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B2B Customer Solutions: How Do Suppliers Provide Support For the Lack of Customer Readiness in the Co-creation Process?

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History Published Online: December 2024</p> <p>Keywords B2B customer solutions Value co-creation Customer readiness Arab markets ICT sector</p> <p>JEL Codes: D12, L22 & M10</p> <p>Corresponding Author Email: s.hamadneh@ju.edu.jo</p>	<p>Extant conceptualisation of business-to-business (B2B) customer solutions depicts that customer and the supplier as equal parties in their readiness and ability to co-create value in solutions activities. The study draws on the co-creation phases of B2B customer solutions to explore how suppliers provide support for better co-creation in low customer readiness markets [LCRMs]. This research adopts an interpretive perspective and conducts 44 in-depth interviews with customers and suppliers of technology-based solutions originated in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector in Jordan. The findings show four distinct, but complementary roles are performed by the suppliers in the ICT sector to compensate for the lack of customer readiness to co-create solutions value. This study develops the co-creation theory through identifying the supplier's role in a business context where the customer and provider are perceived unequally in the co-creation.</p>

1. INTRODUCTION

Value co-creation proposes that both the customer and supplier need to combine and integrate their resources and processes to create customer value-in-use (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Saha et al. 2022). When accomplished, this customer and supplier collaboration fulfils a fundamental marketing objective: superior value provision (Grönroos and Voima, 2013). The context of B2B solutions markets, whereby the supplier offers a combination of an integrated goods and services to address a specific customer need or a problem (e.g., Sawhney, 2006; Epp and Price, 2011), serves as an excellent business settings to demonstrate how suppliers and customers work closely, perform their roles and integrate their resources to create customer value in-use (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Jaakkola and Hakanen, 2013). Macdonald et al. (2016, p.114) define a customer solution as “the combining of supplier and customer processes and resources through a joint resource integration process to create collective and individual value in use, which is monitored and optimized through value auditing process”. Recently, there has been a growing interest among scholars to elaborate upon the joint resource integration process embedded in developing and implementing customer solutions (e.g., Tuli et al., 2007; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016). These studies propose a set of customer and supplier joint activities which has become widely known as value co-creation phases of customer solutions. In each phase, customers and providers are required to contribute in their resources and perform their roles to achieve effective solution implementation. While this research has provided valuable contributions toward understanding the collaborative process embedded in solutions exchanges, it draws conclusions from high customer readiness markets [HCRMs) where customers are always able to operate within solutions markets by applying their resources and performing their roles throughout solutions value co-creation phases. Storbacka and Pennanen (2014: p123) defined high customer readiness markets: “Markets with high readiness are characterized by customers’ ability to operate within the market: customers know how to obtain needed information about the actors in the market, are able to conduct the needed transactions, and are able to use the offering they purchase in their own processes”.

Against this backdrop, there seems to be consensus among scholars that customers may not necessarily be ready to perform their roles and integrate their resources in the co-creation. For instance, Kowalkowski (2011) posits that customers' ability to actively operate within solutions markets and their willingness to adopt value-in-use perspective (e.g., performance outcomes) rather than value-in-exchange (e.g., offering price) depends largely on their readiness. Also, it has been argued that customers may not necessarily possess the ability to apply their resources and engage effectively in the co-creation (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012). This suggests in some markets; customers may have low customer readiness to operate within solutions markets which may serve as barrier to achieve effective value co-creation process. Therefore, it can be argued that suppliers in such markets need to perform additional roles to ensure a better co-creation support through influencing customers' resources, processes and value-in-use (Kowalkowski, 2011; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Grönroos and Voima, 2013). Nevertheless, research on how suppliers compensate for lack of customer readiness throughout solutions co-creation phases remains scarce in the current solutions marketing research. Hence, it can be argued that studying such low customer readiness markets offers an opportunity for theory development in the solutions field; given that there is a consensus among authors that achieving successful value co-creation can be difficult if customers lack the ability and willingness to apply and integrate their resources in the co-creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Tuli et al., 2007; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; DeLeon and Chatterjee, 2017).

