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Customer Interface Design for Co-Creation in the Social Era

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Significance. A typology of co-creation consisting of 12 forms of co-creation includes co-conception of ideas, co-design, co-production, co-promotion, co-pricing, co-distribution, co-consumption, co-maintenance, co-outsourcing, co-disposal, co-experience, and co-meaning creation (Frow et al., 2011). An increasing number of companies embrace customers as co-creators in their strategic attempts rather than as buyers at the last stage of a value chain (Merchant, 2013). Co-creation marketplaces CafePress and Zazzle allow individual customers to design, customize, buy, promote, and sell their creations and personalized apparel and accessories through the built-in toolkit as well as social sharing in peer-to-peer online marketplaces. In addition, social media further assists customer co-creation by allowing individual customers to post their creations, providing companies with access to new micro-markets made by their own customers (Schäefer, 2014). CafePress has 20 million visitors monthly and 31 billion products available and has seen an increase of 1,600% in traffic (Sloan, 2010). Despite the rapid growth of implementing co-creation in the social era, commonly accepted elements of a customer interface design for co-creation have not yet been developed. The term "customer interface" in the context of web-based stores stands for the components offered by e-retailers in order to help customers with easy navigation, information acquisition, and eventually purchasing (Lee & Benbasat, 2001). The purpose of this study was to examine (1) whether aspects of the customer interface design for co-creation, such as (a) character, (b) choice, (c) community, (d) contact interactivity, (e) convenience, and (f) customization, were related to commitment (H2-H7) and (2) whether commitment was related to patronage intention (H1).

Theoretical Framework. Based on Rayport and Jaworski's (2001) seven design elements for a customer interface (the 7Cs) and Srinivansan et al.'s (2002) 8Cs, the six elements (the 6Cs) were created as a framework for co-creation interfaces. Elements of the customer interface design were operationalized as six exogenous constructs: (a) character (e.g., "This website looks appealing to me."), (b) choice (e.g., "This website carries a wide selection of products to choose from."), (c) community (e.g., "Customers of this website benefit from the community that is sponsored by the website."), (d) contact interactivity (e.g., "This website enables me to view the merchandise from different angles."), (e) convenience (e.g., "Navigation through this website is very intuitive."), and (f) customization (e.g., "This website customizes information to match my needs.").

Method. Online apparel shoppers ($n = 688$) from a U.S. consumer panel browsed and experienced a co-creation website, Zazzle.com, and then completed an online self-administered survey. Structural equation modeling was used for data analysis.

Participant Characteristics. Participants were female (67.1%) and male (32.9%) online apparel shoppers. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 64 ($m = 40.21$). With respect to ethnicity, 85.1% were Caucasian. All income categories were represented with $50,000-$59,999 as the median income.

Results. To test the convergent and discriminant validity and composite reliability of the set of measures, confirmatory factor analysis was performed. A structural analysis was conducted using the maximum likelihood estimation method. The structural model had a good fit to the data (χ^2 = 2128.30 with 714 df, χ^2/df = 2.98, CFI = .94, NNFI = .93, IFI = .94, RMSEA = .067, and SRMR = .078). Regarding H1, commitment was positively related to patronage intention (β = .81, t = 22.92, p < .001). For H2-H7, character (β = .38, t = 5.37, p < .001), choice (β = .44, t = 9.07, p < .001), convenience (β = .17, t = 2.60, p < .01), and customization (β = .24, t = 2.97, p < .01) were positively related to commitment.
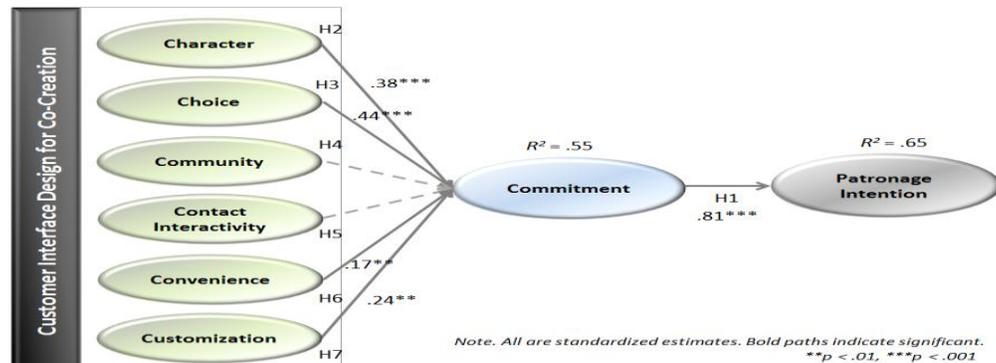

Figure 1. Final model

Conclusions and Implications. This study identified that the exchange of information or opinions regarding offered products and services (i.e., community) as well as the accessibility of customer support tools and the degree of two-way communication with customers (i.e., contact interactivity) were not important elements for co-creation interfaces. Among the 6Cs, character, choice, convenience, and customization were found to be important elements of the customer interface design for co-creation. This study suggests that in order to improve character and choice elements, co-creation providers need to enhance overall co-creation website images through the use of appealing inputs, such as text, graphics, colors, logos, and themes, and a broader range of products within any given category. Furthermore, to facilitate convenience and customization elements, co-creation providers need to develop intuitive and user-friendly co-creation websites, various built-in toolkits for customization options, and fast transactional systems as well as tailor products and services to individual customers.

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