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### **Characterizing well-being capabilities in services**

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to characterize how services present well-being capabilities to responsabilized consumers. This is done by drawing on structuration theory and literatures on responsabilization, social well-being and psychological well-being.

**Design/methodology/Approach:** The paper is based on conceptual development and a qualitative, interpretive study of value propositions in texts and images on websites of eleven different self-tracking wearables and applications.

**Findings:** This paper introduces the Changing-Coping-Countering characterization to explicate different types of well-being capabilities that are represented in services. These capabilities represent different stances towards structures and have different transformative potential. The paper proposes and discusses how these capabilities can have different impacts on well-being on individual and collective levels.

**Research limitations/implications:** This study is limited to the perspective of value propositions in self-tracking services. Further empirical research is needed to investigate well-being capabilities from consumer perspectives.

**Practical implications:** The proposed characterization can help practitioners in becoming more reflexive concerning their value propositions that relate to consumer well-being. This implies becoming aware of well-being discourses that shape and affect service development.

**Originality/Value:** This paper provides a novel characterization for understanding the transformative role of services in the context of responsabilization. It contributes to structural perspectives on the role of services in contributing to well-being.

## Characterizing well-being capabilities in services

### Introduction

One of the crucial questions within current service research priorities concerns the role of services as drivers of well-being on individual and collective levels (Ostrom 2015). Services are both responding to, and creating new expectations for consumers (Russell-Bennett & Rosenbaum 2019), as they play an important and enabling role in a societal shift towards *responsibilization* (Anderson et al. 2016). In practice *responsibilization* has been argued to entail a shift of well-being management from the public sector and collective organizations towards an emphasis on individual responsibility for self-care (Shamir 2008).

This shift towards increased individual responsibility requires consumers to be literate and capable enough to personally manage their well-being (Anderson et al. 2016). During the past few decades, a plethora of services, exemplified by fitness gyms (Sassatelli 2016), wearables and applications for self-tracking (Lupton 2016), personal trainers and weight management programs (Yngfalk & Yngfalk 2015), have emerged to support this *capabilization* (Giesler & Veresiu 2014) in the context of self-management of well-being. Often the capabilities of individual well-being management relate to structural and societal issues that affect their well-being (Giesler & Veresiu 2014; Yngfalk & Yngfalk 2015). For example physical exercise and practicing mindfulness can be seen as personal tools to handle the problems of increasing insecurity and performance requirements in the workplace. As the role of services is becoming increasingly important in consumers' well-being projects, it is important for both research and practitioners to gain an understanding of how they portray the roles of consumers in managing well-being, i.e. how services present consumers with *well-being capabilities*. This study contributes to Transformative Service Research (TSR) by providing a characterization of how consumers are presented with well-being capabilities within the empirical context of self-tracking.

This study is based on a perspective in which consumers are embedded in social and structural circumstances (eg. Giddens 1984; Edvardsson et al. 2011; Askegaard & Linnet 2011), meaning that the focus is not on individual consumers, but rather on how services portray the roles of consumers who seek well-being. While many studies have showed that pursuing personal goals can contribute to individual well-being (Blocker &

Barrios, 2015; Tang et al. 2016), the formation and appraisal of these goals and the required capabilities for achieving them are argued to be affected by culture and language (Baumeister et al. 2013). Previous studies have investigated for example how marketing campaigns portray consumers as responsible for social development (Kipp & Hawkins 2019) and how self-help literature renders individual consumers as responsible for their well-being (Rimke 2000). However, how services portray the roles and responsibilities of consumers in the context of well-being has not yet been studied. In practice, this study seeks to understand how services play a part in defining these realities by focusing on *value propositions* presented by services, i.e. “invitations from actors to one another to engage in service” (Chandler & Lusch, 2015:8).

Even though consumers are usually seen in service research as agentic, their agency and literacy is also argued to be constrained and limited by discourses that promote self-improvement, ideal expectations of behaviour, and normalized body images (Gurrieri et al. 2013; Yngfalk & Yngfalk 2015; Liu et al. 2016; Schroeder & Zwick 2004). Previous research has shown for example that exposure to idealized images of women in advertisements cause anxiety and body shame (Bissell & Rask 2010). Services play also a part in this context, as they tap into *structures*, meaning the norms, values and expectations of behaviour that are culturally formed (Giddens 1984; Blocker & Barrios 2015). These structures constitute the context for personal well-being, and they can shape consumers’ understandings of what it means to be well and fully functioning (Ryff & Singer 2008). Thus, from a structurationist perspective (Giddens 1984), services can play a part in shaping consumers’ capabilities for managing personal well-being, which can be manifested in different ways (Blocker & Barrios 2015; Rosenbaum et al. 2011). The *capabilities* of consumers – defined as “a person ability or competency to achieve a particular goal or fulfill expectations” (Anderson et al. 2016:265) – are in this view inherently linked to structures. In this study the more specific notion of well-being capabilities refers to the competencies to achieve well-being and expectations related to it. Enabled by this perspective, the purpose of this study is to characterize how services present well-being capabilities to responsabilized consumers. The research question that drives this study is thus:

RQ: How are well-being capabilities for responsabilized consumers represented in service value propositions?