To some up this introductory, The study proposes that extending b2b solutions marketing research in low customer readiness markets [LCRMs] may offer new insights into the investigated phenomenon and new or augmented theoretical foundations (Johns, 2006) and "could validate, diversify, and enrich existing research with western origins" (Kowalkowski et al., 2017). Managerially, the study should offer important guidelines for solutions providers operating in low customer readiness markets. To that end, the present study aims to empirically answer the following research question: What influence, if any, does low customer readiness in solutions markets have on the role of the provider in the solutions value co-creation process?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Value co-creation is defined as the joint integration process of the supplier and the customer processes, resources and practices (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). Extant conceptualisation of customer solutions demonstrates the joint resource integration process through a set of value co-creation phases that describe the creation and implementation of a solution. In this process, the customer firm co-creates value by integrating and applying their resources (e.g., knowledge and skills), processes and practices to manage its business and its relationships with their solutions providers. Extant research agrees that achieving effective solution co-creation and solutions implementation depends largely on customer readiness and ability to apply and integrate their resources during the co-creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Kowalkowski, 2011; Macdonald et al., 2016). Storbacka and Pennanen (2014, p123) defined high customer readiness markets: "Markets with high readiness are characterized by customers' ability to operate within the market: customers know how to obtain needed information about the actors in the market, are able to conduct the needed transactions, and are able to use the offering they purchase in their own processes".

The customer solutions literature identifies some customer criteria that reflect their readiness to effectively apply their resources and perform their roles in the co-creation process. These criteria appear to reflect customer readiness across different phases of the solution co-creation. For instance, at the early co-creation phase, customers enable the co-creation by drawing on their operant resources (e.g., knowledge on their business contexts and operations) to recognise their problem and define the reason that prompts them to engage with a solution provider for a certain solution (Petri and Jacob, 2016). In addition, high customer readiness implies that customers are willing to adopt value in-use (e.g., performance outcomes) when engaging with solutions providers instead of value in-exchange (e.g., merely product features and offering price) (Bonnemeier, Burianek and Reichwald, 2010; Kowalkowski, 2011; Windler et al., 2016). Moving to the customer requirements definition phase, high customer readiness implies that customers can perform their roles during the co-creation through planning and organising their resources (e.g., schedule, budget and solution objectives) and share accurate and critical information with their suppliers in order to help them to formulate the best solution offering that fits with their business (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). Finally, at the deployment phase, high customer readiness reflects customers' ability to adopt the solution into their business process and capture the value-in-use (Tuli et al., 2007).

An assumption can be extracted from the current solutions research is that customers are always characterised with high solutions readiness and able to apply and integrate their resources and perform their roles in the co-creation.

However, the same literature recognises that customers may not always have the ability to operate effectively and perform their roles in the co-creation (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). For example, at the early phase of solutions-co-creation, customers may emphasise a short-term objective (value in-exchange) to the extent such focus limits their ability to visualise customer value-in-use and solutions outcomes. This serves as a barrier for the solution provider who seeks to craft offerings that emphasises the customer's value in-use (Kowalkowski, 2011). Another important driver which may weaken customer readiness to operate within solutions markets and limit their ability to draw on their knowledge and skills is lack of customer expertise. Tuli et al.'s qualitative data support this notion that if the customer is inexperienced in a certain offerings, they may lack to operant resources (knowledge and skills) that they need to draw on in the resource integration process and therefore such customers may not be able to offer information and guidance about its operation to a supplier. Such examples of potential customer lack of readiness with solutions markets suggest that providers may need to engage in some activities and perform some additional roles to facilitate customer value creation process. As argued by Grönroos and Voima (2013, p.140) "Through its actions, the service provider simultaneously can influence the customer's value creation process". However, this statement remains largely theoretical and require further investigation into how suppliers compensate for lack of customer readiness within solutions markets.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Sample Selection

This study adopts inductive approach (Myers, 2009) to develop a better understanding of the supplier's role in supporting customer value creation process in LCRMs. Indeed, this approach has been seen as suitable for capturing complex insights and meanings embedded in co-creation activities embedded in solutions exchange co-creation activities and interactions (Tronvoll et al., 2011). The study specifically investigates value co-creation activities embedded in buying and selling solution offerings originated in the information and communication technology sector (ICT). This sector has been chosen for two reasons. First, it has been argued that this sector serves a suitable customer solution context as suppliers integrate their products and services including hardware, software and its associated services in customised solutions (DeLeon and Chatterjee, 2017). Secondly, Miles et al., (1995) reported that solutions originated in this sector tend to have high complexity where advanced technical and technology based knowledge is required. This means that customers may lack expertise in buying such solutions as argued by Tuli and colleagues (2007), limiting their readiness to articulate their solutions requirements to their solution providers.

