

The Active Customer in Value Co-Creation Processes: The Importance for Companies Using the Example of Energy Cooperatives

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Purpose - The aim of this work is to investigate the capabilities of an active customer and what he or she is able to provide better than an inactive customer along the five phases of the value creation process. Based on the example of energy cooperatives, concrete practical implications for the business models of energy cooperatives are derived.

Design/Methodology/approach - First, the paper analyzes and discusses the literature of the active customer with a focus on the value co-creation process. Second, empirical research based on 12 qualitative interviews is conducted and analyzed, adding to the discussion of co-creation in the context of energy cooperatives.

Findings - An 'Active Customer' is a person or group of persons in a defined market. The 'Active Customer' is willing to educate himself and acquire information in order to gain a differentiated view of the (specific) market/ market activities. The 'Active Customer' uses the acquired information to make conscious decisions after weighing the available options. The 'Active Customer' proactively exchanges information with other stakeholders in the (specific) market. In addition, the 'Active Customer' is a provider of intangible goods (knowledge, information).

Research limitations/implications - The research has certain limitations that require further research, for example, regarding the quantitative validation of the active customer. Future research should identify relevant indicators and describe different types of co-creation of the active and inactive customer in the energy sector.

Practical implications (if applicable) - In order for active customers to be able to participate appropriately in the process of co-creation, they need business models of energy cooperatives with low complexity, as multi-layered value creation stages in particular can overwhelm the active customer.

Originality/value - In the EU Directive 2019/944 (Clean Energy Package "Clean energy for all Europeans package"), the EU has described the 'Active Customer' as the basis for a sustainable energy transition. With this study, a concrete operationalization of the 'Active Customer' is possible in practice using the example of energy cooperatives on the basis of the value co-creation process.

Key words - Active Customer, S-D-Logic, Value Co-Creation, Customer integration

Paper type - Empirical and Conceptual paper