The Effects of Cooperative Brand Experience, Length of Membership and Members Loyalty: A Proposed Value Co-Creation Behavior Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been growing scholarly interest in value co-creation. Previous research highlights its essential role in the growth and long-term viability of the consumer cooperative sector. However, while much of the current literature focuses on identifying the components and drivers of value co-creation, there remains a lack of insight into its impact on behavioural factors. By using Service Dominant (S-D) Logic theory and supported by Experiential Learning theory, this paper aims to introduce a behavioural framework for value co-creation, incorporating cooperative brand experience, length of membership and member loyalty within the context of consumer cooperatives in Sarawak. Although prior studies have explored the relationship between value co-creation behaviour and loyalty, there has been limited research investigating the role of knowledge factors, particularly how cooperative brand experience and length of membership serve as moderators. Moreover, the application of these concepts within the context of cooperatives in emerging markets remains underexplored. To fill this gap, this conceptual paper aims to propose a value co-creation behavioural framework that incorporates cooperative brand experience, length of membership and member loyalty, viewed through the lens of consumer cooperatives in developing markets.

Keywords: Value Co-Creation Behavior, Cooperative Brand Experience, Length Of Membership, Loyalty, SD-Logic, Experiential Learning Theory

INTRODUCTION

A fundamental objective of any business is to generate value for customers by offering products and services. As a crucial indicator of business success, value contributes to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Yi, 2014). The creation of value for customers is considered a critical concept in marketing. As conceptualized by Grönroos (2012), value co-creation is the “joint collaborative activities by parties involved in direct interactions, aiming to contribute to the value that emerges for one or both parties”. According to Rubio, Villaseñor, and Yagüe (2020) state that value co-creation remains a crucial topic in the age of marketing 4.0. While research on value co-creation has grown, there is still considerable uncertainty surrounding the use of some concepts (Rubio et al., 2020). The conceptualization of value co-creation has gained significance recently, necessitating a shared understanding between scholars and practitioners (Rubio et al., 2020). In today's market, tangible products cannot thrive without being accompanied by services. According to the service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), the resources for value creation are not solely owned by companies; stakeholders, including customers, can also play a role in creating value. Building on this idea, Yi and Gong (2013) introduced a two-dimensional model of "customer value co-creation behavior," which includes customer participation behavior and customer citizenship behavior. The service-dominant logic highlights the crucial role of customer engagement and communication throughout the co-creation process. In recent years, value co-creation (VCC) has gained considerable attention and recognition as an effective process, fueled by growing interest in the concept from both professionals and academics worldwide (Saha, Goyal, and Jebarajakirthy, 2022).

A key challenge faced by many cooperatives today is securing support from their members, which can also be viewed as loyalty. This aligns with the findings of Harisudin, Adi, and Pratama (2020), who discovered that cooperatives encounter significant difficulties, including intense competition, a decline in membership, and a lack of member loyalty. These issues were identified as major obstacles impacting cooperatives. Additionally, there is a notable gap in cross-industry research that examines the effect of value co-creation (VCC) on customer behavioural outcomes, such as loyalty and commitment. This gap in the VCC literature remains unaddressed and undocumented (Saha et al., 2022). The growing number of cooperatives and total membership each year does not necessarily reflect the success or progress of this sector (Musa et al., 2020). Additionally, the Malaysia Cooperative Societies Commission (MCSC, 2023) highlights in the Malaysian Cooperative Transformation Plan (TransKoM) (2021-2025) that 10 major challenges have been identified. These challenges must be addressed in order to create a supportive cooperative development and regulatory ecosystem, enabling the cooperative movement to compete effectively at both national and global levels. One of the challenges identified is the involvement of cooperative members. According to the Malaysian Cooperative Transformation Plan (TransKoM) (2021-2025), it is essential to strengthen the spirit of 'ownership' by encouraging more active participation from members in the economic activities of cooperatives (MCSC, 2023). Despite the significant contributions of the cooperative sector to the nation's economic growth, Malaysia's cooperative movement is still perceived as less developed compared to those in other countries (Yacob, Ali, Ting, Lajuni, and Hussin, 2017).

