

Rethinking the Relationship Between Dating Services and the Hospitality Industry Through Speed Dating Events: A Partner Ecosystem Strategy

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Highlights

- Relationship between the hospitality and dating services industries
- Relationship between organisations from different but intersecting industries
- 'Control' is an agent influencing trust between intersecting industries
- New avenues for collaboration enhance mutual returns from partnerships

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Abstract

This study aims to develop a conceptual framework for the relationship between the hospitality and dating services industries, theorising this relationship by focusing on the role of speed dating events as a connecting intersection. Several theoretical foundations, including value (co)creation, service ecosystems, cue utilisation theory, and criteria for feasible and sustainable partnerships, were adopted to conceptualise this relationship. The new conceptual framework of relational value (co)creation introduces a novel joint concept that integrates the cues of both industries while allowing each to retain its unique identity. This study contributes to the understanding of relationships between organisations from different but intersecting industries, highlighting that 'control' is a key agent influencing the level of trust between organisations operating in intersecting industries, whilst the development of new avenues for collaboration enhances mutual returns from partnerships within the service ecosystem and creates opportunities for 'unsaturated' business partnerships.

Keywords: Speed dating; Hospitality industry; Saturated/unsaturated partnership; Value (co)creation; Trust; Control

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Rethinking the Relationship Between Dating Services and the Hospitality

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Introduction

For most people, the experience of dating in a bar or restaurant is a mix of excitement and nervous anticipation. Whether it is the thrill of discovering common tastes in food or drinks, or the excitement of engaging in new activities and conversations, hospitality venues provide a unique setting for romantic encounters. Within this context, the interplay of dating and dining/entertainment becomes a fascinating space for social connectivity. As such, events play a significant role in the dating sector by facilitating meaningful in-person connections, with speed dating events serving as essential platforms that enhance consumer engagement.

While the hospitality and dating services industries differ significantly in their core value propositions and business models, with the hospitality industry oriented towards providing physical services and experiences and the dating services industry facilitating human connections and relationships, both these industries focus on meeting specific human needs and providing specialised services (Lashley & Morrison, 2000; Tong et al., 2016). It is these industry connections that this study examines, as they have tremendous potential for delivering and capturing customer value, but they have remained largely underexplored in the literature.

This research addresses several existing gaps in the literature. First, while scholarly work on value (co)creation is well-developed, research specifically examining value (co)creation through business collaborations and partnerships in the hospitality industry remains under-explored. Additionally, the focus on value (co)creation within service and dating industry research is less developed, prompting calls for further studies that explicitly address value (co)creation in business-to-

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business (B2B) service contexts, particularly within the hospitality sector (Assiouras et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2017).

Second, mainstream research investigating various relationships among businesses, as well as the criteria used to assess the feasibility of partnerships between them, has predominantly concentrated on single industry-specific contexts, organisations, products, and services (Albers et al., 2016; Biong et al., 1997; Buhalis & Leung, 2018; Cheng et al., 2013; Chhetri et al., 2016; Ortiga, 2018; Pansiri, 2008; Redondi et al., 2011; Whipple & Frankel, 2006). However, limited attention has been directed toward exploring the dynamics between organisations, products, and services that exist beyond the boundaries of specific industries and related sectors such as tourism, leisure, and events (Cooper & Hall, 2008). Existing research has largely neglected to investigate the potential interactions and interdependencies that emerge among organisations, products, and services operating at the intersection of multiple industries. Only a limited amount of research has, for example, explored connections between the hospitality industry and other sectors such as health and social care (Altinay et al., 2023; Amblee, 2015; Lutz & Newlands, 2018).

Drawing on the theories of service ecosystems (Vargo et al., 2020) and ecosystem strategy, which relates to how an organisation aligns itself with partners and secures its position within an efficient business ecosystem (Adner, 2017), this study investigates the concept of value (co)creation with a focus on the relationships emerging between the hospitality industry and the dating service industry. With a focus on speed dating events as the contextual setting, the study's main objective is to develop a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between the hospitality and dating services industries and to theorise the working dynamics between entities situated at their intersections and the core entities within the

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ecosystem. In doing so, it extends the work conducted by Antchak, Ziakas, Getz, and Costa (see Antchak et al., 2019; Ziakas, 2018; Ziakas & Getz, 2020; Ziakas & Costa, 2011) and builds upon more recent research by Séraphin and Chaney (2024).

Furthermore, the study aims to uncover and address novel forms of partnerships among businesses from different sectors, explore alternative criteria for evaluating the viability and sustainability of such partnerships, and identify avenues for value (co)creation through collaboration and resources or service exchanges for effective strategic alliances. Researching products and services that operate at intersections is particularly significant for industries, such as hospitality, that face challenges due to increasing competition (Hossain et al., 2023). Indeed, innovation often emerges when established practices are disrupted (Brooker & Joppe, 2014), with the intersectionality of products and services offering the potential to foster innovation and deliver substantial benefits to industries seeking to maintain a competitive edge in today's business landscape (Hossain et al., 2023).

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: first, we provide an overview of evolving trends in the hospitality industry and dating services, and a focused literature review on value (co)creation processes and business ecosystems, highlighting the key factors that shape connections between organisations from different industries, as well as the key criteria for collaboration and strategic business alliances. Then, drawing on partnerships' feasibility and sustainability criteria, cue utilisation theory, and service ecosystems theory (Pansiri, 2008; Kim et al., 2022; Vargo & Lusch, 2016), we develop a conceptual framework that proposes a multimodal platform and a novel joint concept for value (co)creation and trust-building in cooperative strategic alliances between dating services and hospitality organisations. Finally, we conclude by discussing the theoretical and managerial

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implications of the study, its contributions and limitations, and outline an agenda for future research.

Literature review

Evolving trends in hospitality and dating services

The hospitality industry is composed of various sectors, each encompassing a broad range of services and market segments. Ottenbacher et al. (2009) provide a taxonomy of core hospitality sectors: Lodging, Foodservice, Travel, Leisure, Attractions, and Conventions. Each of these sectors is further divided into subcategories (Biederman et al., 2008; Ottenbacher et al., 2009). For instance, the lodging sector offers accommodations, ranging from luxury resorts to budget hotels, and is classified according to property type, service level, and location. The foodservice sector, which includes restaurants, bars, and similar establishments, delivers services centred on the consumption of food and beverages. The leisure industry provides both indoor and outdoor recreational activities, while the travel sector, often closely tied to tourism, includes transportation services as well as travel planning and travel agents. Lastly, the conventions sector facilitates the gathering of individuals for the exchange of products, services, and information. Traditionally centred around events like weddings, trade shows, and business conferences, this sector has expanded to include a broader array of events, such as spectator sports and socio-cultural gatherings. These newer types of conventions respond to shifting consumer preferences and the growing demand for experiences that blend social, cultural, and entertainment elements (Ottenbacher et al., 2009). This expansion reflects the evolving nature of conventions, supported by the foodservice sector, as they increasingly incorporate diverse forms of engagement and interaction across industries.