The research question in this study is answered by drawing on theories of psychological and social well-being, responsabilization, and structuration theory, together with empirical insights from a qualitative study on value propositions. Self-tracking devices and applications constitute the empirical context of this study, as they are often aimed at promoting health and well-being. The insights are also relevant for practitioners engaged in creating well-being offerings. Well-being refers in this study to its eudaimonic dimensions, drawing on the concepts of *psychological well-being* (Ryff 1989; Ryff & Singer 2008) and *social well-being* (Keyes 1998). According to this view well-being is individual, but it is formed in the individual's socio-structural context (Ryff & Singer 2008).

By studying how well-being capabilities are represented in services, this study makes several contributions. First, drawing on a social constructionist perspective (Edvardsson et al. 2011), this study contributes to an understanding of the relationship between services and well-being in the context of daily life by looking at the norms and expectations that services associate with well-being, and more specifically, how services propose that consumers should exercise their agency in relation to surrounding structures. These insights can help researchers understand how services contribute to establishing societal norms, as called for by Fisk et al. (2018). Second, it investigates the role of services in the context of responsabilization by showing how services propose capabilities with which consumers can carry personal responsibility for their well-being. Third, it contributes to ongoing discussions within TSR on how services can create more sustainable well-being (Previte and Robertson 2019). Finally, this paper responds to calls for research by Anderson et al. (2013) and Anderson and Ostrom (2015) on the socio-structural dimensions of the interplay between service and well-being.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section presents literature on well-being, and connects it to underlying assumptions that draw on structuration theory (ST) and responsabilization. This is followed by a presentation of the methodology used for the empirical study, after which the findings will be presented. Next, the paper presents a discussion of theoretical and practical implications, where the transformative potential of services under a context of responsabilization is discussed. The paper concludes with limitations and suggestions for future avenues of research.

## **Well-being capabilities from a structurationist perspective**

### *Structuration theory*

In line with the value-in-social-context view presented by Edvardsson et al. (2011), well-being capabilities are in this study seen in relation to aspects of consumers' everyday well-being that are affected by their socio-structural context. The underlying assumptions of this study are informed by structuration theory (Giddens 1984), which acts as a sensitizing concept, i.e. the foundation that shapes the research problem and provides a starting point for the analysis (Bowen, 2006). Structuration theory (ST) is concerned with the question of how social structures are transformed or maintained by knowledgeable actors in society (Giddens 1984). In this study structures refer to the values, social norms and expectations that drive and are shaped by individual actions (Edvardsson et al. 2011). Knowledgeable actors refer in this study to the notion that individuals are not solely steered and governed by structure, rather they are agentic, but they exercise their agency by drawing on their knowledge of surrounding structures (Giddens 1984). This means that both service providers and consumers draw on social structures in their activities.

The closely related concept of *institutions* can to a large extent be seen as synonymous to structure (Barley & Tolbert 1997; Vargo & Lusch 2016). Most commonly, institutions have been defined as the “rules of the game” within social situations (Koskela-Huotari & Vargo 2016), or in other words, the norms, values, meanings and beliefs that affect actors, be they consumers or members of service provider organizations (Vargo et al. 2015). In contrast to the institutional view, ST is used in this study because it focuses more on the processual view on how these structures (or institutions) gain and maintain their shape through the actions of capable individual actors (for example by acting “as one is supposed to”, as Giddens put it), and how these structures can be transformed (Barley & Tolbert 1997; Giddens 1984).

### *Eudaimonic well-being*

During the past years, the creation of uplifting changes for individuals and societies has emerged as a new research priority (Anderson et al. 2013; Ostrom et al. 2015). Consequently, well-being has become the focal outcome and variable of interest in a growing number of studies in the emerging field of Transformative Service Research (Sharma et al. 2017; Tang et al. 2016; McColl-Kennedy et al. 2012). Numerous definitions and conceptualisations of well-being have been developed in different fields,

ranging from an individual's global appraisal of their life, such as subjective well-being (Diener 1984), to more specific aspects, such as financial well-being (Brüggen et al. 2017). The most common understanding of well-being within TSR has divided its outcomes into *hedonic* and *eudaimonic* well-being, where the former relates to pleasure and enjoyment, and the latter implies a more Aristotelian realization of potential or meaningfulness (Ryff & Singer 2008; Anderson et al. 2013; Sharma et al. 2017).

This study focuses on eudaimonic well-being, in order to understand well-being in relation to consumers' daily lives, outside the specific contexts of medical illness and healthcare, as discussed by Durgee and Agopian (2018) in their study on refurbishing services. The notion of Eudaimonia has its roots in the writings of Aristotle, and is concerned with the pursuit of a well-lived life (Ryff & Singer 2008). The perspective on eudaimonic well-being in this study draws on the argument by Keyes (1998:121) that the self is "both a public process and a private product" and provides a useful means for understanding well-being capabilities in the context of this study. Whereas hedonic well-being can be seen as a subjective evaluation of an individual's happiness, this study focuses on eudaimonic well-being, because it is more goal-directed (Ryff & Singer 2008). The goals, or end-states, reflect the purposes of well-being capabilities. The concepts of psychological well-being (Ryff 1989) and social well-being (Keyes 1998) serve to illustrate eudaimonia, as they include for example the dimensions of self-acceptance, purpose in life, evaluations of one's social value, and the quality of one's relationship to society (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Keyes, 1998; Ryff & Singer, 2008). These concepts point to the individual's role in their social context.

