



## CO-CREATION FRAMEWORK IN PROFESSIONAL SERVICE CONTEXT: TOWARD A PRAXIS MODEL

Sk. Kabir Ahmed<sup>1</sup>, Md. Noor Un Nabi<sup>2</sup>, S.M. Misbauddin\*<sup>3</sup> and Farzana Akther<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Architecture Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna-9208, Bangladesh*

<sup>2</sup>*Business Administration Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna-9208, Bangladesh.*

<sup>3</sup>*Department of Management, Jashore University of Science and Technology, Jashore-7408, Bangladesh*

<sup>4</sup>*Department of Business Administration, North Western University, Khulna-9100, Bangladesh.*

KUS: 22/01: 08012022

Manuscript submitted: January 08, 2022

Accepted: April 26, 2022

### Abstract

Co-creation in service is essential through facilitating the coordination between customers and service providers. A holistic understanding of value co-creation in professional services can ensure the improvement of service experience. The objective of this paper is to form a praxis model of value co-creation in professional services. The authors performed a Systematic Review of Literature (SRL) by analyzing 113 research documents and articles on co-creation literature within the year range 1996-2021. The study assimilated the key considerations of co-creation in the professional service context. These led to the formation of a conceptual framework. This study identifies the roles of the actors in value co-creation and outlines the procedures for involving the customers. The paper also provides the inhibitors and enablers of co-creation. The study makes contribution to the existing literature by delineating the criteria and factors for co-creation in the professional service context. The praxis model of co-creation developed here could also be beneficial for the practitioners in improving service design.

**Keywords:** Co-creation, professional services, praxis model, systematic literature review, value creation

### Introduction

Contemporary research has addressed co-creation as a means of inducing organizational competitiveness. Researchers have explored various dimensions of the co-creation process (Keeling et al., 2021; Lusch et al., 2007). Considering the dynamic and competitive business climate in which customer preferences and requirements constantly change, co-creation may precede competitive advantages for a business firm (Pillitteri et al., 2021). As a result, firms have started to embrace the service-dominant philosophy (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Scarlett et al., 2021), resulting in collaborative, dynamic interactions and engagement with target consumers for value creation (Bhat & Sharma, 2021). This marks the essence of co-creation. The resulting customer satisfaction (McAlexander et al., 2003; Yi & Gong, 2013) and the competitive edge of the business firm, followed by an increase in brand equity and revenue, have motivated the managers to introduce co-creation in service design (Pillitteri et al., 2021; Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016). This also caused increased research interest by academicians (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2016).

Extant research has investigated co-creation from various perspectives, including co-creation in social media (Moghadamzadeh et al., 2020); co-creation experience in value creation (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Srivastava, 2021); consumer co-creation behavior (Yi & Gong, 2013) and the relationship of co-creation with brand equity (Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016). However, in the domain of the professional service (e.g., legal, architectural, health services, accounting), the practice and discussion of value co-creation are relatively limited (Anderson et al., 2013). The contribution of professional service is considered significant to the service economy. However, studies that encompass co-creation in this field are few. Factors affecting the different stages of the value delivery system have also not yet been explored (Akolk et al., 2016), which are essential in coordinating the value co-creating process. In the work of Chan et al. (2010), it was suggested to explore how the roles of customers facilitate the value creation phases in the professional service design. The development of co-creation can ensure the effective delivery of such services. To manage co-creation in professional services, issues need to be delineated from the contexts of the

\*Corresponding author: <sm.misbauddin@just.edu.bd >

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53808/KUS.2022.19.02.2201-mb>

company and consumer. Based on the arguments above, our research is aimed at developing a praxis model for co-creation in professional services along with providing answers to the following questions:

- a) Which criteria affect the co-creation procedure in professional service development from the service provider and user perspective?
- b) What are the motivations and roles of the actors for getting involved in this process?
- c) What are the enablers and barriers to implementing co-creation in a professional service context?
- d) Which factors need to be addressed in the proposed framework to develop co-creation in the professional service context?

