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Changes in marketing practice**Co-creators of value**

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Customer co-creation through social media: The case of ‘Crash the Pepsi IPL 2015’

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Abstract

Customer co-creation is a hot topic among companies as well as customers and, thorough communication between customers and companies, is believed to be central to the success of an existing/new product or service. Research has endorsed the importance of co-creation via customer participation. Social media platforms and company websites have encouraged the creation of user-generated content in this era of consumer sovereignty. This article illustrates customer co-creation through social media with the help of a recent case of ‘Crash the Pepsi IPL’ — an advertisement co-creation campaign by PepsiCo in India. This case is evidence of a paradigm shift in power from companies to consumers. It also elucidates the role of digital marketing/social media in front-end innovation. This is believed to be the first article on customer co-creation in advertising through social media in India. *Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice* (2016) **17**, 259–271. doi:10.1057/dddmp.2016.4

Introduction

Gone are the days when the customer was a passive receiver of firms’ communication. Today’s consumer has become an active participant in the co-creation activities of companies, whether it is product or service development or the promotion of these products or services.¹ This has all become possible because of the emergence of various social media applications that facilitate the creation of user-generated content. With the emergence of various digital media platforms enabled by web 2.0, there has been a phenomenal increase in company and customer interactions.² Customer participation in the development of various firms’ offerings is one of the key research areas in services and management research.^{3,4}

The last decade has observed a remarkable change in the market as well as marketing practices that clearly indicates that companies need to join hands with the highly active customers, as their participation has crucial implications for different marketing phenomenon.^{5,6} Hence, customer or user participation has established itself as an area of importance in the marketing literature. There are various studies, like customer co-creation

Insights about future offerings

and branding,⁷ personalization and design of products,⁸ product innovation and offerings of the new service.⁹ The central theme of service dominant logic also mentions that ‘customers are always a co-creator of value (p. 1279)’.¹⁰

At present, there is ample evidence of companies joining hands with their customers, which is frequently termed co-creation,¹¹ and also considering them as a vital source of new offering development.¹² An important logic behind these attempts is that customers possess innovative insights about future offerings.¹³ Co-creation and customer participation is not a new terminology in marketing, but it is grabbing the attention of both academicians and practitioners because it helps consumers in receiving better service quality and relatively greater service control as compared with these in the absence of customer participation.¹⁴

Customer-centric digital media

This enhanced attention is also because of the emergence and high usage of digital marketing platforms and tools, including social media, by companies to communicate with their customers and come up with new products and services as per customer requirements. Payne *et al.*¹⁵ emphasized the role of communication as a significant component in a company’s capacity to succeed in customer co-creation. With an increased usage of social media and the interaction between company and customer — and customer-to-customer interactions — a new era of customer-centric digital media and co-creation has emerged.¹⁶ According to Mangold and Faulds¹⁷ (p. 357), ‘social media is a hybrid element of the promotion mix because in a traditional sense it enables companies to talk to their customers, while in a non-traditional sense it enables customers to talk directly to one another’. The purpose of this article is to emphasize the role of social media in customer co-creation. The authors present PepsiCo India’s campaign ‘Crash the Pepsi IPL’ as an example in order to examine the role of social media in advertisement co-creation.

Creativity and innovation

Customer innovation and social media

Customer innovation in the present era of social media and web 2.0 has become an area of interest for researchers and managers. According to Prahalad and Ramaswamy¹⁸ (p. 80), ‘customers are fundamentally changing the dynamics of the marketplace. The market has become a forum in which customers play an active role in creating and competing for value [NPD]’. Companies encourage customer participation to improve creativity and innovation, and also to save time. Both of these are primary objectives and have been well enunciated by academicians and managers.^{19,20} Social media platforms, such as wikis, have been utilized in the development phase of customer innovation, and these platforms positively influence prototypes and management evaluation.²¹ Moreover, research on customer-involved innovation depicts that customers generally find this process highly enjoyable.²²

Generation of innovative ideas

There are basically two types of activities involved in the front-end innovation process: first, generation of new ideas and, secondly, selecting relevant new ideas to be considered further.²³ Generation of innovative ideas is a creative phenomenon, and, hence, it offers

customers and organizations more freedom than choosing from a standardized set of ideas. The participation of customers in innovation management of products and services is now well accepted by companies, and they are devising various strategies to get their customers involved in this process. Some companies offer cash rewards, others provide non-monetary incentives and acknowledgement, and some give special recognition to their customers. Companies usually offer prizes and recognition only to those customers who come up with best innovative ideas; hence companies organize various competitions to encourage customer innovation.²⁴ The competition should be designed in such a fashion that it motivates customers to come up with better innovation and creativity.

