Satisfaction in the Context of Customer Co-Production:

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We use dissonance theory to show that engagement in co-production leads to greater satisfaction with a specific product category. Significant differences in satisfaction were found in consumers engaged in different levels of co-production, suggesting that co-production activities provide additional value to consumers.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Customer satisfaction has a decades-long history of research in marketing. Scholarly interest has been sustained by evidence that satisfaction leads to loyalty (Suh and Yi 2006), efficiency of promotional programs (Luo and Homburg 2008), and financial performance (Anderson, Fornell, and Mazvancheryl 2004; Fornell, Mithas, Morgeson, and Krishnan 2006).

Against this backdrop of the established importance of satisfaction, marketing appears to be undergoing a paradigm shift from goods dominant logic to services-dominant logic (S-D Logic: Vargo and Lusch 2008; Vargo and Lusch 2004). That is, marketing scholars and practitioners have shifted their focus from tangible resources, to intangible resources, to the co-creation of value, and relationships (Vargo and Lusch 2004). A cornerstone of S-D Logic is the assumption that consumers are integrated in value creation from the initial stages of design through the entire usage life of a product (Lusch, Vargo, and O’Brien 2007).

This development reflects a dramatic shift in researchers’ interest in consumer behaviors that occur after a market transaction to consumer behaviors that are wholly integrated throughout production and consumption. This wholly integrated role of consumers likely is not devoid of implications for consumers’ evaluations of their experiences with goods. The influence of behaviors on a broad range of experiences is well established (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). However, despite evidence that behaviors influence attitudes and despite the increasing emphasis on customer value creation, research has not addressed the degree to which behavioral engagement in value creation activities relates to customer satisfaction.

The present study aims to address this gap by examining the extent to which behavioral commitment to value creation is associated with satisfaction with the product. Our study differs from past studies in that we examine how behavioral variables, as opposed to attitudinal variables, relate to customer satisfaction outcomes. Satisfaction studies grounded in an attitudinal perspective are limited in the degree to which they can explain how the behavioral demands of customer value creation relate to satisfaction.

The produce product category reflects a market landscape where some consumers are presented with choices between traditional market channels or less traditional channels that require greater customer co-production. Understanding why consumers pursue and remain within alternative market channels has obvious implications for marketing practice. However, a conceptual framework for understanding these consumer decisions is a necessary prerequisite for developing generalizable practices. We argue here that dissonance theory is an apt framework for examining the co-production effects that occur in non-traditional market channels.

The purpose of this paper is to add to the current research on consumer satisfaction by 1) using CSAs as a context to test Vargo and Lusch’s (2004) service dominant logic, 2) offering an initial conceptual frame for understanding consumer satisfaction in this CSA context; 3) developing a framework for further research and practical steps for increasing the market for alternative food channels such as CSAs.

In order to test our theoretical framework, data were collected in three urban areas using a stratified random sample design. Respondents were randomly recruited from zip codes found to have a high concentration of CSA locations. One-hundred ninety-eight individuals, serving on a panel at a large marketing research firm, completed an online survey. Results showed several significant differences between CSA and non-CSA members. First, CSA users were found to have greater levels of satisfaction with their vegetables than traditional grocery shoppers. Second, CSA members reported more behavioral involvement in food-related activities than traditional supermarket shoppers. Third, the relationship between CSA membership and product satisfaction was found to be mediated by behavioral involvement in food-related activities. Finally, this mediated effect is more robust with time. In other words, continued behavioral involvement increases the likelihood of continued CSA membership and increases in product satisfaction.

Our findings suggest that the relationship between greater customer co-production and greater satisfaction can be explained by a dissonance-reduction framework. The effort demanded from co-production produces dissonance that is reduced by strong feelings of satisfaction with the product. These findings are consistent with the inherent value from co-production suggested by Vargo and Lusch (2004). Lusch, Vargo, and O’Brien (2007) argue that consumers add value to product experiences through both pre-purchase co-production and post-purchase consumption activities. That is, consumers collectively create value through both co-production and value-in-use activities (Merz, He, and Vargo 2009). By demonstrating significant relationships between satisfaction and both commitment to co-production and behavioral involvement in the product category, our study provides empirical support for both types of value-adding activities proposed by service-dominant logic theorists.

REFERENCES


