

Do platforms contribute to value co-creation processes? Insights from a Service-Dominant logic perspective

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Abstract

Purpose. The aim of the paper is to investigate characteristics, tools and rules of platforms, which have a relevant role in value co-creation processes. Based on the Service Dominant-Logic perspective, the study focuses on a web-based platform in order to understand if and how this platform supports firms in value co-creation processes.

Methodology. The study performs an explorative qualitative analysis using a single case study method. It uses both desk information and a series of interviews.

Findings. The findings provide several outlines of platforms considered as “service providers”, highlighting their main characteristics, tools of interaction and rules used to effectively realize value co-creation processes.

Practical implications. The findings have several implications for existing or to be created firms interested in activating and developing effectively value co-creation processes based on platforms.

Originality/value. This study provides new insights into how value co-creation processes develop following a Service Dominant logic perspective – a domain still understudied in literature- as well as how platforms foster these processes.

Keywords

Value co-creation; platforms; Service Dominant-Logic; service providers.

1. Introduction

Value co-creation studies have been at the cutting edge of management literature for about 12-13 years, from the early studies of Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000; 2004), on the one hand, and Vargo and Lusch (2004), on the other. Value co-creation, in the management domain, has been studied under different perspectives, above all following the Service-Dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) and the strategic approach (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000; Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2014). The first perspective has been developed in the marketing domain, while the second perspective has been developed in strategic management studies. Albeit their differences, which are not at the very core of this paper, these perspectives share some common traits, and above all look at the value of exchange of resources and/or contributions around common projects on behalf of different actors/individuals participating in value co-creation processes (Aquilani et al., 2017). Although both streams of value co-creation literature are today well developed and even new contributions appear, above all examining their theoretical aspects, few papers have truly examined, from an empirical point of view, the tools through which value co-creation is made possible: the platforms.

This paper aims at starting to fill in these gaps in literature looking at how value co-creation following Service-Dominant logic develops thanks to platforms, leaving the theoretical level and approaching the empirical one, through an explorative case study able to point out the characteristics and tools that support value co-creation activities.

Vargo and Lusch (2004) synthesize their view of Service-Dominant (S-D) logic by asserting that “increasingly, marketing has shifted much of its dominant logic away from the exchange of tangible goods and towards the exchange of intangibles, specialised skills and knowledge, and processes which [...] points marketing towards a more comprehensive and inclusive dominant logic, one that integrates goods with services and provides a richer foundation for the development of marketing thought and practice” (p. 2). The new logic moves from the re-interpretation of the service concept, as a transcending concept defined in terms of application of resources through deeds, processes, and performances for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Specifically, it centers in the process of serving other parties (i.e., firms, customers, network partners), where each one’s knowledge and capabilities interact with the others to co-create value and benefits for them all (Lusch and Vargo, 2008). In fact, S-D logic brings not only the customer to the process of value co-creation, but also all the actors throughout the value creation network (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). This is predominantly because S-D logic contemplates knowledge as the fundamental source of competitive advantage and recognizes that knowledge is dispersed throughout the marketing system and society. Consequently, S-D logic stresses that all actors, linked together in shared complex systems of service exchange, must be understood in the context of their network connections (Vargo, 2011), and also must interact and collaborate with other entities in order to integrate resources with them and to co-generate value in different ways. In this new perspective, S-D logic underlines the critical role of technology which can be conceptualized as a set of practices and processes, as well as symbols, that mainly contribute to value creation processes (Akaka and Vargo, 2013). In this respect, Lusch and Nambisan (2015) highlight that the service platform is “a modular structure that comprises tangible and intangible components (resources) and facilitates the interaction of actors and resources (or resource bundles)” (p.166), enabling service exchange and value co-creation. This platform can be mainly observed as a venue for service innovation because many actors can seek, explore and discover useful solutions to their needs and problems. Within these platforms, many actors can effectively activate different forms of interaction and

collaboration with other knowledge sources integrating and applying existing resources in new and innovative ways.

