Rural tourism in Vietnam

Value co-creation possibilities within rural tourism

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## Abstract

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1. Introduction

The development of information and communication technology and social media has helped tourism to grow in the past decades (Frew, 2000; Gössling, 2017) and tourism has become one of the world’s fastest growing sectors (UNWTO, 2018). Through the Internet, customers can find information about a destination (Gössling, 2017). But it is more complicated than that, according to David-Negre et al. (2018) travellers can access different Internet-based platforms to find information. For instance, customers can find information about destinations through social media (e.g. Facebook), reviewing channels (e.g. TripAdvisor), communication exchange channels (e.g. Instagram, YouTube), blogs or tour operators’ websites (David-Negre et al., 2018). These information sources are connected to each other (David-Negre et al., 2018), therefore firms need to take this into consideration when they are offering services (Gössling, 2017). Gössling (2017) mean that firms nowadays can be affected by what their customers think of them and that potential customers may choose another firm due to bad reputation on the Internet.

Tourism refers to people who are visiting a place or places in order to go sightseeing, visiting friends and/or families, taking a vacation and having a good time (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009). This indicates that tourists can spend their leisure time on different activities at the destination(s), such as participating in tours or enjoying the environment. Goeldner and Ritchie (2009) mean that tourism can be defined as:

/.../ the process, activities, and outcomes arising from the relationships and the interactions among tourists, tourism suppliers, host governments, host communities, and surrounding environments that are involved in the attracting and hosting of visitors. (2009:6)

Park and Kohler (2019) argued that tourism is a sector that constitutes many other sectors, which according to Graci (2012) cannot operate on its own. This is due to that tourism is a compound of activities, services and industries that together deliver travel experiences (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009). Ramaswamy (2011) mean that the customer experience is the base for value creation, innovation, strategy and executive leadership. Therefore, firms should change from a “service mindset” to an “experience mindset”, which means that firms should focus on the creation of experiences rather than the service process in order to create value for their customers (Ramaswamy, 2011).
1.1. Problem formulation

Tourism is important, since it is a source to cultural preservation, environmental protection, peace and security, jobs, economic growth and development (World Tourism Organization, 2018). In addition, tourism is especially important for people who are living in poverty (The World Bank, 2018a). People who are struggling with poverty typically resides in rural areas and most of them are living in middle-income countries (The World Bank, 2018a). According to the report from UN (2015), there is a lot of people, especially in Southeast Asia, that lives on or below the poverty line of $1.90 per person a day. The World Bank (2018) has stretched the poverty line to be $3.20 and $5.50 per person per day. This reflects the poverty lines in lower- and upper-middle-income countries (The World Bank, 2018a). Prahalad and Hart (2002) refers to people who are living on or under the poverty line as people who are at the base of the pyramid (BoP). But poverty is not only about lacking monetary funds, it is also about covering the basic needs such as infrastructure, education, security (Howton, 2018), sanitation, an acceptable standard of drinking water and electricity (The World Bank, 2018a).

Modern tourism is related to the development and growth of new destinations, which has made tourism to a key driver for socio-economic progress (UNWTO, 2018). Furthermore, UNWTO (2018) mean that developing countries can benefit from sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism can be referred to as the minimisation of negative social, environmental and economic impacts from tourism (Dávid, 2011). Social aspects can be improved by being fair to the locals and environmental impacts can be improved by minimising pollution and plastic waste (ibid). Finally, firms can minimise negative economic impacts by not exploiting locals and by integrating them into the management and development of tourism activity (Dávid, 2011; Lekaota, 2015).

Even though there are positive effects from tourism, businesses are getting blamed for causing social, environmental and economic problems (Porter and Kramer, 2011). According to Porter and Kramer (2011), this is due to that businesses has a narrow view on value creation, which means that businesses optimises short-term financial performance instead of taking their customers’ and the societies needs into consideration. Thompson and MacMillan (2010) argues that firms can minimise economic problems by operating on a business model that generates profit while limiting poverty at the same time. Prahalad and Hart (2002) also mean that there is an approach for businesses to gain profit while simultaneously increasing the standard of living for the poor, by collaborating with local entrepreneurs and manufacturers from the BoP. Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart (2010) argues that the development of an effective business
model is crucial for firms to survive the challenging environment that is typically present at the BoP. A business model shows how a firm can operate in order to create and capture value (Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart, 2010).

In the traditional market exchange, value is created through exchange of goods and money, so called goods-dominant logic (G-D logic) (Vargo, Maglio and Akaka, 2008). The roles of producers and customers are specific since the value is created by the firm through a series of activities. While, in service-dominant logic (S-D logic) the roles of producers and customers are not specified (ibid). This is due to that value is created jointly and collectively which means that value is always co-created. According to Vargo, Maglio and Akaka (2008), producers use their skills and knowledge to transform resources into a usable product in both G-D and S-D logic. However, in S-D logic value is created when customers put the product to use, in integration with their own resources (Vargo, Maglio and Akaka, 2008).

Lately, researchers have connected value to experience economies and have argued for the importance of developing good experiences (Berry, Carbone and Haeckel, 2002; Verhoef et al., 2009; Sipe, 2018). Experience economies are neither referred to as goods or services but rather as memorable events connected to a purchase (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). An experience can be connected to the entire customer journey since it is affected by everything from the expectations of the purchase to customers thoughts and feelings after the experience (Berry, Carbone and Haeckel, 2002). This is due to that experiences are affected by customers emotional responses to the experiences (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Experiences are always co-created between the customer and the firm (Pinho et al., 2014).

Park and Vargo (2012) argued that co-creation of value is especially important in tourism, since there are various parties that are explicitly or implicitly involved in the different phases of travellers’ experiences. Value can be co-created within a service ecosystem that constitutes of several different actors (Vargo and Lusch, 2008), such as customers and local service providers. There are several barriers and drivers that hinders value co-creation (de Oliveira and Cortimiglia, 2017). For instance, local service providers at the BoP does usually not have the skills or resources that are required to attract foreign tourists (Cheuk et al., 2018). Cheuk et al. (2018) mean that people in rural areas can benefit from collaborating with travel agencies that has both the skills and resources to attract tourists. This kind of collaboration can be equally beneficial for the travel agencies and the service providers in rural areas (Cheuk et al., 2018).
Value co-creation can be enabled via multisided platforms that can be used to bring together two separate types of customers (Muzellec, Ronteau and Lambkin, 2015; Park and Kohler, 2019), such as local service providers and tourists. Multisided platforms can be defined as a forum where the focal firm, such as a travel organisation, co-create value by integrating other businesses and customers into their service ecosystem (Prebensen and Foss, 2011; Muzellec, Ronteau and Lambkin, 2015). To understand how value can be co-created in multisided platforms can be quite complex (de Oliveira and Cortimiglia, 2017), this is due to that it is hard to define what value really is (Vargo, Maglio and Akaka, 2008; Grönroos, 2011). Nevertheless, value can generally be achieved when a party’s well-being has been improved after the usage of products or services from another party (Grönroos, 2011). Furthermore, the value for customers on one side of the platform increases with the number of customers that participate on the other side (Hagiu, 2014).

Like Eisenmann, Parker and Van Alstyne (2006), Prebensen and Foss (2011) defines service platforms as a forum where organisations’ products, services and infrastructure enable the interaction with users. Service platforms can be related to service ecosystems, since the service ecosystem are an ecosystem with firms that together, evolves and adapts to the customers’ demands (Frow et al., 2014). The multisided platforms have the potential of reducing the language and technical barriers that the local service providers are facing (Baraldi, Gressetvold and Harrison, 2012). This can be done through a combination of resources from the different actors within the service ecosystem (ibid).

According to Vargo and Lusch (2011), a business ecosystem can be referred to as a service ecosystem. Williamson and De Meyer (2012) mean that firms today need to have a business ecosystem where they together with individuals and organisations can evolve and co-create value. The authors further mean that today’s technology make it hard for firms to have vertically integrated organisations, since the firms must adapt to its constantly changing environment. Companies’ success depends on how well they can co-operate with their ecosystem, which can be measured by how well the actors in the ecosystem can take advantage of their resources and knowledge (Williamson and De Meyer, 2012). This is dependent on the commitment of different actors and their relationship within the service ecosystem (Williamson and De Meyer, 2012; Park and Kohler, 2019). The degree of commitment to the ecosystem depends on the degree of trust and the perceptions of the facilitating organisation, partner roles and power (Park and Kohler, 2019). Therefore, it is important for the lead firm within the service ecosystem to create an internal organisation that can handle the complexity of it
Williamson and De Meyer (2012) argued that the lead firm needs to have an organisational culture and structure where the firm can develop themselves and their ecosystem, instead of having a hierarchal organisational culture and structure.

1.2. Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how travel organisations can create memorable customer experiences via their service ecosystem. In addition, how travel organisations can co-create value with local service providers within their service ecosystem and how their organisational structure and culture enable the co-creation of values. There are many aspects to consider when operating in tourism, such as the finding and choosing of suppliers as well as building a sustainable collaborative network with them (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009). But also, to find motivational triggers and core values that will ensure that everyone in the organisation will work hard to provide good customer experiences (ibid). Furthermore, it is also essential to develop a sustainable business model to ensure a sustainable future for the business and the actors who are involved (Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart, 2010).

The purpose of the study has led to the following research questions:

- How can travel organisations create good customer experiences via their service ecosystems?
- How does travel organisations co-create value with local service providers in rural areas?

The existing research that we found were either about value co-creation within service ecosystems, how experiences can be created or how different organisational structure and culture can contribute to a company’s effectiveness. However, we did not find anything about how experiences can be created via the service ecosystem and how the organisational structure and culture can contribute to value co-creation within the service ecosystem. We believe that connecting these research fields can lead to development of knowledge.

1.3. Scope and limitations

During the past 30 years Vietnam has been developed rapidly due to “Đổi Mới”, which are reforms of the economic and political systems launched in 1986 (The World Bank, 2018b). The reforms have transformed Vietnam from one of the world’s poorest countries to a lower middle-income country (ibid). This transformation has led to that income per capita has grown from below $100 (UNDP, 2019) to about $2400 (2017) (The World Bank, 2019).
Vietnam’s shift from a centrally planned to a market economy has transformed the country from one of the poorest in the world into a lower middle-income country. Vietnam now is one of the most dynamic emerging countries in East Asia region. (The World Bank, 2018b)

Since the introduction of “Đổi Mới”, Vietnam has gone from an agriculture-based economy to a thriving urbanising industrial economy within manufacturing and construction sectors, exports and foreign direct investment (OECD, 2018). Furthermore, Vietnam’s service sector has recently faced a rapid growth and now represents more than 40% of the country’s GDP (ibid). Due to this, the tourism sector has become one of the largest sources of income for Vietnam (UI, 2018). The total GDP contribution from travel and tourism was calculated to be 9.4% of the total GDP contribution in Vietnam during 2017 (WTTC, 2018). It was further estimated that the tourism industry supported 7.6% of total employment in Vietnam (ibid). In fact Vietnam recorded the fastest growth in international arrivals in South-east Asia during 2017 (World Tourism Organization, 2018). Even though Vietnam is facing an increase in visiting tourists, the country has a problem with returning tourism (Ngan, 2017). According to Ngan (2017), visa issues, road safety, low quality of services and hassling are some of the reasons for low rates of returning tourism. Vietnam has a lot of traffic accidents and the country has not taken the pedestrians into consideration (Ngan, 2017). Furthermore, the low quality of services and vendors that does not want to take a no for an answer have also contributed to the country’s bad reputation (ibid).

This study was conducted in Vietnam, since we wanted to study an emerging country’s rural tourism. We have based this study on the travel organisation Christina’s, which has its operations in Vietnam (Christinas, 2019a). The company was founded in 2014 (ibid). Christina’s is a company that creates tourism experiences in Vietnam via their brands Christina’s Accommodation, Onetrip, The Joi Factory and Müvv (ibid). Through these brands Christina’s can offer a full tourism experience. Since, they offer their customers a place to live, tours of Vietnam, a place to eat and transportation options.

This study does not include Christina’s Accommodation, The Joi Factory and Müvv. We mainly focus on the organisation of Christina’s and their platform and brand Onetrip. Christina’s have a complex service ecosystem with many actors within it. Therefore, we have focused on the following actors: us as customers, local service providers, employees and the
CEO of Christina’s. In section 3.5 we discuss why we chose Christina’s as our case company and the introduction of Christina’s can be found in section 4.2.
2. Theoretical framework

This section lays the theoretical foundation of our study. When we constructed our theoretical framework, we chose articles that had a connection to the relevant fields of this study. The purpose of this was to create an understanding of what the fields has concluded about the research areas. The written material was found through the database UniSearch, a library service that allow for all-in-one search of articles, books and more through a single search entry. The theoretical framework of this study constitutes of articles from academical journals and books written by researchers of the relevant fields. By using a single search engine, we had the same search requirements for all the academical journal articles retrieved. The search requirements verified that the academical articles were peer reviewed and in English. From the different journal articles and books that we found, we went through their bibliography, in order to find new articles and books in order to identify new topics and theories. This method gave us a lot of material and we limited the theories and research that related to our research questions. This is due to our timeframe of 20 weeks; we needed to select the most relevant research and theories for our study.
Figure 1 above, show our analytical model which shows how we believe the different theories relates to each other. We wanted to study experiences within a tourism context and how the focal firm can affect it. Firm’s capabilities can originate from their organisational structure and culture, which can be inspired by the founder(s) personal values. Experiences are co-created between the customer and several actors within a service ecosystem. Service ecosystems are usually initiated by a focal firm. This means that firms have certain control over the customer journey and in turn, the experiences. For instance, firms can choose which partners they want to work with. In addition, they can implement technology to improve the service ecosystems and to market the experiences. Nevertheless, since experiences are based on customers emotional response system, they can also be influenced by external factors such as reviews from other customers. This can result in value co-creation between the customers and the actors in the service ecosystem.
2.1. Experiences within tourism

Verhoef et al. (2009) argues that firms should focus on developing good customer experiences since it is important in creating loyalty towards brands and services which can result in economic value. In addition Sipe (2018) stated that customers are becoming more likely to spend money on experiences rather than on only services, especially within the tourism industry. Finally, Berry, Carbone and Haeckel (2002) argues that it is important to focus on developing good customer experiences, since another focus could affect the firms negatively.

Experience economies are referred to as an overall experience where service providers combines goods and services (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Pine and Gilmore (1998) mean that a service can be used as the stage of the experience and that goods can be used as props to strengthen the experience. The authors thereby distinguish experiences from services and goods. However, Verhoef et al. (2009) points out that an experience entails all responses that a customers can have after direct and indirect contact with a company indicating that it does not necessarily need to be a staged event. Direct contact is usually connected to purchase whereas indirect contact can refer to advertisements or reviews (Verhoef et al., 2009). The authors further argue that firms has a certain degree of control over customers’ experiences, but it can also be influenced by uncontrollable factors such as opinions of other customers. Pine and Gilmore (1998) strengthens this argument by stating that the success of experiences is dependent on design, service delivery and marketing. But it also requires customers participation which the firm cannot control (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). It is, furthermore, a holistic experience that resolves around a customer’s emotions from a purchase (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The customers’ emotional reaction is in turn, affected by their cognitive, social, physical, affective and physical responses to a seller (ibid).

Berry, Carbone and Haeckel (2002) claim that firms can control the customers’ experiences by taking their journey into consideration. The authors further states that the customer journey entails everything from customers’ expectations before the experience takes place to their thoughts after the experience. This means that a customer’s thoughts and feelings both before and after the experience will influence the experience itself. However, the customer journey has become more complex after the development of information and communications technology (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). This is due to that customers are now interacting with firms through different “touch points” in several different channels, which makes it harder for companies to control the customers’ experiences (ibid). Lemon and Verhoef (2016) refer to “touch points” as each occasion where a company and a person is in contact with each other.
The authors further mean that experiences may be impacted by specific aspects such as a brand or technology and that these could be an example of a “touch point”.

2.2. Tourism and technology

Tourism is a sector that has grown fast the past decades (Frew, 2000; Gössling, 2017). This is due to the development of information and communications technology (ICT) (Frew, 2000). Gössling (2017) argued that ICT can be used as a strategic tool for the development of sustainable tourism. Kachniewska (2015) mean that rural tourism is sustainable since it attracts tourists to less popular destinations or areas. She further argues that rural tourism would activate the economic development of local communities and that the negative social and environmental impacts would be low in these areas.