The current research has been conducted by reviewing the literary work on co-creation-related issues in service development, service logic, and architecture of co-creation logic in service. The paper contributes to service co-creation literature by delineating a praxis model and the related elements of co-creation in a professional service setting.

### Materials and Methods

To accomplish the research, a Systematic Review of the Literature (SRL) was applied to identify the most appropriate studies on the co-creation literature (Table 1). The SRL has been used to classify and appraise the available literary data and evidence from a particular research area (Xiao & Watson, 2019). To answer the previously mentioned research questions, systematic searches and literature summarization were done. This was facilitated by detecting keywords, search criteria, and selection of academic databases for search. In particular, the following particulars were of use:

- i) Academic databases: Google Scholar, Scopus.
- ii) Type of document: articles, conference papers, books, and working papers.
- iii) keywords: Co-creation, Customer, Service-Dominant Logic, Professional Service, Collaboration.
- iv) Language: English.
- v) Period of publication: 1996-2021

**Literature Distribution by Publication Types:** The study is based on four types of documents generated from a search in Scopus and Google Scholar databases, namely books, articles, conference proceedings, and working papers. From these publications, 'Article' category was the most dominantly used type, comprising (94; 84% of the total number of publications), followed by books (7; 6%), working papers (7; 6%), and conference proceedings (5; 4%).

**Text Analysis:** The word cloud is an interesting tool to summarize all the key buzzwords centered around a theme (McNaught & Lam, 2010). Qualitative researchers prefer the word cloud due to its ability to synthesize a key theme in a well-shaped graphic (Heimerl et al., 2014). The current research identified the commonly used words in the domain of the co-creation of professional services. The text analysis reveals the general topics of interest in this research. We used the R studio for the text analysis by applying a 1-gram model (Haneem et al., 2017). The 1-gram model analysis (Figure 1) helped the researchers to form a word cloud. This model shows the one word that is the most frequently used in the sections of title and abstract of the scholarly articles related to co-creation in professional services. The word cloud generated in this process depicts the visualization of the most frequently used words.

Here, we have formulated a word cloud to introduce the key concepts/most widely used terms for explaining co-creation in professional service context. As we see from the figure, some notable keywords include 'co-creation', 'value', 'services', 'interactions', 'motivation', 'holistic' etc. Co-creation is a value enhancing process where there is embeddedness of the 'context' i.e., the professional service setting where co-creation occurs. There is systematic 'value co-destruction' to remove the backdated 'value' for customers and make new 'value', which the customers may find meaningful. In turn, the customers also 'exchange' value by providing monetary payments to get the firm's new 'value'. Thus, the word cloud provides the researchers cues for a deeper understanding of the co-creation process.

Table 1. Summary of the findings of literature exploration

Timeline	Key Authors	Key thematic concentrations
1996-2000	Bettencourt & Gwinner (1996) Grönroos (1997) Oliver (1999) Grönroos (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-creation as a new source of value</li> <li>• Co-creating processes by professional service providers</li> </ul>
2001-2005	Bendapudi & Leone (2003) Harhoff et al. (2003) McAlexander et al. (2003) Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) Vargo & Lusch (2004) Ramaswamy (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer role in the service process</li> <li>• DART (Dialogue, Access, Risk Assessment and Transparency) model of interaction in service</li> <li>• The relative importance of service components in value creation</li> <li>• Managing activities in professional service</li> </ul>
2006-2010	Holbrook (2006)  Vargo & Lusch (2010)  Payne et al. (2008)  Voss & Hsuan (2009) Ramaswamy & Gouillart (2010) Zwass (2010) Chan et al. (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business model development through value co-creation</li> <li>• Motivation to participate in co-creation</li> <li>• Effect of customer participation on value creation</li> <li>• S-D (Service-Dominant) logic in value creation</li> <li>• Managing co-creation process through co-creators</li> <li>• Applying the co-creation attributes in B2B (Business to Business) services</li> </ul>
2011-2016	Frow et al. (2011) Grönroos (2011) Gronroos (2012) Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola (2012) Anderson et al. (2013) Grönroos & Voima (2013) Jaakkola & Alexander (2014) Pirinen (2016) Pera et al. (2016) Davis et al. (2016) Kennedy & Guzmán (2016) Vargo & Lusch (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits and motivation of actors in online service co-creation</li> <li>• Enhancing the S-D logic through co-creation in knowledge-intensive services</li> <li>• Consumers' motivation in co-creation activities</li> <li>• Barriers and enablers in co-designing of values</li> <li>• Key motives and outcomes of the co-creation in the multi-stakeholder ecosystem</li> </ul>
2017-2021	Bhat & Sharma (2021) Pillitteri et al. (2021) Scarlett et al. (2021) Keeling et al. (2021) Srivastava (2021) Tóth et al. (2018) Kuula et al. (2018) Bonamigo et al. (2020) Figueiredo et al. (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The roles of professionals and clients in professional service projects.</li> <li>• Presence of tension and structural imbalance in value co-creation</li> <li>• Integration of knowledge resources between service providers and consumers</li> </ul>



