REVIEW ARTICLE

Embracing the paradox of customer experiences in the hospitality and tourism industry

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[Correction added on 15th of July 2023, after first online publication: Copyright line has been updated in this version.]

Abstract

This paper aims to re-evaluate the customer experience literature in the hospitality and tourism (H&T) domain by employing a paradox lens and constructing a model for future research direction and practitioners. Using two co-citation analysis methods—a hierarchical cluster analysis and a multidimensional scaling analysis—to investigate 312 customer experience papers from the leading H&T journals with 22.124 citations over the 44-year period (1987–2021), we identified five knowledge foundations that have made up the intellectual structure of customer experience in H&T: experiential consumption, authenticity, memorability, place branding, and service. This result reveals the dualistic representations of the paradoxical character of customer experience including authentic/fantastical, structured/unstructured, branded/ecological, and bubbled/exposed. Based on this finding, this study developed a framework for scholars and marketers to reveal different approaches to managing the tensions between paradoxes.

INTRODUCTION

Hospitality and Tourism (H&T) is one of the largest sectors of the global economy, contributing to destination competitiveness and economic growth at local, national, and international levels. One indication is H&T accounted for 10.3% of global GDP (£7.79 trillion) and jobs (333 million) respectively in 2022 (World Travel & Tourism Council 2022). H&T belong to a unique category of products—experiences and has been described as *a marketplace of experience* and *experience production system* (Ferdinand and Williams, 2013). Unlike other industries, the management of experiences is a much more complex task in H&T, as it involves a network of people, and geographical and organizational relationships (Gunesch, 2023), also because

of its unique characteristics of resource offerings including communication (website and tour guides), transportation, accommodation, attraction (sights and events), miscellaneous service (duty-free shops and restaurants), tourism regulation, that all directly impact the formulate and implement experience management strategies (Singal, 2020). Driven by the importance and complexity of experience in this industry, it is crucial for marketers and scholars to understand the nature of CX in H&T.

Despite the concept of CX receiving widespread attention in business and management literature, one issue that has limited the understanding of CX in H&T is its paradoxical nature, an issue that has attracted much scholarly debate but never fully explored from paradox theory perspective (Boorstin, 1964; Müller, 2017). At the

heart of the conundrum is the tension inherent in touristic offerings—should service providers supply destination experiences that are objectively authentic, or subjectively gratifying which in practical terms often involve the use of artificial tools to mediate the experiencing of touristic objects (Cohen, 1988; Lapointe, 2020). Ricky's (2022) recent review of authenticity rightly pointed out that this authentic/inauthentic conundrum remains 'one of the oldest and most debated concepts in tourism research' (p. 1). Furthermore, the paradox surrounding the authenticity debate has spill over effects touching every aspect of CX management. Whether it is the tension between using natural ecological inputs or stylized place-branding inputs (Foroudi, 2019), or structured or unstructured travel experiences that are highly unpredictable and exposed (Goolaup and Nunkoo 2023), all exemplified in the forlorn search for unspoilt yet accessible nature or adventures off the beaten track safely bubbled in modern glamping facilities. As Müller (2017) concludes, paradox 'lies at the heart of many forms of tourism' (p. 236).

While scholars are increasingly aware that the CX is grounded in some forms of paradoxical structures in the H&T literature, to date, no literature available offers a conceptualisation of the paradox nature of CX in the context of H&T. Although some researchers have alluded to the use of paradox theory as a meta-theorizing tool to conceptualize certain aspects of the tourism concept (Muller, 2017; Sigala, 2020), no review so far has examined with sufficient rigour the deeper meta-theoretical aspects of CX knowledge by using paradox theory. A scan of the existing reviews of CX in H&T (see Web Appendix 1) shows a focus on developing definitions, measures, antecedents, and consequences of CX (e.g., Adhikari & Bhattacharya, 2016; Godovykh & Tasci, 2020; Hwang & Seo, 2016), but not on how underlying meta-theoretical concerns about why paradoxicality is embedded to address the theoretical foundations and linkages with the paradoxical nature of CX. Other reviews (e.g., Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Kranzbühler et al., 2018) offer general solutions to issues from organizational and customer perspectives but do not prove beneficial for scholars and managers regarding the unique characteristics of specific industries as the H&T industry. Therefore, a research gap clearly exists that inhibits the theoretical development of CX.

To fill this gap, the aim of this review is to re-evaluate the CX literature in the H&T domain by employing a paradox lens and constructing a model of CX for future research direction and practitioners. In doing so, this review follows two steps. *First*, co-citation analysis is employed as it is a well-acknowledged tool to identify key domain-specific knowledge topics in the literature and the relationships among them (Zha et al., 2022). This allows us to identify the paradoxes of CX and the dynamic relationships between

clusters/paradoxes. *Second*, we apply paradox theory to develop a dynamic model of CX, as a meta-theory, it engages researchers in a conversation about innate organizational tensions and their management (Schad et al., 2016).

We offer three key contributions: *First*, this study responds to calls for the use of paradox for generating theoretical contributions in management and organization research (De Keyser et al., 2019; Smith and Lewis, 2022). Based on the findings of the co-citation analysis, we identified the knowledge foundations of CX to provide a basis from which to map all different components of CX, which creates space for future research criticality and reframing of CX management phenomenon in this industry. *Second*, we advance a deeper understanding of the CX concept by applying the paradox theory, it provides us with a powerful lens to examine with great incisiveness the paradoxical properties embedded within its intellectual base. In doing so, we found four paradoxes of CX and dynamic relationships—*authenticity* (authentic/fantastical), *memorability* (structured/unstructured), *place branding* (branded/ecological), and *service* (bubbled/exposed). *Third*, we offer a model as a new managerial tool for the paradox-based management of CX, based on the proposition that the nexus of CX's intellectual structure is situated in between the knowledge fields which are exemplified as four sets of paradoxes.

In the following sections, we first discuss the theoretical underpinning of CX in H&T and then present the method used in the review process. Next, we explain the key findings of the two-citation analysis and discuss how we develop a coherent framework based on the knowledge foundations in different ways. We conclude by introducing a framework of CX to reflect on future research directions, as well as managerial implications and limitations.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Customer experience in H&T

Reflecting the deep influence of socio-anthropological perspectives in early tourism studies, experience in the H&T domain has deep roots going back to contributions made by Cohen (1972), MacCannell (1973) and Turner and Ash (1975), distinguishing tourism as a unique socio-cultural phenomenon. Although they never refer to tourists as customers, scholars commonly agree with these early conceptualizations of the experience in tourism (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020; Uriely, 2005). It was Turner and Ash (1975) who first articulated the tourism phenomenon as a dualism using a *structure/anti-structure* frame of

reference (Goolaup and Nunkoo, 2023). In the same vein, Cohen (1979) examined touristic motivation using dualistic lenses, viewing it as a quest for strangeness and novelty to escape the banality of everyday existence. Arguing from the same socio-anthropological tradition, MacCannell (1973) introduced the concept of staged authenticity which suggests that the touristic space is a *theatre* composed of two parts—a front stage where tourists are shepherded through a set of rituals enacted to actualize a set of shared meanings and a backstage filled with actors. This dualistic orientation was further extended by postmodern scholars such as Lash and Urry (1994) who view tourism as a symptom of a wider psychological search for alternate and fantastical reality.

Within the consumer behaviour domain, Holbrook and Hirschman's two ground-breaking papers were among the first to legitimize the role of feelings, fun, and fantasies by juxtaposing experiential consumption against the more functionalistic forms of the consumption process (Hirshman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). They emphasize the goal is not to replace structural processes as such but to ensure that researchers recognize the equally important role of anti-structural processes in consumption behaviour.

From a firm-based perspective, it was Schmitt (1999) who redefined the role of firms not simply as 'producers of products and brands' but as *experience providers* serving the multi-dimensional needs of the consumer including aesthetic, affective, and hedonic aspects. In the same spirit, it was Pine and Gilmore's (1999) erudition of the experience economy that popularized the concept of experiential marketing. H&T scholars today are of the consensus that firm-based CX writings took inspiration from Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy approach (see Web Appendix 2: Key definitions of experience in H&T). Ritchie and Hudson (2009) went further than most to argue that the *P&G philosophy*—that is, the use of the stage and theatrics as a metaphorical representation for how the management of experiential offering should be viewed— forms the conceptual basis on which much of today's CX literature is built. A most recent review of CX by Kim and So (2022) also identified the experience economy as the core component of CX in H&T literature.

However, it is worthwhile noting that although there is a wide acknowledgement of experiential consumption as the root of CX, much of experiential consumption's core concepts and categories have largely remained unintegrated and not been fully articulated in existing CX research in H&T literature (e.g., Godovykh & Tasci, 2020; Kandampully et al., 2018). Therefore, an effective conceptualization of CX in H&T is currently missing in the literature, and this paper aims to fill this important gap.

Paradox theory

Since the publication of Lewis and Smith's (2011) *Toward a Theory of Paradox: A Dynamic Equilibrium Model of Organizing* management literature has witnessed an explosion of research advancing paradox theory. By defining paradox as 'contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time' (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 382), this recognition of the dualistic relationships can have important implications for explaining the nature of CX in H&T.Critically, in recent paradox research, attention has turned from viewing paradox not simply as a temporary managerial impediment to viewing paradox as a persistent characteristic endemic to complex organizational structures. This follows Berti et al. (2021) who argue that the view of paradoxes as 'unavoidable constituents of collective social action is indeed one of the most important contributions of paradox theory' (p. 33).

