ScotRail and Adopt A Station: The indirect benefits of community involvement in public transport spaces.

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In recent years the customer role has evolved from a passive recipient of services to a proactive cocreator in the activities of an organisation[1]. Customers are increasingly viewed as a resource[2] with firms increasing collaboration to increase benefits to both parties. Cocreation activity can offer improved predictability and quality in the exchange for the firm[3] and feelings of self-efficacy, enjoyment and psychological benefits for customers[4]. Research exploring cocreation focuses mainly on direct relationships between a firm and it's customers and the benefits accrued therein. Little attention has explored the extent to which collaborative activities might have an indirect effect on parties not directly involved in the process. This paper is based on a doctoral study which measured how value cocreation within a public transport setting can offer both direct and indirect benefits to users.

> *"community cocreation is a crucial component in ensuring a satisfactory experience for rail users"*

The study was conducted using a case study of 'Adopt A Station', a community engagement scheme administered by ScotRail, a scheme with its roots in England and Wales and the community rail movement in the 1990s and part of ScotRail's franchise commitment. The results of the case study informed a multi-level study using hierarchical linear modelling (HLM) to explore how station level attributes (level 2) might impact on customers (level 1). The scheme allows communities to utilize unused space within their local railway station in order to provide services or facility improvements to benefit the community. The scheme was introduced in 2005 and to date over 110 stations (from a total of 346) have been adopted with schemes including gardening, charity bookshops and community meeting spaces. The scheme provides an opportunity to empirically test the extent to which co-creating with smaller groups of passionate individuals can positively impact on a wider group of customers who potentially have little interest in co-creating with the firm beyond that needed to enable their day to day travel.

The case study element consisted of station visits, interviews with adopters and staff from the ScotRail. A range of participants were interviewed with data supplemented by field notes, direct observation, photographs and other secondary data. The case study indicated that the success of the scheme was dependent on strong interaction and dialogue between ScotRail's external relations manager and Adopters resulting in a high level of trust and the swift resolution of problems. ScotRail cedes control to adopters allowing them a degree of empowerment over their activities resulting in strong feelings of ownership. For ScotRail adoption represents an opportunity to improve public perceptions of the firm and contribute to improvements in quality control. For the community improved environments and facilities are recognised and appreciated by the wider community.

Case study results suggest that passengers not directly involved may experience enhanced satisfaction derived from improved station

Gardening at Uddingston Station

Refurbished Exterior at Wemyss Bay

Bookshop at Pitlochry

environments and these may be related to perceptions of improved feelings of safety, general reductions of stress and increased enjoyment of the commute[5]. The involvement of the community by association could result in improved perceptions of the firm from passengers and influence future usage.

The multi-level model used in the research is shown in Figure 1 and indicates the constructs to be measured at both level 1 and level 2. The first stage of the multi-level study consisted of a commuter survey (a homogeneous sample with high travel frequency and predictable travel times). The survey used the suburban rail network around the south and west of Glasgow and 1381 surveys were collected at 58 stations (94.5% of respondents started their journey from the same station; 78.7% of the sample travelled at least 4 days a week). The second stage of the study used independent assessment of stations by 6 raters who graded each station on a range of items include aesthetic appeal, use of vacant facilities and the extent of customization. Other level 2 variables were based on data relating to passenger brand loyalty, station facilities (such as ticket office, toilet, waiting room etc), journey factors (e.g. average ticket price, travel time).

The results of this two level model are shown in table 1. These show that as the passenger level satisfaction is influenced by commuter stress, enjoyment and perceived safety. More importantly, the 2 level model indicated that satisfaction was significantly influenced by the level of cocreation at the station level. There were also highly significant effects for journey factors, station facilities and brand loyalty. Crucially though, the cocreation measures had the strongest positive effect on customer satisfaction with the station. The second model assessed the effect of station level variables on the satisfaction-word of mouth part of the model. The results indicate that at the passenger level word of mouth is strongly influenced by station satisfaction but no direct effect of cocreation on word of mouth. However, there would be an indirect effect given the direct effect of cocreation on satisfaction.

"public transport firms can therefore look to community engagement schemes as a strategic imperative"

Table 1 HLM Model Results

Predictor	Coefficient	t-ratio	*p*-value
Level 1 (dependent variable is Station Satisfaction)			
Commuter Stress	0.121	3.930	0.000
Commuter Enjoyment	0.126	3.921	0.000
Passenger Safety	0.224	7.623	0.000
Level 2 (dependent variable is the intercept at level 1)			
Cocreation Rating	0.248	3.764	0.001
Station Facilities	0.162	2.492	0.016
Brand Loyalty	0.222	5.131	0.000
Journey Variable	-0.254	-3.619	0.001
Predictor	**Coefficient**	t-ratio	p-value
Level 1 (dependent variable is Word of Mouth)			
Station Satisfaction (SS)	0.52	15.190	0.000

Customising the Station at North Berwick

The Adopt A Station scheme represents successful community level cocreation on a number of levels. Firstly, the firm harnesses local knowledge and passion of community actors to take ownership of the environment and make improvements that offer benefits for firm, community and a wider set of stakeholders. Secondly, adopters are empowered to customize the station outside of standard commercial boundaries according to the needs of the group and the community. Groups are legitimised and represent their community to the outside world. Crucially, Adopt A Station is not a traditional 'outreach' community programme but 'inreach' and as a result benefits are shared between the firm and adopters but also indirectly received by other passengers. The effect is superior to all the other elements that make up the commuting experience suggesting that community cocreation is a crucial component in ensuring a satisfactory experience for rail users in this context. Adopt A Station moves beyond altruistic forms community engagement by utilising community passion to enhance the value proposition of the firm.

The benefits of the scheme are not simply targeted corporate investments but emerge from the engagement of the community and the relationship between the firm and the adopters. The impact on commuters is not simply related to cosmetic evidence but may represent an attachment to the station and the community it represents; the greater the ownership of the station by the community, the greater the attachment from passengers. Within our 'big society' public transport firms can therefore look to community engagement schemes as a strategic imperative and offer improvements for multiple stakeholders.

References
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Figure 1 – Conceptual Model for HLM study