



## Original Article

## Service Dominant Logic and Consumer Culture Theory: Building Theoretical Framework Through Value Creation

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## ABSTRACT

Marketing thought has evolved substantially from a goods-centered perspective toward a service-centered view emphasizing intangible resources and value co-creation. The introduction of service-dominant logic marked a paradigmatic shift by redefining exchange as the application of specialized knowledge and skills rather than the transfer of tangible goods. In parallel, consumer culture theory emerged as a multidisciplinary framework that examines consumption as a culturally and socially embedded process shaped by meanings, identities, and marketplace structures. This paper conceptually integrates service-dominant logic and CCT by identifying value creation, specifically value-in-use, as the central intersection between the two perspectives. Drawing on the role of operant resources possessed by both firms and consumers, the study argues that service-dominant logic offers a managerial perspective on value co-creation, while CCT provides the consumer's cultural and experiential viewpoint. By linking these perspectives, the paper develops a unified theoretical framework that enhances understanding of how value is co-created through service exchange within cultural contexts, thereby contributing to marketing theory and future research directions.

**Keywords:** Consumer culture theory, Operant resources, Service dominant logic, Consumer-culture theory

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## INTRODUCTION

Marketing has gone through different evolutions since its inception. Being a derivative of economics, it was developed as a distribution of goods at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 19<sup>th</sup> century can be marked as an evolutionary period of marketing discipline. Marketing has been subdivided into many different and separate fields now, for instance, services marketing has emerged as a distinct discipline. The concept of marketing has gone through this progression by being defined from different perspectives, that is, marketing as a distribution focus, a commodity focus, an institutional focus, a functional focus, a managerial focus, and a social focus (Kotler, 1972). It is considered an exchange process (Bagozzi, 1975), as promotion of a social cause to create social change (Fox & Kotler, 1980). Marketing emerged as a relationship marketing marshaling the resources of an organization to meet customer needs (Palmer, 2000); marketing management is the art and science of applying core marketing activities (Kotler, 2002).

In 2004, a major shift in this field emerged, and the marketing concept took a new turn when a new paradigm of marketing was introduced, which changed the way marketing was looked at and defined through different angles. Two authors named Vargo and Lusch coined the term 'Service Dominant Logic' (i.e., SDL) in 2004, which explained the marketing concept with dominance on service provision. This concept of SDL in business gained so much importance and acceptance by marketing practitioners and academicians that many concepts have been studied by using the 'lens of SDL' since 2004.

For instance, Innovation of product, process, or relationship perspective is critical for a firm's growth and profitability. Due to this innovation, marketing research has been studied through the service-dominant logic's perspective (Flint, 2006). Service innovation, which has been primarily studied with a focus on tangible goods, now a new conceptual framework emerges to investigate the antecedents and consequences of SDL (Ordanini & Parasuraman, 2010). A new perspective was introduced, known as customer dominant logic (CDL), as opposed to SDL, as SDL was said to be provider-dominant logic and customer-oriented perspective, it looks at customers from the provider's or firm's point of view (Heinonen et. al., 2010)

All these new concepts from different disciplines with service-dominant logic (SDL) are being established, studied, and proposed due to the tremendous importance they have gained. In either supply chain management, innovation, marketing science, consumer behavior, human resources, or other subfields of management sciences, all academicians and practitioners are attempting to establish links with the SDL perspective. In this paper, the relationship between SDL and CCT has been studied, analyzed, and built. Before moving towards the development of the relationship between service-dominant logic (SDL) and consumer-culture-theory (CCT), it's necessary to explain these concepts so the linking streams can become visible.

