

# Co-Creation as a Success Factor: Enhancing Customer Loyalty through Social Network Engagement

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**Abstract:** In the digital transformation era, businesses face mounting challenges in formulating innovative strategies to enhance customer engagement and cultivate long-term brand loyalty (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Traditional marketing approaches are diminishing in effectiveness, necessitating alternative means of fostering meaningful interactions with consumers. Co-creation has emerged as a pivotal strategy in this regard, actively integrating customers into the innovation and product development process (Mahr et al, 2013; Sarasvuo et al, 2022). This participatory engagement fosters an emotional connection between consumers and brands, consequently reinforcing brand affinity and customer retention (Breibach & Maglio, 2016; Oklevik et al, 2024). Social networks serve as instrumental platforms in facilitating co-creation, enabling real-time interaction between customers and brands. These digital environments empower consumers to contribute ideas, articulate preferences, and engage in collaborative development efforts (Sarkar & Banerjee, 2021). This dynamic fosters enhanced customer satisfaction and provides valuable insights for businesses, which can be leveraged to refine their offerings. Furthermore, participatory experiences engender a sense of community, reinforcing brand loyalty by fostering a perception of shared ownership in the brand's trajectory (Cossio-Silva et al, 2016). This paper examines the multifaceted impact of co-creation within social networks and identifies key success factors necessary for its effective implementation (Bogers et al, 2015; Gemser & Perks, 2015). By categorising distinct types of co-creators and analysing their motivational drivers, this study provides strategic insights for optimising customer engagement. The research delineates different co-creator personas, such as recognition-seekers, knowledge-driven contributors, and pragmatic participants, and evaluates their influence on the co-creation process. Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study integrates qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to classify and analyse co-creator typologies. This methodological framework allows for a comprehensive exploration of behavioural drivers and the efficacy of co-creation initiatives. Findings indicate that successful co-creation initiatives must be designed to accommodate the heterogeneity of co-creator motivations. Companies should integrate both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives to ensure participants perceive their contributions as valuable. Moreover, transparency in the innovation process, explicit communication of expectations, and the cultivation of an inclusive and rewarding engagement environment are essential in sustaining long-term customer participation (Oklevik et al, 2024). Ultimately, co-creation within social networks emerges as a potent mechanism for strengthening customer relationships, driving brand advocacy, and fostering a sustainable competitive advantage (Füller, 2006). Businesses that strategically implement co-creation practices can cultivate a loyal customer base while enhancing their capacity for innovation and responsiveness in an evolving market landscape (Ramaswamy, 2009).

**Keywords:** Customer Engagement, Co-Creation, Social Networks, Customer Loyalty, Consumer Participation

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## 1. Introduction

Acquiring new customers is substantially more costly than retaining existing ones (Kumar, 2022). Consequently, businesses are investing in strategies aimed at fostering enduring customer relationships. One such strategy is co-creation, which enables customers to actively participate in value creation through product development and innovation (Prandelli et al, 2006). Social networks provide an optimal platform for this engagement, offering interactive spaces conducive to customer participation.

This study explores the role of co-creation in social networks as a mechanism for enhancing customer loyalty. It investigates the determinants of customer engagement, classifies co-creator personas, and presents strategic recommendations for businesses seeking to leverage co-creation effectively.

## 2. The Significance of Co-Creation in Modern Customer Engagement and Brand Loyalty

Given the high costs associated with customer acquisition, businesses are increasingly prioritising strategies that enhance customer retention (Narver et al, 2004; Steinhardt, 2020). Co-creation has been identified as a key enabler of customer engagement and brand loyalty, as it facilitates active collaboration between companies and customers in value creation processes (Piller & Roberts, 2016). This interaction fosters a sense of emotional investment in the brand, strengthening customer-brand relationships (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Co-creation is particularly pertinent in the digital age, bridging the gap between companies and consumers (Chesbrough, 2003). Traditionally, companies maintained unilateral control over product development; however, the advent of co-creation has shifted this dynamic, enabling consumers to assume an active role in

innovation (Geise, 2016). This participatory model engenders a sense of appreciation and influence, thereby augmenting brand loyalty (Perks et al, 2012).

Recent research further emphasizes the significance of co-creation in branding as a complex interaction between various stakeholders (Sarasvuo et al, 2022). The DART framework (Dialogue, Access, Risk Assessment, and Transparency) has been identified as particularly effective in driving co-creation initiatives and enhancing customer loyalty (Oklevik et al, 2024). By integrating these elements, companies can foster stronger brand experiences, improve customer satisfaction, and promote long-term loyalty.