Advances in the ontology study of a paradox now see the ever-increasing prevalence of paradox in many forms of complex social structures (Berti & Simpson, 2021; Han and Knight, 2021). The all-pervasive presence of paradox, already labelled by some as a paradox stress that all forms of organizing harbour potentialities for tensions and antagonisms as they ascend the scale of complexity (Cunha & Putham, 2019). In this respect, CX in H&T consumption is no exception. The complexities involved in a tourism consumption process including search, acquisition, gratification, and disposal make consumption a hotbed for paradoxical potentialities (Lapointe, 2020). Among the many types of consumption, H&T consumption represents one of the most highly socialized involving the interplay of multiple actors and actants engaged in an intricate web of consumption interactivity. This is further compounded by the fact that, in a consumption cycle, the customer and a host of service providers are locked an economic exchange of values involving the valuation of consumption. Therefore, for a tourist to move from Points A to B, any one of the agents, intermediaries, and mediators involved in the process can become a potential source of disruption and interference.

From this perspective, one fundamental question naturally arises: How does the paradox lens contribute to understanding the complexities of CX in a tourism consumption process? Organizational paradox scholars (Ramus et al., 2021; Smith & Tracey, 2016) posited that a paradoxical lens allows for highlighting divergent priorities and logics that underlie a complex phenomenon. In our view, the use of a paradox lens is relevant because it allows us to chart and make sense of the divergent properties that underlie CX in H&T. By revealing the paradoxical tensions and trade-offs that characterize the CX in the

H&T phenomenon, it becomes possible to identify practical management strategies that enable practitioners to navigate these contradictions, and also harness the paradoxical tensions as springboards for innovative solutions. Furthermore, utilizing the tools developed in paradox literature to explain the onto-epistemological dimensions of paradox theory will enable us to re-conceptualize a new CX framework, that is more representative of an inherently complex concept like CX in H&T. Taken together, we assert employing paradox theory to understand the nature of CX advances and the body of knowledge about CX in the literature, with important implications for experiential marketing studies. In the next section, we discuss the method and approach applied herein to identify the paradoxes of CX and the dynamic relationships between clusters/paradoxes.

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative method to examine the knowledge structure of a specific field, including citation and co-citation analysis (Podsakoff et al., 2005; Wilden et al., 2017). According to normative theory (Wilkinson & Young, 2005), the assumption of bibliometric analysis is that the knowledge structure of a discipline is based on information resources, as all references used in a paper indicate the foundational impact of the particular past studies on that research (Chabowski et al., 2018). When all references on a topic are considered, some are referenced with greater frequency and are considered the most influential works in shaping the field (Samiee & Chabowski, 2021). While a literature review is limited to emergent cited articles, this approach includes a large number of references appearing in peer-reviewed published CX articles, which allows the development of the main knowledge fields underlying CX literature in the H&T domain to be observed. Moreover, a literature review based on authors' judgement may result in authors' bias, while the bibliometrics researcher has no control over the references of publications in the studied area.

Since the selection of the method depends on the questions that a paper sets out to answer, in the current study we apply co-citation analysis to identify the most influential works and the knowledge foundations of CX in the H&T domain. Co-citation analysis has been used widely in business management research because of its empirical capability to identify the knowledge foundations of a field (Zha et al., 2022). We follow two established co-citation methods—multidimensional scaling (MDS) and hierarchical clustering analysis (HCA)—to examine CX's intellectual structure and map the inter-relationships of the research domains (Foroudi et al., 2021; Zha et al., 2020).

Although many other advanced co-citation techniques and software packages such as VOS have been employed to examine the knowledge structure and provide very large datasets for co-citation analysis (Arici et al., 2022; Köseoglu, 2020; Köseoglu et al., 2022), MDS and HCA can balance data analysis and the linkage to established theoretical bases (Chabowski et al., 2022; Zha et al., 2022), and are also considered better suited for smaller datasets such as the one in this study. Using both HCA and MDS simultaneously enhances methodological rigour and reduces systematic bias. Additionally, MDS provides a two-dimensional spatial configuration mapping with the knowledge structure of CX and represents meaningful and precise findings, while HCA provides new insights by visualizing the thematic connectivity in CX in the H&T domain knowledge structure.

Search strategy and method

We sourced the CX articles from the Web of Science (WOS) database, as it is widely applied in a range of bibliometric research in business and management (Maseda et al., 2022; Samiee & Chabowski, 2021; Zha et al., 2020). Compared to other databases such as Science Direct, EBSCO, Emerald Management eJournals, Sage Journals, and Scope, this database represented a comprehensive source. It is also well-acknowledged as a reliable source of data for co-citation analysis, particularly for examining the knowledge structure of a topic or field (Chabowski et al., 2022). We followed a four-stage procedure of co-citation analysis to ensure a high level of objectivity, reliability, and transparency in our article search and selection (Figure 1).

The *first* step of co-citation analysis is to identify appropriate keywords for extracting CX articles in the H&T domain for data collection. Seventeen keywords were reviewed by five experts in this domain to reduce the internal research bias; this process resulted in five keywords being entered as the search words on the WOS database ('customer experience' or 'consumption experience', or 'consumer experience', 'traveller experience', or 'tourist experience') in the topic section. An initial total of 3,986 articles were obtained from the WOS database including all categories. Following previous bibliometric research in the H&T area (Akarsu et al., 2022; Kim & So, 2022; Rodriguez-Lopez et al., 2020), we decided to adopt a specific approach to our search for our research topic by selecting the WOS categories 'hospitality leisure sport tourism' to provide a clearer picture of core CX literature in the domain, and excluded book reviews, editorials, and method-related articles; 730 CX articles were obtained.
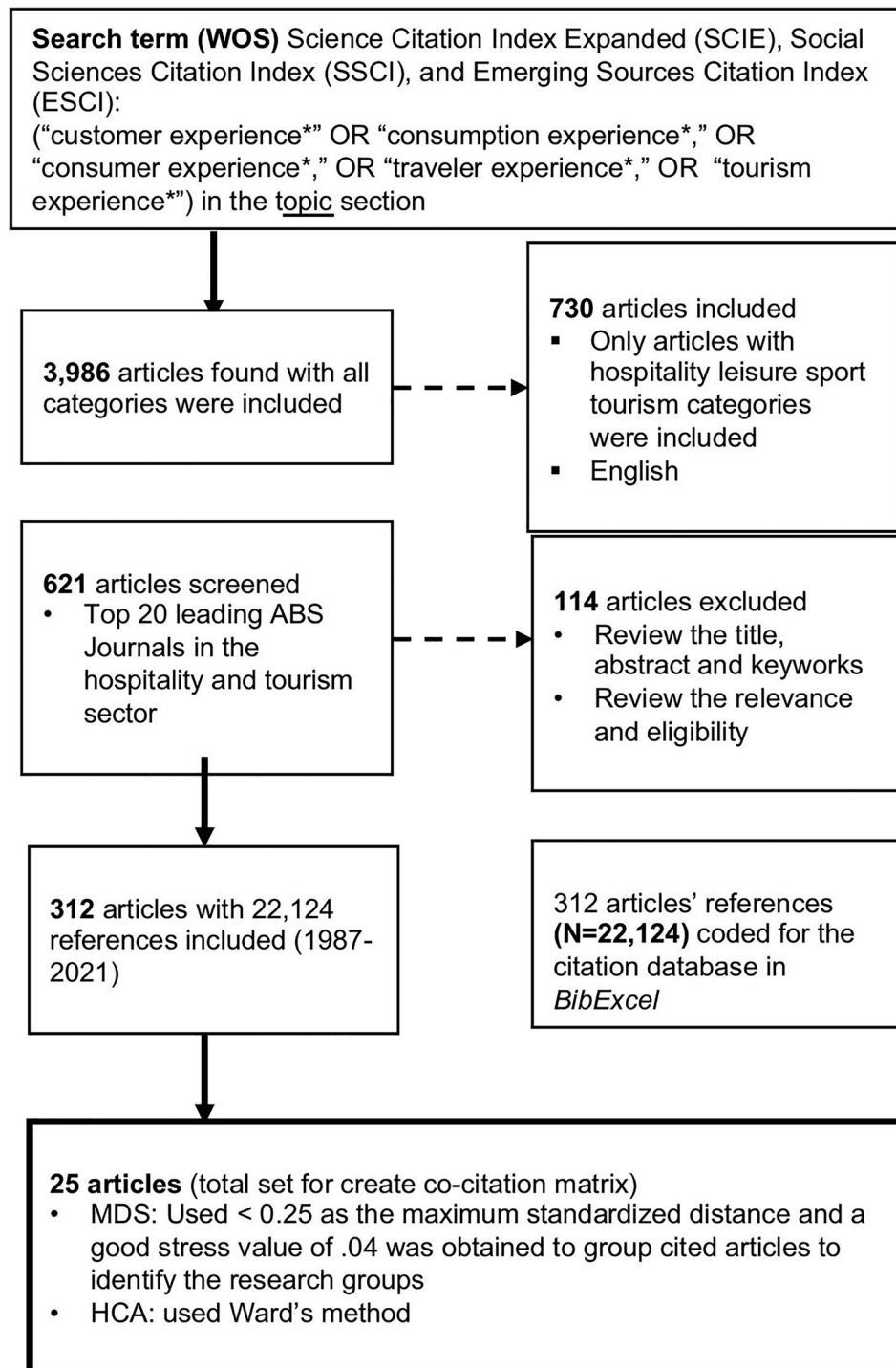
Search term (WOS) Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), and Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI):
("customer experience*" OR "consumption experience*," OR "consumer experience*," OR "traveler experience*," OR "tourism experience*") in the <u>topic</u> section

↓

3,986 articles found with all categories were included

- - →

730 articles included
- Only articles with hospitality leisure sport tourism categories were included
- English

621 articles screened
- Top 20 leading ABS Journals in the hospitality and tourism sector

- - →

114 articles excluded
- Review the title, abstract and keyworks
- Review the relevance and eligibility

↓

312 articles with 22,124 references included (1987-2021)

312 articles' references **(N=22,124)** coded for the citation database in *BibExcel*

↓

25 articles (total set for create co-citation matrix)
- MDS: Used < 0.25 as the maximum standardized distance and a good stress value of .04 was obtained to group cited articles to identify the research groups
- HCA: used Ward's method

FIGURE 1 Search strategy, sampling frame, and selection process.

