ABSTRACT

As researchers seek to understand value co-creation in more detail, it is essential to explore both tangible and intangible products in more depth. This case study provides an understanding of the intangible value created with a tangible product. The Thermomix is a high-end multi-purpose cooking device and through social media, communities of users have increased the value of the device. This article argues that value can be created through the intangible offerings, even when a physical product exists.
INTRODUCTION

The concept of value co-creation has become increasingly important within the literature, particularly within a marketing context. While there is an understanding that value is generally delivered through service, this can be through both tangible or intangible goods or services (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Value co-creation results in consumers and marketers working together to interact and engage, and have a positive experience for the customer. For a tangible product, this could be through value added services, or increased engagement with the brand for a stronger affinity toward the product. This can result in increased positive word of mouth.

Given the understanding of ‘value’ and ‘co-creation of value’ developed in the academic literature, it is important to understand the connection between value and virtual communities. Because virtual communities have changed the way people seek information (Fallis, 2008) and communicate, it is important to understand how information is shared within these communities (Zha, Zhang, Yan & Xiao, 2015). This chapter, therefore, explores value co-creation within online communities targeted predominately at women. In particular, it explores the Thermomix communities.

A modern cooking device, the Thermomix boasts that it replaces the features of twelve devices in one. At approximately $2000 AUD the device is expensive, but offers speed, convenience and community. This chapter explores how the Thermomix community is co-creating value and community through the various customer-oriented virtual communities. Three main communities were observed, in detail, for the study, utilizing netnography principles.

The chapter demonstrates how value created in relation to intangible product attributes and uses can increase the value of a tangible product.

VALUE CO-CREATION

To understand the way virtual communities are creating value, first an understanding of value in a marketing context must be established. Value aligns closely with the use of virtual communities and therefore is a useful consideration in the virtual community space. Co-creation of value is developed through interaction between the marketer and the customer (Ballantyne & Varey 2006; Ballantyne & Varey 2008), therefore it can be understood how product-related virtual communities can result in value creation. This is particularly pertinent because social forces influence service exchange and value co-creation (Edvardsson, Tronvoll & Gruber, 2011).

Customer value is created through experiences and relationships whereby firms do not market to customers but rather market or interact with customers (Aitken, Ballantyne, Osborne & Williams 2006). Co-creation of value alters the relationship between the marketer and the customer (Choi & Burnes, 2013) and customers engage more with the brand, the product and provide more positive word of mouth. Value is an individual thing, defined by each customer in terms of what they perceive as valuable to them and it is essential to understand the customer’s perception. Marketers must, therefore, have a strong understanding of their customers and collaborate with them to determine and provide this value.