

The Evolution of Customer Engagement: From Listening to Co-Creation

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In today's fast-paced business landscape, customer engagement has evolved from the simple listening to an advanced model of co-creation. Companies across the globe are realizing the potential of involving their customers directly in the creation process, not only to enhance customer loyalty but also to innovate and stay competitive. This article explores the journey of customer engagement through the lens of 15 global and 10 Indian brands that have successfully implemented co-creation strategies.

Global Brands Leading the Way in Co-Creation

1. Lego (Denmark)

- Lego's "Lego Ideas" platform allows fans to submit their own designs for new Lego sets. The most popular designs, as voted by the community, are considered for production, giving fans a direct role in the creation of new products.

- Example: <https://www.lego.com/en-us/themes/lego-ideas>

- YouTube: To explore user-generated Lego designs, search "Lego Ideas" on YouTube.

2. Nike (USA)

- NikeiD enables customers to design their own shoes by selecting colors, materials, and even adding personalized text. This customization fosters a deeper connection between the brand and its customers.

- Example: <https://www.nike.com/nike-by-you>

- YouTube: To see examples of customized Nike shoes, search "NikeiD customization" on YouTube.

3. Starbucks (USA)

- Starbucks introduced "My Starbucks Idea," a platform where customers could submit and vote on ideas for new products, store layouts, and more. This platform helped Starbucks to innovate based on direct customer input.

- Example: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/micahsolomon/2015/05/14/how-starbucks-leveraged-customer-input/?sh=21f4e2fb55ae>

- YouTube: For discussions on Starbucks' customer engagement, search "My Starbucks Idea" on YouTube.

4. Heineken (Netherlands)

- Through its "Heineken Open Design Explorations" initiative, the company invited young designers to co-create a concept nightclub. This project allowed Heineken to engage with a creative community while fostering brand innovation.

- Example: <https://www.heineken.com/gb/en/our-products/heineken>

- YouTube: To view highlights of the design explorations, search "Heineken Open Design" on YouTube.

5. Threadless (USA)

- Threadless is a pioneer in crowdsourcing, allowing artists to submit designs for T-shirts that are then voted on by the community. The most popular designs are produced and sold, giving artists a platform and customers a say in the product lineup.

- Example: <https://www.threadless.com/make>

- YouTube: To learn more about the crowdsourcing model, search “Threadless story” on YouTube.

6. Coca-Cola (Global)

- Coca-Cola’s “Share a Coke” campaign allowed customers to personalize their Coke bottles with names or messages. This campaign engaged customers on a personal level and became a global phenomenon.

- Example: <https://www.coca-colacompany.com/news/share-a-coke-campaign>

- YouTube: To view the campaign’s impact, search “Share a Coke campaign” on YouTube.

7. PepsiCo (USA)

- PepsiCo’s “Do Us a Flavor” campaign invited customers to submit and vote on new chip flavors for Lay’s. The winning flavors were then produced and sold, directly reflecting consumer preferences.

- Example: <https://www.frito-lay.com/brands/lays/lays-do-us-a-flavor>

- YouTube: To see the flavor competition in action, search “Lay’s Do Us a Flavor” on YouTube.

8. Burberry (UK)

- Burberry’s “Art of the Trench” campaign involved customers sharing photos of themselves wearing Burberry trench coats. These photos were then featured on the brand’s website, integrating customer content into the brand’s narrative.

- Example: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/onmarketing/2012/11/29/how-burberry-became-the-leading-digital-luxury-brand/?sh=70c09a8d5684>

- YouTube: To view customer engagement with the campaign, search “Burberry Art of the Trench” on YouTube.

9. BMW (Germany)

- BMW’s “Co-Creation Lab” is a platform where customers can contribute ideas for new vehicle features and designs. The platform allows BMW to gather valuable insights directly from its user base.

- Example: <https://www.bmwgroup.com/en/innovation/co-creation.html>
- YouTube: To explore customer contributions, search “BMW Co-Creation Lab” on YouTube.

10. Dell (USA)

- Dell’s “IdeaStorm” platform invites customers to share ideas for new products and services. Many of the ideas suggested by customers have been implemented, reflecting the company’s commitment to co-creation.

- Example: <https://www.delltechnologies.com/en-us/blog/innovating-through-customer-driven-co-creation/>

- YouTube: To see how customer ideas shape Dell’s offerings, search “Dell IdeaStorm” on YouTube.

11. IKEA (Sweden)

- IKEA’s “Co-Create IKEA” platform encourages customers to share ideas for new products, provide feedback, and participate in the development of new designs. This collaboration helps IKEA stay in tune with customer needs.

- Example: https://www.ikea.com/ms/en_JP/campaigns/ikea-co-create/index.html

- YouTube: To see examples of customer involvement, search “IKEA Co-Creation” on YouTube.

12. Unilever (UK/Netherlands)

- Unilever’s “Foundry” initiative partners with startups and innovators to co-create new products and solutions. This collaborative effort allows Unilever to integrate fresh ideas and technologies into its portfolio.