As ST focuses on the reproduction and transformation of structure, specifically through individual agency, it provides a relevant lens for understanding how services can enable eudaimonic well-being. In principle, eudaimonic living focuses on the process of living well, pursuing the right ends for a good life, and realizing one's true self (Ryan & Singer 2008). According to positive psychology, eudaimonic well-being can be achieved through autonomous and volitional behaviour, and by pursuing intrinsic values – in other words, when an individual "evaluates oneself by personal standards" (Ryff 1989:1071). However, individuals remain embedded in social structures, where they face many social tasks and expectations (Keyes 1998:122). Structures can be seen to provide individuals with expectations of Eudaimonia, i.e. how well-being looks like, and how it should be pursued. Similarly to the basic tenets of ST, this implies that

consumers are agentic, knowledgeable actors, but at the same time they are constrained in their efforts to achieve eudaimonic well-being. In other words, ST acknowledges that individual reflexivity and agency are always bounded to some degree by surrounding structure (Barley & Tolbert 1997). Structural constraints to an individual's agency are connected to their motives and reasons (Giddens 1984). This means that individuals may often act in ways that they actually dislike, only because they think that this is the appropriate and expected way to behave. Many individuals may diet or build muscles, not because they like doing it, but because they think that they will become more desired.

This view on well-being means that services reproduce societal norms and values that play a part in influencing consumers (Edvardsson et al. 2011:328). At the same time services can capabilize consumers to face these social tasks and challenges. The next section discusses how capabilization, a necessary element in responsabilization, is operationalized in this study in the form of well-being capabilities.

#### *Capabilizing the consumer*

Responsibilization entails a discourse and shift where social issues and tasks previously belonging to collective organizations or the public sector become the burden and responsibility of individuals, who are expected to utilize market resources in handling these responsibilities (Shamir 2008; Anderson et al. 2016). Previous research has examined responsabilization critically, arguing that it can be overwhelming for consumers, and cause discomfort between providers and consumers (Anderson et al. 2016). The focus in this study is on the role of services – which constitute an important part of the available market resources – in responsabilization and the enabling of well-being management. This means specifically looking at how responsabilization of well-being management is portrayed in service value propositions. Central to this understanding is the P.A.C.T. model, by Giesler and Veresiu (2014), which gives a conceptual explanation of how consumer responsabilization occurs. According to this model, which is briefly presented below, the four-step process entails a *personalization*, *authorization*, *capabilization* and finally *transformation* of the consumer (Giesler & Veresiu 2014).

- *Personalization*: redefining the solution to a social problem as the creation of a more ethical individual behaviour



- *Authorization*: legitimizing this new ethical individual behaviour by linking it to eg. psychological constructs such as well-being and self-esteem
- *Capabilization*: The creation of an infrastructure that supports individual self-management, mostly through market offerings, i.e. products and services
- *Transformation*: The individual internalizes her new role as the manager of her identity project

This study aims to zoom in on the process of capabilization, i.e. the supporting infrastructure, in order to look at *how* services present well-being capabilities to consumers. This topic, as well as other steps in the P.A.C.T. model, is relevant for TSR because services can be seen as constituting a crucial and growing part of this capabilizing infrastructure in the larger context of responsabilization.

Theories of psychological and social well-being, connected to a structurationist perspective, provide the foundation for the specific notion of *well-being capabilities*. These capabilities are in this study seen as different ways in which an individual consumer can enact their agency in managing personal well-being, which is formed in their surrounding socio-structural context. Embedded in this context, the individual consumer engages with structures in the form of tasks, expectations and issues that affect their well-being. In a Giddensian sense (1984), these structural issues can range from more ‘rigid’ or ‘deep’ ones, such as laws and regulations concerning working conditions, to more ‘fluid’ or ‘superficial’ ones (Sewell 1992), such as performance pressures and cultural norms and values concerning idealized body images, health, or success (Giesler & Veresiu 2014; Gurrieri et al. 2013). All of these have implications for individual well-being, as they can serve to shift an individual’s locus of evaluation towards external ideals (Ryff 1989) and affect one’s self-conception and appraisal of performance in social roles (Keyes 1998).

Insert Figure 1 here

Figure 1 visualizes the perspective of this study, based on existing literature, where service enable the responsabilization of consumers by presenting them with capabilities for interacting with structures, i.e. societal values, expectations and norms. As Edvardsson and Tronvoll (2013) point out, these values are not owned by any individual, but rather they are shared as common understandings, which lead to

individual actions that in turn reproduce these understandings. Because of this, it is meaningful to extend the level of analysis beyond individuals, to norms and meanings that are expressed in service offerings, often through “what’s good for you” solutions (Gurrieri et al. 2013:130), i.e. offerings that prescribe well-being goals which often relate to societal norms. Well-being capabilities are directly related to these norms and understandings, i.e. structures. The figure shows how both consumers and services are embedded in structures. The arrows in the figure represent the reproduction of structure through well-being capabilities offered by services to consumers. These capabilities are invested with meanings that connect consumers with surrounding structures. The arrows are two-directional, which indicates the co-constitutive nature of structure and agency (Giddens 1984), meaning that well-being capabilities both shape and are shaped by structure. Next, the method of this study will be presented, together with a discussion on how the meanings of these capabilities can be grasped in a service context.

