Revisiting Co-Creation: Necessary Success Factors for Crowdsourcing Ideas in a Consumer Business Setting

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Abstract

Companies in the business-to-consumer sector are constantly searching for innovative ways to improve their processes and offerings. Traditionally, corporations have already been implementing new ideas and product developments internally, but in recent years the concept of co-creation has been gaining increasingly attention as a new method for innovation. Co-creation, in the form of crowdsourcing ideas and integrating stakeholders in the corporate development processes, not only promises to strengthen the relationship between the firm and consumers, but also to help enhance product value, foster innovation and improve product-market fit. Convincing in theory, in the practical business setting co-creation has often proven not a trivial task. However, existing literature has not sufficiently addressed these challenges yet. The paper at hand aims to make a contribution to closing this research gap, revisiting the concept of co-creation with a specific focus on identifying the issues of and success factors needed for the successful crowdsourcing of ideas in a consumer business setting. For this purpose, successful co-creation strategies of major global brands, including Oreo, DHL and LEGO, with a view of characterizing relevant elements driving the effectiveness of their co-innovation approaches, shall be analyzed. These cases will then be contrasted to an empirical case project of a co-creation campaign of a medium sized enterprise in order to highlight both effective and non-effective approaches to co-creation. As a result, some of the key challenges and main points of difficulty in particular for smaller companies in context of co-creation initiatives will be identified.

Keywords: *co-creation, consumer business, crowdsourcing, success factors, co-innovation, stakeholder involvement, innovation management, product development*

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1.0 Introduction

Traditionally, the relationship between firms and consumers has been based on nothing more but exchanges, in the form of businesses selling goods and services to the consumer in return for a fee (Skaržauskaitė 2011). Additionally, processes such as new product development were seen as purely internal processes falling under the jurisdiction of the firm alone (Cheron & Pera 2016), with consumers being limited to the traditional role of buyer and/or user of the company's products (Fuchs & Schreier 2011). In the conventional model, therefore, the role of the consumer in the supply chain can be characterized as being passive in nature, while firms yield the control over most information.

Today's dynamically changing markets however have driven firms and consumers towards a more active role, a trend made possible most notably through the rapid developments in technology and particularly the growth and development of the Internet (O'Hern and Rindfleisch 2010; Skaržauskaitė, 2013; Cheron & Pera 2016; Ammari &Jaziri 2016). The proliferation of these information technologies has helped to democratize knowledge and has made it easier for consumers to teach and learn from one another more efficiently O'Hern and Rindfleisch (2010), for instance using technological interfaces for collaboration (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016).

Apart from that, the shift to a more active consumer has been driven by the realization that consumption alone cannot satisfy all consumers' needs; and particularly with regards to intrinsic and psychological aspects. Subsequently, more customers are deriving satisfaction from defining the value they want from goods and services (Skaržauskaitė 2013; Lee *et al.* 2011), for instance through satisfying customized and personalized experiences (De Konig *et al,* 2016; Janteng & Tan, 2017). At the same time, companies are pushed towards a steady increase of their efficiency and higher levels of value creation (Voorberg *et al.,* 2015).

Companies have realized that they can solve these issues by seizing the potential of the empowered and participating consumer in the form of co-creation of products and services. While a relatively new concept, business literature points to the fact that co-creation processes and campaigns may offer a number of benefits for companies, including lower costs, better market fit and higher levels of innovation. The paper at hand is taking a look at the main success factors of co-creation campaigns and contrasts effective as well as non-effective approaches.

For this purpose, successful co-creation strategies of major global brands, including Oreo, DHL and LEGO, with a view of characterizing relevant elements driving the effectiveness of their co-innovation approaches, shall be analyzed. These cases will then be contrasted to an empirical case project of a co-creation campaign of a medium sized enterprise in order to highlight both effective and non-effective approaches to co-creation. As a result, some of the key challenges and main points of difficulty in particular for smaller companies in context of co-creation initiatives will be identified.