Service Dominant Logic, commonly known as SDL or S-D Logic, is a revolutionary concept in the marketing discipline. It has changed the 'lens' through which marketers had seen marketing from the beginning, which has been on tangible goods, whereas services were seen as an aid to the goods during the process of marketing (Converse, 1921). Much of the dominant logic of exchange of tangible goods has been moved towards the exchange of intangibles (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

SDL was developed as opposed to the Goods dominant logic (GDL), which has always been the base for all developments and applications in the marketing field, as marketing was considered to be a centric field, i.e., it is something which is made for products that are tangible in nature. GDL, where goods refer to the outputs from the manufacturing firms, has focused on transactions of tangible resources having embedded value. GDL has been the base of marketing as the exchange in marketing has been defined through the viewpoints of economics; whereas the SDL has focused on the intangible resources, relationships, and the co-creation of value; and the economic exchange is based upon service provision rather than goods, traditionally (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

SDL is a service-centric approach, but in SDL, service refers to the offerings in the form of intangible goods. In SDL, services refer to the application of specialized competencies, i.e., skills and knowledge, to facilitate the exchange process between consumers and businesses (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Service in SDL means value-added services, which refer to anything offered to enrich a good's image which including services like medical, hotel, airline, and education (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

In a general sense, services are considered economic activities whose outputs are not physical goods or constructions. These outputs are typically consumed at the time they are produced and provide value in ways that are intangible to the first consumer, such as convenience, entertainment, timeliness, comfort, or health (Quinn, Baruch & Paquette, 1987). As a product, services cover a wide variety of intangible offerings that customers find valuable and are willing to pay for (Wilson et al., 2012). Within the SDL framework, services are understood as the application of specialized knowledge and skills through actions, processes, and performance for the benefit of another party. This perspective reorients traditional business thinking to emphasize service even when the output includes tangible goods (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

Operand resources are resources upon which operations are performed to generate an effect (Constantin & Lusch, 1994). In the context of Goods-Dominant Logic (GDL), operand resources were regarded as the primary resources, since human activity historically focused on acting upon natural resources such as land, minerals, plants, and animals. From a business perspective, operand resources are tangible production factors that can be transformed into outputs with measurable value at relatively low cost (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Simply put, all physical or tangible assets, including raw materials and equipment, qualify as operand resources. Operant resources, in contrast, are those that act on operand resources or other operant resources to create effects (Constantin & Lusch, 1994). These are mainly intangible and include organizational competencies, knowledge, and processes that enable value creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

In simple terms, operant resources are non-physical and processional, e.g., knowledge and skills. Firms and consumers both possess operant resources. For instance, firms' knowledge, skills, and technology are their operant resources; while consumers too have operant resources in stock, which include physical, social, and cultural resources.

### **Consumer Culture Theory**

One of the emerging interesting theories, i.e., CCT in marketing, is an interdisciplinary field where macro, critical, and interpretive approaches are applied to study consumer behavior's perspectives (CCT, 2016). The term CCT was first coined in 2005 by Arnould and Thompson. "CCT refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationship between consumer actions, the marketplace, and culture." It's the study of consumption behaviors and alternatives from a cultural and social perspective, as opposed to the economic and psychological perspectives (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). CCT views culture as a combination of diverse groups and collective meanings, rather than an identical concept, e.g., American culture. CCT has advanced consumer behavior research and knowledge by working on four themes, majorly referred to as the four programs of CCT. These programs are: i) consumer identity projects, ii) marketplace cultures, iii) the sociohistorical patterning of consumption, and iv) mass mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

**Consumer identity projects:** CCT is concerned with the co-productive, co-constructive ways of consumers to work with marketer-produced materials, forge a coherent, if diversified and often fragmented sense of oneself (Belk, 1988).

**Marketplace culture:** In CCT, marketplace culture studies focus on some of the most distinct features of the marketplace culture. Traditionally, people were considered to be the culture bearers, but in CCT, consumers are seen as producers of the culture.

**Sociohistorical patterning of consumption:** This program of CCT is related to the institutional and social structures that systematically influence consumers' consumption, like gender, ethnicity, class, and community. In this, consumers are perceived to play certain social roles and positions as they are bound by law (Otnes, Lowrey & Kim, 1993).

**Mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies:** CCT investigates the ideology of the consumers, which refers to "the systems of meaning that tend to channel and reproduce consumers' thoughts and actions in a specific way to defend the dominant interests in society" (Hirschman, 1993). Consumer culture theory (CCT) is basically related to the consumption by consumers. It studies different aspects of consumption, which are shaped by the experiential, social and cultural forces and hence create a unique consumption culture for the consumer; whereas culture is the unique configurations of thoughts, concepts, beliefs,

norms and values which depict the behavior or lifestyle, and relations of a society or group within a society (Reeves & Baden, 2000).

