When I Becomes We: Interpersonal Ties in Product Co-Creation

Adriana M. Boveda-Lambie, R.I.T., USA
Ruby Roy Dholakia, URI, USA

Co-creation is usually seen as an individual process between the customer and the supplier and recent research has neglected the possibility of collaborative co-creation, by searching our social networks for help. This paper looks at the role of competence, whether collaborative product co-creation is feasible its effects on self-brand associations.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/16330/volumes/v38/NA-38

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyight.com/.
When I becomes We: Interpersonal Ties in Product Co-Creation
Adriana M. Boveda-Lambie, RIT, USA
Ruby Roy Dholakia, URI, USA

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Customer knowledge has been extensively discussed in terms of objective and subjective knowledge, where subjective knowledge is what the individual perceives s/he knows and objective knowledge is what they truly know (Alba & J. W. Hutchinson, 2000). Knowledge exerts a significant and fundamental influence on customer decision-making; customers’ decisions vary as a function of what they think they know (Moorman, Diehl, Brinberg, & Kidwell, 2004). In the case of choosing to co-create, it is their subjective knowledge about their perceived competence that will drive the process.

Customers can use their social networks as an external memory, blending the social and cognitive seamlessly into a social hard drive holding vast amounts of information (Ward & Reingen, 1990). Viewed under the service-dominant logic definition of co-creation (Lusch & Vargo, 2006), social networks are part of the customer’s operant resources, which means the customer can tap into them to co-create value. Companies have used the Internet to give customers the opportunity to engage in the production process (Xie et al., 2008).

Even with access to Internet, people seem to prefer turning to other people for information (Cross & Sproull, n.d.; Levin & Cross, 2004). In other words, a customer facing a perceived lack of competence to complete a task will seek what s/he needs from other individuals (Arias, Eden, Fischer, Gorman, & Sharff, 2000; Salomon, 1993).

H1: Customers with higher (lower) perceived competence are more likely to engage (not engage) in co-creation

H2: Customers engaging in individual co-creation will have higher perceived competence than those engaging in collaborative co-creation

H3: Customers engaging in collaborative co-creation will elicit partners with higher perceived competence

The willingness to engage in co-creation requires a strong degree of product involvement (Bendapudi & Leone, 2003). Customers will not only need to use their knowledge but must also be willing to invest their time, which is a scarce and premium resource for most (Etgar, 2006, 2008). In addition, involvement with the product category and the brand itself can determine their choice to co-create since customer’s product involvement can lead to increased perception of attribute differences, greater product importance and greater commitment (Howard & Sheth, 1968; Zaichkowsky, 1985). When product differences are perceived to be of greater importance, customers can be more willing to get involved in co-creation and dispense the required effort and time (Etgar, 2008). If under low involvement individuals involve in minimal searches while high involvement results in extensive searches then it follows that involvement would also moderate the amount of time a customer is inclined to spend on his/her purchase—in this case, in co-creation.

H4: Customers with higher (lower) product involvement are more likely to engage in co-creation (not engage in co-creation)

Marketers are increasingly interested in how consumers use products and brands to build and maintain a social identity, and previous studies have emphasized that self-brand congruence alone can determine consumer choice (Malhotra, 1988). Brands, as social objects, are socially constructed and imbued with meaning, and customers actively engage in that creation using brands as bridges towards or fences against other people (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Escalas & Bettman, 2003, 2005; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Research on brand communities shows that customers can use commercial offerings (brands) and brand associations as ways to create and further their self-image and shape their reality (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Co-creation may be seen as a way of self-expression through production of their own products and experiences, and taking pride while strengthening their self-identity and fulfillment (Holt, 1995). Customers engaging in co-creation have a tendency to take ownership and pride in their co-creation.

H5: Customers who choose to engage in co-creation will develop stronger self-brand associations.

Methodology
Two-hundred and forty students from a large northwestern and southeastern university participated in an the online survey, where they read a pretested scenario to make one of three decisions: (1) purchase what is available at the store (2) engage in individual co-creation or (3) engage in collaborative co-creation. A final sample size of 233 students was attained. Participants were aged 21–22 (58.3%) and between 18 -21 years of age (41.8%). Gender was evenly distributed with 53% males and 47% females. There was no university effect on the main dependent variables ($F_{(2,232)}=6.5, p=.52$; Levene test statistic: $F_{(2,232)}=1.08, p=.34$).

Competence was significantly different across co-creation groups ($F_{(2,229)}=30.10, p<.01, w^2=.16$) with participants’ perceived competence highest among those choosing individual co-creation ($M_{IndCC}=7.18$, $SD=1.47$, $M_{CollCC}=6.38$, $SD=1.64$, $M_{NoCC}=5.15$, $SD=2.07$). These results support H1 and H2.

The competence of participant’s selected tie(s) was significantly higher ($t_{(229)}=9.49, p<.01$) than participants’ competence ($M_{Perceived}=6.35, M_{CC}=7.33$), supporting H3.

Involvement was not significantly different across co-creation groups ($F_{(2,229)}=1.19, p=.31$) although it noted some directional results with those choosing CollCC having higher involvement ($M_{IndCC}=5.90$) than participants choosing IndCC ($M_{CollCC}=5.69$) or purchasing at the store ($M=5.74$). Therefore H4 was not supported.

There were significant differences ($L=8.15, p<.01; F_{(2,229)}=51.65$) between the SBB ($M_{IndCC}=3.75$, $SD=1.53$) and SBA ($M_{CollCC}=4.55$, $SD=1.66$).

SBB and SBA were significantly different across groups ($F_{(2,229)}=20.683, p<.01$), with those choosing IndCC ($M_{IndCC}=3.75$, $M_{CollCC}=3.93$) and CollCC ($M_{IndCC}=3.85$, $M_{CollCC}=4.84$) having significantly higher after brand associations ($p<.01$), supporting H5.

Discussion
The results reported bring new challenges for companies wanting to implement co-creation strategies. First, they need to consider a customer’s ability. The companies interface with the customer must be easy or make customers feel competent to take on the task at hand. Second, companies must consider the possibility that customers will not be acting alone, and this can affect not only their relationship with the individual customer but also gives the company the opportunity to present themselves to a new set of customers—those invited to help.
REFERENCES


704 / When I becomes We: Interpersonal Ties in Product Co-Creation