Harnessing user innovation for social media marketing: Case study of a crowdsourced hamburger

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how user innovation can be used as an engagement mechanism for crowdsourcing-based marketing initiatives. By building on an in-depth case study of a hamburger chain's crowdsourcing initiative, we analyze key activities in customers' value-creating processes, the crowdsourcer's value-creating processes, and innovation encounter processes. We further identify three key activities by which a crowdsourcer can facilitate the realization of desired outcomes from the crowdsourcing initiative: (1) the development of opportunities for user innovation, (2) the planning of user innovation activities, and (3) the implementation and assessment of the outcomes. Our results emphasize the importance of activities and technical features that enable socializing with other participants, support active participation, and create a participatory experience. Our study will inform research and practice on crowdsourcing and user innovation for marketing purposes.

1. Introduction

Crowdsourcing has become a popular means to facilitate user innovation activities (Zwass, 2010). The term crowdsourcing refers to a type of participative online activity in which a firm proposes, via a flexible open call, the voluntary undertaking of tasks to a group of people of varying knowledge, heterogeneity, and number (Estellés-Arolas & Gonzáles-Ladrón-de-Guevara, 2012).

The term user innovation in turn denotes the integration of users within innovation activities (such as developing new products and services). User innovation exemplifies a trend in which the focus of innovation activity has increasingly moved away from firms innovating for their users to firms co-innovating with users; in some cases, users initiate their own innovation activities (Baldwin & von Hippel, 2011; Witell, Kristensson, Gustafsson, & Löfgren, 2011).

The main focus of user innovation has traditionally been to develop products and services that will better address customer needs. As Kamis, Koufaris, and Stern (2008) have pointed out, user innovation enables customers to express their needs and preferences efficiently and thus helps firms to design new offerings. In addition to providing new or improved products and services, user innovation activities can have other positive outcomes, such as increased customer loyalty (Berthon,

Pitt, & Campbell, 2008; Henfridsson & Holmström, 1999), positive word of mouth, and even customers' willingness to pay a premium to participate in user innovation activities (Fuchs, Prandelli, & Schreier, 2010). Despite these observations, researchers have yet to examine user innovation as a means of engaging customers in marketing-focused crowdsourcing initiatives. The present study fills this void in the literature.

For the second research gap, crowdsourcing to date has largely focused on high-involvement products and services such as software (Blohm, Leimeister, & Krcmar, 2013) and media content (Bojin, Shaw, & Toner, 2011), popular crowdsourcing platforms such as Threadless.com (Brabham, 2010) and Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Azzam & Jacobson, 2013), or engaging environments such as virtual worlds (Kohler, Fueller, Matzler, & Stieger, 2011). Considerably less research has been conducted on the use of crowdsourcing for marketing purposes, particularly in low-involvement contexts such as fast food, beverages, and snacks. This is surprising, given that leading global consumer brands such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and Oreo frequently use crowdsourcing (eYeka, 2015).

Against this backdrop, the purpose of the present study is to investigate how user innovation can be used as an engagement mechanism for crowdsourcing-based marketing initiatives. Building on an

in-depth case study of a burger design contest hosted by a fast-food chain, we elaborate on how crowdsourcing can be used for marketing purposes while using new product development as a means to engage the user community.

The crowdsourcing project investigated in this study achieved three outcomes the company perceived as being important. First, the winning design became the best-selling campaign product in the company's history. Second, the co-creation campaign substantially increased sales and the number of Facebook followers, raised the company's visibility among the target customer segment, and improved the company's engagement with its customers. Third, the hamburger design provided the company with a novel way to present customer product information.

Our study will inform research and practice on crowdsourcing and user innovation for marketing purposes. In doing so, we extend the extant body of knowledge on the uses of crowdsourcing (Azzam & Jacobson, 2013) by taking into account the technological factors (Corney et al., 2010) as well as the community and organizational factors involved in facilitating user innovation (Huberman, Romero, & Wu, 2009).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. After this introduction, we present the theoretical underpinnings of the study. The third section covers the empirical research, while the fourth section presents a discussion of the findings from the theoretical and managerial perspectives. In the final section, we discuss the limitations of the study and present avenues for future research.

2. Background

2.1. Crowdsourcing as a means of user innovation

Crowdsourcing comprises a set of methods that establish active, creative, and social collaboration between producer and customer in new product development (Piller, Vossen, & Ihl, 2012). Schlagwein and Bjørn-Andersen (2014) identified three focal areas in prior crowdsourcing literature: (1) IT artifacts (i.e., the crowdsourcing platform), (2) the crowdsourcer organization, and (3) the people who participate in undertaking the crowdsourced task. For the first focal area—the IT artifact—prior studies have investigated crowdsourcing platforms as web-based information systems that enable connectivity and collaboration among participants (Doan, Ramakrishnan, & Halevy, 2011; Soliman & Tuunainen, 2015). Companies can build their own platforms or use existing platforms such as social media services to integrate users into online innovation activities (Zwass, 2010).

