

Empirical paper

Customer's operant resources effects on co-creation activities



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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the influence of client operant resources, in the form of self-efficacy, bridging social capital and customer expertise, on co-creation activities with companies and the customer resulting perceived benefits. A quantitative study, based on a sample of 362 consumers was carried out to test a model that sets out the relationships among the variables in analysis. The results demonstrate not only how operant resources do effectively contribute towards explaining a certain percentage of the variation in customer co-creation activities, but also how this resources influence gets boosted by the efforts companies make to educate their customers. The results also show that co-creation with the firm enhances customer perceived benefits.

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Los recursos operantes de los clientes y sus efectos en las actividades de co-creación

RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza la influencia de los recursos operantes del cliente, en la forma de auto-eficacia, de capital social que sirve de puente, y de experiencia del cliente en las actividades de co-creación con las empresas y en el resultado de los beneficios percibidos por dicho cliente. Se llevó a cabo un estudio cuantitativo basado en una muestra de 362 consumidores para testar el modelo que establece las relaciones entre las variables del análisis. Los resultados no solo demuestran cómo los recursos operantes efectivamente contribuyen en la explicación de un cierto porcentaje de la variación en las actividades de co-creación del

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cliente, sino que también cómo estos recursos influyen consiguiendo impulsar los esfuerzos que las compañías hacen para educar a sus clientes. Los resultados también muestran que las actividades de co-creación con la empresa se transforman en beneficios percibidos por los clientes.

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Introduction

Value co-creation has become a key concept within service marketing and business management (Saarijärvi, Kannan, & Kuusela, 2013) and has become a widely used term to describe a shift in thinking from the organisation as a definer of value to a more participative process where people and organisations together generate and develop meaning (Ind & Coates, 2013).

The Service-Dominant (S-D) logic introduced by Vargo and Lusch (2004) brought with it a new approach to the creation of value in which the latter now results from a joint production process involving both the company and the customer (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004a, 2004b). In this new approach, the suppliers apply their knowledge and capacities to the production and branding of a product or service and the customers apply their own knowledge and capacities to its daily usage (Vargo, Maglio, & Akaka, 2008).

This new logic defines service as the basis for the exchange of processes in which specialist competencies (knowledge and skills) are applied through the actions, processes and performances undertaken to the benefit of their own or another organisation (Vargo, 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2008b). Thus, the operant resources, those capable of acting upon other resources, such as knowledge and skills, become the foundation stone for competitive advantage.

The S-D logic posits that companies and firms should conceive of their customers, suppliers and other stakeholders as operant resources in order to ensure collaborative co-production and co-creation prevail throughout their marketing and strategic programmes (Lusch & Vargo, 2009). Greater customer involvement in value creation processes leads to the integration of their skills and knowledge, thereby driving both new and important capacities (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004b). According to Vargo et al. (2008), this co-creation of value process also fosters innovation and the evolution of market trends. At the same time the customer also benefits as he gets as close as possible to achieving exactly what he wants or to reduce costs as well as time and energy (Nuttavuthisit, 2010), thus attaining greater satisfaction (Vega-Vazquez, Ángeles Revilla-Camacho, & Cossío-Silva, 2013).

Organisations facilitating the active participation of customers in specific processes become able to reduce their resource investment levels (Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008; Vargo et al., 2008). Therefore, customers emerge as one of the most valuable resources held by companies (Lusch & Vargo, 2009). However, the individual configuration of resources influences the way in which customers deploy their operand resources as well as what usage they make of company operand and operant resources (Arnould, Price, & Malshe, 2006).

Understanding how and in what ways customer resources actually influence their value co-creation becomes correspondingly fundamental. This debate has received only very limited attention in both theoretical and empirical terms. There is still a gap concerning the relationship of company support and customers levels of co-creation. This study thus seeks to establish the way in which customer operand resources influence the co-creation of value alongside whether or not companies are able to play important roles in developing these resources through customer education on service provision processes. To the author's best knowledge, this debate has received only very limited attention in both theoretical and empirical terms. As Grisseemann and Stokburger-Sauer (2012) state there is still a gap concerning the relationship of company support and customers levels of co-creation. In theoretical terms, this research study contributes by studying the ways in which companies might foster this process by raising customer resource levels. This study also contributes by analysing the relationship between co-creation and the resulting customer perceived benefits.

The customer value co-creation process and resources integration

Gummesson and Mele (2010) explain how the co-creation of value derives from the scope for interaction and the integration of resources. Consumers are integrated into social networks in which they exchange experiences that, in turn, shape their own experiences. Every social and economic actor has now effectively become an integrator of resources (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a).

Actors interact with other actors and apply their senses to determine just how and when to respond or act (Vargo & Lusch, 2010) and thereby establishing networks. In these networks, each actor plays different and differentiated social roles that serve as resources that are exchanged in searching out other socially desirable positions. To the extent to which social positions are built up, actors make recourse to them in order to obtain various resources within these value based networks (Akaka & Chandler, 2011). This network based interaction stimulates the integration of resources itself enabling value creation (Gummesson & Mele, 2010). The economic and social actors in a chain of value remain united in accordance with their shared and ongoing competences, mutual relationships and levels of information. Value networks remain united as each respective actor holds competences, relationships and shared information (Lusch, Vargo, & Tanniru, 2010).

Customer resources may be classified as either operand or operant (Arnould et al., 2006). Operand resources

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