UNDERSTANDING VALUE CO-CREATION IN A CO-CONSUMING GROUP

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Abstract. This paper brings together Service Dominant Logic, Consumer Culture Theory, and the Working Consumers concept to understand consumers' and community's roles in value co-creation. Recent research has suggested that 'double exploitation' characterises value creation, due to unequal resources and goals of companies and consumers. We argue that double exploitation is not necessarily a threat to value co-creation, but may instead be considered as activation of empowerment and consumers' sacrifice. We focus on value co-creation outside typical economic exchange – an online football fan community. Results show that consumers can co-create value by themselves through a win-win relationship whereby all participants are liable to gain benefits. The paper contributes to the value co-creation paradigm by: 1) developing the cultural framework to understand value co-creation process; and 2) providing a model of value co-creation.

Key Words branding, co-creation of value, Service Dominant Logic, Consumer Culture Theory, online communities, value

Introduction

Value co-creation has assumed central importance in marketing literature, primarily in regard to value-in-use and the roles of consumers as value co-creators. Co-creation refers to the processes by which both consumers and producers collaborate, or otherwise participate, in creating value. Key concepts linked to value co-creation, include working consumers, co-production, prosumption, consumer empowerment, consumer resistance, consumer agency, consumer tribes. The Service Dominant Logic of Marketing (hereafter, S-D logic) attempts to provide a model for value co-creation that highlights the interaction between consumer and producer (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Within this perspective, consumers are seen to have realised their potential to utlise consumption to construct, represent and maintain their self-identity (e.g., Firat et al., 1995), demonstrate knowledge, distinction, and expertise (e..g, Alba and Hutchinson 1987), and form social networks (e.g., Holt, 1995).

Researchers share a focus on the active role of consumers as a key component of value co-creation. Consequently, the active role played by the 'free consumer' (Zwick et al., 2008) is increasingly seen as a threat to marketers, who are losing the power to control the market (Cova and Dalli, 2009). Furthermore, this active role is often seen to be transforming economic logic, and shifting power from producers to consumers. From this perspective, consumers often know best what they value.

The concept of value co-creation has been investigated through different research streams in order to demonstrate the relationship between company and consumer, and within consumer communities. A rich literature review of value co-creation demonstrates that interaction, dialog, involvement, and consumption between companies and consumers play important roles in the co-creation of value. Recently, Cova and Dalli (2009) have introduced the concept of *working consumers* to understand how consumers collectively co-create value. They pose three basic questions: 1) who is responsible for value co-creation?, 2) how is value created, communicated and transferred to the market?,

and 3) what is the role of the community in the process of value co-creation? However, the processes of value co-creation and the roles of participants and co-consuming groups in the process are still unclear.

Thus, two emergent perspectives are available to understand value co-creation – each focuses on different aspects of value co-creation: S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) and working consumers (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Zwick et al., 2008). According to S-D logic, all parties in the market are eligible to gain benefits or value in a win-win relationship in which all parties are viewed as partners (Gummesson, 2004). According to this view, Lusch and Vargo (2006) have advanced the value co-creation process beyond the production concept within the factory by proposing that 'the customer always co-creates value'. Other studies (Cova and Dalli, 2008, 2009; Zwick et al., 2008) have employed the working consumers concept, which highlights the immaterial labour of consumers, as well as and a dark side of value co-creation processes – *double exploitation.*

Double exploitation was first suggested by Cova and Dalli (2007) and has been expanded by Zwick et al. (2008: 180) to encompass two issues. First, consumers are not generally paid for the know-how, enthusiasm, and social cooperation that they contribute to the manufacturing process of marketable commodities. Second, customers typically pay what the marketing profession calls a 'price premium' for the fruits of their own labor as the use value provided by co-created commodities is said to be higher than that which can be achieved through standardized production's rationalised systems. Thus, in this view, companies are receiving benefits from consumers by charging a premium price, in spite of the fact that consumers are viewed as unpaid workers.

If the concept of the dark side, double exploitation is correct, S-D logic seems to be the bright side of value co-creation process. For example, Cova and Dalli (2009) argue that S-D logic imagines a utopian marketplace, in which there is harmony between companies and consumers. Therefore, this paper seeks to synthesise these two perspectives by presenting a positive view of value co-creation processes. Although scholars, especially Cova and Dalli (2009), have studied the active role of consumers and the importance of social interaction in value co-creation, they do not fully address how the process of value co-creation in the co-consuming group works and how consumers relate to this process. We seek to

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extend the value co-creation process to the co-consuming group with the idea that all participants can gain benefits and value from the process. Moreover, we intend to connect the S-D logic and working consumers within a value co-creation paradigm.

To inform the analysis, we consider cultural framework in order to understand value co-creation processes, due to dynamic and multi-dimensions of value depending on how consumers interpret the consumption of objects (Lawrence and Phillips, 2002; Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007; Vargo and Lusch, 2008), in order to extend S-D logic and working consumers, and also co-develop a value co-creation paradigm. To achieve this, we draw upon S-D logic and Consumer Culture Theory (hereafter; CCT), not because these two concepts are 'natural allies', but rather because they offer complementary insights into value creation (Arnould, 2007a). Both S-D logic and CCT require interpretive perspectives, along with a cultural framework for co-creating the meaning of the consumption or value (Holt, 2002; Peñaloza and Venkatesh, 2006; Schroeder, 2009). We also aim to combine them with the concept of working consumers (Cova and Dalli, 2009) in order to propose a model of value co-creation processes in consumer communities. Our purpose in this paper is to examine the roles of consumers and the consuming group in the process of value co-creation in a win-win relationship in which all participants are liable to gain benefits or value.

We examine the roles played by consumers and co-consuming groups in value co-creation processes through win-win relationships in order to demonstrate the bright side of value co-creation, from which all parties are liable to gain benefits or value. We begin by synthesising S-D logic, CCT, and the working consumer concept into a theoretical framework, and emphasising the consumer's cultural framework and their immaterial labour into value co-creation processes. We conducted an empirical study of a co-consuming group – the online football fan community from ThisIsAnfield Fan-Site: An Unofficial Liverpool FC Fan-Site [http://www.thisisanfield.com] to explore the bright side of value co-creation process. A model of value co-creation is presented that utlises the framework of S-D Logic and the cultural perspective of CCT to provide a contextualised understanding of how consumers co-create value. We conclude by discussing the implications of value co-creation process.

Theoretical issues

Recent research in marketing has addressed value co-creation as a paradigm shift. One influential research stream focuses on how companies and consumers interact to co-create value in terms of *co-production* (Bendapudi and Leone, 2003; Etgar, 2008; Grönroos, 2006; Kozinets, 2007; Wikström, 1996; Woodruff and Flint, 2006), and *consumer involvement* (Andersson et al., 2008; Kalaignanam and Varadarajan, 2006). In some circumstances, consumers are also viewed as value co-creators by using their skills and knowledge to produce or create their own consumption as *prosumers* (Bagozzi and Warshaw, 1990; Toffler, 1980; Xie et al., 2008), or working consumers (Arvidsson, 2005; Cova and Dalli, 2009; Zwick et al., 2008; see also Gabriel and Lang 2006).

Meanwhile, another stream focuses on the importance of the role played by consumption in meaning production – within *symbolic consumption* (Flint, 2006; Holt, 1995; Overby et al., 2005; Shankar et al., 2009; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991), *cultural branding* (Holt, 2004; Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling, 2006), *consumer community* (Cova and Cova, 2002; Cova and Pace, 2006; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001), *co-creation of value* (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006; Grönroos, 2008; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Schau et al., 2009; Vargo and Lusch, 2004), and *consumption experience* (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook, 2006; Schembri, 2006). Consumers may not only co-create value by harmonising with the market or company, but also by forming the power to outflank companies or marketers through the oppositional meaning of consumption as *consumer resistance* (Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2002a; Pongsakornrungsilp et al., 2008) and *consumer empowerment* (Denegri-Knott et al., 2006; Kozinets and Handelman, 2004).