For the second focal area—the crowdsourcer organization—previous studies in the literature have identified four primary crowdsourcing strategies: crowd processing, crowd rating, crowd solving, and crowd creation (Geiger & Schader, 2014). The present study focuses on crowd solving, which refers to solving complicated problems by equipping users with customization tools and then evaluating their contributions according to well-defined criteria. For example, customers have designed vehicles using a set of predefined design kits (Birke, Bilgram, & Füller, 2013). Furthermore, ideation contests run on platforms such as Innocentive or eYeka request creative user input in suggesting new solutions to problems or in designing objects from scratch (Nambisan, 2009).

For the third focal area—the participants—previous studies have found that participation in a crowdsourcing activity can be driven by intrinsic motives, such as curiosity, or by extrinsic motives, such as monetary rewards (Füller, 2010; Roberts, Hughes, & Kertbo, 2014). While extrinsic incentives should be present to attract users, engagement in crowdsourcing projects is essentially the result of intrinsic and experiential motives (Soliman & Tuunainen, 2015). A compelling and enjoyable creative experience is important in evoking participant interest and encouraging their creative contributions in idea and design competitions. (Füller & Matzler, 2007; Nambisan & Nambisan, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003). As a result, crowdsourcing can be a

source of hedonic experience for its users that elicits the flow of fantasies, feelings, and fun (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

Interestingly, previous research has predominantly focused on active participants, although passive participation in collaborative activities can also be valuable for companies. Studies of the behaviors of passive users on digital collaboration platforms have shown that even these participants may engage by using and recommending products through word of mouth, endorsement, and community involvement (Choi, Chengalur-Smith, & Nevo, 2015). With this opportunity in mind, it is worthwhile to consider all participants—active and passive—as potential collaborators. It is thus important to understand the organizational outcomes of user innovation (Huberman et al., 2009) and crowdsourcing that are attributable not only to new ideas but also (and especially) to marketing efforts, such as increasing brand and product awareness and fostering customer engagement.

2.2. Experiential perspective on user innovation

Since the successful employment of crowdsourcing and user innovation depends on user participation, creating and fostering user engagement may be considered both a system-level issue and a strategic imperative (Kazman & Chen, 2009). Prior research has highlighted the importance of experiential aspects of participating user innovation activities (Füller & Matzler, 2007; Nambisan & Nambisan, 2008; Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2013; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003, 2004; Füller, Hutter, & Faullant, 2011). Earlier studies have found that a sense of empowerment from writing blogs (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012), drive people's engagement in user innovation activities. Previous studies have also noted a sense of accomplishment from helping in the design of products (Franke, Schreier, & Kaiser, 2009) as a benefit derived from participating user innovation activities.

Positive experiences that stem from user innovation activities can also lead customers to increase their product consumption and create additional incentives to purchase the product or service (Franke et al., 2009). Previous studies have also suggested that consuming a product or service during the innovation process can have a positive influence on users' beliefs about that product (Frank, Herbas, Enkawa, & Schvaneveldt, 2014). Such participation may lead to increased trust and loyalty to the brand (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012), willingness to purchase premium offerings (Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2013), and increased purchase intention for the products a customer has co-created (Frank et al., 2014; Franke et al., 2009; Fuchs et al., 2010).

One way to explain this phenomenon is to look at the user innovation platform as a marketing communications channel. Users can perceive product-related experiences either directly or indirectly. For example, having firsthand physical experience with a product or service affects the customer directly, while advertising and word of mouth are indirect experiences (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). Participating in user innovation activities makes customers more aware of the value proposition of the product or service and engages them in behaviors where they relate the value proposition to their lives, objectives, and aspirations (Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008). In this way, participants in user innovation activities can have an indirect experience with a product.

As a result, user innovation as an engagement mechanism for a crowdsourcing campaign can affect the users who are involved in the innovation activity. User innovation activities can give the product or service a "designed by the users" label that may signal innovativeness and increase the social value that existing and potential customers attribute to the product or service (Schreier, Fuchs, & Dahl, 2012). For example, online design and idea competitions can help companies to portray a customer-oriented focus and innovation, thus strengthening their brand and increasing customer loyalty (Pfeil & Zaphiris, 2009). User innovation can then lead to positive marketing outcomes such as increased brand awareness, better customer information, and increased

interaction with customers, even without successful new product or service development.

2.3. The analytical framework

We adapted Payne et al.'s (2008) co-creation framework to be our analytical framework to structure our analysis of user involvement in collaborative innovation and the management of the innovation activity. Since user participation in crowdsourcing can be considered conceptually related to co-creation (Füller, 2010), we hold that Payne et al.'s (2008) framework is well suited to guide our study of how user innovation can be used as an engagement mechanism for crowdsourcing-based marketing initiatives.

In their study on value co-creation, Payne et al. (2008) elaborate on the focal actors involved in co-creation and the processes in which these actors participate. According to Payne et al. (2008), collaboration in value creation consists of two main actors—the consumer and the organization—and three processes: customer value-creating processes, supplier value-creating processes, and encounter processes. (In our framework, we use the term "crowdsourcer" instead of "supplier.") These three processes encompass procedures, tasks, mechanisms, activities, and interaction. The processes support user innovation and a long-term interactive relationship between the crowdsourcer and the customer.

