Customer cocreation experience in online communities

Nohutlu, Zeynep Didem; Englis, Basil G.; Groen, Aard J.; Constantinides, Efthymios

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Customer cocreation experience in online communities: antecedents and outcomes

Zeynep Didem Nohutlu
Department of High-Tech Business and Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Behavioral, Management and Social Sciences, Universiteit Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands
Basil G. Englis
Department of Management, Marketing and Creative Technologies, Berry College Campbell School of Business, Mount Berry, Georgia, USA
Aard J. Groen
University of Groningen Centre of Entrepreneurship, University College Groningen, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands, and
Efthymios Constantinides
Department of High-Tech Business and Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Behavioral, Management and Social Sciences, University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to obtain an in-depth insight into the nature and impact of customers' cocreation experiences in online communities and the effects of customer cocreation on innovation processes.
Design/methodology/approach – This study is focused on an online cocreation community created by a market research company on behalf of a company. By means of a case study approach and through in-depth interviews, the authors identify the actual customer experiences and measure (or assess) the degree of involvement of customer creativity and experience in new idea generation.
Findings – Cocreation experience can be enhanced through evoking pragmatic, sociability, usability and hedonic experiences and more positive experiences and therefore, outcomes of collaborative innovation in online communities can be achieved. Findings show a classification of each role the community moderator/community manager and peer online community members perform as antecedents of cocreation experience, highlight the value of group feeling/sense of community/sense of belonging and homophily/communality in achieving that, the nature of a supportive online platform and give an overview of positive and negative outcomes of cocreation experience.
Originality/value – This case study provides with valuable insights in the phenomenon of customer cocreation and how to enhance participation of community members in collaborative innovation in online communities through positive experience, which is important for businesses involved in innovation trajectories and product and service improvement efforts.

Keywords Cocreation, Customer experience, Online communities, Digital marketing, Innovation management, Collaborative innovation

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Cocreation is a process in which firms interact with different actors in their various networks to jointly innovate their services and products (Gemser and Perks, 2015; Frow *et al.*, 2015). Companies engage in cocreation with their customers in order to learn from customer experiences

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with their products and services and to benefit from their innovative ideas for improving their offerings or developing new ones. The term customer cocreation refers to actively involving customers during new product or service development (Hoyer *et al.*, 2010). The potential of customers who are involved in cocreation activities cannot be underestimated; these customers can be very skillful and pioneering parties in the innovation process (Füller, 2006).

Using an online community for cocreation is an effective way of reaching the collective intelligence of a firm's customers all around the world (Antikainen *et al.*, 2010). These communities enable a fast and high-quality dialogue with many customers: online platforms make it easy to share and comment on ideas at any moment and from any location anywhere in the world. An online community is a network environment, and it enables social interactions between community members who share a common interest (Porter *et al.*, 2011).

There are different types of online communities where cocreation takes place. Considering their governance types, these communities can be firm hosted (e.g. Dell Idea Storm, My Starbucks Idea) or can be set up and moderated by an independent party such as a market research company. The latter is often labeled as a market research online community (MROC) or a private online community. Such online communities can lead service or product innovations through jointly formed ideas by their members (Füller *et al.*, 2007). Cocreation in these communities can focus on different stages of new product development (NPD): ideation, design, testing or launch (Hoyer *et al.*, 2010; Russo-Spena and Mele, 2012).

Previous literature about cocreation in online communities often focuses on the motivations of online community participants (Füller, 2010; Roberts *et al.*, 2014; Constantinides *et al.*, 2015; Fernandes and Remelhe, 2016). A key question addressed by previous research is what types of rewards could be used to increase the motivation of participants, and rewards that address different motivations have been highlighted by researchers such as whether monetary prizes would be desired or giving recognition such as "the innovator" status (Boudreau and Lakhani, 2009; Ebner *et al.*, 2009; Antikainen *et al.*, 2010; Antikainen and Vaataja, 2010; Porter *et al.*, 2011). This has been an important stream of research in cocreation since understanding how to encourage participation and stimulate more idea contributions on the part of community members is a key to successful cocreation.

Other research has focused on the nature and content of the contributions of online community members and their joint innovation efforts (Füller *et al.*, 2007). The aim of this work has been to identify those factors that lead to more successful innovations (Hutter *et al.*, 2011). Information and knowledge sharing are essential to build up qualified user-generated innovation content in online communities and can be facilitated by participants who actively get involved in social interactions and discussions (Hutter *et al.*, 2011). Thanks to the growth of information and communication technologies and supportive online platforms, participants of online cocreation projects are able to interact with each other, collaborate on a potential idea with their peers, discuss different aspects of an idea and shape it into a more successful potential innovation (Hutter *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, previous research showed that increasing communication, providing feedback to each other and social interactions enhanced creative performance (Bullinger *et al.*, 2010). Füller *et al.* (2011) pointed out the importance of investigating compelling cocreation experiences that focus on ". . .the role that participating users and their innovative content play in creating such experiences" (p. 270–271). Thus, understanding the behavior of peer community members as well as their way of sharing and improving ideas would give valuable insights into the conditions that lead to successful joint innovations (Füller *et al.*, 2007). Hutter *et al.* (2011) introduced the term "communitition" to capture the idea that both the competitive participation and cooperation/collaboration should be present for the occurrence of more successful innovative content.