In addition, A study by Yen, Teng, and Tzeng (2020) examined how innovativeness influences customer value co-creation behaviors indirectly through customer engagement. However, the study did not account for the contingent factors of other variables, such as consumer involvement or the duration of customership (Clauss, Kesting, and Naskrent, 2018; O'Cass, Boisvert, and Ashill, 2011). Future research could explore whether factors like consumer involvement or the length of customership affect customer value co-creation behaviors through moderating variables. Therefore, it is crucial in this study to investigate the impact of length of membership as a moderating variable. An earlier study by Iglesias et al. (2020) emphasized that brand experience can lead to loyalty only when there is a strong commitment between the brand and its customers. Customers' emotional attachment to a specific brand can enhance the effectiveness of the online brand experience in fostering loyalty. However, the current study by Sleilati and Stefier (2021) did not find substantial empirical evidence to support the relationship between these two variables. The inconsistency in the results regarding the connection between online customer brand experience and online customer loyalty calls for further research (Sleilati and Stefier, 2021). Therefore, it is important to examine the effect of cooperative brand experience as a moderating factor in this study.

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is intentionally crafted as a comprehensive and adaptable learning approach that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior (McCarthy, 2016). ELT serves as a dynamic and inclusive framework that explains how adults gain knowledge through their experiences (Kolb and Kolb, 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Value Co-Creation Behaviour

In this study, value co-creation behavior is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, consisting of two higher-order factors, each with multiple dimensions. These factors are customer participation behavior and customer citizenship behavior (Yi and Gong, 2013). Given that customers within a cooperative context are the members themselves, the two dimensions of value co-creation behavior are defined as member participation behavior and member citizenship behavior.

Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic Theory

Service-dominant logic (S-D logic) asserts that value is co-created through the interactive process between service providers and customers during consumption, rather than being generated through a one-sided exchange (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). Vargo and Lusch (2004) introduced the Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic Theory, which offers a comprehensive view of marketing. This theory highlights that service is not just a particular form of exchange, but the foundational basis of all exchanges, with goods serving as a means to deliver service (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). According to S-D logic, service is a process of value creation that involves the integration of various resources, including those of the customer, to develop value propositions that satisfy customer needs and

desires (Lusch and Nambisan, 2015). Vargo and Lusch (2016) argue that value co-creation is a core element of service-dominant logic. Consequently, customers play a vital role in the value creation process, always acting as co-creators of value in service interactions. Without the engagement between customers and service providers, firms miss the opportunity to participate in the value creation process, which leads to a failure in co-creating value.

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is defined as the process through which knowledge is created by transforming experiences. Knowledge results from both understanding and reinterpreting these experiences (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). Experiential Learning Theory was developed by drawing inspiration from Kurt Lewin's research and John Dewey's concept of "learning by doing," which emphasizes acquiring scientific knowledge through the conceptualization and transfer of experiences (García-Sánchez and Luján-García, 2016). In addition, Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is purposefully designed as a comprehensive and adaptable learning approach that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior (McCarthy, 2016). It serves as a dynamic and inclusive framework that explains how adults acquire knowledge through their experiences (Kolb and Kolb, 2017).

Customer Participation

Customer participation behavior refers to the active involvement of customers in co-creating products or services with the company, representing their in-role behavior (Yi and Gong, 2013; Foroudi, Yu, Gupta, and Foroudi, 2019). The level of customer participation can vary from low to high depending on the type of service being delivered (Ida, 2017). According to Naeem and Di Maria (2021), a participating customer typically demonstrates a specific attitude and behavior by contributing their resources to the co-creation process of service value. Customer participation behavior is crucial for achieving successful value co-creation, as it is considered an essential aspect of the process. The original scale consists of four factors within each of these dimensions. Customer participation behavior includes various customer activities such as seeking information, sharing information, demonstrating responsible behavior to cooperate, and engaging in personal interaction (AbdelAziz, Md Saad, and Thurasamy, 2023).