With this in mind, Jordan as an example of an Arabian country in the Middle East was selected to answer the research question. Jordan is set out to be a suitable context given that the country is considered to be low to middle income country (Al-Jaghoub, and Westrup, 2003). This predicts that business customers may have a low purchasing power which may affect their value orientations when approaching their suppliers. Indeed, the Jordanian ICT sector has is considered one of the most developed and robust in the region (Oxford Business Group, 2015). In order to answer the research questions of this study, a purposeful sampling approach (Patton, 1990) was adopted to recruit managers of supplier and customer firms who can offer rich information about the investigated phenomenon. This approach allows for flexibility during the research process (Coyne, 1997), allowing researchers to interview relevant people from customer and supplier firms who engaged in solution co-creation activities and were involved at various phase of the customer solution process. Overall, accessing to these participants who engaged in solutions exchange is vital to enhance the overall validity of this study (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

In the initial data collection phase, only the leading ICT technology-based solutions providers in the Jordanian ICT sector were targeted. The selected providers offer a wide range of technology-based solutions, that combine tangible components such as servers embedded in a network infrastructure with intangible elements such as software and cloud-based solutions and associated services (see table I). The individuals recruited for the study at providers' firms held various functional roles, and worked in diverse departments and at varying levels of hierarchy. Providers' interviewees had an average of 16 years of solutions experience. Most provider interviewees had worked serving both regional and global markets; enabling respondents to draw on experience that offered comparative insight into customer readiness. In order to generate interviews with customer firms and probe their view about their roles in the value co-creation phases, snowball sampling (Bernard, and Ryan, 2009) was adopted where providers' were asked at each interview to provide the researchers with a sample of their different customer's segments who have recently purchased a solutions offering. Customer interviewees had an average of 16.2 years of experience in their area. However, as the research progressed it became clear that most customers lacked experience in the solutions they had purchased as these solutions were new and not related to their core business processes.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The Data were collected in the form of 44 in depth interviews. Specifically, 28 interviews were conducted with managers from 17 solutions providers (identified with the prefix SP) firms (see table I) all involved in the operation, marketing, development, and deployment of solutions. In addition, 16 interviews conducted with customers

(identified with the prefix C) at 14 firms (see **Error! Reference source not found.**) involved in decision-making, deployment, purchasing and/or using solutions. Semi-structured interviews were adopted as being most likely to yield new insights during the conversation (Myers and Newman, 2007). In addition, through the offer of complete confidentiality, participants were encouraged to be analytical and critical in expressing their views in order to identify new and profound business issues. The interview questions were primarily based on the theoretical framework of customer and provider processes and roles in the co-creation activities (e.g., Payne et al., 2008; Grönroos and Voima, 2013) while utilising the current well known customer solution process (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007) as a fundamental guide of the data collection and analysis process.

Most interviews were conducted in the Arabic language to suit participants since using participants' language "is crucial to put the interviewee at ease and elicit authentic response" (Welch and Piekkari, 2006, p.420). In addition, using the Arabic language helped participants feel comfortable when expressing authentic experiences and, also, this approach enabled the researchers to establish a good rapport with interviewees (Tsang, 1998; Welch and Piekkari, 2006). However, the interview with SP8 was conducted in the English language as per the manager's preference. The researchers felt that this manager chose the English language due to his long work experience in the USA market. The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes on average, and were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and only then translated into English.