2.0 Defining Co-Creation and Its Relevance for Innovative Companies

De Konig et al. (2016, p. 267) define co-creation as a process of making or producing things together. They focus their argumentation mostly on co-creation as a useful concept for firms to

drive down costs through collaborative production. The idea of co-creation as a process of cooperation is also posited by Cheron and Pera (2016), who further add that it can help create new products or services benefiting and of optimum value to both parties. Ranjan and Read (2014) underline that co-creation is based on the elements of co-production, interaction between the participating parties, joint equity and value creation. Similarly, Grönroos and Voima (2013), Cornelio and Cruz (2014), as well as Hamidi and Gharneh (2017), conceptualize co-creation as a form of collaboration between consumers and firms, including idea development and joint design of products and services. Others describe co-creation as a process making use of customer knowledge as a tool for enhancing the firm's production marketing and innovative capabilities (Tijmes, 2010). As Lee *et al.* (2012, p. 818) phrase it, within "the new ecosystem of global business, where individuals, organizations, governments, and economies are all networked and interdependent, we need a new innovation mode", suggesting co-creation and the thereof resulting co-innovation, as a potential solution.

Hence, through involving consumers and organizational stakeholders it may be possible for leading businesses, and even public actors, such as governmental institutions, to identify potential opportunities for creativity (Voorberg *et al.,* 2015). Moreover, information exchange between organizations and consumers allows organizations to better understand and predict future needs and desires of consumers even before designing goods or services. This helps to increase customer satisfaction and ultimately, encouraging customer loyalty and repeat purchase behaviour among consumers (Cossío-Silva *et al.* 2016; Pee, 2016). Cheron and Pera (2016) also note that co-creation strengthens the relationship that firms have with their consumers by enhancing communication and thereby trust in the organization. Weber (2011) furthermore finds that information collected from co-creation may help organizations achieve cost and time savings, as well as reduce the risk of uncertainty in the development of new products and services.

In line with this, co-creation can make a contribution to making businesses more pro-active and more customer-driven. Co-creation may thus enable companies to gain competitive advantages over their competitors by adopting customer-centrism and providing products and brands that satisfy the customers' needs more adequately (Iglesias *et al*., 2017; Sommer & Steger-Jensen, 2012; Lee *et al.,* 2012; Gebauer *et al.,* 2011; Hauser *et al*., 2006).

A study by Janteng and Tan (2017) confirms this assumption, finding a positive link between consumer involvement and a firm's innovative capability. Also Tijmes (2010) points out that in the role as a vital resource for firms, customers can influence production through both tangible (e.g., wealth) and intangible (e.g., information and ideas) factors. This seems to affirm the idea of co-creation enhancing the innovative capabilities of a firm, ultimately increasing the value of the company's offering, as customers – who by definition decide what product they consider of value – have an influence in its design and characteristics (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola, 2012).

This paper defines co-creation as a process that allows for close collaboration between companies and its customers with the aim of collaboratively creating value that may, in turn, contribute to the innovation of unique products and services. This particular dimension of co-creation may be referred to as co-innovation with customers acting as co-innovators in a new product or service development (Kohler *et al.* 2011; Lee et al. 2011; Zhang *et al*. 2015).

3.0 Obstacles for Effective Co-Creation Campaigns

While highly attractive as a theoretical concept, the actual implementation of co-creation campaigns however frequently appears to be a challenging task. In this context, Bergmayr *et al.* (2015) identified three main categories of obstacles for customer co-creation projects, including structural, procedural and communicational issues. First, in terms of structural challenges, a redefinition of the organizational structure to accommodate consumer co-creation may be necessary, as well as a clearly defined interaction management (Arnold 2017). More specifically, the Marketing as well as Research and Development departments may be resistant to co-creation projects particularly if they perceive such projects to be a threat to their relevance. A second structural challenge is the difficulty to define exactly what qualifies as adequate or suitable customer involvement in the creation of products and services. For example, firms may grapple with the dilemma of how much information and knowledge to divulge to consumers or even how much information to incorporate from users. On the same line, findings from a study conducted by Wadeisa and Sada (2015) suggest that part of the challenge stems from the fact that consumers and firms possess different skills, information and knowledge, making it hard to integrate knowledge within a joint project. The lack of certain skills and knowledge by consumers may also limit the ability of consumers to take part in processes, such as new product development effectively.

