

Consumer relationships in service system

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Relational notions developed in B2B and service contexts and applied in consumer markets were theoretically rooted in dyadic interactions (interpersonal, information, etc) and exchanges (financial, social etc) and emphasise continuity, reciprocal and social/emotional significance. With the increasingly acceptance of notion of value co-creation in service systems, the understanding of relational phenomenon in these new practices become acute. It could be suggested that in service system, relationships would take different forms such as from dyadic, triadic to relationship at the system level; entail different nature from bonds based on social, financial exchange to capacities for interactions for performing tasks. Therefore, we argue that theoretical understanding of relationships in service system need to be addressed.

By drawing on assemblage theory, we conceptualised relationship phenomenon in service systems. We define service system as assemblages of actors through capacity interactions for performing tasks/value co-creation. Consumer relationships entail interactions and interdependences of capacities among actors in the system to form an assemblage with an identity for a purpose. There are dynamic processes of assembling and disassembling of actors, in which consumer relationships would move beyond the dyadic or triadic between actors but center on the dynamics of stabilisation and destabilisation of the assemblage. The value addressed is value at the system level for the wellbeing of the service system (Vargo, Maglio and Akaka, 2008).

We empirically investigated consumer relationships in service systems. Using network analysis, we analysed what actors are engage in, what links/connects actors, how strong these links are and the positions of actors and the internal homogeneity in the assemblage; to capture the change to theses assemblages such as factors causing the destabilising of these assemblages. We focus on the structural aspect of consumer relationships by exploring the dimensions of relationship quality of relationships at the system level. Theoretically, this paper would contribute to the relationship literature by using network analysis to unpack the links of actors in service system and measurement of the system level relationships. Empirically, we examined relationships in service system by looking at two cases one in consumer markets and another in B2B contexts.

Reference:

Vargo, S. L., Maglio, P. P., & Akaka, M. A. (2008). On value and value co-creation: A service systems and service logic perspective. *European management journal*, 26(3), 145-152.