Value creation through social media marketing: a threat to sustainability performance?

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Abstract
This paper contributes to the discussion on value creation. Using the literature review approach, it explains why co-creation cannot be the sole consequence of the value creation process between producers and customers. The paper shows through some empirical studies how value co-destruction sometimes occurs; depending on how the collaborative process between producers and customers is handled. The authors further discuss how sustainability performance may be affected by value creation. The review exposes the lack of both empirical and conceptual work in the area. Based on this, the authors suggest a framework that incorporates sustainability performance and value co-destruction and also offer propositions for further studies.

Keywords: *value creation, value co-creation, value co-destruction, sustainability, indicators of value co-destruction, social media marketing*

1.Introduction

Value co-creation has become an important business strategy due to changing market dynamics. The market has become a proactive stakeholder with customers having options and demanding them. Far from the early 20th century customers who had to go along with the desires of producers, as they experimented with marketing management approaches such as; product, production, and selling concepts, modern customers take active roles in the production activity. Current marketing views insist that customers should be made an integral part of the value creation goals of producers (Jaworski &Kohli, 1996; Kotler,1992; Fang et al, 2008), a position that makes business sense since customers end up judging and determining the value of outputs (Anderson & Narus, 1998; Parasuraman, 1997).

One avenue that has made this collaboration possible is Web 2.0 via social media. Equipped with this platform, customers have participated in co-production leading to value creation (Hamilton, Kaltcheva, & Rohm, 2016; Suseno, Laurell, & Sick, 2018). Several studies have explored this route (Buzeta et al, 2020; Tuan et al, 2019; Tajvidi et al, 2017; Yu et al, 2020; Hamilton et al, 2016) and reported positive outcomes. Others have questioned the perfect role played by social media in value co-creation, suggesting that this is not always the situation (Echeverri, & Skålén, 2011; Plé, & Cáceres, 2010). The current work shares this view and aims to contribute to the value creation literature in this respect.

Additionally, this work aims to look at an important area which has been neglected in the value creation discourse. Studies on value creation (co-creation) usually, focus on limited marketing (firm) outcomes like loyalty, brand awareness, brand image, and consumer brand engagement (Luo, Zhang, & Liu, 2015; Cheung, Pires, Rosenberger III, Leung, & Ting, 2020). Considering that most firms are working towards sustainability performance, it must be also examined. These gaps identified in the literature are what the current work purposes to fill. The objectives of this paper are 1. Propose indicators on value co-destruction from existing literature. 2. To connect value creation with sustainability performance. 3. Suggest a framework that incorporates sustainability along with the relevant value creation indicators and to achieve a more complete model. 4. To make propositions for empirical works that may be considered by other researchers in this subject area.

The rest of the paper covers a discussion of key constructs and their indicators, the relationship between value creation and sustainability performance, and the development of a conceptual framework and propositions.

2.Literature Review

2.1 Value and value co-creation

Businesses no doubt appreciate the need to create value for their market. Value is viewed as an antecedent to customer loyalty (Luo, Zhang, & Liu, 2015; Singaraju, 2016). Based on this assertion, value plays a major role in determining whether businesses operate under optimum conditions, whether they merely survive or whether they exit from the market. To be able to properly situate the construct within the context of this paper, it must be properly defined. This is significant because the construct has different "faces" and has been described as having a "kaleidoscopic" character (Dolan et al, 2019). The current work refers to two definitions from two different time frames.

The first definition is one of the earliest definitions proposed at the outset of the study of the construct. It was defined as: "a customer's perceived preference for and evaluation of those product attributes performances, and consequences arising from use that facilitate (or block) achieving the customer's goals and purpose in use situations. (Woodruff, (1997) in Parasuraman, (1997) p.156). The definition highlights, the purpose or use of the product and whether it results in positive or negative consequences. Even though Parasuraman, (1997) observes a measure of ambiguity in the definition and questions "*whether it readily translates into an effective operational definition*", the definition will suffice for this paper, since the purpose of this paper is not to contribute to the operationalization of the construct.

Another definition of value which immerged a decade later states that: "value is embedded in the products or services that focal organizations produce; is added during the production process, which is separated from the customer; and equals the price that the customer pays for product and services -value is objectively measured in terms of money" (Echeverri, & Skålén, 2011 p.353) This definition projects value from a monetary perspective as had been done by Anderson & Narus, (1998) when discussing the construct in relation to business markets. The definition limits value creation to the firm whilst giving the customer a minimal role which is only activated by monetary payments made for goods and services provided by the business.