### **2.1 Co-Creation, Emotional Brand Attachment, and Brand Trust**

Emotional attachment to a brand is a critical determinant of customer loyalty (Fuchs et al, 2010). When customers perceive that their ideas and preferences are integrated into product development, they experience an enhanced sense of connection with the brand (Mahr et al, 2013). Co-creation facilitates direct interaction between companies and customers, fostering a sense of belonging that translates into sustained loyalty (Hazée et al, 2017).

Empirical evidence suggests that consumer participation in innovation not only fosters a positive brand perception but also increases the propensity for repeat purchases (Nishikawa et al, 2013). For instance, LEGO's "LEGO Ideas" platform has been instrumental in cultivating a community of engaged customers who contribute actively to product development (Fuchs & Schreier, 2010). Such initiatives reinforce the notion that co-creation fosters both customer retention and deeper emotional attachment to the brand (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

In recent studies, co-creation has been shown to strengthen brand trust when customers perceive transparency and clear communication in the development process (Oklevik et al, 2024). This trust encourages long-term customer engagement and minimizes brand switching (Sarkar & Banerjee, 2021).

### **2.2 The Impact of Co-Creation on Brand Trust**

Trust is a fundamental pillar of customer loyalty. Co-creation facilitates transparency in the product development process, thereby enhancing customer trust (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). When customers observe that their input is valued and implemented, their confidence in the brand increases significantly (Ramaswamy, 2009). This trust, in turn, strengthens long-term customer relationships (Steinhardt, 2020). Empirical studies confirm that customers who trust a brand exhibit lower price sensitivity and higher repurchase intent (Bogers et al, 2015).

## **3. The Role of Co-Creators in Co-Creation**

Consumers today are no longer passive buyers; rather, they increasingly assume the role of co-creators (Ramaswamy, 2009). These consumers actively contribute opinions, ideas, and needs to the innovation process, influencing product and service development (Ranjan & Read, 2014). This shift from passive consumption to active participation has profound implications for corporate innovation strategies (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014).

Emerging research highlights the complexity of this engagement, showing that successful co-creation requires the involvement of consumers, organizations, and even suppliers in the innovation process (Sarkar & Banerjee, 2021). By fostering a collaborative ecosystem, businesses can enhance product value, improve customer relationships, and foster loyalty (Brand et al, 2025).

Empirical evidence showcases successful examples of co-creation, such as McDonald's 'My Burger' campaign in Germany, which allowed customers to design and vote for personalized burgers. This initiative led to over 116,000 unique burger creations and a six percent increase in revenue (Hofer, 2012). This case demonstrates how co-creation enhances both customer engagement and financial performance.

## **4. Methodology: Classifying Co-Creators**

A mixed-methods research design was utilised, incorporating qualitative focus group discussions and quantitative surveys. The qualitative phase aimed to explore the underlying motivations and perceptions of customers engaged in co-creation initiatives. In contrast, the quantitative component employed statistical analysis to classify co-creators based on their engagement behaviours and incentive preferences (Dillman et al, 2008).

### **4.1 Qualitative Research: Focus Group Discussions**

The qualitative research phase consisted of semi-structured focus group discussions with 20 participants who had previously taken part in co-creation activities. The discussions sought to identify primary drivers of

engagement, perceived benefits, and barriers to sustained participation. A thematic analysis approach was applied to extract key insights, revealing that emotional attachment to the brand, the pursuit of social recognition, and the enjoyment of creative challenges were significant motivators. Participants also underscored the necessity of transparent communication from companies regarding the impact of their contributions.

#### 4.2 Quantitative Research: Sample, Survey and Cluster Analysis

To systematically analyse co-creator typologies and their respective motivations, a structured online survey was conducted. The sample size was determined based on scientific recommendations and established calculation methods. Since conducting a full census of the approximately 37 million active social network users in Germany in 2020 (Statista, 2024) was impractical, a partial sample was selected instead.

To calculate the minimum sample size, a G-Power analysis was performed. This method determines the required sample size based on parameters such as the significance level ( $\alpha = 5\%$ ), statistical power (Power = 80%), and degrees of freedom ( $df = 6$ ) (Klopp, 2010). Based on these parameters, a minimum sample size of 341 participants was calculated. To account for an anticipated dropout rate of 15%, the required sample size was increased to 392 participants. Additionally, a sample size calculator was utilized, based on a margin of error of 5% and a confidence level of 95% (Kraus & Kreitenweis, 2020). This calculation resulted in a recommended sample size of 385 participants. Both methods produced similar results, confirming the scientific validity of the chosen sample size.