Keeping in mind the aim underlined above, the paper first presents a brief literature review on both Service-Dominant logic and service platforms, before illustrating the methodology and the case study. The discussion follows. The paper ends with the conclusion which encompasses the contribution of the paper, its limitations and implications from both a theoretical and a managerial point of view as well as future avenues of research.

2. Service-Dominant Logic approach and the role of service platforms

Since the publication of “Evolving to a New Dominant Logic of Marketing” (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), S-D logic has involved thousands of scholars, from around the world and from different perspectives, oriented to consolidate, elaborate and extend its core framework (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). This logic represents a transition from the Goods-Dominant (G-D) logic to a new philosophy, mindset (Lusch and Vargo, 2014) or a new conceptual lens (Lusch et al., 2007) able to better fit the needs and emerging tendencies in the global economy. Specifically, S-D logic is aimed at exploring and capturing “a convergence of apparently diverse thought that has been shifting the dominant logic of marketing and economic thought away from a primary concern with tangible and often static resources, output in the form of supplier-generated value (goods), and transactions. It points towards often intangible, dynamic resources, inputs for co-created value, and relational, economic and social processes. S-D logic represents an evolution, rather than a revolution” (Gummesson, Lusch and Vargo, 2010, p. 10). In this perspective, service is a unifying concept for understanding social and economic exchange (Lusch and Vargo, 2014) and cannot be observed as an alternative form of product. In fact, service represents “the general and universal case, the common denominator, of the exchange process; service is what is always exchanged. Goods, when employed, are aids to the service process” (Lusch and Nambisan, 2015, pp. 158-159). Therefore, moving from the re-interpretation of the service concept, it becomes a transcending concept defined in terms of application of resources through deeds, processes, and performances for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The central idea of S-D logic is that service is the fundamental basis of economic exchange (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Moreover, this new logic underlines the relevance of two different types of resources: *operand resources*, contemplated as statistic resources that require actions to be performed on them before they provide value (e.g., goods); and *operant resources*, observed as resources able to operate on other resources to create value (e.g., human competence-knowledge and skills).

The contributions of different scholars have mainly determined several modifications oriented to extend the value-centric perspective, moving from value-in use (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), value-in context (Chandler and Vargo, 2011) and value-in-social-context (Edvardsson, Tronvol and Gruber, 2011), and to develop the concept of “service-for-service exchange between actors and within network of actors in service systems” (Lusch and Vargo, 2014, p. 113), actor-to actor orientation (A2A) overcoming the restricted roles of producers/customers and/or firms/customers (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). In addition, they have promoted the reduction of the ten foundational premises (FPs) (Vargo and Lusch 2004) to four axioms (Lusch and Vargo 2014), from which the remaining six FPs could be developed, providing a framework or lens for contemplating all actors in their process exchanges (Lusch and Vargo, 2014).

The axioms are the following: 1) “service is the fundamental basis of exchange” (Vargo and Lusch, 2008); 2) “value is co-created by multiple actors, always including the

beneficiary” (Vargo and Lusch, 2016); 3) “all social and economic actors are resource integrators” (Vargo and Lusch, 2008); and 4) “value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary” (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). The five axioms have recently been developed underlining that “value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions (i.e., norms, rules, symbols, meanings, etc.) and institutional arrangements” (Vargo and Lusch, 2016, p. 6). These institutions and institutional arrangements are mainly observed as indispensable facilitators of value co-creation in markets.

Therefore, in this revised perspective, S-D logic is mainly a value-co-creation model that comprehends all actors as resource-integrators, linked together in shared complex systems of service exchange and the activities of actors must be understood in the context of their network connections (Vargo, 2011). In this respect, Vargo and Lusch (2016) underline that “economic (and other social) networks tend to be self-governed, self-adjusting service ecosystems engaged in value co-creation at various levels of aggregation” (p. 6).