***Co-creation from the User's Perspective:*** In recent times, consumers have been more informed, associated, and engaged on a larger dimension than at any other time. Because of the advancement of modern technologies, the internet's expansionary features provide tools to generate co-creation (Schulz et al., 2021; Ramaswamy & Gouillart, 2010). According to the customer's perspective, co-creation has been identified in their participation level phases, their motivational aspects for participation, role-playing in co-creation, and their overall mode of contribution (Cluley & Radnor, 2020). Diverse buying settings need a different range of consumer inclusion, selecting the input participated by the consumer and the firm. Consumers can be attached to word-of-mouth generation, client benefit, the conformation of new items, and partly agents (Terblanche, 2014). Additionally, they can be engaged through self-service technological platforms (Payne et al., 2008). The range of client contributions affects the operation outcomes and strengthens the communication between the consumer and the firm (Akhmedova et al., 2020).

***Co-creation from the Service Provider's Perspective:*** Organizations have gradually moved from the firm-centric view toward the customer-led view (Rossi & Tuurnas, 2021). In a competitive business climate, firms are now more concerned with the co-creation concept through leveraging user knowledge. Based on the evaluation of Steen (2013) and Khramova (2014), 'User Knowledge' and 'User Relationship Management' inspire and make a foundation for the management of co-creation. While enabling the co-creation with consumers, the firm also creates favorable experiences for the internal employees (Ramaswamy & Gouillart, 2010). For example, firms might establish a platform for employees to cooperate with clients, such as maintaining well-trained staff and setting up information systems.

Other stakeholders comprising consumers, personnel, and distributors need to be involved in management decision-making such as marketing, R&D, and product design. For instance, the French company LaPoste is an ideal demonstration of how a firm applies a co-creative approach to increase client gratification, employee self-esteem, and substantial advancement in the company's operation system (Ramaswamy & Gouillart, 2010).

Two diverse methods are applied in customizing services in the co-creation process (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996). Firstly, adapting the interactive conduct refers to the interaction between employee and customer and comprises language and inflection. Secondly, the customization of services can be done by modifying or pushing service essentials to match consumers' requirements and inclinations. According to Voss and Hsuan (2009), two different methods are available for service customization: combinatorial and menu-driven customization. Combinatorial customization is a procedure in which the service firm delivers a "starting point," and the user can enhance additional service components. On the other hand, in menu-driven customization procedures, the firm offers a range of services, and the customers can pick services according to their suitability.