The quantitative study employed a structured online survey conducted via the SoSci-Panel platform. Participants ( $n = 395$ ) were recruited using stratified sampling to ensure demographic diversity. The sample comprised 55.2% female, 43.3% male, and 1.5% identifying as diverse, with participants ranging from 18 to 65+ years old. Since the study focused on social media engagement, the sample included individuals who actively use social networks at least once per week.

The questionnaire consisted of five sections, covering demographic details, social media usage patterns, motivational factors, and past involvement in co-creation initiatives. Motivational drivers were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, with items adapted from established frameworks such as the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al, 1973). The questionnaire design was informed by previous studies on customer engagement and co-creation (Geise, 2016). Sample questions included: "I engage in co-creation for social recognition," "I participate in co-creation activities because I enjoy creative challenges," and "I engage with brands on social media to receive recognition from the community."

A preliminary test involving 50 participants was conducted to ensure the survey's reliability and validity. Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess internal consistency, with all constructs surpassing the 0.7 threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1993). Additionally, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to validate the structure of the motivational dimensions (Backhaus et al, 2021).

#### 4.3 Key Incentives for Participation in Co-Creation on Social Networks

Social network-based co-creation allows firms to actively involve consumers in innovative processes. A principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was conducted to identify latent motivational dimensions (Klopp, 2010). Sampling adequacy was confirmed via the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure ( $KMO = 0.874$ ), and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity confirmed the appropriateness of factor analysis (significance: 0.000) (Dziuban & Shirkey, 1974; Bühl, 2008). The analysis identified six core motivational factors:

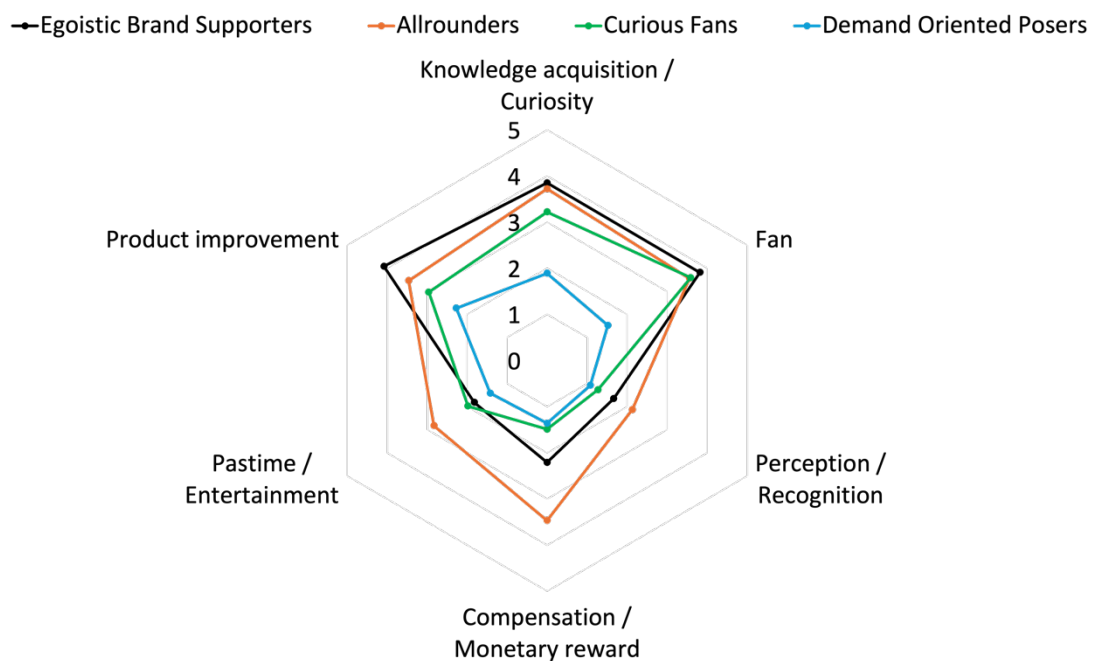
1. **Knowledge Acquisition / Curiosity:** The motivation to gain new knowledge or face new challenges is a significant factor in co-creation. Curiosity and the desire for knowledge are intrinsic motivational factors that encourage individuals to engage with new and unfamiliar topics, thereby expanding their skills and expertise. Emotional attachment to the brand plays a central role in co-creation (Füller, 2006; Dahl & Moreau, 2007; Janzik, 2012; Bretschneider, 2012; Mühlhaus, 2013; Geise, 2016).
2. **Brand Enthusiasts:** Fans of a brand often invest time, passion, and money to demonstrate their connection and are highly motivated co-creators. Their identification with the brand is strengthened through shared experiences and social interactions with like-minded individuals (Stavros et al, 2014; Roose et al, 2017).
3. **Recognition / Acknowledgment:** The desire for social recognition and approval from the community or company is a strong incentive for many participants. Co-creators who receive public praise or acknowledgement for their contributions are particularly motivated to continue delivering high-quality input (Füller, 2006; Janzik, 2012; Bretschneider, 2012; Mühlhaus, 2013; Geise, 2016).