Customer value-creating processes are the resources and practices that customers use to manage their activities. By drawing on research on hedonic consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) as well as on literature on how consumers process information (Oliver, 1999), Payne et al. (2008) concluded that from a customer's vantage point, the relationship experience comprises cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. In the *crowdsourcer value-creating process*, the crowdsourcer (1) defines the target of the innovation activity before (2) using resources and practices to manage co-innovation activities and then (3) harnessing the crowdsourcer's relationships with customers and other relevant stakeholders for the desired outcomes. During innovation-related *encounter processes*, interactions and exchanges between customers and crowdsourcers take place in a virtual environment that must be managed in order to develop opportunities for successful user innovation.

As depicted in Fig. 1, Payne et al. (2008) suggest that engagement in collaboration and relationship experiences consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. Cognitive engagement, which describes engagement in goal-directed activities, relates to the utilitarian side of decision making, such as needing a product or service that could ease users' daily activities. Emotional engagement relates to non-utilitarian aspects of consumption and of valuing the experience of the process, such as from playing a game. Behavioral engagement occurs as a result of perceived cognitive and emotional experience, such as by

Fig. 1. Analytical framework (adapted from Payne et al., 2008).

exhibiting co-innovation actions. The crowdsourcer processes related to user innovation center on leading the innovation activities and designing the relationship experience, which involve providing technology for customers' contributions and inviting customers to participate in the activity. Attracting customers to participate requires an understanding of their motivations; the crowdsourcer also needs to be able to provide support for the participants. An important crowdsourcer process is the development of relevant metrics to measure the outcomes of crowdsourcing activity.

In the next section, we scrutinize our empirical data through the analytical framework.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection and analysis

We adopted an exploratory single case study approach to understanding which factors are important to crowdsourcing for user innovation using online collaboration platforms. Our case consists of a marketing campaign of a leading Finland-based hamburger chain that launched and ran two online contests to allow consumers to create new burgers. The research context and case will be presented in detail in Section 4.

We examined the ways in which a platform was used to engage a user community to interact with the company and thus influence marketing outcomes, such as customer attachment to the product and to the company. Due to the lack of prior empirical research on this aspect of co-innovation, we chose to use an inductive method. Inductive in-depth case studies have been widely used in information systems research (Walsham, 1995), as they enable a deeper understanding of the problem, illuminate the nature and complexity of the process, and generate insights into emerging topics (Rowlands, 2005; Yin, 2003).

We chose a hamburger design contest due to its uniqueness compared to prior co-innovation research. The campaign involved as many users as possible in the innovation activity. The contest and the campaign were developed in collaboration with the hamburger chain and its advertising agency. Because the company gave users toolkits and let them design the product (later launched as a campaign product), our case was appropriate for studying the use of crowdsourcing and user innovation designed for marketing purposes.

During our engagement with the case, we collected both primary and secondary data (Silverman, 2011). We interviewed every member of the project team at the advertising agency that developed and executed the campaign. The team consisted of a digital director (C:1), a copywriter (C:2), and an art director (C:3). We also interviewed the hamburger chain's R&D manager (C:4) to reflect on the company's co-innovation experiences with customers in general and from the hamburger design contest in particular. The interviewees from the advertising agency stated that decisions in the project team were made collectively based on discussions between the team and the client's representative. In addition, all interviewees reported that they were able to express their viewpoints and opinions freely.

The interviews were semi-structured. Most of the questions were similar for all participants, while some questions were based on the position and expertise of the interviewee. The started each interview with a set of introductory questions concerning informant's background, current and prior position as well as his/her role in the hamburger design contest project. Already these questions provided a lot of valuable insights regarding the planning and execution of the design contest. Thereafter, we asked each informant to describe the most critical issues and incidents, positive and negative with respect to the project from his/her vantage point. The last set of questions focused on the reasons for initiating the project and the expected and desired outcomes from the hamburger design contest. In addition, we systematically asked each informant further elaborate on his/her viewpoint. The first interview lasted 1.5 h, while the other three lasted
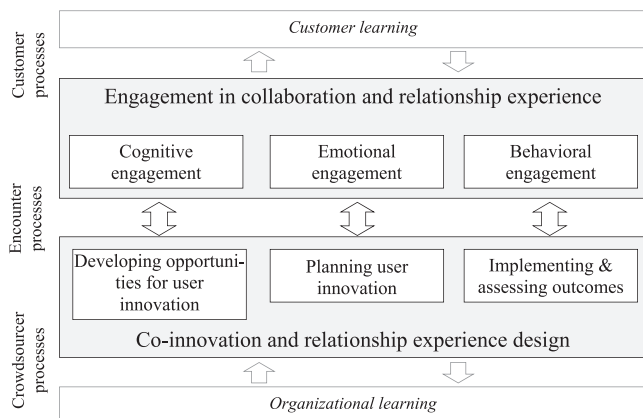
approximately 50 min each. In the first interview, the researcher and interviewee discussed the project setting and timeline. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded.

In addition to interviews, we collected relevant press releases and newspaper and magazine articles. We also observed the activity and discussions on the case company's Facebook page for a two-year period and analyzed official video-recorded material on the design contest and the case released by the company.

We used open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to analyze the empirical material. Later, we aggregated codes into concepts and analyzed relationships between concepts. We followed a systematic procedure (cf. Thomas, 2006) to (1) condense the raw textual data into consistent blocks in a summary format, (2) establish clear links between the evaluation or research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data, and (3) develop a framework of the underlying structure of experiences or processes that were evident in the raw data. This methodology is widely used for qualitative data analysis (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). Our analysis process was iterative, as we created most of the codes by analyzing the first interview and then adding new codes. We then categorized the codes and repeated the process for all interviews after gathering the codes.