In addition, while the ideas proposed by consumer co-creators are potentially creative and novel in nature, not all may be feasible in regards to their production and commercialization (Hoyer *et al.,* 2010). Depending on the form of implementation, co-creation processes might also be costly (Torfing *et al.,* 2016). Wadeisa and Sada (2015) further identify input management as a challenge for firms implementing customer co-creation strategies. Companies could receive large volumes of data from co-creation efforts, having to screen for useful inputs. In other cases, it may be difficult to even activate relevant consumers or users to participate in co-innovation campaigns, as sufficient incentives must be offered for the individual to invest time in the collaborative projects.

Furthermore, firms built on secretive, patented information or proprietary knowledge are likely to find it challenging to implement effective customer co-creation strategies and programs, as the required transparency may not be so easy for innovative firms to practice or implement (Hoyer *et al.,* 2010). This is because some of these firms thrive on competitive advantages gained from heavily protecting data related to the development of products and services, such as in the IT and software industries. As a consequence, intellectual property rights become potential obstacles for the implementation of co-creation strategies (Hoyer *et al.,* 2010; Wadeisa & Sada, 2015). Some companies could choose to reserve the full rights of products and services resulting from co-creation initiatives. In such situations however, contributors may feel short-changed or unappreciated, leading to less participation in the future and distrust between the firm and consumers.

Yet another potential obstacle to the successful implementation of customer co-creation arises from the fact that most customer engagement initiatives take place online and on social media platforms. According to Hofacker and Belanche (2016), the Internet and social networking platforms have revolutionized Word-of-Mouth communication by increasing the speed and

efficiency at which consumers communicate with each other. In this sense, negative messages and information about firms may spread fast and wide digitally, without the company being able to control its outcome fully. As a result, commercial organizations may be afraid of actively engaging with customers because of fears of negative assessment.

4.0 Case Studies: Practical Implementation of Co-Creation

Despite these challenges, within the practical business environment in recent years a number of companies have had outstanding success with co-creation projects. In the following, some of the most prominent examples shall be briefly outlined, discussing cases from the toy, food, transportation and clothing industries. The first three cases have been selected due to their noteworthy success in gaining customer involvement, and thereby attracting attention well beyond a singular co-creation campaign. The last case however has been chosen as a counter example of a less effective approach.

The case of Oreo

Oreo is a popular brand of cookies made by Nabisco, a subsidiary of the Mondelez International snack company. With a history dating back to 1912, Oreo has built a reputation as one of the world's most renowned biscuit brands. As the world's best-selling cookie, at least 40 billion Oreos are produced every year generating over $2 billion in global revenues (Mondelez International, 2017). Apart from its financial success, the Oreo brand has also earned a reputation for its online marketing strategies, which have attracted a massive following on social media. For instance, on Facebook Oreo is liked by more than 42 million fans from all around the world; on Twitter the cookie brand has over 800,000 followers (Mondelez International 2017; Oreo Cookie, 2018).

Figure 1: Oreo's Viral Tweet during the 2013 Superbowl (Oremus 2013)

Oreo regularly uses social media to create value in the form of entertainment for customers, with their messages often having a touch of humor, sometimes earning thousands of likes and retweets.

In 2013 for example, after a blackout during the Super Bowl sports event, Oreo tweeted a message (shown in Figure 1) which would rack in almost 15,000 retweets and 20,000 likes on Facebook within minutes of being posted (Watercutter, 2013). By tweeting this message, Oreo entertained fans and kept them "buzzing" despite the blackout.

