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# CUSTOMER ROLE IN VALUE CO-CREATION – A PATHWAY TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

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## Abstract

The paper includes a brief overview of approaches to the concept of value creation with a focus on the most contemporary one assuming the leading role of consumers. The redefined concept of value co-creation by today's consumers implies their active role so as they can contribute also to managing social and environmental challenges.

The paper addresses different trends in consumers' behaviour which result in their altered position on the market and may lead to potentially even more prominent role in shaping future market offering and business models.

More critical and hyper-connected consumers more frequently choose solutions within sharing or access economy, also in the finance industry, which shows their preferences of sustainable choices and need for active participation in service co-creation. In finance, it often takes the form of "platform economy" whose main role is to match financial counterparts, such as peer-to-peer lending and insurance, crowdfunding and social payments.

Opportunities emerging from consumers' increasing independence and trust as well as their reliance on technology and innovative solutions may contribute to financial inclusion. New firms that will understand and respond to consumers' expectations may create business models more suitable for present conditions than existing ones. This way new players may "disrupt" financial industry in certain areas by winning customers from traditional banks or offering services for the unbanked.

Examples illustrating the role firms other than banks can play in financial inclusion are provided leading to conclusions of their potential in taking over some activities traditionally performed by banks. The emergence of such players is socially vital in the light of overall development goals of sustainable development which place emphasis on financial issues, in particular inclusion.

Banking industry with its specific position and function should have a part in the processes. Sustainable development goals can be met by banks' activities within Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). From the perspective of individuals, however, such efforts are not clear or visible, hence their low awareness of socially important initiative taken by banks.

On the other hand, regulatory environment of the banking industry limits the opportunities for clients' participation and value co-creation in the process of providing services. Therefore, for financial institutions in order to take advantage of clients' readiness to be more active, and to co-create value of the services, a good solution may be an invitation to participate in shaping CSR activities. This will improve banks' image as institutions contributing to sustainable development, guarantee customer involvement and help maintain their position.

Keywords: value co-creation, consumer empowerment, sharing economy, financial inclusion, CRS, sustainable society.

## Introduction

Insight into the discussion on theoretical aspects of value creation provides background to understand why the concepts evolved in different systems and market conditions. Contemporary perceptions of value creation stress the central role of the consumer in this process, a point where definitions of the science of economics and marketing are tangent (Vargo et al., 2008a), (Lusch et al., 2006), (Kotler et al., 2012).

Consumers' power and recognition which stem from the requirements of the markets result in their amplified voice (Kotler et al., 2012) and increased courage to suggest their own new solutions. Empowered consumers, full of initiative and technologically supported contribute to value co-creation and new business model shaping. In contemporary world value determined by the customer and co-created in the joint interaction (service) between buyer and seller has redefined relations with service-providers. The desire to participate in co-creating value is mirrored in the trend towards sharing or collaborative consumption.

Changes in consumer behavior are the consequence of exponential growth in information and technology whose further development should be expected. Innovation diffusion accelerates the pace of changes (King, 2013).

Understanding of the profound changes in consumer behavior is vital for firms which will have to allow for a contribution of customers in creating market offerings. It should be assumed that in the world of the service economy and, even more so, in currently developing sharing (access) economy the role of value co-creation may need to be modified even further.

Business and offer hybridization will have an impact on those market participants whose responsiveness and ability to adjust to current consumption trends is limited. It may affect, in particular, financial institutions in the light of their different regulatory environment, as well as lack of flexibility and consequently, require new solutions for financial institutions to survive in the years to come.

The business system would benefit from acceptance of the eminent role of individuals but should be ready to formulate current models in a new way: from the community upwards. Social potential should be used to steer towards most efficient, desirable solutions.

On the foundation of analyses of theoretical aspects of value creation current market trends and their broad consequences will be examined, potential outcomes discussed and suggestions outlined for the future.