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In contrast, the dating services industry comprises a range of services designed to assist individuals in forming romantic connections, both online and offline. This sector incorporates platforms for searching, matching, and interaction, blending digital technologies with in-person services to facilitate relationships (Smith, 2005; Statista, n.d.). Driven by technological advancements and changing social dynamics, the dating services industry has grown strongly over the past five years worldwide, with dating services increasing in popularity, despite the constrained growth during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lang, 2024). The global dating services industry is valued at \$8.15 billion in 2024, with an expected annual growth rate of 1.91% and a projected customer base of 729.9 million by 2029 (Statista, n.d.). In parallel, the global hospitality market is anticipated to grow to an impressive \$5.8 trillion by 2027 (Hospitality Global Market Report, 2022), highlighting the immense economic scale and substantial opportunities available for both industries.

Despite the success of dating apps and websites, which have introduced new social opportunities for individuals seeking romantic connections (Blackwell et al., 2015) and their increasing popularity among diverse populations (Gunter, 2008; Korobov, 2011), speed dating has experienced a notable surge in popularity over the past three years. This resurgence is largely attributed to a growing sense of fatigue with dating apps, virtual interactions and social media, with many individuals expressing a desire for more meaningful, in-person encounters (Xie, 2024). People are increasingly seeking deeper connections that go beyond the often-superficial exchanges typical of online platforms, driving interest in speed dating as a viable alternative for fostering genuine interpersonal relationships. These trends present significant opportunities for hospitality venues to reconsider their collaborative relationships with businesses in the dating services industry, potentially enabling both

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sectors to co-create enhanced value for their customers. By aligning their offerings and leveraging the growing demand for in-person experiences post-pandemic, hospitality venues can integrate dating services—such as speed dating events—into their service portfolios, creating mutually beneficial partnerships that drive customer engagement and satisfaction.

Speed dating events fall under the category of special interest adult entertainment and are often themed around special activities or events such as wine tasting or Valentine-themed events (Séraphin, 2023). Attendance of speed dating events has seen a significant 49% increase in 2024 from 2023, with new concepts emerging to cater to diverse preferences, a 400% increase from 2022 to 2023 for board game speed dating, and 135% increase for athletic dating events like pickleball and spin classes (Xie, 2024).

This renewed interest of Gen Z and millennials in speed dating events that are enabling ways to recreate “third spaces” and more meaningful in-person interactions (Meyersohn, 2024) provides an opportunity for businesses in the hospitality and dating services industries to re-evaluate their relationship to jointly design and benefit from emerging mechanisms of creating, delivering and capturing customer value.

Value creation – A business ecosystem perspective

Value creation and/or value co-creation play a significant role in obtaining competitive advantage in highly competitive industries such as the hospitality industry (Bowie et al., 2017; Hossain et al., 2023; Okumus et al., 2020; Rokka et al., 2023). In recent times, an increased volume of research has focused on the concept of value co-creation (VCC) (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Dekhili & Hallem, 2019; Ravazzani & Hazée, 2022; Shen et al., 2020) and research into value co-destruction (VCD) (Dieteren & Neuhofer, 2024; Sthapit et al., 2023) is nascent. VCD refers to the

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“interactional process between service systems that results in a decline in at least one of the systems well-being” (Plé & Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010, p. 431). Linked to Vargo and Lusch's (2004) service-dominant logic (SDL), VCC can be described as a dynamic process wherein customers and suppliers engage in interactions within a service context, jointly contributing to the creation of mutually beneficial value (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Sthapit and Björk (2018) referred to VCC as a resource integration process in which resources are transformed into value by the involved actors. Through an interactive and collaborative process, these actors exchange knowledge, communication, and objectives (Assiouras et al., 2023). In this context, Vargo et al. (2020) drew on S-D logic to operationalise the (co)creation process. The value creation process, including value co-creation, value co-destruction and value no-creation (VNC), can be disrupted by service mega-disruptions, policies, and government actions (Assiouras et al., 2023; Makkonen & Olkkonen, 2017).

Building on the process of value (co)creation, Boldrini and Antheaume (2021) adopted a business ecosystem perspective to design a business model tool suited for multi-actor and collaborative contexts. Further supporting this perspective, Fehrer et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of meso-level shared objectives and resources, which align businesses at societal and ecosystem levels. For organisations that exhibit compatibility and can function harmoniously within an ecosystem, several benefits emerge, such as the capacity to share expertise, fostering innovation, and gaining competitive advantages (Adner, 2017; Buhalis & Leung, 2018; Sun et al., 2013).

Academic research in marketing and management has explored various perspectives on the relationship between organisations within an ecosystem, relationship that can be categorised into three main approaches. The first approach

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involves collaborative efforts aimed at fostering an innovative milieu, as highlighted by Peck and McGuinness (2003). By working together, organisations can enhance their competitiveness through shared promotion messages, expertise, and ideas (Buhalis & Leung, 2018), can gain external knowledge (outside-in) and bring new ideas to the market and to innovate (inside-out) through win-win alliances (Camilleri et al., 2023), and can improve economic performance (Mendes et al., 2023). This collaborative model is commonly referred to as a service ecosystem, defined by Vargo and Lusch (2016, p. 10-11) as a “relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange”. The second and third relational approaches pertain to scenarios where organisations either engage in direct competition with each other or adopt a hybrid approach involving both cooperation and competition simultaneously. This paradigm is often known as a non-service ecosystem (Cheng et al., 2013; Chhetri et al., 2016; Ortiga, 2018; Redondi et al., 2011).