In 2014 Mondelez International set up the Oreo Trending Vending Lounge at the South by SouthWest conference and festivals in Texas (Macleod, 2014). This innovative co-creation strategy gave attendees of the conference a chance to eat customized Oreos based on real-time data collected from Twitter. More specifically, attendees got to choose from 12 flavors and colors, depending on what was trending on Twitter with each trend being associated with a particular combination of flavors. Snackers then got to watch their custom cookies being 3-D printed in two minutes (Sloane, 2014; Hanna, 2014). This not only gave customers the chance to customize their cookies, but it also allowed them to feel like they had taken part in the production of the custom cookies by letting them watch, choose and influence flavor combinations through the conversations they had on Twitter via the hashtag #eatthetweet (Sevenson, 2014).

Furthermore, at the beginning of the Christmas season 2015, Oreo launched the "Colorfilled" campaign introducing a limited time offer allowing customers to customize the packaging of original Oreo cookies as a way of expressing the festive mood (Winkler, 2015). The campaign featured pre-illustrated designs from the two artists Jeremyville and Timothy Goodman. After selecting a black and white basic design, customers could do the coloring using a digital paintbrush. In addition, they could add their own personalized messages to the packaging. The customized Oreo pack was then delivered to customers at an extra cost of $5 nationwide. Promotion of the campaign took place entirely through social media (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram) conversations using the hashtag #Colorfilled (Shayon, 2016). As a result of the campaign, the Oreo Colorfilled website achieved a conversion rate between 2 and 3 times higher than the industry standard for direct to consumer e-commerce at the time (Ibidem).

Figure 2: One of the black and white packaging designs in Colorfilled campaign (Nudd 2015

Figure 3: A customized Original Oreo packaging (Winkler 2015)

More recently in 2017, Oreo launched the #MyOreoCreation campaign in which it invited customers to suggest ideas for new Oreo flavors. The top 3 flavors would then be produced on a limited time basis in stores across the United States, with the winning flavor receiving $500,000 as prize money. The suggestions for the flavors were submitted on Twitter and Instagram via the hashtags #MyOreoCreation and #Contest as well as through the Oreo contest site (Villas-Boas, 2017). Subsequently, the contest saw a number of innovative flavor suggestions including coffee, popcorn, carrot cake, avocado, salted caramel and the winning flavor cherry cola (Sherman, 2017).

This co-creation contest offered several advantages for Oreo: First, it allowed the company to interact with customers and learn exactly what they want in terms of flavors; secondly, given the large amounts of free information, Oreo clearly benefited from low cost innovation; thirdly, customers not only got to suggest new flavors, some of them got to actually see their flavors being produced in limited edition (Lucas, 2017). The campaign was widely deemed a success with Oreo's impression score rising to 56 from around 47 in May 2017and its recommend score hit 45 up from 35 in May 2017 (Hiebert, 2018).

The Case of DHL

While co-creation campaigns are most visible in the fast moving consumer goods industries, they can indeed be found in various business areas, including transportation and logistics. For instance, DHL, a part of the Deutsche Post DHL Group and one of the top postal and logistics companies in the world with over 1.3 billion parcels delivered every year, could achieve remarkable results with its co-creation activities.

DHL has a presence in 220 countries and employs over 350,000 employees worldwide (DHL 2018). While the company's social media following is relatively small compared to that of Oreo

with just over 600,000 fans on Facebook, it has to be kept in mind that DHL's biggest customers are primarily corporates.

Nonetheless, the DHL is pursuing a co-creation strategy. As a customer-centric innovative company, DHL's innovation is founded on three pillars: the need to pay attention to the needs of customers, the importance of sharing cross industry best practices and solutions on a proactive basis and collaboration with DHL solution experts (DHL, 2018b).

In line with this, DHL has adopted a hands-on approach to co-creation by hosting customer innovation workshops to facilitate the sharing of best practice and to project the future of logistics. The DHL website explicitly highlights some of the value generated from these workshops. For this purpose, the company has invested in two innovation centers in Troisdorf, Germany and Singapore to provide a specialized environment for the fostering and showcasing of new ideas.