S-D logic stresses the relevant role of technology because service science underlines that service systems are essentially value co-creation configurations of people, technology and value propositions, generating connections between internal and external service systems and shared information (i.e., methods, language, measures, etc.) (Maglio and Spohrer, 2008). In this perspective, technology is defined “as a combination of practices, processes and symbols that fulfill a human purpose” (Akaka and Vargo, 2014, p. 378). Technology is conceptualized as an operant resource (Lusch et al., 2007; Akaka and Vargo, 2014) because it has an impact on the way in which value is determined.

2.1. Service platform: definition, characteristics, benefits

As noted above, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have a fundamental and transformative role as operant resources in service innovation (Lusch and Vargo 2014; Vargo and Lusch 2004, 2008). ICTs associated to other various resources (i.e., skills and knowledge) allow information to be acquired, transferred and repackaged in different contexts to generate suitable opportunities for service exchange and, consequently, for innovation (Lusch and Vargo 2014). Tillson et al. (2010) have pointed out that the generative nature of digital technologies (Henfridsson and Byzstad, 2013) may enable a combinatorial potential for service innovation (Yoo et al., 2012). Then, information, knowledge and technology are essential operant resources for service innovation, “which digitally enabled service platforms can liquefy (i.e., decouple from their original instantiation in physical form) and mobilize so as to be readily available to actors engaged in service exchanges” (Barrett et al., 2015). Lusch and Nambisan (2015) defined a service platform as “a modular structure that comprises tangible and intangible components (resources) and facilitates the interaction of actors and resources (or resource bundles)” (p.166), enabling service exchange and value co-creation. The principal benefit of service platforms is that they leverage resource liquefaction (considered as the decoupling of information from its related physical form) and enhance resource density (contemplated as the possibility to quickly mobilize resources for a time/space/actor that will offer the desired service) (Barrett et al., 2015, p. 160). In this view, these platforms are mainly observed as a venue for service innovation because many interacting actors can seek, explore or discover useful solutions to their problems. Specifically, their resource exchanges can lead to innovative solutions (Barrett et al., 2015). To achieve these objectives, the structure of service platforms is mainly oriented to facilitate the access of actors to diverse resources for resource integration and, then, service innovation. Similarly, these platforms allow a diverse set of actors to participate and to collaborate in such service exchange. In particular, IT tools “can support highly granular service exchanges among a large set of actors that eventually could lead to the co-creation of value for the user.

It allows coordinating, sequencing, and integration of virtual tasks and activities, thus facilitating innovation with different resources” (Barrett et al., 2015, p. 167). Additionally, service platforms provide several structures that stimulate and foster direct and indirect exchanges. In detail, their protocols provide a wider range of embedded rules for indirect exchange and integration of resources. The nature of the protocols and rules can effectively influence the extent of service innovation. Specifically, in the design of the service platform, if the protocols and rules of engagement are clearly specified and the ability to interface is more open, the service platform can efficaciously support a greater degree of resource integration and become like a venue for innovative solutions. In this case, IT is essential to codify or to implement acceptable behaviors and monitor the interactions between actors and resources for service exchange (Barrett et al., 2015, p. 167). Finally, service platforms provide diverse communication channels and forms because they increase the opportunities for knowledge integration and service exchange.

3. Methodology

The objective of the study is to investigate if and how platforms stimulate and support firms in their complex value co-creation processes. To achieve these objectives, the study performed a qualitative explorative analysis (Yin, 2004; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) with the aim to provide a useful description, explanation and interpretation of the phenomenon under specific investigation. The selection of this research method seems adequate because “the new global digital setting in which business decision makers and practitioners operate has been accompanied by a transition to more complex research methodologies, which seems to favour recourse to qualitative methods of investigation” (Guercini, 2014, p. 663; Gummesson, 2006, pp. 170-171). The idea is that these research methodologies must consider the potentialities of new high-tech tools “for the production, acquisition and sharing of information, particularly the internet” (Guercini, 2014, p. 663).