## The Concept of Value Redefined

The concept of value has been central in different sciences but has gained particular importance in economics and marketing. Adam Smith (1776) and other classical economists believed in the creation of wealth in the process of production and claimed that value is added to goods in manufacturing processes, and therefore embedded in goods. Hence, he pursued to explain the differences in value in use and value in exchange (diamond-water paradox) should be based on the assumption that the much higher value (in exchange) is justified and attributable to the sweat and hardship experienced by labor force in the process of manufacturing. In early theories value is referred to as a notion reflecting the power of a good or service to command other goods, services or money in a process of exchange.

With the advent of utility theory other generations of economists claimed that value should be relative to utility experienced by a consumer, the ability of a good to satisfy human needs, coherent with expectations of individuals, their preferences, the extent to which their needs are met, the distance from their point of satiety and specific circumstances, e.g. alternative choices.

In contemporary theories, the focus shifts more towards value-in-use and is apparent in Service-Dominant Logic where it is the consumer who uniquely and specifically determines value according to his or her own experience, preferences, etc. Therefore firms cannot deliver value to customers, according to Vargo & Lusch (Vargo et al., 2008a), as they only make value propositions that are ultimately shaped by their end users.

In the meaning of Service-Dominant Logic "Value is perceived and determined by the customer on the basis of "value-in-use"." (Vargo et al., 2004). A service defined in terms of an actor (customer)- the determined benefit is aligned with value in use.

On the other hand, while the value in use is prime and value in exchange is derived from it, the value in exchange is still important and plays a part in value co-creation although indirectly (Vargo, et al., 2008b).

The reason why value in exchange cannot be ignored is explained by Vargo & Lusch who state: "value in exchange remains important because in contemporary society service is often exchanged for service rights (money) and these service rights become the means to further exchange […] when market exchange is the dominant societal institution, an actor can gain some sense of how well he is providing service by the financial feedback obtained from the market in terms of service rights “ (Vargo et al., 2014)

The understanding of value in Service-Dominant Logic where value stems from the consumer is consistent with the paradigm of value in marketing.

Philip Kotler defines value as “the sum of the tangible and intangible benefits and costs” to the buyer and considers value in a customer value triad: a combination of quality, service and price. (Kotler et al., 2012). The perception of value varies among customers, and their individual judgements are reflected in their satisfaction understood as a performance of a good or service in relation to customer's expectations. As a result, it is assumed that value of goods and services is a consequence of subjective assessment by individuals.

In the contemporary world co-creation of value is gaining new scope: it is a profound process which can go even further since it actually integrates the organization’s offering into the lives of their customers (Payne et al., 2008).

Service-Dominant Logic calls for altered individual attitude to each element of the marketing mix as well as for its more strategic use (Lusch et al., 2006). Consumers co-create rather service offering than a product; similarly, they co-create value proposition instead of being responsive to pricing. Within distribution, the spotlight of the co-creation of value should be on processes and networks, while promotion efforts should focus on co-creating conversation and dialogue (Lusch et al., 2006).

Consumer value co-creation process is fueled by their autonomy, ideas derived from real life coherent with individual expectations, conditions and environment, unrestricted by regulatory requirements. While contemporary consumers, more operative and progressive, are rather “makers” than recipients, the firms’ role should not be passive, but supportive. Instead of attempting to predict consumers’ needs and wants, businesses nowadays can be more successful when accepting consumer-defined solutions and adapting or imitating them in their business models.

## Consumer Changing Behavior

Today’s consumers play an unprecedented role in the market which manifests itself not only in their acceptance of an invitation to participate in value co-creation but also in actions initiated by themselves. Social networks provide platforms for sharing value with other market participants, making consumers empowered, more autonomous and daring. Their increased self-esteem and confidence affect their behavior and lead to further evolution and changes.

The millennial generation, currently the largest adult segment with entirely different behavior than previous ones, demonstrates more attention to experience, time-saving vehicles and work-life balance. Representatives of the generation are more innovative, reliant on modern technologies, and focused more on access than ownership.

Trends in the contemporary market can be seen from two different angles: on the one hand as a reflection of consumer expectations, on the other hand as factors affecting consumers’ valuations of product/service offering and shaping their future mindset. Some of the trends are presented in Table 1.