Ensuring effective cocreation in online communities remains one of the biggest challenges for companies hosting their own online communities as well and market research companies. A recent literature stream emphasizes the importance of examining cocreation experiences

and their impact on outcomes. For example, Gebauer *et al.* (2013) found that an enjoyable cocreation experience of community participants had a direct positive impact on their willingness to pay (WTP) for the cocreated product. However, negative outcomes have received much less attention than positive outcomes. Gebauer *et al.* (2013) investigated the negative outcomes of an idea contest and found that dissatisfaction with the selected idea/outcome led to customer misbehavior and protest. Clearly, there is need for further research in this area.

In order to understand those elements that result in a positive cocreation experience and that lead to more positive experiences and outcomes, we need to gain insights in the antecedents of customers' cocreation experience. This study will therefore attempt to give an answer to the following two questions:

(1) What are the antecedents of customers' cocreation experience in online communities?

(2) What are the positive and negative outcomes of customers' cocreation experience in online communities?

In the following sections, the theoretical background will be discussed (Section 2). The methodology will be presented (Section 3). We will look into each element of our framework, share the results and give guidelines on how to make cocreation projects in online communities more successful (Sections 4 and 5). Finally, the paper will point out the discussion and conclusions, limitations and ideas for future research (Sections 6 and 7) and a managerial guide/implications (Section 8).

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Online communities

Online community is an Internet-mediated mechanism which enables interactions between people (Za *et al.*, 2020). Online communities are seen as a suitable setting for engaging consumers as they connect people around a common goal and bond them through interactions (Fernandes and Remelhe, 2016; Sawhney *et al.*, 2005). Online communities are a very cost-effective way to connect people in a manner that is unbounded by time (participants can often be involved at a time of their choosing) or space (participants can be geographically dispersed). Online communities used as cocreation tools give firms the opportunity to harness the collective intelligence of a large number of consumers; this can involve millions of individuals all around the world (Antikainen *et al.*, 2010). We see such social approaches to innovation increasingly being used by companies in their innovation processes. Participation in online communities is voluntary, and firms are unable to make demands on the contributions of community members (Priharsari *et al.*, 2020). Next to MROCs, there is a wide range of online platforms and communities that companies can consider. As mentioned in the introduction, there are firm-owned platforms such as the Starbucks' "My Starbucks Idea" website, where consumers can share their new product ideas or improvement suggestions to existing products. There are also intermediary online platforms such as InnoCentive (Agogué *et al.*, 2013), where ideas and solutions are shared with firms where companies can place a challenge and individuals can share ideas and solutions to solve that challenge and get rewarded with a monetary prize. Involving customers in cocreation via online communities provides firms with benefits which exceed the insights gained by listening to customers via traditional market research (Sawhney *et al.*, 2005). Online communities enable richer ongoing customer dialogues and knowledge and idea sharing. Firms can build stronger relationships with their existing and potential customers via such communities by creating social ties and building trust (Sawhney *et al.*, 2005).

There are online platforms and communities that are available for different purposes. Online brand communities, for example, such as Harley Davidson's Harley Owners Group

(HOG) serve as a platform for brand lovers. There are also online environments such as Microsoft's customer product forum where customers can help each other to solve a product-related problem (Nambisan and Baron, 2007). Not all the online platforms have a strong sense of community. Not all communities aim to facilitate cocreation between a group of customers who try to contribute new ideas on a topic. Not all of them encourage their members to vote on each other's inputs, collaborate and help companies select the best ideas among the ones submitted. On the other hand, even though the initial purpose of these online platforms may be more branding or customer support than innovation, the voice of these customers can also lead to innovative ideas for companies indirectly. This paper focuses on online communities that are designed specifically for cocreation purposes that involve customers as stakeholders. In such online communities, the objective of cocreating with customers around innovative ideas and improvement suggestions is clearly communicated to the customers before their involvement.

2.2 Cocreation experience

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), the pioneers of the cocreation literature, emphasize the importance of experiences through the following words: "*The next practices of innovation must shift the focus away from products and services and onto experience environments—supported by a network of companies and consumer communities—to co-create unique value for individual customers*" (p. 1).