Second, we limited our selection to articles that are represented to be 'high quality' and 'relevant' if they are published and ranked as the Top 20 leading journals in the Association of Business Schools (ABS) (Chartered Association of Business Schools, 2021). We selected the ABS journal ranking as it offers 'an extensive interdisciplinary list that is verified' through a wide range of peer-reviewed journals, as well as expert and editorial judgements and

citations (Akbari et al., 2022; p. 669), which increased the quality and relevance of our database. This high-quality standard reduced our data to 621 CX articles for inclusion in this stage of the study.

Third, all authors examined and reviewed every article's title, abstract and keywords, and carefully checked the selected articles to ensure their eligibility and relevance to CX in the H&T domain. As a result, we removed

114 articles, giving us a final sample of 312 papers with 22,124 citations/unique references over the 44-year period (1987–2021).

Fourth, to identify the number of most influential CX papers in H&T, we coded these articles' references for the citation database in BibExcel, which is a non-profit software designed to assist academics to analyse bibliographic data. This tool enables researchers to generate data files that are imported to *Excel,* a widely applied tool for bibliometric researchers (Akbari et al., 2022; Zha et al., 2022). Using the frequency counts, 25 articles were identified that represent the most impactful works in shaping CX literature in the H&T domain. Furthermore, according to researchers (e.g., Foroudi et al., 2021; Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004; Samiee & Chabowski, 2021), to obtain an acceptable model for MDS and HCA, between 25 and 30 articles is optimal.

Multidimensional scaling

In the first co-citation analysis—MDS, we employed stress values—goodness-of-fit—to determine a suitable number for the most frequently cited CX in H&T articles to evolve the MDS map. This includes the square root of the normalized squared discrepancies between interpoint distances in the MDS plot and the smoothed distances predicted from the dissimilarities. Applying a research-wide practice, with good (< 0.10) or fair ($0.10 - 0.20$) stress values, we reduced the number of articles to 25 (Web Appendix 3) for the co-citation with a two-dimensional solution (a good stress value of .04 was obtained). We used ≤ 0.25 as the maximum standardized distance to group cited articles to identify the research groups. A research group is when two publications met the distance threshold while a research clique is a group of three or more influential works from the overall CX knowledge structure in the domain (Hair et al., 1998; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). This resulted in seven research groups in CX in the H&T literature.

Hierarchical clustering analysis

HCA uses the bottom-up method to layer agglomerated information by merging clusters into a pyramid hierarchy, highlighting discrete research subsets at various thresholds. Hence, we can consider key knowledge nodes, which fundamentally affect CX in the intellectual structure of the H&T domain. In this analysis, we used Ward's method to identify clusters based on article similarity (Hair et al., 1998); this resulted in five clusters in the HCA results. Accordingly, a pattern of influential publications in two-dimensional space (MDS) and underlying clusters (HCA) was developed (see Figure 2). This section details our MDS (specific research groups and cliques, the evaluation of CX literature in H&T over time) and HCA (general research clusters of the domain that can provide new insights for future research) (Foroudi et al., 2021). Therefore, using a multilevel approach with both methods provides a solid basis for developing potential future research directions in the subsequent discussion section.

RESULTS

This section provides an overview of the key knowledge structures of CX in H&T during 1987–2021 based on the findings of MDS and HCA, and the analysis of the paradoxes within and between the clusters.

Knowledge structures of CX in H&T

There are five specific knowledge fields which can be noticed; these are experiential consumption, authenticity, memorability, place branding, and service (see Table 1 for an overview of the five knowledge fields).

Cluster 1: Experiential consumption

The results of co-citation analysis reveal that Cluster 1 and Groups 1−3 are strongly related to experiential consumption (Figure 1), and mainly focus on the salience of extraordinary and staged experiences in H&T. Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) and Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) proposed CX as customers' fantasy, fun and extraordinary experiences, which represents the theoretical face of the experiential consumption concept in the CX literature. Pine and Gilmore (1998) proposed the managerial face of experiential consumption, emphasizing the importance of companies selling memorable experiences rather than just selling goods and services to an experience economy. Later on, Oh et al. (2007) operationalized the measurement scale of Pine and Gilmore's four dimensions (educational, escapist, aesthetic, and/or entertaining) of CX in the tourism sector. Their paper foregrounds the functional and structural aspects of experiential consumption. In contrast to Arnould and Price's (1993) look at the anti-functional and anti-structural elements of experiential consumption, this study enriches the concept of CX by understanding that consumption experiences do not only cross a single service encounter but also multiple service encounters and a set of repeated experiences.
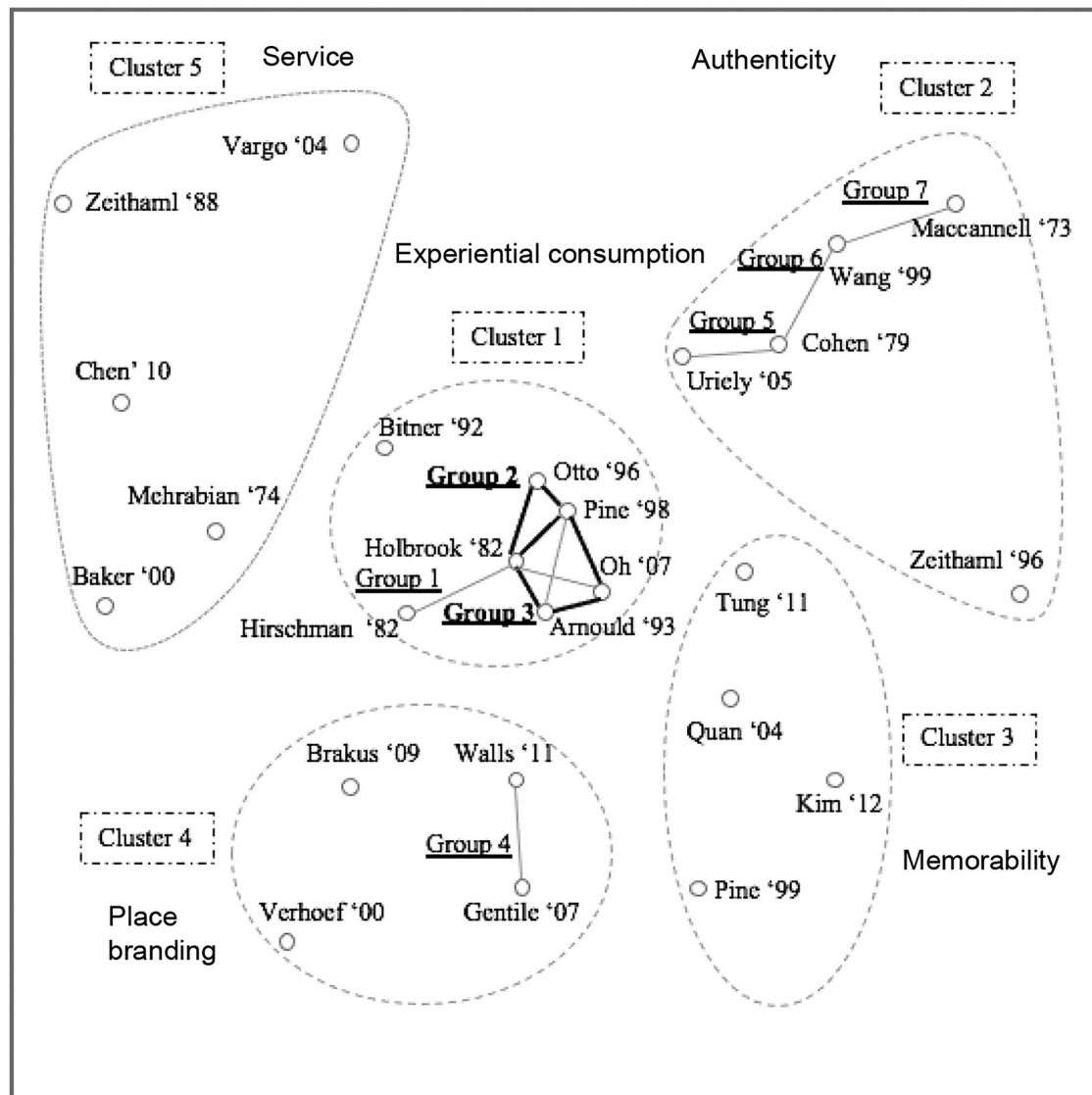
FIGURE 2 Customer experience literature in hospitality and tourism intellectual structure (a hierarchical cluster analysis and multidimensional scaling analysis).

Cluster 2: Authenticity

Unlike Cluster 1 which focuses on the consumption processes. Cluster 2 and Groups 5–7 confirm the importance of an authentic experience as a conceptual base for CX in the H&T domain. Boorstin (1964) and Turner and Ash (1975), viewed the growth of mass tourism as a malignant symptom of the consumption age. At the core of their argument is the observation that, although the tourist seeks authentic experiences, in practice what is really offered is a form of artificial travel experience, more fantastical than authentic. In response to the vitriol, early tourism scholars expended a great deal of energy defending and explaining modern touristic offerings. While all agreed that modern

tourism phenomena are characterized by the paradoxical conflation of the search for the authentic and desire for the fantastical, researchers made great efforts to reconcile the authenticity motive with the fantastical outcome. The three research groups in this cluster allowed researchers to visualise the different approaches in the spectrum of this debate, and each differing solution to resolve the paradoxical nature of the tourism phenomenon.