These research streams largely agree that consumers can co-create value with companies, by themselves, and with other consumers in order to satisfy their individual or social life goals. Moreover, to create value, consumers require skills and knowledge (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) or what has been called immaterial labour (Arvidsson, 2005; Cova and Dalli, 2009; Zwick et al., 2008). The two perspectives; S-

D logic and CCT, often converge, but they offer different perspectives about the value beneficiary. Moreover, the research streams mentioned above cannot demonstrate how the active role of consumers works for co-creating value or the role played by consumer communities in this process. Although Cova and Dalli (2009) and Leigh et al. (2006) argue that communities of consumers play a role as brand curator, we believe that from different streams and multi-dimensions of value (Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007), communities of consumers may not only play a role as brand curator in the value co-creation process. Therefore, we propose a conceptual framework , drawing upon three perspectives on value creation: Service-Dominant Logic of Marketing (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), and Working Consumers (Cova and Dalli, 2009).

S-D logic is a way of thinking about marketing in terms of 'market to' to 'market with', specifically by focusing on processes of value creation between companies and consumers, rather than focusing on tangible outputs or products (Lusch et al., 2007). Vargo and Lusch (2004) use the singular word, 'service', to label the process of benefit co-creation for each entity. According to this view, service is:

> ... application of specialized competences (operant resources – knowledge and skills), through deeds, processes, and performances for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself. (Lusch and Vargo, 2006, p.283)

In this process, value is a core concept within S-D logic although in this context value can be problematic inasmuch as it can be perceived differently depending on consumer perception. Thus, a cultural framework is required in order to understand value co-creation. In this view, value is not only functional utilities of goods or services, but also the consumer's interpretation of consumption objects, including products, brands, and services (e.g., Lawrence and Phillips, 2002). To understand consumer's cultural schemata in the value co-creation process, we aim to integrate the concept of the S-D logic with CCT. The notion of CCT refers to co-productive actions of consumers, markets, and culture (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Within a CCT perspective, scholars view co-creation value in terms of a cultural framework that focuses on how customers perceive, interpret, understand, and interact with market offerings (e.g., Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Holt, 2002).

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In this way, value co-creation has moved beyond the consumer's purchasing power and the functional utilities of products to focus on the symbolic meaning of consumption, so that companies have to understand how consumers value their set of life projects, and how they enact their life narratives (Arnould and Price, 2000). On the other hand, CCT emphasises how consumers bring their culture and social resources into the value co-creation process in order to co-create value for themselves (at the individual level) or their peers (at the social level).

Like S-D Logic and CCT which consider consumers as active players in the market, S-D Logic and Working Consumers are also natural allies, but they stand on opposite sides of the value beneficiary. Within S-D logic, all participants are liable to gain benefits whereas in working consumers, consumers are exploited by companies. In S-D logic, each participant – company or consumer – has to employ their skills and knowledge to provide benefits for each other through win-win situations, all the while overlooking how much each party has sacrificed or invested into the process as long as they can achieve their life goals. Consequently, companies can generate profits and positive cash flow. At the same time, consumers receive what they desire; such as extended self-identity, social recognition, functional utility, cost economy, experience, and so forth. Thus, in value co-creation paradigm, on the one hand, consumers control value co-creation process with companies and other consumers. On the other hand, consumers have been used as unpaid workers by companies (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000; Zwick et al., 2008) according to the concept of working consumers or "double exploitation" (Cova and Dalli, 2009).

In this sense, an example of double exploitation can be found in brand communities (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001) or tribal brand cultures (Cova and Dalli, 2009) in which consumers themselves co-create the authenticity or symbolic meaning of their consumption, while companies solely receive benefits or premium charges from consumers – in spite of the fact that consumers have employed their abilities or consumers' "general intellect" (Zwick et al., 2008) to involve in the value co-creation process. This general intellect is derived from Marx's theory of labour (see also general intellect, Zwick et al., 2008: 178), in which Zwick et al. (2008) refers to a set of competencies which are free and available in all individuals. Similarly, both skills and knowledge in S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), and immaterial

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labour in Working Consumers (Cova and Dalli, 2009) are a set of competencies and the crucial component which consumers employ to co-create value. Therefore, we would like to conclude that S-D logic is similar to Working Consumers inasmuch as they share a view of the consumer as value co-creator. However, they have different views on the value beneficiary.

The notion of working consumers concerns how companies employ consumers as 'unpaid' labourers as also how marketers and all participants manage asymmetry or double exploitation within the market, whereby consumers dedicate their energy, power, minds, or resources to co-production with companies. Pettinger (2005) has supported this idea by demonstrating the relationship between work and consumption within the fashion retail context whereby consumers play a role as workers to represent brands. As Cova and Dalli's (2009) point about double exploitation that this unfairness is not the holistic situation, and they also realise about non-economic value from working consumers – a bright side of value co-creation, the idea that working consumers contribute to the value co-creation paradigm, by providing insights into the role of consumers in the value co-creation process.

Therefore, we would like to argue that double exploitation (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Zwick et al., 2008) is not a threat to value co-creation on the basis that it can be found in unethical companies. It can contribute value or benefits to consumers by stimulating the consumer empowerment rather than reinforcing the dark side of value co-creation. We believe that it is impossible to create a utopian marketplace in which all parties work and gain equal benefit from the same economic resources (Schroeder, 2000), even allowing for the circumstances of market emancipation (Arnould, 2007b; Kozinets, 2002a). In this paper, we derive a view of value co-creation from S-D logic, whereby all participants in the process have an equal chance of gaining benefits, but these benefits are not always equal, because each party has different life goals and competencies; therefore, they expect or desire different value from the process (Vargo and Lusch, 2008).

Meanwhile, double exploitation might happen if a company has limited ethical goals and is mainly concerns with the maximization of profit, chiefly by charging high prices. This is one of the reasons why marketing scholars and practitioners have called for a new marketing paradigm. Vargo and

Lusch (2004) have responded by proposing Service-Dominant Logic of Marketing and emphasising *value-in-use* rather than value-in-transaction. Rather than struggling to gain maximized profit, companies should be concerned by the long-term sustainability of consumer satisfaction and loyalty. In this regard, it is noteworthy that companies do not evaluate their market performance according to income or profit-loss statements, but rather from cash flow, as indicative of a financially healthy company and also a mark of how well that company serves consumers (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

Value Co-Creation Processes

The definition of value is one of the most controversial issues in the marketing literature (Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). Value – complex and multi-dimensional – can be perceived to have different meanings, i.e. value as interactive relativistic preference experience (Holbrook, 2006); as a symbolic meaning (Shankar et al., 2009), as value added concept (Woodruff and Flint, 2006), or value-in-use (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The perception of value can be explained through the idea of fragmentation, whereby postmodern consumers may customise value and meaning to achieve their life goals (Firat et al., 1995). For example customers may worry about finances when they go shopping at the end of the month. In contrast, they might feel happy when they are shopping for a gift for their friends or families.

In this paper, we have derived the concept of value from S-D logic regarding 'phenomenology of value' (Vargo and Lusch, 2008), or value as context, for creating the definition of value at least less subject to different perspectives. It should be noted that we do not intend to dictate what value means; instead, we explore the social aspects of consumption by examining the roles of consumers and community within the value co-creation process. Moreover, we also extend Cova and Dalli's (2009) *three basic questions* about value co-creation in order to understand how the value co-creation process works. In other words, a model of value emerges from the empirical context of a co-consuming group.