"In the most general and broadest use of the term, experience is the mental state that occurs in any given individual, at any conscious moment" (Kohler *et al.*, 2011, p. 3). There are several experience frameworks and dimensions in the literature that help to understand what forms a great experience (Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011). For example, Pine and Gilmore (1998), in their experience economy article, suggested that experience is related to customer participation (active versus passive) and connection with the environment (absorptive versus immersive) (Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011) and pointed out four categories that intersect with those two dimensions as entertainment, educational, aesthetic and escapist (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Some other experience dimensions have been mentioned in Sundbo and Sorensen's work, as hedonic versus ethical-moral versus intellectual experience; active or passive role of the consumer and absorptive versus immersive (Scupola and Fuglsang, 2018). While hedonic experience can be about joy, ethical-moral experience is about social consciousness, and intellectual experience can be about learning. An example for an active role of the consumer can be attending a concert; an example for a passive role of the consumer can be watching a concert; an example for an absorptive experience can be teaching and an example for an immersive experience can be reading (Scupola and Fuglsang, 2018).

Kohler *et al.* (2011) use the term "compelling experience" to define a qualified experience that arises from intrinsic enjoyment (p. 2). A compelling cocreation experience is highly enjoyable and therefore provides many positive outcomes such as positive attitudes toward the company and the product and positive behavioral intentions (Kohler *et al.*, 2011; Füller *et al.*, 2011) such as purchase intentions or willingness to contribute to the company's innovation by sharing feedback and ideas again in the future and create positive word of mouth (WOM) and even become a brand advocate. Moreover, a compelling cocreation experience encourages people to have playful moments and high concentration which lead them to perform at their peak levels that result in more creative outputs and more participation (Kohler *et al.*, 2011).

When we look at the literature related to the cocreation experience, it is obvious that a challenge for many companies is how to maintain the engagement and active participation of participants (Kohler *et al.*, 2011). Kohler *et al.* (2011) conducted research on cocreation experience in virtual worlds and concluded that a compelling cocreation experience encouraged active participation in ideation. This is essential as the more engaged the online

community members are, the more they participate and contribute innovative ideas; active participation during cocreation increases the chance for positive outcomes of a cocreation project. One essential element of ensuring such engagement, and thus stimulating active participation of members, is providing a compelling cocreation experience (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

A research stream that focused on the experience of online community members is that of Nambisan and colleagues (e.g. Nambisan and Baron, 2007; Nambisan and Nambisan, 2008; Nambisan and Watt, 2011). This work focused on customers' interaction experiences in virtual environments and product forums. Nambisan and Nambisan (2008) argued that there are four experience dimensions present in these virtual customer environments: "pragmatic, hedonic, usability, and sociability." The interaction experiences of participants were found to shape their actual participation. Kohler *et al.* (2011) suggested that this framework be extended by adding one more component called collaborative experience. In their research, the authors asked the online community members to cocreate ideas on how the cocreation experience could have been made better, which refers to the collaborative experience. Füller *et al.* (2011) and Gebauer *et al.* (2013) conducted studies on the impact of cocreation experience and drew attention to the negative outcomes that could arise during cocreation trajectories.

The end goal of understanding experiences is to ensure effective cocreation/innovation outcomes. In the following, we describe the types of experiences discussed by Nambisan and Kohler and their colleagues and each element of our tentative theoretical framework and how experience dimensions, potential antecedent and outcomes of customers' cocreation experience are connected.

2.2.1 Cocreation experience dimensions. 2.2.1.1 Pragmatic experience. Pragmatic experience refers to the utilitarian experience of participants: participants expect to learn from their participation in the cocreation project. For example, they may have an interest in developing their knowledge about the cocreated service/product or they may simply be interested in learning more about the company/brand. The interactions during cocreation can provide these participants with practical benefits and thereby encourage them to make better contributions (Nambisan and Nambisan, 2008). Learning from community members and community moderators through interactions can be an essential motive. Considering these, Kohler *et al.* (2011) suggest that companies use an "interactive and inspiring community design to improve participants' pragmatic experience" by enhancing their learning (p. 777). Thus, any initiative such as the usage of creativity techniques to enable learning and enhancing performance, giving constant feedback to increase the utilitarian benefit of participants is expected to result into a better cocreation experience in an online community.

