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A NEW CLASSIFICATION OF OPPORTUNISM IN CO-CREATION PLATFORMS

ABSTRACT

Co-creation platforms are virtual platforms dedicated to a variety of contests launched by a seeker of a particular solution (e.g., brands). These contests are solved by different participants (e.g., individuals) having distinct skills, background, and resources (e.g., knowledge, time). These platforms are characterized by conflict of interests and uncertainty, and they are a place where everyone try their best to achieve their goals. As such, different behaviors may take place.

This study focuses on opportunism which is one of the most prevalent and inherent behavior in co-creation platforms. Building on co-creation platforms and opportunism literatures, we investigate the role of opportunism in co-creation platforms. By using the method of Netnography in one of the leading international co-creation platforms, we found that opportunism could be constructive and destructive at the same time. Theoretical and practical implications are presented.

Keywords: Crowdsourcing, Co-creation, Co-creation Platforms, Opportunism

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, many brands outsource certain tasks to the crowd (i.e., Internet users). This has become popular since it allows them to solve complex problems and get out-of-the-box ideas. This outsourcing could be done through a brand's own platform (e.g., My Starbucks Idea, P&G Connect & Develop, Lego Ideas, Club Makers) or via another one managed by a third party which gathers different brands to multicultural individuals (e.g., eYeka, Jovoto).

These platforms could be based on three models: cooperation (e.g., Google's open source platform), competition (e.g., InnoCentive, Eli Lilly) or coopetition (e.g., Swarovski Enlightened, eYeka). The two former models are the most known. However, the latter is the one that includes an interactional community with both cooperative (possibility to give feedback) and competitive functionalities (leaderboard, prize) and on which we are working (Hutter et al. 2011; Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2018; Rass et al. 2010; Zhao et al. 2016). This exchange space allows participants to share, discuss, rate, and vote on the best ideas (Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2018).

These platforms are known by conflict of interests, uncertainty (Jian et al. 2019), and participants may adopt different behaviors to attain their goals such as opportunism.

Prior research has mainly been focused on studying opportunism in physical world and categorizes it according to interfirm relationships.

Also, literature on co-creation platforms has intensively discussed the characteristics of the crowds, their motivations, even if, at many times, various authors (Leclercq et al. 2016; Rass et al. 2010; Roth 2016) have highlighted the importance of conducting further research on opportunism. In fact, little is known about opportunism in virtual world, especially in the context of co-creation platforms.

Therefore, our study aims at exploring the role of opportunism in co-creation platforms. Also, with this research, we propose a new categorization of opportunism in this context.

In order to fill this gap, we address the following research question:

What is the role of opportunism in co-creation platforms and what are its forms and related individual reactions?

BACKGROUND

Firms give a lot of importance to innovation. That's why knowing how to innovate is what makes the difference. One of the most adopted strategy nowadays is crowdsourcing. The latter refers to outsourcing tasks to the crowd (i.e., public online) (Howe 2006; Innocent et al. 2017; Lemoine et al. 2017). That obviously means that crowdsourcing takes place in the internet through platforms which are dedicated to online contests. For instance, one of the first and famous crowdsourcing platforms is "InnoCentive". It is based only on competition. Through it, organizations seek and find solutions to complex problems.

There are various types of crowdsourcing, but we focused our work on the one characterized by co-creation (i.e., crowdsourcing of creative activities) (Lemoine et al. 2017), a process through which actors collaborate and create value together (Leclercq et al. 2016).

Therefore, we work on platforms based on co-creation and we use the term co-creation platforms to refer to.

Co-creation platforms are the place where actors interact and create value together (Leclercq et al. 2016). They contain an interactional space that could be based on three types of models (Hutter et al. 2011; Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2018; Rass et al. 2010; Zhao et al. 2016): cooperation, competition, and also co-competition (which designates the mixture between both cooperative and competitive functionalities of the community). In these platforms, participants behave differently to achieve their goals. Among these behaviors we have identified "opportunism".

Psychologists defined opportunism as recognizing and seizing opportunities (Hammond et al. 1993; Seifert and Patalano 2001). It has been discussed in terms of planning time (Hayes-Roth and Hayes-Roth 1979) and execution time (Birnbaum and Collins 1984), and thus, it has been linked to goals whether the suspended or the executed ones (Hammond et al. 1993). This helped us to find out participants that plan, in advance, to act opportunistically and those that adopt this behavior at that particular moment of participation.

In management literature, opportunism has been explored in terms of interfirm relationships (Williams 1975). Researchers have identified some types of opportunism in physical world (e.g., cheating, lying, distorting information) (Wathne and Heide 2000), and they consider it only as a destructive and dysfunctional behavior (Lusch and Brown 1996).