The conducted workshops specifically allow for collaboration between DHL and its customers with a view of coming up with ideas for new and highly satisfying products, services and processes. Some sessions focus on the collaboration between DHL experts and customers with the aim of developing custom and industry specific trend radars, as well as exploring potential solutions for specific issues, such as Big Data, low cost sensor application and use of robotics in logistics (Crandell, 2016; DHL, 2018b).

As a result of these initiatives, over 6000 collaboration engagements have taken place in DHL Innovation Centers, producing a number of innovative projects. For instance, the DHL Parcelcopter unmanned aerial vehicle is one such innovative service, promising greater responsiveness, agility and cost-efficiency. In fact, the DHL Parcelcopter has already been successfully deployed in medicine delivery missions to remote regions in East Africa (Deutsche Post DHL, 2018). Another example of innovation from the collaborative engagements is the smart glasses and augmented reality software project, which enhances the efficiency of the warehouse picking process. The success of the co-creation workshops may also have played a significant role in driving Customer Satisfaction scores beyond 80% and On-time Delivery Performance scores of its global business being at least 97%. DHL furthermore saw improvements in customer retention and an increase in income generated from new products and services (Crandell, 2016).

The case of LEGO

Yet another insightful case study of successful co-creation can be observed for the LEGO brand. LEGO is a Danish manufacturer of plastic construction toys mostly in the form of plastic bricks known as Lego bricks, mini-figures and other parts. LEGO toys are sold in at least 140 countries, with the company posting record profits of over $1.3 billion in 2016 (Lego Group, 2017). The LEGO brand has been ranked among the world's most powerful ones by Brand Finance, including in 2015 and 2017 when it topped the rankings (Kauflin, 2017). The strength of the brand is also reflected in its huge social media following that includes over 12 million fans on Facebook and over 6 million subscribers on its YouTube channel.

One of the most substantial co-creation initiative by the toy manufacturer has been LEGO IDEAS project (Gilliland, 2018). This program was officially launched worldwide in 2011 and allows fans

of Lego to submit ideas for new and innovative Lego play-set designs, which may be produced if they get at least 10,000 votes. Those who have their designs manufactured by Lego receive 1% worth of net sales from their creation (Ibidem).

In addition to that, fans stand the chance to win other prizes in the form of trips, shopping sprees and signed LEGO sets among others (LEGO IDEAS, 2018). The success of this initiative is evident in the fact that at least 19 Lego set ideas have been successfully created and commercialized, including the LEGO Voltron and a LEGO Ghostbusters (see Figure 4 and 5).

Figure 5: LEGO Ghostbusters set from LEGO IDEAS (Ratcliff 2014)

Figure 4: LEGO Voltron set from

The case of Ecochic

However, not all cases of co-creation are successful, as the following example is going to illustrate. For instance, the fashion manufacturer and seller Ecochic has implemented a co-creation campaign as part of their online marketing strategy in spring 2018. As the enterprise wishes to stay anonymous, the organization's name has been changed for this paper. All other information however is accurate and is reflecting the actual performance of the campaign. Until recently, the company had not pursued any strategic marketing plan and recently starting to with some innovative campaigns based on the input of some of its employees. Ecochic presents a rather small organization with an annual turnover of roughly 155.000 Euros. Each customer is in average ordering products worth around 136 Euros. In 2018, the company's social media websites registered more than 63.000 unique users.

Ecochic's customers are quite sophisticated and have an above-average education and income level. Around 90% of the customers are female. The visitors on the Facebook site also reflect this: Around 81% of the fans are female, and 18% male. As a method to involve its customers more, Ecochic started a co-creation marketing campaign in fall 2018, in which it encouraged its customers to come up with ideas for new products or about sustainable clothing. The contributors

were encouraged by participate by the promise of a product voucher of 100 Euros as part of a lottery.