In short, the view of company and consumer as value co-creators has changed. Strategic attention has moved beyond the market orientation's emphasis on consumers over products, (e.g., Jaworski and Kohli, 1993), to emphasise how consumers create symbolic meaning and value via consumption (Firat and Dholakia, 2006). Wikström (1996) also suggests that marketing philosophy does not focus on how companies create value for consumers, but rather on how they create value *with* consumers. This marketing revolution is a change from a producer-consumer perspective to a co-creation perspective (Wikström, 1996), as it is termed in S-D Logic of Marketing (Vargo and Lusch, 2008), in which the role of company and consumer has been recast from producer-consumer to co-creators of value. Both company and consumer have their own desired values, which need to be balanced in the interaction through dialog, involvement and consumption, and consumers will perceive value when they consume objects. Moreover, such consumption also allows consumers to co-create self-identity as an insider in a group to which they belong (Firat et al., 1995). In this sense, consumers may apply consumption to co-create different identities depending on time or situation.

Within consumer research, consumers are often seen as powerful agents, inasmuch as increasing collective consumer interactions (Baron, 2006) may create opportunities, and pose a threat to firms (Denegri-Knott et al., 2006; Kozinets and Handelman, 2004). Therefore, the unit of analysis for consumers is not only specific to the individual level of consumption or the relationship between firms and consumers, but also extends to the social level of consumption (e.g. brand community, subculture of consumption, consumer tribe, etc.), known as the 'co-consuming group' (Arnould et al., 2006).

The co-consuming group is one of the tribal perspectives which consumers form by 'linking value' in order to co-construct their consumption, resistance, or empowerment (Cova and Cova, 2002). To try to understand the power of co-consuming groups, many scholars have investigated the characteristics, emergence of, or important factors relating to collective communities (Belk and Tumbat, 2005; Cova and Cova, 2002; Leigh et al., 2006; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). Researches in many contexts have found that reciprocity and gift giving are important components in the co-creation of value. – for example, within virtual communities and online gift economies (Belk 2007),

Napster music file sharing (Giesler (2006), and peer-to-peer communities(Mathwick et al. 2008),

Moreover, marketing scholars have addressed how value is co-created within the co-consuming group

through three activities – *relating, communicating, and knowing* (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006), *social*

capital (Mathwick et al., 2008), *theory of practice* (Schau et al., 2009), and *working consumers* (Zwick et

al., 2008; Cova and Dalli, 2009). All of these studies found that consumers can co-create value by

themselves; however the ways in which they do this and the roles of consumer communities are less well

understood.

From the literature reviews mentioned above, we develop the specific research questions in order

to clarify how the value co-creation process work and whether double exploitation exists within the

process:

1. What are the roles of consumers and consumer community within the value co-creation

process?

2. How does the value co-creation process work?

In the next section, we turn to the research context – an online football fan community – and

explain why the case of Liverpool FC fan-site, the TIA community is suitable to understand value co-

creation process; thereafter, we describe the methodology employed to study in this context.

Research Context

Liverpool FC, formed in 1892, is one of the oldest (and most successful football clubs in the

history of English football. Liverpool FC has both a large international fan-base, and a strong affinity

with its local working-class supporter-base, even though Liverpool FC has not won the League title since

1990s. This strong fan-base of Liverpool FC collectively contributes to form the tradition and culture of

Liverpool FC through different circumstances such as the Hillsborough disaster in 1989 (Liverpool FC,

2009) in which a large number of supporters were crushed to death when the stadium collapsed during a

game. Moreover, Liverpool FC fans also co-create a strong group identity against Liverpool FC

opponents such as *The Sun* newspaper or the club's American co-owners, as well as their willingness to

mobilize themselves to support what they believe in, or resist what they do not (Pongsakornrungsilp et al., 2008).

We selected the virtual brand community of football fandom on the ThisIsAnfield fan-site or TIA (Anfield is Liverpool's home-stadium) as a source of data because for several reasons. TIA is open to all supporters, and does not restrict membership to specific groups such as the local fans (Pongsakornrungsilp et al., 2008). TIA can be considered a 'compromiser' group because its members are Liverpool FC supporters around the world, and it strikes a balance between the culture of specifically English football, and the globalization and commercialization of football. In other words, it brings together both local and global concerns. Compromisers are the local Liverpool City fans of Liverpool FC who are open-minded to fans from outside Liverpool City; this is as opposed to "hardcorers", who have strong sense of local identity, and thus disapprove of non-local fans. Compromisers are happy with Liverpool FC fans around the world, as long as they learn and adopt the culture and traditions of Liverpool FC (Pongsakornrungsilp et al., 2008).

The TIA community is an independent community operated by Liverpool FC supporters. These supporters have united with other communities or fan-sites to form the Spirit of Shankly (SOS) – a football supporter union by deriving a name from one of the greatest Liverpool FC managers, Bill Shankly who led the team from 1959 to 1974, in order to express their empowerment against Liverpool FC and its American co-owners. Importantly, the characteristics of TIA and social interaction between supporters make a useful contribution to our understanding of the co-creation of value in a co-consuming group (Arnould et al., 2006; Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008). TIA also exhibits the three markers of a brand community: consciousness of kind, sharing of rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). Therefore, the TIA community provides a useful case of consumer community to co-create value among themselves, whereby all consumers are eligible to co-create value and gain unique benefits from their social interaction.

Methodology

Data was gathered in several ways. We conducted netnography to observe the roles of consumers on the TIA fan-site [http://forums.thisisanfield.com/], an unofficial fan-site for the Liverpool FC supporters. Netnography is like ethnography in that it is a form of cultural anthropology and cultural studies; in such studies, the researcher can fully participate in the cultural group as a 'recognized cultural member' (Kozinets, 2002b). Kozinets (2002b: 62) compares netnography to other research techniques and recommends it as being far less time consuming and elaborate, less obtrusive, and less costly in many instances. Furthermore, this netnography technique also offers a way of observing the consuming group in its natural environment. Recently, the capability and reliability of netnography has been demonstrated by many branding researchers (Avery, 2007; Giesler, 2006; Mathwick et al., 2008). For example, Avery (2007) has studied an independent consumer brand community, namely Porsche automobile enthusiasts (much like the TIA fan-site), focusing on how consumers in that brand community use their chosen brand as an instrument to construct their identity, who they are or who they are not. In addition, Mathwick et al. (2008) has studied social relationships by understanding how consumers cement peer networks within brand communities through the formation of norms within online group. These studies have contributed to our understanding of how consumers value their set of life projects, or how they enact their life narratives (Arnould and Price, 2000). However, in this paper, we adapt this inquiry technique to investigate the roles of consumers and community in the value co-creation process in order to demonstrate how it works.

During the data collection process, we adapted the 'humanist inquiry method' which Hirschman, 1986: 240 - 242) suggested into three stages: 1.) '*a priori* conceptualisation' to see the overall phenomenon, 2.) 'exploratory investigation' to understand the humanist phenomenon, and 3.) 'personal immersion', that is to immerse the researcher in the phenomenon. We observed consumer-to-consumer interactions on the TIA community, acting both as a participant and a non-participant, with the permission of the site-moderator and other members. There are 7 ranking systems within the TIA community: TIA Board Members, TIA Legends, TIA First Team members, TIA Subs-Bench members, TIA Research

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Team members, TIA Youth Team members, and TIA New Signing members, respectively. TIA Board

Members are the TIA founders and moderators who voluntarily manage the TIA community, enforcing its

rules. TIA Board Members share their experiences and knowledge of Liverpool FC with fellow TIA

members, and also commit themselves to compulsory duties, such as answering questions, posting new

information, and disciplining badly behaved members. In addition to this, they moderate all threads and

posts of TIA. TIA Legend is the highest status or rank that a typical member can reach, while TIA New

Signing member is the lowest status or rank within the TIA community.