***Table 1.*** *Trends reflecting altered consumer expectations.*

| **Trends** | **Definition/ Explanation** |
|---|---|
| Hybridization | Lines/borders between industries blurred, products/ services merged, unique concepts created |
| Experience | Priority/ top valuation in a world abundant in possessions |
| Personalization | Non-standard offerings, tailor-made, specific/ specialized products |
| Prosumerism | “Maker" culture (more than the user-generated content), consumer like professional |
| Tribalism | Groups formed around interests, brands events or causes |
| Collaboration | Sharing ideas, resources, creating solutions |
| Gamification/competition | More competitive and engaging game dynamics applied to real-world problems |
| Sharing/ access | Access to goods rather than ownership |
| Eco-awareness | Sustainable products, local, organic, recyclable |

Source: own conclusions

The blurred boundaries between industries and hybridization of offerings lead to consumers' greater openness in search for products in companies operating in different sectors.

Consumers' technology skills and initiative are driving the economy towards the more participative model with increasing number of prosumers contributing to further development of offerings.

Living in a hyper-connected world, consumers engage in social media and follow the need to gather in groups or tribes formed around specific interests or causes which provide new ways of communication between members.

For companies, there is an opportunity to tap into the media, get insight into ideas of many people in almost real time, and finally genuinely interact with the entire market. So it is through social media that firms engage in relations, gain trust and invite to co-create value. Such interaction and co-creation, the very core of Service-Dominant Logic, is an asset that stimulates proliferation of innovation. Social networking, crowd-sourcing and sharing define the form, content and scope of interactions between individual consumers.

Another symptom of altered consumer behavior is a different attitude to quality time and work-life balance, resulting from time poverty. Members of Millennial generation show commitment to entertainment, enjoyment, recreation and relaxation, the facts that impose specific requirements on service providers in introducing elements of competition (like in gamification) to create specific ties with consumers.

Higher standards of living of individuals abounding in possessions, and time poor shape different personal priorities with self-development and self-realisation in the centre. Focus on self-development and education results, inter alia, in heightened awareness of sustainability issues, desire to buy eco-friendly products or more efficiently use resources previously underutilized. The emergence of a new consumer with a changed mindset is symptomatic for the economy of sharing. Possessing is no longer a goal or means of satisfying consumer's needs or wants. Thus, consumer society is being transformed towards user society.

These altered consumer mindsets and attitude are determined by constant, dynamic changes in the micro- and macro-environment, in particular, technological environment. According to Lusch, Vargo & O'Brien “Increasingly, everyone and everything is connected to each other and each thing. Network ubiquity accelerates the consequences of open standards, specialization, and connectivity. The consequences are higher collaboration and more innovation”. (Lusch, et al., 2007).

The areas and industries where high collaboration results in market success are multiple. Examples throughout the entire economy can be sourced and span from “Allrecipes”, a digital resource for cooks” which started as a platform for sharing recipes (now with 85 million users globally and 1.5 billion users annually), through Groupon, a daily deal site aggregating purchases, thus enabling price cuts (with 49.5 million customers in 2017 who had bought at least one of its deals during the trailing 12 months) to peer to peer lending which increased seven-fold between 2014 and 2015, from $9 bln to $64 bln and, according to *PricewaterhouseCoopers, and* may expand further to at least $150 bln by 2025.

Consumers show they want to collaborate also by contributing to components of marketing-mix, for example to promotion by means of viral marketing. This way individuals demonstrate their resistance to traditional advertising and desire for authenticity and reality. Research carried out in the first decade of the XXI century showed that more than half of all consumers were interested in paying more for certain goods when given a chance to choose marketing options they preferred, while 70% were interested in products they could use to block advertising. Over 50% of respondents maintained they avoided buying goods that overwhelmed them with marketing and advertising (Yankelovich survey, 2004).

One of the main reasons why consumers are dissatisfied with existing offers is the price as downward pressures on prices have been particularly visible since the last crises (Kotler et al., 2012) resulting in austerity, interest in aggregate purchases and sharing resources.

The sharing or access economy is an evident reflection of human desire to go beyond certain limits, to cross borders of established business models and be able to enjoy the freedom of own choice. It is a customer whose decisions are mirrored in market success, as his decisions to make use of certain offerings will be ultimately materialized in the form of profit.