However, some organisations may be reluctant to enter partnerships due to limitations associated with this management strategy. In that sense, Biong et al. (1997, p. 94) stated that “cooperation implies that one has to rely on the other party in order to complete the tasks within a relationship. It is impossible for companies to cooperate without giving up some of their independence, which could be uncomfortable and even threatening to the parties involved”. Moreover, additional concerns may arise regarding the potential inability of the partner to provide products or services that meet the same quality standards as offered independently, as well as concerns about the absence of added value in terms of cost reduction, increased

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sales, and overall competitiveness. Other hindering factors include a lack of strategic fit and differences in organisational philosophy (Biong et al., 1997).

Regardless of the form collaborative efforts take within an ecosystem, the service ecosystem perspective posits that all actors within service systems engage in continuous interactions, leading to resource integration and value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). This study builds on this perspective by concentrating on the creation of an innovative milieu through a relational view that underscores the importance of fostering collaborative relationships as a key source of competitive advantage through idiosyncratic service exchanges with alliance partners (Dyer et al., 2018).

Value creation in the hospitality industry

In the hospitality industry, research examining customer value co-creation has primarily focused on understanding the concept as it relates to customer behaviours such as participation, networking, trust, open dialogue, reciprocity, and factors that shape co-creation such as emotional bonding, personalisation, and interactivity (Carvalho & Alves, 2023). Antecedents of customer value co-creation, such as consumers' willingness to participate, social pressure, the servicescape, and the ease of use of technologies have also been explored, as well as customer outcomes such as satisfaction, loyalty, and perceived value (Carvalho & Alves, 2023; Chen et al., 2017). However, much of this literature has predominantly focused on customer outcomes as a result of the value co-creation process, whereas studies exploring multi-industry dynamics and partnership avenues to support value creation are limited.

In the specific realm of hospitality and dating services industries, utilising a User-Centred Design (UCD) approach, Séraphin and Abou Hamdan (2023)

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introduced the innovative 'dinner date' concept within speed dating events, offering valuable insights into the marketing dynamics between the dating services and hospitality sectors. Through collaboration within their respective ecosystems, the overall value delivered to consumers is enhanced (S raphin & Abou Hamdan, 2023). Yet, most existing literature continues to emphasise VCC predominantly from a B2C perspective (Freire & Ver ssimo, 2020).

The purpose of any hospitality organisation is to create value for its immediate stakeholders and for the society at large, using management approaches such as evaluation of market positioning and benchmarking (Okumus et al., 2020). Value co-creation in the hospitality industry can be the outcome of a firm on its own, and/or in collaboration with third parties, which can be customers, employees, and other stakeholders (Bowie et al., 2017). Whatever strategy is adopted, the creation of value is beneficial for both customers and hospitality organisations (Wu et al., 2018). For instance, for the organisation it could be the increase of revenues (Tu et al., 2018), and for the customer, a good experience (Buhalis et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). Research on value (co)creation in hospitality (Bowie et al., 2017; Guan et al., 2018; Okumus et al., 2020; Rihova et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2022), is covered from the perspective of customers and their contribution to value creation (Guan et al., 2018; Rihova et al., 2019) or in partnership with employees (Shulga & Busser, 2020); from the perspective of technology (such as Metaverse; robots in restaurants) and its use to improve the experience and engagement of customers at all stages of their visit (Buhalis et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022); and travel agencies and their suppliers collaboration to develop new products and services (Chen et al., 2017). Nevertheless, less research has focused on (co)creation in a B2B context, and it is this gap in literature that the present study is addressing.

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A key condition for an effective service ecosystem and organisations working successfully together in creating customer value is the pivotal role of effective business partnerships where, rather than focusing on power relationships between organisations, the focus is on how collaboration can achieve shared goals. It is these criteria for feasible and sustainable partnerships that are addressed next.

Criteria shaping the relationship between the dating services and hospitality industries

A valuable framework for assessing the feasibility and sustainability of partnerships between organisations is the framework proposed by Pansiri (2008), which introduces five critical criteria, namely compatibility, capability, commitment, control, and trust. (1) *Compatibility*, which encompasses a wide range of factors, including the alignment of organisational values, mutual goals for future development, and the ability to address common challenges. Albers et al. (2016) further elaborate on compatibility from three perspectives, i.e. activity-domain-based (related to the sector in which partners operate), partner-characteristics-based (considering affiliations and positioning in the value chain, as well as geographic location), and alliance-structure-based (focusing on how the partnership is structured and managed). (2) *Capability*, which revolves around two key aspects. Firstly, it examines the extent to which the organisations involved complement each other, and how collaborating can enhance their respective competitive advantages. Secondly, it assesses whether the parties possess the necessary in-house expertise and tangible and intangible resources to effectively achieve their joint objectives (Pansiri, 2008). (3) A high level of *commitment* is crucial for the success of the partnership (Pansiri, 2008), which largely depends on the willingness of all parties to wholeheartedly commit their tangible and intangible resources to ensure its success. (4) Maintaining

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a sense of *control* over each other's actions is often seen as means to mitigate perceived risks (Pansiri, 2008), as organisations often perceive the potential loss of total control as a risk in partnerships; and (5) The level of *trust* and confidence exhibited by each partner plays a pivotal role in the success of the alliance. This encompasses aspects such as high integrity, a willingness to openly discuss problems, and a strong sense of business acumen on both sides (Whipple & Frankel, 2006). Trust acts as both an input, influencing the effort invested by all parties, and an output, leading to the establishment of a robust and collaborative partnership.

Earlier studies have highlighted the strong compatibility and synergistic capabilities between organisations in the dating services industry and the hospitality industry, rooted in four key considerations: entertainment, target market, economic influence, and venue (S raphin & Chaney, 2024; S raphin & Yallop, 2023) (see Figure 1). Entertainment plays a major role in shaping customers' experiences and represents an integral part of the offerings provided by the hospitality sector (Hudson & Hudson, 2017; S raphin & Yallop, 2019). Entertainment and food and beverage are also central to both industries and they play an important role in creating the right atmosphere at venues and events (Kim et al., 2022; Heide et al., 2009; Rokka et al., 2023), as well as constituting primary cues in bars and restaurants (Kim et al., 2022), and significantly influencing customers' decision-making process when choosing potential bars and restaurants (Baek et al., 2006).