## **Methodology**

This study follows a social constructivist perspective, as used in previous service research, such as Cheung and McColl-Kennedy (2019). Within this qualitative approach value propositions are seen as carriers of cultural values and meanings, which are conveyed to consumers. The aim is thus to not to generalize from observations, but to understand the focal phenomenon and to use the empirical material as a resource for developing theory (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Alvesson & Kärreman 2011). In this study, the empirical context of self-tracking refers to the collecting of data on physiological and cognitive attributes and functions. This context was judged as relevant for the study, as these devices and applications are becoming increasingly popular and they often contain normative expectations of health and appropriate behaviour (Pantzar & Ruckenstein 2017). The devices and applications included in this study measure for instance heart rate, weight, mood, and sleep. This setting is relevant for services that aim to transform consumers’ lives and increase their well-being.

Website content in the forms of both texts and images constitutes the empirical material for this study, and these contents are handled together as textual material. The collection of empirical material was done during 2018 through internet searches on wearable devices and self-tracking, in order to identify a number of services for the sample. Texts and images were collected from the front pages and respective product pages of eleven companies in total. The material is presented in table 1. The analytical

approach corresponded to an interpretive, qualitative content analysis, which can be used in revealing meanings and cultural norms (Daymon & Holloway 2010:277-288). For the analysis process, screenshots were printed of these websites, consisting in total of 30 pages of material. The research evolved in an iterative manner, meaning that the author moved back and forth between data collection and analysis stages (Spiggle 1994). As the analytical focus was on depth instead of breadth, and as the empirical material consisted of both text and images, the author analysed the material manually. The sample is not generalizable, but rather uses examples of a broad spectrum of wearables that serve as a platform for showcasing what types of meanings relating to wellbeing capabilities are represented in the value propositions of services.

Insert table 1 here

In accordance with Spiggle (1994) the process of inference involved both *analysis*, in the sense of breaking down and dissecting wholes into parts, and *interpretation*, which entailed grasping a sense of what these texts and images mean, using metaphors. The analysis included a detailed reading of the collected texts and images. The main focus and unit of analysis consisted of both overt and covert value propositions – referring to the “invitations from actors to one another to engage in service” (Chandler & Lusch, 2015:8). ST functioned as a sensitizing concept (Patton 1990:391) in the analysis, meaning that attention was given to 1) what implicit or explicit norms, expectations, and assumptions, i.e. structures relating to eudaimonic well-being are present, and 2) how are consumer stances towards these structures portrayed. In the next step, these findings were compared between different texts and images, in order to find both patterns of similarity and difference, which were then categorized. At this stage, the process of *interpreting* (Spiggle 1994) these categories was started. The interpretation focused on looking at the two aspects of structures and stances towards structures. In this way, different well-being capabilities could be discovered. Next the findings will be presented.

## **Findings**

On a general level, the empirical part of this study pointed to the realization that in almost all of the cases well-being is concerned with contextual issues, such as managing

a hectic and stressful work life, or enhancing impression management and the presentation of a healthy self. This also supports the notion of responsabilization of individuals, as argued in several previous studies (Giesler & Veresiu 2014; Anderson et al. 2016). Although this is a common theme, the capabilities for tackling these problems are defined in different ways by service providers, sometimes even representing conflicting meanings (Thompson & Haytko 1997).

Based on theoretical and empirical insights, three different types of capabilities emerged: *changing*, *coping* and *countering*, which are suggested to have different implications for individual well-being. These capabilities are seen as different ways for consumers to act within social structures, in order to improve their well-being. These three types are summarized in table 2 and will be discussed below.

Insert table 2 here

### *Changing*

The first type refers to consumers *changing* their physique or appearance in order to reflect surrounding norms. This represents an extrinsic, active, assimilating approach where well-being is reached by fitting in and corresponding to expectations. This is illustrated by text on the website of Lumo Lift, a posture tracker, promising that the user will “*look better, feel better, be better*” by “*changing your posture*”. This type of capability enables most directly the reproduction of structure (Giddens 1984). It is thus indicative of a service where schemas of eg. normalized body images have affected and become reproduced in the service design process.

In an image on the same website, a man is climbing and conquering a mountain, which can be read as a classic metaphor that refers to the end goal of succeeding and overcoming challenges. This is coupled with a call-to-action, implying that this is done by changing one’s posture: “Sit straighter, stand taller, look better.”

*“Slouching lets your stomach hang out and look bigger than it actually is – standing or sitting with a good posture pulls it all in and can make you look up to 10 pounds lighter!”*

*“You only get one first impression, make it count. Your first impression matters. Show off your best self with a strong first impression. Poor posture affects how people perceive you – and not in a good way! Stand upright and make that first*

*impression count. You will immediately appear much more open, confident and up for any challenge ahead.”*

The quotes above, from the front page of the company Upright, are illustrative of the common theme of controlling and thus changing one’s physical appearance, which characterizes the capability of *changing*. They can be seen as representing what Johansson et al. (2017) call *managerial athleticism*, which builds on cultural meanings where fit and athletic bodies are representative of managerial identities. A successful manager, according to this logic, is also successful at managing her own physique and performance. At the same time, a stomach that “hangs out” or a sagging posture are constructed as undesirable and as signs of a person who is unreliable and who does not correspond to the expectation of being a successful leader.