Dávid (2011) states that rural tourism entails everything that creates a rural experience, this could be when tourists experience local culture in the form of traditions or when they are enjoying the natural environment of rural areas. Kachniewska (2015) argues that rural tourism can decrease poverty in rural areas since it can provide more income and employment opportunities for the inhabitants. She further means that it can allow more residents to stay and live in rural areas and that it may even have the possibility of attracting new inhabitants to the area. Despite the advantages from tourism, Borden, Coles and Shaw (2017) means that the growth in tourism also has consequences since it is partly responsible for issues such as climate change and the decline of resources. However, tourism can be approached from a sustainable perspective which has the possibility of limiting the negative impacts (Dávid, 2011). According to Dávid (2011) and Kachniewska (2015), sustainable development within tourism includes economic, social and environmental aspects. All of these need to be considered for a business to be considered sustainable within tourism (Dávid, 2011).

Ecotourism refers to protecting the environment where there is tourism activity (Dávid, 2011). As indicated by Borden, Coles and Shaw (2017), tourism has negative effects on the environment and it is thereby necessary to invest time and resources into preserving the natural environments where there is tourism activity. Dávid (2011) means that it is important for organisations to collaborate with tourists and partners in order to succeed with sustainable tourism. For example, that there should be programmes that encourages tourists to aid in protecting the environment of the area that they are visiting. However, Borden, Coles and Shaw (2017) mentioned that managers would generally neglect pursuing environment protection.
goals if it decreases the quality of the service they are providing. This is due to that managers would not want to risk lowering the guest satisfaction (Borden, Coles and Shaw, 2017).

In order to be sustainable, organisations must also protect the host communities of tourism. (Dávid, 2011). This means that they should preserve the culture and heritage of its population in addition to not exploiting natural resources. Lekaota (2015) and Dávid (2011) argues that the integration of locals into the development and management of tourism is important for the cultural protection of locals. By developing sustainable relationships with local entrepreneurs of the areas that organisations seeks to bring tourists, they increase the chances of protecting the culture of locals as well as favouring them economically (Kachniewska, 2015). Lekaota (2015) also argues that the success of a tourist destination is dependent on the support and engagement of locals and that they would be more inclined to be supportive if they were empowered rather than neglected.

Jaakkola, Helkkula and Aarikka-Stenroos (2015) argued that the effective use of ICT and the Internet can be a base of expanding the firm’s brand and reaching potential customers. The authors further argued that it can be used to get employees to commit to the firm and to work more strategically. Internet-based platforms has become an important aspect within tourism, since it enables a global connection and an easier approach to reach customers around the world (Gössling, 2017). According to Gössling (2017), tourists use the Internet to find relevant information about a destination such as entrance fees, reservations or products and services related to travel. Gössling (2017) further argued that ICT has become one of the most important factors in the demand and supply structures of tourism. This is due to the role of ICT; it can match the supply and demand sides by providing information about availability and locations or departure times and connections (Gössling, 2017). The negative side with Internet-based platforms is that it creates competition between the businesses within tourism on both the demand and supply sides (ibid). For example, platforms such as TripAdvisor creates competition through ratings and the ratings can contribute to higher guest expectations, which means that the customers gets more power over the businesses (Gössling, 2017).

In the traditional multisided platform, the firm who owns the platform enable the contact between the creator of a service or a product with a customer (Hagiu, 2014; Park and Kohler, 2019). Firms can use Internet-based platforms in order to match their customers’ demand, for example by matching customers with service providers (de Oliveira and Cortimiglia, 2017), see Figure 2 below. In the traditional value chain, costs and revenues are separated by having
costs on the left side of the value chain and revenues on the right side (Eisenmann, Parker and Van Alstyne, 2006). But Eisenmann, Parker and Van Alstyne (2006) mean that two-sided markets differ from this traditional view, since two-sided networks have both costs and revenues. They furthermore argued that a two-sided market often consists of one platform that are used by both sides. Two-sided markets (or two-sided networks) are also known as multisided platforms that brings together two different groups in a market (Eisenmann, Parker and Van Alstyne, 2006), which mean that it can either be B2B (business to business) or B2C (business to customers) (Muzellec, Ronteau and Lambkin, 2015).

2.3. Marketing within tourism

The information and communication technology (ICT) and the social media are two factors that has changed the global tourism system (Gössling, 2017). In addition, the development of ICT has also allowed businesses to move their operations to the Internet in order to reach more potential customers and to reduce costs by the absence of physical stores (Muzellec, Ronteau and Lambkin, 2015). Customers are now more connected, informed and active due to the development of ICT and the Internet (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Ramaswamy, 2011). The easy access to information on firms, products, technologies, performance, prices and customers reactions has reduced the geographical limitations of accessing information (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). This means that potential travellers are no longer limited to physical stores and documents when choosing among travelling options (ibid).

It is essential that travel companies adapt to the growth of information technology and develops strategies to reach their targeted group of customers via the Internet (Gössling, 2017). According to Cheuk et al. (2018), digital marketing is a low-cost and effective method. It is furthermore a tool in which the physical barriers separating the potential customers and markets can be avoided which is especially important for rural areas that are rather unknown (Cheuk et al., 2018). The usage of social media platforms to promote and offer products is a form of digital marketing (ibid). Social media is referred to as a website community where people can express their needs and value through a common platform such as YouTube or Facebook (Musthafa and Hasman, 2018). According to Gössling (2017), social media has become
increasingly more important for economic success within tourism. The author also mean that social media can be used to promote sustainable tourism. However, as stated by Cheuk et al. (2018), there are several barriers that hinders locals of rural areas to use digital marketing, which includes the usage of social media marketing. Examples of these are limited technological and language competency.

Digital marketing can also be used to promote brands, which allows firms to differentiate their products from others’ through a combination of tools such as symbols and designs (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). Kotler and Gertner (2002) mean that brands can evoke emotions and increase or decrease the perceived value of a product. Countries and cities can also be seen as brands and can attract tourists through branding and marketing (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). An increased amount of tourism can generate higher wages in low-paying jobs in the service industries such as restaurants or hotels (Kotler, Haider and Rein, 1993). Kotler and Gertner (2002) points out that travellers’ choices are influenced by country images that are based on people’s perceptions and impressions of places. The authors mean that a country’s image needs to be believable, simple and appealing in order to attract tourists.

The development of information technology has also increased the pressure for firms to deliver good experiences. Gössling (2017) means that any service provider can now be evaluated online which impacts the perception and the success of the business. This is due to that customers can make comparisons between different offers based on reviews from previous users of sites and services (Chekalina, Fuchs and Lexhagen, 2018). Sustainable customer relationships are likely to result in more positive comments and service recommendations (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008). It has thereby become increasingly more important to develop sustainable long-term relationships with customers (Li and Petrick, 2008). So called relationship marketing primarily developed in B2B but has since become significant in B2C as well (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Relationship marketing seeks on building trust and commitment between the firm and their customers (ibid).

Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2008) defines the process where customers share their experiences with others as word of mouth (WOM). The authors mean that these experiences can either be positive or negative which will impact how they are communicated. The reason why customers want to share their thoughts and opinions about a service can either be because they want to feel better about a negative experience or because they want to relive positive memories
WOM used to entail communication between individuals (ibid).

The process where customers share their thoughts and opinions about a service online is referred to as electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008; Kitcharoen, 2019). Kitcharoen (2019) mean that customers purchasing decisions are greatly affected by previous customers via eWOM. It has even been indicated that customers are more affected by other customers than they are by marketing campaigns or experts due to that they find information from previous customers to be more reliable (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008; Kitcharoen, 2019). This is especially applicable within the tourism industry (Kitcharoen, 2019). There are for example sites such as TripAdvisor and booking.com where people can share tips and comments about their travel experiences, which will affect the choices that other tourists makes regarding their own travels (ibid). Kitcharoen (2019) mean that this affects brand behaviour since positive comments can make customers favour certain brands or services more that negative comments. In addition, the feedback can be used to understand how guest satisfaction can be improved (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008; Kitcharoen, 2019), but also increase customer loyalty and purchases (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2018).

Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2018) means that firms can benefit from eWOM. For instance, encouraging customers to write and share comments via eWOM can create a connection between the firm and the customers which can stimulate loyalty and future purchases (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2018). In addition, by highlighting positive customer reviews on their website, firms encourages customers to access public review forums which can create an interest for the firms products or services (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008).

2.4. Value co-creation within service ecosystems

Grönroos (2011) refer to service as “value-creating support to another party’s practices” (2011:285). While Vargo, Maglio and Akaka (2008) refer to service as: “Service is the application of competences (knowledge and skills) by one entity for the benefit of another” (2008:145). Tourism is an example of a service sector where suppliers and customers are interacting closely. Shaw, Bailey and Williams (2011) means that this results in high levels of value co-creation. This type of reciprocal value can be seen in businesses where the customers’ value that is generated from the support of suppliers, also generates financial value for the suppliers (Grönroos, 2011).
Since value is always co-created, Vargo and Lusch (2008) has developed ten fundamental premises (FPs) for S-D logic. We aim to study how value co-creation possibilities can occur within a service ecosystem. Therefore, we think that FP6-FP10 are most suitable for our study. FP6 implies that the customers are always a part of value co-creation. Furthermore, FP7 means that firms cannot deliver value by themselves, but only offer value. According to FP8, a service-centred view implies that the value co-creation is customer oriented and relational. Vargo and Lusch (2008) mean that the context of value co-creation occurs within a network, therefore, FP9 “All social and economic actors are resource integrators” (2008:7). Lastly, FP10 “Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary” (Vargo and Lusch, 2008:7). This implies that within a service ecosystem, the actors can define value differently, for example, how they perceive an experience (Vargo and Lusch, 2008).

Value is a diffuse concept that is hard to measure since it is based on people’s perceptions (Vargo, Maglio and Akaka, 2008; Grönroos, 2011). Nevertheless, it is achieved when a customers’ well-being is increased after the usage of products or services (Grönroos, 2011). Vargo and Lusch (2004) mean that value can be achieved in the form of financial gains, either between business partners or between a business and a customer. But Ekman, Raggio and Thompson (2016) stated that there are different types of values, it can either be tangible or intangible. The authors mean that value is not always measurable, since people perceive value differently. Tangible value is in the form of monetary funds and intangible value is non-monetary (Ekman, Raggio and Thompson, 2016). Ekman, Raggio and Thompson (2016) found three types of value in their research: economic value, sustainability value and brand value. The economic value refers to cost savings, revenue generation and improved performance due to more knowledgeable employees (Ekman, Raggio and Thompson, 2016). Ekman, Raggio and Thompson (2016) refer to sustainability value as the environmental and societal benefits. Societal benefits are the feeling of well-being and belonging to a network. The authors mean that brand value is how organisations are viewed by others, which can generate word of mouth. Ekman, Raggio and Thompson (2016) further mean that brand association is important for the brand value, which means that the organisations reputation can be based on its brand.

Value can be co-created within business ecosystems where different businesses jointly develops their capabilities to offer new products and innovations (Moore, 1993). Service ecosystems can be referred to as a business ecosystem (Vargo and Lusch, 2011), since an ecosystem constitutes of enterprises that adapts and evolves to the market environment (Frow et al., 2014). For businesses to succeed in service ecosystems they need to have a shared
targeting vision (Kandiah and Gossain, 1998). This does not mean that the firms must have an entirely shared vision, but they must share some aspects of it in order to gain value-creative advantages from their collaboration (ibid). A service ecosystem is usually created when an actor reaches out to other actors with a value proposition (Ekman, Raggio and Thompson, 2016). When the other actors accept this proposition, they agree to become co-creators. However, Ekman, Raggio and Thompson (2016) argues that all actors will only be able to create and benefit from value once the service can be delivered.

Vargo, Maglio and Akaka (2008) argued that the function of a service system is to use its own resources in combination with other systems’ resources to create value for themselves. Vargo and Lusch (2011), defines two types of resources, operand and operant. Operand resources refer to natural resources that requires usage to have value and operant resources refers to resources such as knowledge and human skills, that can be used to create value (Lusch, Vargo and O’Brien, 2007; Vargo and Lusch, 2011). According to Vargo and Lusch (2011) “/…/firms, consumers, suppliers, distributors, stakeholders, etc. are all seen as resource-integrating, service-providing enterprises” (2011: 184) . Furthermore, as stated by Hilton, Hughes and Chalcraft (2012), value is only co-created when the resources from the different actors are integrated within a service ecosystem. Service ecosystems constitute of systems that integrate resources through the exchange of skills and knowledge that are based on pre-determined arrangements that are continuously renewed and generated through a platform (Polese et al., 2018).

The purpose of connecting different groups with each other within a multisided platform is to enable value co-creation opportunities (Muzellec, Ronteau and Lambkin, 2015). Value co-creation is in the essence of multisided platforms where interaction between the customers and firms allows for integration of their separate knowledge and skills (de Oliveira and Cortimiglia, 2017). It is fundamental that the company that implemented the co-creative platform provides the necessary tools for these interactions to take place (ibid). Furthermore, it is important that the company that developed the platform develops a business model where value can be fully captured in order to motivate actors continuing participation on the platform (de Oliveira and Cortimiglia, 2017).

Pinho et al. (2014) states that companies can only offer value propositions and that it is the customers’ participation and response that determines the value that is created from the experience. Furthermore, value can only be co-created by the customer and other actors who
combine their resources. This means that the firm alone does not have the control of value co-creation, but it is co-created by several actors within a service ecosystem (Pinho et al., 2014). Shaw, Bailey and Williams (2011) thereby argues that the process of value co-creation is especially significant in memorable customer experiences related to the consumption of services and goods.

2.5. Business model

Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart (2010), refers to the choice of a business model as a form of strategy. A business model indicates how a firm operates in order to create and capture value (Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart, 2010). A good business model identifies customer value (Magretta, 2002). According to Teece, (2010), this includes the identification of the targeted segments, the features that will be included in a product or service, what kind of value will be created for customers, and finally the assembling of features that will capture this value. It is, furthermore, essential that a business model identifies appropriate cost structures so that profit can be made (Magretta, 2002).

Tactics are choices that firms can make in order to carry out their business model (Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart, 2010). These choices are essential since it directly affects how much value a firm creates and captures (ibid). Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart, (2010) argues that a company’s business model sets the basis for which tactics that company can choose from. The authors further imply that a business model does not only provide a framework for which tactics a firm can choose from, but it also limits the amount of choices that is open to them. There is furthermore a term known as tactical interaction, which refers to how a firm’s tactics affects other firms that they are either collaborating with or competing against (Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart, 2010). This occurs when an organisation’s business model relates to the business models of other firms (ibid). Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart (2010) mean that the value creation and value capture of a firm, is not only dependant on the choices by that same firm, but that it can also be affected by choices of other organisations.

Recent shifts towards e-businesses and the bottom of the pyramid has stimulated extensive research in the field of business models since the development of an effective business model is required to survive in such environments (Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart, 2010). According to Thompson and MacMillan (2010), there has also been an emergence of firms that operate on business models that generate profit while reducing poverty at the same time. This simultaneous way of doing business can grow into a bigger market with many profit-making
and poverty-reduction possibilities (Thompson and MacMillan, 2010). Prahalad and Hart (2002) recommends that firms who seeks to do business at the base of the pyramid should integrate locals into their distribution- and production channels.

2.6. Organisational theories

Value from experiences is essentially dependant on customers emotional response to the experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). It can thereby be argued that the personal and emotional bond between customers and employees can increase the value of experience economies (Jaakkola, Helkkula and Aarikka-Stenroos, 2015). This is due to that the shared experiences can result in positive memories which can strengthen the bond between the customer and the firm. Jaakkola, Helkkula and Aarikka-Stenroos (2015) implies that this can also affect customers perceived value of future purchases from the firm. Due to the arguments above we believed that it was relevant to include organisational theory and how it impacts service employees into our study.

2.6.1. Organisational commitment

Affective commitment refers to a type of employee commitment that can lead to less employee turnover, absenteeism and stress in the workplace (Mercurio, 2015). Mercurio (2015) describes affective commitment as an individual’s identification and involvement in an organisation. The author argues that affective commitment in an individual means that the individual identifies with the organisations values and that they have a higher willingness to be productive in the organisation. It also makes employees more loyal to the organisational goals (Mercurio, 2015). Cho and Park (2011) furthermore, argues that organisational commitment makes employees more motivated to work for the organisation.