Staying within the sociological paradigm, MacCannell's (1973) solution was staged authenticity. In MacCannell's view, authenticity is not intrinsic and innate, but a socially constructed project. According to MacCannell's (1973) site sacralization theory, a site acquires its authenticity via intersubjective processes involving layers and layers

TABLE 1 An overview of five knowledge fields.

Knowledge fields	MDS and HCA	Definition	Scope	Representative articles
Experiential consumption	Cluster 1; Groups 1–3	'An experiential view that focuses on the symbolic, hedonic and aesthetic nature of consumption' (Holbrook & Hirschman., 1982, p. 132)	Focus on the creation of consumer fantasies, feelings and fun experiences in pre-consumption, consumption and post-consumption processes and how they influence consumer behaviour.	Arnould & Price, 1993; Bitner, 1992; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Oh et al., 2007; Otto & Ritchie, 1996; Pine & Gilmore, 1998
Authenticity	Cluster 2: Groups 5–7	'Authenticity can be understood epistemologically (i.e. *knowing* what is real or true) or ontologically (i.e. *being* "true" or authentic)' (Moore *et al.,* p 109)	Focus on not only the experience of authentic goods, places, sites, people, and culture, but also subjective experiences of authenticity such as feelings that an individual's experience is meaningful.	Cohen, 1979; MacCannell, 1973; Uriely, 2005; Wang, 1999; Zeithaml et al., 1996
Memorability	Cluster 3	'A tourism experience positively remembered and recalled after the event has occurred' (Kim *et al.,* p. 13)	Focus on the creation of experiences that are most likely to be recalled from customers' memories.	Kim et al., 2012; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Quan & Wang, 2004; Tung & Ritchie, 2011
Place branding	Cluster 4: Group 4	'Place branding is primarily focused on attractions and location image that might attract events, tourists, investors, visitors (e.g., students or professionals), trade and the category of people termed influencers' (Foroudi et al., 2016, p. 1353)	Focus on the creation of consumer experience by using tools such as attractions, events, locations, sites, hotels, and food to attract both national and foreign nationals as tourists; in turn, promote the place's image and reputation.	Barkus et al., 2009; Gentile et al., 2007; Verhoef et al., 2000; Walls et al., 1999
Service	Cluster 5	'The subjective personal reactions and feelings by consumers when consuming or using a service' (Manhas, and Tukamushaba, 2015, p. 77)	Focus on the management of service-centric consumption experience.	Baker, 2000; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Chen, 2010; Zeithaml, 1988; Vargo & Lusch, 2004

of social processing such as naming, framing, and elevating, and enshrinement, mechanical reproduction and social reproduction. The tourist experience is an integral part of the signification process and is authenticated by participation and immersion.

Assuming a phenomenological perspective, Cohen (1979) emphasized the role of subjectivity and meaning-making in tourism phenomena and held the view that tourists are conceived of as individuals motivated by the desire for authentic experiences to compensate for the plastic and inauthentic existence of modern living. This form of functional authenticity is liberatory in essence, as the touristic journey serves as a transport away from the mundane and the ordinary.

Wang (1999) posited that the consumer's search for authenticity, though forlorn and elusive, has an unintended consequence—it can become a catalyst from which tourists reap existential meanings. Authentic existential moments can be found in fantastical offerings. In so doing, the *lived experiences* of real consumers become the praxis

from which authentic moments emerge. This version of 'useable authenticity' quickly caught on, inspiring in its wake bolder and ever more imaginative permutations of the authenticity doctrine, while Uriely (2005) noted that a conflation of ideas influenced by postmodern theories has led to the *pluralizing depictions* of the touristic experience, a heterogeneous view defined by a multiplicity of often conflicting and paradoxical experiences.

Cluster 3: Memorability

Cluster 3—memorability links to Cluster 1, and mainly focuses on *structured* and *unstructured* experience in experiential consumption, wherein the construction of a touristic narrative is critical to memorability. The narrative provides coherence to all of the individual events in a journey and helps the consumer make sense of the experience. For instance, Pine and Gilmore's (1998) research pointed to the significance of a thematic core around which the tourists organize their impressions, sensations, stimulations, and perceptions, mined along the journey as materials from which to construct their narrative and preserve their memorability. Crucially, the narrative also provides the tourists with a *useable story* that they can re-tell and thus extend the reach of the experience socially and temporally via virtual or person-to-person interactions. Tung and Ritchie's (2011) qualitative study showed that the structuring of a memorable narrative is highly dependent on the provider's capabilities to shape 'feeling' states, creating an experience of service excellence that is beyond the customers' expectations; beyond merely providing knowledge about destinations to becoming an active participant in the co-creation of useable narratives.

In developing a scale to measure memorable tourism experiences, Kim et al. (2012) suggested that the structuring of a memorable narrative is not a one-off event; rather, it is based on a chain of events composed of multiple impressions mined along the touristic customer journey. Tung and Ritchie (2011) suggested that the tourist's overall evaluation of the chain of touristic activities and events 'begins before (i.e., planning and preparation), during (i.e., at the destination), and after the trip (i.e., recollection)' (p. 1369). Data based on in-depth interviews reveal four key dimensions—affect, expectations, consequentiality, and recollection—which are the main drivers of memorability. Research in this cluster further highlights the important roles of both the peak tourist experience and the supporting consumer experience in CX in H&T as Quan and Wang (2004), eschewing the artificial separation between peak experience and supporting service experience in conventional tourism literature, suggest that researchers view the structuring of a memorable narrative holistically.

Cluster 4: Place branding

The role of place-branding in the CX process in H&T is shown in Cluster 4. The purpose of place-branding is twofold. First, it condenses information about a place into a *place brand*, one that is user-friendly, so that customers find it easy to identify, remember, and recall. Place-branding also reconfigures the attributes of the place, highlighting its unique character *vis-a-vis* other destinations. To do that, the information has to be redacted, re-configured, and manipulated so that it is computationally less demanding and readily accessible to the customer. Brakus et al. (2009) focused on the experiences provided by place brands as a means of acquiring knowledge and meanings about the place. Customers responding to these brand experiences acquire these symbolic resources for all sorts of self-construction and self-extension projects, including the construction of a personal narrative that adds to memorability.

Verhoef et al.'s (2009) paper on the determinants of CX provides one of the most comprehensive views of the factors that go into the creation of an experience offering; the authors take a more ecological approach to the transfer of information by imploring creators and managers of experiential offerings to consider a broader range of factors including those that outside retailers' control. From this ecological perspective, Gentile et al. (2007) suggested that what contributes to the creation of experiential value is not only the selling of a stand-alone *peak* attraction but the embedding of hedonic and meaningful devices along a customer journey. Providing the space for the tourist to experience the unintended, emergent, and stochastic experiences within the H&T setting, according to Walls et al. (2011), enlarges the bandwidth of CX, as it were, to include both the ordinary and extraordinary, cognitive and emotive.

Cluster 5: Service

Cluster 5 comprises six events concerning service experience featuring studies that focus on the service aspect of CX in H&T. For example, Chen and Chen's (2010) paper on *experience quality* looked at how *service* should be viewed as the delivery of a holistic, satisfying experience rather than simply service excellence. In this sense, this paper serves as a bridge between value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) and service quality (Zeithaml, 1988) from the view that the service opens the door for the co-optation of more types of servicing inputs that are equally complicit in shaping the overall CX in H&T. In this vein, we agree with Otto and Ritchie's (1996) description of the H&T industry as an 'amalgam of service industries' (p. 165). Every

touchpoint along the customer journey has a role in shaping the outcome of CX. This ecological view stands in contrast with Quan and Wang (2004), where the *peak experience* is distinguished from *supporting experience* gained through the servicing infrastructure.

The analysis of the paradoxes within and between the clusters

The combinatorial use of HCA and MDS methods in the bibliometric analysis has identified five knowledge fields that together make up the intellectual structure of CX in H&T. Informed by Zhao and Strotmann's (2016) suggestion that the 'locations of individual objects within groups and on the entire map may also be meaningful' (p. 51), we examine the co-citation map via two proximities of bibliometric computations including (1) proximity of articles, groups, or clusters to the core which measures the competing representations between knowledge fields and (2) proximity between clusters which measures relationality between knowledge fields.

Based on the first set of the proximity of metrics, we noted that the centralization location of Cluster 1 and the two research cliques (Groups 2–3) in Figure 2 represents *experiential consumption* as a core knowledge field of CX in H&T. Furthermore, using the second proximity of metrics, we noted that this core knowledge field is surrounded by four clusters. Thematically, each cluster is populated by papers dealing with a specific aspect of experiential consumption in H&T—Cluster 2 (authenticity), Cluster 3 (memorability), Cluster 4 (place branding), and Cluster 5 (service), and the thematic consistency of each individual cluster with discreet and well-defined boundaries highlights the maturity of each respective knowledge field. Since the meanings of these knowledge fields are derived from their contribution to experiential consumption (e.g., the authenticity of CX, the memorability of CX) we view them as satellite clusters.

Next, we noted how each of the four satellite clusters (2–5) is positioned in equidistance to the core (Cluster 1) indicating that, relationally, each of the satellite clusters is engaged in an independent and discreet dialogue with the core. On closer inspection of these dialogues, we noted the following thematic contradictions that exist between the core vis-à-vis each satellite cluster: (1) the focus on authentic experiences is juxtaposed against the focus on fantastical experiences in experiential consumption; (2) the focus on structured experiences is juxtaposed against the focus on unstructured experiences in experiential consumption; (3) the focus on branded experiences is juxtaposed against the focus on ecological experiences in experiential consumption; and (4) the focus on bub-

bled experience is juxtaposed against the focus on exposed experiences in experiential consumption.

