy" problem-outcome	Open, unpredictable process
Resource integration type	Homopathic resource integration	Homopathic resource integration	Heteropathic resource transformation
Value creation	Value is "in" stakeholder resources	Value is jointly generated	Value as creative transformation of stakeholders' resources

5.2. Managerial implications

This article also raises important implications for managers. First, Table 2 sets out how firms may deploy the proposed framework to manage multi-stakeholder cocreation. Based on its own, and its stakeholders', objectives and the identification of required value type(s), the organization is likely to adopt different roles (i.e., conductor, engager, or facilitator), leading it to implement specific activities or tasks within its ecosystems. For example, when facing a prespecified problem, we suggest the organization to adopt the role of conductor, initiating cooperative stakeholder relationships. In this process, managers tend to delegate tasks to their stakeholders and coordinate the required skills, revealing their need to possess agile learning skills (e.g., as facilitated by stakeholder journey mapping accompanied by clear instructions and deadlines; Day, 2011).

By contrast, when dealing with ill-defined issues, the results suggest

the organization to take on the role of engager, and develop collaborative relationships. Here, the organization engages its stakeholders to work together toward a shared purpose, while also nurturing stakeholders' autonomy. Managers are advised to coordinate these collaborative activities by considering cultural and/or relational dynamics and setting common goals.

Finally, to deliver novel, original, and open solutions, we recommend the organization to play the role of facilitator, initiating ecosystem-based cocreation by enhancing its stakeholders' creativity and autonomy. Managers are advised to foster innovation (Tiago et al., 2015), including by designing platforms without barriers that enable creativity to thrive and by creating value-laden social encounters facilitating stakeholder dialogue and cross-pollination of solutions and ideas.

5.3. Limitations and further research

Despite its contribution, this study also incurs limitations that offer opportunities for further research. First, our adopted case study methodology limits the generalizability of the reported findings. Therefore, future scholars may wish to further explore, or compare and contrast, the value created by cooperation, collaboration, and cocreation, respectively. In particular, we recommend academicians to undertake further study on the relative importance, or the existence of any hierarchy, among these concepts, or their potential overlaps and differences (e.g., across contexts). To study these issues, researchers may adopt the proposed framework as a theoretical foundation, which may also be expanded, etc.

Second, the value created by multiple ecosystem-based stakeholders is impacted by resource-related factors (e.g., operant/operand resource quality, availability, liquefaction, etc.), where cocreation is fueled by stakeholders' desire to make a positive (e.g., economic) impact. However, insight into cocreation's effect on specific economic/financial or social metrics lags behind, warranting further investigation. Conversely, future study may wish to address the impact of cocreation's antonym of codestruction on these metrics. Finally, the undertaking of network analysis would be useful to elucidate the nature of stakeholders' interactions with other focal stakeholders within their different, interfacing ecosystems.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Giampaolo Viglia: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Rebecca Pera:** Investigation, Conceptualization. **Shynar Dyussembayeva:** Data curation, Methodology. **Matthieu Mifsud:** Visualization, Formal analysis. **Linda D. Hollebeek:** Supervision, Validation.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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