4. **Compensation / Monetary Rewards:** Financial incentives, discounts, or exclusive product offers can also serve as strong motivational factors for participation in co-creation processes. Depending on the effort and contribution, participants expect adequate compensation to perceive their involvement as worthwhile (Füller, 2006; Janzik, 2012; Mühlhaus, 2013; Geise, 2016).
5. **Leisure Activity / Entertainment:** Co-creation is often considered a recreational activity. Many participants enjoy the creative challenge and the fun associated with taking part in innovative processes. This intrinsic enjoyment of participation is another crucial factor that motivates co-creators (Schweiger, 2007; Rössler, 2011; Goetz et al, 2013).
6. **Product Improvement:** Another significant incentive is the interest in contributing to the enhancement of a product. Many co-creators participate in such processes to improve existing products or to bring their own ideas into development. This contribution to innovation particularly motivates technically inclined or dissatisfied users (Füller, 2006; Bretschneider, 2012; Janzik, 2012; Mühlhaus, 2013; Geise, 2016).

#### 4.4 The Four Types of Co-Creators

A hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward’s method was conducted to classify participants into distinct co-creator profiles based on their motivational factors (Janssen & Laatz, 2017). The optimal number of clusters was determined using the elbow method and silhouette analysis, leading to the identification of four primary co-creator types.

The analysis of collected data identified four main types of co-creators who differ in their motivations, demographic characteristics, and level of engagement. These types can be classified according to the following criteria: age, gender, proportional distribution within the co-creator community, and the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.



**Figure 1: Cluster Centre's of the Motivation Factors of the Four Co-Creator Types as a Network Graph. (Source: Own Representation)**

1. **Egoistic Brand Supporters:** These individuals are particularly active on social networks and use their participation in co-creation processes to enhance their status and influence within the community. This group, primarily composed of young adults aged 18 to 40, represents the largest segment of the co-creator community at 30.21%. The gender distribution is predominantly female, with 56.90% women, 42.24% men, and 0.86% identifying as diverse.
2. Their motivation is predominantly extrinsic: they seek social recognition and aspire to be perceived as opinion leaders within the co-creation community. Recognition from the company or other community members is a key driver for their participation (see Fig. 1).
3. **Allrounders:** Allrounders are highly engaged co-creators who not only contribute creative ideas but also provide valuable feedback on prototypes, making them essential partners in innovation projects. They

are predominantly aged between 18 and 35, constituting 29.43% of the co-creator community. The gender distribution is well-balanced, with 51.33% women, 47.79% men, and 0.88% identifying as diverse. Their motivation is a balanced mix of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. While they have a personal interest in product development, they are also motivated by external incentives such as recognition and compensation. They appreciate contributing ideas but also value feedback and rewards (see Fig. 1).

4. **Curious Fans:** Curious Fans are mainly younger consumers who show a strong interest in the brand and seek exclusive insights into the innovation process. They typically belong to the 20 to 45 age group and are characterised by high brand affinity and enthusiasm.
5. This group, which comprises 25.52% of the total co-creator community, is predominantly female (57.14%), followed by male participants (42.85%) and a small percentage (1.02%) identifying as diverse. Their motivation is primarily intrinsic: driven by curiosity and the desire for knowledge acquisition, they participate in the co-creation process out of personal interest (see Fig. 1). They enjoy the creative process and wish to learn more about the brand and its products.
6. **Demand-Oriented Posers:** This group of co-creators focuses primarily on improving product functionality and is particularly valuable for technical innovations. Demand-Oriented Posers are generally older than other types, typically aged between 55 and 64. Representing 14.84% of the co-creator community, this group consists of 54.39% women, 40.39% men, and 5.26% identifying as diverse.
7. Their motivation is predominantly intrinsic: they are primarily interested in solving technical problems and enhancing existing products. External rewards play a minor role for this group, as they are mainly driven by their desire to contribute to product development (see Fig. 1).