2.2.1.2 Sociability experience. While experience can well be affected by situational factors that can be controlled in an online cocreation environment, the direction of the experience toward positive or negative also highly depends on the participants involved, which is difficult to control (Kohler *et al.*, 2011). According to the sociability principle, social interaction is a significant component of participants' engagement in cocreation projects. Participants themselves are the key to forming a positive social experience. The interaction experience highly depends on the actors involved in cocreation such as peers, brands and the community moderator/manager. Brands can also interact with the online community members at one point about certain topics. They can, for example, post their feedback around the ideas that are generated by the community or ask the opinion of the community on certain topics. If the community members are cooperative and friendly, then the other participants are expected to have a positive social experience. When a contrasting situation is dominant, then it is likely to result into a negative experience (Nambisan and Watt, 2011). This fact underlines the importance of understanding user experiences as the outcomes of cocreation interactions mainly depend and are limited to the experience participants have inside the community. In fact, some authors see this limitation as a negative effect of customer integration (Gassman

et al., 2010) in cocreation projects. Therefore, the online community moderator/community manager has an essential role in providing participants with the social environment to encourage positive interactions. Initiatives taken to create a cooperative environment among participants are therefore very important. Getting in touch with peers and the feeling of being a part of a community also known as group feeling/sense of community/sense of belonging are other things people expect from such interactions in a community (Nambisan and Nambisan, 2008). Gebauer *et al.* (2013) considered sense of community as an important facilitator of community members' behavior in leading different outcomes. Priharsari *et al.* (2020) mentioned sense of community as an enabler of positive influence on customer engagement.

Despite its importance, very limited empirical research has been done to examine this type of experience, and thereby, the topic needs more attention from scholars (Nambisan and Watt, 2011). Nambisan and Watt (2011) also suggest that research needs to examine homophily (e.g. the level of similarity between the participants' demographics and values) between community members and how this affects social experiences. Similar arguments on this topic are often mentioned in the literature: people tend to establish trust and socialize easier with others who are like-minded, thereby such a strong social tie arising from their similarities will increase their sociability experience (Brown *et al.*, 2007).

2.2.1.3 Usability experience. The usability experience can be defined as customers' ease of use and effectiveness in navigating the online community environment (Nambisan and Watt, 2011). For example, companies that enable the necessary site features, such as chat functionalities, facilitate interactions among participants. Previous research suggests that making the navigation of the community as simple and clear as possible in terms of structure would enhance usability experience (Kohler *et al.*, 2011). Basic functionalities provided in an online community platform such as comment/vote buttons can also be considered as elements of the usability experience.

2.2.1.4 Hedonic experience. Participants' hedonic experience refers to the fun and enjoyment they feel and the challenge they perceive during cocreation activities. This enjoyment can arise from the task itself but also through the interactions with others. There are several strategies companies can apply to ensure hedonic experiences in an online community. For example, using gamification, integrating game mechanics into participants' tasks, will not only provide them with a higher enjoyment level but also encourage better performance by enhancing their competitiveness (Kohler *et al.*, 2011). Thus, initiatives taken to foster a competitive spirit could enhance the hedonic experience. Participants of cocreation projects may find the task enjoyable, interesting, fun to do and be intrinsically motivated to get engaged in such activities; therefore, we can speak about "task enjoyment" as one of the drivers of their engagement (Füller *et al.*, 2011). Since intrinsic motivation arises from task enjoyment and enjoyment of the task means having hedonic experience, we could conclude that hedonic experience results in intrinsic motivation. Hence, intrinsic motivation is an essential element which increases creativity (Amabile *et al.*, 1996; Matthing *et al.*, 2006). This means that motivation derived from task enjoyment can enhance the creativeness of the contributions submitted by participants during ideation. All these points relate to what Nambisan and Nambisan (2008) discuss as the role of hedonic experiences such as having fun during a cocreation task is one of the factors participants see as a benefit to further get engaged in those cocreation activities. What Kohler *et al.* (2011) suggest companies should do is to "nurture playfulness and provide challenging tasks" to ensure more favorable hedonic experiences during cocreation (p. 777).

2.2.1.5 Collaborative experience. This experience's design principle, although not part of Nambisan and Nambisan's (2008) framework, was later suggested by Kohler *et al.* (2011). The authors argue that participants can also be helpful in providing feedback on the cocreation activities and strategies of the company. In other words, the authors suggest that companies cocreate the cocreation system with community members by facilitating ongoing conversations and discussions with them. This is what is meant by their "collaborative experience."

2.3 Conceptual table

The foregoing literature review leads us to the following conclusions concerning factors that are related to cocreation experience in online communities: (1) factors influenced by the firm which moderates the cocreation process, such as community site features and tools, mechanisms to steer cooperation and competition, creativity techniques, task enjoyment, giving feedback, enabling learning, fostering conversations and (2) participant-related factors such as peer behavior (cooperative/competitive/both), nature of sharing and interacting, homophily/diversity among community members, participant roles/profiles (e.g. influencer or innovator). These can be used to evoke different types of cocreation experiences from pragmatic to sociability, from usability to hedonic and/or collaborative.