However, as the company´s management was disappointed to find out, the results of this marketing activity have been extremely limited and not effective in their return of investment: While the co-creation campaign was set up with the goal of a large number of active shares and participation in the campaign, involvement has been extremely small, gaining only a handful of likes and just 15 contributions in form of comments at most, despite several attempts at the campaign in different form. Clearly, for this company, it has been difficult to successfully engage their audience in a proactive exchange of information and ideas. In fact, business literature has also been pointing to the fact that – despite effective examples – involving stakeholders and customer communities is not a trivial task (Harris & Dennis, 2011; Breuch, 2017). Ecochic's management apparently did not anticipate this kind of obstacle and did not have a strategic approach to proactively engage their audience, besides of posting the campaign messages on social media.

This brings up the question why – despite the other discussed companies being massively successful with a co-creation approach, the same results could not be realized with Ecochic. Indeed on the first look, it seems that the fashion producer is in a suitable position for such a campaign, as its fans are educated, interested and involved. While the absolute reason is hard or even impossible to pinpoint, some potential reasons are elaborated upon in the following as a conceptual analysis of the above discussed case examples. While not necessarily completely transferable or statistically relevant due to their individual situation, considered in comparison these corporate cases can nevertheless give insightful indications for the development of best practices.

4.1 Success Factors for Co-Creation Strategies

Audience size

One of the first things noticeable in the successful case studies is that each of the brands analyzed has access to large audiences that hold huge potential for brand-customer collaboration and the creation of mutual value. Oreo, for example, boosts over 42 million fans on Facebook and over 800,000 followers on Twitter. In addition to that, it is sold in 100 countries around the world implying access to a worldwide, potential audience for collaboration projects. Similarly, LEGO can exploit its massive audience both in terms of access to geographical markets, as well as concerning its social media following. The company sells its products in at least 140 countries. In addition, the company has over 12 million fans and on YouTube it has attracted over 6 million subscribers to its channel. However, while Oreo and LEGO have millions of fans on social media sites, the same cannot be said for DHL with just over 600,000 fans on Facebook. Nonetheless, a key difference between DHL and Oreo and LEGO is the fact that DHL's clientele is largely comprised of corporate customers. Furthermore, DHL still has access to a large worldwide audience due to its presence in at least 220 countries and thereby benefits from a significant geographic diversity.

The importance of audience size for the success of co-creation strategies is further illustrated by the fact that Oreo chose the 2014 South by SouthWest Conferences and Festivals to implement its Oreo Trending Vending Lounge co-creation project. This annual event is attended by hundreds of

thousands with the 2014 event recording official attendance figures of at least 400,000 people (Forrest 2015). On the same note, LEGO IDEAS contest requires successful IDEAS to garner at least 10,000 votes implying that the project maintains a large audience, which sustains its success. LEGO Life may also be deemed effective from the start due to its ability to attract a huge audience of over 700,000 children below the age of 13 in the first year alone. Such a large audience produces value in the form of a bigger pool of creative ideas from which LEGO can draw from, as well as social value for members in the form of increased potential for interaction and networking.

With Ecochic on the other hand just having around 60.000 followers, its network of potential contributors has likely been too small to gain traction. For this point, it would be desirable to conduct further empirical studies to confirm this assumption. Unfortunately, failed co-creation campaigns are much less visible and are usually not referred to in business research, which would make them an insightful target for the development of best practices.

These cases furthermore underline the relevance of choosing the right audience for co-creation. For example, Oreo and LEGO both target individual consumers with their co-creation strategies; in the case of LEGO Life, this includes targeting a specific audience of children aged below 13. On the other hand, DHL, recognizing that its most important clients are corporates targets these organizations to take part in its innovation workshops and other co-creation projects. For example, the IoT report is produced by DHL and one of its corporate customers, Cisco. Petrovski and Neto (2017) note that targeting the right audience is important as it allows brands to better understand the needs of their customers and subsequently design strategies to create value that matters for customers. The right targeting may also help brands choose audiences with whom they have shared interests; a factor recognized as an influencer of co-creation by Akolk, Huang and Perrone (2016).