Mercurio (2015) found that social relationships within the organisation and good HR practices can lead to increased affective commitment. Good HR practices include recruitment, socialisation and training and development. It has furthermore been suggested that trust leads to organisational commitment and employee satisfaction (Cho and Park, 2011; Mercurio, 2015). Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) defines trust as the willingness to risk something. Cho and Park (2011) defines three types of trust within organisations: trust in co-workers, trust in supervisors and trust in management. According to the authors, all these types of trust leads to organisational commitment but trust in management has the biggest impact.

Goal clarity and autonomy leads to trust in management (Cho and Park, 2011). Goal clarity refers to how well the employees understand the organisations goals and how they should be
achieved (ibid). Cho and Park (2011) mean that organisations can achieve goal clarity by having a clear mission and objectives. It has, furthermore, been shown that goals can affect employee motivation and efficiency if the goals are aligned with the values of the leader in the organisation (Hasel and Grover, 2017). However, to be effective, the employees must identify themselves with the leadership’s values (ibid).

Autonomy is closely related to empowerment of the employees and can be achieved by allowing employees to be more flexible (Cho and Park, 2011). Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) further means that trusting employees to perform work-related tasks empowers the employees. In addition, supporting employees affects trust and can positively affect employee performance (Hasel and Grover, 2017). It has also been implied that organisational culture affects trust and organisational commitment (Cho and Park, 2011). For instance, strong control within the organisation can prevent trust from developing (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995).

2.6.2. Organisational structure

Every organisation must find a structure that suits their capabilities and situation (Grant, 2016). Grant (2016) argues that an organisation needs to be structured around a hierarchy, where hierarchy can both be a mean for control via authority and used to achieve coordination through efficiency and adaptation. There are also organisations that evolves around natural hierarchies which can be structured around teams (Grant, 2016).

The development of Internet-based tools and platforms has transformed organisational dynamics (Ashuri and Bar-Ilan, 2016). Ashuri and Bar-Ilan (2016) states that tools and platforms have made it easier for employees to communicate and work, but also made it easier to find employees who share the company’s values and that the company desires. This can be done through decentralisation, let the group who leads the recruitment sort through the potential candidates and then send it further to responsible members without having to go through middle management (Ashuri and Bar-Ilan, 2016). In addition, decentralised organisations are more likely to solve complex tasks faster (Carzo, 2006). Flat organisation are decentralised, since there are less or no level of middle management between the employees and the executives (Ghiselli and Siegel, 1972).

In his article, Worthy (1950) argues that small organisations are more productive than large organisations. He furthermore stated that employees within small organisations had better morale than large organisations. The advantages of small organisations can be implemented
into large organisations by using a flat organisational structure (Worthy, 1950). Worthy (1950) mean that when employees are challenged to take responsibility for their actions, this will help them to grow and mature as people (Worthy, 1950). According to Carzo and Yanouzas (1969) a flat structure allows for self-actualisation. A flat organisational structure allows also for a looser communication structure, which means that the different groups within the organisation can communicate with each other (Carzo and Yanouzas, 1969). According to Carzo and Yanouzas (1969), this will allow the organisation to make faster decisions and information will not disappear along the way through different management levels.

In flat organisations the leadership style is democratic leadership which means that the responsibilities of the group’s objectives and activities, and its governance are shared between the superior and the subordinates (Ghiselli and Siegel, 1972). Democratic leadership can also be referred to as participative leadership, which means that the management relies on the input from the whole group (Auerbach, 2018).

2.6.3. Organisational culture

Viinamäki (2012) stated that organisational values define some part of the organisational culture and that values of an organisation can also serve as a bonding mechanism between the employees. The author further argued that values have recently served as an important component of the organisation’s strategic direction, mission determination and visions. Schein (2009) stated that organisational culture can be divided into three different layers: artefacts, espoused values and underlying assumptions. In other words, a company’s culture is both visible and invisible. Artefacts are the things that are easiest to observe, which is the things one can see, hear and feel (Schein, 2009). When it comes to the espoused values, Schein (2009) means that it needs to be described by someone from the inside of the organisation. Underlying assumptions are the expected behaviour, which in turn is the beliefs and values of the organisations (Schein, 2009). While Sathe (1983) stated that “Culture is the set of important understandings (often unstated) that members of a community share in common.” (1983:6).

This helps individuals to understand the organisational functioning in order act accordingly to the norms of the organisation they work in (Deshpande and Webster, 1989). Organisational culture furthermore facilitates communication and collaboration among the employees, which in turn help them to be more productive and make better decisions (Kuo and Tsai, 2019). Kuo and Tsai (2019) stated in their article, that strong cultural norms leads to a more efficient organisation, since the norms is the foundation of behaviours that will influence the firm’s performance. Therefore, organisational culture could affect the performance of the
organisation, since it forms the informal behaviours of the employees within the organisation (Kuo and Tsai, 2019).

Wallach (1983) mean that organisational culture “... is the shared understanding of an organisation’s employees – how we do things around here” (1983:29). As the other authors Wallach (1983) also refer organisational culture to the beliefs, values and norms of the organisation, which can be communicate effectively within the organisation (Gautama So et al., 2018). Instead of dividing the organisational culture into different level like Schein (2009), Wallach (1983) stated there are three types of organisational culture: bureaucratic, innovative and supportive. Bureaucratic cultures refers to centralisation of authority, which means that the lines of responsibility and authority are clearly defined (Wallach, 1983; Kuo and Tsai, 2019).

The workplaces of innovative cultures are characterised by creativity, challenges and risks (Wallach, 1983). In addition, organisations with innovative cultures empower and motivate their employees to share ideas in order support and develop the organisation (Kuo and Tsai, 2019). Organisations with supportive cultures are considered more as warm and “fuzzy” workplaces (Wallach, 1983). It is furthermore, a culture where people are usually friendly, fair and helpful, which means that the environment of the organisation is more trustful, safe, encouraging, open and collaborative (Wallach, 1983). Supportive cultures creates a feeling of an extended family (Wallach, 1983; Kuo and Tsai, 2019), which in turn facilitate free communication and joint problem solving (Kuo and Tsai, 2019). Kuo and Tsai (2019) mean that a supportive culture also leads to higher levels of job satisfaction and performance.

Organisational culture starts with the leadership, this mean that organisational culture and leadership goes hand in hand (Schein, 2009). If the leader is the founder of an organisation, he or she can create the culture that is appropriate for the organisation by imposing beliefs, values and assumptions onto new employees. If the founder succeeds with the implementation of the cultural elements, then it will reflect the whole organisation’s leadership style (Schein, 2009).

2.6.4. Value-based leadership

Experiences should reflect organisational values (Berry, Carbone and Haeckel, 2002). Grant (2016) argued that values can be referred to as beliefs about how purposes and visions can be realised. The author further mean that values are typically used to demonstrate a company’s image. However, according to Grant (2016) and Hopkins and Scott (2016), values can also be used to guide employees through choices and decisions in an organisation. Grant (2016) further states that reliability and consistency in an organisations core values influences employee
performance and commitment. Common values also have the possibility of strengthening the level of cooperation among employees (Grant, 2016) and increasing the feeling of belonging to an organisation (Nygaard et al., 2017).

Viinamäki (2012) argues that the integration of values and ethics in an organisation are essential for the organisation’s survival. The author further means that values plays a significant role in effective leadership of large companies. In addition, Nygaard et al. (2017) claims that leaders who led their employees through example will encourage values and commitment to the company as well as service quality. Hasel and Grover (2017) further argues that understanding and identification with the values of a leader can lead to trust, which can positively affect effectiveness and performance in the organisation.

Leading through values can be defined as value-based leadership (VBL) (Hopkins and Scott, 2016). Viinamäki (2012) mean that VBL means caring about values such as integrity, empowerment and social responsibility. He furthermore means that management do not need to rely on authority if they used VBL. According to Hopkins and Scott (2016), several theories have emerged from VBL, one of which is authentic leadership. Zubair and Kamal (2016) found a positive correlation between authentic leadership, and workflow and creativity. The authors define authentic leaders as goal oriented, consistent, moral and as people who have sustainable relationships with those, they are leading.

Zubair and Kamal (2016) further mean that workflow is achieved when employees find satisfaction in completing tasks and that creativity is usually associated with innovation. Sipe (2018) argue that experience economies require continuous innovation and that leaders should correlate employees’ passion with suitable projects since it will stimulate new ideas. The author further mean that employees are important in co-creating value regarding guest experiences and innovation.
3. Research methodology

In business research, it is important to be aware of the research approach and what kind of scientific perspective the research should have (Justesen and Mik-Meyer, 2011; Bryman and Bell, 2015). This lays the foundation of the study, which means that the way the researchers are interpreting, interviewing and observing is affected by the research approach (Bryman and Bell, 2011; David and Sutton, 2016). In this section, we describe our research approach and argue for why it is suitable for our study. This section also feature a description of our data collection methods.

3.1. The scientific perspective

There are two different concepts that forms a scientific perspective: ontology and epistemology (Justesen and Mik-Meyer, 2011). Ontological considerations refer to how the researchers’ assumptions and views could influence the research process (Bryman and Bell, 2011). But Justesen and Mik-Meyer (2011) state that ontology is about how the researchers view the social world studied, which means how they perceive the social world. Epistemological considerations are about how the social world should be studied (Bryman and Bell, 2011) and how to gain knowledge about the studied field (Justesen and Mik-Meyer, 2011).

The epistemology of this study is based on interpretivism, which means that the researchers want to understand the studied phenomenon through the observations they conduct (David and Sutton, 2016). Therefore, the ontology of this study has a phenomenological perspective which can also be referred to as the hermeneutical perspective (David and Sutton, 2016). The hermeneutical perspective allows the researchers to interpret the studied phenomenon, which means that they try to understand the studied phenomenon from the perspective of the people that they interact with (Justesen and Mik-Meyer, 2011; Bryman and Bell, 2015). The hermeneutical perspective can be used in order to interpret interviews and participation observations, in order to understand complex phenomena since this kind of data collection methods often involve groups such as organisations and individuals (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2017) argued that the hermeneutical perspective is based on the objectivity of the researchers, which means that this study have a relative objectivity and never an absolute objectivity.

The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of how value can be co-created within a business ecosystem, especially the value co-creation possibilities between the local service providers in Vietnam’s rural areas and Christina’s. We therefore needed a scientific perspective
that allowed us to interpret the empirical data from different angles, since the people who we interacted with had different experiences about *Christina’s* and *Onetrip*. This can be related to the hermeneutical perspective (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The hermeneutical perspective allowed us to understand the studied phenomenon through our interpretations of the perspectives of the participators in our study.

### 3.2. Research approach

Bryman and Bell (2015) stated that interpretive research means that the knowledge of the studied phenomenon develops from the process of both involving theoretical concepts and empirical findings. This can be connected to an abductive research approach (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The abductive approach contains both deductive and inductive approaches (David and Sutton, 2016). With a deductive approach the researchers forms hypothesise relating to existing theories which they test via empirical findings (Blaikie, 2004a; Bryman and Bell, 2011). The deductive approach allowed us to understand the theoretical background of the related fields before conducting our study. The deductive approach also allowed us to construct a relevant interview guide based on existing theories and research. The interview guide was used to collect our empirical data. More about our interview guide, see section 3.6.3.

Meanwhile, an inductive approach means that the researcher has a more explorative approach (David and Sutton, 2016), where they seek to find general conclusions from the collected data (Blaikie, 2004b; David and Sutton, 2016). Bryman and Bell (2011) explain that an inductive process implies that the researcher is trying to generalise the inferences out of the empirical findings. This approach allowed us to be explorative and to seek an understanding of the phenomenon through interviews with the employees of *Christina’s* that works with *Onetrip*. In addition, we participated on tours provided by *Onetrip*, which allowed us to gain an even deeper understanding through observations of the studied phenomenon.

### 3.3. Research strategy

A qualitative approach indicates that researchers have been trying to understand the social world through exploration of that world (Bryman and Bell, 2011), which mean that the researchers are committed to field activities in order to understand the studied phenomenon (Kirk and Miller, 1986). Qualitative research is a more explorative form of research, it allows the researchers to study the phenomenon more in depth, in order to gain a better understanding of it (David and Sutton, 2016). According to David and Sutton (2016), the purpose of a qualitative study is to find connections between the samples and the studied phenomenon rather
than to quantify it. This also means that the researchers can draw conclusions from the collected data about the phenomenon (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

A qualitative approach is suitable when the researchers are using interviews and observations as data collection methods (David and Sutton, 2016), which was the case for this study. Furthermore, a qualitative approach is also a suitable approach when the researchers cannot connect any theories or hypothesis to the study beforehand (David and Sutton, 2016).

Since we observed and interacted with the service providers on tours and interviewed the employees of Christina's, we believed that a qualitative approach was suitable for our study. When using a qualitative approach, the researchers need to think about the subjectivity, since the interpretation of the collected data is only based on the researchers’ views and assumptions (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This leads to less objectivity and generalisability and therefore affects the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study (ibid). This and what we have done to reduce these risks is discussed further in section 3.8.

3.4. Research design

According to Yin (2014), the research design is a logical plan that links the collected empirical data and the conclusions of the study with its research questions. Furthermore, a case study is suitable when we want to study something that happens right now (Yin, 2014). Bryman and Bell (2015) argued that a case study can be based on individuals, organisations, locations or events. It is furthermore a preferable approach when researchers are uncertain about the phenomenon they seek to study (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015), which relates to our circumstances in the beginning of this study.

This study is based on a single case study of the organisation Christina's with the focus on Onetrip. A single case study can either be holistic or embedded (Scholz and Tietje, 2002; Yin, 2014). A holistic case study only studies the nature of an organisation (Yin, 2014), while, an embedded case study involves more than one unit or object in the analysis (Scholz and Tietje, 2002; Yin, 2014). Furthermore, it allows the use of different data collection methods within the analysis of the different units (Yin, 2014), which we have done.

Case study evidence can come from six different sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations and physical artefacts (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) argued that it is important to use evidence from multiple sources that converge into the same findings. In this study we have used these following data collection sources: documents,
semi-structured interviews and participation observations as data collection methods. We used documents from different world organisations in order to get a better view of Vietnam’s development, economy and its tourism, and we also used documents provided by Christina’s. This study is an embedded case study, since we studied different teams within Christina’s that are working with Onetrip. The main unit was the organisation, and the subunits were the individuals from different teams that we interviewed. We, furthermore, participated on different tours that Onetrip offered in order to gain a better understanding of how they co-created value within their business ecosystem. More about our data collection methods can be found in section 3.6.

Halinen and Törnroos (2005) stated in their article that theory generation in management and marketing literature often comes from case study research. Furthermore, Burawoy (1998) stated that the gained knowledge from the empirical findings in a case study can be used to extend theories. de Oliveira and Cortimiglia (2017) used a case study to conduct their research about how value can be co-created in multisided platforms. They collected their empirical data through interviews with the founding team and employees and analysed the internal documents of the studied firms (de Oliveira and Cortimiglia, 2017). de Oliveira and Cortimiglia (2017) based their interview guidelines on existing theories about value co-creation.

Bryman and Bell (2011) argued that using the same methods as other researchers within the same fields ensures a certain level of transferability. Researchers of connected fields has conducted case studies to extract their empirical data and used the same data collection methods as in our study. We, therefore, believed that our choice to do an embedded case study was an appropriate method for this study.

3.5. Case selection

We conducted a case study of Christina’s, with the focus on their social travel platform Onetrip, since it seemed like they collaborated with local service providers throughout Vietnam. We encountered Onetrip through the YouTube channel, Best Ever Food Review Show, where a man named Sonny Side gives food reviews. In one of his videos, he promoted Onetrip (Side, 2017). This inspired us to search for Onetrip on Google, which led us to Onetrip’s official webpage. On the webpage we found more information about Onetrip and the company behind it. We did not find any platform that was like Onetrip. The closest comparison we could make was with Airbnb. However, Lutz and Newlands (2018) stated that Airbnb is more for microentrepreneurs to earn money on their property on their spare time. They furthermore
emphasised that *Airbnb*’s business model is based on a sharing economy, that allows people to share their homes with others.

*Christina’s* is a profit seeking company, who focuses on team development. Therefore, the platform *Onetrip* cannot be viewed as a sharing economy, since their platform is for B2C (Business to Customer) and B2B (Business to Business). We chose *Christina’s* and *Onetrip* since it seemed that they were one of the companies that worked with rural tourism in Vietnam. Furthermore, we could not find a business that seemed to work as closely with local service providers as they do.

### 3.6. Data collection

The data collection was crucial in understanding the service providers’ perspective of *Onetrip*, and how the creators of the platform co-operate within their business ecosystem in order to co-create value. A deeper understanding of the service providers’ and employees’ perspective can only be gained through investing time into individuals by deep interviews or observations (Bryman and Bell, 2011; David and Sutton, 2016).