According to Roy, Balaji, Soutar, and Jiang (2020), customers actively seek information to better understand the services they will receive and their roles and responsibilities in the value co-creation process. This information-seeking behavior helps reduce uncertainty and facilitates the acquisition of the knowledge and skills required for effective resource integration (Lee, Hsiao, and Chen, 2017). Additionally, sharing information is essential in various contexts. Without the necessary information provided by members, employees cannot begin or perform their duties (Yacob et al., 2018). Failing to share the correct information with the service provider can lead to a reduced value co-creation experience (Khan and Hussainy, 2017). Thus, it is clear that this factor is a crucial driver of success in value co-creation. To ensure a successful value co-creation process, customers must adhere to directives from employees, such as being physically present when required (Yi and Gong, 2013). Khan and Hussainy (2017) further emphasize that the value co-creation process is unlikely to achieve significant success without the responsible behavior of customers. Finally, personal interaction between customers and employees, known as interpersonal relations, is critical to the success of value co-creation (Yi and Gong, 2013).These relationships significantly contribute to the overall process of co-creating value (Yi and Gong, 2013). These aspects include qualities like respect, friendliness, and courtesy. Customers often engage in resource sharing with each other, frequently offering physical help or advice to fellow customer-strangers. This behavior encourages further interactions and can create a temporary sense of camaraderie among those involved (Rihova, Buhalis, Gouthro, and Moitall, 2018).

Customer Citizenship

Customer citizenship behaviour also refers to extra-role behaviour or voluntary actions beyond the expected role of a customer, which involve engaging in positive behaviours towards other customers, employees, or the company (Assiouraset, Skourtis, Giannopoulos, Buhalis and Koniordos, 2019). More recent research suggests that customer value creation behaviour could be considered as a customer citizenship behaviour, which focuses on the extra-role behaviour that provides extraordinary value to the firm (Yi and Gong, 2013; Arıca and Kozak, 2019; Assiouras et al., 2019). Customer citizenship behavior involves a variety of customer actions, such as

providing feedback, advocating for the firm, recommending it to others through positive word of mouth, assisting fellow customers, and showing tolerance and patience when the service or product does not meet expectations (AbdelAziz et al., 2023). Additionally, Yi and Gong (2013) emphasize the importance of customer citizenship behavior in enhancing the co-creation experience and guiding strategies for value co-creation. This behavior gives firms a competitive advantage in fostering value co-creation with other customers and helps in developing additional strategies for value creation. Furthermore, it encompasses four distinct aspects: feedback, advocacy, helping, and tolerance.

According to Kim, Tang, and Bosselman (2019), feedback is a discretionary action, meaning that it is not required for successful service delivery. In other words, customers can choose to provide feedback, but its absence does not impede the overall success of the service delivery process. Advocacy is defined as "recommending the business—whether the firm or the employee—to others, such as friends or family" (Yi and Gong, 2013, p. 182). Khan and Hussainy (2017) highlight that referrals and recommendations offer significant advantages, especially in service settings, by promoting products, enhancing the company's image, and supporting business growth. Furthermore, Yacob et al. (2020) explain that helping behavior in service co-creation refers to customers' willingness to assist and support other customers, actively contributing to the collaborative process of value creation. Finally, tolerance is described as "the customer's willingness to be patient when the service delivery does not meet the customer's expectations of adequate service, such as in cases of delays or equipment shortages" (Yi and Gong, 2013, p. 1820). The extra-role behavior displayed through citizenship behavior helps ensure the smooth operation of a company’s social system.

Cooperative Brand Experience as Moderator

Sleilati and Sfeir (2021) describe brand experience as a multidimensional concept with four key dimensions: sensory, affective, cognitive, and behavioral. The "sensory" dimension refers to the visual and brand-related elements that consumers experience through their senses (Hwang and Hyun, 2012). A brand's aesthetic features can enrich sensory experiences by stimulating the consumer's senses, including touch, sight, hearing, and smell (Brakus et al., 2009). urthermore, many marketers argue that sensory experiences are shaped by aesthetic elements such as materials, colors, and styles, as well as thematic components like visual cues and slogans incorporated into the brand's messaging (Hulten, 2011). Recognizing the significance of sensory experience is crucial for successful brand management and research, as the sensory aspects of customer experience are key factors in establishing brand competitiveness (Moreau, 2020).