<<<INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE>>>

Previous studies further assert that the success and popularity of speed dating events depend significantly on the selection and quality of the venue (bars/restaurants) with speed daters primarily evaluating venue-related aspects such as value for money, atmosphere, and location (S raphin & Yallop, 2023). Moreover,

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for the intersection between the hospitality and dating services industries (speed dating events) to yield fruitful outcomes, a synergy between both parties is essential to mitigate intersectional gaps, defined by Bowie et al. (2017) as standard, delivery, and perception gaps. These gaps involve discrepancies between the service produced and delivered compared to customers' expectations, failure to meet customers' standard expectations, and differences between customers' anticipated experiences and what is delivered to them. Whilst a high compatibility and capability between the dating services and hospitality industries is evident, previous studies have also revealed a lower level of commitment and trust (S raphin & Chaney, 2024), as depicted in Figure 1. Understanding these dimensions and their implications holds significant implications for both industries and lays the groundwork for potential advancements in their collaborative efforts.

From a theoretical perspective, examining the conditions that contribute to both 'best' and 'worst' case alliance scenarios is crucial, as research on entrepreneurial endeavours tends to focus on success (Singh et al., 2007). Extending Pansiri's (2008) model of strategic cooperative alliance performance, this study acknowledges the limitations of focusing solely on 'best' case alliances, which fails to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that may lead to alliance success or failure. By investigating speed dating events, and the potential alliances between dating services and hospitality organisations, this research offers an opportunity to explore both 'best' case scenarios—marked by compatibility and capabilities—and 'worst' case scenarios, which may be characterised by issues of commitment and trust (Figure 1). This dual perspective enriches our understanding of strategic alliances by emphasising both the positive and negative dimensions of partnership dynamics.

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Both industries (dating services and hospitality) cater to a diverse and sizable audience, making them inclusive in terms of target market and customer base (Alexopoulos et al., 2020; Blackhart et al., 2014; Bowie et al., 2017; Duguay, 2016; George, 2021; Sloan et al., 2013; Zeng et al., 2019). This shared characteristic enhances their compatibility. Speed dating events are organised and primarily hosted by speed dating businesses and are typically held in bars and restaurants (S raphin, 2023; S raphin & Yallop, 2023). The location and choice of venue are important factors in customers' decision-making process (Tzeng et al., 2002). In that sense, this commonality further strengthens the bond between the two industries. In economic terms, both industries contribute significantly to the service sector, collectively valuing billions of dollars globally (Lang, 2024). This financial significance also contributes to their mutual compatibility and capabilities.

However, despite these shared factors, the low level of commitment and trust between the two industries prevents speed dating – an intersectional product/service – from being viewed by hospitality organisations as offering value to their customers or as a source of competitive advantage (S raphin & Chaney, 2024). This may be because of possible negative perceptions associated with dating, difficulties in transferring actual experiences, and perceived intersectional gaps. Dating activities may also be associated with questionable conduct, alcohol-related incidents, aggression (Cava et al., 2020), and other unethical behaviours (Minina et al., 2022). This 'perception gap' is potentially limiting the partnership between the two industries. Additionally, the transfer of experiences presents some challenges. For instance, if speed daters have an unsatisfactory experience at a speed dating event, they might associate this disappointment with the restaurant, despite the venue's role merely being a provider of space for the event (S raphin & Yallop, 2023). This view is

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supported by Ingram and Simons (2002) who argued that customer experience (positive and negative) can be transferred from one organisation to another when involved in a partnership. However, they also argued that positive experiences more often outweigh the negative ones. In the case of hospitality and dating services industries, this may mean that if speed daters enjoyed the drinks and food, which are the primary cues of the industry (Buhalis et al., 2023; Yi et al., 2017), it could outweigh a negative experience at the speed dating event, hence establishing an effective working relationship between the two parties is important.

Due to the seemingly low commitment and trust, a one-way relationship seems to have emerged between the two industries, with speed dating event organisers actively promoting bars and restaurants and using them as Unique Selling Points to attract participants. However, the reverse is seldom observed, with only a small percentage of hospitality venues (approximately 20%) advertising their hosting of speed dating events (Eventbrite, n.d.). This imbalance limits the potential for a robust partnership between the dating services and hospitality industries, despite the significant value that such collaborations could generate for both sectors.

Cues of hospitality and dating services influencing consumer behaviour: The intersectional role of speed dating events

Research in hospitality and event management has investigated various moderating factors (or cues) that influence consumers' behaviour and motivations. Cue Utilisation Theory is a valuable framework for understanding consumer behaviour, which posits that consumers evaluate products by utilising various cues (Kim et al., 2022; Zeng et al., 2019). These studies contended that a series of extrinsic and intrinsic cues influence consumer behaviour and provide businesses with potential competitive advantages. Extrinsic cues are factors or attributes related

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to the product/service (but not part of the product/service itself) that influence customers' attitudes towards the product/service, such as the services' quality provided by staff and venue's atmosphere, whilst intrinsic cues are primarily concerned with attributes related directly to the product/service, such as the provision of food and drinks, healthy ingredients, flavours (Kim et al., 2022).

However, hospitality and event management businesses operate within a business ecosystem that purports that intersections and synergies are commonly occurring among business entities within the different industries (Wang et al., 2004). More recently, Séraphin and Chaney's (2024) research has examined the intersectional cues of hospitality and dating services, with speed dating events as the juncture between the two industries and argued that most prominent intersectional extrinsic cues of speed dating events are those pertaining to operational aspects of the event (before and/or after the event), whilst intersectional intrinsic cues of speed dating are comprising of aspects happening during the event such as the quality of product/service they are consuming during the event, and everyone present during the speed dating event (Séraphin & Chaney, 2024). This would imply that the socialisation aspects of speed dating are also critical cues that influence consumers, and, therefore, effective collaboration between industries can address loneliness by enhancing consumer-to-consumer interactions and emotional empathy. With regards to socialisation, to date, a limited number of studies investigated loneliness as an emotion in a hospitality setting (Choi et al., 2022) and only a few studies examined how solo dining impacts on consumers' emotions (Choi et al., 2022; Her & Seo, 2018; Line & Hanks, 2019).

Furthermore, the concept of social servicescape is a co-creation which captures the interaction between consumers and their social environment, and more

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research is needed in this area due to both, the dearth of research, and the fact that the solo market is growing (Choi et al., 2022). Social servicescape in hospitality settings, and more specifically in food service settings, is directly related to emotional empathy, also known as emotional congruence, and can be explored from two perspectives, namely the interaction between consumers and service providers; and the interaction consumer-to-consumer, the former being the most commonly approach to explore the topic (Ibid.). Within this point of view, this study is arguing that the hospitality industry has so far failed to address the issue of consumers' loneliness because of the lack of effective interaction and strategic cooperation with the right partner. The co-creation of a servicescape between hospitality and dating service industries can address the issue of loneliness of consumers of the hospitality industry, through the interaction consumer-to-consumer. An effective collaboration between the two industries would likely address emotional empathy or congruence from both perspectives i.e. interaction consumers-service providers; and consumers-to-consumers, and additionally, beyond speed dating, it may also be extended to the design of the venue.