#### 3.6.1. Cultural differences

In order to be able to do proper interviews, we thought it was important to take the cultural differences into consideration. With the cultural differences in mind we could concentrate on the important aspects of our study, instead of trying to avoid misunderstandings. Therefore, we used a country comparison tool at the website, www.hofstede-insights.com. This allowed us to compare the differences in the national culture between Sweden and Vietnam. This comparison was done since we are from Sweden and are basing our results on a case study in Vietnam. It is important to consider the culture differences between these countries when collecting data. The comparison tool of national culture is based on Professor Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov research (Hofstede Insights, 2019).

Cultural barriers between Sweden and Vietnam can for example be seen in a difference of power distance between the countries (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Sweden are generally characterised as being more neutral and less hierarchical in terms of accessibility to superiors and equal rights than Vietnam. Furthermore, the Vietnamese people are generally more collectivistic than Swedes, meaning that they tend to value family and loyalty above independence (Hofstede, 2001). These differences could have made it challenging to extract negative answers from the interviewees since they were either employees or collaborators of *Christina’s* and hence, had a certain degree of loyalty or power distance to them.
Vietnam can typically be referred to as a high-context culture, indicating that people mostly understand each other through contexts and cues rather than actual words (Kim, Pan and Soo, 1998). On the other hand, Sweden is a low-context culture where meanings are communicated and interpreted through direct words. The high-context culture in Vietnam (Kim, Pan and Soo, 1998) could have provided us with a challenge in correctly interpreting the meaning from the interviewees since we were mostly used to low-context cultures.

We believe that it was important to have these cultural differences in mind when doing interviews with employees of Christina’s. We tried to circumvent these cultural differences through having one of the authors observe during the interview process. This allowed her to more closely inspect facial expressions and body language, to better interpret the interviewees answers. In addition, the author that led the interviews had a Vietnamese background, which means that she better understood the cultural aspect of the answers, which in turn decreased the cultural differences.

3.6.2. Selection of interviewees

In a qualitative study it is hard to tell how many interviews there should be, but the common number are 10-15 interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) the suggested number of interviews should only be used as a guideline when deciding the number of interviewees. The reason for this is that researchers need to interview as many subjects as necessary to ensure a certain level of saturation where further interviews will not contribute in the extension of knowledge about the studied phenomenon (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015).

It can be hard to get access to an organisation from within, when you are seen as an outsider (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Our study of Christina’s gave us access to their staff and collaborators which has increased the possibility of getting interviews. This is due to that the CEO allowed us to study the organisation. We got in touch with the CEO by contacting Christina’s through their online chat-box on their website. He referred us to an employee who set up the interviewees according to relevance.

The employees at Christina’s were not entirely chosen by us. We sent an e-mail to Christina’s and told them that we wanted to interview someone from the following departments: the technical developing team behind Onetrip, business development, human resources (HR) and marketing department, as well as people who worked as guides. The interviews with the employees lasted about 45-60 minutes. The interview with E1 was not a planned interview. We
were out for lunch with a friend and told her about our study and she introduced us to interview person E1. Even though, the interviewee was not selected by us or Christina’s, the information we got was similar to the information we got from other employees we interviewed.

We did a total of seven interviews with nine interviewees with the employees according to Table 1. We thought that this was enough, since our observations also gave us empirical data. The combination of observations and our conducted interviews made our empirical findings reach a certain degree of saturation. We thereby decided that it was not necessary to conduct more interviews.

Table 1 Overview of the interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview person</th>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Length of the interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>Business development</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>58 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>58 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4a</td>
<td>HR</td>
<td>48 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4b</td>
<td>HR</td>
<td>48 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5</td>
<td>Onetrip operations</td>
<td>47 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E6</td>
<td>Guide</td>
<td>58 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E7a</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>48 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E7b</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>48 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6.3. Interview guide

An interview guide is a scheme that allowed us to control the outcome of the interviews to properly answer our research questions. It provides researchers with quite homogenous interview answers (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The usage of an interview guide is appropriate since it focuses the interviews which enables a coherent data collection. This study featured three separate interview guides. One of which was used to interview the employees of Christina’s, another which was directed to local service providers that are integrated into the platform Onetrip, and a third which was directed to the CEO of Christina’s. We believed that this would enable an overall view of the value co-creation process that emerges from the platform Onetrip.

Before our planned interviews with the local service providers, we conducted two interviews with one employee and the CEO (see Appendix 1 for the CEO’s interview guide) of Christina’s in order to gain a better perspective of Onetrip so that the questions for the local service
providers could be more adapted to our study. After our first tour we changed the interview guide for the service providers, so that it was adapted to a more suitable language where they could understand our questions better. For example, we changed our reference from Christina’s to Onetrip so that the local service providers would not get confused over the names. The service providers seemed to see Onetrip as a company instead for what it is, a digital platform. See Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 for the differences. Nevertheless, we never used the adapted interview guide since we chose to interact with the local service providers via participant observation instead.

After our observations during our tours we also modified the interview guide for the employees at Christina’s. Since we gained other perspectives of the company and wanted to know more about the organisation. For example, how Christina’s was able to grow so fast and how Christina’s could maintain such a good quality of the tours even though there were hundreds of kilometres between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City where customers could go on tour. In Appendix 4 we asked: “How long have you been working for Christina’s?” as the first question. But in Appendix 5 we made some changes in the section where we asked about the employee’s role at Christina’s. We started with asking what kind of position they had at the company. This let us understand how the company structure affected the way they work. Furthermore, Appendix 5 has more questions about why the employee chose to work at Christina’s.

3.6.4. Interviews

Interviews can either be structured, semi-structured or unstructured. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) semi-structured and unstructured interviews are common data collection methods when the researches has a qualitative approach of the study. We collected empirical data through semi-structured interviews. These types of interviews are typically used to understand people’s everyday life, from their perspective (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). Furthermore, the usage of semi-structured interviews seemed suitable since it allowed us to modify the questions, in terms of order and necessity (David and Sutton, 2016). According to Bryman and Bell (2011) responses are also more varied and detailed in semi-structured interviews than in structured interviews. Due to a lack of homogeneity in the questions (Bryman and Bell, 2011), unstructured interviews would be less effective because of the challenges of creating a proper analysis of the collected data.
To understand how Christina’s, co-create value within their business ecosystem it seemed relevant to interview the employees of Christina’s who are involved in the platform and the brand Onetrip. This allowed us to gain a better understanding of the organisation, which was crucial in understanding the added value from the platform. However, it is important to consider that the answers from the interviewees may not reflect their true views. This is partly due to cultural differences and organisational biasness. The interviews consisted of employees of Christina’s who may have been hesitant to communicate negative experiences associated with Onetrip and the company. In order to allow the interviewees to give us their true perspective, we asked about “challenges” that they have encountered while working with Christina’s. The word challenge does not necessarily have a negative implication. It does, however, give interviewees more room to explain difficult experiences associated with the company. Nevertheless, it was important for us to have this biasness in mind, when we were interpreting the empirical data.

The interviews were recorded after gaining approval from the interviewees. The recordings were used to ensure that the collected data was transcribed accordingly. Only notes would not allow the same level of trustworthiness in the transcription of the interviews (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Therefore, we divided the interview tasks into two parts: one of the authors led the interviews and the other person took observational notes of the situation. One of the authors of this study has a Vietnamese background and it was thereby decided that she would lead the interviews, in order to limit the cultural difficulties.

Interpreters were used in the interviews for the purpose of limiting the language barriers between us and the service providers (Langdon and Saenz, 2016). Our interpreters were also our guides for each of the tours we participated in. There are identified risks with using interpreters, such as not being able to properly transmit the substance of our questions to the service providers. In addition, content may be lost in translation (Langdon and Saenz, 2016). In order to reduce these kinds of risks, we asked some of the questions about the service providers on our way to the destinations, if it was possible. This enabled the interpreters to better adapt our questions to the service providers during our tours and it gave us some information that we could base our questions on. We, furthermore, intervened if the interpreter received too much immediate information from the service providers. This improved the quality of the translation since the interpreter had less dialogue to translate at a time.
We used different interpreters during our interactions with the different local service providers, since we were in different parts of Vietnam. The usage of multiple interpreters limited the possibility of a coherent language translation since they may have interpreted the content differently (Langdon and Saenz, 2016). The translation method we used was consecutive. This method allowed the interpreter to interpret from English to Vietnamese and from Vietnamese to English, when we had spoken. The consecutive method also enabled a more personal contact with the interviewee even though we did not understand each other directly (Langdon and Saenz, 2016).

It was originally decided that we would have interviews with the local service providers that we encountered on tour. However, due to time limitation of each tour we participated in, it was not possible to have deep interviews with the local service providers. We thereby decided to understand the perspective of the local service providers by interacting with them during our observations. Nevertheless, we did conduct two interviews with the local service providers. But the interpretation of our interview questions was not completely accurate, which one of us understood due to her Vietnamese language skills. We therefore decided to disregard the interviews. However, some of the content from the interview with the service providers was used in our field notes.

We coded the interviews after a system of capitals and numbers where each combination refers to an interviewee. We use the capital E when we refer to an employee. The numbers combined with these capitals is given in the order of the interviews. For example, our third interview was coded E3. When two employees were interviewed at the same time, we added the additional letters a or b, in order to separate them. We have not mentioned the CEO by name, but his opinions and perspectives are presented in the results.

3.6.5. Participant observations

Interviews mainly give access to opinions and perspectives from individuals own point-of-view (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Thereby, we also decided to use observations as a method to collect additional data to verify our findings from the interviews. This increases the objectivity and the degree of trustworthiness of this study (Bryman and Bell, 2011). We used ethnography as our observational methods.

Ethnographies are typically used when researchers are trying to understand the organisation from the inside (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Bryman and Bell (2011) also state that participant observation is a form of ethnographic research method. This means that the researchers are
participating in the organisation’s activities in order to explain and gain a better understanding of the different situations that have appeared during their field study (David and Sutton, 2016). In this study we were participants while doing our observations of how Onetrip tours operates. We observed how guides and service providers work on tours in order to understand how they co-create value for their customers and themselves. But we were also interacting with the guides and the local service providers in order to get more information about the tours and the local service providers. This gave us a deeper understanding of how the service providers viewed Onetrip and how they work together. After each tour we went through our thoughts and created field notes, this was due to secure agreement about the observations in order to create credibility in our study.

We were not able to choose which service providers to interact with, since the tours we participated in had already been planned out by the staff of Onetrip. However, the service providers had to originate from rural areas. We chose tours that have been operating for different amount of times. The reason for this is that we wanted to compare how Onetrip operate their tours and how the service providers’ lives had changed after encountering Onetrip. This ensures the credibility and relevance to our findings in terms of added value from the platform Onetrip.

The tours that we participated in were: The Mekong Delta, Ninh Binh Adventure and Sapa 2-Day Trekking. The Mekong Delta tour is one of the oldest tours1, it had been operated for over four years. This tour is one of Onetrip’s oldest tour2, it gave us an understanding of the impacts of long-term collaboration between Onetrip and their local service providers. The Ninh Binh Adventure tour was one of the newer tours, it had only been operated for about one year and the last tour, the Sapa 2-Day Trekking tour was Onetrip’s newest tour. These tours gave us a good overview of how the guides interacted with the service providers and how they created value together. We also got a better understanding of how the organisations of Christina’s worked and how they are working to change the Vietnamese tourism.

Due to that we had an itinerary to follow and some of the service providers had other customers that needed their attention, we chose to only observe and talk to the service providers during short periods of time. One example is during The Mekong Delta tour, the stop at each service provider was too short for an interview, so instead we talked for a shorter time. During our

1 According to our tour guides during The Mekong Delta tour
2 According to our tour guides during The Mekong Delta tour
Sapa tour we walked most of the time and our local guide was talking to us and told us about how she became a guide and about the Red Dao community. We did not encounter a lot of service providers during our Ninh Binh tour. We had a lunch stop but the owner of that restaurant did not have so much time since he had to take care of other customers.

We furthermore used information about Christina’s and Onetrip from TripAdvisor. TripAdvisor is a website for opinions about different travel listings around the globe, which includes: accommodations, airlines, experiences and restaurants (TripAdvisor LLC, 2107). The travellers can read about other travellers’ experiences about where to live, how to travel, what to do and where to eat at specific destinations (ibid). We think that this information was important since it was often stated that Onetrip was number one on TripAdvisor during our interviews. This triangulation allowed us to confirm what was said in the interviews and we could furthermore observe what customers of Onetrip thought of the tours. In addition, it gave us an understanding of if our own experiences from the tours matched the opinions of other customers.

Table 2 provides an overview of the service providers that vi encountered during our tours with Onetrip. We did not interact with the service providers that provided Onetrip with transportation. This is due to that they worked for bigger companies and that they did not fit our service provider criteria.

Table 2 Overview of the service providers that we encountered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service provider</th>
<th>Tour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The coconut lady</td>
<td>The Mekong Delta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lunch lady</td>
<td>The Mekong Delta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Dao guide</td>
<td>Sapa 2-Day Trekking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast at a local family</td>
<td>Sapa 2-Day Trekking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner of the homestay</td>
<td>Sapa 2-Day Trekking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch at homestay</td>
<td>Ninh Binh Adventure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6.6. Documents

We studied different documents from secondary sources in order to collect empirical data (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The public documents that we used were reports from UN, UNDP, UNTWO, WTTC (World Travel & Tourism Council), The World Bank, OECD about Vietnam’s overall development but also its development in tourism. These documents were found on the different organisations’ websites. But we also got organisational documents from Christina’s
such as Christina’s core values, organisational structure scheme. We also used the information from Christina’s website. We are aware of that this kind of information only show us what the company want us to know. We had this in mind when we used the information from the website.

3.7. Content analysis

To analyse the empirical findings, we used qualitative content analysis with hermeneutical interpretation. This allowed us to find different meanings in the transcribed interviews and in our field notes rather than being limited to one “correct” interpretation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). The purpose was to find different contexts and meanings from the transcribed interviews and the field notes, that could be codified into different categories (Julien, 2008). By categorising the data, we could reduce the empirical findings and sort out less relevant data from our interviews.

We started to transcribe every interview and then looked for similar concepts in the transcribed materials. To find similar concepts we simply opened an empty document and started to copy text that we thought said the same thing about a specific topic. After that we went through our field notes and incorporated the relevant concepts. We found approximately 20 concepts from the transcribed interviews. After our first categorisation, we went through the document again in order to reduce the material one more time. The purpose of this was to limit unnecessary empirical data. In this way we made sure that our data was relevant to our study. The main categories are organisational structure, organisational culture, brand and technology. The development of the categories can be viewed in Figure 3. This is the base for our analysis. However, the main categories were not used as titles. This is due to that we wanted to make the analysis as clear as possible for our readers. Figure 3 is rather used as a guidance to understand the important elements of our analysis.
First order concepts

- Flat organisation
- Business ecosystem
- Fast expansion

- Training
- Co-ordination of employees

- Leadership
- Vision and Mission
- Core values

- Empowerment
- Making sense
- familiar

- Established
- Future

- Word of mouth
- Blog
- Social media

- Offline and online
- Future development

- External communication
- Internal communication

Second order categories

Organisational structure

Organisational culture

Brand

Technology

*Figure 3 Categorisation of empirical data*
3.8. Quality

There are three prominent quality criteria for business research: reliability, replication and validity (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Bryman and Bell (2015) argued that reliability and replicability are closely related; reliability relates to if a study’s result can be repeated, while replication is about redoing a study that has been conducted. Validity is the contents that are generated from measurements and reflected in the conclusions of research (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Reliability and validity are two criteria that are important for researchers to establish within quantitative research (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Bryman and Bell (2011) states that it is hard to reach the criteria external reliability and validity in qualitative research, since qualitative researchers do not use measurement as a method to collect their data.

Bryman and Bell (2011) argued that the researchers can use Guba and Lincoln’s quality criteria, trustworthiness, as an alternative to reliability and validity within qualitative research. Trustworthiness constitutes of the four criteria: credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability) and confirmability (objectivity) (Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba, 2007). These four criteria help the researchers to explore the social world and reduce the problems with validity, reliability and objectivity in qualitative research (ibid).

