THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON OPPORTUNISM IN CO-CREATION PLATFORMS

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ABSTRACT

Crowdsourcing of creative activities takes place in co-creation platforms, which gather participants worldwide, who take part in contests launched by brands through these platforms. However, in the latter, a variety of behaviors may take place, among them we identified opportunism. Prior research has mainly discussed opportunism in terms of strategic alliances between firms and has analyzed it from a negative view. Moreover, extant literature of co-creation platforms has neglected studying the relationship between culture and opportunism in co-creation platforms by focusing on investigating, more importantly, the crowds' motivations. Therefore, our study aims to fill this gap by investigating the impact of culture on participants' opportunistic behavior in co-creation platforms. Netnography was used in a famous international co-creation platform and thus gave rise to important results which are presented together with theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: Crowdsourcing of creative activities, Co-creation Platforms, Opportunism, Culture, Netnography

INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technologies offer a lot of alternatives to firms to better innovate. Among these alternatives we find crowdsourcing of creative activities (Lemoine et al., 2017), which aims at calling on the wisdom of the crowd (Brabham, 2010; Howe, 2006). It is based on co-creation, a process through which the actors collaborate to create value (Boukouyen et al., 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Leclercq et al., 2016). Crowdsourcing of creative activities takes place in co-creation platforms, which are virtual platforms where actors co-create to generate value (e.g., InnoCentive, Club Makers, My Starbucks Ideas, eYeka) (Boukouyen et al., 2020a, 2020c). Participants worldwide take part in contests launched by brands through these platforms (Hutter et al., 2011). The latter give the opportunity to participants to interact and see their peers' ideas through an interactional model that is based on coopetition. The latter means the simultaneity of cooperation and competition. Apart from the cooperative behaviors, like interactions between participants who help each other to improve their contributions, we found opportunism (Boukouyen et al., 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). Drawing on the literature of psychology, opportunism is defined as recognizing and seizing opportunities (Seifert and Patalano, 2001). On one hand, prior research has mainly discussed opportunism in terms of strategic alliances between firms and has analyzed it from a negative view. On the other hand, extant literature of co-creation platforms has neglected studying the impact of culture on opportunism in co-creation platforms by focusing on investigating, interestingly, the crowds' motivations (e.g., Jian et al. 2019). Therefore, our study attempts to fill this gap by addressing the following research question: **what is the impact of culture on participants' opportunistic behavior in co-creation platforms?**

BACKGROUND

Crowdsourcing of creative activities and co-creation platforms

Crowdsourcing of creative activities refers to a practice where brands seek brand new solutions (creative ideas) from the crowd (i.e., online users or participants) by launching online contests through co-creation platforms. These contests may concern graphic design, creative writing, service innovation, product innovation (Lemoine et al., 2017). After taking part in these contests, participants submit the creative ideas in the platform, which are transferred to the brands via their Community Managers. The winning ideas are rewarded whether monetary or non-monetary and then transformed to an innovative product or service (Boukouyen et al., 2020a, 2020c). In fact, the platforms are composed of a coopetitive model, which combines both cooperative (e.g., feedback and discussion) and competitive (e.g., prize) functionalities of the community. Participants may help each other by commenting on their peers' ideas but at the same time focusing on their contributions and strive to win. Therefore, they may act for their personal interest and act opportunistically by seizing the opportunities they recognize. This behavior is named opportunism, which we have been able to identify in co-creation platforms (Boukouyen et al., 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c).

Opportunism

The concept of opportunism has been mainly studied in terms of interfirm relationships in the context of strategic alliances, and researchers have limited it to a destructive view by following the definition given to it by Williamson (1975): "opportunism is self-interest seeking with guile". However, psychologists consider opportunism as recognizing and taking advantage of current opportunities. They analyzed it based on individuals' daily tasks by applying two models, planning and execution times (Hammond et al., 1993). Although studying opportunism is crucial to conduct successful crowdsourcing campaigns (Jian et al., 2019), co-creation

platforms' literature has neglected it by studying the motivations of the crowd, as aforementioned. Furthermore, in management and marketing, researchers have discussed opportunism in different manners, by identifying its forms (e.g., Williamson, 1975), the controlling mechanisms (e.g., Wathne and Heide, 2002), or demonstrating the impact of culture on it (e.g., Chen et al., 2002). Starting from this point, we decided to understand the relationship between culture and opportunism in a whole different context, which is that of co-creation platforms, by investigating the impact of the former on the latter, drawing on Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

Culture

Along with motivations and personality traits, culture plays an important role in guiding and determining individuals' behavior, thus it is considered as one of the main human behaviors' drivers. According to Matsumoto and Juang (2016), culture "provides guidelines or roadmaps on what to do, how to think, and what to feel". Referring to Chen et al. (2002), culture affects opportunism, and it is a check for opportunism (Williamson, 1975).