Table I. Solution provider interviewee characteristics

Supplier number	Technology type/based solutions	Interviewee's position	Years of exp.	No. of employees	Company age in Jordanian market	Market served
SP1	Software solutions such as ERP and gas stations solutions;	Chief Executive Officer (Owner)	18	65	17	Jordan and the Middle East
SP2	Solutions such as educational management software	Vice President/ Business Development	18	230	27	Jordan, Middle East, USA
SP3*	HR Software solutions	Marketing Manager	16	200	14	Jordan and Middle East
		Sales Manager	13			
SP4	SharePoint solutions and Business intelligence	Projects Director	15	30	8	Jordan and Gulf
SP5**	Telecom service solutions	Pre-Sale Manager	15	2000	17	Jordan and global market
		Key Account Manger	22			
		SMEs Sales Team Leader	16			
SP6***	IT solutions including hardware and software	Pre-Sale Manager	16	300	26	Jordan and MENA Region
		Sales Manager	15			
		Marketing Manager	12			
	Follow up interview	Sales Manager	15			

SP7	IT Infrastructure and WIFI solutions;	Managing Director / Co-founder	15	37	16	Jordan and Middle East	
SP8	Software solutions for the Banking Industry	Group Chairman and CEO	25	50	24	Jordan and Global Market	
SP9**	Software solutions for several industries	General Manager/ Co-founder	22	200	17	Jordan, Middle East, and Europe	
		Sales and Business Development Director	10				
SP9**		Sales and Business Development Manager	8	100	14	Jordan and Middle East	
		Corporate Sales Manager	17				
SP10	Telecom service solutions	Corporate Sales Manager	17	0	100	14	Jordan and Middle East
SP11	Network and software solutions for several industries	Development Manager	10	65	12	Jordan	
SP12	Digital marketing and software solutions;	Managing Director	22	60	14	Jordan	
SP13*	Managing customer experience and CRM software solutions	Regional Sales Manager	10	150	15	Jordan and Middle East	
		Business Development Manger	12				
SP14	Telecom business solutions	Marketing Director	20	500	17	Jordan and Middle East	
SP15*	Telecom business solutions	Commercial Director	16	300	7	Jordan and MENA	
		Business Development Manager	21				
SP16	Telecom and contact center solutions	Marketing Team Leader	16	88	23	Jordan and Middle East	
SP17*	Records management software solutions	Sales Account Manager	14	122	22	Jordan and MENA	
		Sales Account Manager	15				

* Two interviews, ** Three interviews, *** Four interviews

Nvivo 11 software was used to support the analysis by organising the coding and the categorization process. Utilising this software allowed the researcher to search and retrieve materials needed throughout the analysis process. Also, the software enabled the researcher to report from the data and to visualise the relationships among various themes (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). Given that core existing theoretical constructs of solutions conceptualisation were available from the literature review section, template analysis technique was used to analyse the data. Template analysis is a style of thematic analysis which combines a thorough structure in analysing data with the flexibility to fit the analysis to the need of a particular study (King, 2012). A template has certain themes and each theme includes a list of codes identified in the textual data. While some of these themes are defined as priori themes, "the possibility [is] always considered that any a priori theme may need to be redefined or discarded" (King, 2012, p.430). During the course of analysis, additional codes and themes pertinent to co-creation activities were added to the template.

Table II. Customer interviewee characteristics

Customer number	Solution (s) purchased	Interviewee's position	Years of experience	Number of employees
C1*	Pharmaceutical software system solution	IT Manager	10	450
		Marketing Manager	15	
C2*	ERP software solution	GM/Partner	22	180
		IT Manager	14	
C3	ERP software solution and IP camera security solution	IT Manager	14	150
C4	Business intelligence and web solutions	Projects Manager	18	20
C5	Considering buying Business Intelligence Software solution	Financial Manger	12	170
C6	SharePoint software	Go to Market Leader	15	2500
C7	Human resource software solution	Human Resources System Manager	17	4200
C8	ERP and financial software solution	Financial Manager	15	500
C9	Core banking software solution	IT Manager	20	2000

C10	Customer relationship management software solution	Marketing Manager	18	750
C11	Telecom business solution	IT manger	19	45
C12	Workforce optimisation software	Senior Human Resource Officer	18	800
C13	Digitised document management system	Project Manger	12	62
C14	Supply chain management software	Purchasing Manager	18	160

* Two interviews

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Low customer readiness and the supplier's role at the early co-creation

The research provided rich information on some customers' characteristics that limit their readiness to effectively operate within technology-based solutions market. At the early co-creation phase, while solutions providers focus on how the solution will add value to the customer firm in the long term (value in-use), customers would tend to adopt a short term orientation by focusing on value in-exchange;