The two definitions that have been provided give evidence of the differences in how the construct has been used. Whilst one author focuses on the use and benefits associated with the offering of a business, the other looks at the amount of money consumers are willing to exchange for the product. The authors of this work merge the two perspectives into a form that gives credence to the benefits (or otherwise) that accrue from the usage of the product and also, the monetary measure paid for the product. This position is to give a more complete picture of the construct to readers and to provide a general position on how value could be viewed as has been used in this work.

Because value is ultimately relevant to the success of the business, firms have over the years adopted numerous strategies to create value for their customers. The value chain analysis as well as the resource-based view of the firm are notable frameworks that have guided in developing value creation strategies. The traditional stance of these frameworks and other researchers in the field was that the responsibility of creating value solely rested on the producer (Porter, 1985; Hart, 1995). Organizations were deemed to have the responsibility and the knowledge needed to create value for customers by primarily following the G-D logic. Investing and supplying innovative products was thus a good place to start earning customers' loyalty.

The 21st century ushered in a contrary thought about value creation. Prahalad and Ramaswamy, (2000) hinted at the need to change the existing value creation model replacing it with the concept of co-creation. This thought placed the customer in active mode in the value creation model. They argued that evolving circumstances had changed customers' roles. According to them, customers are now sources of competence because they have access to market information, are forming customer communities, are becoming diverse, and finally, customers are looking for opportunities for co-creating personalized experiences. Vargo and Lush, (2004; 2008) built on this by introducing the S-D logic, which emphasized the concept of co-creation. The conclusion was that businesses were required to include customers in value creation. Doing this would produce better results in terms of customer satisfaction.

Producers must assess the benefits of value co-creation. To do this, relevant measures needed to be applied. From a pool of literature, Ranjan and Read (2016) identified and subsequently, validated some dimensions of value co-creation. These they broadly categorized into two main dimensions, co-production and Vin (value in use). These broad dimensions are related to the common definitions and descriptions that have been suggested for value (Parasuraman, (1997). Following this, they identified sub-dimensions for each of them. These are; interaction, equity, and knowledge (sharing) for co-production and experience, personalization, and relationship for Vin.

2.2 Value co-destruction

Contrary to the assertions by co-creation and S-D logic that value is always created when producers and consumers (customers) interact (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000; Vargo & Lush, 2004); some few researchers have proposed an additional outcome. Value co-destruction is a concept that some researchers have opined that it should be included in the value creation model (Echeverri, & Skålén, 2011; Plé, & Cáceres, 2010). The literature on value co-destruction is still evolving after a decade of its introduction. It is expected that with time, researchers and practitioners alike would come to fully appreciate it. However, it has been defined as: "an interactional process between service systems that results in a decline in at least one of the systems' wellbeing (which given the nature of a service system, can be individual or organizational), (Ple & Caceres, 2010 p.431). The definition claims that value could be destroyed as a result of the interaction process between producers and customers, herein, referred to as systems. The authors of this work take a similar position and further deepen the argument by stating that when value co-destruction occurs, it affects both parties in the system at least in the long run.

Echeverri and Skålén, (2011) argue for this position by providing two reasons why the co-creation and S-D logic position is skewed. They insist that: 1. The foundation for a perfect interaction model for value creation is conceptual studies and hence shaky. 2. Such a conclusion is inconsistent with real-life experiences that we all encounter. Based on these they explicitly insist that producer-consumer interactions do not only result in value co-creation but could potentially destroy value. Using the practice theory, they were able to evidence co-destruction through empirical work. Their study showed that the producer-consumer interaction resulted in both co-creation (in some instances) and co-destruction (in other instances).

A study by Daunt and Harris, (2017) also connected customer showrooming to value co-destruction. According to the authors, when customers collect information from a producer and use it in their purchase decisions whilst purchasing from another producer, then value is destroyed for the source of the information. They argue that showrooming has a simultaneous effect by creating value for the producer that was chosen but destroying value for the producer that was rejected since the purchase decision was based on information from the rejected producer. They also used their work to prove the possibility of co-destruction through such interactions.

Finally, Dolan et al, (2019) contribute to the argument on co-destruction by conducting a study in the airline industry where they analyzed customer complaints and airline representative responses into either value co-creation or value co-destruction. The work identified three complaining practices for customers on social media platforms as falling into any of these categories; solution-seeking, support seeking, and social engagement. They concluded from the findings that for each of the categories, depending on how the representatives handled the complaints, it resulted in either co-creation or co-destruction.