2.3.1 Moderating company-related factors. 2.3.1.1 Community site features, tools and mechanisms (to steer cooperation and competition). Community site features, tools and mechanisms help participants to navigate the platform easily, vote and comment on each other's input, which are supportive to participant contribution and cooperation (Nambisan and Watt, 2011). Similarly, game mechanics can be designed to enable both cooperation and competition between participants. Therefore, it is essential for the moderating company to carefully design a community that enables and encourages participation of online community members by enhancing their experiences (Kohler *et al.*, 2011).

2.3.1.2 Creativity techniques. Creativity techniques can vary from a company's community moderator/manager asking questions to introducing pictures to community members in order to stimulate their creativity and help them to think of new ideas by tapping into their previous experiences and asking them to narrate a story on what they see. If the moderating company prepares a calendar for themselves to integrate such techniques in the community, it is likely to enhance the cocreation experience of community members (Amabile *et al.*, 1996; Matthing *et al.*, 2006; Kohler *et al.*, 2011).

2.3.1.3 Task enjoyment. Moderating company can make a cocreation task positively challenging and enjoyable for participants by designing the task characteristics effectively which will enhance the cocreation experience (Nambisan and Nambisan, 2008; Füller *et al.*, 2011).

2.3.1.4 Moderator's role (in giving feedback, enabling learning, fostering conversations). Community moderator/manager assigned for the community by the moderating company has an important role in building and maintaining an engaged community. For example, giving feedback and sharing product/service-related information will enable the learning of community members and strengthen the competence (Kohler *et al.*, 2011). Responding to participant questions and comments reactively or proactively and connecting community members with one another will foster conversations within the community and build a sense of community/belongingness (Nambisan and Nambisan, 2008). These will enhance the cocreation experience of community members.

2.3.2 Participant-related factors. 2.3.2.1 Peer behavior (cooperative/competitive/both). Peer behavior motivates or demotivates the involvement of other peer participants. If peers are cooperative on the cocreation tasks, and perhaps there is a healthy level of competition, in the sense of taking ownership of their tasks and performing well, this may inspire others to do the same (Hutter *et al.*, 2011). It is likely that this will lead to a more engaged community and happier community members, who feel a sense of belonging and responsibility toward the community, with an enhanced cocreation experience (Priharsari *et al.*, 2020).

2.3.2.2 Nature of sharing and interacting. If community members are friendly in their communication with each other, if they make constructive sharings to the community to achieve common goals, this is likely to enhance the cocreation experience of participants (Nambisan and Nambisan, 2008).

2.3.2.3 Homophily/diversity in participants. Homophily, meaning similarity, and diversity can be present among participants in various aspects, such as demographics, values, personalities, thoughts and behaviors. Sharing similarities with like-minded peers can lead to

more enhanced cocreation experiences within the community (Brown *et al.*, 2007; Nambisan and Watt, 2011).

2.3.2.4 Participant roles/profiles. According to Hoyer *et al.* (2010), consumers can undertake several roles during new product/service development. These different roles are also the ways they engage in cocreation (Verhoef *et al.*, 2010). While some can be contributing with innovative ideas during ideation of a new product (innovators), some consumers make the idea fit to social norms (influencers) and some could be a brand advocate who tries to spread the word for the new product/service among their social networks. There are other roles participants can perform as in the study of Guo *et al.* (2017), where users who are involved in collaborative innovation in online communities are found to be a project leader, active designer, generalist, communicator, passive designer or observer, displaying different contribution behaviors. Different roles community members are assigned to undertake might have an impact on the perceived cocreation experience and cocreation outcomes.

2.3.3 Positive or negative potential outcomes of cocreation. Outcomes related to the factors described above include the number of unique ideas and the quality of ideas contributed (Füller *et al.*, 2011), WOM (Nambisan and Watt, 2011), WTP/purchase intention (Franke *et al.*, 2010), cocreation evangelism (Kohler *et al.*, 2011) as desired positive outcomes and destructive behavior of customers and conflicts or crisis as negative outcomes (Piller *et al.*, 2012; Gebauer *et al.*, 2013).

2.3.3.1 Contributions (the number of unique ideas and quality of ideas). Positively perceived cocreation experiences will enhance participants' engagement and performance and lead to better contributions. Previous literature considered "quality of contributions" and "number of contributions" as outcomes of a positive cocreation experience (Füller *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, several other scholars mentioned the importance of obtaining as much as creative ideas at the beginning of an ideation process that enables a firm to make a good start to innovation (Kristensson *et al.*, 2004) and decrease the risk of failure, therefore making the "quantity" an essential measurement to take into consideration.

2.3.3.2 WOM (word of mouth). The positive impact of a positive experience on attitudes toward the company or product cannot be disregarded (Nambisan and Watt, 2011). Positive WOM in this case can occur if the participants are willing to spread the word for the cocreated service or the cocreation activity itself through their networks.