The observation was started from 1 July 2007, when the first author has joined as a TIA member,

and got permission to conduct the study from a TIA Moderator until we obtained sufficient data for

analysis and summary of the research findings. Members who are still activating their memberships from

each ranking were observed and their roles in the social interaction in the community were recorded. As

mentioned through the literatures, the interactions within the TIA community are considered as the value

co-creation process, therefore, we observed the way TIA members participate, share information, argue or

discuss with other members. Table 1 shows the observation profiles classified by ranking, a number of

posts, and a period of membership. The total posts from 310 activated members are 242,845 posts which

account for 50.03 % of all posts (On 8 December 2008, there are 9,547 members, 15,932 topics, and

485,375 posts). On average, each member has been a membership for 1 year 8 months, and their

characteristics are listed in Table 1.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Although participant observation may create a bias (Avery, 2007), it allows us to form direct

relationships with the other members of the group, and we can be identified as a member of the consumer

community, that is a *recognized culture member* (Kozinets, 2002b). The most relevant online

conversations were downloaded for discourse analysis, and these data were directly copied, transcribed,

and inscribed during the observation (Kozinets, 2002b). We followed Mathwick et al.'s (2008) iterative

process in the analysis by reading the posts and categorising the data appropriately. We also analysed emerging themes in our observations through a hermeneutical framework of interpretation (Thompson, 1997) by rereading the posts and online interactions, retracing to the literatures, and conducting theme revision in order to satisfy the interpretive convergence (Kozinets, 2002b).

Findings

Our data show that consumers may act as providers and beneficiaries within the value co-creation process, and that the co-consuming group is not only a brand curator (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Leigh et al., 2006), but also a source of value or a platform for consumers to co-create value. In this section, we present the roles of consumers in the value co-creation process by highlighting their roles as providers and beneficiaries. Next, we present the process of value co-creation within co-consuming group in order to show how it works, and demonstrate the role of the co-consuming group in helping consumers to co-create value.

Consumer Roles in Value Co-Creation

In this study, we aim to understand the roles of consumers by observing the interaction of TIA members. TIA members play the roles of beneficiaries and providers by participating in the TIA community. They are different in the ways they interact, participate, and converse within the community; especially the degree of resource co-creation. It is noteworthy that all members are beneficiaries, but only some can be providers.

Beneficiary

Beneficiary is a basic role of all members of the TIA community. In this capacity they form a relationship with other members and thus contribute to the community as a whole. Less experienced or "newbie" members tend to be only beneficiaries who are attempting to bond with the community or individual members, and accumulating knowledge and experience about Liverpool FC and the TIA community. They participate and interact with their fellow members in order to experience pleasure, or what Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) call experiential hedonism. Basically, beneficiaries are members who post responses to threads and enjoy the experience, and who would like to gain social recognition through the ranking system. As beneficiaries, members do not require much experience or a high level of knowledge about Liverpool FC or the TIA community.

The following post gives an example of how a beneficiary may participate to form the consciousness of kind and a sense of community (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001) through a game or play a fantasy football for being the Liverpool FC manager. Before every football match, one member starts a thread called as a pre-match thread (to discuss former matches, players, position, first XI players, etc.); a further thread during the match called an in-match thread (to provide information on game, updated result, or current situation); and a final thread after the match called a post-match thread (to discuss about the team, players, managers, opponent teams, etc.).

> Aurelio doesn't play 2 games in 4 days, and therefore won't play this. Hyypia could get a game to rest Carra or Agger but not sure about that. Wouldn't be surprised to see Babel start, which id be happy to see. Don't expect Alonso, Masch and Gerrard all to start. Torres *could* be back...
> I'd go with: Reina
>   Arbeloa Hyypia Agger Dossena
>   Kuyt Gerrard Mascherano Riera
>   Babel* Keane
> * Torres if fit. (Matt, 10/26/08, TIA Editor)

Matt, as the TIA Editor, one of TIA Board Members, is an experienced member of the community, who acts as both a provider and beneficiary. He participates through this pre-match thread as a beneficiary by sharing information and comments on players who might have chance to be the first eleven players in this game such as Aurelio, Carrager and Agger, Liverpool FC defenders, who might not play because of the rotation system of Liverpool FC.

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From the post above, he and other members always show the team formation for this match by posting from goalkeeper, defenders, midfielders, and forwards, respectively. In this role, members tend to be more relaxed than when acting as providers, because they are consuming the experience of the Liverpool FC and the sense of community with their fellow members. TIA members perform the beneficiary role as a means by which to form bonds with other members and so experience the sense of community offered by TIA.

Online participants do not only discuss football, but also aspects of their personal lives, such as birthdays, holidays, and former members, even though they do not have a chance to see each other in the offline world. Furthermore, the symbolism of the colour red and Liver-bird crest, the Liverpool FC icon, afford TIA members further meaning by which to express their sense of community. They employ additional icons to express his emotion and actions. For example, members use a smiley icon, a pint of beers, or the winking smiley to celebrate with friends

Interestingly, these icons are used to express their emotions as though they are in face-to-face conversation. Beneficiaries can participate or discuss as they are chatting within the chat room, in order to share their experience of Liverpool FC and enjoy a football fantasy in the same way as the chatters enjoy the experience of conversation in chat-rooms (Shoham, 2004).

TIA members share their relationship with the Liverpool FC brand to other TIA members as a way of drawing other TIA members into a stronger relationship with the Liverpool FC. However, there are also inauthentic actions from beneficiaries who are kneejerk fans or "glory hunters", and members who only post for the purposes of upgrading their ranking (due to the rank system run by a number of posts). These members are typically less experienced and do not know how to post or interact because they cannot embody themselves with the community and other members. However, they also contribute value by strengthening the tradition of Liverpool FC and the TIA community, because more experienced members will participate in this kind of thread to share knowledge and information, correct some points made by these members and thereby help less experienced members to identify more strongly with Liverpool FC and the TIA community.

The following posts are typical examples of posts from less experienced members who struggle to embody with the spirit of Liverpool FC or the TIA community:

> yessssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssss amazing second half performance, chelsea were nowhere near equalising. We created the most chances and we could even have gotten away for a 2-0 win!!
> Well done lads!! Well done rafa!!!!!!!
> AM SOOOOOOOOOOOO HAPPPPPPPPPPYYY!!! (informal, 10/26/08, TIA Youth Team member)
>
> wahey! brilliant result, played well to a man. all the back four were excellent, riera and kuyt pick of the attacking players for me, brilliant workrate.
> we looked like arsenal at times knocking it about! (shug, 10/26/08, TIA Subs-Bench member)

These two posts are examples of beneficiary posts made in response to a post-match thread to celebrate Liverpool FC's victory over a rival club, Chelsea FC. These examples show that beneficiaries are only resource receivers who reply shortly without any strong reason, information, or comments to support their posts. On the other hand, they do only experience Liverpool FC fandom with their fellow members.

In short, as beneficiaries, TIA members enjoy experientialism alongside their fellow members in order to satisfy their individual level of consumption and form a strong relationship with other members. On the other hand, beneficiaries are consuming the Liverpool FC fandom through the interactions within the TIA community. Although they do not directly co-create value or contribute value to the community, they participate as beneficiaries through collective actions in order to form strong relationships with the community and the fellow members. They do not only gain experience and enjoyment through the interaction, but also benefit as members of a collective group by helping to connect all members and forming the solid community through a consciousness of kind and a sense of community (Matwick et al., 2008; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). Moreover, their contributions express community life inasmuch as a particular thread will be moved to the first page of the forum when members add new posts.