As have been indicated, value co-destruction is still evolving and it is still at the concept stage yet to be fully conceptualized and measured by researchers in the area. This gap has resulted in very few empirical works with the majority conducted qualitatively probably due to unavailable measures. The current work fills this gap by proposing some measures that have been identified in the existing literature. The authors approach this exercise by arguing that any attempt at conceptualizing co-destruction should be done from a balanced perspective; focusing on the loss of value arising from the interaction between producers and consumers. The authors, therefore, create a taxonomy which puts the measures into producer-related measures and consumer-related measure. This path is consistent with the central theme of the concept (Camilleri & Neuhofer, 2017).

Existing literature on the subject provides insight into how it can be measured. For example, consumer exploitation (Cova et al, 2011), miscommunication (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011), power insecurity (shifting control in favor of consumers) (Fisher & Smith, 2011), misuse of customers' resources (Smith, 2013), misuse of firms' resources (Daunt & Harris, 2017) and unfair customer complaints. A more organized, precise, and detailed way of looking at this is presented in **Table 1.**

Consumer exploitation describes the concept because, producers use consumers' labor for free during value creation and yet charge them premium prices for the value that has been created (Cova et al, 2011; Terranova 2000; Arvidsson, 2005; Bonsu

& Darmody, 2008; Humphreys & Grayson, 2008) thus resulting in value co-destruction. *Miscommunication* is another feature in value co-destruction. All the empirical works indicate that miscommunication between producers and customers leads to value breakdown. This ultimately results in; disagreement, misinterpretations, obstructive responses, keeping information, neglect, and a complete breakdown of communication (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011). *Power insecurity* is also another situation that has been mentioned with co-destruction. Consumers feel empowered by the value creation process however, this has negative consequences for the producer since ceding power is not something they are comfortable with (Fisher & Smith, 2011; Pongsakornrungslip & Schroeder, 2011). *Misuse of customers' resource* is also seen in co-production (Smith, 2013). Producers take advantage of consumers' knowledge, experiences, and desires without properly acknowledging these in their production. They end up taking credit for their innovative products when in reality, consumers played a major role in that endeavor. On the other hand, consumers have also been blamed for *misusing producers' resources* through showrooming (Daunt &Harris, 2017). There could also be *unfair customer claims*. There are instances when customers make malicious complaints (Xu, Yap, & Hyde, 2016) and exaggerate situations to their advantage to court sympathy from other customers. Finally, there are also instances where customers are abused during the value creation process by producers and their representatives a situation that is all too common.

Table 1 Dimensions of Value Co-destrustion

Customer-related measures (dimensions)	**Producer-related measures (dimensions)**
Customer exploitation: Cova et al, (2011); Arvidsson, 2005; Bonsu & Darmody, (2008); Humphreys& Grayson, 2008, Fauch, (2011)	**Power insecurity**: Fisher & Smith, (2011); Pongsakornrungslip & Schroeder, (2011)
Abuse of customers' resources: Daunt &Harris, 2017; Smith, 2013	**Abuse of producers' resources**: Daunt & Harris, 2017
Miscommunication: Echeverri & Skalen, (2011)	**Miscommunication**: Echeverri & Skalen, (2011)
Abuse of customers: Echeverri & Skalen, (2011)	**Customer complaints**: Xu, Yap, & Hyde, (2016)

2.3Social media marketing

Social media has been defined as: "…a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan & Haelein (2010) in Yadav & Rahman, 2017 p.1295). Yadav and Rahman (2017) further point out that social media comes in several forms such as social networking sites, blogs, wikis, and microblogging. When firms manage aspects of their marketing activities especially those relating to their brand and customer relationships on social media platforms (such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube) they are practicing social media marketing (Cheung et al, 2020; Hinson, 2019). Yadav and Rahman (2017) attempted to provide a comprehensive definition of social media marketing after reviewing eight definitions (Taubenheim et al, 2008; Chan & Guillet, 2011; Chi. 2011; Chang et al, 2015; Pham & Gammoh, 2015; Choi et al, 2016; Tuten & Solomon, 2016; Felix et al, 2017). Though insightful, they produced a superfluous and unbalanced definition which like the others touched on value creation (by firms) instead of value co-creation (firms and customers). Other future attempts at creating a definition, should focus on both firms and their customers.

Social media marketing has become an avenue through which firms reach a large segment of their market and provide them with information about their brands and firm activities. It is reported that over 65 million businesses have taken advantage of this platform to reach their markets (Cheung et al, 2020; Hinson, 2019). Customers and potential customers are also able to contact firms through these platforms on issues about their brands for specific personalized information to help them in their brand choices and purchase decisions. These platforms provide firms and customers the opportunity to co-create value (Yu, Tsai, Wang, Lai, & Tajvidi, 2020).