In summary, Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the synthesis of principal theoretical perspectives that underpin the development of the conceptual framework, which examines the relationship between dating services and the hospitality industry. The framework is further elaborated in the subsequent section.

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Conceptual framework of the relationship between dating services and the hospitality industry

Criteria for effective collaboration and strategic cooperative alliances

The earlier examination of value creation processes and Pansiri's (2008) framework for partnership compatibility indicates that the dating services and hospitality industries exhibit strong potential for collaboration. However, low levels of commitment and trust hinder these partnerships (S raphin & Chaney, 2024; S raphin & Yallop, 2023) (Figure 1), and there is a perceived imbalance in marketing efforts between the two industries. Trust and commitment are crucial for effective relationship marketing and joint marketing initiatives (Amoako et al., 2019; Jensen & Cornwell, 2021). Despite some organisations' reluctance to form alliances due to concerns about autonomy loss, conflicts, or misalignment in standards, added value, strategic fit, and philosophy (Biong et al., 1997), engagement in service innovation through exchange relationships enabled by joint idiosyncratic contributions of the alliance partners are known to generate increased customer value and competitive advantages through inter-firm relationships (Dyer et al., 2018). This approach requires fresh-thinking and future-oriented dynamic capabilities for transforming and reconfiguring through co-specialisation, where, for example, innovations in the provision of speed dating events are highly dependable on enhancements in the hospitality industry and vice-versa, with both industries actively seeking opportunities for cooperation and alliances (Teece, 2007).

Likewise, grounded in the value (co)creation paradigm, Inayatullah's (2008) concept of futures thinking and a "future thinking for transforming" approach to Pansiri's (2008) framework for assessing the feasibility and sustainability of partnerships would involve the dating services and hospitality industries envisioning a shared future. This vision includes defining desired outcomes and strategies that

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leverage mutual assets and expertise to create and deliver significant value to consumers (Adner, 2017). Achieving this requires shifting the focus from power dynamics between ecosystem entities to prioritising how collaboration can accomplish shared goals. Collaboration is especially critical given the potential impact of dating apps on traditional face-to-face speed dating events, which, in turn, affect the hospitality sector (Leurs & Hardy, 2019). By collaborating, hospitality venue owners and speed dating organisations can not only maintain their business models but also initiate projects that enhance value creation, fostering a competitive and sustainable future.

Futures thinking approaches can drive collaboration between the hospitality and dating services industries by co-creating servicescapes that foster meaningful socialisation (Pansiri, 2008). These partnerships enable both industries to strategically manage interactional cues that facilitate emotional empathy and social engagement (Amoako et al., 2019). Such collaborations allow the hospitality industry to evolve by generating “co-value” through emotionally engaging environments, enhancing customer experiences and fostering deeper social connections.

Within this overarching approach of 'future thinking for transforming' adapted from Inayatullah (2008), the concept of 'control' in Pansiri's (2008) model serves as a critical moderating factor. Specifically, 'control' influences the success of strategic alliances between the dating and hospitality industries (Figure 3), as it is a central determinant of trust between partner organisations (Das & Teng, 2001).

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Drawing on cue utilisation theory, this study posits that despite the presence of significant intersectional cues that highlight collaboration opportunities between hospitality and dating services businesses, such partnerships can only be fully

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realised through deliberate and strategic efforts to manage and control these interactional cues for mutual benefit. A joint strategic approach is essential to capitalise on these seemingly untapped partnership opportunities by developing integrated concepts and creating multimodal platforms that facilitate servicescape co-creation.

Key cues, such as the quality of food and beverages and the strategic organisation of speed dating events, act as critical touchpoints at the intersection of these two industries (see Figure 4). Implementing stringent quality control measures for foodservices by speed dating event organisers, in coordination with similar control protocols by venue operators, would be an important initial step towards building trust and fostering robust working relationships. To achieve deeper collaboration and a higher level of trust, extending these quality control measures to address all relevant cues, as illustrated in Figure 4, may be necessary.

<<INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE>>

In hospitality research, *control*, which encompasses aspects related to staff, products, and service delivery, has consistently been recognised as a critical factor in achieving quality standards and fostering trust among stakeholders (Eves & Dervisi, 2005; Papadopoulos-Bayliss et al., 2001). Moreover, control has been linked to enhanced overall performance (Noone, 2008). In the context of speed dating events, where the hospitality and dating services industries intersect (S raphin, 2023), a reciprocal control mechanism between the two industries and their representative cues could yield significant benefits for both, as well as for their joint product and service offerings. By fostering mutual control, these industries can work collaboratively to strengthen their relationship and build trust. In this regard, ‘trust and control are interlinked processes commonly seen as key to reach effectiveness in

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inter and intra-organisational relations' (Costa & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007, p. 392), whilst the presence of self-monitoring and monitoring of others contributes to cultivating cooperation and trust (Ferrin et al., 2007).

Directions for novel theoretical implications and insight for the management of service organisations: Saturated and unsaturated partnerships

Despite the potential for shared consumer value from speed dating events, this shared value appears not to have been sufficient to instil trust and cooperation between the hospitality and dating services industries. The concept of mutual control between these business partners could be crucial for cultivating trust, as previously discussed. For the partnership to be truly effective and maximise value for customers, the advancement of a joint concept may prove beneficial. Currently, speed dating events seem to be perceived as separate from hospitality organisations. However, a joint (mutually agreed-upon) concept developed through collaborative efforts (i.e. resource integration and service exchanges), such as a product/service that offers shared value, may transform this business relationship. By offering a product or service that delivers shared value, the interaction between dating services and the hospitality sector could lead to a cohesive value proposition within the service ecosystem (Adner, 2017). Innovative future thinking can also help create the conditions for a paradigm shift whereby an organisation develops new strategies, enables stakeholders, and employs innovative tools and creativity to build a new future (Inayatullah, 2008). This approach encourages the development of novel joint concepts and strategies focused on value co-creation and mutual benefits from partnering within the service ecosystem.