Figure 3 illustrates the diametric properties of the dialogue expressed as two opposing constructs that articulate the paradoxical nature of the relationship between the core vis-à-vis each satellite cluster. As defined in paradox theory, two opposing constructs that are diametrically opposed are not sufficient justification for a paradox; importantly, they must also be interdependent and interlocked (e.g., Berti et al., 2021). While diametric properties reveal antagonisms as contradictory and divergent, the dialogical properties between them articulate 'the interrelatedness of the antagonism' (Costanzo & Di Domenico, 2015, p. 485). In this context, we observe that the two opposing constructs in each of the paradoxical settings on the map are mutually constitutive (Farjoun, 2010). For example, one cannot define fantastical experience without defining authentic experience or define unstructured experience without defining structured experience. In this sense, the two opposing constructs are, ontogenetically speaking, *joined at the hip*, where one set of variables feeds the other. In other words, one set of variables drives and fuels the emergence of the other.

This relational view of CX's intellectual structure corresponds to the prevailing ontological explanation that the paradox phenomenon is both *system-inherent* and *socially constructed* (Smith & Lewis, 2011). From a systemic perspective, contradictions occur when various different systems

collide (e.g., systems of thought, cultural or management systems) are juxtaposed together to *mint* new compound concepts (Lewis and Smith, 2014; Schad & Bansal, 2018). This re-alignment of systems 'creates boundaries', accentuate contrasting demands and 'pull them apart' (Smith and Lewis 2022, p. 533). The touristic offering is one such systemic amalgamation, a *cocktail* concept that requires the embracing of inputs culled from multiple schools of thought and practice, one ranging from inputs as varied as hospitality industry to exploration and adventure, from entertainment industry to history-geographical studies. The enactment and management of a touristic offering, therefore, requires the interplay of an intricate network of mediators and interlocutors originating from vastly different industrial and cultural background, all to be simultaneously engaged in the creation of a common CX. No matter how minor or insignificant their roles (e.g., bus drivers, restaurant owners, museum curators, travel writers etc.), they all play a part in mediating the inputs that ultimately add up to the experience of a place.

As these systems and their interlocutors connect, they accrue contradictions and complexities. According to the paradox theory, these system-inherent contradictions remain mere potentialities, phenomenally unrealized and
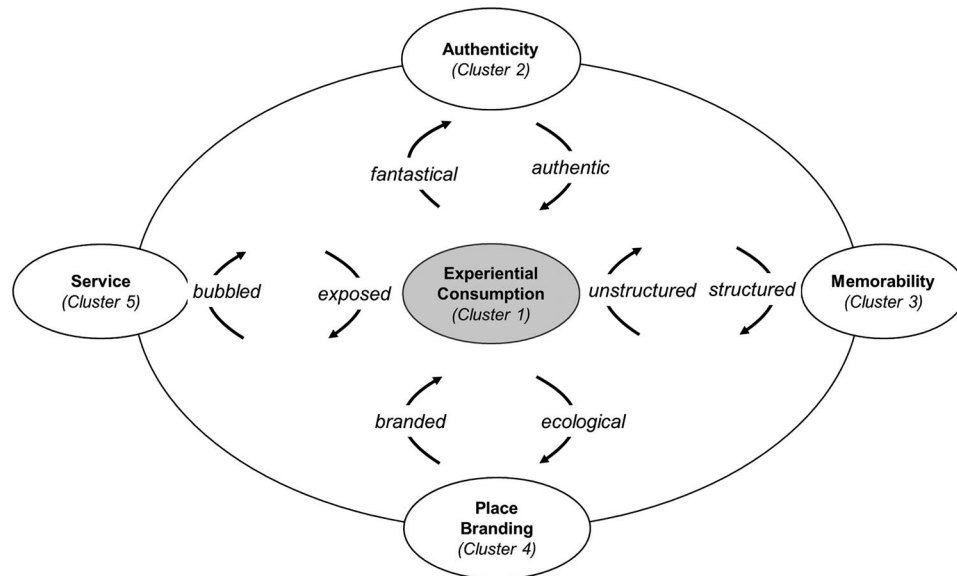
FIGURE 3 Paradoxes of customer experience: diametric and dialogical relationships between clusters.

subjectively inchoate (Hahn & Knight, 2021). They only surface to become salient when they are *constructed* into paradoxical contingencies triggered by changes in the context (Lewis & Smith, 2022). In the paradox literature, documented saliency triggers include scarcity of resources, change and plurality (Smith & Lewis, 2011), organizational measurement systems (Hahn & Knight, 2021), and power dynamics (Berti & Cunha, 2022). For example, plurality triggers can appear when new competitors enter the market and offer better or more attractive packages. Scarcity of resources triggers can appear in the form of increased cost. A steep rise in hotel rates causes the firm to rethink what they can offer exacerbating a trade-off. Change triggers can appear in the form of travel restrictions. During the pandemic agencies are forced to innovate by creating *stay-cation* packages—local hotel stays with *away-from-home* feel and atmospherics. These triggers make salient the underlying 'lurking paradoxes' pointing at the same time to deeper conflicts taking place in-*between* rival systems (Lewis & Smith, 2022, p. 532).

Therefore, the nexus of CX's intellectual structure, we argue, is situated in-*between* knowledge fields on the map (see Figure 3) nested within the four sets of paradoxical relationships, and the search for the meaning of CX's intellectual structure should not end with the knowledge fields but rather in the dynamic relational spaces between them. Berti et al. (2021) contended that paradoxes do not exist as two independent entities but rather arise from the nested and embedded structure of social life, where approaches interact constantly and reinforce one another through unexpected routes. This relational view assumes that properties of each knowledge field can only be under-

stood in relation to properties from another which, in this instance, is exemplified in the juxtaposition of paradoxical properties between the satellite clusters and the core. Thus, paradoxes do not reside in knowledge fields; rather, they exist as bridges *between* fields.

DISCUSSION

In this section, we examine more closely the nature of these diametric and dialogical relationships between the satellite clusters and the core knowledge field (experiential marketing) based on the finding of co-citation analysis and introduce paradox as a lens that can be used to connect these clusters in a coherent framework (Figure 3), within which each set of paradoxical relationship is visualised as an *in-between* paradoxical space where the two constructs are simultaneously engaged in oppositional but interdependent motion. We also reviewed the 90 most recent highly cited articles (Web Appendix 4) in the WOS database to improve research validity (Zha et al., 2022).

Managing the authenticity paradox (authentic/fantastical)

In the first discussion point, we note that the diametric and dialogical relationships between Cluster 1 (experiential consumption) and Cluster 3 (authenticity) foreground the need for firms to attend concurrently to the customer's desire for a fantastical experience and the desire for an authentic experience. In this instance, the diametric

aspect of the relationship articulates the inherent contradiction between the authenticity doctrine and experiential consumption focusing on feeling, fun, and fantasy. The dialogical aspect, on the other hand, views the two concepts as entangled dualities, antagonistic yet 'synergistic and interrelated' (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p 386). As such, we view both accounts as integral to the authentic/fantastical paradox underpinning CX's intellectual structure.

While the findings in Cluster 2 provide a comprehensive overview of the founding precepts of the authenticity doctrine, it is fair to state that Wang's (1999) functional view of authenticity is pivotal in inspiring a host of new and imaginative interpretations of the concept (Rickly-Boyd, 2012). In this respect, Li et al.'s (2020) recent classification of the new authenticity models into object-related authenticity (objective/constructive) and activity-related authenticity (existential/authenticity) is particularly useful. Since CX is primarily concerned with how the customer journey contributes to the creation of desired feeling states, activity-related authenticity is of special relevance. No doubt, the authenticating of thereness moments are compelling in evoking a truly memorable CX (Kesgin et al., 2021; Shafieizadeh et al., 2021).

Standing in diametric opposition to the authenticity cluster is the experiential consumption cluster with Group 1 as its core represented by two seminal papers (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Hirshman & Holbrook, 1982). In a retrospective essay some years later (Holbrook, 2018), Holbrook summarized what considers the core principles of experiential consumption, chief among them is how experiential consumption has broadened the bandwidth of cognition so that consumption encompasses not only conscious processes but also 'unconscious thoughts, mental images and dreams or daydreams', collectively labelled by the author as 'fantasies' (p. 423). In any consumption process, including the consumption of destinations, consumers unconsciously admit into the processing mix a pool of internally generated desires and expectations that are the products of imaginings and fantastical yearnings. This psychological mechanism enables the experiencing of an imaginative feeling state.

Throughout the duration of gratification, this experience overrides more cognitive-heavy processing, allowing the organism to *sense* the virtual experience as real and authentic. Crucially, the fantastical phenomenon should not be trivialised as a psychological anomaly as implied in research (Wang et al., 2019). In experiential consumption, fantasy consumption is a primary processing mechanism. From this perspective, a fantastical offering is defined as the provision of tools, technology, and know-how to generate a fantastical experience (Chalmers, 2022).

This mix of authentic and fantastical brings us to the core of the relationship between Clusters 3 and 1. Cus-

tomers on a touristic journey carry with them expectations for authentic experiences and also expectations for fantastical experiences. In fact, Knudsen et al. (2016) suggested that, for performative authenticity to make sense, we have to accept that a mix of the fantastical is inevitable. Vidon et al. (2018) also asserted that the inclusion of psychoanalytical processes in postmodern authenticity facilitates greater depth and breadth of explanation in the realm of the seductive, considering authenticity as a workable fantasy. Understanding the authentic/fantastical paradox is an indispensable tool for CX.