Extant literature on social media marketing conceptualizes it as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of five dimensions. These are entertainment, customization, interaction, EWOM, and trendiness. *Entertainment* in social media represents the fun aspect of a marketers' content. Studies show that a positive relationship exists between entertaining content on social media and behavioral loyalty (Yoshida et al, 2018). *Customization* deals with providing customers with personalized products and experiences (Cheung et al, 2020; Seo et al, 2018). *EWOM* are customers' opinions about the products expressed on-line (Cheung et al, 2019; Hennig-Thurau et al 2004). These stories and experiences reflect customers' most intimate impressions about assessments since they have been gathered through use and exposure to the firm and their products. Interaction is the ability to communicate. Social media as a platform allows firms to interact and create some form of relationship with their market. Finally, *trendiness* according to Naaman et al, (2011) is a topic in its infant stage. Through social media, producers can provide current information about their firms and their offerings.

The nature of social media puts it in the right spot for value co-creation as producers and customers can easily collaborate to create value. But it is perhaps these qualities that make it vulnerable and a route to co-destruction. Currently, very few works have been done on how social media marketing is a source of co-destruction. To better understand this, researchers must build on the conceptual works and test these empirically since very limited studies exist in this regard.

2.4 Sustainability performance and value creation

Sustainability performance has become a laudable goal that most businesses work towards. Sustainability performance requires that businesses balance their economic interests with social and environmental considerations (O'Neil, & Ucbasaran, 2016). Their stakeholders expect that in addition to their financial growth, they support them and the environment. This is how value is created for both the business and its stakeholders. This rather broad measure for business success (in terms of value) makes it quite challenging, yet, much of the studies that have been conducted in sustainability claim that it is a strategic tool for value creation (Zaman, Vasile, & Cristea, 2012; Lesk et al, 2016).

Sustainability performance provides a good opportunity for value co-creation as firms can invite their customers (stakeholders) to collaborate with them and thus mutually achieve value. For example, when social media marketing facilitates the prompt handling of customers' complaints then social goals are being achieved. As businesses entertain, interact, and customize their offerings for their customers, they are using social media for value co-creation and working towards their social sustainability goals. Environmental sustainability goals can equally be achieved as producers and their customers (stakeholders) work within the social media marketing space. When these parties collaborate using social media, they take off some pressure from the physical environment. Online engagements are a good way of minimizing waste and protecting the environment **(**Sharma, & Iyer, 2012) thus achieving environmental goals. They can also collectively work to design programs that can support the environment especially in situations where the firm is not a specialist in such environmental issues and stakeholders are willing to provide their expertise. Finally, economic goals are achieved even as these businesses take advantage of social media marketing. This significantly reduces the marketing budget as traditional marketing strategies are exorbitant **(**Zhao & Zhu, 2010; Weber, 2002**).** Additionally, this allows them to build stronger brands and reap the financial benefits associated with them.

Consistent with the arguments put forward, sustainability could result in value co-destruction. This can happen when the parties do not achieve their goals. Sustainability presents businesses with the challenge of dealing with diverse stakeholders who have competing interests (Mena, Hult, Ferrell, & Zhang, 2019). It must be noted that unlike shareholders who usually seek out economic goals. Other stakeholders focus on social and environmental goals and are usually keen on demanding them from firms. The effect of this situation is worst especially when they have an online relationship. Value co-destruction ultimately results in the firms' inability to achieve their economic goals. Further research must be conducted in this research area so that the mechanism by which value creation is achieved by sustainable businesses can be fully appreciated.