"The Jordanian market represents a huge challenge for us, it is very price sensitive and customers emphasise what they are going to pay today rather than of what solutions can do in the long term. They do not plan effectively about this issue". (SP8)

A key characteristic of the customer in high solution readiness markets is considering the trade-off between the solution price and value achieved from the solution during use. However, if the customer focuses solely on the price at the point of purchase, the supplier will find it difficult to emphasise the value that the customer will capture when using the solution. This discrepancy of the value orientations between suppliers and customers in this market leads to value conflict;

"We talk about how our solutions will make their business secure and they talk about price. It is typical to break the cost down to the customer so we tell them [Customers] the cost is this amount of money and my profit is this percentage, they pressure us to reduce the price which ultimately is going to shrink our profit. However, there is no provider that can work for only a two percent profit from a solution, this is really frustrating". (SP7)

In the meantime, the solution intangibility associated with software solutions overlaps with Jordanian customers' focus on value-in-exchange and thus reducing customers' willingness to invest in this type of solutions and thus approaching their suppliers in this market. The business development manager of SP 2 commented on this:

"The worst thing about software solutions is its intangibility. You are actually handing over a running application. But the mentality here in Jordan is that this should not cost a lot of money. They do not understand how much effort you have put forward to develop this software". (SP2)

Customer 2 who purchased an ERP software solution agrees with the above quote and stated: "I took us a lot of time before we bought our software because we realised it is going to cost us a lot of money and we were unsure if it was worth it or not. Many of my friends ask me today why you paid a lot of money to buy this software". (C2)

Therefore, solutions providers in Jordan were found to lead the early value co-creation activities in this market by engaging in various activities to increase customer readiness. Providers engaged in different customer education activities to increase customer knowledge and skills (operant resources) of the value of software solutions:

“Many customers know that there is point of sales or [must-have] software solutions. However, they do not know about the Business Intelligence (BI) software solution, so they assume that their business is going on, not knowing that their business process could be improved with BI solution. We have to approach them and educate them”. (SP4)

Suppliers' role associated with customer education can be termed as solutions knowledge provider. Customers also find this role important as it illuminate their knowledge of certain solutions that can improve their business processes and reducing their costs. Therefore, the majority of the interviewed customers welcomed the role of solution knowledge provider;

“It would be great if suppliers would do more sharing [of their] experience, their market knowledge, approach and educate” (C4).

More importantly, this role is crucial because Jordanian business customers may not necessarily value technology-based offerings such as software solutions. In the words of an IT manager of a customer firm:

“..., unfortunately, technology infrastructure and telecommunication solutions are the last thing owners and top management think about when running their business and allocating budget, sometimes we don't value IT solutions” (C1)

Another important market development activity was also performed by the supplier is demonstrating the potential value of technology-based offering. This role can be termed as value demonstrator. Providers argued that this role is of particular importance given that Jordanian buyers were largely driven by solution price (value-in-exchange) when negotiating solutions deal:

“A lot of the times we actually put calculations for the customer on how before our solutions, what are the losses they are doing, and we actually ask them for numbers, we ask them how much you spend on this and this, and we come up with a formula of how much money he is losing. If he implements this solution, how much he would be saving, and that saving better be more than the price of the solution. So eventually, this increment is what makes them decide to buy a solution”. (SP8).

4.2 Low customer readiness and the provider role at the requirement definition

At the requirement definition phase, solutions customers are required to draw on their information of their needs and processes to offer operational guidance to providers to help them crafting the best solution offering. However, as the research developed, it became clear that lack of customer expertise in technology-based solutions influences their ability in identifying their solution objectives and scope their solution requirements. As a result, inexperienced customers were unable to offer adequate operational counselling on their business needs and processes to their solutions providers:

“Usually, any project will have a requirement from the customer side; we tell them what we need such as IPs and a lot of other technical things. However, inexperienced customers are unable to provide us with what we need due to the lack of expertise. As a result, we will do our part as well as theirs on their behalf. This affects the project plan and slows down the process.” (SP7).