Customer shifted expectations of a variety of choice and their preferences towards efficient use of resources are materialized in the sharing economy which is presumed to have an immense growth potential, especially in the five main industries: financial services, transportation, accommodation and tourism, as well as labor. It takes different forms of lending/ borrowing, barter, making resources, such as time, money and skills available for other users. Aggregate income from sharing economy in the aforementioned five core areas is estimated to account for $335bln by 2025. Its potential, to a high extent, derives from altered consumer perception of value. Recent research carried out by *PricewaterhouseCoopers* on sharing economy shows that consumers' way of thinking about value added by ownership is evolving: 81% of respondents agree that it is more efficient to use other people's possessions than actually own them, 43% of the surveyed think that ownership of resources is an unnecessary burden for the budget and 57% claim that access to resources and goods is an attractive alternative to owning them. The approach appears to be the response to the last crisis and urbanization, the need to avoid indebtedness as well as inconvenience related for example to parking space limitations. Additional benefits, such as reduced negative effects of pollution resulting from optimization and efficient use of resources (cuts in car manufacturing, economizing on fuel, etc.) should not remain unnoticed.

Such changing consumption patterns based on shifting criteria of more critical customers, inclined towards more ethical, sustainable and socially responsible choices can benefit a society at large when recognized and exploited skillfully by service providers.

The spin-off effect of sharing economy-customer trust and relationship building- can contribute to the consolidation of service providers with their target audience and result in widespread acceptance of suggested business solutions and offerings.

Awareness of the trends in consumer behavior seems to be indispensable for companies willing to use the potential a steer towards most efficient and socially desirable solutions. Society is likely to play an even more active part in the future. Consumers participative role should be integrated into business models which should evolve in the new direction: from the community- bottom up, where customer-driven solutions are applied and integrated into organizations.

## Service Co-Creation in the Financial Industry

The evolving approach to value co-creation has acquired a new dimension in the financial services industry. Technology, first of all, has impacted the way financial services are delivered to contemporary customers. Electronic banking, initially perceived as a way of reducing costs of banking services, became a source of customer satisfaction resulting from ease of transaction and unlimited access, thus adding value to traditional financial services.

In the banking industry, however, customers are deprived of the benefits of actively participating in value co-creation which is the case in other industries. Regulatory environment restricts significantly customer influence on the shape of the final service. Only certain customer segments, such as HNWI can gain from negotiable elements of banks' offering. In most areas, however, clients are not given value proposition and an invitation to co-create.

Owing to unrestricted access to technology, which gives them immediate insight into details of every offer and an unlimited opportunity to compare different options, clients' awareness is stimulated and position altered. The revolutionary changes in customers' power and influence have resulted in different stance they take towards service providers. Being unable to contribute to service co-creation in the banking industry, individuals have become open to counter- solutions devised on a peer-to-peer basis and, as a result, they turn to options that promise more flexibility and satisfaction.

Social banking /peer to peer banking has been partly taking over certain services. The reasons may be varied and range from austerity, drive towards efficiency or customers' need to be heard or considered.

Banking services are available through different mobile devices, which means banks are no longer needed to broker the connection between lenders and borrowers and there are other institutions or platforms to make the match. Customers who have more options feel stronger, self-sufficient and self-confident which urges them to cut out the middlemen, to put downward pressure on prices, speed up and streamline processes. They want to become more audible and influential, but banks seem not to notice it. As a result, people may no longer need banks in their traditional form, although banking services cannot be forgone. (King, 2013)

According to PricewaterhouseCoopers, the sharing economy will be one of the most disruptive forces the banking sector has experienced by 2020. As concluded in PwC's 2016 report called "Financial Services Technology 2020 and Beyond: Embracing Disruption" the sharing economy is one of the most important transformative factors influencing the industry.

Increased trust on peer-to-peer basis seems to spill off to other areas of life. Participation in peer-to-peer payments seems to be a spin-off effect of participation in value co-creation in other spheres. Customers involvement in value co-creation in many other industries may result in their reliance on companies other than traditional banks for financial services providing. Firms from other sectors take such opportunities to enter the financial services market, for instance, Apple, created a platform for iPhone users that allows money transfer in a seamless way.