Bryman and Bell (2011) mean that the credibility of a study is dependent on there being multiple accounts of a social reality. Credibility can be achieved through: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis and member checks (Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba, 2007). We used prolonged engagement, persistent observations, triangulations and member checks in order to achieved credibility. Prolonged engagement and persistent observations were achieved through contact with the employees and the local service providers of Christina’s. The interviews and the participation on the tours from Onetrip helped us identify elements that were not spoken such as body language and emphasis on words. Triangulation was achieved by using different data collection methods, such as interviews, participation observations and reading documents about Christina’s. After our interviews with the employees of Christina’s we sent the transcribed interviews to the participants, in order to validate our findings (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Transferability refers to the description of the studied context, which can be referred to as “thick description” of the concept (Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba, 2007). “Thick description” is the detailed description about the studied context (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba (2007) mean that the thick descriptive data serve as a base for other researchers to conduct
similar research or who will use all or part of the findings elsewhere. We have tried to describe
our methods as close as possible for other researchers to understand our study and to replicate
all or part of it or to use the findings for future research. They may not get the exact same
results, since the studied context is unique and may vary with time (Schwandt, Lincoln and
Guba, 2007). Furthermore, one of us has a Vietnamese background and we think that this has
made it easier for us to collect data, since she has the language knowledge and the cultural
understanding. Other researchers should have this in mind when conducting a study like this.

Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba (2007) argues that dependability and confirmability requires an
audit approach. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), this means that the authors should keep
perfect track of their research projects and that all phases of the study should be accessible. To
achieve dependability, there needs to be an external audit that verifies the process results
(Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba, 2007). The external audit is responsible for verifying that
correct procedures are being taken, which includes the assessment of the theory that is being
used for the study (Bryman and Bell, 2011). We achieved dependability by having a supervisor
that supervised our project from start to finish. We had several meetings with our supervisor
during our research project. The purpose of these meetings was to inform our supervisor of our
research process so that he could advise us and give suggestions to alter our study if necessary.
In addition, we created documents with different version numbers in order to have a complete
record of the research phases. This also included transcribed interviews, audio files from our
interview and field notes. These files are stored at a secured cloud-service provided by our
University.

Qualitative studies are based on interpretations that are generally affected by beliefs and values
(Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba, 2007). This can make it hard to separate scientific evidence
from interpretations (ibid). Nevertheless, the last of the trustworthiness criteria, confirmability
can be achieved when researchers have acted in good faith (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Bryman
and Bell (2011) mean that researchers should not let personal values or theories influence their
study or the interpretations of their findings. We had this in mind when we interpreted the
results. However, we have acted in good faith by continuously reviewing the results with each
other. In addition, we ensured a certain degree of objectivity by sharing our study process with
our supervisor and other business students during the seminars that our supervisor arranged.
3.9. Ethic

According to Bryman and Bell (2011) researchers in the field of business and management must reflect upon ethical issues and following code of ethics for business and management research. We have used Vetenskapsrådet (2002) ethical guidelines to conduct our study. According to Vetenskapsrådet (2002) there are four main ethical issues to take in consideration: the information requirements, the consent requirements, the confidentiality requirements and the usefulness requirements.

The information requirements mean that the researcher need to inform the participants about the study and that participation in the study is optional (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). While, the consent requirements seek the consent of the participants and allow them to terminate the interview during anytime (ibid). Before every interview we informed the interviewees about our study and why we wanted to interview them. We further informed them that the participation in the interviews is solely optional and based on their willingness to participate. Furthermore, we asked the interviewees for approval to record the interview in the beginning of every session. In addition, we informed them that they can terminate the interview at any time if they do not wish to participate in the study anymore. Therefore, we believe that we have fulfilled both the information and the consent requirements.

The confidentiality requirements requires that the researchers do not spread the information gathered in the study further and the usefulness requirements means that the researchers solely intend to use the collected data for the study (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). The interviews did not contain any personal information about the interviewees since we did not think that it would add any value to our study. Furthermore, the interviews were stored at a secured cloud-service provided by Linköping University. The information from the interviews was only used by the authors of this study and was not transmitted to any third party. This is due to the safety of the participants of our study, since we think that the participants should not be held responsible for what they have told us in confidence. Therefore, we think that we have fulfilled both the confidentiality and the usefulness requirements.
4. Empirical findings

In this section we present our empirical findings from our field studies and the interviews with the employees of Christina’s. It first presents the customers experiences. This is heavily based on our own tour experiences. However, it also contains findings from our interviews. The customer journey is followed by a presentation of the organisation of Christina’s, how they enable experiences and finally, how they co-create value within their service ecosystem.

4.1. The customers’ journey

Figure 4 shows an overview of where we were in Vietnam. The Mekong Delta tour started in Ho Chi Minh City; we went on motorcycles to Ben Tre. Both the Sapa 2-Day Trekking and Ninh Binh Adventure tours started in Hanoi. For the Sapa tour, we went by train from Hanoi to Sapa and for the Ninh Binh tour, we went by a car.

4.1.1. Before the tours

We found Onetrip through Sonny Side’s YouTube channel, Best Ever Food Review Show. In his videos about Vietnam, he promotes Onetrip tours. His videos show his travelling experiences, which gives insights to the Vietnamese culture. This made us interested to find out more about Onetrip, which led us to their website to find more information. On their website we found an extract of a review of their tours (Christina’s, 2019b). This led us to search for more reviews about the tours of Onetrip on TripAdvisor. We found that they were ranked number one in Ho Chi Minh City (Onetrip Adventures (Ho Chi Minh City), no date). Previous customers of Onetrip seem to have had good experiences and highly recommended Onetrip based on their comments on TripAdvisor (ibid). Furthermore, some of the customers indicated that their expectations of the tours had been met. This increased our own expectations of Onetrip and their tours. We understood that
Christina’s rely on customers recommendations and reviews through our interviews. For example, our interviewee from the marketing team (E3) stated that “/…/ Onetrip is growing, is just through word of mouth. People are so satisfied by the tours, that they just recommended it all the time to other people who are traveling to Vietnam /…/.”

Afterwards, we looked up Onetrip on several social media channels, such as Instagram (christinas_vietnam and onetrip_vietnam) and Onetrip’s Facebook page. These channels showed Vietnam’s culture and heritage in an authentic and appealing way that made us even more interested in going to Vietnam. On Onetrip’s website they have a slogan that reads “Experience the real Vietnam”, which made us think that we would not encounter a lot of tourists and that we would experience Vietnam from a local’s perspective with Onetrip tours. The YouTube videos from the Best Ever Food Review Show also made us think this. Via Onetrip’s website, that featured a positive statement from a customer and through TripAdvisor we could read that customers thought their experiences with Onetrip were good. The reviews indicated that the tours gave customers a real cultural experience without any “tourist traps” and that the guides were enthusiastic about sharing their culture. This increased our expectations of Onetrip tours further.

According to several interviewees, Christina’s is dependent on good reviews. The CEO informed us that Christina’s only invested about $100 per day to advertise their company on Facebook, with a focus on Onetrip tours and Christina’s accommodations. However, he could not tell us how many customers this reached, since they only target tourists who are already in Vietnam. Furthermore, Christina’s has a blog where they recommend tourists where to eat and what to do in Vietnam. They promote Onetrip in some of their blog posts (Nguyen, 2019). In our own experience, we thought that Onetrip was promoted similarly in all platforms and associated their brand with good quality tours that would bring us closer to the locals.

To organise our tours, we contacted them via the chat-box on their website to get advised on which tour we should base our study on. We told them that we wanted to experience tours in rural areas of Vietnam. They provided us with the relevant information about the tours and told us how to book it on Onetrip’s website and helped us to schedule it. In addition, they informed us how we should travel to Hanoi in the North of Vietnam and where they would pick us up for our tours in Sapa and Ninh Binh. We felt confident in how they handled the bookings and trusted their recommendations since we felt that they cared about their customers and that they wanted them to have a good experience.
4.1.2. The tours

In order to create good experiences, *Christina’s* invest into their transportation options, they want their customers to have a comfortable and secure ride during every tour they give. Many of the tours gives you the option of riding behind a tour guide’s motorcycle. For security reasons, the tour guides provide you with a helmet, knee- and arm pads. We were told that the CEO does not want to use vespas, since they are not environmentally friendly. The CEO told us that he created *Onetrip* due to his guests’ bad experiences from other tour companies. Therefore, he was very concerned with the customers’ comfort and wanted them to be able to enjoy the tours.

The guides from *Onetrip* get all the information about the customers they are going to encounter through *Two Heart*. In addition, the application contains the contact details of every person they collaborate with during a tour such as other guides and service providers. The day before our tours, we got an e-mail from *Onetrip* that confirmed time and pick-up location. This made us feel secure in *Onetrip*’s services and even more excited for the tours. The tours included meals and activities but also historical, cultural and social perspectives. The purpose of the activities was to show us how locals live and work. For example, we were shown how locals peel coconuts and were encouraged to do it ourselves in the Mekong Delta. Furthermore, we were offered food on banana leaves in Sapa. Our local guide in Sapa told us that they often use banana leaves to eat on since it is convenient and easily accessible for the locals.

The tours gave us the insight that preserving culture and nature is important for *Christina’s*. This was also confirmed through our interviews with the employees of *Christina’s*. They meant that the exploitation of the environment is something they do not support. One example comes from our tour in Sapa, our *Onetrip* tour guide explained that Ta Phin, the village we were visiting was one of the few villages that had not been exposed to mass tourism. The guide further explained that they had actively search for a village like Ta Phin. He also explained that there were no hotels in the village and that we would stay in a traditional home that belonged to the Red Dao minority. During the Sapa tour we had an additional local guide from the Red Dao community. In addition, this tour was developed in collaboration with the Red Dao community in Ta Phin. *Onetrip* collaborates with locals in order to include and empower local communities. However, they also do it so that they will be able to provide better and more local experiences for their customers. We experienced local customs on all the tours but especially in Sapa, where we got to participate in an embroidery workshop and take traditional herbal
baths. According to our local guide, the women usually collect the herbs for the baths together and during the evenings they gather and sew national costumes.

We observed that Onetrip cares about the environment, since our guide started to collect plastic waste that was scattered in the surrounding nature. Furthermore, Christina’s care about the environment were reflected in our interviews with the employees. For example, the guide that we interviewed (E6) said that “...when we work together as a team, we also keep reminding our team about you know what should be the good, appropriate behaviour toward the environment around.”. We were also told that they stopped using wet paper tissues since it was bad for the environment. Furthermore, Onetrip had asked their service providers to stop serving plastic straws to their customers in order to reduce plastic waste.

The guides made us enjoy the tours. They did this by sharing their knowledge in an engaging way. The feeling that we got during the tours, was that we were friends with the tour guides since they did not act as a “typical” guide in the sense that they did not separate themselves from us. In addition, they shared personal information about themselves which strengthened our bond. Furthermore, the guides offered to take pictures of us and the surroundings during the tours. They told us that they would send us the pictures after the tours and explained that it was a part of the tours. The guides wanted us to remember the tours afterwards and have something to show our friends and families. We believe that the experiences would not have been as positive or as memorable without the guides due to their enthusiasm and the bond that we developed with them.

4.1.3. After the tours

Our expectations about the tours were met and exceeded. This is due to that we felt that we had been on an adventure and had tried new things. In addition, Onetrip’s slogan of “Experience the Real Vietnam” felt appropriate for the experiences we had shared. We talked about the tours with our family and friends and explained our new experiences. We even recommended Onetrip tours to all our acquaintances who were planning on going to Vietnam. However, we were disappointed when we saw many other tourists in Ninh Binh. This is due to that we expected Onetrip to provide tours where we would feel close to the locals, which was based on their marketing and on the reviews, we had seen on TripAdvisor. It was also based on our previous experiences with Onetrip in Sapa and in the Mekong Delta, where we encountered few other tourists.
We were curious to see all the pictures that our guides had taken on tour since we believed that it would show our experiences from new angles. The guides told us that they normally send the pictures to the customers a few days after the tours. However, after not receiving the pictures after this time from some of the tours, we either emailed Onetrip’s customer service or contacted the guides directly. We received the pictures from the guides, after contacting them. Customer service responded that the guides who was responsible for the pictures would send them to us as fast as possible. This took approximately a week and we felt that a few pictures were missing. The pictures themselves made us feel like we could re-experience the tours which made them more memorable. However, the longer process of receiving the pictures made us feel slightly neglected and we wondered if there was an official process behind it. Nevertheless, we were happy with the overall experience that we had shared with Onetrip and would go on tour with them again and recommend their services to others.

In order to improve Onetrip tours, the guides ask their customers to evaluate their experiences at the end of every tour. They ask for feedback of what they could have done better and want to know what their customers think of their overall experiences. When they asked us for feedback, it made us think more deeply about the experiences we had been on and made us remember more details of the tours. In addition, it made us feel closer to the guides since we felt that they cared about our opinions and that we could have an impact on future experiences that they would co-create. We were also asked about our other plans in Vietnam. If we were interested in exploring new areas of Vietnam, the guides offered us recommendations both with and without Onetrip.

4.2. The organisation of Christina’s

Christina’s was created when the founder, who is the current CEO, was searching for accommodation in Ho Chi Minh City. One day he found an empty building and made an agreement with the owner that allowed him to rent the whole building for a cheaper price. This agreement allowed him to rent out some of the apartments in the building on Airbnb, which led to profit that could be reinvested into the development of apartments. This was essentially the start of Christina’s Accommodations. While renting out accommodations under the brand Christina’s, the founder noticed that guests lacked enthusiasm after coming home from visiting tourist attractions, such as the Cu Chi tunnels. When asked about their experiences, the guests stated that they did not have a good overall experience. Since the CEO had positive experiences from travelling in Vietnam, he was surprised by this. This inspired him to create Onetrip. Onetrip provides tours in Vietnam, it is a sister brand of Christina’s Accommodation. The
CEOs vision was to create memorable customer experiences by showing the real Vietnam. Today Christina’s is a fully integrated travel organisation that have operations throughout seven different cities from the South to the North of Vietnam and has about 500 employees.

Figure 5 above shows a simplified version of the business ecosystem of Christina’s, that we created from an official document that we got from Christina’s. It furthermore shows an overview of Christina’s organisational structure; the company is divided into two parts: offline and online. The offline part constitutes of: Onetrip, Christina’s Accommodation, The Joi Factory and Müvv. Furthermore, Christina’s use their in-house developed technology to provide services via their different brands, which is the online part of their business. These two parts forms the business ecosystem of Christina’s. Christina’s main role in the ecosystem is to connect the different partners, such as local service providers with tourists. They do this by using their communication application, Two Hearts. Two Hearts connects all platforms where they are present, such as booking.com, Airbnb, their own website and their e-mails. This makes the communication with their guest and within the organisation much easier, since everything
is connected to the application. *Two Hearts* make the communication with the guests much easier, since multiple employees can answer the customers questions. One of the interviewees means that this create a seamless technology where everyone knows about what happens in the company and help each other out.

According to the interviewees from the technology team, the technology within *Christina’s* is mostly web-based. The reason for this is that it is easier to create applications that every type of operative system can use, and it is easier to connect every platform they use to *Two Hearts*. *Onetrip* is a social travel platform that is Internet-based, through their website the customers can purchases tours and communicate directly with operators from *Onetrip* via the website’s chat box. Through this chat box customers can customise their tours, ask questions about the itinerary or get help about other services that is offered by *Christina’s*. *Onetrip* have not yet developed any technology that make it easier for their collaborators to see bookings and communicate with each other. The *Onetrip* operation team need to confirm bookings with their local service providers. For example, give the food preferences and how many guests that are expected, then the restaurant owner needs to confirm that they can serve that number of guests. Furthermore, the guides that stated that they are available through their common calendar need to confirm their availability. Everything is done manually, either by a phone call or through a message on *Two Hearts*. We were told that the guides usually call the local service providers in order to confirm everything, since there is no application that they can confirm the booking through.

*Christina’s* believes that great team experiences will lead to great guest experiences (*Christinas*, 2019a). Therefore, *Christina’s* has a flat organisational structure that are built around different teams. These teams operate across and within teams, in order to provide good customer services and to develop their operations. Through our interviews, the employees referred to the CEO by his first name, instead of using his title. Sometimes, they could say “the founder” but never referred to him as their boss. We were often told during tours and interviews that *Christina’s* does not have any bosses just “team members” and “team leaders”. This is due to reduce the hierarchy in their company structure. Furthermore, it allows employees to share their ideas and make their own decisions. Authority and leadership are based on who makes sense, rather than position. As stated by the CEO: “*In our company, we said that whoever makes sense, has the most authority. /*.../ authority in the company is not based on position.*.”
4.3. How Christina’s co-create value with local service providers

The tours we participated in gave us an understanding of how Onetrip develops their relationships with the local service providers. This starts at the development stage when guides from Onetrip operations reach out to local service providers that fits Onetrip’s quality criteria and ask if they want to start a collaboration. For example, if a service provider owns a restaurant, they need to use good quality products and have a high hygiene factor. The collaboration brings the service providers a significant number of customers. This gives the local service providers a steady income that they can use to provide for themselves and their family.