Provider

As the TIA community is an independent co-consuming group, run and operated by consumers, TIA members voluntarily play the distinctive role of provider by contributing knowledge, information,

experience, well-analysed comments, stories, legends, and so forth, about the Liverpool FC to the community. Providers are more experienced members (both longtime members and newbie members), who can embed themselves within the community. However, most of them have high community ranks such as TIA Board Members, TIA Legends, TIA First Team members, TIA Subs-Bench members. As providers, they do not only act as beneficiaries by enjoying the experience of Liverpool FC and the TIA community; they also make contributions to the TIA community as *'creative posters'* and *'brand warriors'*:

Provider: Creative Posters

Creative posters act as providers by posting with the contributions of knowledge, comments, information, or stories about the Liverpool FC as English football Gurus. Moreover, creative posters do not only contribute a wealthy of information and passion about the Liverpool FC; they are also able to discuss the football world, and other national leagues. The following post is an example of the football debate, posted by an experienced member, Geriant:

> …I am partly bringing up this point because the German always gets nominated, but Baresi never rates a mention. He epitomised the role of libero in the modern European game, leading the stingiest defense in Italy combined with having the stamina and creativity to start many of his team's attacking moves. He also won the World Cup as well as making a semi and final. Needless to say, his club honours completely overshadows the German's, but no he never gets rated anywhere near him. I believe that the German is usually included as a token defender so that the journalist appears to be unbiased and well-informed... (Geriant, 11/21/08, TIA First Team member)

Note that Geriant, a TIA "First Team member", is an experienced TIA member. His post is information rich, and gives critical reasons to support his arguments. He states that journalists is the crucial reason to support why players from Germany were always nominated as best football player in Europe, while Baresi, one of the greatest football players from Italy, who performed well both in the club (AC Milan FC) and national level (Italy) had never been nominated. Moreover, this kind of post can lead to debate or ignite arguments among other members (e.g. the criteria he offers for judging players could become a focus for debate).

The creative posters do not only provide information to the fellow members, but also educate new members in the Liverpool FC traditions, ways, or myths. Moreover, this kind of post calls for the argument or discussion, which can contribute to the collective resources of the TIA community. These stories can also tie new blood fans to Liverpool FC and its tradition. The following post shows an experienced member explaining how creative posters can contribute to this learning process:

> The point with THIS forum is that NO ONE knows who the other members are, what they look like, how old they are. We all start from ZERO when we join… ME? I came to this site as a newbie and knew no one here… if I can remind younger fans of the work of Shanks and Paisley and the traditional meaning of being a Liverpool fan, then I will be consider my time not wasted.... because whatever we argue about... We'll never walk alone. (Geebo, 12/25/07, TIA Caretaker)

Geebo, as a TIA Caretaker, calmly explains fellow members that all members have started from zero, and gradually accumulate knowledge and experience within the TIA community. He also notes the worth of sharing the Liverpool FC story or history to the newbie members because he believes that this is a way of forming and extending the Liverpool FC tradition. There are no restrictions to participation in the TIA community, even children, younger, or global supporters may all participate in TIA and learn about Liverpool FC ways and culture. The more knowledge and tradition they learn, the more they identify themselves with Liverpool FC and the TIA community.

Provider: Brand Warrior

With the long history of Liverpool FC, the traditions and culture of Liverpool FC have emerged and been accumulated through many circumstances, such as the Heysel memorial at the European Cup Final in 1985, Hillsborough memorial at the FA cup Final in 1989, or at the fifth Champion of Europe in 2005. The two former circumstances tragically led to the death of Liverpool FC supporters, while the latter commemorates a Liverpool FC victory over AC Milan, in which Liverpool FC recovered from being down three nil in the first half (Liverpool FC, 2009). A well-known tradition is "You'll Never Walk Alone" (thereafter; YNWA), meaning that the club, players, manager, former players and managers, and fans, are one, and fans always support the team, players, and manager. In other words, they are united by

the same colour (red), and crest (Liver bird, a sign or logo of Liverpool FC). However, this unity may be diluted by the globalisation and commercialisation of football, the result of which has been an influx of foreigner players, many multinational companies and tycoons in the English Premier league, both sponsoring and owning the English football clubs. Moreover, international match-goers are attracted to the English Premier League. Because of the differentiation in culture and proximity, most global match-goers attend English Premier League games to satisfy leisure time as tourists (thus they are generally not well-acquainted with English football culture). Interestingly, these global match-goers also participate in different football fan-sites as *'glory-hunter fans'*, who are not loyalty to any particular football club and are interested only the victory and trophies. They usually express bad behaviour by moaning or despairing with the manager and players. Therefore, to protect against bad behaviour, so-called brand warriors play an important role in protecting the tradition of Liverpool FC; either as "LFC knights" or "tradition reminders."

The LFC knight is a way by which Liverpool FC supporters have constructed their identity against antagonists, especially by expressing empowerment or resistance against the American co-owners of Liverpool FC, Tom Hicks and George Gillett. They have conflicted with all Liverpool FC supporters since the first season of their ownerships in 2007. They have promised to support huge transfer budget to the manager, but they own Liverpool FC for making profit to their business portfolio (Pongsakornrungsilp et al., 2008). The TIA community, alongside other Liverpool FC fan-sites, have formed a group, named Spirit of Shankly (SOS) by integrating all independent Liverpool FC supporter groups, both offline and online, to co-establish the first football supporter union in the United Kingdom (Spirit of Shankly, 2009). This group was formed by Liverpool FC supporters who disapproved of the ownership of Liverpool FC by two American owners after one of them planned to sack Rafael Benitez, a Liverpool FC manager, who is popular among all Liverpool FC supporters. Many campaigns had been developed to force the club and owners to listen the fans (e.g. boycott the club merchandises, staying in seats after home games, normally, supporters have to leave the ground as soon as possible after the final whistle), or the "Save Rafa" campaign – chanting and singing songs to support Rafael Benitez and protest American co-owners – etc).

As a result of these actions, Liverpool FC's American owners have realised the power of their club's supporters. This movement is the first step for Liverpool FC supporters to influence the Liverpool FC management.

Furthermore, LFC knight also constructs the opposition of rival brand communities (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001); for example with rival clubs, Manchester United FC, Chelsea FC, Everton FC, and also other 'opponents' such as *The Sun newspaper* because it claimed that the Hillsborough was the fault of Liverpool FC supporters. This led Liverpool FC fans to 'Boycott the Sun'.

The TIA community is thus publically against the Sun newspaper, and nothing regarding the Sun can appear in the TIA community. This is a way that Liverpool FC fans demonstrate the strong symbolic action and co-create a tradition of Liverpool FC fans against the Sun, rather than intend to damage its business. The TIA community also constructs Liverpool FC identity by hosting a forum named "Hillsborough Memorial: Learn about the disaster and the fight for Justice For The 96 and why Reds Boycott The S*n newspaper (Hillsborough Memorial Forum, (ThisIsAnfield, 2009)" within the Albert – LFC Talk forum. This special forum is a platform for experienced members to educate and discuss the history about Hillsborough and the reasons why Liverpool FC fans have to boycott this newspaper.

LFC knights do not only resist Liverpool FC opponents; but they also defend against internal antagonists, such as 'glory-hunters' or 'kneejerk fans'. LFC knights are passionate fans who do not tolerate uncommitted or un-passionate fans who may otherwise become stereotypical members of the community.

> The following posts are examples of posts from kneejerk or glory hunt fans:
>
> We got exactly what we deserved... Manchester United still play 2 levels of thoughtful football higher than our hoof and hope style. Congratulations to them, we've played our part in making them champions elect. (strazzaque, 03/23/08, TIA New Signing member)
>
> was a joke to watch. i thinki'll give up watching us playin united in league. (Grenfell 08, 03/23/08, TIA Reserve Team member)
>
> I would definitely be open to a swap of managers. I like Rafa, but he ain't dipped in gold. (mdawg, 03/26/08, TIA New Signing member)
>
> No title for us this year, this game should have been won, simple as that. No excuses. (stretton, 09/20/08, TIA New Signing member)

As seen from these examples, these posts are examples of kneejerk posts because they give up with the 19th champion title and want Rafael Benetez, a Liverpool FC manager, leave the club when Liverpool FC lost or drew. The posts from strazzaque and Grenfell 08 were in the same thread when Liverpool FC lost to Manchester United FC on March 23, 2008, while mdawg responded in the discussion about Rafael Benitez thread after the defeat.

