Increasing the competitiveness of business ecosystems by identifying the social values of the regional community

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Abstract. The focus of the article is on the formation and use by the participants of business ecosystems of new approaches to increase their competitiveness. The purpose of the study is to substantiate the complex of creative factors to increase the competitiveness of business ecosystems. The motivation for the research is to improve the quality of goods and services for consumers by examining the structural elements of business ecosystems as innovative participants in the economy. The design and methods of research include a logical sequence of presentation of the material on the basis of a questionnaire. To achieve this goal, within the framework of the theoretical component, we analyzed relevant conceptual and empirical articles, as well as information obtained as a result of large-scale empirical studies of the conditions of ecosystem development and changes in consumer values. The main conclusions are that the intensification of competition in the market due to the emergence of new economic agents in the form of business ecosystems, causes the need to search for creative factors of competitiveness. Such, in our opinion, are the social values of the members of modern society, formed under the influence of the leading trends in consumer behavior. The practical and managerial implications of the study are to increase the level of competitiveness of participants in business ecosystems functioning to increase the level of consumer satisfaction. As a result of studying and synchronizing the social values of the modern regional community, the actual values of potential consumers have been identified, which allows us to form a strategy for the development of business ecosystems, taking into account the result obtained.

1 Introduction

Business ecosystems are one of the most relevant areas of modern economic research and include the following main aspects: the essence of business ecosystems and their typology [1, 2]; features of innovative and digital business ecosystems and prospects for their development [3, 4]; institutional support of business ecosystems [5, 6]; ecosystem monopoly [7, 8]; ecosystem models [9, 10]; landscape of business ecosystems [11, 12].

Despite the presence of certain accumulated empirical experience in the field of business ecosystems functioning, as well as, although not numerous, theoretical publications, the study...
of business ecosystems is still only at its initial stage. The current situation is quite explainable by the fact that business ecosystems are complexly structured formations with multiple internal and external links in the context of each of their functional areas. Solving the problem of increasing business ecosystems competitiveness requires the development of fundamentally new approaches that adequately take into account features and issues of ecosystems’ functioning in today’s economic realities.

The development of promising areas for increasing the competitiveness of business ecosystems is updated by the fact that they compete not only with each other, but also with the sphere of small and medium-sized businesses engaged in similar activities as participants in business ecosystems. In other words, a multifaceted competitive environment has developed in which, in addition to business ecosystems, other participants in the modern business environment also operate. Such a situation necessitates a comprehensive approach to the problem and a revision of the existing theoretical provisions regarding the competitiveness of economic agents.

2 Purpose and objectives of the study

2.1 The purpose of the study is the substantiation of creative factors for increasing the competitiveness of business ecosystems, which make it possible to enhance their competitive advantages in relation to other formats of business activity of present-day participants in market relations.

2.2 The objectives of the study are as follows:

- to systematize an array of analytical information related to business ecosystems;
- to substantiate the concept of business ecosystem competitiveness;
- to form the composition of factors affecting the competitiveness of business ecosystems, highlighting its creative component;
- to develop tools for using creative factors to increase the competitiveness of business ecosystems in improving their landscape design.

3 Literature review

The basic concept in the study is such as the competitiveness of an organization.

The study showed that the modern understanding of the competitiveness of an organization has been formed during a rather long stage of historical development and a change in various concepts of competition (Figure 1).

At the top level of the modern understanding of competitiveness is the concept of Adam M. Brandenburger and Barry J. Nalebuff, who believe that business is an important process of interaction between subjects, in which both tendencies of struggle and tendencies of cooperation are observed [14].

The formulation of the competitiveness concept in relation to business ecosystems involves consideration of their features.

In recent years, the ecosystem phenomenon has been given a very large and ever-increasing importance, which only increases the various interpretations of this term.

The term “ecosystem” itself in the context of the semantic load is an obvious combination of the two words “eco” and “system”, the first of which is of biological origin, and the second comes from the Greek “systema”, that is, a whole consisting of parts. In this case, there is a situation when the terminology of the organic world was borrowed into business verbal constructions. The emergence of this term is traditionally associated with the British botanist Arthur Tonsley, who defined an ecosystem as local communities of organisms interacting both with each other and with the environment [23].
Among modern numerous definitions of an ecosystem, it is quite reasonable to single out the approach proposed by B. Kleiner (corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences) [24]. A distinctive feature of this definition is that an ecosystem is as follows:

1. Spatially localized complex of hierarchically uncontrolled units: organizations, business processes, innovative projects and infrastructure systems.
2. These structural elements interact with each other in the process of creation and circulation of material goods and values.
3. The complex has the ability for long-term and independent functioning on the basis of circulation of goods and systems.

In modern conditions when integration processes are under development, business ecosystems, which are also called as entrepreneurial systems or economic ecosystems, are of decisive importance in the composition of all types of ecosystems [25, 26].

In the most general case, a business ecosystem is such an interdependent structure that includes a central organization (a company, its structural or business unit) and its infrastructure environment, a system of links between them in order to provide its participants with various additional resources to achieve adopted development strategy and set objectives.