The case of the working relationship between dating services and the hospitality industry, illustrates that partnerships can yield more than initially expected. This study

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introduces the term *unsaturated partnership* to describe a business collaboration that appears to have reached its full potential but, upon deeper exploration, reveals additional benefits. Conversely, a *saturated partnership* refers to one that has maximised all possible gains, where further value cannot be extracted (Hennink et al., 2017).

Research on partnership largely focuses on collaborations between organisations with naturally aligned activities, with limited attention paid to cross-sector partnerships involving diverse business operations. As Brooker and Joppe (2014) note, studies on service industry partnerships often lack the disruptive innovation needed for significant advancement. Few studies have explored service co-creation within hospitality and tourism (Casanueva et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2017). Strategic partnerships play a significant role in business performance as organisations share tasks, complement their skills and resources to adapt the need of the market, and, arguably, signify 'saturated' partnerships as they align to Pansiri's (2008) model and its best possible case scenario, i.e. criteria for the sustainability of a partnership, and for the optimisation of mutual benefits (Casanueva et al., 2014).

Nonetheless, partnerships between businesses from different industries/sectors, operating in distinct activity domains – contrary to what Pansiri (2008) defines as compatible organisations sharing similar values, mutual goals, and aligned domains – may yield innovative and creative business solutions with vast potential for value creation. The potential collaboration between dating services industry and the hospitality industry exemplifies such an *unsaturated partnership*. This partnership has not yet reached its full potential, and there remains unrealised (latent) value that can be harnessed (Hennink et al., 2017). Two plausible criteria for *unsaturated partnership* may include: (a) Reluctant full partnership: Partners are

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engaged in collaboration but not to its fullest extent, often due to a lack of trust and commitment. This reluctance may stem from concerns such as reputational risks or the transfer of proprietary knowledge and experience; (b) Joint concept development: Although partners may appear to have low compatibility, particularly when they belong to industries with minimal or no apparent connection, developing a joint concept –whether a new product or service – can significantly enhance compatibility. This collaborative approach allows each partner to derive direct benefits while fostering mutual control mechanisms that build trust.

The concepts of *saturated* and *unsaturated* partnership devised in this study encourage businesses to pursue innovation through collaboration with unconventional partners. Exploring the unrealised or latent potential of such partnerships offers an innovative strategy for achieving competitive advantage and creating substantial value. This paradigm shift invites businesses to consider the strategic benefits of collaborating with unlikely partners, thereby opening new avenues for value co-creation and enhanced performance.

Novel practical implications and insight for the management of service organisations:

Multimodal hospitality platforms/venues

Multimodal platforms are designed to integrate a diverse range of services, either spanning multiple industry sectors (Loescher, 1998); or within a single sector where offerings complement one another (Soudene et al., 2008). The overall purpose of these platforms is to ensure a high-quality consumer experience by addressing various needs effectively (Loescher, 1998; Soudene et al., 2008). Additionally, the purpose of multimodal platforms is to bring a lively atmosphere to existing single modal platforms which are old-fashioned, too small, have no coherent organisation of services offered, and sometimes dilapidated (Loescher, 1998).

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Example of sectors where multimodal platforms are used include transport (Loescher, 1998), and health (Souidene et al., 2008).

However, the hospitality industry has yet to adopt the concept of a multimodal platform. In this study, the term *multimodal hotel and/or restaurant* refers to venues that, through strategic design, decor, and atmosphere, can host a range of products and services, including events, that adapt to consumers' personal and contextual needs throughout their lives. This includes accommodating the interplay between work and leisure activities, with finding a romantic partner being a relevant aspect of non-work life (Zacher & Froidevaux, 2021). For hotels and restaurants, this means reconsidering venue design to support the integration of new products and services.

The latest trend in hospitality design, biophilic design, emphasises incorporating natural elements and systems into the built environment, yielding benefits such as enhancing guests' emotional responses, elevating perceptions of venue quality, and positively influencing customer behavioural intentions (Lee, 2019; Nanu & Rahman, 2023). Effective design is particularly crucial for speed dating events, as the setting significantly impacts participants' pleasure and arousal levels, both of which are critical for a successful and engaging experience. This, in turn, facilitates effective matching between participants (Alexopoulos et al., 2020; Bhargava & Fisman, 2014; Turowetz & Hollander, 2012).

Discussion and conclusion

This study contends that intersections between unrelated industries can lead to innovative products and services, driving value co-creation that enhances both the performance of hospitality and dating services businesses and customer experiences. Specifically, it explores the concept of value (co)creation through the

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lens of service ecosystems (Vargo et al., 2020), in which relationships between hospitality and other industries, such as the dating service industry, are ensuing.

Speed dating events occupy a unique position at the intersection of the hospitality and dating services industries. While primarily organised by businesses within the dating services industry, these events are commonly hosted in hospitality venues such as bars and restaurants (Séraphin & Chaney, 2024; Séraphin & Yallop, 2023). These events contribute to value co-creation, where participants integrate resources to generate mutual value (Sthapit & Björk, 2018). Speed dating events are particularly noteworthy as they exemplify the interaction between these two industries (Séraphin & Yallop, 2023), facilitating customer-to-customer engagement in a romantic setting (Turowetz & Hollander, 2012). Our study highlights unique collaboration opportunities between hospitality and dating services, industries typically seen as external to one another. By targeting speed dating events, the analysis explores how hospitality businesses can engage with an industry that has different objectives, revenue streams, and operational models.

Contributions

This paper advances hospitality and event management research by proposing a conceptual framework that examines the relationship between dating services and the hospitality industry. The framework focuses on cues control and the development of a new joint concept / multimodal platform for value creation as a strategy to foster trust and commitment between these industries. Grounded in theoretical foundations related to value (co)creation, business/service ecosystems, and criteria for feasible and sustainable partnerships, the study conceptualises the dynamic interactions between hospitality and dating services, contributing to a deeper understanding of cross-industry collaboration.