2.3.3.3 WTP (willingness to pay)/purchase intention. A favorable behavioral intention toward the cocreated service/product would be WTP for it. The service cocreated will not only be more attractive because the participant was engaged in cocreating it (Franke *et al.*, 2010) but also because that will be a solution to the participant's own needs; therefore, a purchase at the end is a potential outcome. Moreover, this is one of the core aims of a company getting engaged in cocreation.

2.3.3.4 Cocreation evangelism. Kohler *et al.* (2011) suggested a much stronger term in the place of WOM: "co-creation evangelism." The term carries a more active involvement of the person in convincing others to take part in cocreation projects or spread positive opinions about it.

2.3.3.5 Destructive behavior of participants/conflicts/boycotts. Failing to manage the cocreation process well can result into the dissatisfaction of the participants of online communities. Gebauer *et al.* (2013) found that dissatisfaction with the winning ideas can cause angry reactions and dysfunctional behavior from participants. The benefits of understanding the reasons of this kind of conflicting behavior appear to be the chance to fix it and to ensure more positive outcomes for the cocreation project. In addition, it is vital to manage the negative comments on the spot when such behavior is encountered as they may have undesired results in terms of negative WOM that may require much more efforts to reverse into company's favor later on. A possible boycotting behavior can have very dangerous

consequences for the company/brand as they create negative perceptions of other consumers (Harris and Reynolds, 2003). Striving for a positive cocreation experience of participants will help companies eliminate possible negative outcomes of customer integration in the innovation process (Gassman *et al.*, 2010).

3. Methodology: in-depth interviews

3.1 Market research company and case selection

The methodology used in the present research was a case study in an online community which was moderated by a reputed market research company which is kept anonymous in this paper. This market research company is an international firm which has branches in various countries. The company focuses widely on creating and managing online cocreation projects and customer panels for their clients among which there are worldwide known brands operating in different areas such as travel, consumer goods, technology. Before we selected this specific online community project from them as the most suitable case to investigate, we had several meetings with the representatives of the company. We carefully evaluated each online community project on the basis of the following criteria:

(1) Objective of creating the online community (market research or innovation).

(2) Online community members (ordinary customers, frequent customers or lead user suppliers; presence of both innovator and influencer roles).

(3) Contributions of online community members (activeness of members, volume of interactions such as comments and votes).

We selected this online community as the case to be studied for three reasons:

(1) In this paper, our focus is cocreation and innovating with customers, and this community's primary purpose was the cocreation of service ideas led by the experiences of frequent customers, customers of the participating brands, focusing on the ideation stage of the innovation process. This stage is vital in order to create new products and services that satisfy the needs of the market and thus prevent a failure.

(2) Cocreation can include different stakeholders. Our focus in this paper is cocreation with customers. Online community members in this case were frequent customers of the participating brands. These customers were selected with a survey prior to the cocreation project according to their traits being innovators or influencers, and both roles were present in this community.

(3) There were a large number of interactions and new ideas available in this community, which meant that the members were involved and active in the ideation process. This would allow us to more fully investigate how the interactions and contributions took place.

Selecting one market research company and one online cocreation project case of this company was seen sufficient as our purpose was to gain preliminary insights in the experiences of community members in a specific type of customer community. Similar single-case study approach was followed by Füller *et al.* (2011) with their Swarowski Jewellery Design online cocreation project, where they investigated the triggers of a compelling cocreation experience; by Gebauer *et al.* (2013) with their SPAR Bag Design online cocreation project, where they investigated the positive and negative behavior of community members and by Hutter *et al.* (2011) with their OSRAM LED Design online cocreation project, where they investigated the collaboration and competition between community members. In our future studies, we aim to perform further case studies and investigate different types of online communities. This way we will be able to make comparisons.

According to this market research company, an MROC/private online community can be defined as a small group of highly engaged people joined together by a common passion, connected online for a long period, who are systematically engaged by applying various social media techniques for different business objectives, especially cocreation or even collaboration (Anonymous market research company employee publication, 2012). This company uses communities of up to 150 participants. The specific context of these private online communities has not received so much attention from scholars. Furthermore, there are not sufficient insights on how participants of these communities experience the cocreation process. Therefore, we opted for an exploratory case study that would be the best way to give us preliminary insights. Moreover, a case study method is considered very useful in generating in-depth insights when there is a lack of theory in a particular field (Eisenhardt, 2007). If the case study is an exploratory study, "what" questions are suitable as research questions (Yin, 1990). With this exploratory case study, we aim to gain insights in the antecedents that form a positive/negative cocreation experience and what positive and negative outcomes they lead to.

3.2 In-depth interviews

As the topic we were investigating is experiences of customers in an online community during the cocreation project, interviews was chosen as the main method to gain in-depth insights with open and follow-up questions. An in-depth literature review, data from in-depth interviews, discussions with the project manager, company project data such as the documents which included the details of the cocreation project and data derived from the online platform (e.g. ideas and comments posted by online community members) as well as other content of the online platform are the sources we integrated in our design.