The main characteristics of business ecosystems allow us to conclude that they allow market participants to some extent adapt to today’s complex business environment and

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**Fig. 1.** The historical genesis of the development of the “competitiveness” concept [14-22]
implement new forms of intercompany cooperation. In other words, business ecosystems are a kind of adaptive niche for both start-ups and mature companies in conditions of a high level of macroeconomic instability.

There is no generally accepted classification of Russian business ecosystems yet, but it is possible to distinguish the following main corporate structures that have ecosystem features: Sberbank, Yandex, Tinkoff, Mail.ru Group, MTS, which are the largest B2C ecosystems.

The main feature of business ecosystems is that they generate a synergistic effect. In modern business turnover, synergy is understood as a special state of complex systems in the context of macroeconomic instability. In other words, synergy is a kind of cooperation, interrelated actions in a single vector, which are manifested in the form of current and strategic partnerships, mergers and mutually beneficial cooperation. A synergistic effect occurs when the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In other words, the interaction of companies in business ecosystems in total gives a greater result than each of them separately.

A feature of business ecosystems is that they include many companies of various types. For example, the Sberbank ecosystem includes about 40 companies in 12 different industries. Some services are designed only for entrepreneurs: consulting, leasing, smart terminals, electronic document management, while others are aimed at solving everyday problems of the population: food, transport, shopping, sending parcels. Business ecosystems have a big advantage in terms of having a large customer database. Given this factor, and in order to reduce the risk of ecosystem monopolization, proposals are being put forward to limit non-core activities of business ecosystems. Nevertheless, the dynamism in their development is obvious and the problem of increasing their competitiveness is quite justified.

In this regard, under the competitiveness of the ecosystem, it is proposed to understand its ability to comprehensively meet the needs of customers by developing additional types of business in addition to core activities and gaining competitive advantages due to a synergistic effect.

In relation to various areas of ecosystem activity, the classical system of factors for increasing competitiveness, which includes:

- financial position of the company;
- availability of innovative technologies;
- availability of qualified personnel;
- ability to product and price maneuvering;
- availability of a distribution network;
- availability of credit;
- effectiveness of advertising and other means of sales promotion;
- availability of information and solvency of the main buyers.

4 Results

As a result of studying and synchronizing social values of the modern regional community, the actual values of potential consumers will be identified, which will make it possible to form a strategy for business ecosystems development, taking into account the result obtained.

However, it is quite logical to assume that in the context of the upcoming monopoly restrictions on the activities of ecosystems and the strengthening of the competitive positions of other business units, they will need non-standard, creative methods to increase competitiveness. One of these factors, in our opinion, may be the study of social values of the main consumer groups and the formation of a development strategy in accordance with their content.

Social values are understood as established, rather accepted in society, rules, patterns, standards of people's behaviour, which are the regulators of social life. They are the
boundaries of the permissible behaviour of people in the specific conditions of their life [27].

Signs of social values are shown in Figure 2.

Fig. 2. Signs of social values

The most important function of social values (SV) is to act as selection criteria from a certain set of alternative courses of action.

An important feature of SV is that, being recognized by society, they are taken for granted, realized and reproduced in people’s actions.

Social values are formed for each person individually, in one society it is almost impossible for two people with the same SV.

Social values are an integral part of the general value system of society (Table 1) [28, 29, 30].

Table 1. The system of social values of modern society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System elements</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vital</td>
<td>Life, health, physicality, security, well-being, human condition (satiety, peace, vigour), strength, endurance, quality of life, natural environment (environmental values), practicality, consumption, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Freedom of speech, civil liberties, good ruler, law, order, constitution, civil peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral</td>
<td>Good, love, friendship, duty, honour, honesty, disinterestedness, decency, fidelity, mutual assistance, justice, respect for elders and love for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>God, divine law, faith, salvation, grace, ritual, Holy Scripture and Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>Beauty (or, on the contrary, the aesthetics of the ugly), style, harmony, adherence to tradition or novelty, cultural identity or imitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Universal, traditional, modern, terminal, instrumental</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consider the main approaches to understanding the term “regional community”. This term is widely used in business, but more often in the sense of some regional professional community (for example, appraisers).

The concepts of “civil society” [31], “regional civil society” [32] are subjected to a detailed analysis.
A regional civil society is understood as a polyvariant system of interaction and relationships that arise between social, economic, ideological and cultural subjects and institutions of a given region, which aims at protecting the interests of citizens from state authoritarianism. In the conditions of the region, civil society appears as a specific social, economic and cultural space in which a certain balance of various (individual and group, informal and institutional) interests is achieved, and their implementation takes place within the framework of diverse non-political forms of collective life.

The formation of a regional civil society can be viewed as part of the process of regionalization, which is a consistent democratic change in the society, in the state and in the field, aimed at increasing the role of regions in the life of the whole society.

The term “local community” is also used as a community of people living in a certain territory and united by common interests in solving issues of life through the use and development of local material and social resources on the principles of self-government [33].

The regional community is closer, in our opinion, to this definition. As part of the study, the term “regional consumer society” was introduced.