In summary, the capability of *changing* can be seen to produce expected obligations (Giddens 1984) of ideal conduct and appearance, while simultaneously encouraging the user to evaluate herself by the standards of these expectations. This encouraged self-assessment (Yngfalk & Yngfalk 2015) turns the locus of evaluation towards the external realm of the user, which, as Ryff (1989) showed, can affect well-being negatively.

### *Coping*

The second well-being capability is *coping*. Coping refers to a more passive stance, where the consumer is simply encouraged to withstand pressure and cope with stress. This is exemplified by Spire, a breathing tracker which alerts the user when her breathing indicates increased strain, and coaches stress-relieving breathing practices amid stressful situations:

*“Get notifications of tension before it strikes. When your breathing becomes rapid or erratic, Spire will send you a gentle notification with actionable next steps.”*

In a very similar manner, Vitali communicates the value proposition of its smart bra:

*“The VITALI Smart Bra tracks your breathing, and heart rate variability (HRV), key physiological indicators of the balance between stress and your well-being. The biofeedback gives you guidance at the time when an unbalance is first detected, so small actions such as taking a deep breath can effectively take you back on track.”*

Coping does not explicitly uphold normalized body projects or encourage conformity to norms or structures, but rather aims to “handle the situation” through a passive acceptance. Coping also most clearly upholds the transfer of responsibility to the individual consumer, by framing the solution as something that lies within the individual, rather than in the environment or in political means. The individual’s *reflexivity*, i.e. capacity to observe and understand what they are doing (Giddens 1984), can thus be shaped in a way that it is not structures that should be altered, but one’s individual behaviour. For example workplace stress, as mentioned in these examples, should be remedied by means of tolerating stress better, such as breathing exercises, rather than addressing the root cause, which might often be located in the organization or surrounding culture.

On the website of the breathing tracker Spire, an image shows a woman with a harmonious and relaxed expression on her face, in what appears to be a busy office. She sits in front of a computer, and the blurred outlines of people in the background represent a fast-paced environment. The text indicates that by using the tracker, she as an individual can decouple herself from the hectic setting that causes stress and anxiety. Shifting the locus of remedy to the individual is usually also coupled with the logic of self-optimization, as exemplified by the slogan for the stress-relieving wearable Touchpoint:

*“Stress less, sleep better and manage anger to be the best version of yourself”*

To summarise, coping implies a more implicit and not as direct reproduction of structure (Giddens 1984). Although this type of capability encourages users to turn their gaze inwards, towards their own physical and cognitive attributes, it still does not encourage reflection concerning the structure that surrounds her. In this case, turning the gaze inwards implies an increased individualism, which, as McGuire (1988) noted, can hamper the transformation of harmful social structures.

### *Countering*

The third type of capability is *countering*. This represents again a more active stance, but this time with a more reflexive, subvertive, and non-conformist take. It implies standing up against external pressures and extrinsic motivators, typically by turning the

user's gaze inwards; to find intrinsic well-being in knowing one's body or being comfortable with oneself. The VITALI smart bra, an activity tracker and wellness coach, does this by acknowledging a plurality of goals and types of people, without prescribing any ideals, as the quote below shows.

*“The bra is tailored to a woman's everyday need regardless of how she lives. Medium support, tested and tried on many different bodies to be just right.”*

Phrases such as “regardless of how she lives” and “tested and tried on many different bodies” are telling of a conscious effort by the service provider to not portray any ideals, and in so doing the consumer is encouraged to evaluate herself by personal standards, instead of external ones (Ryff 1989). The smart vibrator Lioness is another example of a self-tracking device that most directly encourages countering, which is illustrated by their “pact” with consumers, stating for instance:

*“I'm not afraid to question convention” and “I define my own pleasure”*

The activity tracker Jawbone is marketed along similar lines, with the tagline:

*“Feeling great is a very good look”*

These taglines openly confront and reject the expectation that one has to change the shape or behaviour of one's body in order to fit the ideal of beauty, thus encouraging a transformative agency among their users. These catchphrases are also directly representative of an internal locus of evaluation, and a rejection of external norms. In this sense, they can be seen as empowering and indicative of service users as agentic actors.

The imagery from the social media feed on the website of Lioness shows the same line of reasoning. Portrayals of older persons, and other depictions of women that differ from stereotypical popular cultural serve to emphasize the argument of questioning norms. In one image, an older woman, with large black-rimmed glasses, short, spikey grey hair, and colourful clothing says “don't live in anybody else's image”. In another image there is a drawing of a hunched woman with thick glasses and hairy legs. The woman says “I'm a smart, strong sensual woman”. The texts associated

with both pictures also direct the locus of evaluation from the external to the internal realm. In more subtle forms, *countering* simply implies shifting this locus of evaluation away from the external, and encouraging a plurality of motives, goals and outcomes, which is also evident this particular phrase from the lifelogging application Optimized:

*“Improving your life is all about setting the right goals. Whether you want to regularly go to the gym, do more creative stuff or spend more time with your loved ones, Optimized provides you with the right tools to keep your goals on track.”*

Even though the popular notion of *improving* one’s life occurs also here, it is coupled with an array of very different outcomes, from exercising to simply fostering one’s social life. In this way, it does not contribute to discourses of maximising productivity or efficiency, as is often the case with those capabilities that more directly reproduce responsabilization and other social expectations. The same emphasis on an internal locus of evaluation is also evident in some of the value propositions of Oura, a smart ring that tracks its user’s sleep, activity and heart rate. In an image on their website, a man is seen at home happily playing with what is presumably his child. There are no references to matters pertaining to work, looks, performance or exercise. The accompanying text, stating “Be you. Nobody does it better.” is a clear nod to focus on one’s own persona. The man seems to focus only on the moment, without any external expectations. This emphasis on an internal locus of evaluation sets *countering* apart from the capabilities of *changing* and *countering*.