Those former 3 posts were in season 2007/2008, while the last post was in season 2008/2009. Stretton's post is another example of kneejerk posts when Liverpool FC drew at home with its underdog, Stoke City FC in the early of the season 2008/2009. They expressed their despair with the similar words such as no title, no more, Rafa get out, and so forth. Most of them are low-ranking members and thus presumably less experienced.

To protect the stereotype of kneejerk posts within the TIA community, experienced TIA members have to take on the role of LFC knight, as a form of authority other unpassionate or antagonistic posters. The following post is an example of LFC knight:

> Clearly you don't embody the spirit of the team. They never say die, the true fans will never give up. How can you say that is the end? It is only half time, and the lads give 100% each time they go out there. They will do the same at Stamford, and we will qualify. Next time try and be more positive! (No.17, 04/22/08, TIA Reserve Team member)

So, No.17, as a TIA Reserve Team member (who has been a member since TIA was formed in 2003), cautions another member regarding the Liverpool FC spirit which fans should learn and embody. This is a way for older members transfer the tradition and culture to newbies. In some circumstances, the LFC knight role has dominated other members to protect players and support the club, and there is a call to boycott the club in order to discredit the American co-owners, as some fans believe that protest can damage the owners' profits. This may be a good sign of the Liverpool FC fans unity to against perceived enemies of Liverpool FC. However, some fans cross the line by including the club as a perceived enemy; apparently this is not the Liverpool FC way inasmuch as all fans are expected to stay behind the team – players and manager, even in the face of bad results. Experienced members tend to play an important role as 'tradition reminder' to recall them back. With the 'YNWA' tradition, Liverpool FC supporters can

protest against the owners whenever it does not affect the players or damage the club, and all Liverpool

FC fans can do it in order to express symbolically the solidity of fans' voices.

This example, posted by Dragonshadow, recalls the Liverpool FC spirit:

…Boycott the club store by all means. Boycott the merchandise, boycott the pre-match burgers and booze. Boycott the e-season tickets on the Offal. But don't boycott matches. It's not Rafa's fault we're saddled with two American muppets at the top. It's not the players fault either. The team needs all the support we can give them…And the only way we can do that is by supporting the team from the terraces…It's just not the Liverpool Way. (Dragonshadow, 09/19/08, Forum Admin)

Dragonshadow, as Forum Admin, one of TIA Board Members, reminds other members about the internal

conflict between Rafael Benitez and Co-American owners regarding a transfer budget. Thus, he recalls

the Liverpool FC way, 'YNWA'; that Liverpool FC fans always support the players and manager.

In summary, the collective actions of TIA members have contributed to the creativity of the

resources of tradition, culture, and knowledge of the Liverpool FC and the TIA community. It is

noteworthy that TIA members can learn and accumulate these collective resources from interacting with

fellow members (both by reading and discussion). This is similar to the way in which the great players of

Liverpool FC transfer the culture and tradition of Liverpool FC to the young players (Gerrard and Winter,

2006). The interaction process activates the value co-creation process by extending knowledge,

information, or experience, when other members read, discuss, and argue on threads, continually, in that

new resources are developed and co-created.

In this way, TIA Board Members who manage the community, alongside other members have co-

created the extended resources of the community through a continuous learning process, whereby

members must use an internal search engine before starting new threads in order to ensure that no one

posts duplicate threads. This serves not only to keep the TIA community tidy, but also to provide a source

of value or resources in one place and by which all members may access the history, tradition, culture or

story of Liverpool FC and the TIA community. The examples of extended resources can be found in

different threads which have been posted for a long time, but there are also discussions or arguments of

current relevance, such as 'who would you buy' in regarding to new prospective players (posted on

10/27/07 with 159,716 views and 4,322 replies in April 2009), 'Take Over Talk Thread v.4: Kuwaitis to

take over?' for discussing about takeover rumours (posted on 01/22/09 with 45,240 views and 804 replies in April 2009) etc (ThisIsAnfield, 2009). Moreover, the providers also contribute to form and strengthen the tradition of Liverpool FC and the TIA community, which can protect the Liverpool FC brand name, and the TIA community from the commercialisation and globalisation of football. It is also worth noting that in contrast to beneficiaries, the activities of providers focus on collective interaction with other members in order to develop social resources, rather than to serve their individual sake.

The Process of Value Co-Creation

The results of our empirical observation within the co-consuming group confirm that consumers can co-create value by themselves through the roles of beneficiaries and providers within the context of a win-win relationship, whereby all participants are liable to gain benefits or value towards achieving their life goals. We have also demonstrated that the co-consuming group does not only act as a brand curator (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Leigh et al., 2006), but also as a source of value for consumers to co-create value. Finally, this paper demonstrates the process of negotiation between individuals through collective actions within the co-consuming group. Each consumer or member in the co-consuming group pursues two main goals: individual goals – information, experientialism, social life, self identity, and collective goals – a sense of community, group identity, collective resources, brand experience, oppositional brand community, brand legitimacy, and so forth.

The value co-creation process of the TIA community is a product of collective interaction within the community. According to S-D logic, TIA acts as a source of value or resource integrator (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). The resource integrator is essentially a platform for value co-creation where members can interact, participate, and converse with fellow members (Arvidsson, 2006; Blazevic and Lievens, 2008). With the power of the computer-mediated community, process within the co-consuming group is not merely one-to-one relationship; rather it is many-to-many relationships (Gummesson, 2006), whereby individuals gradually engage in the community or 'the social network of practices' (Schau et al., 2009).

Interaction within the network advances from one-to-many interaction (one way communication through email) to many-to-many interaction (multi-way communication through the computer-mediated environment) so that consumers are able to share information with company or other consumers (Hoffman and Novak, 1996). The latter interaction is a bottom-up approach, whereby information resources are focused from a grassroots perspective (Zwick et al., 2008).

Our findings show that there are two main roles in the value co-creation process: provider and beneficiary, as shown in Figure 1. Within this process, creative posters and brand warriors play an important role as the providers by sharing resources and other benefits to the community, and strengthening the Liverpool FC brand value. Because value can be uniquely perceived by each beneficiary, benefits from this process can be experience of social interaction, aggregated knowledge, or hedonistic emotion depending on the situation, person, issue, or time (Holbrook, 2006; Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Providers also play an important role by sharing, discussing, and educating less experienced members, using the community's collective resources – knowledge, information, and experience of Liverpool FC, and the TIA community in order to institutionalise and regulate these less experienced members as members of the community (Avery, 2007).

In this way, members can employ these collective resources to co-create the symbolic meaning of their interactions in order to construct strong identity regarding who they are and how they socialise. Moreover, from our results, it can be seen that interaction between consumers in the collective group contributes to the co-creation of the cultural code of the brand through history, tradition, and expectation. This co-creation contributes to the solidarity of the brand value, whereby consumers co-construct the cultural code of the community in order to protect their community from external threats (e.g., globalisation and commercialisation of football, the Sun Newspaper, rival clubs, etc.) and internal threats (e.g., fake fans, kneejerk fans, glory-hunters, etc.), in a manner that makes TIA or being a Liverpool FC supporter feel distinction from other football clubs and communities.

