

Ongoing value co-creation amidst service encounter setbacks in the banking environment: a viewpoint and call to action

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Abstract

Purpose – Bank customers generally perform a variety of roles during service encounters. They partake in the delivery of the services they acquire and assist other customers in making important financial purchase decisions. Customers offering help may also be guided by other customers in the broader service environment (i.e., friends or family members), who may provide support or perform the role of gatekeepers in the helping process. Accordingly, a viewpoint is presented, arguing that value co-creation practices in the service ecosystem may be disrupted when gatekeepers and fellow customer helpers' support networks engage in knowledge-hiding practices. Potential motivational drivers for knowledge-hiding behaviours are discussed. Additionally, alternative avenues fellow customer helpers may resort to for further assistance are presented.

Design/methodology/approach – Bank marketing and broader social literature guided the theoretical investigation.

Findings – Knowledge-hiding behaviours may be attributed to feelings of ownership, competition and lack of trust. Customer helpers' subsequent adaptive behaviours may lead to the development of new service ecosystems that may ignite novel value co-creation practices from new (and perhaps more effective) actors in the system, including different online financial communities, other neighbours or colleagues at work, as well as financial service personnel or a bank's artificial intelligence technology.

Originality/value – The viewpoint closes with a call to action and sets the agenda for further research on this topic.

Keywords Banking, Customer-to-customer interaction, Customer helping, Knowledge-hiding behaviours, Service ecosystems

Paper type Viewpoint

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that in the interconnected world of today, service encounters are influenced by service ecosystems (Di Pietro *et al.*, 2025; Tirado *et al.*, 2024; Viglia *et al.*, 2023), allowing for extensive value co-creation opportunities in the marketplace. Typically, service ecosystems comprise a number of actors (e.g. customers, firms and broader society) who engage in multiple service exchanges and co-create value when operant resources like knowledge and skills are integrated (Akaka and Vargo, 2015; Van Tonder *et al.*, 2020; Vargo *et al.*, 2023; Viglia *et al.*, 2023). Service ecosystem practices are also evident in the banking industry, where it has been observed in recent years that customers may not only deal with bank employees but also engage with fellow customers, assisting with service offerings (Van Tonder and Saunders, 2025). For instance, fellow customers (e.g. friends and family members) may help other customers in using a bank's self-service or making more complex investment decisions (Van Tonder and Saunders, 2025; Van Tonder *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, it is plausible that fellow customers providing help may be assisted by gatekeepers and support networks,



which could include friends, family members or online social communities. Gatekeepers may perform a moderating role, ensuring that fellow customers providing help act in the best interest of the other customer being assisted. Support networks could provide further norms for guiding helping behaviours by fellow customer helpers. Refer to [Van Tonder and Saunders \(2025\)](#) for a more detailed explanation of these potential roles. Accordingly, the value may be co-created when actors within a bank's service ecosystem, including bank employees and fellow customer helpers (assisted by their gatekeepers and support networks in the background), interact with other customers and operant resources, such as knowledge and/or skills are integrated.

These interactions and value co-creation practices during service encounters may lead to favourable outcomes in a banking environment, such as greater acceptance and use of the bank's financial products and services, as well as enhanced market share for the bank ([Van Tonder and Saunders, 2025](#)). However, in practice, the interaction among actors of the service ecosystem is not always successful and could result in value being reduced or destroyed ([Viglia et al., 2023](#)). These developments are particularly likely when actors in a system do not provide their full cooperation and hide required knowledge from others ([He et al., 2021](#)). Within service settings, there is widespread evidence that people do not always voluntarily share what they know with others ([Connelly et al., 2012](#); [Gustina and Sitalaksmi, 2023](#); [Singh, 2019](#); [Wen and Ma, 2021](#)). These knowledge-hiding behaviours could lead to several negative consequences, such as prohibiting new thought generation and team creativity as well as knowledge loss and broken trust ([He et al., 2021](#)).

However, the good news is that the potential knowledge-hiding behaviours may not lead to complete service encounter failures in the banking environment. Previous research suggests that actors in a service ecosystem have adaptive capabilities and may resort to alternative avenues (actors) for assistance and to receive the necessary support. Value co-creation may continue despite setbacks and communication problems between actors experienced, given the adaptive nature of actors in the service ecosystem ([Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2023](#)).