From a co-creation platforms standpoint, research has been focused on studying characteristics of the crowds, their motivations, the strategies they adopt (i.e., cooperation, competition, co-competition) without investigating opportunism even if different researchers have highlighted the importance of exploring it further (Leclercq et al. 2016; Rass et al. 2010). Hence, little is known about opportunism in virtual world, particularly in the context of co-creation platforms.

Based on both views of opportunism (i.e., psychology and management), we have found that numerous studies explored it in physical world.

Comparing to prior literature, our study takes a new direction in opportunism analysis which is the context of co-creation platforms. Therefore, we address the following research question: **"what is the role of opportunism in co-creation platforms and what are its forms and related individual reactions?"**.

METHODOLOGY

To explore opportunism in co-creation platforms, we chose the method of Netnography since it is efficient for analyzing online communities (Kozinets 2010).

Therefore, we proceeded as follows:

- *Planning and Entrée*: after a deep research on Internet, we chose to work on a leading international co-creation platform that links various brands to different participants from around the world.
- *Data collection*: three types of data were collected: Archival data (from the community blog of the platform and forums), Fieldnote data (through our participant observation in the platform and forums), and Elicited data (email interviews with 40 community members).
- *Data analysis*: we realized a thematic content analysis using Nvivo 12.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We found out the existence of two categories of opportunism: opportunism of the participants and opportunism of the brands. For each of these two categories, we identified different forms.

Opportunism of the participants

Destructive feedback: This opportunistic behavior is described by the participants as the reception of bad and rude comments or negative reviews.

Acting this way, opportunists aim at discouraging the participant and incite him to quit the platform in order to get more attention of brands and then win.

To face opportunists and try to protect themselves, most other participants react, in their turn, by deploying similar opportunistic strategies.

Theft of ideas: Firstly, this concerns specifically the exploitation of the creators' ideas by their peers in other contests. In the same contest, the similarity of ideas could also happen but generally by accident.

Secondly, because of the possibility of saving visible ideas on the community space, opportunists may also use their peers' ideas for nurturing their own projects without their permission.

Some participants contend that they do nothing about stealing. Their justification is that they don't have any proof and so they don't even report that to the platform's Team.

However, others act differently and add their stolen idea to their portfolio to show their creativity and skills.

Cheating: it is a recurring opportunistic behavior that emerged during the study. Participants contended that they always see the same winners on the platform even if their ideas are not original and are often just a copy of what already exists on the market.

In this case, the interviewees affirm that they can do nothing because the decision is made by brands. For them, the latter are responsible for these deviant behaviors.

Mutual learning: at first sight this may seem as an ethical behavior, but in fact it is just the opposite. Through our discussion with the participants we discovered that they give a lot of importance to the visibility of ideas on the community space by pretending their thirst for learning.

As a result, participants don't react to this form of opportunistic behavior.

Opportunism of the brands

Spoilation: some creators confirmed the exploitation of their rejected ideas by firms, without their approval. Some of them even mentioned the name of the brands because the latter have free access to all ideas.

Our analysis revealed various types of creators' reactions toward this form of opportunism.

On one hand, there are participants who react positively to the spoilation of ideas, by adding the stolen idea to their portfolio.

On the other hand, there are those who stay neutral and don't react. These participants justify their passive reaction by arguing that they know that taking part in such platforms is too risky.

These results show clearly that opportunism is inherent in the platform and almost everyone accept it and use it as a strategy to overcome their peers and win. This makes opportunism constructive for participants as well as brands and the platform, since it allows them all to attain their goals.

However, we found that there are some participants that develop negative feelings toward the platform and the brands (i.e., being exploited and being cheated), which lead them to disengage from the platform without getting any value. This could be destructive to the platform too in the future.

As a result, opportunism could be either constructive or destructive in co-creation platforms.

CONCLUSION

Firstly, our current study contributes to both co-creation platforms and opportunism literatures by suggesting a new classification of opportunism in virtual world, particularly, in the context of co-creation platforms. Consequently, through a dialectic perspective, we have identified the role of opportunism. It could be constructive and/or destructive for co-creators. Moreover, it's an inherent strategy in co-creation platforms and hence it is accepted and adopted by almost all the participants.

Secondly, concerning practical implications, our results give insights to co-creation platforms' managers about their co-creators' behavior (i.e., opportunism), which can help them to adjust their strategies to the latter.

Finally, we suggest that these platforms' managers frame opportunism on their platforms in a balanced way (i.e., keeping it but in a certain limit) in order to avoid negative Word-Of-Mouth or actions that could be taken against them.

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