In this perspective, single case study method was deemed appropriate because it addresses research questions with a particular emphasis on qualitative approaches and forms of ongoing research and it enables the description, explication and comprehension of business scenarios from the perspective of their dynamics and evolution. The case here selected is Direttoo, a digital platform oriented to connect and support the interactions between restaurants and farmers and/or producers. The selection of the case study was concretely based on the combination of theoretical interests and ongoing research activities (Siggelkow, 2007). The empirical study was developed by using different sources: 1) semi-structured interviews with key informants; 2) informal follow-ups based on e-mails and short phone calls; 3) archival data (mainly reports and presentations) and company-internal material. First, it performed field research through a semi-structured interview with the CEO and the co-founder in order to explore aspects related to Direttoo and its digital platform. In particular, the selection of interviewees was targeted toward informants who are the most knowledgeable about the Direttoo digital platform, its main characteristics, objectives, tools and roles, collaborations mechanisms and involved actors. The interview was literally transcribed, and took place in June 2017, lasting approximately 4 hours and following the methodological prescriptions on data collection through personal interviews (Lee, 1999). This primary source of information was complemented and, then, triangulated with materials derived from different secondary sources. Triangulation of different data sources was used to mitigate risk from informant bias, control for subjective judgment of individuals and, thus, increase construct validity (Anand et al., 2007; Gibbert et al., 2008). All interview transcripts were reviewed and the results were

presented to the respondents in order to obtain their feedback and corrections in order to validate the qualitative analysis (Elliott, 1999). The results are reported in the next section.

4. The Direttoo service platform

4.1 The story of Direttoo

Direttoo was founded in 2015 by the meeting between Diego Pelle, Roman restaurateur and CEO, and Chiara Mastromonaco, marketing manager of a small wine-growing company and now co-founder of Direttoo.

The idea comes from the analysis of the B2B agri-food industry, considering its complexity and onerousness for producers and restaurateurs.

Combining the studies undertaken by Diego on the Anglo-Saxon restaurant system to the earlier consideration made with Chiara, they quickly started the company.

The main aim of Direttoo is to establish a direct connection between the real protagonists of the B2B agri-food industry, i.e. producers and restaurateurs; an innovative, digital, transparent and non-intermediary tool.

Indeed, Direttoo has created a platform allowing a direct connection between producers and the world of Ho.Re.Ca.

This main aim should be realized through the reduction of time waste and money saving for participating actors bearing in mind the wellbeing of society as a whole; this system should also allow food wastefulness.

The completeness and exhaustiveness of the services offered by Direttoo cannot be found in any other national reality. In the United States, there are rather similar business realities such as BlueCart™ which is, following its words, “a web and mobile platform built to streamline and modernize the wholesale procurement process for buyers and sellers” (<https://www.bluecart.com/index.html>).

BlueCart™ defines itself as “the [USA] market leader in the hospitality industry” (<https://www.bluecart.com/index.html>). However, it is hardly comparable to Direttoo because of the substantial differences between the Italian (and generally European) and American market, as stated by Direttoo - BlueCart™ for example also allows food wholesalers and suppliers to participate differently from Direttoo.

Direttoo, therefore, wants to break down the distribution costs by putting chefs and restaurateurs in direct contact on the one hand and producers on the other hand, disintermediating the whole supply chain. Direct dialogue between producers and chefs and/or restaurateurs allows more guarantees on product quality as well as better quality standards for the restaurateur and ensures greater revenues for the producer. To date the service has been tested in Lazio and by the end of 2017 a pilot scheme will be launched in Lombardy to replicate the model (<http://www.green.it/direttoo/>).

The service promotes the use of local products at zero km, while simultaneously encouraging sustainability – i.e. for the last mile Direttoo uses electric bikes (see also § 4.2.)- pointing to an even greater attention to food quality. As a final remark, it can be said that producers and restaurateurs, thanks to Direttoo, assume the roles of true protagonists in the supply chain.