Connecting this to streams of thought within service research, this *countering* represents what Edvardsson and Tronvoll (2013) call *configuring new sets of structures*, or what Blocker and Barrios (2015) refer to as breaking free from one’s everyday life and worldview. Appropriate behaviours and appearances, such as gender stereotypes, are actively confronted and rejected, thus portraying a change – or transformation – in the realm of action (Barley & Tolbert 1997) of individual consumers. Although this stance can be seen as best being able to induce structural transformation for the benefit of well-being, perhaps surprisingly, it occurred more rarely in the sample of this study.



## Discussion

The aim of this paper was to gain an understanding of how services propose well-being capabilities to consumers in a context of responsabilization, through a qualitative content analysis of value propositions presented in website contents of self-tracking services. Insights from structuration theory, psychological well-being and social well-being acted as a guiding frame of reference in connecting the notion of well-being capabilities to structures, such as norms, values and culturally contingent, taken-for-granted assumptions. Understanding the modes in which capabilization occurs, as well as other steps in the P.A.C.T. model (Giesler & Veresiu 2014), is especially relevant for TSR, as its aim is to understand well-being in the interplay between providers, consumers, and society (Anderson et al. 2013). Arguably, services can be seen as constituting a crucial and growing part of this capabilizing infrastructure in the larger context of responsabilization.

To summarize the findings, this study argues that the different capabilities presented in services can be seen in terms of *changing*, *coping* and *countering*. These capabilities represent different ways for consumers to interact with their environment, which has been argued to affect their well-being (Kuppelwieser & Finsterwalder 2016). The proposed characterization is applicable both for services that are transformative by design, and that have transformative potential (Rosenbaum et al. 2011). By studying meanings that are present in value propositions on company websites, the focus has not been on understanding specifically *how to enhance well-being*, but rather in shedding light on *how well-being capabilities are presented* in services to responsabilized consumers. The unit of analysis is thus the value proposition, not the consumer. Accordingly, a central limitation is the fact that this study has not considered how consumer themselves form meanings around well-being and how they perceive capabilities that relate to it. It is also worth noting that the three types of capabilities are primarily distinguished analytically and represent a heuristic model with the aim of better understanding the role of services in relation to structures. This means that every type of wearable or other service does not fall neatly into one category of capabilities, but rather that the capabilities are found in differing degrees in different offerings. The implications of the proposed framework are presented in table 3.

Insert table 3 here

Table 3 shows the well-being implications of the three proposed stances on both individual level and macro level well-being. These well-being implications are theoretical, based on the relations of these capabilities to psychological and social well-being. If a service presents the individual with *changing* capabilities, it takes a more reproductive stance towards potentially harmful structures. The notion of *changing* in order to fit idealized images and norms can reinforce certain conceptions of desired identities, instead of encouraging a plurality of different appearances and ways of being. This capability suggests that consumers should use their agency in actively shaping their behaviour or physique to correspond to a proposed norm. In its pure form it puts the individual's locus of evaluation outside the self, implying that this type of capability is uncondusive to autonomy (Ryff 1989). If, on the other hand, the capability represents *countering* these structures, it has potential to be more transformative in nature, by encouraging personal standards and destigmatization over the reliance on collective norms. Countering implies a more reflexive attitude towards oneself and one's life circumstances. As a result, this countering capability can potentially also be more conducive to long-term, sustainable change, which has been called for by Previte and Robertson (2019) among others. This potential sustainable change is, however, only suggested in this study, as no consumer data was involved. *Coping*, in turn, falls more passively in the middle of the reproducing-transforming axis, potentially reinforcing the tension between individual and collective well-being. This reinforcement occurs by framing the responsibility on the individual, and by framing solutions to collective problems as lying in the hands of individual consumers (Giesler & Veresiu 2014). While the coping capability emphasizes the individual consumer as the locus of responsibility, it differs from the changing capability by downplaying the agency of consumers. In addition, it differs from the countering capability by placing the locus of evaluation outside the self, meaning that purpose and self-acceptance do not come from within. These capabilities can be seen as different was in which consumers are suggested to enact their agency in the pursuit of well-being, however all of these capabilities emphasize the individual as responsible for their well-being.

