



# The impacts of technological environments and co-creation experiences on customer participation



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 28 February 2014

Received in revised form 4 January 2015

Accepted 27 January 2015

Available online 9 February 2015

### Keywords:

Social media

Co-creation experience

S–O–R framework

Task-relevant cues

Affection-relevant cues

Future participation intention

## ABSTRACT

Social media offer unprecedented opportunities for companies to involve their customers in value co-creation through the use of social media sites. However, why customers participate in co-creation activities on these firm-initiated social media sites have received insufficient academic attention. Based on the stimulus–organism–response paradigm, this study develops a model to theorize how site characteristics improve customers' co-creation experiences and subsequently affect their intention to participate in co-creation in the future. The results indicate that future participation intention is determined by customer learning value, social integrative value, and hedonic value experiences, which are influenced by perceived task-relevant and affection-relevant cues.

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## 1. Introduction

Driven by the infusion of social media into customer–firm and customer–customer interactions, digital media are transitioning into a consumer-centric co-creation era [80]. Users employ social media that combine user-generated content with social networking features to create, initiate, and circulate online information within online social networks [66]. Examples include social networking sites (SNSs), blogs, micro-blogs, Wikipedia, social shopping sites, and other content sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr [33]. There are two main reasons that social media are regarded as a technology that enables co-creation. First, social media use the latest technological advances that allow for real-time, media-rich, and highly personalized interactions and social collaboration between firms and customers [28], thereby enabling firms to involve their customers in product planning, product development, and product marketing activities [60]. The increased interactions between customers and businesses provide customers with a sense of “empowerment” that further drives their desire to engage in co-creation activities [24]. Second, social media facilitate

firms' and customers' efforts to create content on social media, which are termed marketer-generated content (MGC) and user-generated content (UGC) respectively, as well as allowing customers to efficiently share MGC and UGC in social networks [60,21]. These two types of content related to a brand and its products in online social communities serve as engines for co-creation [80]. More than 1.5 million businesses have launched brand communities on social media platforms to leverage the potential of social sharing (a type of co-creation activity) to co-create marketing value [21]. For instance, Dell has created a corporate Twitter profile to co-opt customer competencies in disseminating information (e.g., new product information and promotion information) for marketing purposes. Simultaneously, marketers, on behalf of Dell, generate content on a Dell-initiated Twitter profile.

Clearly, the success of such business efforts seeking to capture the economic value of co-creation activities depends on a large number of customers participating in value creation activities [47]. Thus, a failure to create appropriate incentives to motivate customers to engage in participation would jeopardize the viability of a firm-initiated social media site [20]. However, little work has been conducted to examine the customer motivations underlying their participation in value co-creation during product marketing phase [7,31]. The present study seeks to fill this gap. We draw upon the stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R) model to theorize how

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characteristics of firm-initiated social media sites improve customers' co-creation experiences and how such experiences subsequently affect their intention to participate in future co-creation activities.

This study offers important contributions to the extant literature. First, although prior research on co-creation has examined the antecedents of customer participation, the focuses are on the new product development phase [24,20] and the product support phase [47,46] of value creation. For instance, Füller et al. [20] investigated the determinants of consumer intention to participate in future co-creation activities during the new product development phase from a consumer empowerment perspective. Hoyer et al. [24] presented a conceptual framework to theorize the antecedents and consequences of co-creation at each stage of the new product development processes with respect to the degree of consumer co-creation. Nambisan and Baron [46] examined the antecedents of customer participation in product support from an integrative perspective of interaction-based customer benefits and affective evaluation. Our study differs from the extant literature in significant ways: we focus on the product marketing phase and explain co-creation behavior from a co-creation experience perspective. Further, in our setting, co-creation is valuable primarily as a mechanism for information dissemination rather than as a means of capitalizing on customers' innovative knowledge that will improve an organization's innovative productivity [31]. Second, we employ the S–O–R model to link the characteristics of social media to customers' participation behavior. Although prior studies have enriched our knowledge of how the human–computer interface influences consumer behavior [26,52], little attention has been devoted to emerging social media. Based on a generic typology of the online environmental cues proposed by Eroglu et al. [17], we focus on two types of characteristics: task-relevant cues and affection-relevant cues. These two characteristics capture key features of firm-initiated social media sites and thus shed light on this new phenomenon. Third, based on prior studies [47,31,46], we develop a framework of co-creation experiences that includes customer learning value, social integrative value, and hedonic value for the social media environment. We believe that this framework would be useful for examining the internal state of customers in the context of social media.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section presents the theoretical background of the paper. The third section proposes a research model based on the S–O–R framework. The research methodology is discussed in the fourth section, followed by the analysis of results in the fifth section. The final section concludes with a discussion of the results, the theoretical and practical implications, and limitations and future research directions.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. The S–O–R framework