Managing the memorability paradox (structured/unstructured)

In the second discussion point, we highlight that the diametric and dialogical relationships between Cluster 1 (experiential consumption) and Cluster 3 (memorability) foreground the need for firms to attend concurrently to the customer's inherent desire for a structured experience and a desire for an unstructured experience. The diametric aspect of the relationship articulates the conflicting priorities between goals of memorability with its focus on accessible and easy-to-remember experiences and experiential consumption with its focus on spontaneous and emergent feeling states. We view both accounts as dialogical, a pair of paradoxical constructs underpinning the CX concept.

According to Cluster 3, underpinning all CX activities is the goal to maximize memorability. In a structured experience, customers are offered ready-to-use information and cues to construct touristic narratives that are coherent, memorable, and easy to take away (Martin & Woodside, 2012). Arguing from a psychological perspective, Larsen (2007) viewed CX as essentially a memory process, 'the storing of a past personal travel event, emotionally strong enough to have entered long-term memory' (p. 15). In a structured narrative, firms not only introduce a string of major attractions but are able to co-opt these individual episodes into a meaningful narrative, a process Pine and Gilmore (1999) call *theming*. In an effective theming process, nothing is left to chance; every aspect of the experience is carefully manicured to instantiate the theme and reinforce the message. A touristic episode is only memorable when it has been emotionally co-opted and becomes an integral part of a touristic narrative.

From this perspective, the memorability cluster sits in diametric opposition to the nature of the experiential consumption cluster with its emphasis on the consumption inputs that are emergent, unpredictable, and spontaneous. Holbrook (2018) suggested that experiential consumption

enlarges the bandwidth of affects by admitting the spontaneous experiencing of affective inputs such as 'love, hate, joy, sorrow, anger, fear, disgust, curiosity' (p. 423). In Arnold and Price's (1993) account of river-rafting (Group 3), elements within the natural environment—the ravine, the torrent, the waterfall—are harnessed and renditioned as a services cape. However, it is the unpredictability of the river-rafting journey, the spontaneity of the unstructured encounters, and the spectre of danger, that generate the participants' experiences of extraordinary and liminal Cary (2004) alluded to these unstructured moments with her description of the 'serendipitous moment' that simultaneously produces and erases the tourist as a subject and allows one to go beyond 'being a tourist' (p. 68).

Allowing the co-existence of both structured and unstructured experiences brings us to the core of the paradoxical structure exemplified in the diametric and dialogical relationships between Clusters 3 and 1. Customers on a touristic journey carry with them expectations for structured experiences and also expectations for unstructured experiences. Embracing the structured/unstructured paradox means being attentive to the customer's need for structure yet offering them the latitude for them to grow their own travel monologues, write their own travel adventures, and narrate their own plots and unique touristic narratives (Kim & Kim, 2022).

Managing the place branding paradox (branded/ecological)

In this third discussion point, we show that the diametric and dialogical relationships between Cluster 1 (experiential consumption) and Cluster 4 (place branding) foreground the need for firms to attend concurrently to the customer's desire for a branded experience and the desire for an ecological experience. The diametric aspect of the relationship articulates the inherent contradiction between the customer's need for place-branding inputs and the customer's need for ecological inputs. As such, we view both accounts as paradoxical constructs underpinning CX's intellectual structure.

If authenticating and memorability of *thereness experiences* are key drivers of touristic consumption, then place-branding plays an important role by ensuring the efficient acquisition of information to materialise the *thereness* experience (Chen & Chou, 2019). For most tourists, impressions of a destination, in large or small measures, come through this standardized place-branded format. Through a place-branding lens, destinations are redacted into accessible easy-to-understand mental maps anchored around recommended locations, neatly

compartmentalised shopping districts, designated food trails, and must-see attractions. Within this prescribed matrix, a tourist can fill in his or her own adventure of little markets, towns, restaurants, and people. If authenticating a sense of *thereness* is the motive, the place-brand mechanism is by far still the most efficient means of accessing relative information about a destination.

Sitting in diametric opposition to the place branding cluster (Cluster 4) is the experiential consumption cluster (Cluster 1) with its emphasis on the processing of embodied and sensorial information. For Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), experiential consumption broadens the bandwidth of cognition by including the processing of information emerging from body/mind processes: 'Individuals not only respond to multisensory impressions from external stimuli (a perfume) by encoding these sensory inputs but also react by generating multisensory images within themselves' (p. 92). In a touristic journey, the embodied tourist is exposed to all kinds of unconscious sensorial stimulation that generates impressions and 'internal imagery containing sights, sounds and tactile sensations' of the destination (p. 92).

In an ecological experience, the place becomes the locus of an ongoing dialogue between tourists and the locals, one that is toured into being (Urry, 2016). That means that, although the starting experience for most tourists is the use of place-brand information, allowing the buffer for ecological interaction turns the tourist/destination interface into a space-making subject. Moving beyond branded information, a tourist may emerge with a totally new perspective of what the place means and not simply what the place is well-known for. Since tourism is about collecting 'thereness' memories, unique narratives and stochastic thereness moments provide the natural tourist with memorable artefacts that distinguish one's travel experience from those of others (Knudsen et al., 2016; Vidon & Rickly, 2018; Vidon et al., 2018). While place-branding may provide the tourist with a standard list of thereness trophies, it is often the stochastic moments, the surprise moments, and the non-representational moments that yield the greatest experiential value. Therefore, allowing for the co-existence of branded/ecological experiencing empowers the *travelled self* which, in modernity, is a source of power, significance, and sophistication.

This mix of branded and ecological inputs brings us to the core of the paradoxical relationship between Cluster 3 and Cluster 1. Customers on a touristic journey carry with them expectations for place-branded experiences and also expectations for ecological experiences. While the offer of a branded experience has its obvious advantages, tourists are also very much enlivened by unmediated, unfiltered ecological experiences.

Managing the service paradox (bubbled/exposed)

In this final discussion, we indicate the diametric and dialogical relationships between Cluster 1 (experiential consumption) and Cluster 5 (service) foregrounding the need for firms to attend concurrently to the customer's desire for a bubbled experience and the desire for an exposed experience. The diametric aspect of the relationship articulates the inherent contradiction between the customer's need for a bubbled service infrastructure and the customer's need for an exposed touristic infrastructure. As such, we view both accounts as integral to the bubbled/exposed paradox underpinning CX's intellectual structure.

Cluster 5 reiterates the important role of service marketing in CX's intellectual structure. Customers will always canvass for touristic offerings that offer minimum inconvenience, minimum discomfort, and minimum disruption to their way of life. The service provider, in this instance, shortens the pathway to the realization of the desired CX. What may take many days of overland travel to get to an exotic destination is now shortened by the provision of air-travel infrastructures such as airports and flights. What may take many days of trekking to get to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro is now shortened by the use of cable cars. The service provider also minimizes the effort required to adapt to a new and unfamiliar environment by providing luxurious hotels in the most far-flung destinations, to ensure that modern tourists continue to enjoy all the trappings of modern living even though they might be located in inaccessible and inhospitable terrains.

The service cluster thus stands in diametric opposition to the experiential consumption cluster with its focus on embodied and participatory experience. According to Holbrook (2018) experiential consumption broadens the bandwidth of acquisition to include a 'wide range of playful or creative consumption activities associated with product usage—which we named "Fun"' (p. 423). That means, customers not only value an acquisition process on the basis of functionality, convenience and cost but are equally concerned with the gratification associated with the process itself. Ye et al. (2021) insisted that the quest for strangeness and novelty, is a key element in the tourist experience; Cohen (1979) argued that the discontinuity aspect of the touristic experience, the discomfort associated with 'a temporary reversal of everyday activities' (p. 181) is a valid touristic motivation, and, similarly, Smith (1978) highlighted the tourist's desire to experience change as the prime motive to visit 'a place away from home' (p. 1).

This mix of bubbled and exposure brings us to the core of the paradoxical relationship between Cluster 5 and Clus-ter 1. Customers on a touristic journey carry with them expectations for bubbled experiences and also expectations for exposed experiences. The relationship between the two while diametric is also dialogical—that is, one cannot do without the other. While the offer of a bubbled experience has its obvious attractions, tourists are also enervated by the exposure to a performative and embodied experience (Zhang and Guo, 2022). While the desire for a CX that fulfils the more functionalist and structuralist need for convenience, comfort and continuity exists, it is apparent that the tourist is also driven by an anti-functional and anti-structural need for performative and participatory interaction with the destination (Lanier & Rader, 2015).

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE FRAMEWORK

An important contribution of the co-citation finding is the notion that the nexus of CX's intellectual structure is situated in-between knowledge fields, nested within four sets of paradoxical relationships in a coherent framework visualized in Figure 3. Mindful of this distinguishing feature, we introduce the CX framework in H&T (Figure 4) to explain the paradox relationships and reveal different approaches to managing the tensions between them for future studies and practitioners. This framework is not a set of operating procedures; rather it acts as a heuristic for the CX practitioner on three levels of paradox management: (1) Managing the four levers of customer experience; (2) Managing stakeholders' roles; and (3) Managing the customer experience offering. Next, we also provide additional paradox management strategies to explain the tensions of CX in terms of practices, rhetoric, reframing, and trade-off optimization. Finally, we propose future research directions.