Involvement Level

Customer involvement is defined as the overall perception that individuals possess in regards to the relevance of a particular object based on their needs and interests, as well as the things they value (Ida 2017). High customer involvement is characterized by users with increased interest in a firm's activities and projects. It is also associated with increased engagement and ultimately, an improved environment for collaboration between firms and their customers (Setiyati & Wijaya, 2015). Customer involvement as characterized in this paper, therefore, refers to the level of interest and motivation that customers have to engage in co-creation activities with firms. The importance of customer involvement is perhaps most evident in the incentives that the brands under study have put in place to create audience interest in their specific co-creation initiatives. With Oreo, for example, an incentive for customers to contribute to the #eatthetweet conversations was the possibility of influencing flavors being offered at the Oreo Trending Vending Lounge. Similarly, the incentive for using the vending machine was the intrinsic value of customizing one's Oreo cookie, as well as the satisfaction of getting to watch the cookie being produced using 3D printing technology. The vending machine, therefore, provided a unique experience which served as a motivator for people wanting to use the machine and participate in the #eatthetweet conversations. For its #MyOreoCreation campaign, Oreo incentivized fans to participate by offering a wide range

of prices, including $500,000 for the most innovative flavor, as well as the possibility of having Oreo produce limited batch editions of some of the unique flavors created in the contest.

In regards to DHL, customer interest in the innovation workshops is heightened by the fact the logistics company provided a platform for firms to share best practices, explore solutions such as the incorporation of disruptive technologies in their supply chains, and to get useful industry insights to better equip them for the future. To build customer interest, LEGO even employs a number of strategies focusing on this goal in their co-creation projects. For instance, the chance to rate the creations of others, to compete against other designers and the possibility of winning prizes, such as trips, shopping sprees and having one's creation produced by LEGO subsequently being entitled to 1% of the net revenues, all serve to motivate fans to take part in the LEGO IDEAS co-creation project, be it as voters, designers or just spectators. On the other hand, the promise of having a secure place to network and share LEGO creations helps to motivate the under 13-year-olds to join the social networking app LEGO Life.

Here also the difference to Ecochic becomes apparent: As only a minor eco-brand, it could probably not evoke enough interest and involvement among its followers to produce noteworthy participant numbers. In addition, just the promise of a 100 Euro product voucher might have been insufficient as incentive to co-create.

In summary, the above illustrates the importance of having incentives in place to help create and sustain customer involvement in co-creation projects. These may include monetary and non-monetary incentives. In addition to that, in particular the cases LEGO Life and DHL highlight the relevance of creating value that is relevant for a firm's customers by motivating them to take part in co-creation projects and activities.

Communication and Marketing Approach

Another success factor that may be identified in light of the successful case studies is the need for an appropriate communication and marketing approach. Communication, as used in this paper, refers to the exchange of information between the firm or brand and its customers, while marketing is particularly concerned with the promotion and creation of awareness regarding co-creation projects and activities carried out by a brand (Hasan and Rahman 2016). In the case of Oreo, communication and promotions regarding co-creation activities are done mostly via social media such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. For example the success of the #eatthetweet campaign seems to have largely depended on conversations taking place on Twitter via the hashtag. The promotional success of the campaign is evident in the fact that the #eathetweet hashtag trended for more than 24 hours including before the beginning of the South by SouthWest conferences and festivals.

Similarly, communication and promotional activity regarding the #MyOreoCreation campaign took place entirely via the social media networks Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The same can also be said for LEGO which has particularly excelled in using YouTube as a platform for intra-customer and customer-brand communication. However, the failure of #legoideas to become popular on Twitter and Instagram despite the project being a popular one seems to suggest that choosing the right communication and promotional strategy is a complex task, even for the most

successful of brands. While the DHL case study does not show any evidence of how the brand communicates with customers and promotes its innovation centers on social media, communication still emerges as an essential factor.