This study builds on the S–O–R paradigm in environmental psychology [43], which depicts how the various aspects of the environment as stimuli (S) affect individuals' internal organisms (O), and in turn, their behavioral responses (R). In the context of online retailing, stimuli refer to the design features of the online environment with which consumers interact [18]. The organisms pertain to internal processes and structures intervening between the stimuli and individuals' final responses, which consist of perceptions, experiences, and evaluations [26]. The responses represent consumer behaviors, namely, approach and avoidance behaviors [18].

The S–O–R model is an appropriate overarching theory for this study for two reasons. First, the S–O–R model has been extensively applied in previous studies on online consumer behavior (e.g., [52,18]). These studies' findings have supported the applicability of this model in explaining customers' internal reactions and behavioral responses to environmental cues. Second, given the critical roles of site characteristics and customers' experiences in influencing the latter's behaviors in social media contexts, the S–O–R model provides a parsimonious and structured approach to examine the effects of site features of social media (stimuli) on customers' evaluations of their co-creation experiences (internal organisms) and, in turn, their intention to participate in future co-creation activities (external responses).

### 2.2. Site characteristics as environmental stimuli (S)

In social media, the interaction between customers and the company is mediated by the technological characteristics of the media involved [2]. Thus, it is intuitive that customers' experiences of interaction/co-creation on a firm-hosted social media site would be influenced by the characteristics of the co-creation environment (i.e., the social media site). The technological features of social media sites not only reflect their objective properties, independent of customers, but also their subjective properties as perceived by customers [26].

Information Systems (IS) Researchers have asserted the salience of task-relevant (TR) and affection-relevant (AR) cues as online environmental cues in determining customer behavior [52,17,55]. As customer interactions in social media vary in the nature of the customer task and affection [73], our study focuses on these two types of site characteristics, namely, TR cues and AR cues. TR cues and AR cues, as site characteristics, can be understood in two ways. First, they can be regarded as structural properties of a social media site. TR cues refer to all descriptors on the site that facilitate and enable the customer's goal attainment, including security, ease of navigation, and information fit-to-task [17], whereas AR cues are affective elements that can induce a customer's core affect [55]. Second, they can be understood as dynamic qualities experienced by the customers. Because our study focuses on customers' perceptions, experiences and behaviors, the TR and AR cues here refer to the subjective properties of social media sites as experienced by the customers. Thus, we examine the quality of such cues as perceived by the customers.

TR cues are regarded as utilitarian in nature, as they are oriented toward the efficient and effective execution of customer tasks, which will determine how a customer reacts to an online medium [52]. Given the importance of TR cues in the online retailing environment, Eroglu et al. [17] posited that online environmental cues consist of two general categories (high- and low-TR cues) and that these cues will influence shoppers' organismic states, which then affect their shopping behaviors. In a similar vein, Parboteeah et al. [52] asserted that various environmental cues on a site can be classified into two groups, namely TR cues manifested as information fit-to-task and mood-relevant cues manifested as visual appeal. Their study found that high-quality TR and mood-relevant cues increase the likelihood and magnitude of online impulse buying. Adapting from Parboteeah et al. [52], this study conceptualizes perceived TR cues as perceived information fit-to-task and defines it as *a customer's perception of the extent to which information presented on a site is accurate and appropriate for directly supporting the fulfillment of the customer task*.

AR cues are specific features of a site that can manifest the site's affective quality [55]. In the online channel, music [79], images [11] and visual presentations [53] are found to be distinctive affective cues. These cues are crucial in creating an atmosphere that provides a more pleasant customer experience [17]. AR cues

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