3.0Methodology

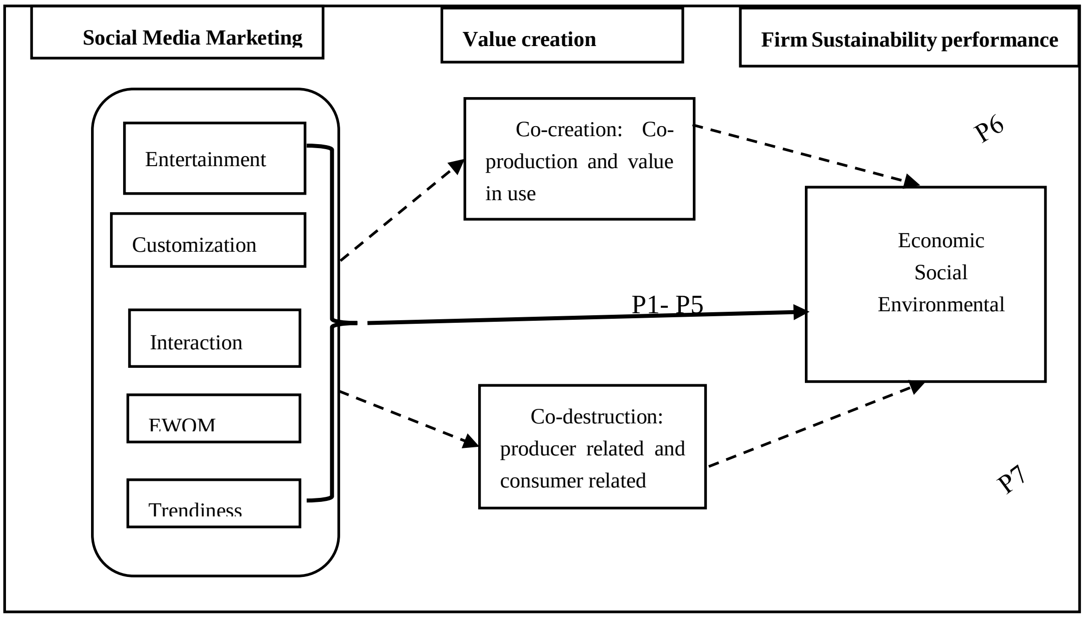
The literature review method was used for the work. The authors searched the Scopus and Google scholar databases and selected over 50 scientific articles. The selection of the papers was based on search terms such as value creation, value co-creation, value co-destruction, dimensions of value creation, dimensions of value co-creation, sustainability performance. The selected papers formed the basis for the current work.

4.0Discussion of Findings

4.1 Conceptual framework

The literature review, in addition to the S-D logic, stakeholder theory, and resource-based theory form the basis for the sustainability value creation model. Firms can use social media tools to achieve competitive advantage and hence, create value for their stakeholders through sustainability goals i.e. social, economic, and environmental. Further as indicated in the framework, the value creation process could result in either co-creation or co-destruction. This framework could form the basis for future empirical works. This is shown in Fig 1*:* Sustainability Value Creation Model through Social Media Marketing.

Fig 1. *Conceptual framework*



Source: Author's Construct
Hypothesized effect
Non-hypothesized effect

4.2 Propositions based on literature review

P $_1$-P$_5$: Social media marketing tools have a direct relationship with firm sustainability performance.

P$_6$: It is proposed that value co-creation has a mediating influence on social media marketing and firm sustainability performance.

P$_7$: It is proposed that value co-destruction has a mediating influence on social media marketing and firm sustainability performance.

4.3 Theoretical and practical implications of the paper

The work has explored current ideas on value creation and found that in addition to value co-creation, value co-destruction also occurs. This implies that authors in this research field would need to accommodate value co-destruction in their future works and work at developing the concept just as it has been done for value co-creation. The arguments put forward indicate that any discussion on value creation that ignores value co-destruction and its consequences would be deficient.

The authors have further expanded and enriched the theory on value creation by suggesting appropriate dimensions useful in ascertaining value co-destruction. These dimensions focus on both consumers and producers, therefore, giving researchers who may be interested in a study of this nature a complete perspective. This contribution to the existing is no means exhaustive, rather, it forms a sound basis for exploring further dimensions.

This paper has also deepened the understanding of value creation within the context of sustainability by drawing attention to the connection between social media and firms' sustainability performance. With the aid of the S-D logic, resource-based theory, and stakeholder theory, a conceptual framework has been developed with testable hypotheses that researchers can explore. This analysis provides a good foundation for future related studies.

Practically, firms have been provided insights into how they can use social media marketing to create value whilst achieving their sustainability goals. It is expected that firms take lessons from the argument on value co-destruction so that they manage the value creation process well to avoid destroying value.

4.4 Limitations of the paper

Even though the literature review was extensive, it was still limited to papers that could be accessed by the authors. There may be other scientific papers that could have influenced the direction of the discussion. Also, the concept of value co-destruction though interesting and relevant has not received the attention it deserves. Because of that, there were only a handful of papers that were useful and relevant to the discussion. Finally, this work is only a conceptual paper it is possible that even with the evidence that has been provided, empirical findings may suggest otherwise.

5.0 Conclusions

The authors set out to contribute to value creation by highlighting value co-destruction as a possible outcome of producer-consumer interaction. They also introduced a model that connects sustainability performance with social media value creation. It is anticipated that others may build upon the work.

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