First, several meetings and discussions took place with the project manager of the community, in order to gain insights into the overall project, as well as understanding his perceptions in the antecedents and outcomes of cocreation experience in this community.

Second, we examined the project documents including the cocreation project plan, objectives, design and stakeholders involved and the data downloaded from the online platform such as the posts of the community moderator/manager and ideas and comments of the community members. We investigated the content and features available on the online platform by considering the experience dimensions in order to understand which specific initiatives were used to influence the different experiences of online community members.

Third, in collaboration with the project manager, invitations were sent via e-mail to the 38 most active members of the community to ask whether they would like to participate in an in-depth interview and talk about their experiences in the community. In total, 11 of these highly active community members and the moderator/community manager were interviewed for a total of 12 interviews. We interviewed the moderator in addition to online community members in order to understand the bigger picture by integrating different stakeholders' perspectives. According to the saturation principle, interviewing a minimum of six cases is considered sufficient in qualitative studies with similar sampling characteristics by several previous researchers (see, e.g. Guest *et al.*, 2006) as after a certain amount of cases/interviews, new data do not shed any further light on the issue under investigation. In the same study, the authors mention that within the first 12 interviews, their data reached saturation, while within six interviews, metathemes were generated (Guest *et al.*, 2006).

We interviewed three female and eight male customers. The roles they undertook within the community were mixed and included innovators who came up with new ideas and social influencers/influential who tried to ensure that the ideas were socially acceptable. These roles were predefined by the online community moderator/community manager and the participants were informed in advance which role they would be undertaking. The

innovators were people who consider the functional side of products and give their decisions independently based on their personal experiences without being influenced by social recognition, while influencers were asked to comment on those ideas as they were the people who considered the products from a social environment perspective and value the concrete benefits (Anonymous market research company employee publication, 2010).

Their occupations were also various. This way, diverse experiences could bring diverse perspectives and contributions to the community.

The semi-structured interview questions were based on our literature review, shaped around Nambisan and Nambisan's (2008) framework of four dimensions (hedonic, pragmatic, sociability and usability) of cocreation experience and potential antecedents of these dimensions. Collaborative experience which was an additional dimension to Nambisan and Nambisan's (2008) dimensions by Kohler *et al.* (2011) was excluded as the project manager informed us that this was not taken into account when building the community, and therefore, it would be irrelevant to ask our interviewees. Questions that arise from the potential antecedents of the mentioned dimensions above were related to participants' roles in the community, role of the moderator and the overall experience. Moreover, encouragements and motivations and demotivating factors, dissatisfaction or negative feelings were asked. Peer behavior, factors that encouraged cooperation or competition, experience in interactions and socializing with community members were included as another category of questions. Finally, perceptions of fun and entertainment during cocreation, perceptions of platform functions, game mechanics such as badges and other reward mechanisms, perceived utilitarian benefits, creativity techniques used by the moderator, functionality/usability of the online platform were other discussion topics. Some general questions were also included that asked the occupation of participants, their initial motivations for participation and perceptions of the positive and negative outcomes of this cocreation project as well as perceptions of the brands' involvement in cocreation process. Moreover, some additional questions were asked in order to understand the respondent's familiarity with cocreation, experience with team work and creative activities.

After each interview, the researcher thought about any additional issues and questions that might be included in the next interview and this way made it a more powerful analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

All interviews were recorded with the permission of the respondents and transcribed for analysis. The transcriber listened to some parts of each record more than once in order not to miss any important information. Each transcriber then proofread each transcription against the audiotape and revised where necessary to ensure a high level of accuracy. Interviews ranged between 30 and 60 min, and each transcription was an average of 12 pages.

Next, we used the coding techniques of Strauss and Corbin, 1998 and Miles and Huberman (1994) in order to analyze the transcribed interview data. As Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested, we started with a conceptual table (Table 1) and potential research questions which we derived from the literature review on cocreation experience and its dimensions and potential antecedents. The analysis included an iterative process of first creating concepts and noting memos and placing those concepts into more comprehensive themes and categories as (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) suggested in their open, axial and selective coding technique. During open coding, the researcher is engaged in an analytical process where he/she considers several concepts, categories and properties of those categories. Axial coding takes place when the researcher realizes the interconnections between the key categories and their subcategories. Comparing the categories and identifying and improving connections between the key categories happens during selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Following this technique, we reviewed each sentence of our transcriptions carefully and made note of the concepts that arose (Miles and Huberman, 1994). We then wrote definitions for those concepts, created categories for them and then aggregated them into categories that would cover all transcriptions by involving the categories and concepts of each transcription.