Social media usage and customer co-creation

Co-creation platform

Social media is now widely utilized as a platform for interaction between companies and customers, as a result of which many companies have started utilizing social media platforms for co-creation of products and services.²⁵ According to Kaplan and Haenlein²⁶ (p. 61), 'social media is 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'.

Company discomfort

Social media has changed the face of communication as it facilitates direct communication between companies and customers at relatively lower cost and enhanced efficiency as compared with traditional communication tools.²⁷ Social media usage is an opportunity for companies to co-create and develop better customer relationships with customers. It brings companies and customers closer to each other, which in turn facilitates and enhances customer involvement in the innovation processes of goods and services.²⁸ Companies are progressively using social media to create online communities where consumers and other community members interact and co-create innovative solutions.²⁹ Certainly, employing various digital and social media channels can be quite advantageous for firms that wish to gain competitive edge and want to engage their customers in co-creation and customer relationships. However, very few companies feel comfortable in this era of highly active consumers and where companies cannot regulate or control the information present on these social media platforms about them.²⁶ Gebauer *et al.*³⁰ have discussed the pros and cons of co-creation in online innovation community. Healy and McDonagh³¹ emphasized the role of customers in branding and co-creation through virtual communities.

Virtual eco-system for co-creation

Social media platforms, such as wikis, have been utilized in the development phase of customer innovation, and these platforms positively influence prototypes and management evaluation.²¹ Social media comprises a variety of platforms, such as social networking sites (Facebook), micro-blogging sites (Twitter), video content sharing sites (YouTube), etc. These social media platforms form a virtual eco-system that can be utilized by companies and customers in co-creation of

various innovative ideas. Various studies in the previous literature^{32–38} have focused on the importance of consumer-generated ads through social media. Thompson and Malaviya³⁵ validated empirically that co-created advertising campaigns are more effective in engaging and retaining the loyal customers of a brand. Steyn *et al.*³² found that consumers generally like an ad that is quite popular among other consumers and is award-winning. As per Hautz *et al.*,³⁶ user-generated advertisements are generally rated high as compared with company-generated ads. According to Hansen *et al.*,³⁷ consumer-generated advertisement significantly enhances consumer attitude and interactive behaviour. This trend of consumer-generated ads is growing because of the presence of content sharing sites like YouTube, which has empowered consumers as broadcasters, and this is stimulating a revolution in advertising.

Why social media?

No company interference

The Economist Intelligence Unit (the research and analysis wing of the Economist Group) observed that technology would make customers more powerful in the coming 5 years.³⁹ Karpinski⁴⁰ has termed this power transfer to customers as ‘bottom-up-marketing’ and has considered consumers in the digital world as intelligent and as those who trust either self-opinion or the opinion of their peers. This trend of the bottom-up market is because of the ‘billions of people who create trillions of connections through social media each day’ (Hansen *et al.*,⁴¹ p. 3). These connections establish relationships that, in turn, form a huge social network consisting of a customer marketplace where companies will never be permitted to interfere.

Conversations, not messages

Keeping marketing performance in consideration, Metcalfe’s Law recommends that the worth of a social network grows in percentage to the square of its connections.⁴² Early 21st Century insights from the Cluetrain Manifesto⁴³ about the consumer marketplace, which were later considered as social media eco-system, suggest that markets are about conversations; they are not about messages. Levine *et al.*⁴³ (p. 87) state that, ‘conversations are the products the new markets are marketing to one another constantly online ... By comparison, corporate messaging is pathetic. It’s not funny. It’s not interesting. It doesn’t know who we are, or care. It only wants us to buy. If we wanted more of that, we’d turn on the tube. But we don’t and we won’t. We’re too busy. We’re too wrapped up in some fascinating conversation. Engagement in these open, free-wheeling marketplace exchanges isn’t optional. It’s a prerequisite to having a future. Silence is fatal’.