Our results show that co-consuming groups act as agents of the value in co-creation process, as show in Figure 1. This process demonstrates the transformation of resources (the flow of resources, see

straight arrow in Figure 1), and the dynamic role that each participant is able to play, either as a provider or beneficiary. There are two key entry points into this process: those of less experienced and more experienced members. Less experienced members (they can be found in different ranks, but most of them are "newbie" members) access and benefit from the social proximity offered by TIA, in which regard they act as beneficiaries.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

However, they can only act as beneficiaries because they lack of experience, knowledge, or information to share with others; therefore, their value co-creation process is limited to the shaded circle shown in Figure 1. In contrast, more experienced members can enter the process as providers who give or share resources to members of the community. However, experienced members can also access the process as beneficiaries by reading and responding to threads for their own sake. When providers share knowledge, information, or statistics, they become beneficiaries inasmuch as they gain benefits from the interaction (see also an example of beneficiary from Matt). Although they have more or better knowledge about resources or Liverpool FC and the community, they also receive benefits from the interaction such as experience, socialisation, playful debate and conversation, etc. Thus, they can appear in the process either as providers by adding new resources, or as beneficiaries by reading and responding to threads. The flow of this process moves cyclically, depending on the roles of participants, and the contributions that they make to the community. The roles played by participants are similar to those of 'bidirectional creators' (Blazevic and Lievens, 2008), who act as passive and active customers within firm – customer relationships.

Beneficiaries can become providers by increasing their commitment to the community by participating in the community, which benefits them by increasing their skills or knowledge (this is known as the evolvability process; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). They act as providers by contributing new resources - knowledge, information, statistics, data, or well-analysed arguments (see black arrow in Figure 1). As providers, they engage in the collective consumer creativity practice, which TIA members co-create through their social interactions (Kozinets et al., 2008). New knowledge emerges

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as new resources when members interact and exchange their knowledge with others (Blazevic and Lievens, 2008; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). This is a continuous process by which all members learn together (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006). An open mind plays an important role in this learning process (Pini, 2009). At the end of the interaction, resources have been transformed into two ways: 1) co-consuming group's new resources, and 2) individual resources – experience and knowledge which individuals gain and accumulate from the interaction. Individuals gradually collect these resources which are then re-employed as collective resources, thus increasing individual competence in the co-creation of value.

Importantly, the performance of this social interaction depends on whether members can embed themselves within the community. This is similar to the concept of 'production labour process' which relies on the relationship between workers or customers (Zwick et al., 2008), but we view this application of immaterial labour (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Zwick et al., 2008) as the co-creation of value rather than co-production of value, because the concept of value co-creation goes beyond production in the production line of a factory or customer involvement in the process of product design, serving, product assembly (Vargo and Akaka, 2009), or co-producing value through prosumption. This is because co-production is optional, and is not a compulsory process in the business exchange, while value is always co-created.

However, the results from this study are divergence of S-D logic apart from which Maglio et al., (2009), Vargo et al., (2008) and others from IBM Research Centers have advanced S-D logic as foundation of service science, and moved S-D logic beyond multi-dimensions of value. Within service science, scholars view value creation process as a systematical process whereby value creation seems to be a predictable achievement of a job or a particular project. They view value creation process between service systems through a normative model, ISPAR (Interact-Serve-Propose-Agree-Realize), which can provide 10 different results (Maglio et al., 2009). Thus, we would argue that value creation is not a systematic and unpredictable process, but rather, a continuing and dynamic process whereby all participants employ their 'skills and knowledge', 'general intellects', or 'immaterial labours' to co-create a unique value, played by social and cultural schemas, in order to achieve their life goals.

Our results show that consumers do not only act as creatively as collective consumers by co-creating resources; they also play an important role in the co-creation of brand myths through storytelling, and protect the Liverpool FC brand (as understood within the concept of brand culture) within the *'You'll Never Walk Alone'* tradition. This co-creation process is a brand hijack (Cova and Pace, 2006), whereby consumers seize the brand creation role from the company. Because value or resources from the providers are not finished or ended process, the brand perpetually evolves through the discussions and arguments of consumers. This leads to the co-creation of value in line with the notion of brand culture; that is "a focus on cultural processes that effect contemporary brands, including historical context, ethical concerns, and cultural conventions..." [and] "… refers to the cultural codes of brands – history, images, myths, art, theatre." (Schroeder, 2009: 123 – 124).

In the value co-creation process, providers contribute resources with which individuals reproduce the meaning and history of a brand as part of a group or brand community. Moreover, consumers cooperate to protect and strengthen brand value against antagonists through the form of consumer resistance or consumer empowerment. The American co-owners of Liverpool FC are example of antagonists who stimulate empowerment due to their double exploitation of Liverpool FC and its supporters (inasmuch as Liverpool FC supporters, especially TIA members, found that the American co-owners seem to own Liverpool FC as a part of their portfolio of assets and making profit, rather than with the intention of making the club successful).

Our finding of the YNWA tradition demonstrates that all Liverpool FC supporters and TIA members are 'devote to suffer' with the sorrow period of waiting for the first English Premier League champion nearly 20 years, and also several tragedy circumstances. As mentioned above, it is an evidence to prove that there is no or less double exploitation because all Liverpool FC supporters are ready to suffer. This is a way of '*sacrifice'* whereby all Liverpool FC supporters have dedicated their lives, money, time, energy and heart to the club without expected returns. Therefore, consumers cannot be paid back or monetarily rewarded, because sacrifice is something that is made for the sake of it. However, sacrifice can lead to positive value of strong commitment among members within the TIA community (Van Lange et

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al., 1997). Our finding also demonstrates that all Liverpool FC supporters would like to upgrade the empowerment into the management level; therefore, if they get paid, they would lose their voice against the club.

From our empirical data, we would argue that double exploitation is not absolutely unfair, because companies have returned value which consumers co-create, or help consumers to co-create meaningful consumption, or at least, provide 'satisfaction'. For example, companies do not only wish to gain profit; they also wish to gain sustainability, consumer loyalty, or an excellent corporate image, whereas consumers may desire to extend their self, gain group membership, save their money or enjoy their lives. Thus, value is subjective, uncountable and incomparable in that it is not merely economic value. For these reasons, we would like to argue that the harmony relationship between companies and consumers or consumer and consumer is possible in value co-creation process when both parties have set their goals above economic value. It is not a utopian marketplace because they have different competencies, which require different resources to employ in the value co-creation process, and they also receive different benefits or value. On the other hand, their investments, resources, and benefits from the value co-creation process are not considered quantitatively.

In summary, our results suggest that the roles played by consumers in the value co-creation process (provider or beneficiary) highlight the bright side of value co-creation; namely, that all participants, TIA members, can receive benefits and value in a unique way in order to achieve their goals both in individual and collective level of consumption. For example, an individual member can co-create collective resources and the tradition of Liverpool LC, and also enjoy their experience of Liverpool FC and the TIA community. Moreover, to extend Cova and Dalli (2009) and Leigh et al., (2006), the co-consuming group acts as a source of value and brand curator, which allows consumers to interact and co-create value. It also contributes to strengthen the brand value whereby consumers co-create myth, tradition, and culture of a brand (Allen et al., 2008; Holt, 2004; Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling, 2006).This movement contributes to changes in the ecosystem of the value creation paradigm by increasing consumer empowerment through the network of collaboration and consumer creativity in communities (Denegri-

Knott et al., 2006; Kozinets et al., 2008; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Finally, our findings turn another perspective of value creation paradigm within S-D logic from the systematical service science of S-D logic whereby value is multi-dimensional context depending on time, person, resource, and situation.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have studied the co-creation of value by investigating consumers' roles in the value co-creation process in order to demonstrate how the value co-creation process works. We have defined the roles of consumers by addressing two consumer roles; provider and beneficiary. Meanwhile, the roles of a source of value and brand curator played by co-consuming groups support and facilitate consumers to co-create value among them. We also provide evidence that it is possible to co-create value within the context of a win-win situation, whereby all parties gain benefits or value in order to illuminate the concept of double exploitation (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Zwick et al., 2008). However, we accept that there may be double exploitation within the value co-creation process. Instead, we believe that double exploitation is a catalyst for consumer empowerment, thus offsetting asymmetry in the market.