4.2 The characteristics of the service platform

The platform is the digital *agora* where operators can meet and get to know each other. It also allows data storage and analysis able to support many and different actors. In fact, producers and chefs can access data and statistics concerning sell out – producers – or purchased quantities – chefs – as well as average prices of products bought through the

platform. This data is made available in order to support actors to optimize their selling prices – producers - and bought quantities – chefs - as well as to launch the best promotions each time and evaluate the results of applied strategies and policies.

Coming to the first aim of the platform – the *agora*- it has to be said that through this tool chefs and/or restaurateurs can make orders directly to the producers and can freely select and communicate with other users - albeit moderately in that this form of communication is always mediated by Direttoo.

To build the present portfolio of actors operating on the platform but also to continuously enlarge it, the first essential step is the meeting and analysis of some fundamental features of both producers and restaurateurs and/or chefs by Direttoo.

For producers, during the first meetings the prices, products offered and delivery methods to be applied are negotiated and agreed together. At this stage, Direttoo assumes the role of facilitator and, consequently, supports producers in the definition of sales' strategies and logistics aspects - producers remain absolutely free to decide all features of their offers (i.e., quantity, quality, prices, etc.).

Certainly, this represents one of the main differences and the main benefits in respect to the traditional distribution system. Another benefit of the Direttoo platform is for producers to have higher margins than those gained through a traditional supply chain made of wholesalers and/or distributors. Even if it is true that when the products are available on the platform, it is easy to find new chefs and/or producers interested in them and therefore the sold quantity rises quickly as do producers' revenues.

However, Direttoo in order to maintain a high level of quality of the proposed products, before including them as well as their producers on the platform, carries out a “quality test”. This test is made by chefs and/or sommeliers internal and/or external to the actors already involved in the Direttoo network and concerns not only the quality standard of products, but also the service provided and the reliability of the producers.

A different procedure is established to include chefs and/or restaurateurs.

Direttoo, meeting the chefs and/or restaurateurs investigates their requests to understand their problems and needs, which products he/she is interested in and try to create *ad hoc* basket of products appropriate to the needs outlined by each of them. Also preferred delivery systems are considered to facilitate the match between these requests and the features of producers.

It is important to point out that the basket of products offered by producers can be enriched if chefs and/or restaurateurs ask for new and/or different products to be made available on the platform. It is also possible for the chef to ask and obtain, thanks to an especially made research by Direttoo, a totally new product, not offered by existing producers operating at this moment on the platform.

Once all the features of both demand and supply are defined it is possible for the “perfect match” to be realized. From this moment all actors – chefs and/or restaurateurs and producers - operating on the platform could make orders and supply products, respectively also changing customers and suppliers following the requests or needs.

The platform draws and matches the orders, making the supply process more efficient for both parties. Direttoo can intervene in support of manufacturers to manage logistics by following two approaches.

In the first, the company intervenes by intercepting the shipment of the goods into its sorting hubs in the city center and make the last mile of delivery with electric cargo bikes (see also above). With the latter, if the manufacturer fails to cover the shipment, Direttoo takes care of it completely through its logistics partners – who are now traditional logistics operators but who are destined to become green operators in that Direttoo as a part of its

philosophy of food and quality considers the environment and the wellbeing of the society in which it operates really important.

There are many benefits for the chefs involved: lower prices and better quality, quality standards maintained over time, certainty in supplies, easy and security of payments.

In addition, the platform represents, as mentioned above, an analytical tool for cost control and process optimization.

The platform offers the restaurateur a unique and simple tool to handle the entire process also having products especially made for him whose quality has been tested, while the producer simplifies order management, gain higher margins and has the possibility of acquiring new and reliable clients.

Thus, the platform can be defined as an e-commerce platform of multivendor B2B where there are several vendors and several acquiring actors.

Moreover, Direttoo offers some additional services such as:

- communication services;
- services to support contact and process;
- technical consultancy services;
- other consulting services;
- other services and opportunities.

With regard to communication services, in the platform there is a frequently updated blog with subjects of interest to participants on the platform and a newsletter is issued regularly. Direttoo can also be contacted thanks to the platform in that both e-mail addresses and telephone number are provided.