For instance, DHL clearly communicates the value that customer-centric innovation workshops provide on its website. The use of highly interactive social media, primarily YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram by LEGO and Oreo seems to underline the importance of open communication among customers and between the firm or brand and its customers (Akolk *et al.,* 2016). At the same time, this finding furthermore suggests the impact of firms communicating with customers across multiple platforms, so as to ensure that the core messages reach as many people as possible. On the other hand, the success of the DHL innovation workshops underline that promotion of co-creation activities need not necessarily take place on social media for them to be successful. Brands can promote their activities and communicate with customers via other platforms, such as their websites and offline, such as showrooms like the DHL Vision Suite, as long as these touch points can reach the audience effectively.

Here we also see the difference in comparison to Ecochic: Besides of posting the co-creation campaign on Facebook, no further steps were taken to attract attention to the program. In essence this means that most likely only a small part of the brand´s audience was actually aware of the enterprise´s efforts, clearly limiting the impact of the campaign.

Visibility and virality of Co-Creation Content

The last noteworthy factor for the success of the discussed case studies might be visibility and virality of the co-creation campaign. Visibility, as characterized in this paper, refers to how seeable a brand and its co-creation campaign is. Ideally, increased visibility results in increased awareness about the brand and its co-creation campaigns or activities (Levy 2014). Virality, on the other hand, is used to refer to the extent to which a particular brand message surges in online popularity as a result of being distributed by users and customers (West, 2011). The relevance of visibility and virality is best illustrated by the Oreo and LEGO case studies. Oreo's viral tweet during the blackout at the 2013 Super Bowl earned it positive reviews and increased the visibility of the brand both on Twitter and Facebook. LEGO's videos are also renowned for their popularity, often garnering thousands and even millions of views. It may be possible that the viral nature of this content and the visibility it creates helps to ensure that mutual value is created by collaborating or engaging with as many people as possible. This might consequently boost the potential for the co-creation initiative to succeed. Nonetheless, the DHL case study illustrates, virality by itself is not a mandatory prerequisite for co-creation success.

Again, concerning this dimension, Ecochic did not follow an effective approach: A simple idea contest with a relatively small incentive has likely been not remarkable enough to gain sufficient virality and visibility within the crowded digital marketplace.

5.0 Conclusion and Future Outlook

The aim of this paper was to identify and discuss some of the necessary success factors for co-creation strategies. Using the examples of Oreo, DHL, LEGO and Ecochic, a range of possible

success factors of co-creation have been identified. The first of these is the audience; more specifically, having a large audience and targeting the right people with the campaign. Secondly, the level of customer involvement may present a possible determinant of co-creation success. In particular, firms ought to come up with strategies to generate interest in their activities and motivate customers to take part in them. This includes the use of monetary and non-monetary incentives. Evidence suggests that the more the interest customers have in a co-creation project, the higher its chances of success. Thirdly, the paper has identified communication and marketing approach as further relevant regarding a brand's co-creation and subsequently a possible determinant of success. The case studies have illustrated the need to communicate clearly about the value of the co-creation project, as well as the effectiveness of implementing communication and promotional activities across multiple platforms. The last factor identified in this paper is the visibility and virality of content. The case studies, particularly of Oreo and LEGO, clearly demonstrate that going viral can be beneficial in helping to enhance the visibility of co-creation activities and content. However, the DHL case also highlights that virality is not a mandatory factor for visibility and success of co-creation.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that while these conclusions are based on the findings from the analyzed case studies, they are based on secondary data that was investigated mainly on a theoretical and logical basis. This means that the causal relationship between the four factors identified and co-creation success has not been empirically established. In the future, it would be necessary for more scientific research to be carried out to further assess and ascertain the causal relationship between the four success factors identified and co-creation success. In addition to that, while this paper has shown that co-creation can take place on online as well as offline platforms, the growth of the internet and social media and networks suggests that the future of co-creation may lie in the ability of brands to leverage these social platforms to create mutual values. Given the open and competitive nature of the Internet, this may increase the importance of virality in enhancing brand visibility and influencing the success of co-creation. Ultimately, brands must continuously find new and exciting ways to engage their audience, convince them of the benefit to co-create and keep them interested through innovative content and ideas.

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