We used the data that we collected during interviews and other sources to identify theoretically meaningful patterns (Markus & Robey, 1988). During the analysis, we used our framework, based on Payne et al.'s (2008) framework, to decipher any patterns that emerged from the data. Taken together, the analysis of the empirical observations allowed for the synthesis of key principles of the environment in support of the desired outcomes of the co-innovation activity.

3.2. Case description

The company that sponsored the contest is a family-owned, Finland-based fast-food chain established in the 1960s. We call the case organization "the Burger Company." The chain comprises around 300 restaurants in Finland and roughly 150 in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Russia, Germany, Belarus, and Bulgaria. The chain employs a total of 6700 people. In 2017, the aggregate revenue of the restaurants in Finland was €218 million, making it the leader in the Finnish fast-food market.

The company's product selection comprises hamburgers, salads, fries, soft drinks, milkshakes, and desserts. The menu offers a permanent selection of products, as well as "campaign" products that are typically available for two- to four-week periods. Campaign products allow the company to test new products with customers and to introduce new products to the market while keeping the menu fresh.

Based on information revealed in our interviews with the marketing manager, the Burger Company began to use social media, particularly Facebook, for marketing in late 2009. After one year on Facebook, the company had gained 60,000 fans. The "Yummy of the Year" hamburger design contest was launched in 2011 on Facebook. The idea of the contest was to invite people to create their own burgers. All participants were given an online toolkit with which to customize a burger based on a large selection of toppings and ingredients, along with an option to suggest additional ingredients.

The contest involved three stages, each of which focused on different activities crowdsourced from the customer community. During the first stage, the participants designed their burgers (Fig. 2a) using the design toolkit. During the second stage, a company-appointed jury evaluated the burgers and selected three finalists. People then voted for their favorites (Fig. 2b). During the third stage, the burger design that received the most votes was launched as a campaign product in all Burger Company restaurants in Finland. At the same time, the company introduced a slot-machine game on Facebook, where the winning burger's ingredients were presented as slot-machine symbols. The game included a draw of gift vouchers for company products. The purpose of the game was to thank the users for participating and to promote the

contest, the winning burger, and other products (Fig. 2c).

As a result of the contest, the Burger Company obtained 70,000 new Facebook fans and became a top three brand on Facebook in Finland. The contest participants submitted 17,756 burger designs, used 185,600 ingredients, proposed 6380 new ingredients, shared 8605 burger designs as wall posts, placed more than 6000 votes in the second stage, and played approximately 400,000 coin-slot games. In addition, the winning burger became the company's all-time best-selling campaign product. A video released by the Burger Company's advertising agency and marketing partner for the Yummy of the Year contest summarized the marketing outcomes to be the key objective of the contest and revealed that the company had pursued capitalization on social media through the contest (Satumaa, 2012).

The second Yummy of the Year design contest was launched in 2013. This competition followed the same three-stage pattern; after the voting stage, however, two finalists were nominated and introduced to the public, who then chose the winner. After the first stage, approximately 30,000 burger designs were submitted.

The key reason for the Burger Company's use of social media and its establishment of the design contest was to increase sales. In addition, the company was able to achieve product development outcomes and (with the help of a design toolkit) to collect user ideas about their burger preferences. Apart from hamburger design ideas, the Burger Company obtained ideas for new product names from the burger design contest, which were later used for internally developed products. The contest also made the company's Facebook followers more active: customers started to suggest new ideas and ingredients on Facebook.

In terms of marketing outcomes, the company was able to obtain detailed demographic information about its Facebook fans (in addition to their contact details), and even information about their likes on Facebook. The company also benefitted by saving on advertising expenses. The contest allowed customers to see the broad selection of available ingredients, which then affected customer learning.

To summarize, the Yummy of the Year competition achieved outcomes that satisfied the company at a reasonable cost. The company launched its most successful campaign product to date, gained new insights into user preferences, and obtained thousands of new followers on Facebook.

4. Findings

4.1. Crowdsourcer processes

We structured our observations of the crowdsourcer's process into three categories according to our analytical framework (Payne et al., 2008): (1) developing opportunities for co-innovation, (2) planning the innovation activities, and (3) implementing the activities and assessing the outcomes.

4.1.1. Developing opportunities for user innovation

The crowdsourcer was highly committed to the project and communicated actively with the participants. It was also evident from the early phases of the crowdsourcing project that the company would devote sufficient resources to implement changes in its communications if required:

The Burger Company put a lot of time and effort into this; they were really devoted. They're also very honest and always wanted to make sure that everything was done properly. They felt that "if we're going to do this [burger competition], *we'll definitely keep this real and prepare a real person's burger." (C:2)*

The increased interaction with customers generated an increased number of negative comments, varying from comments expressing disappointment in the winning product to general complaints about the brand. The company did not remove negative comments and responded to each when applicable:

a) Burger design   **b) Voting**   **c) Implementation**

Fig. 2. Illustration of the Burger Company's "Yummy of the Year" hamburger design contest.