Accordingly, against this background, I address in this viewpoint the potential knowledge-hiding behaviours that may occur within a bank's service ecosystem. I specifically focus on gatekeepers and fellow customer helpers' support networks and argue that their knowledge-hiding behaviours directed towards fellow customer helpers may be driven by selected internal factors. Furthermore, I debate possible alternative avenues that fellow customer helpers may resort to for further assistance and guidance in helping other customers in a bank. I close the viewpoint with a call to action for bank providers wishing to capitalise on the value co-creation activities within their service ecosystems.

2. Motivational drivers for knowledge-hiding behaviours within a bank's service ecosystem

Knowledge hiding can broadly be defined as an individual's intentional effort to keep or hide knowledge needed by another individual ([Connelly et al., 2012](#); [Khizar et al., 2024](#)). Guided by banking and broader social literature, three factors in particular are likely to contribute to gatekeepers and support networks hiding knowledge from fellow customer helpers.

For example, knowledge-hiding behaviours may be attributed to feelings of ownership. Within bank settings, employees may hide knowledge from others due to a sense of psychological ownership. Employees may not want to give away "ownership" of attained knowledge, feeling that it belongs to them ([Singh, 2019](#); [Wen and Ma, 2021](#)). Similarly, when customers within consumer service settings experience a sense of psychological ownership, they may engage in territorial behaviours to protect their perceived possessions ([Peck and Luangrath, 2023](#)).

These behaviours could be echoed when customer helpers seek guidance from gatekeepers and their support networks in bank settings. Gatekeepers and support networks may believe they have psychological ownership of the financial knowledge attained. They may feel they

have invested a lot of effort in acquiring knowledge about financial products, such as where to invest to maximise financial gains. Not wanting to share their successful investment strategies, gatekeepers and support networks may decide not to respond to fellow customer helpers' calls for help. While gatekeepers could be aware of more appropriate investment options, they may keep quiet when fellow customer helpers assist other customers in deciding where to invest. Additionally, helpers' support networks may not respond when fellow customer helpers seek advice about possible investment options within online communities or offline through colleagues or friends.

Furthermore, bank employees have been found to not disclose their knowledge, because they are in competition with other employees and have certain targets that must be met (Gustina and Sitalaksmi, 2023). In broader social science literature, social experimental studies have identified that individuals may engage in knowledge-hiding behaviours when they view team members as their competition (Grant and Shandell, 2022).

These competitive practices could also transpire when customers help other customers within bank settings. It is plausible that gatekeepers and support networks may believe they too have a responsibility to directly assist customers (i.e. other family members) experiencing problems with making important financial investments. This may create a competitive environment, with all customers involved in the helping process wanting to fight for the attention of the customers needing assistance. Subsequently, gatekeepers and members of the support network could decide to hide knowledge from customer helpers, as they would rather directly engage with the customers needing assistance to ensure their own suggestions are implemented. In practice, it is not uncommon that actors performing a supporting role in the background in service ecosystems may become more visible in the event of service disruptions (Story *et al.*, 2020).

In the financial services environment, employees may also withhold knowledge from co-workers when they do not trust them (Connelly *et al.*, 2012). Psychology literature has noted that individuals distrusting other individuals would generally attempt to avoid engagement with them or would invest in safeguarding efforts to protect themselves from anticipated harm (Six and Latusek, 2023).

Likewise, gatekeepers and support networks in financial service settings may hide information from fellow customer helpers if they believe they cannot trust them. For example, within online community environments, customers may be reluctant to disclose information about where they invested, how much they invested and offer guidance on transactional benefits if they do not trust the customer helpers seeking support and whose agendas may appear to be suspect. In an offline context, gatekeepers and support networks may believe fellow customer helpers are not equipped to make investment decisions on behalf of the other customers and hence they may not disclose what they know to the customer helpers.

3. Alternative avenues for guidance and support

Fellow customer helpers who do not receive assistance from gatekeepers and their support networks could react in a number of different ways. For instance, fellow customer helpers may expand their horizons outside the current service ecosystem and reach out to different actors for assistance. Actors who become vulnerable due to a shortage of resources in their current service ecosystem tend to reach out to other actors outside the system for help. The interactions and value co-creation practices between the new network of actors could lead to the formation of a new service ecosystem (Thompson-Whiteside *et al.*, 2023). Subsequently, when fellow customer helpers experience a shortage of resources due to knowledge-hiding behaviours, they could easily expand their horizons (Thompson-Whiteside *et al.*, 2023) and turn to other available financial online communities for assistance, such as Reddit, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Financial Common Cents and the Bogleheads Forum (DeMatteo, 2021; Thukral *et al.*, 2023). Within the new platform, value may be co-created in a more effective way if the community is more willing to share knowledge and assist fellow customers in advising other

customers. In an offline context, fellow customer helpers could reach out to other actors in the system who they did not initially consult, such as neighbours or work colleagues with knowledge of financial products. During these consultations, new gatekeepers (i.e. the neighbour's spouse or friend of the colleague) may fulfil the moderating role and ensure value is co-created in the best interest of the other customer who needs to make an investment.