## 5. Success Factors for Co-Creation in Social Networks

The effectiveness of co-creation in social networks is contingent upon the incentives provided and the communication strategies employed (Mahr et al, 2013). While innovators value the realisation of their ideas, pragmatists require clear and measurable improvements (Füller, 2006). Socialisers are driven by recognition within their communities, necessitating public feedback and acknowledgement of their contributions (Perks et al, 2012; Geise, 2016).

Conversely, passive participants tend to respond more positively to tangible incentives, such as exclusive offers or discounts (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). These distinctions highlight the need for businesses to tailor co-creation initiatives to different co-creator segments. The following strategies optimise engagement across distinct participant groups:

- **Egoistic Brand Supporters:** Implementation of status-enhancing mechanisms such as leaderboards, ambassador programmes, and public recognition initiatives.
- **Allrounders:** Creation of structured yet adaptable participation opportunities, including ideation contests and prototype testing.
- **Curious Fans:** Provision of exclusive brand insights, access to beta-testing, and educational content to sustain engagement.
- **Demand-Oriented Posers:** Facilitation of direct collaboration with research and development teams, allowing for hands-on involvement in functional product development.

## 6. Recommendations for a Successful Co-Creation Strategy

For co-creation initiatives to succeed, businesses must engage in strategic planning (Geise, 2016), ensuring that different co-creator types are adequately accommodated. Innovators thrive when afforded creative autonomy, while socialisers require recognition-driven motivation. Pragmatists demand transparent, result-oriented collaboration, and passive participants are best engaged through structured incentives (Ranjan & Read, 2014).

A comprehensive co-creation strategy should integrate a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, fostering sustained participation. Transparency in communication and clarity regarding participant contributions are essential to maintaining trust and commitment.

## 7. Conclusion

Co-creation in social networks enables businesses to position customers as active stakeholders in the innovation process (Füller, 2006). This approach strengthens customer loyalty by fostering a sense of shared ownership, allowing companies to tailor their products and services to consumer needs. By engaging customers in value creation, businesses can cultivate long-term relationships and enhance brand advocacy (Cossío-Silva et al, 2016).

Incorporating contemporary frameworks such as the DART model (Oklevik et al, 2024) and acknowledging the dynamic nature of co-creation in modern markets (Sarasvuo et al, 2022) ensures that co-creation strategies remain aligned with evolving consumer expectations. By combining theoretical insights with practical strategies, companies can effectively strengthen customer engagement and achieve sustainable growth.

The findings emphasise that co-creation initiatives must be strategically aligned with participant motivations. Businesses should implement a balanced mix of intrinsic and extrinsic incentives to ensure that contributors feel valued and rewarded. Intrinsically motivated co-creators, such as Curious Fans and Demand-Oriented Posers, seek opportunities for knowledge acquisition and product influence, whereas extrinsically driven participants, such as Egoistic Brand Supporters and Allrounders, respond to public recognition and tangible rewards. Recognising these differences allows businesses to refine their engagement strategies for optimal participation.

Additionally, social networks provide an ideal platform for fostering real-time, interactive co-creation experiences. These platforms enable customers to share ideas, provide feedback, and actively contribute to brand evolution. A well-structured co-creation initiative requires companies to moderate and manage these interactions, ensuring that they yield meaningful outcomes for both businesses and consumers.

A crucial element of long-term co-creation success is the cultivation of a strong, engaged community. When customers perceive their contributions as valuable and feel connected to a broader group of like-minded individuals, engagement levels increase. Structured participation opportunities—such as ideation contests, behind-the-scenes access, and direct R&D collaboration—enhance this dynamic. Furthermore, transparent communication regarding how consumer input influences innovation fosters trust and strengthens co-creation credibility.

Ultimately, co-creation via social networks represents a powerful mechanism for enhancing customer engagement and brand loyalty. Companies that effectively leverage this approach can gain a competitive advantage in an increasingly participatory market. Future research should explore the long-term impact of co-creation on brand equity and customer lifetime value, as well as the potential of emerging technologies—such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality—to further enhance co-creation experiences. By continuously evolving their strategies and prioritising customer involvement, businesses can unlock the full potential of co-creation, driving innovation, customer satisfaction, and sustainable growth.

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