We realised that the relationship between the producer (the Football Club) and consumers (supporters or fans) is blurred, inasmuch as supporters often play an important role at the management level in many football clubs (e.g., Stockport County, Exeter City, and so forth (SupportersDirect, 2008)). Moreover, local supporters tend to have a strong relationship with the history of the football club through ties of kinship or community. Thus, we have stressed that the value co-creation process is beyond the marketplace inasmuch as there is no economic exchange. This means that we only focused on how Liverpool FC supporters, who are members of TIA, play roles in the value co-creation process; we did not intend to investigate what value is in this context. The majority of TIA members are male and football remains a masculine endeavor; therefore, it may be problematic to extend our findings to female consumers. Moreover, in this study, we employed only participant and non-participant observation, because we could not access TIA members in the offline world. Future research would benefit from

interviews, as a further source of data on value co-creation process and the symbolic meaning of consumption.

Our synthesis of S-D logic with working consumers, through the cultural framework of the CCT in order to understand value co-creation within the co-consuming group shows that companies have to change perspectives or strategy for managing brand communities, while marketers need to focus on the processes of social interaction and the use of collective resources by consumers, whereby consumer-communities co-create value. These resources would help companies and marketers to co-create the value of a brand with consumers through processes of myth-making, history, and tradition, thus developing the strength of their brand (Allen et al., 2008; Holt, 2004; Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling, 2006). However, given the active role of consumers, companies cannot directly manage or control brand communities (even firm-sponsored brand communities); therefore, they need to create strategies that support or strengthen brand value by relying on the collective resources from the co-consuming group. For example, a company may work closely with a community's executive board members, as found in the TIA community, in order to clarify implicit rumours or conflict between football fans and the football club. In this case, it can reduce the anger or resistance of fans or consumers who have increasingly expressed their empowerment, and thus create a friendly atmosphere or future cooperation among them. Moreover, a company may develop a meaningful sign such as stickers, badges, T-shirts, etc, to express the coordination between consumers and community, and also the brand, in order to extend members' brand loyalty or their sense of community.

The fundamental reasons for individuals to participate in an online community are initially information and experience of their passionate before upgrading to co-create their own consumption within their proximity. This turns the ecosystem of value creation paradigm in the control of consumers which effects to the marketing mainstreams such as satisfaction, loyalty, customer relationship, and brand value. As seen from Pongsakornrungsilp et al.'s (2008) Left Behind: Global Brand of Local Fans, Liverpool FC fans are together for negotiating between local and global fans toward Liverpool FC fandom. 'Compromisers' are a group of moderately negotiators who call for the Unity of Liverpool FC

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fans around the world. They also form the tradition and unity of Liverpool FC fans by attempting to co-create a strong group of consumer empowerment. They do not only co-create a network of practice through the offline world, but also online community, and ThisIsAnfield (TIA): an Unofficial Liverpool FC fan-site is one of these passionate fan groups. They took over the active role of value creation to control their own proximity of consumption by deciding who consumers they are, and how they consume. By synthesising the theoretical concepts from S-D logic, CCT, and working consumers, we found that we should consider on benefits from engaging in value co-creation process, rather than focus on the costs (both monetary and non-monetary costs) of the process. Our findings also evidence that double exploitation of company is not a threat, but rather, it is a catalyst to bond the strong identity of consumers for counterbalancing company's double exploitation through consumer empowerment.

Our findings demonstrate that individuals do not only achieve their life goals, but also the collective identity goals by employing their resources into the value co-creation process. In order to do this, online community, played as a source of value and brand curator, is the crucial platform for co-creating value which can solve the problem or alleviate the tension between local and global (Pongsakornrungsilp et al., 2008), or experienced and less experienced members. From these processes, we argue that there is no or less double exploitation within the co-consuming group. We found that consumers employ their own resources to invest in the social relation for satisfying their own and collective sakes as sacrifice. Although our conceptual argument has provided another perspective of double exploitation, we realise that our empirical data may not provide strong evidence to support arguments on double exploitation. It is difficult to compare the contributions or rewards of the individuals within the online community through socio-cultural benefits. Further researchers should extend to investigate the socio-economic of value co-creation process by considering the economic benefits from the brand in order to fulfill the whole picture of working consumers.

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Table 1 Observation profile

| Ranking	Number	%	Post	%	Average Membership period	Post/Year	Post/Day
TIA Board Member	11	3.56	45,320	18.73	**4.93**	9,201.75	2.57
TIA Legend	31	10.03	**93,051**	**38.45**	2.88	**32,323.86**	**3.51**
TIA First team	12	3.88	21,575	8.92	3.17	6,811.37	2.17
TIA Subs-bench	22	7.11	26,353	10.89	2.09	12,625.57	2.27
TIA Reserve team	53	16.83	33,406	13.80	1.93	17,270.95	1.47
TIA Youth team	95	31.72	20,084	8.30	1.27	15,831.01	0.64
TIA New signing	86	26.86	3,056	1.26	0.92	3,317.55	0.15
Total	**310**	**100.00**	**242,845**	**100.00**	**1.70**		**1.17**
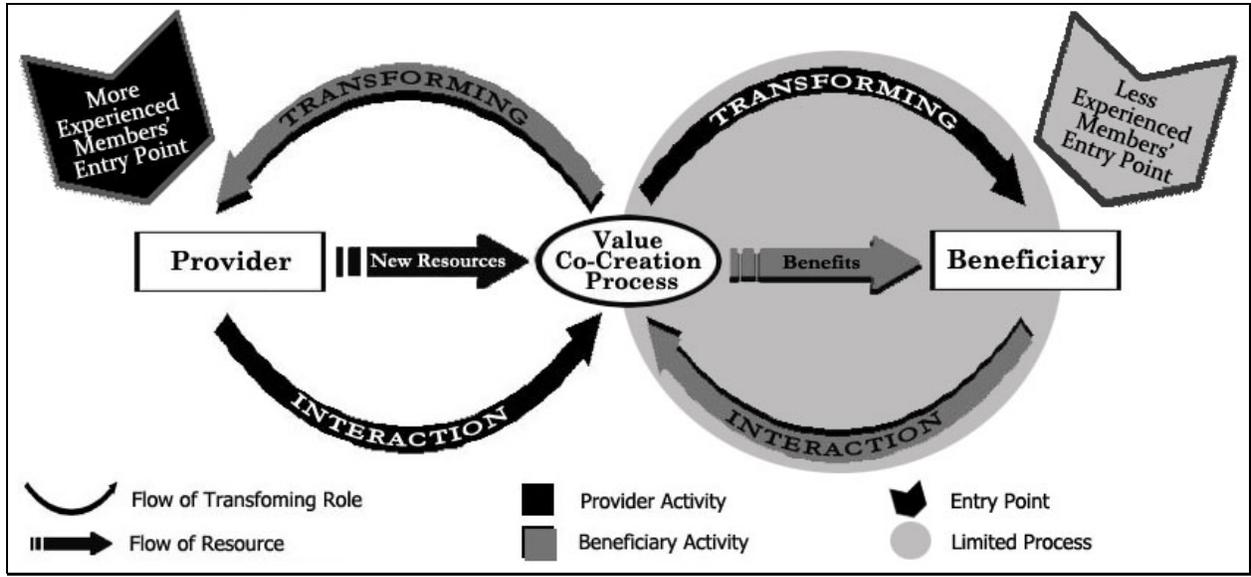
Figure 1 Cycle of Value Co-Creation Process