Attention via engagement

It can be easily understood that in the current scenario of the digital marketing world, marketing cannot achieve its objective with the old formula of ‘attention via reach’. Marketers should concentrate on capturing and sustaining attention via engagement. This paradigm shift makes it necessary for companies to engage their customers and co-create various products and services through various social media platforms.

Why do customers co-create?

Rewarding intangibles

Why do customers participate or why do they co-create? The theoretical background of such human behaviour can be understood from social exchange theory by Homans⁴⁴ and self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan.⁴⁵ Social exchange theory states that consumers interact virtually with companies and participate in virtual co-creation events as they believe that it will be rewarding.⁴⁶ For consumers, tangibles like goods or money, and intangibles like social amenities or companionship, are rewarding.⁴⁷

Internal and external motives

As per self-determination theory, co-creation activities can be regarded as a function of internal motivation and external motivation determined by self.⁴⁵ Consumers are internally motivated if they consider an activity valuable for its own sake. Consumers can be considered externally motivated when they focus on contingent outcomes specific to the activity *per se*.⁴⁸ There are several reasons that motivate consumers to engage in co-creation projects that extend from purely inherent motives (eg, enjoyment, friendship and altruism) via internalized external motives (eg, prestige, learning and self-use) to purely external motives like money and career prospects.⁴⁸ According to Berthon *et al.*,³⁸ intrinsic enjoyment, self-promotion and changing the perception of the target audience are three primary motives behind consumer-generated ads.

Reasons for co-creating

On the basis of the above discussion, some reasons why customers co-create are discussed below (see Figure 1):

- When customers co-create they get a higher degree of customization, and hence the resultant products and services meet their requirements and experience.
- Co-creation provides an opportunity to customers to demonstrate their creativity to a large audience, which enhances the prestige of a customer.³⁸
- Co-creation campaigns initiated by companies are a good source to the customers for making money, and they feel rewarded.⁴⁸

Figure 1: Why do customers co-create?

- Co-creation also acts as a source of self-promotion that can eventually lead to generation of employment³⁸ as it assists companies to recruit their next internal designer, advertising agency or even an excellent strategist.
- Customers usually find co-creation campaign very joyful.^{22,38} Customers really enjoy being able to demonstrate their creativity with the brands they love or are attached to. This is because, in the process of co-creation carried through social media, there can be simultaneous co-creation and perception of co-created advertising by the same subjects.

Pepsi brand portfolio

‘Crash the Pepsi IPL’: Co-creating and involving customers

Pepsi is considered to be one of the largest companies in the food and beverages industry of India. The company has a product portfolio of 16 brands in India, the iconic, and the largest selling brands include Pepsi, Tropicana fruit juices, Lay’s chips, Mirinda, Aquafina, Slice, 7UP, etc. PepsiCo India has organically developed eight brands in just 20 years, which include its mineral water brand Aquafina, cola beverage Pepsi, clear lemon beverage 7UP and Mountain Dew, mango flavour beverage Slice, cloudy lemon and orange flavour Mirinda, and snacks like Lay’s and Kurkure.

India’s first ad co-creation

Pepsi is well known for making creative advertisements, and this time, moving one step further in its ‘global Pepsi® Challenge™’, PepsiCo India launched an advertisement co-creation and customer-involvement campaign known as ‘Crash the Pepsi IPL’, the first case of customer co-creation in advertising in India. Speaking about the campaign, PepsiCo India’s chief marketing officer, Vipul Prakash said:

‘Today’s generations are creatively inspired, not scared of new experiences and eager to live life in the now. Brands around the world are stepping it up through collaborative innovations to create a sense of disruption that’s soon becoming the “norm”. For us, “Crash the Pepsi IPL” exemplifies all of this and empowers original creativity and the young consumer making their own mark. We are extremely excited to launch “Crash the Pepsi IPL” and, in true “Live It Abhi” style, we look forward to cheering the creative, inventive and spirited consumer of today!’⁴⁹

Engaging creative customers

The campaign is known to be the brand’s largest socially run, content-focused initiative ever with a diversity of challenges intended to motivate customers around the world to resist agreement, make every moment an epic, whether big or small, and truly ‘Live for Now’. The various stages of the campaign are shown in Figure 2. In this campaign, the company challenged customers to make a 30-second advertisement that, if selected as a winner, would be played in the live telecast of Pepsi IPL 2015.