Some companies have mistaken the importance of being open in their dialogue with the customers. If someone's being critical or giving you negative feedback, you shouldn't just delete it. Doing so may bring back customers who are extremely disappointed and who'll post comments such as, "What do you think you're doing?!!!" (C:2)

The Burger Company fostered collaboration with the users by allowing discord. The managers of the campaign believed that the community itself could resolve any troublesome behaviors and negativity if the campaign had the right culture. Someone did have to follow the information flow for emergent situations, however:

In the Burger Company's case, a feedback system operates through the community website. Usually they respond to critical postings by expressing that the company feels sorry about the user's negative experience and asking users to email the company about their experience. The email goes to the company's system. It is of utmost importance to answer and to not let the customer down, because otherwise [the situation] *might turn into something very negative. (C:1)*

Altogether, these observations underscore the importance of crowdsourcer's commitment to the initiative. In our case, this commitment was manifested in the resources allocated in the hamburger design contest as well as crowdsourcer's active role in communicating with the participants and other people interested in the initiative.

4.1.2. Planning the user innovation activities

One of the initial goals and key marketing outcomes of the contest was to have an increased number of Facebook fans. The Burger Company was ambitious in not wanting to engage people who were only seeking a one-time benefit from becoming a fan:

Of course they [the Burger Company] *wanted supporters, but they could have done something a lot easier if they'd only just wanted fans. But what's the point of just getting likes without real liking* [being involved]*? (C:2)*

In the planning stage it became apparent that for usability reasons the design contest must be executed with standard ingredients. Since the new products designed in the contest were basically new (and already existing) configurations of standard ingredients, the contest did not enable generating radically new burger ideas.

[The company also had] *the problem that* [the contest used] *the standard selection of ingredients, and few customers entered anything on their own—or if they did, we still didn't feel that could become a tool for product development.* [The company did this because] *we need to look for new campaign ingredients. We can't rely on competition listings. (C:4)*

Our informants revealed that the central aim of the contest was to strengthen the company's brand identity through signaling that customers input and ideas are important.:

The Burger Company's slogan is "As you like it," which means something like "How would you like it?" "Just for you," or "According to your preferences." The Yummy of the Year promotion reflected a lot of [the idea of the slogan], *which is very close to the Burger Company brand. (C:3)*

4.1.3. Implementing the activities and assessing the outcomes

In addition to marketing outcomes, the Burger Company achieved several product development outcomes. Using the design toolkit to collect user ideas about their burger preferences, the company launched a product that customers would be willing to purchase. One additional benefit from the competition was gaining an increased understanding of customers' preferences:

Currently, healthy living is a "megatrend", but this [burger winner] *totally destroyed that idea—the winner was the biggest burger, which has more than a thousand calories. That's confusing, since people talk a lot about healthy living and eating healthy food, yet they still buy the biggest burger immediately when it comes to the market... (C:1)*

Interaction with customers via digital platforms can often provide insights into their preferences, although the customers in this case seldom offered genuinely original ideas.

[Collaboration with customers] *makes sense, but in fact, we get very few ideas about products from customers. They're more like people who wish for (for example) an old campaign product to be re-launched...But tangible suggestions that would fit very well with a burger—for example a spice or something like that—those we get very little of. (C:4)*

One of the reasons for this situation might have been that customers lacked the core skills necessary to design a product.

[The customers suggested some] *totally ridiculous ideas—for example, fish steak, chicken steak, and normal steak all in one burger. It occurred to me that maybe the consumers aren't capable of really thinking in terms of taste...Maybe it's really difficult to come up with a product if you don't have any experience with cooking or you don't have a restaurant background. (C:4)*

Instead of offering new product development opportunities, the burger design contest was more of a new, experimental approach to marketing.

Our experience from campaign products is that big products sell well...I think about the Megamunch [the winning burger], *as it was also about trying a new type of marketing. Like not just old-school advertising of the*

product but emphasizing the fact that a customer has developed it, which makes people want to try the product. (C:4)

4.2. Encounter processes

While we based our analysis on the chosen analytical frame, we failed to find much support for system mechanics or for a more detailed design of the encounter processes involved, so we structured our observations of the encounter processes within the crowdsourcing contest into three new categories: (1) system design features and functionalities for supporting the social interaction between participants, (2) the facilitation of construction of identities during the collaboration, and (3) creating a game-like user experience. Our findings related to these three categories are presented in the following section.

4.2.1. Fostering social interaction

The company had experimented with hamburger design contests before the Yummy of the Year contest but had used the company's website instead of Facebook. Compared to these early experiments, a key success factor in the Yummy of the Year contest was that the company had selected Facebook as the hub of activities. Doing so not only eliminated the need for people to create user accounts on the contest website but also allowed participants to socialize with one another and to obtain social recognition from their ideas. In addition, the company could communicate with the participants and invite new people to enter the contest.

Previously, the Burger Company made "a machine" (online tool) that customers could use to build their preferred burgers, but that was pre-Facebook. They tried it, but it didn't work so well because it didn't take place on Facebook, so sharing the design was impossible, and it was just on the company website. (C:3)

The primary aim of the innovation activity was to boost sales; a secondary aim was to build up a small community who could be targeted for marketing communications and could potentially provide feedback about the company's marketing activities. In addition to marketing, the campaign was planned and implemented as an IT development project. As the following informants describe, the company took the nature of social media into account when it designed the activities.