On a general level, this study contributes to Transformative Service Research by looking at well-being as a socio-culturally constructed phenomenon, in response to calls for research by Anderson and Ostrom (2015), among others. In the context of this study,

the socio-cultural perspective means that the data and unit of analysis were not based on individual consumers, but rather on representations that are found in services. More specifically, in line with the hermeneutic paradigm of service research (Tronvoll et al. 2011), the characterization is an interpretation of how the well-being capabilities of responsabilized consumers are constructed in services. Whereas previous research has studied how the responsabilization of consumers is represented eg. in marketing campaigns (Kipp & Hawkins 2019) and in self-help literature (Rimke 2000), this study contributes by investigating these representations in services. The aim is to spur discussions in TSR around a richer understanding of the construction of well-being as a socio-cultural phenomenon, outside the context of illness and disease – what is here referred to as *everyday well-being*. As a result of this, discussions on the role of services in personal management of well-being can better take into account structural issues, instead of overly emphasizing the individual as the locus of responsibility (Anderson et al. 2016). This echoes the co-creation perspective, in which well-being is not solely created by consumers, but together with services, in a social context (Kuppelwieser & Finsterwalder 2016; Edvardsson et al. 2011). By going explicitly beyond individual service encounters, this study thus helps in gleaning the *institutional arrangements* that influence both providers and consumers (Akaka & Vargo 2015).

In addition, building on findings by Blocker and Barrios (2015) this study also shows the transformative potential of service providers to promote social and existential well-being through distancing the consumer from normalized representations of behaviour and physical appearances, and resisting an exaggerated focus on presentations of the self. Previously, Liu et al. (2016) proposed that how consumers present their selves in social settings affect consumers' perceptions of well-being. This study showed that service providers actively both encourage and discourage a focus on presenting the self in these social settings. Even though certain uses of services may be beneficial for well-being in the short term, by ignoring the structural conditions they might affect well-being negatively in the long run. By realising how the capabilities that services offer can affect consumers' stances towards norms and structural issues, service providers can help responsabilized consumers in achieving more *enduring* well-being that is sustainable over time (Durgee & Agopian 2018; Previte & Robertson 2019). Ultimately, this points to the argument that service providers should be more reflexive regarding their understanding of beauty norms and ideals of well-being.

By characterizing the different stances presented in service value propositions, this study also showed how services can frame consumers' capabilities in ways that reproduce tension between individual and collective well-being. In doing so, the findings from this study show how "consumer capabilization" (Giesler & Veresiu 2014) takes place in practice through services. This, again points to the role that service providers can take in shaping social realities (Rosenbaum et al. 2011), mainly through two routes. First, they portray capabilities that have the potential to induce individual actions that either reproduce or transform structures that affect well-being, such as beauty ideals and performance expectations. Second, the consumer responses to social sources of ill-being, such as stressful workplaces or beauty ideals are framed by services as individual rather than collective or structural, contributing to a responsabilization of well-being management.

Finally, these findings also point to views on how "different social groups can construct radically different meanings of technologies" (Vargo, Wieland & Akaka, 2015:65), in the context of well-being technologies. Although responsabilization is a common theme, the capabilities for managing individual well-being are defined in different ways by service providers, sometimes even representing conflicting meanings (Thompson & Haytko 1997). The suggested use of these technologies varied in this study from finding pleasure through self-knowledge, to the creation of ideal employees by monitoring physical aspects of one's body (Johansson et al. 2017). These ultimate purposes of well-being technologies represent an area which has not received much attention in TSR. They can also be seen as representing different underlying teleological assumptions concerning well-being. This echoes existing discussions of well-being within TSR, where the end goals of well-being have been framed in ways ranging from increased productivity and improved service quality (Mirabito & Berry 2015) to societal equality (Blocker & Barrios 2015). Within the field of management studies, this phenomenon of tacit assumptions framing research questions has been identified, and a call for "epistemic reflexivity" has been put forth (Johnson & Duberley 2003), meaning that the social context and interests that guide research should be better exposed. Supported by the findings in this study, an increased reflexivity regarding the production of knowledge within TSR could be helpful in increasing our understanding of the interplay between service and well-being.

### *Practical implications*

In an era where the beauty industry is increasingly being criticized for creating unhealthy norms of behaviour and bodily appearances (eg. Huffington Post 2014), this study presents some timely implications for practitioners within service industries that are geared towards well-being. Within the beauty industry there is a growing awareness and reaction against these kind of harmful norms and ideals, exemplified by Dove's 'Real Beauty' campaign (Bissell & Rask 2010). Becoming aware of the *moral rules* (Giddens 1984), i.e. what's expected of one's behaviour or appearance, can make structures and responsabilizing discourses more visible in the service design process as well, enabling transformative potential. With the realization that service providers are embedded in social systems, just as consumers are, follows the implication that service development can benefit from being done in a more *reflexive* manner. This means relating the core benefit – the proposed capability and the ensuing notion of well-being – to surrounding structures. During the service development process, critical questions can be asked about what tacit ideals or norms this particular service might reproduce or transform.

Many of the sampled service providers in this study can be seen as part of a start-up culture, where individual successes are celebrated, and failures are seen as the burden of the individual, as one ethnographic study of Silicon Valley culture has suggested (English-Lueck et al. 2002). This framing of the individual also seems to support an increased responsabilization, as argued in several previous studies (Giesler & Veresiu 2014; Anderson et al. 2016). Just as with self-help literature (Rimke 2000), service offerings designed to help individuals and increase their well-being might participate in framing individuals as solely responsible for structural threats to their well-being.