Given that most of solutions offered by suppliers target a non-core business customer needs, lack of customer expertise in buying technology-based offerings posed a challenge for the customer to articulate their solutions requirements. This serves as barrier for the customer to have a clear plan of their solution resources including, budget, time-schedule and solutions objectives. Therefore, solutions providers' role continues to help customers at articulating their needs:

“[...] when we dig deeply into his business process we realise that they do not need 123 as they thought but they need A, B and C” (SP1), documenting their requirements “We believe that our role is to direct these customers to document their requirements and write proper RFPs”

(SP9) and planning their financial resources “what we do actually is we help customers to plan their solution budgets and how to spread its cost over a number of years” (SP11).

Providers' role at the requirement definition phase to compensate for lack of customer readiness to apply and integrate their resources effectively can be termed as the role of customer resources organiser.

It is typical in the resources integration process that customers are expected to share accurate information about their resources and process to help providers propose the optimal solution that fits with their business needs. Surprisingly, however, a number of Jordanian providers expressed concerns about the accuracy of information given to them by customer firms during the co-creation process;

"Customers may be dishonest about their expectations from the solution, who their stakeholders are and who is the person in charge to sign. We may not get this directly" (SP15).

Similarly, S2 compares the accuracy of information shared by their Jordanian and non-Jordanian clients while developing and implementing teaching solutions;

"We find international corporations operating in Jordan are straightforward about their key performance indicators (KPIs) and the contractual relationship. In Jordan, possibly due to the culture, the client's mentality is not necessarily like that. The customer's objective from the solution might be hidden, sometimes the client may say that his concern is the efficiency of that solution, but it turns out that his concern [is] making profits. This is a real challenge". (SP2)

The previous quotes suggest that such practice associated with customers' being indirect in offering accurate information can cause negative value co-creation experiences perceived by the provider and may ultimately influence solutions effectiveness. More importantly, they also suggest that cultural aspects may also influence solutions customer readiness. According to S2 as stated above, Jordanian [Arabian] culture associated with indirectness in communication may reduce their readiness to effectively perform their role and share accurate information in a solution relationship.

4.3 Low customer readiness and the provider's role at the solution deployment phase

Finally, at the implementation phase, lack of customer readiness was perceived as customers' inability to transform the potential value of the solution to value-in-use. This is due to lack of customer users' adoption to technology-based offerings. All provider and customer interviews indicated that customer users were reluctant to adopt using the implemented solutions as they thought it would bring upheaval to the way they perform their process or would replace them. At 4,200 employees, C7 reported that their users served as barriers in adopting their HRM software solution:

"Unfortunately, some of the users have the mentality that if we buy this solution, it would replace them, it took us a long time to train, convince and implement the solution". (C7)

Similarly, C1 described the reaction of their pharmacists when they were asked to adopt the new solution into their business processes;

"In the beginning our pharmacists were against implementing the new pharmaceutical system. It was like the new pharmaceutical system was going to fail" (C1). This, however, was found to jeopardise customer value-in-use "this affects the customers' ability to obtain the maximum value of the software" (SP17).

While aiming to unravel how Jordanian suppliers attempted to cope with customers' inability to utilise and adopt value in-use effectively, it appeared many suppliers adopted the role of "value in-use enabler". This role refers to a set of techniques and activities that are undertaken by solutions providers to increase customer users' adoption and effectively utilising value in-use. For instance, providers can increase customers solution adoption if they develop a user-friendly technology-based solution that will enhance users' willingness to use the solution,

"[...] the most important task is to find an easy solution that customers will find easy to use and adopt". (SP5).

From the customer perspective, the role of value-in-use enabler also encompasses providers' ability to convince users to adopt the solution and reduce their perceived risk;

"The supplier role is to teach users that the solution is going to make their life easy and facilitate their tasks not to replace them". (C13).

A solutions development manager of a supplier firm agrees with the previous quote and emphasised the value of sharing experiences from more mature solutions markets to increase customer solution adoption;

“it is important to present and share how developed countries and international organisations benefited from technology-based solutions”.(SP9)

In summary, this section presented and analysed how solutions providers provide support for better co-creation and influence the customer processes and resources to increase their readiness in this market. The previous analysis generated four distinct, but complementary roles performed by the Jordanian suppliers to support customers' limitations that may hinder them from performing their roles in the co-creation process. These roles are: solution knowledge provider, value demonstrator, customer resources organiser and value in-use enabler respectively (see table III below).

