

DIY CONSUMERS AND RETAILERS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON VALUE CREATION IN THE DO-IT-YOURSELF INDUSTRY

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INTRODUCTION

Marketing theory recognizes the increasing importance of consumer involvement in the co-creation of value (Vargo and Lusch 2004), but the consumer typically is viewed as a passive buyer of what others produce and not as the actual producer of goods or services (Xie et al. 2008). An exception is Kotler (1986a), who forecast that a new type of consumer, the prosumer, would emerge out of the sociocultural environment of modern society. Consistent with the notion of “value co-creation” (Lusch and Vargo 2006, p. 284), prosumption activities are defined as consumers producing products for their own consumption (Xie et al. 2008). Kotler (1986a) predicted that consumers increasingly would be drawn toward prosumption and “Marketers must find methods to facilitate prosumption activity” (p. 511). Retailers like Home Depot and Lowe’s have answered this call by tapping into the prosumption trend and a phenomenon popularly known as Do-It-Yourself (DIY). DIY practice offers many of the benefits sought by prosumers, and refers to activities in which individuals engage raw and semi-raw materials and component parts to produce, transform, or reconstruct material possessions, including those drawn from the natural environment (e.g., landscaping). Despite the size and growth of the industry, DIY practice has prompted few academic studies. Early DIY-related research typically profiles the DIY segment relative to a non-DIY segment (Bush et al. 1987; Hornik and Feldman 1982; Schwartzlander and Bowers 1989), whereas the more recent work explores motives for DIY (Watson and Shove 2008; Williams 2008).

The goals of the present research are to examine DIY practice and develop a conceptual model that identifies the consumer- and retailer-relevant processes that co-produce customer values. Understanding how DIY skills are exchanged, learned, and deployed can offer insights into how firms can improve value propositions (Gebhardt et al. 2006). Because there is little existing theory in this area, we begin by conducting an exploratory study using depth interviews with DIYers to gain insights.

Because few studies have been published in this area, more information is needed to inform the development of a model. Therefore, we conducted several dozen informal followed by 15 formal depth interviews with DIYers to gain insights into their DIY experiences. The transcribed formal interviews served as text for a grounded theory of consumers’ DIY practice. Themes, categories, and relationships emerged throughout the interview process, and we continued collecting interviews until our themes were saturated and no additional refinements emerged from the addition of more participants (Glaser and Straus 1967). Interview participants were selected to vary in the types of DIY projects and the level of difficulty projects entailed.

We develop a model of the motivations and outcomes of DIY practice that is informed by a depth interview study and, where it exists, linked to the appropriate literature. The purpose of developing this model is to improve our understanding of a large consumer segment that, in many ways, behaves differently than typical consumers. We elaborate on the linkages of the conceptual model, which explains the patronage of DIY retailers in terms of the multiple motivations for undertaking DIY projects. These motivations arise from: (1) the marketplace evaluations of goods and services; (2) identity enhancement; and (3) the imaginative thinking and idea sharing that take place in DIY stores. Certain conditions, however, render these motivations more likely to emerge; namely, DIYers’ discretionary time and prior experience. Once evoked, the motivations to DIY practice typically result in the patronage of DIY retailers. Although retail patronage and DIY practice often involve iterative rounds during the planning, design, and project implementation phases, participation in DIY practice and completion of projects result in the co-creation of values. Just as materialism (Richins 1994) and voluntary simplicity (Avraham 1981) are viewed as values that are deeply ingrained, not easily changed, and have significant impacts on an individual’s behavior, another important contribution offered by the DIY model is the proposal that DIY practice can take on greater meaning than the functional value of the project. More specifically, the benefits or values we derive can be described as identity enhancement, and include a sense of empowerment, an identity as a craftsman, and membership in a community of DIY enthusiasts. These values extend notions of typical consumer values that examine the material values tied to acquisitions of goods (Richins and Dawson 1992) or associated with voluntary simplicity (Avraham 1981).

References Available on Request.