**‘Value’ in SDL and CCT:** The common concept that is found in both of the theories, i.e., in CCT and SDL, is ‘Value’. Value is the word that emerges in different places in these concepts. In CCT, as a ‘value’ for the customer in his consumption culture, whereas in SDL, the ‘value co-creation’ is used, where the firm and customers are considered to be value co-creators.

Value mostly conveys two types of meanings: ‘worth’ of something, while in the other instance, it is used to refer to some kind of ‘quantity’. Like in economics, sociology, marketing, and ethics, the value refers to something of worth; whereas in mathematics, computer sciences, accounting, and finance, the value refers to some kind of quantity. Value is defined as the outcomes relative to costs (Porter, 2010). In economics, value is a measure of the benefit that is achieved from a good or service; in marketing, value is the difference between costs and benefits of a product or service according to the consumer’s evaluation.

Different authors have used the concept of value differently; most commonly, two kinds of interpretations are in use currently. These are either ‘value-in-exchange’ or ‘value-in-use’. For instance, value-in-exchange refers to the value added by the firm to the selling value of the product (Beckman, 1957).

Despite many different interpretations in different fields, the value has been an elusive concept (Woodall, 2003). The concept of value refers to the evaluation of benefits against sacrifices (Ziethaml, 1988). Value creation is a process by which the consumer as a user becomes better off in some respect (Gronroos, 2008). Basically, a firm’s production process generates the potential value, while usage is generation of the real value (Gummesson, 2007), which is what is referred to here as the ‘value-in-use’.

**Figure 1: SDL and CCT**

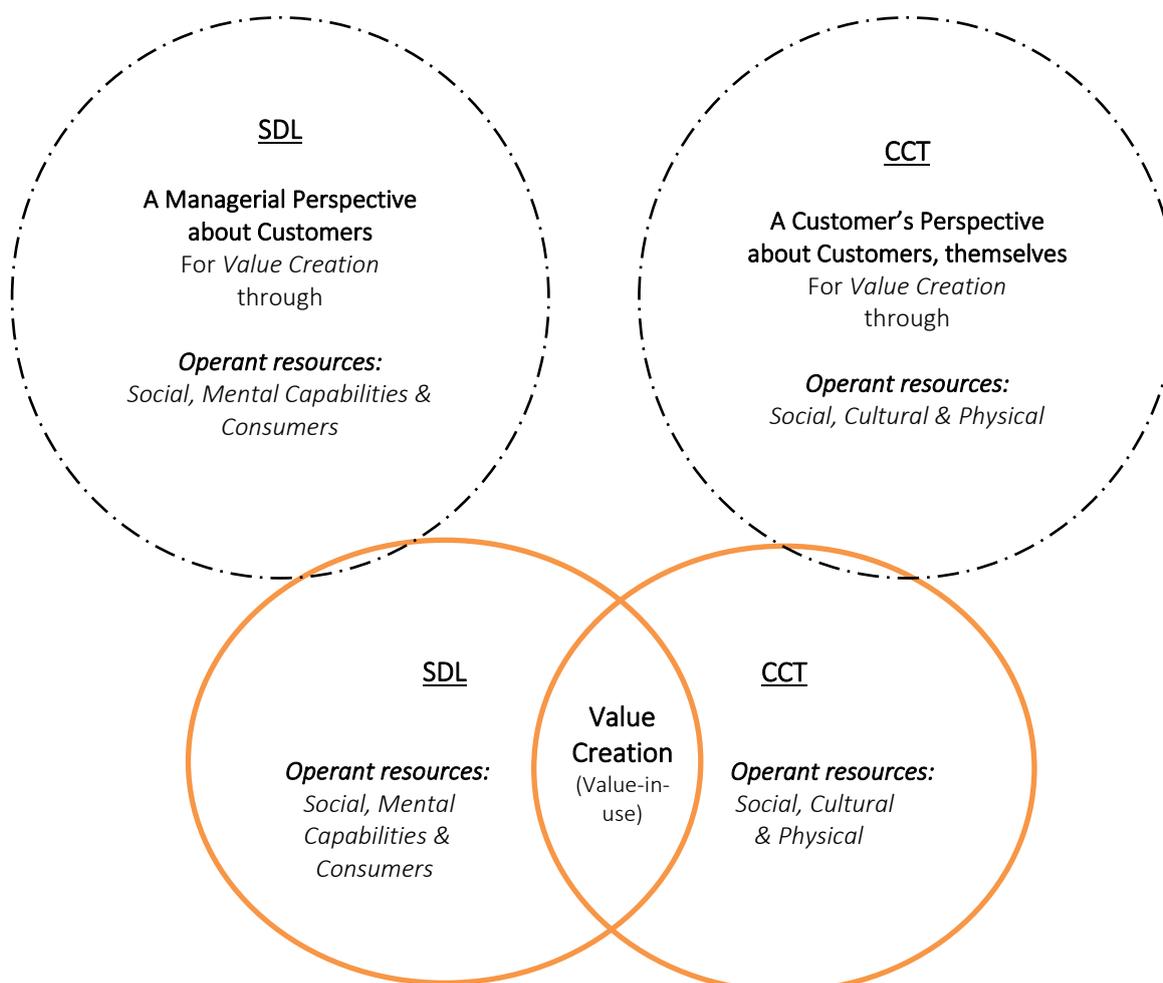
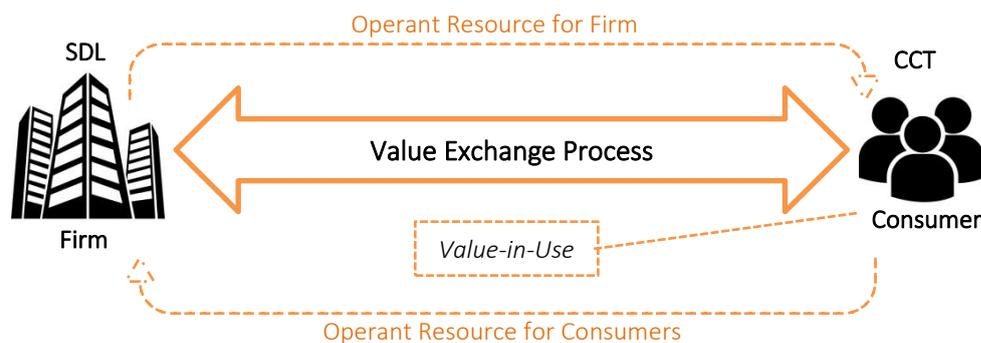