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The study offers two important theoretical contributions and one key managerial insight regarding the interaction between intersecting industries, specifically the hospitality and dating services industries. *First*, it addresses a gap in the literature by investigating the concept of "intersection", which refers to the convergence point where two or more distinct business entities with shared synergies meet (Wang et al., 2004). At these intersections, entities maintain fully developed, distinct identities and characteristics (Punch & Tisdall, 2012; Wall, 2019). Recent research emphasises the need for a holistic, integrative approach in management research rather than viewing disciplines in isolation. For example, research in tourism, hospitality, and event management increasingly advocates for interdisciplinary integration (Antchak et al., 2019; Ziakas, 2018; Ziakas & Costa, 2011; Ziakas & Getz, 2020). Building on these perspectives, this study explores the relational dynamics that emerge when organisations operate at the confluence of different industries. *Second*, by employing the concept of service ecosystems (Vargo & Lush, 2004; Vargo & Lusch 2016), the study introduces a novel conceptual framework for value creation through resource integration and service exchange. In doing so, the study proposes new avenues for approaching unrealised (latent) value from business partnerships, examining ways for increasing mutual returns and customer value from partnering within the service ecosystem. *Third*, employing the case of two intersecting industries (hospitality and dating services) the key managerial insight includes the imperative for a new "joint concept" and multimodal hospitality platform that leverages resources integration and service exchanges between the hospitality and dating services industries.

The introduction of a new "joint concept" and multimodal hospitality platforms that leverage resource integration and service exchanges offers substantial practical

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managerial implications, fostering innovation and enhancing value co-creation between dating services and the hospitality industry. A joint hospitality-dating service concept can lead to the development of unique, synergistic offerings that draw on the core strengths of both industries, thereby increasing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and competitive advantage. For example, hospitality venues can partner with speed dating companies to offer exclusive event packages, including themed speed dating nights, bespoke menus, and venue customisation designed specifically to enhance the dating experience. This strategic alignment can result in memorable and engaging events that attract a diverse clientele. Additionally, the implementation of loyalty programmes and cross-promotional strategies, such as offering discounts for repeat visits to the hosting venue, can incentivise participants to engage in future events. These initiatives not only encourage continued interaction but also promote post-event networking opportunities, reinforcing long-term customer relationships. Moreover, marketing and brand alignment strategies, such as partnerships between high-end hospitality venues and premium dating services, along with shared promotions can enhance customer experiences, foster loyalty, and generate new revenue streams through innovative and collaborative service offerings.

Limitations and future research

This study is not without limitations. First, the study is conceptual and, therefore, it lacks empirical data to test the proposed framework. More research is called for to expand and validate our conceptualisation, whilst future research may be conducted to provide empirical support for the proposed framework. Second, as highlighted in this study, research exploring service ecosystems and business relationships is context-specific and has predominantly focused on single industry-specific contexts, industry-specific organisations, products, and services. Given this specificity, future research should consider expanding work into understanding

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criteria to assess the feasibility of partnerships between organisations situated within different business activity realms, sectors and industries. Investigating diverse and cross-industry contexts could yield novel insights into the factors contributing to successful partner ecosystem strategies and reveal the role that contextual variables may play in the success of these strategies.

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Figure 1: Relationship between the dating services industry and hospitality industry. Source: Séraphin and Chaney (2024)

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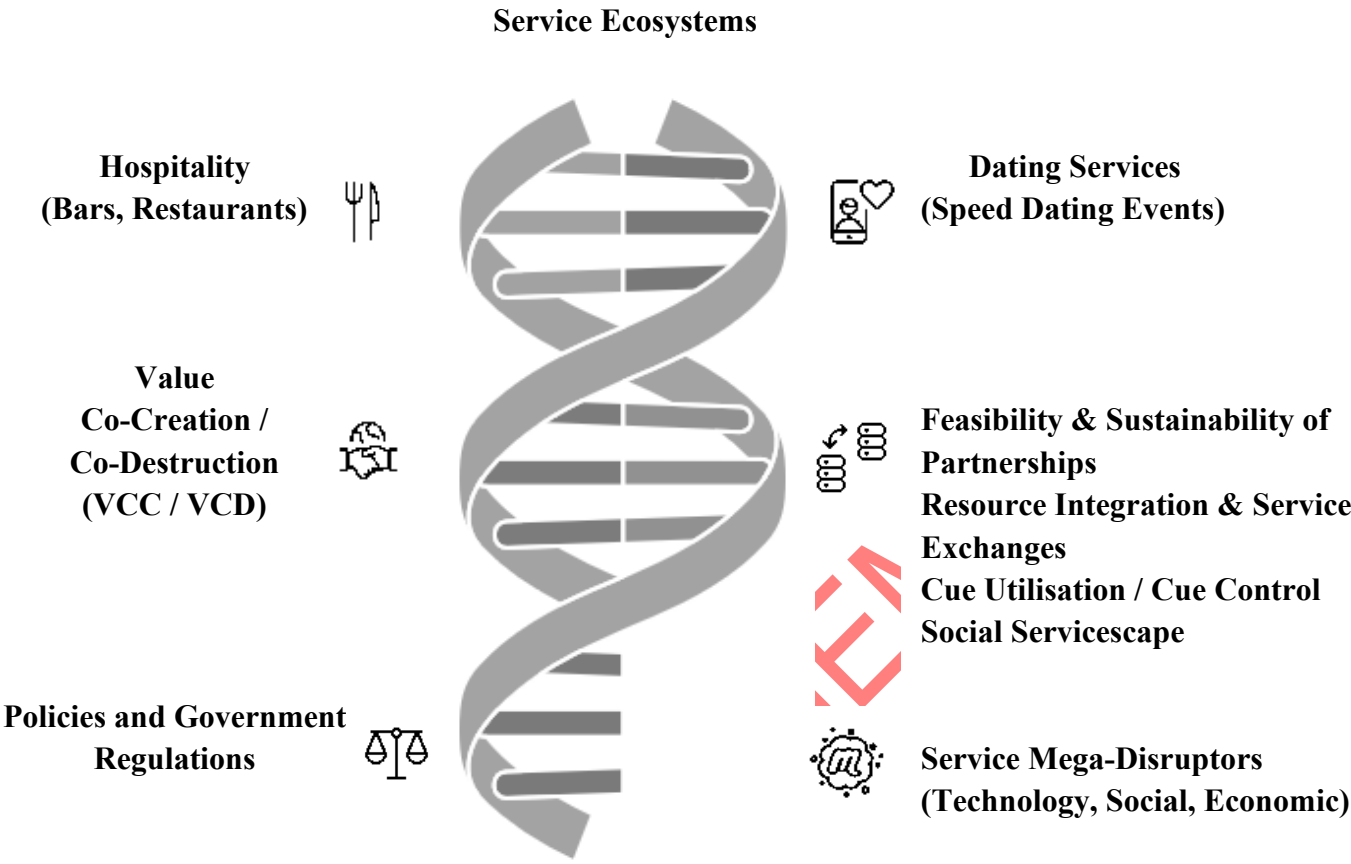