Culture is defined through two different perspectives. The first one considers culture as external to the person and concerns their beliefs and values. However, the second one, which stems from psychology, considers it as internal to the person together with their motivations, perceptions, attitudes, personality traits (Chen et al., 2002). In fact, many theories emerged to explain and understand this concept. However, we draw our study on Hofstede's work to better understand and explore the impact of culture on opportunism in co-creation platforms. In line with this, Hofstede (1984, 2011) identified six dimensions of culture, namely: Power distance, Individualism-Collectivism, Masculinity-Femininity, Uncertainty avoidance, Long term orientation-Short term orientation, Indulgence-Restraint. In our current study, we chose to work on these dimensions – which are interrelated – since a variety of cultures are gathered in co-creation platforms. In fact, for the cultural dimension of Individualism-Collectivism, we relied on three factors to explain the opportunistic behavior of both individualists and collectivists: self-identity, self-interest, and moral obligation (Chen et al., 2002).

METHODOLOGY

The present study – which is part of our main research project – carried out a qualitative approach based on Netnography, which is founded by Kozinets in 1997 and consists in studying online communities. We chose it because it is efficient and suits better our research context (i.e., co-creation platforms). Thus, we followed four main steps of Netnography:

Planning and entrée: this step consists in choosing and entering in the community following specific characteristics, namely: heterogeneity (linking different brands to participants worldwide), interactivity, data-richness. Therefore, we worked on an international co-creation platform that has all these characteristics.

Data collection: in the present study, we relied specifically on fieldnote data (through our participant observation) and elicited data (interviewing by email 22 participants). All the participants interviewed belong to different countries and thus cultures: **India, Morocco, Argentina, Sweden, Croatia, Egypt, Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Philippines, Madagascar, United Kingdom, Belarus, China.**

Data analysis: we performed a thematic content analysis by relying on three main steps (Miles and Huberman, 1994, 2003): data management, data reduction, and interpretation. The latter is done through a hermeneutic approach (Thompson, 1994). Nvivo 11 was used during this step.

Research ethics: to avoid any project's failure or results' bias, we did not follow the perspective of Kozinets (2015), stipulating that a researcher should disclose their identity to the community. However, we kept the anonymity of the platform and its members.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned before, this study is a part of our global research project, so different results concerning opportunism emerged and have been published. However, we are going to shed light only on the main results which are related to the current study, because the latter discusses just one of our project's research questions, which concerns the effect of culture on opportunism in co-creation platforms.

In our previous studies, we identified three categories of opportunism, which we are going to explain briefly: opportunism of the participants composed of destructive feedback (receiving negative comments), theft of ideas (exploiting peers' ideas), cheating (using already existing ideas), mutual learning (learning from peers without giving one's help), opportunism of the brands containing spoliation (exploiting participants' rejected ideas by brands), and opportunism of the platform including failure to respect co-creation approach which means not involving participants in determining their expected benefits and favoritism which stands for making a difference between co-creators (i.e., brands, participants). Concerning opportunism of the participants, we found two types of negative feelings: being exploited (related to contribution and reward factor) and being cheated (related to transparency and clarity of the platform), which we are going to use to address our research question.

Through our discussion with the community members, the latter did not specify the cultures (or countries) of opportunists. However, by analyzing in depth their verbatim, we found that participants who behave opportunistically pertain to two different cultures: collectivist (India) and individualist (United Kingdom, Argentina). This result contradicts prior literature that stipulates that collectivists act opportunistically only towards outgroups. In our study, this could be explained by the fact that India, known basically as collectivist, is also individualist. So, here the participant is individualist and act opportunistically to protect himself but also to gain a competitive advantage: *"The good part is you always learn and get to see what others have done globally in the community space"*. Thus, we support prior research affirming that individualists are opportunists because they try to protect themselves, concentrate on their self-interest, and have a low score of moral obligation. For the participant coming from Argentina, he learns from his peers for three reasons: self-interest, ego, and gaining a competitive advantage.