Figure 2: Value Exchange Process



### Value co-creation

Co-creation is a managerial practice or business strategy that involves bringing together multiple stakeholders, typically a company and its customers, to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Value co-creation occurs when these stakeholders collaboratively generate unique and personalized experiences for customers, while also enhancing the organization's performance, revenue, and learning capabilities. It can be understood as the joint process in which a company and its customers work together to shape the service experience in a way that fits the customer's individual context (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). The two perspectives discussed above, named SDL and CCT, are related to each other to a great extent. If one tries to link up these two concepts, there are two key underlying concepts in these two explained perspectives that create a connection between SDL and CCT. The connecting or intersecting point between these theories can be created or stated by using two concepts, i.e., Value Creation and Operant Resources.

Value creation takes place in the process of value exchange between firms and their customers. If the value exchange process between customers and firms is illustrated through a diagram, putting firms on the left and consumer group on the right side, it can be seen that Value Creation, as 'value-in-use', which is used in both SDL and CCT perspectives, takes place at the consumers' side. Value exchange process in SDL is not complete without CCT, because if exchange process is explained through a two-way process where at the one side of the process is the firm or 'managers representing firms', who employ their knowledge and skills to facilitate the exchange process in creating value for consumers; on the other side of the process are 'consumers', who are users of those products or services produced by the firms. So, the exchange process runs between firms and consumers.

SDL is the perspective of the firms, i.e., the managerial point of view of consumers, and focuses on customers and their involvement in completing this value creation process, while CCT is the perspective of the consumers, i.e., consumers' own point of view about them. Both of the perspectives take value creation as the value-in-use concept, whereas value in use is always created at the consumers' side after consumption, whether it's SDL or CCT, it does not matter. So, the value in use can be the joining or intersection point for both of the theories.