Figure 2: Synthesis of theoretical perspectives informing the conceptual framework

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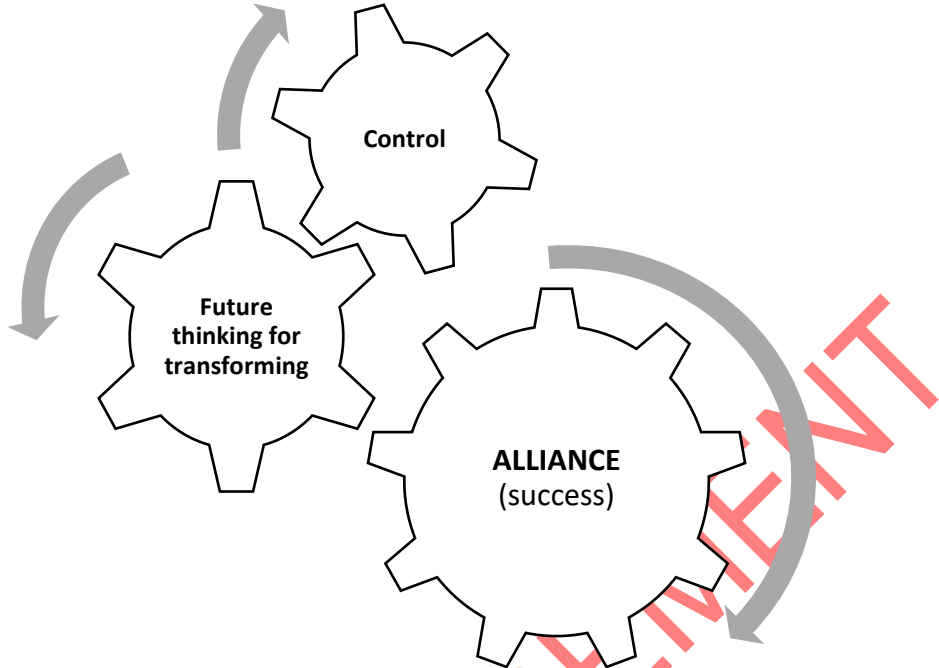


Figure 3: Suggested approach for a successful cooperative alliance between dating services and the hospitality industry

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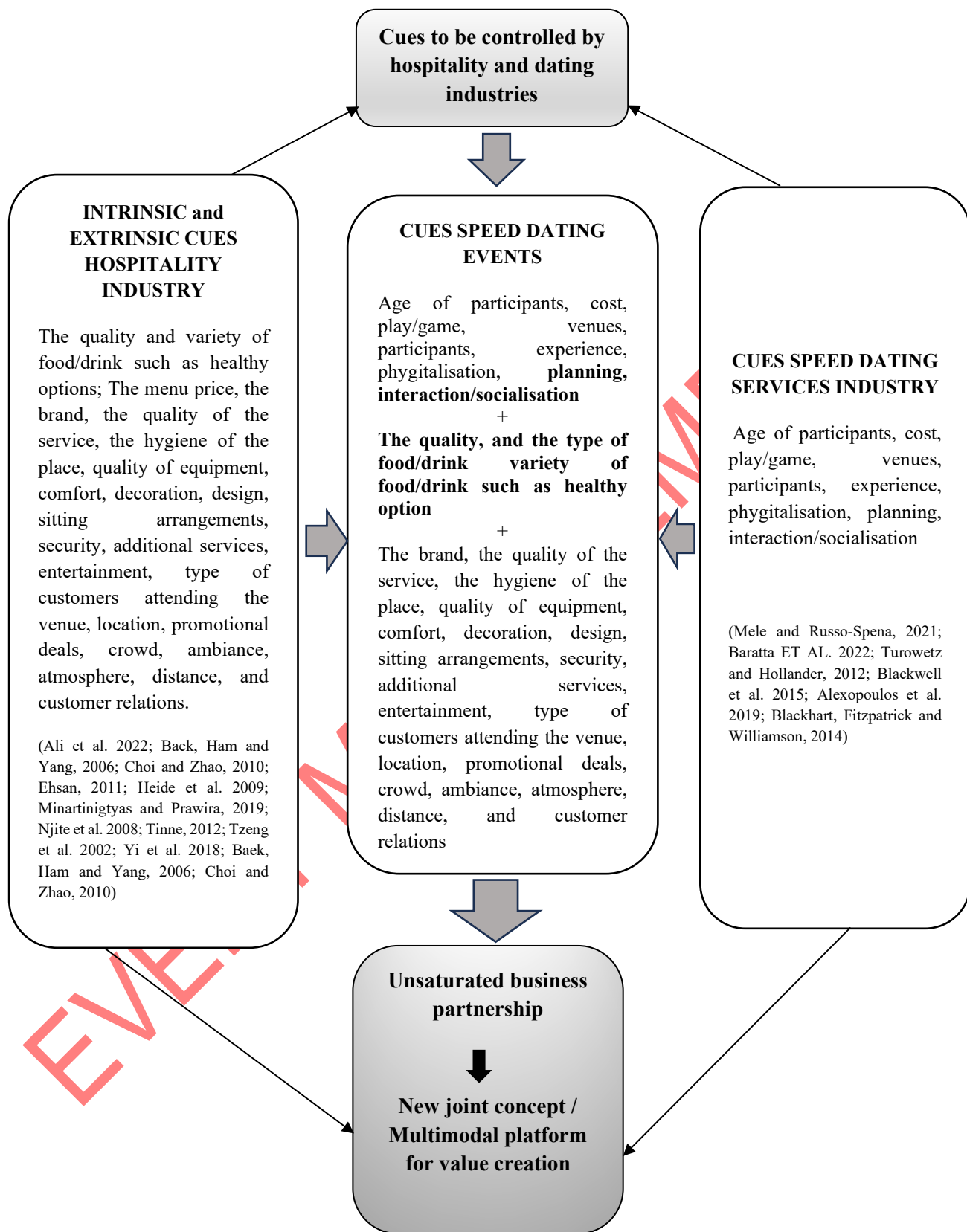


Figure 4: Conceptual framework of the relationship between dating services and the hospitality industry through cues control and development of new joint concept / multimodal platform for value creation