The "affective" dimension of brand experience refers to the personal feelings and emotions that consumers associate with a brand (Hwang and Hyun, 2012). Consumers may perceive a brand positively, experiencing emotions like joy, desire, and loyalty, or negatively, feeling emotions such as distress, fear, and disgust (Kang et al., 2017). Iglesias, Singh, and Batista-Foguet (2011) highlighted the importance of identifying the factors that evoke positive emotions in customers through experiential marketing. This is crucial because the emotional impact of a brand plays a significant role in consumers' decision-making processes, particularly when they seek satisfying and meaningful purchasing experiences. Brand experience is generated by stimuli that evoke excitement and pleasure in customers, encouraging them to repeatedly seek and relive those experiences over time (Ong, Wei Lee, and Ramayah, 2018). A study by Pratiwi Salim and Sunaryo (2021) found that brand experience has a positive and significant impact on brand loyalty. The research indicated that the influence of brand experience on loyalty development is largely driven by behavioral loyalty, which is fostered through brand experiences, especially in the affective and sensory dimensions. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the impact of brand experience as a moderator in the context of the consumer cooperative sector. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by exploring the moderating role of cooperative brand experience on member loyalty.

Length of Membership

"Duration" refers to the time that has elapsed since a member first joined until they ended their membership (Fang, Fombelle, and Bolton, 2021). This value remains unknown or "right censored" for those who are still active members. In contrast, "membership length" is defined as the period an individual has been a member at a specific point in time (Fang et al., 2021). Additionally, Debaere, Devriendt, Brunneder, Verbeke, De Ruyck, and Coussement (2019) describe membership length as the number of days a member has actively participated in the community. Recently, cooperatives have garnered significant attention as a potential tool to address various

developmental challenges (Slade Shantz, Kistruck, Pacheco, and Webb, 2020). Time investment, distinct from the level of participation, refers to the duration a member stays involved in a professional association (Clouse, Stan, and Shooshtari, 2023). Members with longer membership have more opportunities for engagement and are more likely to have a greater impact on shaping the development and structure of the association's activities and services (Clouse et al., 2023). Another study by Prentice, Han, Hua and Hu, (2019) shows that there is a significant moderating effect of the duration of membership on the relationship between social identification and customer attitudinal engagement. The findings indicate that individuals who are new to a group are more inclined to be affected by the values cultivated within that community and the perceived resemblances between themselves and the community. Moreover, a study conducted by Lee and Park (2019) shows that membership duration does not moderate the relationship between social capital and content capital towards the attachment to the current community. It shows inconsistency from previous studies on the effect of membership length as a moderator from different contexts. Hence, this study will contribute to the literature by examining the length of membership as the moderator from the context of the consumer cooperative sector.

Loyalty

According to Cossio-Silva et al. (2016) argue that value co-creation behavior affects both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty dimensions. Loyalty can be understood in different ways and includes several dimensions. Behavioral loyalty refers to repeat purchasing, while attitudinal loyalty relates to a customer's personal attitude, which includes emotions that contribute to their loyalty toward a product or service (Cossio-Silva et al., 2016). Building and sustaining customer loyalty is often regarded as the ultimate objective of business efforts (Singh, Iglesias, and Batista-Foguet, 2012). In the context of services marketing, customer loyalty is defined as a customer's readiness to form a long-term relationship with a particular brand and actively promote it to others (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011; Markovic, Iglesias, Singh, and Sierra, 2018). Customer loyalty is commonly seen as a key business goal for many companies, as loyal customers can help attract new prospects and drive business growth, as highlighted by Lariviere, Keiningham, Cooil, Aksoy, and Malthouse (2014).

In the cooperative context, member loyalty presents a distinct challenge inherent to the cooperative model (Morfi, Ollila, Nilsson, Feng, and Karantininis, 2015). This loyalty depends on the cooperative's effective functioning, which can be difficult to maintain due to the need to balance economic performance with the interests of the members (Klafke, Pinto, and Picinin, 2022). Cooperative members generally expect lower input prices and higher selling prices for their products. This requires the cooperative to operate with competitive pricing, achieve optimal economic performance, and effectively meet the needs of its members (Klafke, Pinto, and Picinin, 2022).