### DISCUSSION

The marketing concept has been evolving since its inception as a derived field of economics, and it started as a field to study and understand the distribution of goods. The 19<sup>th</sup> century can be marked as an evolutionary period of marketing discipline. In this time period, new marketing concepts developed, and some even got so much attention that they emerged and developed as a separate sub-discipline within the marketing field, for instance, services marketing.

Marketing has been defined from different perspectives, that is, marketing as a distribution focus, a commodity focus, an institutional focus, a functional focus, a managerial focus, and a social focus (Kotler, 1972). Vargo and Lusch coined the term SDL in 2004, which explained marketing concepts from a different perspective with a focus on service provision. In this paper, the relationship between SDL and CCT has been studied, analyzed, and built conceptually.

SDL focuses on intangible resources, relationships, and the co-creation of value; and the economic exchange is based upon service provision rather than goods, traditionally (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In SDL, services are defined

as: “the application of specialized competencies, i.e., knowledge and skills through processes and performance for the benefit of another entity”. Service-centric dominant logic is the reorientation of the philosophy that is equally applicable to all marketing offerings, even including those that have a tangible output in the form of physical products (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

The term CCT was first coined in 2005 by Arnould and Thompson. CCT is not a kind of unified grand theory; rather, it refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationship between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings. It’s the study of consumption behaviors and alternatives from a cultural and social perspective, as opposed to the economic and psychological perspectives (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). CCT has advanced consumer behavior research and knowledge by working on four major themes referred to as the four programs of CCT. These programs are: i) consumer identity projects, ii) marketplace cultures, iii) the sociohistorical patterning of consumption, and iv) mass mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers’ interpretive strategies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The common concept that is found in both of the theories, i.e., in CCT and SDL, is ‘Value’. In SDL, the value is always co-created by the customer, i.e., value is something which is co-created when the tangible or intangible product is used by the facilitation of the service, i.e., the *value-in-use*.

The two perspectives, named Service Dominant Logic (SDL) and Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), are related to each other to a great extent. The connecting or intersecting point between these theories can be created or stated by using two concepts, i.e., *Value Creation* and *Operant Resources*. To combine SDL and CCT, the value co-creation process has to be understood through the cultural lens (Pongsakornungsilp et al., 2008). SDL is the perspective of the firms, i.e., the managerial point of view of the consumers, and focuses on customers and their involvement in completing this value creation process, while CCT is the perspective of the consumers, i.e., consumers’ own point of view about them.

The SDL has been studied through firm’s viewpoints about the customers, that is why the literature lacks where the connection between SDL and CCT is established and tested properly. The studies available that have attempted to conceptualize this relationship between SDL and CCT have not tested it empirically. Before establishing relationships with SDL, it’s necessary to define those concepts concretely upon which foundation of these concepts are founded. Like value is a very elusive terminology used in the SDL framework, and has been criticized for this vagueness, too. That is why, before moving forward, some key concepts need to be clear.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has conceptually examined the relationship between SDL and CCT by positioning value creation particularly value-in-use as their common foundation. While SDL emphasizes the firm’s managerial perspective and the role of operant resources in facilitating service exchange, CCT highlights the consumer’s lived experiences, cultural meanings, and social contexts through which value is realized. The findings suggest that value creation does not occur at the point of exchange but emerges during consumption, where consumers actively integrate firm-provided resources with their own social, cultural, and experiential resources. By bridging SDL and CCT, this study addresses a notable gap in marketing literature and offers a more holistic understanding of value co-creation that accounts for both managerial intent and consumer interpretation. Future research may empirically test this integrated framework across different cultural and service contexts to further refine the conceptual linkages and extend the practical relevance of SDL through a culturally informed lens.

## DECLARATIONS

**Consent to participate:** Written consent had been obtained from participants. All methods were performed following the relevant guidelines and regulations.

**Availability of Data and Materials:** Data will be made available upon request. The corresponding author will submit all dataset files.

**Competing interests:** None

**Funding:** No funding source involved

## AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTIONS

**AS:** Concept and design of study, critical intellectual input.

AS: Acquisition and analysis of data, drafting of the manuscript, and critical intellectual input.

AS: Acquisition of data, drafting of the manuscript.

The author had read and approved the final manuscript.

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