- Example: <https://www.unilever.com/brands/foundry/>

- YouTube: To learn about Unilever’s innovation partnerships, search “Unilever Foundry” on YouTube.

13. Procter & Gamble (USA)

- P&G’s “Connect + Develop” program invites external innovators and consumers to contribute ideas for new products. This program has led to the development of numerous successful products.

- Example: <https://www.pgconnectdevelop.com/>

- YouTube: To see how the program works, search “P&G Connect + Develop” on YouTube.

14. General Electric (USA)

- GE's "Ecomagination Challenge" was a global call for innovation, where individuals and companies were invited to submit ideas for clean energy solutions. The best ideas received funding and development support.

- Example: <https://www.ge.com/reports/ecosystem/>

- YouTube: To see innovative ideas from the challenge, search "GE Ecomagination" on YouTube.

15. LEGO Ideas (Denmark)

- Lego's second entry into co-creation highlights the depth of its customer engagement strategy. The "Lego Ideas" platform invites fans to propose new Lego sets, vote on submissions, and potentially see their ideas become official products.

- Example: <https://ideas.lego.com/>

- YouTube: To explore fan-created designs, search "Lego Ideas" on YouTube.

Indian Brands Embracing Co-Creation

1. Amul

- Amul regularly crowdsources ideas for its famous topical ads from customers, reflecting the public's views on current events. This strategy keeps the brand relevant and deeply connected with its audience.

- Example: <https://amul.com/m/amul-hits>

- YouTube: To see some of the most popular crowd-sourced Amul ads, search "Amul ads" on YouTube.

2. Paper Boat

- Paper Boat involves customers in its storytelling process by inviting them to share their childhood memories. These stories inspire new product flavors and marketing campaigns, creating a nostalgic connection with consumers.

- Example: <https://www.paperboatdrinks.com/>

- YouTube: To view customer stories featured by the brand, search "Paper Boat memories" on YouTube.

3. Tata Motors

- Tata Motors launched the “Made of Great” campaign, which invited customers to share their stories of greatness, inspiring a sense of shared achievement and connection with the brand.

- Example: <https://www.tatamotors.com/>

- YouTube: To watch customer stories featured in the campaign, search “Tata Motors Made of Great” on YouTube.

4. Fabindia

- Fabindia engages with its customers through its community engagement initiatives, inviting them to contribute ideas and feedback on products and store layouts, ensuring the brand remains aligned with consumer preferences.

- Example: <https://www.fabindia.com/>

- YouTube: To see how Fabindia involves customers, search “Fabindia customer engagement” on YouTube.

5. Zomato (continued)

- Example: <https://www.zomato.com/blog>

- YouTube: To see how the company uses customer feedback, search “Zomato customer suggestions” on YouTube.

6. Godrej

- Godrej’s “Brighter Living” campaign invited customers to share ideas on how to make their homes more comfortable and efficient. The best ideas were implemented in Godrej’s product lines.

- Example: <https://www.godrej.com/>

- YouTube: To explore how Godrej implements customer ideas, search “Godrej Brighter Living” on YouTube.

7. Marico

- Marico’s “Nihar Shanti” campaign invited customers to contribute ideas for social initiatives that the brand could support, creating a sense of shared purpose and community involvement.

- Example: <https://www.marico.com/>

- YouTube: To view initiatives by Marico based on customer input, search “Marico Nihar Shanti” on YouTube.

8. Asian Paints

- Asian Paints' "Colour Next" initiative involves customers in predicting color trends, influencing the brand's product offerings for the coming year. This co-creation approach keeps the brand ahead of market trends.

- Example: <https://www.asianpaints.com/>

- YouTube: To see how Asian Paints involves customers in trend predictions, search "Asian Paints Colour Next" on YouTube.

9. Royal Enfield

- Royal Enfield engages its community of riders in product development by inviting them to test new models and provide feedback. This involvement ensures that new products resonate with the brand's loyal customer base.

- Example: <https://www.royalenfield.com/>

- YouTube: To watch customer feedback on Royal Enfield's new models, search "Royal Enfield customer feedback" on YouTube.

10. Flipkart

- Flipkart's "Big Billion Days" campaign involved customers in the creation of deals and offers, asking them what products they wanted discounted during the sale. This engagement led to a highly successful sales event.

- Example: <https://www.flipkart.com/>

- YouTube: To see how Flipkart engages with customers during sales, search "Flipkart Big Billion Days" on YouTube.

The Shift from Listening to Co-Creation

The examples from global and Indian brands highlight the significant shift in customer engagement strategies from passive listening to active co-creation. This evolution reflects a deeper understanding that customers are not just buyers but also valuable partners in the innovation process. By inviting customers to co-create, brands can tap into their creativity, foster loyalty, and develop products and services that are more closely aligned with customer needs.

Conclusion

As businesses continue to evolve, the role of the customer in the brand's journey will only grow in importance. The brands that succeed will be those that embrace co-creation, transforming their customers from passive recipients into active contributors. This shift not only enhances customer engagement but also drives innovation and ensures long-term relevance in a rapidly changing market.