### **Criteria Affecting the Co-creation Procedure in Professional Services**

The co-creation process is influenced by the consumer and service provider paradigms and the involved tools and components of engaging in it (Knote et al., 2021). In addition, the evolution of technological media, including broadband, digital TV, and fifth-generation mobile services, create a scope where consumers and stakeholders can engage without the physical presence (Payne et al., 2021). As a result, there has been an increasing trend of S-D (Service-Dominant) logic (Font et al., 2021; Vargo & Lusch, 2004) which refers to the architecture of co-creation and is considered a major criterion for the co-design of services. Some of the major criteria of value co-creation are appended below:

***The Relationship Experience:*** The collaborative creation process entails the consumers being engaged in the cognitive function of decision-making where they decide on the importance of getting involved in past, present, or future experiences (Khan & Krishnan, 2021; Oliver, 1999). Customer evaluates the pains and gains of a designed service, and they must be ready to search for information and characteristics whether to buy a particular service (Zeithaml, 1988; Grönroos, 1997). The Three main cognitive points of this relationship experience are cognition, emotion, and behavior.

***Customer Learning:*** Customer learning emerges from the continuous interaction between users and providers (Hsu et al., 2021). Service providers attempt to understand the relationship experience of the users through analyzing customer cognition, emotion, and behavior. Customer satisfaction and the magnitude of customer participation help the service provider gain required customer learning and devise appropriate encounters, which also help consumers in reviewing the service experience (Aakerblom & Ness, 2021). Creating a learning culture is

crucial for adapting the co-creation process over time. The knowledge management system focuses on building an architectural system where the service processes could be reconfigured and stored for further experimentation (Hussain et al., 2020; Frow et al., 2011). Firms can implement co-design process economically by configuring processes and developing a knowledge management system (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

### **Inhibitors and Enablers for Professional Services Co-creation**

While designing customer collaboration and simultaneous co-creation for professional services, service firms must look for the driving factors that direct the co-creation mechanisms (Barnet et al., 2021). While implementing co-creation, service providers tend to face a set of barriers and facilitators which influence the outcomes (Bonamigo et al., 2020; Kleinsmann et al., 2007). For example, according to Pirinen (2016), language and cultural diversification might influence why some service projects are not on the due track to implementation while dealing with the professional communities. In addition, the lack of commitment of the service provider to co-designing the services and responding to the empathy domains of the clients could have a bearing on the progress of professional services. On the other hand, the service firms' inability to mobilize the appropriate degree of time, resources and, funding might thwart the service co-production. Moreover, the skills and learned experience of the professionals such as architects, designers, and lawyers dictate a lot regarding the success of co-design projects.

Zwass (2010) posited that creating trust in the reputation systems is one of the enablers of building a successful transactional and participatory relationship between service firms and users. The lack of trustworthiness among the counterparties demonstrates an erosion in value co-creation (Sudo & Ito, 2021). Therefore, Zwass (2010) discussed the term 'Adhocracy' in co-creation efforts to distribute the decision rights and coordinate work among the collaborative partners. Paulini et al. (2013) cited the innovative processes of the service co-design with the users' community as the facilitators in service co-creation because innovation processes are inherently rewarding and motivating for the participants.

Davis et al. (2016) opined that the lack of a flexible and defined structure for co-creation is poised to create hindrances in the facilitation of service co-design among professionals and service users. Thereby, some of the enabling factors for the professional service co-creation have been mentioned, such as the lively involvement of the multi-professional members, the generation of design thinking, and convergent thinking through the participatory processes of brainstorming, ideation, and visualization of service mechanisms with the participants (Davis et al., 2016). According to Lawler and Bilson (2009) and Davis and Smith (2012), the collaborative service design by the service users and professionals can be facilitated through the humanistic concept of problem-solving based on the collective sharing of varied personal experiences and tacit knowledge of the participants. In addition, both the users and provider must be engaged in reliable and approachable communication by bearing responsibilities and contributing to the co-design process. Pirinen (2016) described the well-concentrated systems and reporting criteria as the key enablers in monitoring the progression of service co-creation efforts. According to Pirinen, the growing contribution of convenient process toolkits and appropriate training of the implementers are important facilitators.