Choosing from customer-created ads

The contest started from 3 March 2015 and lasted until 15 May 2015. All that a participant had to do was to make a 30-second commercial expressing their love for Pepsi at their own expense. In the second step, customers had to upload the commercial at YouTube through their personal YouTube account and name it, ‘Crash the Pepsi IPL — film title’

Figure 2: Stages of 'Crash the Pepsi IPL 2015'

or 'film title — Crash the Pepsi IPL'.⁵⁰ In the third step, they had to register with the campaign website, www.crashthepepsiip.in. In the fourth step, participants had to share their YouTube link on this site. In the fifth step, an internal panel of the judges had to shortlist the ads that complied with all the terms and conditions of the campaign, and these ads were referred to as shortlisted ads. In the sixth step, the shortlisted ads were further judged by the panel to get the finalists, the number of which could not exceed 50. In the seventh step, an independent panel of judges from different fields were invited to judge the finalists' entries and declare five winners. According to PepsiCo India,

'the five-member jury panel includes today's hottest movie star and Pepsi ambassador Ranbir Kapoor, distinguished film director and producer, Gautham Menon, and celebrated music composer Pritam. Bringing their marketing expertise to the judging table will be Ruchira Jaitly, senior director marketing — social beverages, PepsiCo India, and Anuja Chauhan, acclaimed author and advertising veteran'.⁵¹

Winner's ad debuted at match

The presence of celebrities as judges is generally to enhance customer engagement and also to demonstrate the transparency and grandeur of the event. The sixth winner was referred to as 'popular choice winner', as this ad was chosen by consumer voting on the campaign website. In this step, users had to vote for their preferred advertisement video from the list of finalists ads and share that video on their social media pages, like Facebook, Twitter, etc, from 8 May 2015 to 15 May 2015. To further enhance customer engagement and participation, Pepsi announced a Flipkart gift voucher of INR2000 for 50 lucky winners whose voted and shared videos were among the winners. In the last step, the final winner's video was aired during IPL 2015, and winners, along with their crew, were given an opportunity to fly to a match in IPL 2015 and witness their

advertisement debut from the Pepsi VIP Box, in addition to a cash prize worth INR1,00,000.

‘Crash the Pepsi IPL’ journey

Sources for evaluation

In this case of customer co-creation in advertisement/marketing communication, we followed Antonacopoulou and Pesqueux⁵² to describe the case and the following points were considered:

- Purpose of the campaign;
- Place (context, platforms utilized, social-cultural aspects);
- Ideologies; and
- Outcomes.

Purpose of the campaign

Secondary data sources, like the official website of PepsiCo India (www.pepsicoindia.co.in), the official website of the campaign (www.crashthepepsiip.com), social media content sharing site YouTube (www.youtube.com), social networking sites (www.facebook.com) and micro-blogging sites (www.twitter.com), were utilized to study the case.

The key objective of the campaign was to co-create an advertisement of 30 seconds, which would be shown during Pepsi IPL 2015. In addition to this, other implied objectives of this campaign were:

- To engage and involve the current and prospective customers of the company, specially brand lovers of PepsiCo India.
- To have an idea about the customers’ experiences and their feelings related to the brand.
- To obtain insights on various product-use situations of the brand that would help in future segmentation.
- To create a feeling among customers that they are really important for the company and to enhance customer relationships and brand value.
- To stimulate customer creativity.

Place

This campaign adopted an integration of various social and digital media platforms to achieve synergy. The company used the following platforms in the campaign:

- Social media content sharing website YouTube to upload the advertisement.
- The official website of ‘Crash the Pepsi IPL’ (www.crashthepepsiip.com) to submit the YouTube link and for customer voting to choose the popular choice winner.
- Facebook, the largest social networking site in the world.
- Micro-blogging site Twitter.
- Sony Max TV channel.

Ideologies

The basic ideologies of the campaign were the following:

- To learn from the customer, rather than creating the advertisement that the company considers best-suited for the customers.

- Listen to the customers.
- To develop genuine customer interactions.
- To enhance customer engagement with the firm.

Outcomes

PepsiCo India received an overwhelming response for this campaign. As per the official website of PepsiCo India,⁵³ the results of the campaign were as follows:

- Number of customer-made commercials received: 2,600+.
- Total advertisements shortlisted: 900+.
- Total number of finalists: 33.
- Jury winners: 5.
- Winner by consumer voting: 1.
- Number of Facebook likes on its page, 'YEH HI HAI MOMENT #LIVE IT ABHI': 33 million.⁵⁴
- Twitter page 'YEH HI HAI MOMENT #LIVE IT ABHI' had 18,000+ tweets and 1,47,000 followers (Twitter⁵⁵).