Managing the four levers of customer experience

At its most basic level, the framework is constructed around the four sets of bipolar variables described in Sections 5.1–5.4. At this strategic level, the four sets of paradoxes visualized in the framework as four movable levers, straddle the two end-poles of each paradox set. Lever 1 allows the practitioner to manage the tensions between authentic and fantastical, Lever 2 allows them to manage the tensions between structured and unstructured, Lever 3 allows them to manage the tensions between place-branding inputs and ecological, and Lever 4 allows them to manage the tensions between bubbled and exposed. Depending on the practitioner's understanding of the
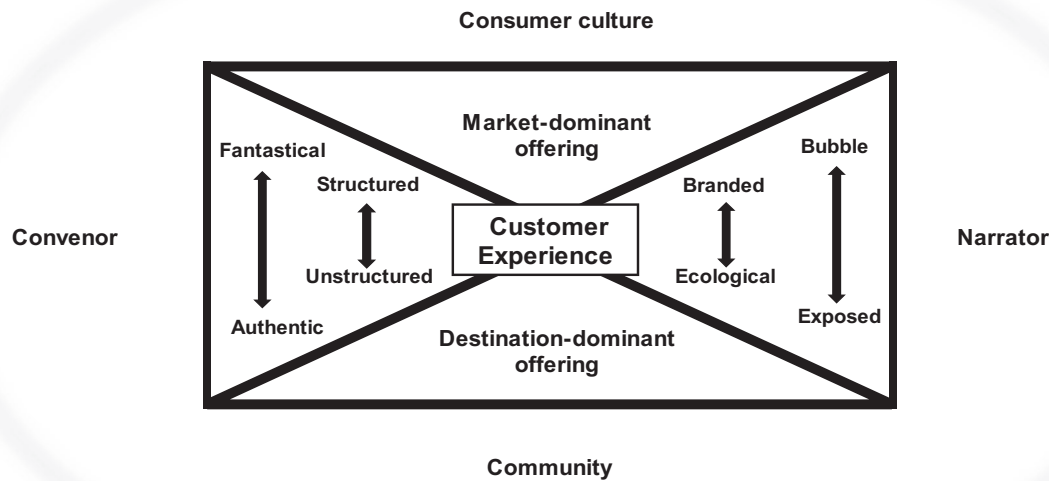
FIGURE 4 Customer experience framework.

customer's orientation and motivation, the use of the movable levers provides a map from which the practitioner can start conceptualizing the paradoxical characteristics of the customer in terms of where they are positioned within the paradox space.

Managing stakeholders' roles

We further explain the socio-material inputs that go into the making of CX. Informed by paradox management theory (Hahn & Knight, 2021), the managerial response to CX is not accomplished by mere mentalizing; instead, the actualization of a CX is mediated through the socio-material inputs culminating in a touristic event. At this strategic level, the framework provides a typology to categorise the types of socio-material inputs that go into the making of a touristic event visualized in Figure 4 as (1) *consumer culture* (top) reflecting inputs from the authenticity paradox; (2) *community* (bottom) reflecting inputs from the place-branding paradox; (3) *narrator* (left) reflecting inputs from the memorability paradox, and (4) *convenor* (right) reflecting inputs from the service paradox. CX does not operate in a vacuum; materializing the CX event is necessarily grounded in the reality of organizing including the mobilizing of resources, dealing with the budgetary con-

straints and scheduling, and dealing with the preconceived views and expectations of the customer.

Consumer culture

The tourist as a consumer is embedded in a culturally constituted world, from which one cannot escape (McCracken, 1986). There is no blank slate for tourists. Tourists as consumers bring with them cultural and social baggage that impinges on the creation of CX events. The intersubjective world of 50 *unique bucket list ideas*, Lonely Planet travel guides, and world news show predetermine the consumer's perception of destinations with an onslaught of social and cultural meanings. In this sense, *thereness* is always defined in terms of *hereness*. Crang (2006) argued strenuously that the tourist does not just bring with them 'internalized wishes' but that, as a consumer, the tourist is embedded within a social milieu, influenced by 'wider social imaginaries' articulated through 'constellations of media and social practise' (p. 63) populating social media, Netflix series, eWOM so forth. The author suggested that tourism cannot be located in a neat box as happening *over there* in a distant location during a discrete period. In other words, the *over there* is powerfully shaped and framed by the consumption

landscape *back here*. These two contexts—*back here* and *over there*—together constitute the socio-material inputs that shape the contours of CX. Authenticity is therefore always a trade-off between the local culture and what the tourist brings to the event as a consumer.

Community

In Figure 4 we distinguished the destination from the community. The community is the space in which the customer in a touristic cycle draws geographical, historical, cultural, and social resources to create the CX of the destination. As such, the community looms larger than the destination since the destination is only that which is subjectively experienced by the tourist within a designated space and time. Oakes (2006) argued against viewing *place* as static; rather, *place* is the location of a continuous dialogue between locals and tourists. This dynamic relationship can only be realized in active dialogical interactivity. Depending on the narrative's cultural requirements and the customer's cultural distance, different narrativity exposes the customer to differing levels of immersive experience with the community.

Convenor

While the communicator supplies narrativity, soft skills, and competence, the convenor supplies touristic infrastructures. The H&T infrastructure is vast and complex, involving a dynamic system of interconnected organizations, direct and indirect activities, and core and peripheral agencies. Jafari (1987) suggested the spatial notion of a touristic event involving 'the act of taking off from the ordinary platform, passing through the gates of departure, paying highway tolls' (p. 157). Many of the destination items are highly structured according to the economy. Features such as 'pay more—you don't have to wait in a queue for a ride' or 'pay more—you can eat at a high-end authentic restaurant instead of the usual boring tourist-feeding stop' all have a discriminatory effect on the touristic feeling state.

Narrator

Customers' perception and experience of the destination are narrated into being by a variety of actants central or tangential to the touristic journey (Cary, 2004; Ourahmoune, 2016). We conceptualize four narrative categories affecting CX in H&T: (1) institutional, (2) artistic, (3) non-representational, and (4) media. Institutional narratives are those determined and produced by institutions such as national or regional tourism agencies or even management/tour agencies promoting and managing the destination. Tourists appreciate the expediency of a brochure or touristic map with basic information about a destination when visiting a new destination for the first time. In this respect, the role of tour guides as experienced brokers deserves special mention. Tour guides have been described as having many roles such as (i) being the voice of the sites and performing the narrative (Banerjee & Chua, 2020), (ii) connecting the visitors with the place or local culture (Guan & Huan, 2019), (iii) cultural brokers (Holloway, 1981), and (iv) responsible for interpreting the site, bridging the distance between the visitors and the site, and fabricating facts to create authenticity (Cohen-Aharoni, 2017).

Another area that has attracted special attention in CX research is the role of non-representational inputs. On a touristic journey, communicators can be the locals who have a chance to meet in a local restaurant, bus drivers, or strangers encountered for the first time. Scholars in the fields of sociology and anthropology define performance as acting socially in a way that is meant to carry a message and meaning. As defined by Zhu (2012) 'Practices become performative by transforming from "doing" to meaning-making' (p. 1500). An example of a highly influential paper in Web Appendix 4 is that of Luo et al. (2019) which identified how customer-to-customer interactions can have both co-creative *and* co-destructive effects on perceptions of service quality.

Managing the customer experience offering

The interplay of the two sets of heuristics—mentalizing the paradoxical customer and the paradoxical event—together provides the metrics from which to moderate the different types of paradoxical offerings. All offerings in the marketplace are by necessity moderations and always need to fit the logic of economic exchange such as 'what you are willing to sell must fit what the customer is willing to pay'. Adapting the three categories of responses articulated in paradox management (Berti et al., 2021), we envisage three approaches to manage the paradoxical offerings; these are a trade-off, compensatory, and oscillation. Figure 4 illustrates the two triangles, the top triangle representing a market-dominant offering, one skewed towards the economic considerations of the purchasing customer, and the lower triangle representing a destination-dominant offering, one skewed towards actualizing the authenticity of the destination.

Market-dominant offering and destination-dominant offering Trade-off approach

Following the trade-off approach (Berti et al., 2021), in this view, constrained by market and economic considerations including budgetary, schedule, supply, demand and competition, the practitioner may choose to construct a touristic offering that is market-dominant. In paradox management theory, this category of response is called an *either-or* approach. In spite of the obvious advantages of using the both/and approach which serves to preserve the utility of the two-opposing demands (Smith & Tracey, 2016), the practitioner is often constrained by circumstances to use an either-or option (Bednarek et al., 2020). In doing so, they choose to subordinate the destination-dominant set of variables—authenticity, performative, ecological, and emergent—as a trade-off against affordability. Authenticity comes at a cost: to experience a truly authentic experience costs time, money, and additional effort. For example, to see a whale in its natural habitat specific cruising arrangements are required. As one scales the levels of authenticity, outlays of cost, time, organization and support become increasingly exorbitant and prohibitive. To *square* an offering, economic trade-offs are necessary, albeit a *not-so-ideal* necessity.

In a market-dominant offering, therefore, object authenticity is kept minimalistic. Touristic offerings looking forward is some measure of activity-related authenticity subsuming the authentic for the fantastical (Smith, 2006). To save time, the offering is skewed towards the predictability that comes with a structured experience versus the unpredictability that comes with an unstructured experience (Martin & Woodside, 2012). To create this type of touristic offering the practitioner requires the use of ready-made, user-friendly information provided by intermediaries (e.g., tourist information centres, brochures, tour guides, guided tours) versus the performative values that come from an exposed CX. Touristic activities are conducted within the safety of designated tourist enclaves. The optimal type of touristic infrastructure is one that is functional and efficient. What is interesting is that this kind of 'fast-food' delivery of CX is by far the most prevalent and most popular, despite the fact that its less-than-ideal role as a market-dominant model using affordability as a trade-off is still a highly sought-after touristic proposition.