Additionally, fellow customer helpers could connect with different financial service personnel whom they expect to provide financial advice to customers (Aw *et al.*, 2024). They may believe that this personnel would not have a problem integrating operant resources, such as knowledge and skills, since it effectively is their duty to serve customers. They may visit bank consultants or investment advisers and make their own recommendations to other customers based on input gained. A colleague of the bank consultant or investment adviser may serve the role of the new gatekeeper during these consultation sessions.

Finally, fellow customer helpers could reach out to a bank's artificial intelligence (AI) technology for assistance. Previous research acknowledges AI assistance as "non-human actors in value co-creation during service encounters" (Jylkäs *et al.*, 2018, p. 1437). Typical examples of AI-driven chatbots in the banking industry that can be approached for advice include Erica (Bank of America), COIN (JPMorgan Chase) and Eno (Capital One). However, overall, it is more likely that fellow customer helpers will approach financial service personnel over a bank's AI technology. Empirical research has shown that compared to robo-advisers, customers have greater trust in financial advisers with high expertise and are more likely to use their services (Zhang *et al.*, 2021).

4. Conclusion, research implications and call to action

Customers generally perform a variety of roles during service encounters. They partake in the delivery of the service they purchase for themselves (Bitner *et al.*, 1997). Additionally, customers may directly or indirectly assist other customers in transacting with a service provider by fulfilling the role of fellow customer helpers, gatekeepers or members of the fellow customer helpers' support networks (Van Tonder and Saunders, 2025). Consequently, this viewpoint contributes to the conversation by denoting that value co-creation in a service ecosystem may be disrupted when some actors, such as gatekeepers and fellow customer helpers' support networks, engage in knowledge-hiding practices. As further explained in this viewpoint, knowledge-hiding practices may not lead to complete service failures. Given the adaptive nature of actors in a system (Thompson-Whiteside *et al.*, 2023), fellow customer helpers may simply reach out to other actors outside the system for assistance. New service ecosystems may be formed and could involve novel contributions from new (and perhaps more effective) actors in the system, including different online financial communities, other neighbours or colleagues at work, as well as financial service personnel or the bank's AI technology.

Customer helpers' potential adaptive behaviours may have serious implications for bank marketing. In an interconnected environment and when customer helpers reach out to the broader marketing environment for assistance, customer experiences could be shaped by the contributions of many actors within multiple service ecosystems (Story *et al.*, 2020). Beyond the dyadic relationship between bank providers and their customers, multiple actors across different service ecosystems could, directly and indirectly, influence the perceptions and behaviours of customers having to make financial decisions. Subsequently, a new research agenda is called for that will allow for a greater understanding of "markets as complex adaptive systems" (Vargo *et al.*, 2023, p. 3) within the banking environment. Engagement in multi-actor settings may be demanding (Danatzis *et al.*, 2021) and it is critical to understand more about the needs and behaviour of fellow customer helpers who may need to serve in more than one service ecosystem in the banking environment. Knowledge is required of what would motivate fellow customer helpers to embrace change and not to accept the status quo. Moreover, insight is needed into the actions required that will better equip fellow customer helpers in seizing available opportunities within multiple service ecosystems.

Further exploration of this agenda could contribute to a better understanding of customer-to-customer interactions in the banking environment. Subsequently, future research may want to commence with focus groups and panel interviews that could aid in validating the opinions presented in this viewpoint and guide further research on the topic. Additionally, quantitative research could provide a broadened perspective on the underlying reasons why gatekeepers and customer helpers' support networks engage in knowledge-hiding behaviours and the subsequent adaptive behaviours of customer helpers that may follow.

However, in the long run, the onus is on bank providers to decide to what extent they would want to walk the extra mile and capitalise on the many value co-creation opportunities within their service ecosystems. Strategic interventions may be needed to further strengthen relationships within newly formed service ecosystems and to improve resource integration.

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