We observed that the relationships between the service providers and Onetrip were respectful and friendly. This could for instance be seen during our Mekong Delta tour when the coconut lady told us that she only worked with Onetrip, since she felt like they had not been taking advantage of her. More of her experiences with Onetrip can be seen below:

She does not actively collaborate with any other travel agencies. There are, however, companies that randomly stops by. Nevertheless, she prioritises Onetrip over any other company after being in the tourism business for 10 years. /.../. She used to collaborate with other companies, such as the boat company that Christina’s working with, but she does not feel like they take care of their suppliers in the same way that Onetrip does. (Mekong Delta field notes)

In addition, the guides are responsible for contacting the local service providers beforehand in order to confirm bookings which can include the number of customers and meal preferences. The guides usually contact the service providers via mobile telephones. We experienced this during our Ninh Binh tour, when our guide called the local homestay to confirm that they would have bicycles and lunch for us when we arrived. The guides told us that the local service providers do not have any booking tools provided by Christina’s. Therefore, Onetrip’s bookings between them and their local service providers need to be done manually.

According to the CEO, Christina’s pay their guides and local service providers fairly in order to be able to provide good customer experiences. Furthermore, they try to empower their collaborators by motivating them to develop their businesses instead of exploiting them. One example comes from the Sapa tour, when our Onetrip guide told us that the Sapa trekking tour will eventually only be operated by local guides from the Red Dao community and that Onetrip will only be responsible for bringing the customers to the Red Dao guides. The CEO means
that this can lead to economic independence for the service providers, which entails that they do not need to move away from the rural areas and their family unless it is in their interests. One of the employees (E6) that we interviewed described the interaction between the actors in their service ecosystem, as can be seen below:

_So, the three people here you can see in a you know in a circle, the guests of course, we as the people who are providing tours and the local people. So, we three and in that circle, we help out each other. Yeah. So, everybody benefits from that._ (Onetrip guide (E6))

_ Christina’s _ has both outdoor and indoor training to verify that the recruits are well-adapted to the company’s culture. The purpose of the training is to give the tour guides knowledge about the routes and what is expected of them. This is essential since Onetrip operates differently than other organisations. For example, Onetrip only offers small group tours and interact closely with the customers. It is common for the guides to create a more friendly relationship with the customers and they dislike the idea that they are serving the customers. For instance, they always eat lunch together on tour, as one of our interviewees explained: “We’re like friends together. We’re not a tour guide and a guest. Or they’re not the boss, we are not the staff.” (Onetrip operations (E5)). This relationship between staff and customers is unusual according to the guides we encountered on tour. Therefore, the guides need to learn how to work according to Onetrip’s standards before they can operate as a tour guide.

4.4. How Christina’s makes the experiences possible

_ Christina’s _ try to see everyone in their market as possible collaborators, since they do not believe in competition according to several interviewees. Furthermore, Christina’s believes that everyone can help to contribute to a better world through collaborations. Therefore, they list other tour companies on their website so that their customers can get the experiences that they do not offer, but also tours that are similar to Onetrip’s. One example that the interviewees often talked about is the food tour, _A Vegan Food Adventure_, in Ho Chi Minh City. This food tour is operated by former employees that wanted to do their own tours. This is reflected in the following quote: “We believe in empowering people to do what they love, working for themselves and making the world a better place.” (Internal document provided by Christina’s).

Furthermore, Christina’s uses technology in their organisation in order to be able to work more effectively and to provide better experiences. The Two Heart application helps the guide during tours to communicate with other guides and their operational team. The operational team can
help the guides with certain matters such as what they should do if the tour has been delayed due to issues such as the weather. In addition, the operational team can use the application to communicate with each other directly. This can aid the operational team in solving tasks faster and to better help the guides and local service providers with issues that occurs during tours. Through our interviews and during the tours, everyone highlighted that technology is a very important part of Christina’s. The technology has enabled the fast expansion of Christina’s operations to other cities in Vietnam, since it is easy to scale up from the current business model.

The vision of Christina’s is to change the way people travel in Vietnam and to give their customers a true local experience, and the mission of Christina’s is to empower people within their business ecosystem, from the employees to their collaborators. Christina’s vision and mission are reflected in the following seven core values: “make sense”, “think different”, “be a team player”, “pursue the adventure”, “focus on the little things”, “be fair and honest” and lastly “love solves everything”. We observed that the employees share Christina’s core values and that they live by them. Furthermore, we observed that the employees aligned their own values with the values of the organisation and that they believed in the vision of the company. For instance, our guide in Ninh Binh stated that “If they have a good vision and they can do it, I work for them”.

Throughout our interviews we found out that many “team members” believe that it is important to “make sense”. This can refer to listening to whoever makes sense in terms of authority or when it comes to choosing which ideas should be implemented. It furthermore does not matter how long someone has worked at the company if an idea make sense, it will be valued. Christina’s second core value is to “think different”. This means that they value creative thinking. Christina’s further believe that creativity is a source for growth. In order to support creative thinking, they empower people to voice their opinions and to take risks. Christina’s is also supportive of change and open to new ideas. The company do not only empower their employees but also local communities including partners they are collaborating with. To be a “team player” at Christina’s is important. This correlates with Christina’s way of seeing potential partners, rather than competitors. They believe that they can create a better world by working together, instead of against each other. During our field study we observed that the employees enjoy their jobs and that they sometimes do not even see it as a job. We, furthermore, observed that some of them see their “team members” as a part of their family.
Christina’s has also listed “pursue the adventure” as one of their core values. They mean that it is important to live in the moment and to take risks. Furthermore, Christina’s also means that it is important to not be comfortable with where you are. In addition, Christina’s encourage their employees to “focus on the little things”. This means that employees should try to notice details. It is also important for employees to “be fair and honest”. This has led to that there are employees that feel encouraged to speak up. Furthermore, our interviewees told us that they felt that they were equally valued as their colleagues. Christina’s additionally mean that it is important to treat people in a way that they would like to be treated themselves. Therefore, they share their knowledge with partners. Finally, Christina’s believe that “love solves everything”. This means that they value both passion and compassion, which is something that they look for in their employees. They have a recruitment process that ensures that new employees share the company’s values. In addition, employees often talked about the core values of Christina’s during our interviews.

Christina’s culture is adapted so that the employees will work hard to provide good customer experiences. The culture was created from the CEOs mission and vision for the company. From our observations and interviews, it seemed that the CEO is a role model and an inspiration for the employees. The employees appeared to share the CEO’s values and his vision and mission for the company is reflected in the employees and in the way that they work. It, furthermore, seemed that the employees trusted the CEO to succeed with Christina’s missions. For example, one of the employees from Onetrip operations (E5) referred to the CEO as the person “who empower all of the people who work for the company”. This has made employees feel like they can pursue their goals at Christina’s, which is something they work hard for.
5. Analysis

I this section we discuss how our empirical findings of Christina’s correlates with existing theories. But also, how we think Christina’s can operate the way they do. We start this section with a discussion about how Christina’s can create experiences within their service ecosystem, followed by how they enable the creation of experiences and how value co-creation can be achieved in the service ecosystem. Lastly, we conclude our analysis in order to show how Christina’s are working to create memorable experiences with their customers.

5.1. Experiences within a service ecosystem

Berry, Carbone and Haeckel (2002) theories suggest that firms can control customer experiences by considering the customer journey, which includes customers’ expectations before the experience and their thoughts and feelings after the experience. We argue that Christina’s controls their customers’ expectations of Onetrip tours via social media and other marketing channels such as their blog and their website. Christina’s adaptation to the growth in information and communications technology by using digital marketing is essential to attract customers and something that every travel organisation should aspire to do, which Gössling (2017) mean is important in his article.

Christina’s digital marketing efforts provide a basis for how they want their customers to react to their brand and to their offers. However, in accordance with Lemon and Verhoef (2016) theories about customer experiences, it is only customers emotional response to an experience that determines the value of the experience. Therefore, it can be argued that it is only the customers reaction to Christina’s marketing content that impacts their expectations. It is thereby important that organisations such as Christina’s seeks to make an emotional impact on customers via their different marketing channels. We argue that Christina’s does this by showing simple and authentic pictures of Vietnam on their different marketing channels and by using the slogan “Experience the Real Vietnam” on their website. As indicated by Kotler and Gertner (2002), a country’s image should be simple, appealing and believable. Therefore, by showing simple and appealing pictures of Vietnam, customers can become more eager to explore Vietnam and its culture. In addition, customers can become keener to experience Vietnam with Onetrip since they are explicitly telling tourists that they want to provide a real cultural experience. This is due to that our empirical findings imply that tourists’ value real cultural experiences. In accordance with Kotler and Gertner (2002), brands can increase the perceived value of an experience. Therefore, it can be argued that the marketing of Onetrip
increases customers perception of the tours. In addition, we think that the collaboration with Sonny Side can make customers more eager to experience Vietnam with Onetrip because of their trust in Sonny Side.

However, in accordance with Gössling (2017), Christina’s customers are also influenced by external factors such as word of mouth. It can thereby be assumed that many of the tourists that are going to Vietnam will search for tours on TripAdvisor. This can, furthermore be related to Kitcharoen (2019) and Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2008) that stated that customers trust other customers more than experts. As shown in our empirical findings, Christina’s is aware of the positive impacts that word of mouth can have and even relies on it. It is due to this that they focus on building good customer experiences which is important according to Verhoef et al. (2009). Christina’s number one position on TripAdvisor indicates that firms benefit from focusing on building positive word of mouth by providing good experiences.

Christina’s is the focal firm that has created a service ecosystem where all their brands are included. Christina’s structure and culture has allowed the firm to create memorable customer experiences via their service ecosystem. This is due to that Christina’s core values and vision and mission have guided their approach to tourism, which has impacted the tours. For instance, the incorporation of locals into the development and management of Onetrip rural tours reflects Christina’s willingness to empower people. This can be applied to Lekaota (2015) and Dávid (2011) articles where they argue that it is important to have a close collaboration with locals in order to protect their heritage and culture. Lekaota (2015) further stated that the success of a tourist destination is dependent on the support and engagement of locals. We, therefore, argue that Onetrip’s close collaboration with locals, results in successful experiences.

Onetrip is not a traditional multisided platform, since it does not function only as a platform, where creators and customers can exchange value. It rather connects the local service providers services with the travellers during their journey, since neither the local service providers nor the travellers know each other before they meet. The local service providers are only informed of how many guests that will arrive and what kind of food preferences the different guests may have. Figure

*Figure 6 The multisided platform of Christina’s*
6 above show what the relationship between Onetrip, the local service providers and the travellers looks like in the service ecosystem of Christina’s. The local service providers and the travellers are not in direct contact with each other, instead Onetrip works as their connection bridge. Through Onetrip’s tours the travellers get to “Experience the real Vietnam”, resulting in exiting tours and good travel experiences. We think that this is achieved through the collaboration with the local service providers throughout Vietnam. This means that Christina’s still creates value within their service ecosystem.

Successful tourism experiences require the engagement of locals, it can be argued that one of Christina's main roles within the service ecosystem is to connect the local service providers with travellers. However, according to Jaakkola, Helkkula and Aarikka-Stenroos (2015) experiences are also dependant on the emotional bond between service employees and customers. We argue that the emotional connection that forms between the guides and the customers on Onetrip’s tours improves the experiences. It can furthermore be argued that the interaction between some of the local service providers and the customers also results in an emotional bond which improves the experiences further. In order to provide good experiences via their guides, Christina’s uses their in-house built communication tools. In accordance with Jaakkola, Helkkula and Aarikka-Stenroos (2015), technology can make employees more strategic and committed. Onetrip guides can use the communication tool Two Hearts to ask for assistance which can aid them to improve the experiences they are providing for Onetrip’s customers.

According to Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2008) and Li and Petrick (2008), firms should focus on building their customer relationships, which enhances loyalty and trust towards firms and increases the chances of positive word of mouth. We argue that Christina’s does this via their good experiences. But also, by providing good marketing content and by providing after services, which can be assumed to positively affect customers’ expectations and thoughts of the experience itself. This can be referred to Berry, Carbone and Haeckel (2002) that stated that a customer’s experience is dependent on the customers journey. It can, furthermore, be said that the pictures that are provided to the customers from Onetrip makes the experiences more memorable. However, it would be preferable if the pictures are sent out faster. In addition, the fast answers from Onetrip via their chat box and customer service can also be said to improve the customer journey resulting in positive word of mouth.
In accordance with theories on eWOM, *Christina’s* also controls customers’ expectations by encouraging them to look up public reviews about them. In addition, *Christina’s* does ask for feedback from customers at the end of the tours. However, according to Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2018) theories on eWOM it would be preferable if they also encouraged their customers to leave reviews on public forums since it could stimulate loyalty. Nevertheless, it can be argued that asking for feedback indirectly encourages customers to give reviews and that it, therefore, may increase customer loyalty. Finally, Teece (2010) argues that it is important to determine customer value and how to capture it. Therefore, by listening to feedback, *Christina’s* can continuously improve customer experiences.

5.2. *Christina’s* enables the creation of experiences

*Christina’s* organisational values starts with the leadership, the founder has created a culture where there are no bosses and the employees are all equally valuable. This can be related to Schein’s (2009) view of the relationship between leadership and organisational culture. Furthermore, the founder has incorporated his beliefs, values and assumptions into the organisation through the company’s vision and mission. But also, through the core values of *Christina’s*, which the employees seem to live by. The core values of *Christina’s* are also a way to make sure that the employees act in accordance with the firm’s norms and values. We think that the founder has succeeded with the implementation of his beliefs, values and assumptions, since his leadership style is reflected through the whole organisation and no one referred to another employee by a title, but only by the employee’s first name.

*Christina’s* organisational culture, can be related to Wallach (1983), Kuo and Tsai (2019) theories about organisational culture. From our empirical findings we can say that *Christina’s* has a mix between innovative and supportive culture. This is due to that they want to empower their employees and motivate them to share their ideas and at the same time create an environment where employees can grow as people. Furthermore, the environment at *Christina’s* is not competitive but rather friendly and familiar, the employees felt that they were encouraged to share their ideas and that they work in an open and collaborative environment. We argue that the organisational culture of *Christina’s* has made their employees more committed to the organisation, since the employees want to give the best experiences to their customers.

The organisational culture and structure of *Christina’s* is not typical for a Vietnamese company. It is important to take Vietnam’s high-context culture into consideration; it may have
some effect on the organisational culture of Christina’s. We think that even though the organisational culture is familiar and encouraging, it can be hard for new employees to adapt to the culture of Christina’s. How Christina’s expect their employees to act and behave are not the usual way for employees to behave within other organisations in Vietnam. We, furthermore, think that Christina’s low-context culture attracts employees that share the firm’s values and beliefs. Mercurio (2015) suggests that trust is important since it leads to affective commitment. The employees at Christina’s seems to trust each other, since they gladly help and support each other. On the other hand, the loyalty from the employees can come from Vietnam’s collectivistic culture, where family and loyalty is more important than independence (Hofstede, 2001). We believe that the collectivistic culture increases the trust in the organisation even more.

Christina’s organisational culture is the foundation of their organisational structure. The founder of Christina’s has created a hierarchy structure around teams, where there is a lack of middle management. Furthermore, the lack of middle management has allowed the teams to take faster decisions and solve problems based on their judgement. This is in accordance with Carzo and Yanouzas (1969) theory about flat structures. The flat organisation structure of Christina’s has made it easier to communicate within the organisation. Like Worthy (1950), the CEO believe that it is good for the employees to make decisions and to deal with the consequences, since it helps them to grow as persons. This is what the CEO called empowerment. We argued that self-actualisation can be related to empowerment, which mean that the employees are encouraged to use their talents to develop the company’s different brands and in the process themselves. This is due to that Christina’s want their employees to speak up and share their ideas. It has, furthermore, been suggested that empowerment of the employees leads to organisational commitment (Cho and Park, 2011). Our empirical findings show that the employees of Christina’s are committed to the organisation, since the employees talk fondly about the organisation’s values and the founder. In addition, they work hard for the organisation’s goals.