The principles of access economy in financial services sector manifest themselves in decentralized asset ownership and innovations that match financial counterparts, such as peer-to-peer lending, insurance, crowdfunding and social payments. With the commoditization of financial services traditional financial institutions have been challenged by other market participants that enjoy freedom from deregulation, more flexibility, openness and are more receptive to the changes in consumer behavior. Fintech companies have been often filling the gap resulting from customer expectations and strict regulations impeding flexibility and responsiveness of traditional banking institutions.

## The Role of Technology in Financial Inclusion and Meeting Sustainable Development Goals

Many global organizations, such as the World Bank, the United Nations Division for Sustainable Development have stressed the importance of financial issues in meeting other advancement and progress objectives. *While financial inclusion* is perceived as "a key enabler of reducing poverty and boosting prosperity" according to the World Bank, about 2 billion people do not use formal financial services and over a half of adults in the poorest households are unbanked. The Global Findex shows that the reasons why ¾ of the world poor do not have a bank account are: poverty, costs involved in opening a bank account, travel distance and amount of paperwork when dealing with banks (59% of adults in developing economies, 77% of adults earning less than $2 a day and 11% of adults in high income economies). In all regions, with the exception of high-income economies, borrowing from friends and family is the most commonly reported source of credit for current loans; 55% of borrowers in developing economies use only informal sources of credit. 61% of account holders in Europe and Central Asia use their accounts to receive wages and only 32% in the rest of the developing world.

The role that financial institutions were expected to play in financial inclusion is now more and more fulfilled by players' other traditional banks. Such firms, by providing innovative technological solutions in the area of mobile banking, are playing a crucial part in historically unbanked regions when assisting their inhabitants in gaining financial access. It is the case of Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, where mobile banking has expanded to 16% of the market with traditional banking development hampered by transportation and other infrastructure problems. Research has shown the most effective way to significantly expand lower-income populations' access to formal financial services is through a digital channel, and the optimal digital channel is the mobile phone. In Kenya, Tanzania, and Nigeria, nine in 10 adults are reported to a have mobile phone and SIM card access.

Kenya is the most prominent example of mobile technology contributing to the development. It has the 21st most connected population in the world: while 43 % of the inhabitants live on $1.50 a day, mobile phone subscriber rate in 2015 accounted for 80% of the population (30% in 2007) according to the World Bank. The statistics show that mobile technology penetration rate in Kenya is very high at 83% and 79% in Africa while it is much lower globally - 51% in the world. A third of the population in Kenya have access to the Internet, and a half of it make payments via smartphones; an estimated number of the Internet users in Kenya is 26.1 million, and 99.9% of those, access it through mobile data.

The access to mobile phones and digital financial services across the globe gives people a wider opportunity of using the vehicles ubiquitous in more developed regions. It also allows for more advanced customization and specialization leading to offering services specifically designed for the needs of different communities. For Kenyans studying or living abroad, for instance, applications cutting out middlemen are available that facilitate distribution of remittances for money transfers and gifts to the country of origin. To promote Kenya's agricultural offerings, such as coffee, expats can order on their smartphones specific regional bean varieties, custom-designed packages. Sharing Kenyan products with colleagues in their adoptive countries expats should help the exposure of such products in lucrative import markets. Other solutions include: instAid which allows to distribute, and manage medical and food vouchers on mobile platforms, M- farm useful for agricultural producers to determine a fair market rate for their crops- an app that indicates average suggested fair prices and other information on distributing domestically and internationally- and Eneza which helps get educational materials in hands of schoolchildren.

Similarly, Fintech companies by tapping into local communities and responding to their specific needs fill in the gaps in existing market offerings. Such is the role of TransferWise, a payment startup, established to reduce costs of money transfers, particularly important for immigrant workers sending money to their families. Innovative financial services can also contribute to the financial inclusion of women. It is exemplified by the precedent described by a young blogger in Afganistan where young female citizens are not allowed to have a bank account in their name. This legal obstacle was overcome by her being paid for writing services in bitcoins that were later redeemed in online stores.