### **Motivations of the Actors in the Co-creation Process**

**The Motivation of the Consumers:** Customers' motivation to volunteer in service co-creation can vary in different contexts. The nature of motivation is dependent on which factors trigger consumer behavior and the subsequent course of actions. For example, the factors contributing to the customer's tendency to co-producing the professional service are determined by the consumers' benefits (Tóth et al., 2018). Similarly, the cognitive processes operating in consumers' minds dictate the consumer perceptions of tangible or intangible benefits that might accrue from such value creation activities (Nambisan, 2002; Holbrook, 2006). Consumer motivations to directly collaborate with a firm for co-creating values can be broadly explained under three dimensions (Figure 2).

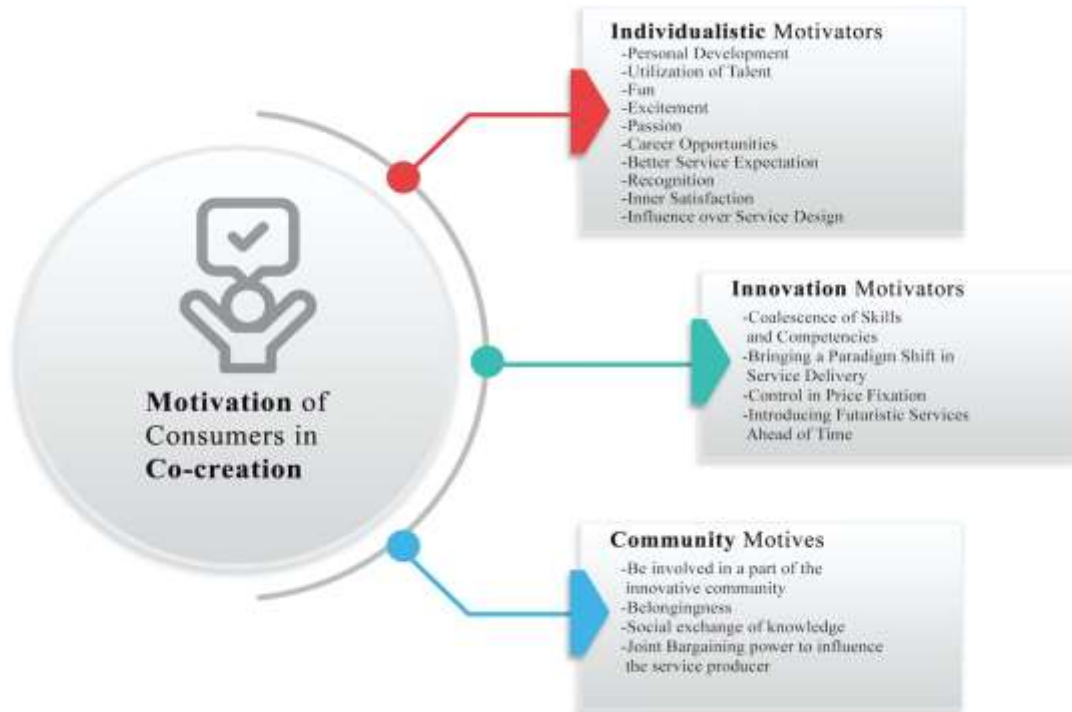


Figure 2. Motivators of consumers for co-creation in professional service

The above model shows that the three main dimensions of motivation are: consumers' individual motives, community-centered motives and innovation-driven motives. First, consumers possess the intrinsic need to acquire an ideally satisfactory service as well as incur fun, excitement, and pride in the adaptation of services (Fuentes et al., 2019). Customers' community motive to act in a group makes a chain of social exchange among multiple consumers to accumulate their collective knowledge for better service process design. In such instances, co-creation is propelled by the motivation for reputational gains, opportunities for recognition, the building of the network, community ties, belongingness, and reciprocal learning (Harhoff et al., 2003). Then come the innovation motivators, which facilitate the users to collaborate with innovative services that can change their lifestyle. Finally, consumers feel empowered to control the mode of delivery and the price fixation of the service.