The flat organisational structure allows the employees to take initiatives and execute an idea if the team(s) think it make sense. Therefore, Christina’s develop everything in house, from the itinerary of Onetrip tours to the company’s technology. Ashuri and Bar-Ilan (2016) mean that technology in an organisation can ease the communication barriers. This is the case for Christina’s. Two Hearts makes the communication between employees and customers much easier, since it is one application that connects every communication channel Christina’s use.
The technology that is built has mostly made it easier for employees and customers, but not for the local service providers. We think that it would be much easier for the local service providers to have an overview of how many guests and what kind of food preferences there are for each group that are coming a certain day. But there are other factors in the picture too, the local service providers may be illiterate or do not have the skills that are required to use the technology Onetrip provides. Furthermore, Onetrip want to keep a relationship with their local service providers, we think that it can be hard to create a relationship through applications, since it lacks the human interactions.

It was hard to identify Christina's business model, but we think that the essence of their business model is to make the life of the travellers as easy as possible. Therefore, they have developed several brands to create a whole experience for their customers, from where to live to what to do. Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart (2010) theory about tactics and tactical interaction, can be seen in the business model of Christina’s. Christina’s has chosen to see everyone as possible collaborators not competitors, therefore they try to find ways to collaborate instead of competing. The fact that Christina’s has adapted their business to information and communications technology in order to attract customers is another prof of this. We believe that Christina’s culture is reflected in their strategic choices and in their business model. This is due to that Christina’s includes locals into their distribution- and production channels, which can be related to Prahalad and Hart's (2002) theory about how firms should operate at the BoP. Furthermore, the guides from Onetrip help to reduce the communication barriers between the local service providers and the travellers. The integration of locals into their distributions- and productions channels also aid them in creating memorable tours, which results in memorable experiences.

5.3. Value co-creation within the service ecosystem

Pine and Gilmore's (1998) theories on experience economies can be related to the organisation of Christina’s. We think that Christina’s can only set the stage of the experiences, meaning that they can only offer value to the actors within their service system. This can also be related to Vargo and Lusch (2008) FP7 and FP8. From our findings we can say that the customers of Onetrip is a part of the service ecosystem value co-creation activities, which we think is in accordance with Vargo and Lusch (2008) FP6. Since the experiences is dependent on the customers’ emotional respond to the experiences, we argue that the customers’ value is also dependent on their emotional response. This can furthermore be strengthened by Vargo and Lusch (2008) FP10, which states that value is determined by the beneficiary.
Christina’s business culture has created a workplace where they care about their employees, which we think is one of the drivers behind the employees’ commitment to the company. Nevertheless, Frow et al. (2014) mean that it is important for a service ecosystem to share a targeting vision. We believe that Christina’s willingness to empower and care for people has led them to share the common values of their local service providers, such as preserving the cultural heritage and the environment. Furthermore, this creates a basis to create memorable experiences and good relationships with their collaborators. According to Vargo and Lusch (2008) FP9, all actors within the service ecosystem are resource integrators. Therefore, we think that all actors who are involved with Onetrip are important in the process of value co-creation. Ekman, Raggio and Thompson (2016) suggested three types of values: economic, sustainable and brand, which we believe can be created within the service ecosystem of Onetrip.

The services of Christina’s enable the interaction between local service providers and tourists. Furthermore, according to Thompson and MacMillan (2010) firms can have operations at the BoP that allow them to generate profit and at the same time reduce poverty. The way Christina’s operates does not only generate profit for their firm but also creates job opportunities, which help the locals to become more economically independent. Onetrip offers the local service providers to collaborate with them, which can result in economic and sustainability values for both Christina’s and the local service providers. Furthermore, the collaboration allows Onetrip to offer their customers more local experiences, which can increase the experienced value for their customers. In turn this can lead to increased brand value for Onetrip, which can lead to positive word of mouth from their customers. This can furthermore make more people interested to purchase tours from Onetrip, which leads to more customers and an increase in revenue for all the actors within Onetrip’s ecosystem. Sustainability values partly comes from the social benefits within the service ecosystem, such as the feeling of belonging and being well-cared for by Onetrip.

Lekaota (2015) argued that it is important to incorporate locals into the development and management of tourism. This is due to that it protects the cultural heritage of the locals and can allow them to stay in their homes. As shown in our empirical findings, this is something that Christina’s desire. Therefore, we argue that Onetrip co-creates sustainability value by incorporating local service providers in the process of developing and providing the tours. However, as stated by Ekman, Raggio and Thompson (2016) sustainability value can also arise due to the environmental benefits that can be gained from the service ecosystem. Through our
interviews and observations, we could see that Christina’s actively work to make their collaborators more aware of what the customers wants. This in turn leads to a more sustainable tourism, since the local service providers try to give the customers of Onetrip the best local experiences. We believe that it is important for Christina’s to help their local service providers to preserve their traditional villages in order to create a better life for the locals. This is due to that we also believe that the traditional villages can attract tourists that are interested in experiencing the real Vietnamese culture and traditions. Furthermore, Dávid (2011) mean that it is important that tourism operators protect the environment by incorporating their customers and suppliers in their sustainability goals. Onetrip does this through their guides that cares for the environment by minimising plastic waste. However, the guides also minimise the negative impacts from tourism by encouraging tourists to be more responsible.

Jaakkola, Helkkula and Aarikka-Stenroos (2015) argued that the emotional connection between the service employees and the customer could result in better experiences. But we argue that the emotional connection to the focal company is important for everyone in the service ecosystem. This is due to that we believe that everyone gains some sort of value through the service ecosystem. Furthermore, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) stated that relationship marketing is essential in both B2B and B2C. In addition, our empirical findings show that the service providers were loyal to Onetrip due to being well-treated by Christina’s and due to the bond between them and the guides of Onetrip. Therefore, we argue that firms such as Christina’s should focus on relationship marketing, this can increase the value within the service ecosystem.

5.4. Conclusion of our analysis

Figure 7 below, show how we think that experiences are created within the service ecosystem of Christina’s. It starts with expectations by the travellers that has seen reviews and videos of Onetrip’s tours on the Internet. The reviews make travellers believe that Onetrip offers good tours, since there are other people that has experienced it. Furthermore, we believe that expectations from reviews can make customers more eager to purchase tours. The videos posted on YouTube by Sonny Side, build the reputation of Onetrip. This is due to that he shows what tourists can expect if they purchase a tour with Onetrip. The organisational culture and structure of Christina’s help them to form their service ecosystem. By setting expectations and norms that their employees and collaborators should act in accordance too. Due to this, the actors within the service ecosystem can provide good experiences for customers that
participates on tours, which in turn can lead to positive word of mouth. This can once again, increase the expectations for new customers.

Everyone in the service ecosystems including the travellers are all a part of the value co-creation, in the form of good experiences and economic benefits. It is the travellers that decide if the tour was a good purchase and what kind of value it has delivered. The value co-creation possibilities depend on what the customers think of the tours. If the tours get a good reputation, we think that it will increase the purchase of tours and in turn, increase the profit for Christina’s and their collaborators. With higher profit the local service providers can reinvest into their business and better provide for them and their families. This may mean that the service providers are encouraged to stay in the rural areas with their families and friends, protecting the cultural heritages.

![Figure 7 The experience circle](image-url)
6. Conclusions

The findings in this study can be applied to similar travel organisations like Christina’s. Christina’s has changed their way of approaching tourism, they want tourists to see the real Vietnam due to customer demands. Therefore, their organisation is dedicated to giving foreign tourists the best of Vietnam without feeling hassled. Christina’s has achieved this by paying their employees and local service providers fairly in order to motivate them to provide good experiences. Since Vietnam has a problem with returning tourism, it would be good for other related industries to cope with Christina’s way of doing business. This can lead to reduction of poverty, since many people rely on a continuous flow of tourists. If tourists do not return, local businesses need to try to make their living by forcing their services and goods on the existing tourists. Instead, businesses could collaborate in order to give the best experiences for their customers and in turn get a good reputation and increase positive word of mouth.

The travel industries in Vietnam should look at Christina’s and learn from how they have succeeded with both making profit and change the way their customers experience tours. It is due to the small tour groups and the emotional bonds that the guides and the local service providers creates with the travellers that makes Onetrip unique. Other tour and travel agencies should listen more to their customers’ needs and customise their operations accordingly. Like Christina’s, they developed Onetrip from the demand of their customers, their customers wanted to experience Vietnam without tourist traps. If other tour and travel agencies understand this, the tourism sector in Vietnam would not have bad reputations. But there is more to this, the government can aid their citizens by easier visa application procedures and investing into the country’s infrastructure such as better traffic solutions in order to attract more tourists.

We can conclude that good experiences require dedicated actors that are willing to work hard together in order to create memorable experiences. This is the foundation that Onetrip is built up on, the collaboration with the local service providers in the rural areas of Vietnam show that they can create good experiences together. In addition, the organisational culture and structure of Christina’s empowers their employees and their collaborators, especially in the rural areas. Since Christina’s has understood that their employees are their key to success, the company has invested into their employees and trust them to develop the organisation. Through the clear core values of Christina’s, the employees have a guidance of what to do in order to develop good relationships with local service providers and how to create tours in accordance to the
ever-changing preferences of their customers. It can therefore be assumed that other travel companies can also improve tourism experiences by investing in their employees.

Furthermore, the technology of Christina’s also enables the positive experiences. This is due to that technology makes it easier for employees to work together, which results in better overall experiences. For instance, it makes it possible for customers to book tours and to get recommendations directly on the company’s website. However, it also makes it easier for the guides, that are engaging directly with the customers, to get information from the office that can improve the tour. Technology has, furthermore, increased the pressure for firms to deliver good experiences since customers can now compare different brands online. We think that good experiences lead to better customer reviews and in turn also more customers. But not only monetary funds, the value of the brands of Christina’s will also be increased, which in turn also leads to better word of mouth and even more customers. Through their service ecosystem and the dedicated employees, the local service providers will also get more customers which will increase their revenues as well as Christina’s. An increase in the revenues will help the locals in the rural areas to stay with their families instead of moving into big cities to work. We mean that sustainable rural tourism can decrease poverty in rural areas, since it allows people to earn more money to take care of their families. With an increase in monetary funds, people who reside in rural areas can preserve their traditional villages and their culture in order to attract more tourists. This in turn, will improve the standard of living for the people at the base of the pyramid. We think that this will further inspire other locals to try to preserve their cultural and historical heritage in order to attract tourists to the rural areas of Vietnam. But also, the environment, since it is a base for clean water and air.

6.1. Research questions

What distinguishes Onetrip from other tour companies in Vietnam is their care for the environment and the preservation of the Vietnamese culture. Without a clean environment and the different aspects of the Vietnamese culture, Onetrip would not be able to offer the real Vietnamese experiences. To answer our first research question “How can travel organisations create good customer experiences via their service ecosystems?”, we would say that it starts with the focal firm. We think that a well-developed itinerary and dedicated service employees is the essence of good experiences. This is due to that experiences are dependent on customers emotional reaction to every aspect of the tours, which includes the environment, the service and the emotional bond between the customers and the people that they encounter on tour. We believe that a focal firm needs to implement values and goals that are aligned with the values
and goals of the people that they work with since this will inspire them to work more efficiently. Furthermore, it is important to implement an organisational culture and structure that empowers their employees and collaborators so that they will be more willing to work for their common goals. In addition, we think that technology can make it easier to provide good services if it is well implemented in their service ecosystem. Therefore, travel companies should develop their technology in accordance with their needs and with the intention of improving customer experiences. Furthermore, tour and travel agencies who operates at the base of the pyramid, need to adapt to the environment by developing a suitable business model.

This leads to our second research question “How does travel organisations co-create value with local service providers in rural areas?”, we would say through memorable experiences. But also, through the focal firm’s organisational culture and structure. Without an organisational culture and structure where the employees are seen as the resources of the firm, the travel organisations would not be able to motivate their employees to provide the best experiences for the customers. In order to provide memorable experiences, the firm need to pay their employees and collaborators fairly and implement core values that are easy to understand and live by. When the actors in the service ecosystem share similar values and goals, they can cooperate with each other and receive both tangible and intangible value from the collaboration. The tangible value refers to the monetary funds that they receive from the customers. The intangible value can be referred to the increase in well-being from the societal aspects such as a cleaner environment and the feeling of doing something important for their culture and families.

6.2. Future research

Howton (2018) mean that poverty is not only about the lack of monetary funds, it is about how the basic needs are covered too such as education, infrastructure and sanitation. Through the sustainable tourism approach people who reside in the rural areas can have a more liveable life, due to the social, environmental and economic impacts (Dávid, 2011). Our suggestion for future research is to look closer on how the organisational culture and structure of travel agencies could affect their service ecosystems in value co-creation possibilities. With the focus on the effects of the intangible values. Since these values are hard to define and hard to observe during a shorter timeframe, we think that further research on how experiences can create intangible values could be interesting. But also, how these effects can lead to limitation of poverty in the means of better living standards. In addition, we suggest that the effects from
the intangible values on the organisation can be an interesting field to study since we believe that it can affect the whole service ecosystem.
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Appendix 1

Interview guide: The CEO of Christina’s
1. Start by informing the participant of the study (the aim and purpose of the interview). For example:
   “We are here to conduct our master thesis by studying the platform *Onetrip* where we want to see how the platform has a positive impact on the actors involved.”

   “We are very thankful for your participation in this interview. And we also want to inform you that you can end the interview whenever you want to and that there will not be any consequences of this”.
   - Do you have any questions before we start the interview?
   - Can we record this interview? The recording will only be viewed by us and the supervisors of this project. It will also be destroyed after the master thesis has been approved.

2. Asking questions about the interviewee’s role at *Christina’s*:
   - Can you describe your role in the company?
   - What kind of tasks do you have that are associated with your role?
   - Are you one of the creators behind *Onetrip*? (If no: ask who came up with the idea. If yes: continue with the supplementary questions)
     - Supplementary questions:
       - When did you come up with the idea for *Onetrip*?
       - Can you describe a similar platform?
       - When did *Onetrip* start operating?

3. Following with questions about *Christina’s* organisation:
   - How many employees do you have?
     - What kind of employees?
   - How are the roles and tasks defined in this organisation? (Try to find out if they can adapt to a fast-changing environment)
   - We found out about your platform *Onetrip* through *YouTube*, and we are wondering how you advertise your tours? (Try to find out the importance of digital marketing through social media)
     - Supplementary questions:
       - Are there any other social media platforms that you use? (If yes: ask for more details)
• Do you collaborate with Best Ever Food Review Show or any other youtubers or spokespersons? (If yes: ask how this collaboration works)
• In what way does digital marketing impact the number of customers you attract?
• In what way would your success in attracting customers differ if you did not have access to social media or any other digital marketing tools?
• How would you describe your social travel platform Onetrip? (Try to find out about the structure, how the processes work)
• How many tours do you have today?
  o What is the aim of the tours? (Try to find out the impact that the tours have on the suppliers)
  o How has the tours developed over time? (Try to understand if they take their customer reviews seriously, in order to improve the tours)
  o Are the tour standardised or do the guides adapt them after their knowledge and skill?
• What is your business model? (See if they actively co-create value with the suppliers)
  o Supplementary questions:
    ▪ Can you describe your customer base for us? (Try to find out if the suppliers are customers or collaborators)
    ▪ What do you offer your customers? (Value proposal)
    ▪ How do you gain revenue? (Value can be in form of financial value)
    ▪ Do you pay the suppliers for their service or are you payed for enabling contact between them and the tourists?
    ▪ Do you collaborate with other organisations that offer similar services as you? Why? (Try to understand how Christina’s create value within their service system)
• How has your organisation changed over time? (Try to find out how they have improved their value proposal)

4. Questions about the suppliers:
• How many suppliers do you have?
• What kind of suppliers do you have? (For example: restaurants, guides, homestays etc.)
  o Supplementary questions:
    ▪ Do you see your guides as part of your staff, or do you see them as suppliers? (If the guides are a part of the staff, ask questions about how Christina’s employ them later)
    ▪ Do you see your suppliers as collaborators or as customers, please explain the role of your suppliers?
    ▪ What do you offer your suppliers?
    ▪ What do the suppliers offer you?
    ▪ How do you think that the life of your suppliers has changed after you started working with them?
• How do you choose your suppliers?
  o Supplementary questions:
    ▪ Do you have certain criteria that the suppliers need to fulfil in order to be part of your network?
    ▪ Can the suppliers apply to be part of your network or do you reach out to them?
• How do you employ your guides?
  o Supplementary questions:
    ▪ What kind of criteria do the guides need to fulfil in order to be part of your organisation?
• How does your platform Onetrip work?
  o Supplementary questions:
    ▪ How are the suppliers informed of the bookings? (Try to find out how the suppliers gets information from the platform)
    ▪ What kind of information does the suppliers receive about the customers before the tours? (Try to find out if the suppliers are in direct contact with the customers before meeting for the tours)

5. Ending the interview:
• How do you see the future of Christina’s?
Do you see a change in the future in terms of the organisation, the tours and the customers?