You can't push the number of fans and followers to grow by just posting something irrelevant. You'll need to show the fans that you really are interested in creating value for them. It should feel like a real campaign. If you have a nice-looking environment that has all the mechanisms needed to invite friends, and if you take full advantage of, say, Facebook as a platform, then you should use them properly. If you do something substandard, people will notice immediately. People recognize nowadays what's good stuff and what isn't. (C:1)

In addition, the members of the project team believed that the contest lowered barriers to the expression of opinions and opened a dialogue with the company:

It goes both ways. Of course, [the contest is] *a channel for advertising, and the Burger Company wants to reach a larger audience, but people can also reach the company as well. (C:2)*

4.2.2. Facilitating identity construction

Our case exemplifies the crowdsourcer's need to differentiate its innovation activities from other initiatives in order to raise interest in its initiatives among potential contributors. Our informants saw that the participants needed to identify with the initiative for them to commit to the innovation outcomes. In this regard, the digital environment carries its own risks. One of these risks was realized during the second Yummy of the Year contest. A new feature of the second contest was related to

having more publicity for the people who designed the winning burgers. Our informants believed that this could increase the credibility of the competition by showing that the winner was a "real" person (i.e., not an employee) and would give a face to the competition.

The first time we [did this contest]*, we just made more or less an all-Facebook type of thing, so the whole thing—the game and voting—once the final votes by the fans were in, they went on Facebook. In this new version we picked only two winners, but we showed the winners' faces, and we put them in the TV ads. We put the panel of burgers in the ads… (C:1)*

The culmination of the Yummy of the Year design contest was a battle of the top two products, in which the company planned to present the designers of the burgers. As in the first year's contest, the winner's burger would be launched as a campaign product. This did not happen, however, because the contest ended: the person who had designed the winning burger was a slightly overweight adolescent who was bullied at school because of the publicity he had attracted by winning the contest. The bullying drew negative attention to the contest and to the company in traditional and social media. Partly in response, the company did not hold any subsequent burger design contests.

To avoid these incidents…well, we can't ask for people's BMI [body mass index] *when they present their burger ideas; it just doesn't work* [that way]*… (C:4)*

The company also created a memorable public identity for the contest. The identity manifested a diversity of the users and was built on the participants' genuine contributions. The company did not remove negative or hostile comments. Preventing users from expressing their opinions on one social media platform could unleash hostility on other platforms, where other community members may start to support the person whose comments were removed, thus potentially harming the company's reputation. But there are ways to respond to negative comments:

Companies are often concerned about what to say publicly, since social media is so open, but it's uncontrollable. If people revealed their own identity, then they wouldn't spread so many negative messages, except maybe young people and some of the competitors' supporters. But the community members often take care of troublemakers: "Don't come here; please go make trouble somewhere else." Therefore, you don't have to control the community so much. The Burger Company has one person, a marketing manager, who's responsible for the task. She answers most of the questions alone and has lots of other things to do, of course, which gives you an idea of the amount of resources required. (C:1)

After the Yummy of the Year contest, some people—such as professional designers and people whose entries did not win—criticized the winning design. The organizers of the contest resolved these conflicts by keeping to the rules specified at the beginning of the contest. In general, the audience saw the openness of the communication as fostering awareness and commitment toward the community among customers. Redirecting disappointed or angry customers from the public space to private discussion is a common strategy for counteracting negative comments in social media:

I remember there was a comment about Megamunch, which is the name of the winning design. It's not a very sophisticated name. Someone emailed us indicating she was very worried, stating that "Why do you have this kind of a product? The name's awful and it's not good for young people; this doesn't make a good example—please don't do this." I understand where that kind of criticism originates, but at this point, we had to answer her that the name had resulted from the contest and had been developed by the participant who'd designed the burger. The Burger Company didn't create or change it. (C:2)

4.2.3. Creating a game-like user experience

According to Malone (1982), for users to have a game-like experience that they will enjoy, the experience must consist of challenge, curiosity, and fantasy. The hamburger design contest met these criteria. The challenge was for users to create burger designs. Their curiosity was stimulated and maintained throughout the contest while users waited eagerly for the next activities. The content visualization fostered fantasy in the design, which was another key issue for the platform operation. In fact, between the 2011 and 2013 Yummy of the Year contests, the company used a different type of visualization in a salad designing competition. Although the salad contest had fewer entries, salads still sold well:

We did a similar thing with salads, which also sold very well. The contest wasn't as successful on Facebook as the burger contest was—and maybe that's normal—but sales of salads were very good. (C:1)

The salads may not have been as appealing to customers as the winning burgers were, or the type of visualization the company used to represent the salads may have been less fantasy-driven, thus bringing the user out of the game and into reality:

We tried various things with salads. Last summer, we made video clips of people cutting tomatoes; it was a video clip on how to slice a tomato. We had a video of all the ingredients. It looked good, and the salads looked good and fresh, but [the contest] was more complicated [than the burger contest was]. The salad campaign didn't work so well, and it felt more complicated [than the burger contest], but maybe it was because of [the relative unpopularity of] salads. [C:3]

4.3. Customer processes (relationship experience and learning)

Following our analytical framework, we categorized our observations from the case in terms of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. Cognitive engagement was noted to have taken place throughout the contest, since people learned about the opportunity for collaboration and became interested in it. Emotional engagement was found to be related to experiences of enjoyment and fantasy that stem from the opportunity to collaborate in a game-like environment. Our observations suggest the participants who were most emotionally engaged in the collaboration also experienced a strong sense of belonging and of being potentially important contributors. We identified behavioral engagement as various acts of user innovation, such as posting ideas or commenting on the ideas of other participants.