Thus, new players emerging in financial services market supplement traditional institutions by accessing markets deprived of traditional services or markets dissatisfied with existing offers. They simplify communication with alienated markets, develop solutions to satisfy specific needs of local communities. Such service providers assume a role that financial institutions should play in sustainable development and financial inclusion. This way they model solutions for customer participation in value creation in financial services.

This pathway created by institutions other than traditional banks is very likely to broaden in the near future because the more consumers get used to technology and innovation, the less time is needed to proliferate and universalize them. (King,2013)

A crucial role may be played by Fintech startups that challenge the traditional financial players with services such as bank transfers and peer-to-peer loans by application of blockchain technology which enables fast, cheap and secure real-time data and value transmission. The second decade of the XXI century saw huge interest in blockchain technology and investment. Now there are broader opportunities “to re-engineer the infrastructure and processes of the global financial services industry” according to Santander InnoVentures report.

By eliminating middleman payments can be processed faster and cheaper, by decentralization, real-time accounting settlement systems can be more efficient. Blockchain technology can also facilitate raising finance by providing access to liquidity sources by means of initial coin offerings (ICO), thus making loans and credits safer and cheaper. There are plans to implement the technology on stock exchanges and to create automatic contracts that would be useful to the insurance industry.

On the one hand, the potential of blockchain technology can be used by banks that introducing greater automation into bank transfers can be more efficient. On the other hand, the ability to process transactions directly between parties poses a risk to traditional banking, according to Santander report. However, the two market participants have something to offer to the other. “New digital businesses must either grow quickly or die. Banks can offer Fintechs immediate scale and critical mass through access to demand”.

## Banks towards Sustainable Finance

Financial institutions operating in specific regulatory environment face restrictions that limit their ability to offer innovative services, and to invite consumers to participate in value creation. On top of that, the banking industry has always been based on trust which gave it the competitive edge. In today's world, the notion of consumers’ trust has different scope and form, as the whole sharing economy is known to function thanks to the trust of individuals in each other. This way the position of banking institutions is weaker, as they are not the only ones to benefit from consumers’ trust.

Banks’ prominent role in the society as institutions of public trust should manifest itself in their commitment to improving community’s well-being by means of activities within CSR. To strengthen their position in a market invaded by industry “distractors”, financial institutions should search for new, unique ideas that will make their offering discernible and responsive to consumers’ expectations and praxis, the currents of the era. Through intensified sustainability-focused efforts, clearly and directly addressed and communicated to consumers, financial institutions may be able to accomplish their business goals.

CSR activities previously taking a form of PR initiatives, are now transformed into a wide variety of sustainable activities. Customers are often attracted to companies offering sustainable products or being involved in socially important activities within CSR. This is true in well-developed economies where, as evidence shows, consumers are more discerning and likely to choose companies that guarantee sustainable offerings even despite their higher prices. Such attitude is parallel to improving the standard of living. Sustainable development is perceived as vital in societies where capital has been accumulated over years while in poorer countries individuals’ decisions are based on thrift and aim at improving their standard of living.

In less developed or emerging economies consumer awareness of CSR appears to be low for several reasons: firstly, consumers are not specifically focused on activities not directly transformed into reduced price of banking services (known to be the main attraction in poorer communities); secondly, because of the complex nature of financial services that discourages consumers' interest in the banks' activities.

CSR initiatives, undertaken by banks, seem to remain unnoticed by a vast majority of individuals, as shown by the results of an online survey carried out by students of the University of Economics in Poland in January 2018. Over 90% of 65 respondents claimed not to know any activities within CSR. Only widespread and widely recognized actions were quoted, such as the initiatives of WOŚP (Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy), the countrywide charity event aimed at collecting donations from the wide public in the streets, multiple auctions via the internet, etc. to subsidize medical equipment for hospitals. The cyclical event taking place in January gets wide publicity and is broadcast by main TV channels, with a lot of celebrities participating, offering items for auctions, playing concerts, etc. As one of the main sponsors was m-bank, the event was recognized as the one (and nearly the only) of banks' CSR initiatives.