Service providers should also be aware of different discourses and meanings that relate to well-being – they are encouraged to reflect on which types of meanings they want to support, and which they want to distance themselves from. One way of doing this is to involve end-users in the service design process, as has been discussed in prior literature (Hurley et al. 2018). However, this approach comes with the caveat that in articulating their needs and behaviours, end-users might also reproduce structures that are harmful to well-being. In other words, it does not guarantee increased reflexivity in the process of developing services.

### **Limitations and further directions**

The intention with this study has been to draw attention to the role of services in the larger context of responsabilization, coupled with transformation and reproduction of structures that affect consumers' well-being. This study focused on services and their value propositions, meaning that consumer perspectives on well-being were out of the scope of this study. Future research could therefore take as its point of departure the different well-being projects that consumers are engaged in, through the use of various services. The Changing-Coping-Countering characterization could be applied in consumer-focused studies with the aim of understanding how users of services reflect on the structural conditions they are embedded in. This research should be carried out at several levels, from the individual to the group and to the societal levels. On the other hand, future research could also focus on investigating the reproduction of structure within companies, for example in the service design process. For example ethnographic studies could provide a "behind-the-scenes" understanding of how customer needs for these service are identified, and how the framing of the proposed solution occurs. Another limitation is the fact that, although this study included female health solutions in the empirical material, it has not explicitly considered issues of gender or intersectionalism (Corus & Saatcioglu 2015). As such, studying the gendered manifestations of well-being, especially its social dimensions, would further increase our understanding of the complexities around the transformative roles of services with regard to societal well-being.

Finally, as Sharma et al. (2017) have previously pointed out, there is a need to further investigate the potential conflicts between individual and collective well-being. More research on how transforming potentially harmful structures can affect sustainable, collective-level well-being is needed. One way of capturing this conflict could be through oscillating foci between micro, meso and macro, as proposed by Chandler and Vargo (2011). Findings from the study at hand support this argument, and point to the need to further increase our understanding of the mitigating and exacerbating roles of services in these conflicts.

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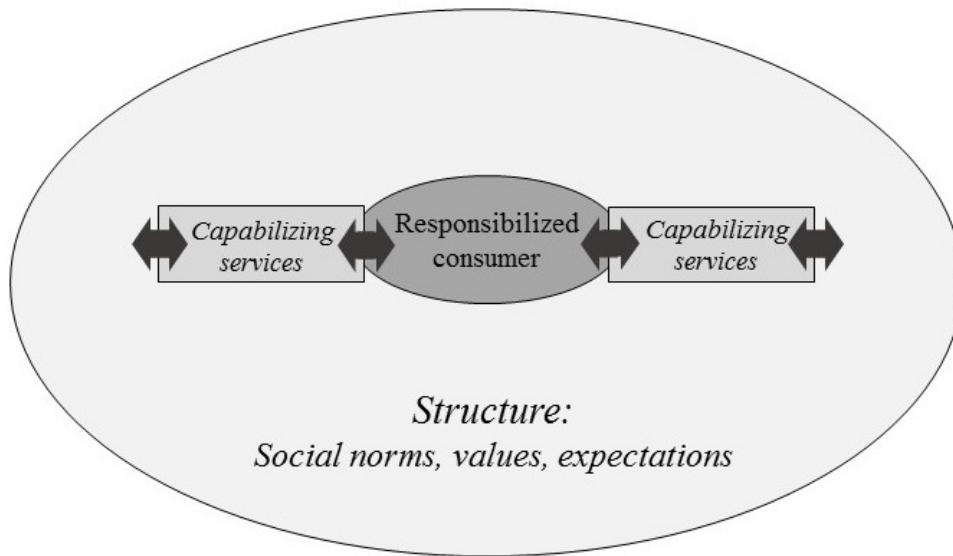


Figure 1: Placing services in a structural context

Name	Type	Purpose
Lumo Lift	device	Posture tracking
Spire	device + app	Breath and activity tracker
Upright	device	Posture tracking
Lioness	device + app	Smart vibrator
Touchpoint	device	Stress relief
Beddit	device + app	Sleep monitor
Vitali smart bra	device	Wellness coach
Jawbone	device	Fitness tracker
Garmin Vivosmart	device	Activity tracker
Optimized	app	Lifelogging
Oura	device	Sleep and activity tracker

Table 1: Sampled self-tracking services

<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example quote of value proposition</b>
<i>Changing</i>	Actively conforming to norms by changing appearance or physique	"Sit straighter, stand taller, look better"
<i>Coping</i>	Learning to live with external pressures, managing the situation	"Don't let stress hold you back"
<i>Countering</i>	Self-knowledge, non-conformism towards norms	"I'm not afraid to question convention (...) I define my own pleasure"

Table 2: Three types of well-being capabilities


<b>Type of capability</b>	<b>Micro level implications for well-being</b>	<b>Macro level implications for well-being</b>	<b>Role of service in relation to structure</b>
<b>Changing</b>	Short term: both increased well-being and risk for anxiety, long term: lower self-acceptance	Stigmatization and exclusion of alternative bodily forms and expressions	Reproducing  Transforming
<b>Coping</b>	Short term: improvement, long term: threat to sustainable well-being	Reinforcing tension between individual and collective well-being, by emphasizing the individual	
<b>Countering</b>	Short and long term: improved conditions for eg. self-acceptance and evaluation of social value	Destigmatization, encouraging plurality of bodily forms and expressions	

Table 3: Implications of the CCC characterization