4.3.1. Cognitive engagement

According to the interviewees, the contest made the Burger Company's Facebook fan community more active, since customers suggested new ideas and ingredients on the company's Facebook contest page that thus became engaged in collective creative effort in a gamified environment.

New ideas came from some of the ingredients in the Megamunch, which haven't been included in other burgers. People are now asking on Facebook: "Can you put this in, too?" In a way, people also started to create and propose things spontaneously. Then they found out that this is good, it suits the burger, even though they hadn't tried it before. (C:1)

The contest also allowed customers to see how many available ingredients there actually were, which contributed to their learning about the company and its products:

Often, you don't even think that the scale or the offering is that big. The Burger Company offers eight different breads, lots of different meats, and then all the extra ingredients—something like 30 or 50. [The contest lets] you see what you can really choose at the Burger Company. (C:1)

4.3.2. Emotional engagement

The engaging environment allowed users to feel like active participants in product development, and to derive pleasure from the activity itself:

It was the Burger Company's classics…customers wanted to have some of the old products back, because they hadn't seen them for years, and we thought, okay, let's just pick all the classics. Then users can vote for which ones they want to have back. And it went all right, but it wasn't like [the Yummy of the Year contest]; it wasn't like new fans were popping in through the windows. It was okay, but voting is so common nowadays; they do it a lot on Facebook. (C:2)

The Burger Company allowed all the finalists to design their own burgers so that fans could vote for the winner. This was another type of co-innovation, although the company knew that mere voting would not provide enough benefits to its stakeholders. More active user involvement in the design process was a key to success; the company achieved success by using the design toolkit, which required users to invest time and effort into the company. One of the design intentions was to inform users of the company's many offerings:

When they design burgers they also think about them, so they'll start being hungry and thinking about what they're doing. (C:3)

4.3.3. Behavioral engagement

Using the combination of social media and a design toolkit allowed the Burger Company to engage its customers in a positive experience. Users were kept interested by playing a game with several stages. First, they designed their burgers; then they voted for the best ones. In the final stage, the users competed for vouchers to try the winning burger:

The whole idea is to think of it as a loop. First, you have a well-made application—a game-type of creation tool—that's fun and easy to use, that doesn't take too much time, and that gives you a chance to win fame and fortune and burgers for a whole year. Then you take a break and come up with the voting opportunity, and that's fun again. Finally, you have the winners, and it's more or less about how to keep the customer in that loop. (C:1)

The slot-machine game kept users updated and enticed them to try the winning burger. Users became so engaged that they played the game repeatedly. In that way, they memorized the ingredients of the winning burger and developed positive feelings toward the company:

We thought of something simple to make [i.e., the slot machine] as an activator. We had this Yummy of the Year contest, and then it took a long time before we were able to start selling the product. We wanted to make people remember and tell them that the Megamunch is now available. (C:3)

5. Discussion

5.1. Key findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate how user innovation can be used as an engagement mechanism for crowdsourcing-based marketing initiatives. To this end, we have presented a case study of a hamburger design contest. We adapted Payne et al.'s (2008) co-creation framework to build our analytical framework, which we used to structure our analysis.

Our study emphasizes the importance of activities and technical features that enable socializing with other participants, support active participation, and create a participatory experience. Second, our results provide insights into how social media can be used to engage users in marketing-focused crowdsourcing activities. Fig. 3 presents the framework construction based on our findings.

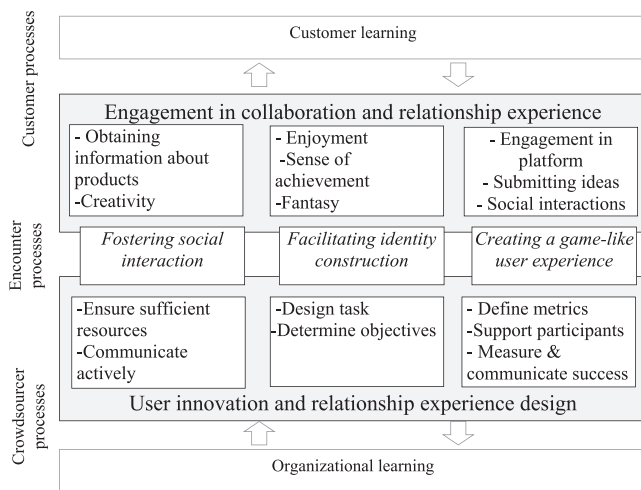The main findings of the study relate to the three encounter

Fig. 3. User innovation as an engagement mechanism for crowdsourcing-based marketing initiatives.

processes we have identified: fostering social interaction, facilitating identity construction, and creating a game-like user experience. Fostering social interaction describes capabilities to integrate users in their preferred social environment, such as using the system in a group or by themselves. Facilitating identity construction refers to the platform's ability to provide customers with a means to link the activities in the platform and to communicate virtual and real-life identities. Finally, creating game-like experience refers to the characteristics of the platform that draw and sustain participants' attention; our observations underscore the role of a game-like experience in fostering customer participation. This finding aligns with prior crowdsourcing research (Birke et al., 2013) and supports the use of gamification (Deterding, Sicart, Nacke, OöHara, & Dixon, 2011; Hamari & Koivisto, 2015) in designing crowdsourcing initiatives and platforms.