Compensatory approach

The practitioner could also work within the limits of a *both/and* paradox management fashion, an offering that seeks to accommodate the two contradictory variables present in a paradox setting (Krautzberger & Tuckermann, 2022; Li, 2021). In this instance, this offering may lie between the authentic and the fantastical, between structured and unstructured, between place-branding and ecological inputs, and between bubbled and exposed experiences. But, in practical terms, the balancing act is not always achievable, a point conceded by Berti et al. (2021) who noted that 'managing complex paradoxes successfully with simple recipes is impossible' (p. 13). Rather, at the point of saliency, the practitioner may acquire socio-material resources to compensate for what they view as a contingent solution to redress the balance between the variables. For example, a customer who parachutes into a five-star resort on Bali Island has very limited exposure to authentic Indonesian culture, but the infusion of authentic destination objects such as local food by local artisans may go some way towards injecting a sense of *authenticity* to cater to the customer's desire for a measure of *thereness*. Therefore, practitioners can harness these socio-material resources to narrate the cultural uniqueness of the destination. A customer shuttling through a city-hopping package tour may have a craving for unstructured experiences that can be met by including a *free and easy* day in the highly structured itinerary. Hence, managing CX entails compensatory strategies, infusion of the unstructured with the structured, infusion of the environment into the branded, and infusion of exposure into the bubbled environment.

Oscillation approach

Applying the oscillation approach, the practitioner constructs a parallel artifice allowing the customer to move seamlessly back and forth between the artificial and the authentic without compromising the authenticity of the destination object (Lewis and Smith, 2014). In paradox management theory, practitioners are observed to use *more-than* models to transcend paradoxical intractability through the use of an 'epistemological device enabling exploration of new organising forms' (Berti et al., 2021, p. 32). Critically, we do not view paradox response as a *cop-out*; rather, recognizing the reality of the paradoxical tension, practitioners creatively summon new socio-material technology and tools to bridge the two divides of the paradox without acquiescing to the demand of one at the expense of the other. In our view, this optimal scenario allows for the creative interplay of opposites (Clegg et al., 2002) to achieve a *win-win* balance (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009).

Through the enactment of non-invasive and non-destructive artificial environments such as glamping

amenities, discreetly located adjacent to the destination, the customer is allowed to transit back and forth between exploring the authentic object while enjoying the familiarity of modern amenities that glamping technology brings. At the Great Barrier Reef, the discreet use of ecologically friendly and non-disruptive floating platforms, allows customers to undertake short exploratory dives to experience the amazing fauna of the underwater world, and to climb back swiftly onto the safety and comfort of the platform to enjoy the sumptuous buffet or even a glass of champagne. In recent years, the enactment of the Airbnb homestay infrastructure has ushered in a new type of touristic offering whereby the local community can actively participate in the organization of a tourist event (Zhang et al., 2023). This socio-material digital infrastructure also enables the location of tourists *within* local neighbourhoods while they are also exposed to the unbranded sensations arising from their immersion into the social ecology of the destination community. The appropriation of socio-material resources such as glamping technology, floating platforms, and AirbnB homestay infrastructure demonstrates how the creative use of socio-material inputs has a material impact on the saliency and effectiveness of paradox management.

Paradox management strategies in practice

Considering the practices, rhetoric, reframing, and trade-offs that characterize the CX phenomenon, it becomes possible to identify practical management strategies that enable practitioners to navigate these contradictions, and harness the tensions to drive new innovative approaches. For example, in the case of the authenticity paradox, an effective approach seems to be that of reframing the issue to be one of experiential rather than object authenticity. What is authentic and unique is the emotional/cognitive/embodied engagement of the tourist with the experience. This is similar to what happens when we watch a movie; we know that it is fictional but, in the moment of immersion, what is experienced sensorially becomes the dominant interlocutor for what is real. As for the memorability paradox, a management strategy seems to be practice related, in that it is possible to structure the experience, making it safe and relatively predictable (as in the case of rafting), without removing the uniqueness of the individual personal experience (the exhilarating experience of descending the rapids). The branding paradox can also be managed by leveraging the performative effects of branding, which is also shaping expectations, priming tourists to expect specific stimuli that are then experienced as ecologically unique. Finally, the service paradox can simply manifest as a pure trade-off, for which a contingently optimal solution can be found—that is,

aligning different customers' desires/expectations with a specific mix of comfort/exposure; for instance, as in the experience of trekking in New Zealand's fjord land, that can involve carrying your own gear and sleeping rough, travelling lighter and sleeping in cabins, or even having your gear taken to luxury lodges on the track for comfort.

Future research directions

Our framework as a guide for future research and practitioner builds on Cohen's (1972) typology of tourist roles where a synchronic typology of contemporary tourists is represented on one end by the characterization of the drifter and, on the other, the organized mass tourist. The CX framework represents both a continuity and an advancement of Cohen's typology since it extends the typology of touristic preferences into four sets of paradoxes. Going forward, testing the framework in the field to determine its applicability for practitioners represents an important item on the research agenda. As such, we propose the following questions: How will the understanding of paradoxicality reinforce the practitioner's agency in the shaping of CX offerings? How will practitioners located at different levels of the touristic infrastructure respond to the heuristics suggested in the CX Framework? Berti and Simpson (2021) observed that the process we employ to tackle paradoxes is based on their capability level. Not everyone has access to the socio-material or managerial inputs required to address the paradoxical situations confronting an organization. For example, an agency may recognize the limitations of a bubbled destination experience but have no power to determine the type of hotel accommodation at the destination.

Another potential future research direction is operationalizing and testing the eight constructs conceptualised as four pairs of diametric/dialogical paradoxes in the framework. To date, Kim et al.'s (2012) 24-item memorable tourism experience (MTE) scale is the most widely used measurement scale in the CX domain. In our view, the scale comprising seven unipolar items—hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty—reflects only a *two-dimensional* view of touristic consumption. The four sets of paradoxes on the other hand offer a *three-dimensional* view of touristic consumption, one that should be rigorously tested in the field to determine their validity in explaining tourism behaviour. In this respect, we suggest that future research should answer the following questions: How are the seven items in the MTE and the eight constructs in the CX framework engaged in productive dialogue? What are some of the outstanding similarities or differences? How can we better explain the underlying assumptions between the

two scales and utilize both instruments to better explain the nature of customer experiences in H&T?

From a theoretical perspective, researchers should focus on deepening the use of the paradox theory as a meta-theoretical tool to further the conceptual development of the CX concept. For example, to further develop Figure 4, it may be useful to consider the role of agency and power in shaping the possibility both for the firm and for the customer to navigate the paradoxes of CX in H&T. Paradox theory predicts that, when actors are subjected to contradictory demands that they have no agency to negotiate, they will experience pathological 'pragmatic paradoxes' such as double binds or catch-22 situations, that can be both paralyzing and destructive (Berti et al., 2021; Hahn & Knight, 2021).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study elaborated on the inherent paradox of CX through the review of the CX knowledge structure in the H&T domain, revealing the need for further research to develop a framework grounded in the unique context and character of the CX concept. Through the study, we realize that a simple adaptation of existing CX theories is insufficient, as H&T phenomena have unique features that require significant theoretical engagement. By adopting a paradoxical lens, this study has identified eight constructs framed in four paradoxes that formulate the basis of a coherent CX framework. They are fantastical/authentic, structured/unstructured, branded/ecological, and bubbled/exposed appealing to the consumer's need for discovery or narrativity, and the perception of the tourist subject as a destination and community. Therefore, in our view, managing CX requires managing these four pairs of paradoxes, and it also requires inputs of knowledge, skills, and experience of both the theoretician and practitioner.

The first theoretical implication of our paper relates to identifying the four paradoxes of CX and the dynamic relationships between them based on the findings of bibliometric analysis. It provides a deeper understanding of the paradoxical nature of CX in this domain to the existing literature and suggests ways for researchers to manage it. Another theoretical implication concerns proposing a framework of CX including managing the four levers of customer experience; managing stakeholders' roles; and managing the customer experience offering by using trade-off, compensatory, and oscillation approaches, as well as considering paradox management strategies in terms of practices, rhetoric, reframing, and trade-off optimization that open up new research paths towards paradox resolutions.

Our review also provides important managerial implications, as our study rightly points to the key paradox tensions of CX that are required for managing the tensions between the authentic and fantastical, branded and ecological bubbled and exposed, and structured and unstructured paradoxes. This study sheds some new insight into how contributing managers balance salient tensions between these paradoxes. For example, through its paradox approach, this paper sheds new light on the authenticity debate. In contrast to the consumption of experiential products like video games or theatres where consumers remain highly conscious of their intrinsic fictional properties throughout the process, the CX is grounded in a sense of *thereness* that must be temporally and spatially defined (Äijälä, 2021). The motivation to see for oneself, to experience a destination in the fullness of one's sensorial faculties, to set foot on foreign land and authenticate for oneself, is an experience many desire and, crucially, are willing to pay for. This aspect of customer behaviour and expectation grounds CX in the reality of the purchasing cycle and brings to the fore an aspect of authenticity that is yet to be fully explored: purchasing authenticity. Any paying customer will rightly expect and demand purchasing authenticity. CX grounds the authenticity debate in the practicalities associated with a purchasing cycle, one that should contribute to the ongoing authenticity debate.

LIMITATIONS

The results of this study are constrained by some limitations. *First*, our bibliometric review did not capture the articles that may have been published relative to CX-related phenomena in H&T in other business and management journals. However, our goal is to develop a conceptual framework to explain the grounded paradoxical character of the CX phenomenon in H&T. Therefore, examining the CX articles in leading H&T journals reduced the risk of excluding studies on the general CX phenomenon. *Second*, unlike meta-analysis and literature review, co-citation analysis is inherently a more generalized method to examine the research topic. The co-citation pattern is a generalized pattern in a network which unpacks the knowledge structure of large bodies of studies in a field, which is distinctive to all bibliometric research. Despite these limitations, we are confident that this review offers new insights that can guide academics to deal with foundational important managerial priorities.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.