The consumer society is studied in more detail in modern publications, and its characteristics have both positive and negative aspects.

In modern publications, the consumer society is often called the cause of the spiritual degradation of the individual in society. But there is also a point of view according to which in such a society the right of a person to a decent standard of living and the realization of person’s social needs is not denied.

The priority of consumer values and consumer lifestyle can be aimed at stimulating the labour market, encouraging people to work hard and earn money, thereby reducing the time available for the consumption of goods and services.

The formation of a consumer society is associated with scientific and technological progress and industrial development, which ensured the mass production of consumer goods and the formation of an information society.

Researchers emphasize the influence of the consumer society on human behaviour, which is associated with the value of consumption as an expression of prestige, functioning as a measure of social value and human dignity.

To identify the social values of the modern regional community, an interview was conducted among students of the Don State Technical University. Its results led to the following conclusions.

More than half of the respondents – 52.4% believe that their main social values are self-realization and self-development, and therefore, as new services for ecosystems, they proposed the organization of training platforms, training centres, as well as platforms with online courses.

Part of the interview participants – 28.7% named things such as family, friends, mental well-being as the main social values. They would like to see as part of ecosystem services, such as the provision of psychological assistance, assistance in financial management.

The following were also named as social values: freedom of speech, freedom of thought, honesty, faith, truth – 10.4%. They envisioned additional ecosystem services such as career counselling.

A number of interview participants (4.9%) noted success in business as a social value and offered to organize a number of services, for example, flower delivery.

The lowest percentage in the composition of social values was occupied by such a position as financial well-being – 3.6%. These interview participants suggested new services such as low-interest loans, withdrawing money from a client’s account with subsequent home delivery, and loyalty programs.

Graphical interpretation of the survey results is shown in Figure 3.
We believe that we have obtained satisfactory results, indicating the versatility of the social values in the modern regional community, the results of which can be used to create new services for business ecosystems.

If, in general, the issues regarding business ecosystems are already reflected in publications, then their marketing activities have not yet been studied enough, although recently many new publications have appeared regarding the development of ecosystems.

The construction of marketing activities in business ecosystems, in our opinion, will depend on the organizational and economic mechanism for their construction.

1. If the participants in the business ecosystem are structural divisions of one company, then the marketing service should also be part of this company.
2. If the participants in the business ecosystem are independent legal entities, then two options are possible:
   - marketing service is created in each division;
   - marketing function is outsourced.

In any case, a special approach is needed to the organization of marketing research, the main purpose of which will be to study the social values of regional consumer society representatives using questionnaires.

**5 Study design**

The research approach is universal.

- Research method is analysis and synthesis.
- Participants of the study are four people forming a research group.
- Research procedure and ethical considerations: interviewing is used.
- Online questionnaires should include the following questions:
  - life values – the idea of good and evil, happiness, purpose and meaning of life;
  - universal values life, health, personal security, welfare, family, education, qualifications, law and order;
  - the values of interpersonal communication are honesty, disinterestedness, goodwill;
  - values of public recognition diligence, social position;
  - democratic values freedom of speech, conscience, parties, national sovereignty and others.

It is advisable for marketing structures of business ecosystems to conduct online surveys, which include the following steps:
formulation of the purpose and topic of the survey;
- determination of the sample of respondents;
- compiling a set of questions;
- compiling questionnaires;
- distribution of questionnaires;
- analysis of the survey results.

6 Discussion

1. The emergence of business ecosystems in the modern business world is explained by the desire of companies to diversify their activities in a variety of ways: organizing non-core activities, merging within one service with other companies, working on an information basis with various companies on a single digital platform.

2. For consumers, the activity of business ecosystems as part of their non-core divisions means the development of the market for goods and services and contributes to the most complete satisfaction of their various needs. The factor of creating additional jobs also plays an important role.

3. For small and medium-sized businesses, the activity of business ecosystems means increased competition under different financial conditions. Business ecosystems invest in their units, as a rule, their own financial resources, while small and medium-sized businesses invest borrowed funds in the form of bank loans.

4. Antimonopoly regulation is likely to pay attention to this factor in the near future and create certain difficulties for ecosystems in terms of developing their non-core activities. In this regard, increasing their competitiveness by non-traditional methods is a special issue, in particular through a system of consumers’ social requirements.

5. In order to obtain relevant information about the social values of consumers, it is necessary to conduct marketing research, mainly in an online format, using special methods.

6. In this sense, business ecosystems will be able to form their marketing programs, in addition to taking into account the classical factors of increasing their competitiveness, also the social values of consumers.

7 Conclusion

One of the main directions of modern economic development of domestic business is the formation of business ecosystems as spatially localized complexes of hierarchically interconnected business processes that interact with each other in the process of creating and circulating material goods and values.

Business ecosystems perform competitive interaction both among themselves and with other business participants. This makes it necessary to increase their competitiveness due to both classical and creative factors that have not yet received wide distribution. Such creative factors include social values of members of modern society. These factors, existing mainly in an online format, will increase the competitiveness of business ecosystems as part of all their structural elements and ensure the stability of their functioning in a modern dynamic environment.

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