5.2. Theoretical implications

Our study extends the scope of extant crowdsourcing literature (e.g., Bayus, 2013; Birke et al., 2013; Kozinets, Hemetsberger, & Schau, 2008; Ren, Nickerson, Mason, Sakamoto, & Graber, 2014; Ye & Kankanhalli, 2013) by suggesting that in addition to tangible *outcomes* such as cost reduction, increased innovation, and shorter development cycles for new products and services (Kazman & Chen, 2009), the crowdsourcing *process* itself can be the main source of benefits for companies. We have shown that a crowdsourcing initiative that leverages user innovation as a form of engagement for developing new product ideas in a game-like online environment can also be used for marketing purposes. Our results show that crowdsourcing campaigns such as the hamburger design contest examined in this study can be powerful tools in drawing attention, attracting users, and facilitating community creation.

While the design contest yielded only a small number of innovative and viable product ideas, the company was very satisfied with the marketing outcomes, such as improved social media visibility, the reaching of more customers, and increased sales. As a result, the company benefited particularly from the mass of customers who participated in the contents instead of the small minority who actually generated useful ideas. In this respect, our observations diverge from the lead-user perspective of open innovation research, which views a small minority of users (i.e., the lead users) as the key source of value (Franke, von Hippel, & Schreier, 2006; von Hippel, 1986).

Second, our study contributes to the research on experiential aspects of co-creation (Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012; Rathore, Ilavarasan, & Dwivedi, 2016) by demonstrating that compelling hedonic experiences *during* co-creation activities, facilitated by game-like elements (as one example), can be equally or even more important than the actual

outcome. Our findings further suggest that elements of gamification may be very effective in attracting participants to take part in crowdsourcing activities as well as contributing to their continued participation. Taken together, our observations further elaborate Kamboj, Sarmah, Gupta, and Dwivedi's (2018) assertion that customer participation in brand communities on social media positively contributes to branding co-creation in the end.

Third, the study adds to prior research on the value of social media for knowledge management purposes (e.g., Yates & Paquette, 2011; Mäntymäki & Riemer, 2016). Our results show that crowdsourcing initiatives can be a means to facilitate customer learning by providing product information and increasing customer awareness of the different available options. In addition, crowdsourcing initiatives can contribute to organizational learning by providing opportunities to observe how customers interact with products and other customers.

5.3. Managerial implications

For practitioners, our study provides advice on how to leverage crowdsourcing for marketing purposes and user innovation as an engagement mechanism for crowdsourcing initiatives. One particularly interesting observation was that the hamburger design contest was successful, while the salad contest (conducted with traditional voting) was not. This observation translates into five recommendations.

First, the focal product in a task given to participants should be such that large numbers of people will be familiar with the product. Second, the task given to the crowd should require a certain level of effort and provide a feeling of accomplishment without overwhelming the participants; this could be executed (for example) by giving the participants of a design contest a limited number of alternatives. Third, crowdsourcing activities require active facilitation to ensure that participants will receive support when needed and that any undesirable social interactions between participants will be promptly moderated. Fourth, game-like experiences were an important ingredient in the success of the hamburger design contest examined in this study, which aligns with prior studies on the role of enjoyment in drawing and retaining participants' interest in an idea and design competition, as well as in supporting the generation of creative contributions (Füller & Matzler, 2007; Nambisan & Nambisan, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003). Since fantasy is a key element of enjoyable games (Malone, 1982), incorporating elements that evoke fantasy in crowdsourcing within otherwise potentially trivial crowdsourcing tasks can make such tasks surprisingly engaging.

Finally, our results show that an important benefit from user innovation activities stems from customer learning. For example, a product design contest can provide a means to communicate a firm's offerings to its customers and thus increase the customers' awareness of different options and their attributes. This situation adds to preference fit, design effort, and awareness of being a creator, all of which have been proposed in prior studies as being important elements of toolkits for user innovation (see, e.g., Franke et al., 2009).

5.4. Limitations and future research

Our results are subject to interpretation and are limited to the available data. Because we relied on a single-case approach, our empirical observations have been drawn from a single context and from a small number of informants. To address this limitation, we suggest future research with broader contextual coverage. Second, the majority of the participants in the hamburger design contest were teenagers. This observation is not particularly surprising, since young people are a major user group of playful online environments (Mäntymäki & Salo, 2013, 2015; Mäntymäki & Riemer, 2014). Nevertheless, while teenagers are an important customer segment for fast-food restaurants (including our case company), it is evident that the participants of the contest examined in this study represented only a particular subset of

customers. As a result, future research focused on other demographic groups is needed to evaluate the extent to which our results are applicable in other settings. Third, while our observations underscore the importance of hedonic experience as a driver for user participation, what exactly constitutes the hedonic experience within online crowdsourcing initiatives remains largely unclear.

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