Table III. Providers' roles to increase customer readiness to operate and co-create value within the Jordanian ICT solution market as emerged from analysis

Value co-creation phases of customer solution	Proposed rules adopted by solutions providers	Impact of performed role on customers' resources and processes during the co-creation process
Early co-creation activities	Solution knowledge provider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increases customers' knowledge and skills about technology-based solutions. - Identifying the areas where customers may have problems or can improve their business process. - Increases customers' willingness to buy and engage with a solution provider.
	Value demonstrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shifting the customer focus from value-in-exchange approach (e.g., solution price) to performance outcomes. - Demonstrating the functional and economic value of the solution.
Requirements Definition	Customer resources organiser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scoping and defining customers' specific requirements. - Helping and directing customers at writing an RFP document. - Helping customers to plan their solutions budget effectively.
Deployment and Post-deployment	Value in-use enabler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring customers adopt the solution into their business process. - Ensuring that customers utilise solution value in-use effectively.

5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this article is to investigate the impact of low customer readiness on the role of provider in providing support for better co-creation in a customer solution context. Storbacka and Pennanen (2014: p123) defined high customer readiness markets: "Markets with high readiness are characterized by customers' ability to operate within the market: customers know how to obtain needed information about the actors in the market, are able to conduct the needed transactions, and are able to use the offering they purchase in their own processes". Prior research draws conclusions from HCRMs where customers are always able to operate within solutions markets by applying their resources and performing their roles throughout solutions value co-creation phases (e.g., Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016). This study adopted a unique customer solution context, where customers had various limitations throughout solution co-creation phases to understand how suppliers provide better support for the co-creation to influence the customer's processes and resources (Kowalkowski, 2011; Grönroos and Voima, 2013) and therefore increase their readiness to operate within solutions markets.

Findings from studying the ICT solutions sector in Jordan identified various reasons why business customers lacked readiness to effectively operate within this solution market and co-create value throughout solution co-creation phases defined in the previous literature. First, at the early phase of solution co-creation, business customers in this particular market were found to possess limited operant resources (skills, knowledge) of technology-based solutions. This result may be explained by the fact that most solutions exchanged address a non-core customer business needs and also due to the high technical innovation encompassed in technology-based solutions (Miles et al., 1995). Furthermore, customers' emphasis on short-term benefits (e.g. solution price) posed a challenge on the provider to

craft the best offerings and emphasise solution value-in-use. This finding may be explained by the fact that Jordan is a low to middle-income country that has limited natural resources and thus budgets set by customers firms for such solutions are relatively constricted. What also increases the challenge for any supplier in this particular market is the offering intangibility associated with software solutions which also reduces customers' willingness to appreciate providers' resources (time, money) invested in developing these solutions. Therefore, In contrast to western findings in HCRMs (e.g., Petri and Jacob, 2016) that suggest customers lead co-creation activities by identifying their solution objectives and problems which prompts them to approach a solution provider, providers in this LCRM had first to go proactively and develop the ICT sector solution market by adopting the role of solution knowledge provider and value potential demonstrator. The role of solutions knowledge provider involves engaging in customer educational activities (Bell and Eisingerich, 2008) where the supplier provides the customer with the skill and ability to utilise information about a solution offering. Subsequently, suppliers in this market complemented this role by adopting the role of value potential demonstrator where they prove the economic (e.g., TCO) and functional value obtained from the solution during use. Kowalkowski (2011) argued that if the customer's main focus on the solution price, the provider may need to persuade the customer to shift their focus on the offering outcomes. Hence, the role of value potential demonstrator is vital as it provides customers with evidence of the software's value and reduce the vagueness derived from the intangibility element associated with offering software solutions.