The services to support the contact and the process are numerous and can be reassumed in:

- acceptance and review / preparation of bids / chef's requests;
- pre-examination of restaurateurs and/or Chefs and/or producer's request;
- addressing services provided to chefs and/or restaurateurs towards specific manufacturers for special needs;
- search service for specialized partners and/or suppliers when needed;
- creation of *ad hoc* groups for specific needs;
- monitoring services throughout all contact processes carried out by chefs and/or restaurateurs on the one hand and producers on the other;
- evaluation services of the solutions and/or proposals identified.

Technical consultancy services can both suggest improvements to existing technologies in the enterprise and/or integration of running the business. Indeed, Direttoo can suggest other activities to manufacturers that could potentially support them in their business, also enlarging it as for example the production of different formats for some products or the transformation of some of the agri-food products into marmalades, for example, or ready to use preparations.

Other consulting services are aimed at enhancing the visibility and efficiency of the people involved in the platform, for example providing suggestions about the graphical aspects of the institutional web site or the announcements made on the platform.

Direttoo is also able to support actors operating on the platform from an organizational point of view, scheduling orders, payments as well as other internal activities, etc. differently, in order to support the firm management of each participant requiring this service.

From another point of view, the Direttoo platform provides suggestions and then selects the best supplier in regards timing, quality and quantity for each specific business need.

Finally, Direttoo e-commerce platform follows all the requirements needed in terms of privacy and security of payments so as to be totally reliable for both chefs and/or restaurateurs and producers.

5. Discussion

The case study just illustrated above is of particular interest in that it highlights that the services provided by Direttoo are essential, not only in that they allow direct contact between producers and chefs and/or restaurateurs, but also provide support for each participant to the platform. Moreover, it appears clear that Direttoo operates as a guarantee in the exchange system on behalf of both parties, thanks to the platform– on the one hand, for the quality, reliability and prices of products (chefs and/or restaurateurs) and, on the other, for the regularity of payments, the gained margins and the opportunity to enlarge the client base quickly and effectively (producers). Through its platform, Direttoo makes the “perfect match” to be realized online possible, assuring benefits for all actors operating on the platform, even if not necessarily at the same time. Indeed, the value is generated over time and “always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary” (Vargo and Lusch, 2008) as stated by the axiom of the S-D logic. Moreover, each actor can integrate the resources at the time and in the way most suited as he chooses, also with the opportunity of having new products or formats created *ad hoc* by the facilitator (Direttoo).

Direttoo has set some general and starting rules to be included in the platform but then allows exchanges leaving the actors to generate the rules they want during exchanges; the latter can vary slightly depending on the specific actors engaged in each exchange. In this sense general actor-generated institutions exist, but can also be changed over time by actors relating to each other in a more stable way. Therefore, institutions and institutional arrangements, essential to value co-creation can be found within Direttoo platform.

In this sense, it can also be assumed that the social and economic network created and continuously enlarged by Direttoo is partially self-governed and self-adjusted (Vargo and Lusch, 2016), even if a basic control system has been put in place by Direttoo. Indeed, its revenues are represented by commissions on closed affairs; to control closed transactions is essential to its survival. In this respect, Direttoo can be considered not only as a facilitator, but also as one of the actors involved at a different level in value co-creation in that it enables generations of value for other actors but through this activity it has the opportunity to capture value from transactions closed on the platform, thus capturing value at another level from the one at which chefs and/or restaurateurs and producers capture their own.

In this service context, the role of technology is essential in that it not only has an impact on how the value is determined (Lusch et al., 2007; Akaka and Vargo, 2014) – just think about how the order is made on the platform in terms of rapidity and preciseness – but also as part of value co-creation in that the blog for example provides information of interest enlarging the knowledge of participants about specific topics and/or products they will then produce or purchase.

Coming to the platform characteristics, it is clear that Direttoo can be considered as Lusch and Nambisan (2015) do. Indeed, it is made of tangible and intangible elements and it enables service exchanges as well as value co-creation. Moreover, the platform is able to decouple information, but it also allows the mobilization of resources needed in a timely and correct way to lead to service delivery as desired by the single actor operating on the platform (Barrett et al., 2015, p. 160).