It seems indispensable for banks to improve public knowledge and understanding of CSR activities supporting sustainable finance by:

- making customers more aware of the importance of sustainability issues,
- supporting and encouraging eco-friendly decisions,
- creating frameworks, conditions for such choices, eg by gamification,
- creating more participative models with the potential of co-creating value.

The European Union legislation is supportive in this respect. Information and data about CSR activities are required by law after Directive 2014/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the disclosure of non-financial and diversity information by certain large undertakings and groups, entered into force (starting from 2017). It is aimed at increasing the transparency of social and environmental information submitted by business entities in the Member States.

Raising consumers' awareness of CSR activities is very difficult: although information is available online, for example in annual reports, its length and complex nature are discouraging for individuals. To improve their active participation in value co-creation consumers' involvement in socially responsible activities should be encouraged, their feeling of empowerment strengthened. In its recent campaign ING bank in Poland supported such contributions with a slogan: "tell us your idea by applying for a credit to meet your needs for eco-friendly solutions, and we will refund a commission". This way consumers' eco-awareness can be improved and societal forces' interest boosted in solutions offering more than money.

## Conclusions

Various theoretical concepts verified by observations and evidence point out to the necessity of taking a different stance to societal forces in today's economy. Consumers, as product and service end-users, have never before played such an active part in determining and co-creating value as they do now. They are better informed, creative and independent in finding their own ways when interacting with peer-to-peer communities as well as companies. Their perception of value is different than before, often derived from an ability to use rather than possess things; their satisfaction depends on an ability to actively cooperate in creating value, and their market choices are often based on principles of sustainability. The scale and intensity of collaboration are still likely to further increase as a result of network ubiquity, leading to the emergence of new solutions and business models which have so far been developed from communities upwards, using ideas originally devised on bases of peer-to-peer contacts.

Customers' changed participative attitude is not yet realized or taken advantage of by certain industries, for example, banking. While there is an important role that financial industry can play in supporting sustainable development, it is not fully recognized by big traditional institutions that are often challenged by new Fintech companies which are said to "disrupt" the system.

Both new as well as established players may take advantage of operating in the globally interconnected environment: Fintechs may benefit from their better understanding of social media ("they are more in tune with the peer-to-peer culture engendered by the explosion of social media") and flexibility, and banks from their experience, position as well as access to "demand" and data (Santander, 2016). While Fintechs can "focus on creating single-purpose solutions, designed to offer an improved experience within just one product or service", according to Santander, traditional institutions offer more complex systemic solutions.

Electronic and mobile banking, which changed the industry dramatically by streamlining transactions and cutting costs, is now taken for granted, but the downward pressures on costs in banking are still intense. On the other hand, remote banking had a profound impact on relationships between banks and their customers who became less reliant on contacts with traditional institutions and hence more independent and open to an alternative offering of new players.

Remote banking may still contribute significantly to financial inclusion in areas where access to financial services is limited, and consequently foster achievement of other development goals. Now, financial institutions may need to prove they have a role to play and can offer unique benefits in the world where banking without banks is more and more common.

Traditional banks seem to be well aware of the opportunities resulting from innovative technologies, such as blockchain. According to Santander report "Many have decided they need to participate in this disruptive trend by actively supporting Fintechs – the list includes Citi, Santander, UBS, BBVA, Barclays, NAB and Capital One, among others. They have launched incubation and acceleration initiatives, and created investment vehicles to harness, foster and scale up innovation".

Financial institutions' role still remains important, but the new "disrupted" system may require they emphasize their traditional values of "giving more than money" mirrored in their efforts within Corporate Social Responsibility. Thus, focusing on the unique relationship, confidence and well-established trust they have historically enjoyed, traditional financial institutions could prove they deserve such image and appeal to consumers' sensitivity to by pursuing socially important initiatives.

To prove their dedication to sustainable development financial institutions should also focus on education and communication with the public to increase awareness of sustainability issues and invite consumers to participate in creating desirable solutions. To be successful and to ensure sustainable profit margins financial institutions have to find their own path to demonstrate their ability and readiness to actively respond to the requirements of the modern economy. Their failure to evolve and present new business models may mean they will be left behind.

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