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

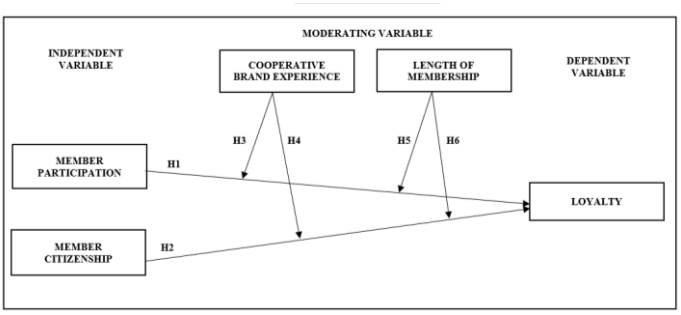

Fig. 1: Conceptual framework adapted by Yi & Gong (2013) and Kolb (2015)

Due to the mixed findings from various studies, the following hypotheses are developed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between Member Participation and Loyalty.

H2: There is a positive relationship between Member Citizenship and Loyalty.

H3: Cooperatives Brand Experience moderates the relationship between Member Participation and Loyalty.

H4: Cooperatives Brand Experience moderates the relationship between Member Citizenship and Loyalty
H5: Length of Membership moderates the relationship between Member Citizenship and Loyalty. H6: Length of Membership moderates the relationship between Member Citizenship and Loyalty.

METHODOLOGY

The target respondents for this study are members of consumer cooperatives in Sarawak. The respondents were selected from the members of a cooperative in Sarawak and can be approached through the major divisions of these cooperatives such as Bintulu, Kinawot, Kapit, Kuching, Lawas, Limbang, Marudi, Meradong, Miri, Mukah, Samarahan, Saratok, Sarikei, Serian, Sibu, Simunjan and Sri Aman. This research employed purposive sampling, as the researcher had predetermined specific criteria for selecting the targeted respondents. The criteria for this study include members of the cooperative sector who have subscribed to products or services offered by consumer cooperatives. Examples of such products include food, beverages, apparel, and more. The decision to focus on Sarawak is based on its ethnically diverse population and the relatively limited presence of cooperative organizations in the region. This highlights the significance of recognizing cultural diversity among cooperative members. Furthermore, Sarawak's economy ranks third in contributing to Malaysia's GDP (Lee and Voon, 2022). Additionally, consumer cooperatives are the fourth largest contributors to the nation's economy in terms of turnover, following behind banking, credit, and service cooperatives (Zakaria et al., 2022). A total of approximately 250 respondents will be surveyed to ensure the reliability of the data and to provide a sufficient backup in case any errors occur during the questionnaire completion process. According to the G Power 4.0.9.6 calculation, the minimum sample size required for this study is 129 respondents ($f2 = 0.15$, number of predictors = 4). The results will be obtained using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29 and Smart PLS 4.0.9.6.

CONCLUSION

This study has practical implications for the cooperative movement in Malaysia, highlighting the essential role of value co-creation behavior among members in ensuring the success of cooperatives. The findings contribute to the development of a proposed conceptual framework for value co-creation in consumer cooperative firms, providing both conceptual and practical insights into the value co-creation behavior model and its implementation. The research framework, which clarifies the relationship between co-creation behavior and member loyalty, can serve as a useful guide for practitioners, helping them improve their marketing strategies and practices. Furthermore, these research findings will offer a deeper understanding and insights into cooperative brand experience and length of membership regarding loyalty, emphasizing its importance as a crucial element of relationship quality within the cooperative industry. The study also highlights the significance of members' participation and citizenship as key dimensions of value co-creation in consumer cooperatives. This understanding will help recognize the benefits of member participation and citizenship in enhancing their loyalty towards consumer cooperatives. Understanding the co-creation dimensions as antecedents and their impact on loyalty as an outcome is crucial. It will help generate favourable responses from customers. Value co-creation acts as a framework that enables organizations to remain viable and competitive in the market. The completion of this research introduces an emerging research model of value co-creation behavior, designed to enhance the loyalty of cooperative members.

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