**The Motivation of the Service Providers in Co-creation:** The professional service firm tends to have specific intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to co-create. First, there are economic consequences of having collaborative services. Firms recognize that when users provide reviews while using less popular professional services, the marketers tend to have more sales from the market niches (Roberts et al., 2006). Firms focus on three major intrinsic motives which trigger the co-creation process: i) image improvement, ii) relationship building and, iii) new experimentation with innovation. Firms have the intrinsic expectation of forming new partnerships and alliances to create superior quality services. These relationships could build an increased level of bonding and information exchange in the service ecosystem (Payne et al., 2021). Finally, firms inherit an instinct desire for deliberate experimentation to bring innovation to new services development. The experimentation motive empowers firms to adapt solutions from other stakeholders and embed service solutions into their service design (Pera & Viglia, 2015). On the other hand, firms have their extrinsic motives to utilize organizational capabilities, consumers' knowledge, and the relationships with key stakeholders to deliver high-quality shared services (Edvardsson et al., 2011). Organizations that establish the linkages between stakeholder motives and pool resources for co-creation tend to achieve competitive advantages (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013).

**Roles of Actors in the Co-creation Process:** The co-creation process is facilitated by the joint contributory roles from both the perspectives of the firm and consumers. Service providers can improve and distinguish their offerings by adding diverse resources that customers and stakeholders can invest in through collaborating and co-producing behavior (Wang et al., 2021). In technology-enabled and medical services, empirical evidence shows firms invite community consumers into their operations (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Service providers play a crucial first-hand role in co-creation by investigating how prospective service users' resources can be enhanced to convert them as potential collaborators. The roles of actors in a co-creating service environment can be summed in the Figure 3.