Our analysis reveals three individual reactions towards opportunists:

Acting the same way (i.e., opportunistically): participants pertaining to this category whether they try to protect themselves, satisfy their self-interest, or have low moral obligation (i.e., they do not have a sense of community and do not respect the platform's rules). In this case, participants are from India and United Kingdom. One of the community members added: *"So, whenever I have received a bad comment […] I have given back in the same style"*.

Doing nothing: participants who do not face opportunists are those who act by opportunism, since the latter is a normal behavior for them, or those who respect ethics, have a sense of community, and for whom trust is the most important within a community and which guides their behavior. In this case, four cultures are concerned, namely: India, Morocco, Egypt, Sweden, and Croatia. One of the participants noted: "*I trust the Platform and its team, and I would like to share with them my creativities forever… Frankly, I am attached to this Platform and I like it a lot"*.

Other tactics: participants face opportunists by behaving differently and are from two cultures: Firstly, Sweden, by integrating their stolen idea in their portfolio. This reaction can be explained by the fact that Sweden has a high score of Indulgence-Restraint. So, Swedish tend to be optimists and have a positive attitude: *"If somebody else use your idea […] be proud of it even if nobody paid you. You can put it into your portfolio"*. Secondly, Philippines, by comparing their ideas with those of opportunists and ignoring their destructive feedback, and they are always happy with their ideas: *"First is I check their designs […] and compare them to mine […] Second, I take a good look at my work. I'm always happy with the designs I submit […]"*. This could be explained by two main reasons. Firstly, in cultures where masculinity is high, conflicts are resolved by facing them. Secondly, Philippines is known by a low score of Uncertainty avoidance, so in situations where uncertainty prevails, like co-creation platforms, Filipinos adopt a relaxed attitude: *"some of the brands used my idea too […] But for me, it is okay. It is just like that in contests. Sometimes we win, but more times, we always lost"*.

Concerning negative feelings, we found that participants who express them come from: Madagascar, Sweden, United Kingdom, Belarus, Indonesia, Dominican Republic, China. These feelings are related to the cultural dimension of Power distance. In fact, we found that for participants coming from cultures with low Power Distance believe that inequalities must be minimized, and participants should be treated equally. Cultures concerned by this result are Madagascar, Sweden, and United Kingdom. For one of the community members who is from Madagascar, he chose to disengage from the platform: *"The first time I thought the platform can be something safe, but there is always the risk of getting your projects used by the companies […] I did not participate anymore […]"*. Concerning the other cultures (i.e., Belarus, Indonesia, Dominican Republic), Power distance scores are high, which means that individuals accept centralization of power. In fact, even if they feel that they are exploited, participants from these cultures, whether they trust and give importance to the platform's rules (i.e., Belarus), or they do not react against opportunists (i.e., do nothing) for two reasons. Firstly, because the most important for them is stimulating their creativity (i.e., Dominican Republic). Secondly, they accept inequalities and centralization of power (i.e., Indonesia). However, we found that the participant coming from China, decided to disengage too, and not accept the centralization of power even if China is known by its high score of Power distance.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Although our current study is still in its early stages, and the results evoked in the present paper are preliminary, it has important implications.

Concerning theoretical implications, our present study contributes to both opportunism and co-creation platforms' literatures by investigating the culture's impact on opportunism in co-creation platforms drawing on Hofstede's cultural dimensions. A question that has not been addressed before by prior literature of co-creation platforms, rather it has only been studied in management literature (Chen et al., 2002). The results emerged from the present study demonstrate that participants act opportunistically according to their culture and its related dimensions.

For methodological implications, our study used the method of Netnography in a leading co-creation platform, since it is heterogenous – gathers participants worldwide – and provides us with crucial and valuable data that yielded interesting findings.

Finally, regarding practical implications, our study provides co-creation platforms' managers with valuable insights that will help them to better understand their participants' behavior, especially opportunism, and to know how to deal with them according to their culture.

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