It is also true that on the Direttoo platform, sometimes with the offline support of people operating in the firm, new and different solutions and/or products can be proposed to satisfy, for example, the needs of chefs and/or restaurateurs. Also the platform, on its own, offers innovative solutions (Barrett et al., 2015) like logistical ones to facilitate the exchange of services and continue innovation, for example using green transportation means for the whole delivery time and not just for the so-called last mile.

In this sense, it could be said that Web 2.0 facilities and tools are essential. They are interactive and allow actors to operate simultaneously on the platform while at the same time offering the possibility of designing the full process of purchase - completely shaped step by step by the single actor- and to change it or not each time and for each single stage of the process. This kind of structure is able to create and maintain a certain degree of granularity (Barrett et al., 2015) and all resources can be combined finding the right solution for the single actor on each occasion – i.e. to purchase a single product the chef and/or restaurateur can change the producer and therefore the features of the product as well as the selling conditions every time. However, the same rules can be followed on each occasion, saving time and using his/her previous experience on the platform. Moreover, he/she can easily access new opportunities or formulate new requests, enhancing the whole process of service innovation also on behalf of other actors operating on the platform or who would enter on it thanks to available new products and/or services. From its side Direttoo profits from the technology as well as the platform in that it enables the codification, the control of behaviors and interactions among actors and resources (Barrett et al., 2015, p. 167), facilitating the monitoring of the whole process and gaining commissions on the closed negotiations.

Obviously, all these activities must be supported by communication channels which should be deemed to the specific kind of service exchange the platform enables and supports. In the case of Direttoo, personal communication is essential, above all at an initial stage, and can occur when new services are required or innovations are proposed. In day to day operations order forms to be filled in and other automated forms of communications are used, besides e-mails and telephone calls which can help when standard ways of communication are insufficient to support the service exchange.

6. Conclusion

The paper addresses an interesting phenomenon and offers some contributions in the domain of both Service-Dominant logic and web-based service platforms. Specifically, it highlights the relevance of these platforms as “service providers” where all actors can interact, participate and integrate resources and knowledge. In addition, it starts to shed light on how these platforms are effectively created and maintained by firms and in which sectors, pointing out which type of interactions they support and what kind of benefits actors operating in it, at different levels, can obtain.

The study, to the author’s knowledge, represents the first study oriented to investigate service platforms following Service-Dominant logic. Certainly, being a first attempt to understand in which way service platforms are created and carried out, the research has some limitations that characterize qualitative and exploratory analysis. The most important limitation is to have analyzed a single case pertaining to an interesting sector, it is true, but which insights could not be applied to all sectors because of the special features of the food industry.

From a theoretical point of view, the findings of the study contribute to the service platform literature pertaining to its role, characteristics, tools and rules in value co-creation activities and processes. From the managerial point of view, the study might be useful for entrepreneurs, who are more oriented toward considering concrete opportunities provided by service platforms to define and develop efficacious activities and processes of value co-creation by integrating abilities, resources and knowledge and obtaining several benefits. Therefore, moving from the idea that the platform is a valuable tool to foster and support interactions between different actors, the study underlines how a service platform reinforces

and promotes innovative thinking and the way of engaging participants in order to co-create value.

It is also true, as this case study shows, that service platforms could represent new business opportunities in all sectors of activity, making clear that they can be successful businesses to be started for new and/or young entrepreneurs with a reduced investment if compared to the one necessary for a traditional activity, above all in the manufacturing sectors.

Future avenues of research encompass the comparative analysis of different cases pertaining to different industries seeking to identify the best practices to create and foster value co-creation on service platforms. Towards this future step a preliminary study could also consider the point of view of actors operating on this platform, creating a framework to understand which value is created for whom at each stage and to also understand the time sequence in value co-creation following the Service-Dominant logic.

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