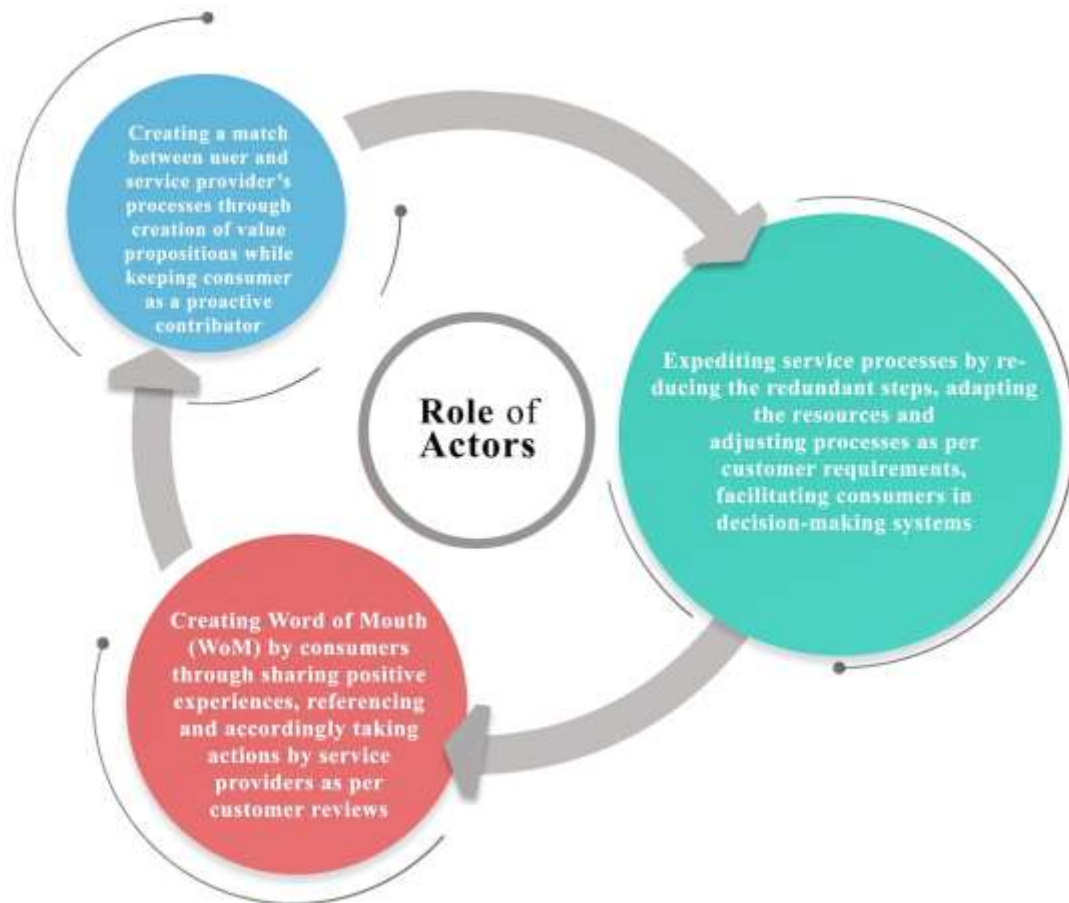


Figure 3. Role of actors in the co-creation process

To sustain the co-creating service attempts, customers furnish diagnostics information on the needs and demands (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola, 2012; Bagdonienė & Gegužytė, 2018). On the contrary, service providers stimulate customers to define their needs to facilitate co-creation (Chih et al., 2019; Bendapudi & Leone, 2003).

#### **Proposed Model of Co-creation in Professional Services**

Developing co-creation by involving multiple stakeholders, including internal and external actors and consumers, is a complex process. Building a conceptual model by deploying the relevant dimensions could range from identifying co-creation opportunities to delineating the roles and motivations of actors for self-sustaining co-creation. The co-creation model is portrayed in the Figure 4.