Moving to the customer requirements definition, lack of customer readiness manifested in this market through customers inability in integrating their resources effectively with their solutions providers. Particularly, customers lacked a proper planning concerning their resources such as solution objectives, budgets and schedule. Payne et al. (2008) argued in this situation, the supplier can influence the customer's process in a way that make customer able to utilise their resources more efficiently and effectively. Hence, the study suggests that providers can play the role of customer resources organisers by helping the customer at managing and utilising their resources effectively. This role involved helping customers and documenting their solution scope and providing them with necessary skills to manage the solution project such as planning their solution budgets. However, adopting this role was shown to be challenging as data provided evidence where Jordanian customers may not necessarily be willing to share direct and explicit information of their resources during the co-creation. This finding was unexpected in a solution context where offering indirect and confusing operational counselling to the provider may lead to solutions failure (Tuli et al., 2007). The fact that indirectness is a feature of an Arab communication style as defined in earlier literature (Hall, 1966; Zaharna, 1995) may influence to some extent customers' willingness to share explicit information about internal resources and process and therefore making them less ready to effectively fulfil their roles in the co-creation.

Finally, at the solution deployment process, it has been argued that it is the customer's role to transform potential value to value in-use (Grönroos and Voima, 2013). However, the findings of this study provides empirical evidence where Jordanian customer users showed reluctance to adopt technology-based offering into their business processes. Specifically, customer users had negative assumption about these solutions thinking it would bring upheaval to their ordinary way of performing activities. This can be related to the fact Arabian people are less likely to adopt new technological offerings as they bring more uncertainty and anxiety about the future (Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, solutions providers played the role of value-in-use enabler which involves implementing a user-friendly based solutions and reassuring customer users that these solutions will ease their life to increase the likelihood of solution adoption and therefore utilising value-in-use effectively. This role is important as extant research suggests if customers fail to adopt providers' offerings, providers and customers may experience ineffective solutions implementation and solutions failure (Tuli et al., 2007; Alshurideh et al., 2023a; Alquqa et al., 2024).

6. CONCLUSION

This study is among the first empirically informed studies to have investigated B2B solution co-creation in a LCRM. In terms of the theoretical contribution, the study responds to calls for empirical studies on supplier and customers roles within the co-creation (Payne et al., 2008; Grönroos and Voima, 2013) and extending customer solutions research into low customer readiness markets (Tuli et al., 2007; Kowalkowski, 2011). Specifically, the research applied the well-known value co-creation phases of customer solutions (e.g., Tuli et al., 2007; Al-Dmour et al., 2023) to identify the supplier's role in providing support for better co-creation in a market where customers had various limitations that hampered them from effectively co-create value. The findings from a LCRM offer a new perspective of how customers and providers can be perceived as unequal partners in the co-creation. Jordanian suppliers were found to be more dominators than their customers in managing the co-creation activities by performing additional roles to compensate for lack of customer readiness. Jordanian customers appeared not to be ready for adopting the principles of the S-D logic in the ICT sector. Their lack of readiness stems not only from their focus on solution price (value in-exchange) or lack of operant resources (skills and knowledge) but also sometimes derived from some culturally based assumptions such as being indirect in communication (e.g., resources ambiguity). Therefore, solutions providers adopted four distinct but complementary roles to compensate for lack of their customer readiness throughout the solution co-creation phases (Al Ketbi & Alshurideh, 2022; Alshurideh et al., 2023b). Overall. The four proposed roles performed by the suppliers in this LCRM responds to the research call of the need to understand how suppliers influence the customer's value creation processes (Payne et al., 2008; Grönroos and Voima, 2013; Alwan & Alshurideh, 2022; Al-Faouri et al., 2023).

For managers working in the ICT solutions sector, data show that customers who buy technology-based solutions like intangible software might not have the skills to predict how those solutions might be beneficial in the long term (Amponsah, 2024; Zahra, 2024). Suppliers therefore should focus their early activities on informing the customer of these solutions and demonstrating its value to create solutions leads (Alshurideh, 2024; Ozturk, 2024; Sukkari, 2024).

As any study, this research has some limitations which can drive future research. First, the study has focused only on customer readiness when buying and using solutions originated in the ICT solutions sector. However, ICT solutions are high-tech which may limit customers' ability to define their solution scope. Hence, the four distinct roles performed by the provider to support the customer value creation process in the ICT solutions sector, may not be applicable in other solutions sectors and, hence, further research is needed to understand how different types of solutions manifest in different roles in the co-creation phases. Another promising area for research is examining the influence of other social and cultural contexts on co-creation activities.

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