- Sum up the interview in order to confirm that we understood the material the way the interviewee wanted us to. This is important since the transcribed interviews cannot be sent out due to the language and technical barriers.
- Ask if the interviewee has any further questions.
- Repeat that the recordings will be destroyed after the master thesis has been approved and that the material will only be viewed by us and the supervisors of the project.
Appendix 2

Interview guide: Suppliers of Christina’s

1. Start by informing the participant of the study (the aim and purpose of the interview). For example:
   “We are here to conduct our master thesis by studying the platform Onetrip where we want to see how the platform has a positive impact on the actors involved.”

   “We are very thankful for your participation in this interview. And we also want to inform you that you can end the interview whenever you want to and that there will not be any consequences of this.”

   “Also feel free to ask questions if anything is unclear or to come with any general comments when you feel like it.”

   • Do you have any questions before we start the interview?
   • Can we record this interview? The recording will only be viewed by us and the supervisors of this project. It will also be destroyed after the master thesis has been approved.

2. Ask questions about the interviewee’s organisation:
   • How would you define your business?
   • How long have you operated as …?
     o Do you have any employees? (If yes: what kind of roles do they have in your business? If no: try to find out why)
     o What do you offer your customers? (Value creation)
     o What kind of experience do the tourists get from visiting you? (Value creation measure)
   • Who are your regular customers? (Try to find out if they have a domestic or foreign customer base)
     o Do you get many customers that come to you individually or do most of them come from the tour that Christina’s organises? (Try to find out if they get more foreign customer after collaborating with Christina’s)

3. Asking questions about the interviewee’s relation with Christina’s:
• How did you come in contact with Christina’s for the first time?
  o Why did you choose to work with Christina’s?
  o How long have you been working with Christina’s?
  o How do you keep the contact with Christina’s?

• How many times a week do you participate in Christina’s tours?
  o When do you get the information about visitors before seeing them?
  o Can you please describe what kind of information you get about the visitors?

• Please describe how it is to work with Christina’s?
  o What does Christina’s offer you? (Value co-creation possibilities)
  o What is your role when working with Christina’s?
  o Do you work together with other suppliers from Christina’s? (Try to understand how the platform Onetrip work)
    ▪ If yes: Who do you work together with?
    ▪ How do you work together?
    ▪ If no: Do you think that would be a good idea, and why?

• Has your business changed after starting to work with Christina’s?
  o For example: increased revenue, increased customer base
  o What revenue did you have before your collaboration with Christina’s and how has this developed after the collaboration with Christina’s?
  o How has this changed your life? Please give some examples?

• Have you worked with any organisations that are like Christina’s?
  o If yes:
    ▪ What are the differences/similarities between the organisations?
    ▪ Do you still collaborate with the other organisations? Why?
  o If no:
    ▪ Why have you not worked with any other organisations to get customers?

• How would your situation change if you quit working with Christina’s?

• How do you feel that you contribute to Christina’s work?

4. Questions about marketing and social media:
• What do you think about Facebook and YouTube?
• Have you used the Internet to get customers?
If yes: How did you do this?
If no: Why have you not used the Internet to attract customers? (Try to understand if there is any barriers)

- Do you think that platforms such as Facebook and YouTube can help you in getting customers for your business? Why?
- Do you think that Christina’s can get you more customers through the Internet by using YouTube for example? Why?
- Why do you think that customers come to you? Give some examples of this.

5. Ending the interview:

- Do you provide for other family members? (Try to find out how many, BoP)
- Do you think that you will continue working with Christina’s? Why?
- How do you think that the future of your business will be?
- Sum up the interview in order to confirm that we understood the things the way the interviewee wanted us to. This is important since the transcribed interviews cannot be sent out due to the language and technical barriers.
- Ask if the interviewee has any further questions.
- Repeat that the recordings will be destroyed after the master thesis has been approved and that the material will only be viewed by us and the supervisors of the project.
Appendix 3

**Interview guide: Suppliers of Christina’s – Version 2.0**

1. Start by informing the participant of the study (the aim and purpose of the interview).
   For example:
   “We are here to conduct our master thesis by studying the platform Onetrip where we want to see how the platform has a positive impact on the actors involved.”

   “We are very thankful for your participation in this interview. And we also want to inform you that you can end the interview whenever you want to and that there will not be any consequences of this.”

   “Also feel free to ask questions if anything is unclear or to come with any general comments when you feel like it.”

   - Do you have any questions before we start the interview?
   - Can we record this interview? The recording will only be viewed by us and the supervisors of this project. It will also be destroyed after the master thesis has been approved.

2. Ask questions about the interviewee’s organisation:
   - How would you define your business?
   - How long have you operated as …?
     - Do you have any employees? (If yes: what kind of roles do they have in your business? If no: try to find out why)
     - What do you offer your customers? (Value creation)
     - What kind of experience do the tourists get from visiting you? (Value creation measure)
   - Who are your regular customers? (Try to find out if they have a domestic or foreign customer base)
     - Do you get many customers that come to you individually or do most of them come from the tour that Christina’s organises? (Try to find out if they get more foreign customer after collaborating with Christina’s)
3. Asking questions about the interviewee’s relation with Onetrip:
   - How did you come in contact with Onetrip for the first time?
     - Why did you choose to work with Onetrip?
     - How long have you been working with Onetrip?
     - How do you keep the contact with Onetrip?
   - How many times a week do you participate in Onetrip tours?
     - When do you get the information about visitors before seeing them?
     - Can you please describe what kind of information you get about the visitors?
   - Please describe how it is to work with Onetrip?
     - What does Onetrip offer you? (Value co-creation possibilities)
     - What is your role when working with Onetrip?
     - Do you collaborate with other businesses that works with Onetrip? (Try to understand how the platform Onetrip work)
       ▪ If yes: Who do you work together with?
       ▪ How do you work together?
       ▪ If no: Do you think that would be a good idea, and why?
   - Has your business changed after starting to work with Onetrip?
     - For example: increased revenue, increased customer base
     - What revenue did you have before your collaboration with Onetrip and how has this developed after the collaboration with Onetrip?
     - How has this changed your life? Please give some examples?
   - Have you worked with any organisations that are like Onetrip?
     - If yes:
       ▪ What are the differences/similarities between the organisations?
       ▪ Do you still collaborate with the other organisations? Why?
     - If no:
       ▪ Why have you not worked with any other organisations to get customers?
   - How would your situation change if you quit working with Onetrip?
   - How do you feel that you contribute to Onetrip work?

4. Questions about marketing and social media:
   - Do you market your business on the Internet?
• Have you used the Internet to get customers?
  o If yes: How did you do this?
  o If no: Why have you not used the Internet to attract customers? (Try to understand if there is any barriers)

• Do you think that platforms such as Facebook and YouTube can help you in getting customers for your business? Why?

• Do you think that Onetrip can get you more customers through the Internet by using YouTube for example? Why?

• Why do you think that customers come to you? Give some examples of this.

5. Ending the interview:
• Do you provide for other family members? (Try to find out how many, BoP)
• Do you think that you will continue working with Christina’s? Why?
• Do you want to be able to operate independently? Please describe why
• How do you think that the future of your business will be?
• Sum up the interview in order to confirm that we understood the things the way the interviewee wanted us to. This is important since the transcribed interviews cannot be sent out due to the language and technical barriers.
• Ask if the interviewee has any further questions.
• Repeat that the recordings will be destroyed after the master thesis has been approved and that the material will only be viewed by us and the supervisors of the project.
Appendix 4

Interview guide: The staff of Christina’s

1. Start by informing the participant of the study (the aim and purpose of the interview). For example:

“We are here to conduct our master thesis by studying the platform Onetrip where we want to see how the platform has a positive impact on the actors involved.”

“We are very thankful for your participation in this interview. And we also want to inform you that you can end the interview whenever you want to and that there will not be any consequences of this.”

- Do you have any questions before we start the interview?
- Can we record this interview? The recording will only be viewed by us and the supervisors of this project. It will also be destroyed after the master thesis has been approved.

2. Asking questions about the interviewee’s role at Christina’s:

- How long have you been working for Christina’s?
- What is your role in the company, and can you describe your tasks?
  - If marketing department:
    - How do you market your tours?
  - If HR:
    - How do you advertise new job offers?
    - What kind of criteria do the staff need to fulfil to be a part of your organisation?
  - If guide:
    - What kind of criteria did you need to fulfil to join Christina’s?

3. Following with questions about Christina’s organisation:

- Do you feel like the roles and tasks are clearly defined in this organisation, can you give some examples of this? (Try to find out if they can adapt to a fast-changing environment)
- We found out about your platform Onetrip through YouTube, and we were wondering how you advertise Onetrip? (Try to find out the importance of digital marketing through social media)
Supplementary questions:

- Are there any other social media platforms that you use to advertise your tours? (If yes: Ask about which ones and why they chose them, If no: why?)

Do you collaborate with any youtubers or spokesperson other than *Best Ever Food Review Show*? (If yes: Ask how this collaboration works)

- In what way does digital marketing impact the number of customers you attract?
- In what way would your success in attracting customers differ if you did not have access to social media or any other digital marketing tools?

- How would you describe your social travel platform *Onetrip*? (Try to find out about the structure, how the processes work)

- What is your business model? (See if they actively co-create value with the entre)

  Supplementary questions:

  - Can you describe your customer base for us? (Try to find out if the suppliers are customers or collaborators)
  - What do you offer your customers? (Value proposal)
  - How do you gain revenue? (Value can be in form of financial value)
  - Do you pay the suppliers for their service or are you paid for enabling contact between them and the tourists?
  - Do you collaborate with other organisations that offer similar services as you? Why? (Try to understand how *Christina’s* create value within their service system)

- How has your organisation changed over time? (Try to find out how they have improved their value proposal)

4. Questions about the suppliers:

- How many suppliers do you have?
- What kind of suppliers do you have? (For example: restaurants, guides, homestays etc.)

  Supplementary questions:

  - What type of suppliers did you recently hire?
- Do you see your suppliers as collaborators or as customers? Why?
- What do you offer your suppliers?
- What do the suppliers offer you?
- How do you think that the life of your suppliers has changed after you started working with them?

• How do you choose these suppliers?
  o Supplementary questions:
    ▪ Who chooses them?
    ▪ Do you have certain criteria that the suppliers need to fulfil in order to be part of your network? Why?
    ▪ Can the suppliers apply to be part of your network or do you reach out to them?

• How does your platform Onetrip work?
  o Supplementary questions:
    ▪ How are the suppliers informed of the bookings? (Try to find out how the suppliers get information from the platform)
    ▪ What kind of information does the suppliers receive about the customers before the tours? (Try to find out if the suppliers are in direct contact with the customers before meeting for the tours)

5. Ending the interview:
- How do you see the future of Christina’s?
  o Do you see a change in the future in terms of the organisation, the tours and the customers, why?
- Sum up the interview in order to confirm that we understood the things the way the interviewee wanted us to. This is important since the transcribed interviews cannot be sent out due to the language and technical barriers.
- Ask if the interviewee has any further questions.
- Repeat that the recordings will be destroyed after the master thesis has been approved and that the material will only be viewed by us and the supervisors of the project.
Appendix 5

Interview Guide: The staff of *Christina’s* – Version 2.0

1. Start by informing the participant of the study (the aim and purpose of the interview). For example:

“We are here to conduct our master thesis by studying the platform *Onetrip* where we want to see how the platform has a positive impact on the actors involved.”

“We are very thankful for your participation in this interview. According to our University policies and to the Swedish science council in humanities and social sciences, this interview will remain confidential which means that we will not send the content of this interview to anyone else. We also want to inform you that you can end the interview whenever you want to and that there will not be any consequences of this”.

- Do you have any questions before we start the interview?
- Can we record this interview? The recording will only be viewed by us and the supervisors of this project. It will also be destroyed after the master thesis has been approved.

2. Asking questions about the interviewee’s role at *Christina’s*:

- What is your position in this company?
- How long have you been working for *Christina’s*?
- How did you find out about *Christina’s*?
- What kind of requirements did you need to fulfil in order to be a part of *Christina’s*?
- Why did you choose to work at *Christina’s*?
- How does *Christina’s* compare to your previous jobs?
- What benefits are there to working with *Christina’s*?

3. Following with questions about Christina’s organisation:

- We have heard about your townhall meeting, what is the purpose of the meetings?
- What is your business model? (See if they actively co-create value with the suppliers)
• How important do you think that your collaborator/suppliers are for your business model?
  o How do you create value for yourself and your collaborators?
  o How do you define value?
  o How do you co-create value with your business network?

• How would you define your organisational structure? (Try to find out if they can adapt to a fast-changing environment)
  o If you would draw a picture of your organisational structure, what would it look like?
  o Do you see Onetrip, Christina’s and The Joi Factory as departments or subsidiaries?
  o I’ve heard previous employees describe the hierarchy as there are “team members and team leaders”. What kind of teams are there?
  o Who reports to whom?

• How would you describe your social travel platform Onetrip? (Try to find out about the structure, how the processes work)
  o Many suppliers refer to you as Onetrip, do you see Onetrip as an additional brand or as a department in your company Christina’s?
  o Do you see the suppliers your guests meet on the tours as collaborators or as customers? Please explain.

• We have heard about sustainable tourism, is this something you working towards? Can please describe the processes and give us some example.
  o How do you define sustainable tourism?

• If marketing:
  o How would you describe your brand/brands?
  o What is your customer base (who do you target?)
    - How do you target these customers?
  o How do you advertise your tours and Onetrip?
  o We found out about your platform Onetrip through YouTube, and we were wondering how you advertise Onetrip? (Try to find out the importance of digital marketing through social media)
o Are there any other social media platforms that you use to advertise your tours and Onetrip? (If yes: Ask about which ones and why they chose them, If no: why?)

o How do you pick out which tours you are going to do? Can you describe the process of how you pick out the tours for us?

o How long are the trial tours before you can offer the full tour to your guests?

o Who are your competitors?
  ▪ How to you maintain your position on the market?

• If HR:
  o How do you advertise new job offers?
  o Can you describe your recruitment process?
    ▪ Do you have an HR department in every city where you are operating?
    ▪ Who has the final call when it comes to hiring new employees?
    ▪ Is it hard to find employees that shares your core values?
  o What kind of requirements do your new employees need to fulfil in order to be a part of your team? Please give some examples.
  o Do you reach out to potential employees, or do they come to you? Please describe this process
    ▪ Do your current employees recommend new staff members?
    ▪ Are the employees encouraged to recommend new staff members? (If Yes: Why?)
  o What do you offer your employees? Please give some examples

• If guide:
  o Are you working as a freelance or a fulltime guide (If freelance: why freelance?)
  o Have you helped in developing any tours?
  o Would you say that you are working for Onetrip or for Christina's?
  o All other guides encouraged us to pose for pictures during our tours which they would later send to us via google link. Is this something that Christina's/Onetrip encourages you to do?
o Have you worked as a guide before? (If: No: Why now? If Yes: can you compare your experiences of working as a guide before and working for Christina’s now?)

- If tech-team:
  o What kind of tools do your company use?
  o How does your platform Onetrip works? Please describe the different user aspects.
  o Do you only develop software for Christina’s, or do you have other customers? Please describe this process
  o What kind software/hardware do you develop?
  o How do your different development team work?

- How has your organisation changed over time? (Try to find out how they have improved their value proposal)

- Have you experienced any challenges while working with Christina’s? Please give some examples.
  o How did you tackle this/these challenge?

4. Ending the interview:

- How do you see the future of Christina’s?
  o Do you see a change in the future in terms of the organisation, the platforms, the tours and the customers, why?

- According to our University policies and to the Swedish science council in humanities and social sciences, we need to send out a copy of this interview to you. It is a way to confirm that we have not falsified anything that you have said, and it is also a chance for you to change the answers. Can we send you the transcribed interview on your e-mail?

- Repeat that the recordings will be destroyed after the master thesis has been approved and that the material will only be viewed by us and the supervisors of the project. You can end your participation in our study, whenever you want, this means that you can tell us that we are not allowed to use your recordings anymore.