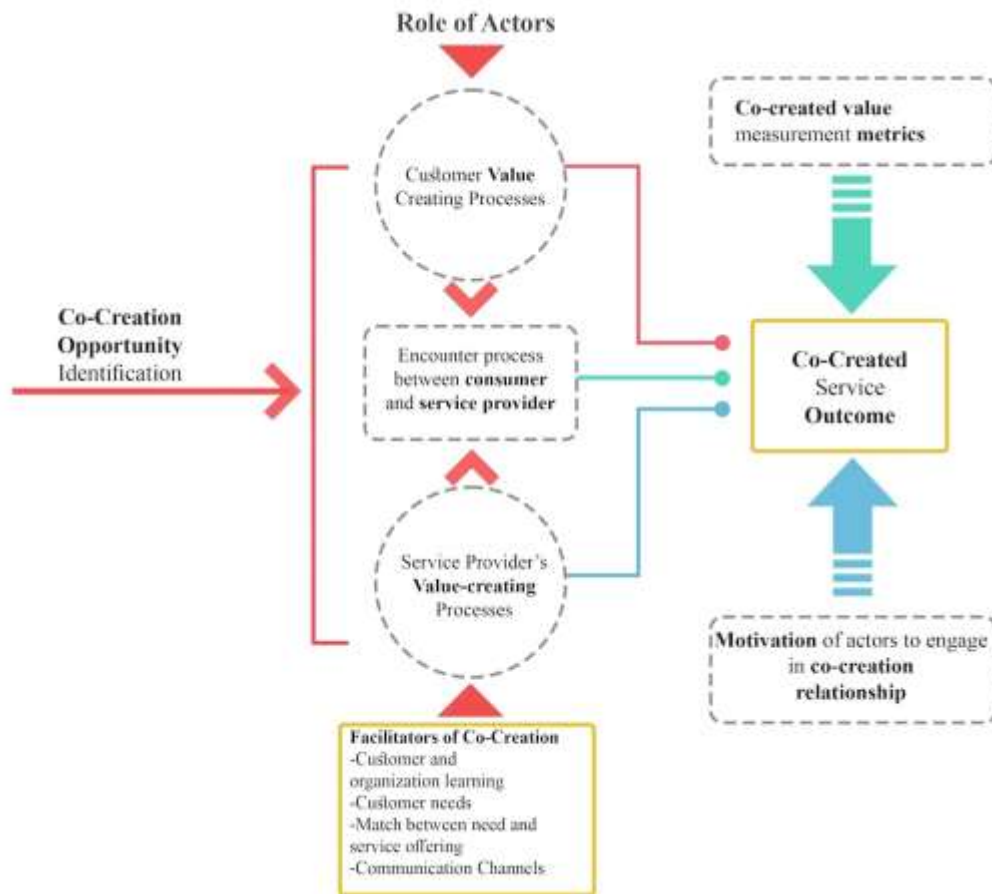


Figure 4. Conceptual model for co-creation development in professional services

The proposed model first introduced the concept of “Opportunity Identification” as the beginning point of co-creating services because the professional service organization determines that a co-created service would lead to better competitive advantage and improve customer satisfaction (Kuula et al., 2018). When the firm finds a congenial atmosphere to bring the stakeholders and customers together for co-creation, such opportunity emerges.

Such co-creation opportunity dictates the respective roles of customers, service providers, and the interaction process between the customer and service providers. For example, the customers come out with their needs, inputs, and experiences so that the service provider can incorporate customers’ perspectives into service dimensions. Similarly, the provision of customer reviews and word-of-mouth by the customers promote the service providers’ products in a significant way (Figueiredo et al., 2019).

In such a value creation process, the customers’ specific needs act as facilitators where the service providers match between the need and offers. In addition, organizational learning is further facilitated as the organization gains experiential learning due to collaboration with the consumers over the years. Next, the motivations of the participating customers and service providers are important determinants of the sustainability of such co-creation efforts. Through the internal communication process within the organizational groups and the external communication elements with the customers, organizations can bring radical and gradual innovative features into the co-creation process (Laud & Karpen, 2017). Finally, the outcomes of these attempts are controlled and quantified through the measurement of metrics which can specify the standards of value creation and how much deviation has passed from the standard. The overall synthesized outcome of these mutually dependent processes is called the “resultant co-created service outcome.”

### Implications of the Research

Modern service development logic treats the roles of the service providers and consumers as not distinct; instead, the actors can collaborate and co-create the service production process through the amalgamation of mutual interests, resources, and competencies. The current study framed a conceptual model to develop the co-creation in a professional service setting by reflecting on the roles of participants and the criteria and antecedents that could lead to meaningful value co-creation. Our research has implications for the researchers interested in exploring dimensions of co-creation and testing the mechanism in empirical research. The research is also helpful for the service managers and professionals who want to develop a competitive service quality and ensure superior customer satisfaction through introducing a favorable atmosphere for co-creation. The praxis model developed in our paper could help the practitioners better understand the process and implement them in their service context.

### Future Research Directions

The proposed co-creation framework has been established by analyzing existing literature. Further research might be conducted on whether the proposed model can be validated through hypotheses testing in empirical research of more specific service sectors, such as accounting or health care, to explore how the model works in diverse sectors. Moreover, the academicians may generate different key thematic concepts from our literature review and formulate relevant co-creation models based on the perceived knowledge gaps. Our research has specified the actors' roles in the process; thereby, further research could specifically examine which traits the actors should have to co-create radical services and whether these traits change at different stages of co-creation processes over time. Our research has attempted to advance how co-creation occurs in the professional service context. Future researchers may develop longitudinal studies to further investigate the different components of our framework.

### Conclusion

The objective of the paper was to improve the understanding of co-creation by formulating a conceptual framework for co-creation in professional services. The methodology was to analyze the concerned literature on co-creation within the range of 26 years. The relevant literary sources were reviewed to assimilate the narratives and perspectives in line with the objectives of our research paper. Firstly, the criteria important to consider during the service co-creation procedure were identified and explained from the perspective of the service provider and the consumer. Then, the motivating factors which play a vital role in the interactive co-creating process were evaluated. Thirdly, the concerned actors' precise roles, including user, service provider and the stakeholders were defined to facilitate and successfully implement the co-creation activities. Finally, a model encompassing the required antecedents and processes in a pictorial diagram was proposed. Also, the concerned components and processes of the proposed model were elaborated to explain how a successful co-creation process can be implemented. This paper contributes to the service development literature by presenting co-creation in professional service via the core antecedents and a comprehensive model.

### Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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