Highly engaged customers

It can be said looking at these facts and figures that PepsiCo India was quite successful in co-creating an advertisement and also in engaging its customers well throughout the campaign. The overwhelming response shows that customers were highly engaged with this creative ad-co-creation campaign. Customer engagement was possible because of the presence of social media platforms, like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, which can eventually lead to enhanced firm performance and sales, enhanced profit and competitive advantage.⁵⁶ The basis of these declarations is that engaged consumers play an important role in viral marketing process by offering referrals and/or recommendations for specific goods, services or brands to others.⁵⁶

Implications

Creating strong brands

This article adds to the growing literature of customer co-creation, social media and customer participation. It is the first case of customer co-creation in advertising through social media in India. This article enhances our understanding about how customer co-creation can be utilized in marketing communications and subsequently achieve customer engagement and better customer relationships. The encouraging results of this campaign reveal that co-creation through various social media platforms can be quite helpful to companies in creating strong brands and to engage their customers. This article also demonstrates the power and utility of social media platforms in advertisement co-creation, which can provide valuable insights to managers about various processes and benefits of such kind of campaigns to the firms.

Generate digital linkages

The promising response of this campaign also depicts that use of social media in advertisement co-creation can result in enhanced customer engagement, which can eventually lead to enhanced firm performance and sales, enhanced profit and competitive advantage.⁵⁶ The basis of these declarations is that engaged consumers play an important role in viral

Customer-company goal congruity

marketing process by offering referrals and/or recommendations for specific goods, services or brands to others.⁵⁶ As co-created advertising campaigns are more effective in engaging and retaining the loyal customers of a brand,³⁵ this article can provide insights on how to engage such loyal customers with the help of social media platforms. As marketing communications are progressively integrated with the digital world, marketers can utilize social media to generate digital linkages with consumers to co-create.

Consumers and fans co-creating advertising, predominantly with other fans, can be regarded as informal 'democratizing of innovation'.⁵⁷ Managers can do this by changing their business models and adopting social media in co-creation.⁵⁸ Managers can adopt their role in this process as collaborative co-creators. This can also encourage greater formal, 'democratizing of innovation'.⁵⁹ Managers can become collaborative co-creators by utilizing the power of various social media communities (YouTube, Facebook and Twitter in this case) to deliver mutual benefits to consumers and firms through better knowledge of customer experience and the ways it can be enhanced.^{60,61} Management engagement with social media platforms as collaborative co-creators can result in enhanced customer-company goal congruity, enhanced customer satisfaction and reduction of customer's expectation-experience gap.³¹

Dependence on customer co-creation

If companies really wish to benefit from web 2.0, then they should utilize various social media platforms, like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, as a source of information for both customer and company, co-creation of products and services, customer engagement and subsequently customer relationships and brand equity. It is crucial for organizations to understand the degree of dependence of the business on customer co-creation and customer participation and the ways it can be facilitated. Lastly, managers can include customer participation as an integral component of their business model.

Conclusion

The creative challenge

In an era of consumer sovereignty and social media, customer co-creation is not possible without utilizing the interactive digital social media platforms. In the years to come, almost each and every part of our day-to-day lives will be related to social media. This trend is well supported by the growth in monthly active users of various social media sites, like Facebook (1.44 billion), Twitter (302 million) and WhatsApp (800 million) as of the first quarter of 2015. Companies around the world have started taking social media seriously and have considered it as an essential part of integrated marketing communication strategy of the firm. 'Crash the Pepsi IPL' is known to be the brand's largest social media-run, content-focused and customer engagement initiative ever. PepsiCo India's senior director marketing, Ruchira Jaitly, said:

'In line with our global initiative #PepsiChallenge, we've designed "Crash the Pepsi IPL" as a creative challenge for India. The world will be watching the Pepsi IPL 8 — and our consumers will be front-and-centre on this stage, with the opportunity to showcase their creativity'.⁴⁹

As the world market is customer-focused and customers are embracing various social media platforms, making customers feel delighted through co-creation is necessary, with its execution taking place through social media.

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