Moderating company-related factors	Positive or negative potential outcomes of cocreation	References
(1) Community site features, tools and mechanisms (to steer cooperation and competition) (2) Creativity techniques (3) Task enjoyment (4) Moderator's role (in giving feedback, enabling learning, fostering conversations) Participant-related factors (1) Peer behavior (cooperative/competitive/ both) (2) Nature of sharing and interacting (3) Homophily/diversity in participants (4) Participant roles/profiles (e.g. influencer or innovator)	(1) Contribution (the number of unique ideas and quality of ideas) (2) WOM (word of mouth) (3) WTP (willingness to pay)/ purchase intention (4) Cocreation evangelism (5) Destructive behavior of customers/conflicts	Amabile *et al.* (1996) Harris and Reynolds (2003) Kristensson *et al.* (2004) Matthing *et al.* (2006) Brown *et al.* (2007) Nambisan and Nambisan (2008) Franke *et al.* (2010) Gassman *et al.* (2010) Hoyer *et al.* (2010) Verhoef *et al.* (2010) Füller *et al.* (2011) Hutter *et al.* (2011) Kohler *et al.* (2011) Nambisan and Watt (2011) Piller *et al.* (2012) Gebauer *et al.* (2013) Guo *et al.* (2017) Priharsari *et al.* (2020)

Table 1.
Conceptual table on factors that relate to cocreation experience in online communities

The technique of (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) suggests to use existing concepts but also to come up with nonexisting new concepts which fit to the situation under investigation. Being open to new concepts helps to contribute to theory building in a particular field under investigation (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Consequently, a framework based on this analysis was generated (see Figure 1).

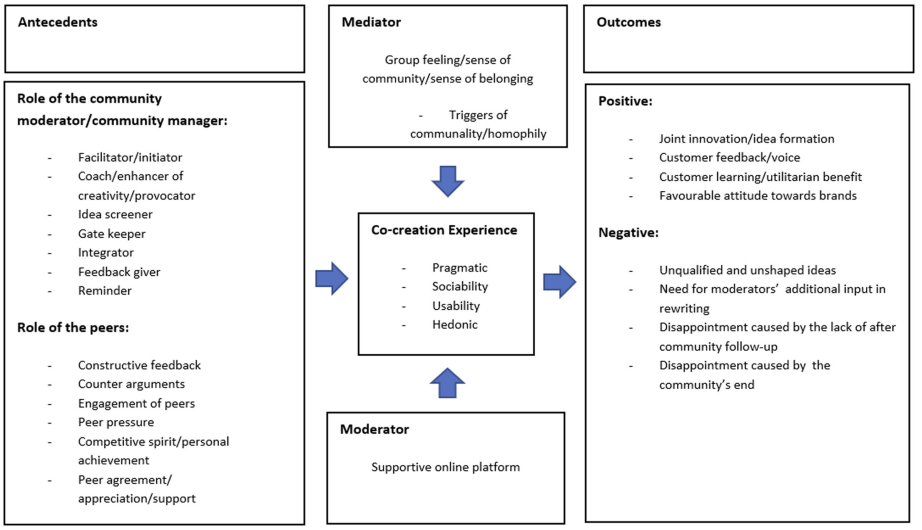

Figure 1.
Antecedents and outcomes of customers' cocreation experience in online communities

4. Online cocreation community

4.1 Client brands' cocreation story

Client brands in our case study wanted to improve their customers' experience and ensure a better service quality that would lead to higher satisfaction, loyalty and retention of frequent customers. This is the point of departure for their cocreation story. The customer insights and experience team of the brands decided to cocreate with their customers through a private online community. The community was built and managed by the market research company as a platform to tap into customers' innovative ideas. One aim was to identify potential new business opportunities during customer experience (Anonymous market research company employee publication, 2012).

Cocreating with their customers helped the client brands in several aspects: (1) to understand their customers' experiences and identify areas for improvement, (2) to detect their needs and wants and (3) to gather insights into what makes up the ideal experience.

The brands' employees were involved in the cocreation process through offline workshops where they provided feedback on the ideas their customers came up with in the online community. These customers were frequent customers who were selected through a screening survey performed by the market research company at the beginning of the project. These customers were from diverse countries, occupational and demographic backgrounds and participated in the community over a three-week period. They were identified either as innovators or influencers within the community.

This cocreation project led to a contribution of 450 ideas and comments from customers and 700 ideas in total together with the client brands (Anonymous market research company employee publication, 2013). From these ideas, three of the best performing service concepts were selected for further investigation by the brands.

4.2 Nature and characteristics of the online community

We investigated the project-related documents and the content and features of the online platform itself in order to gain insights into the nature and characteristics of the community. This investigation helped us gain an understanding of the interactions between the community members and the moderator. This way, we also could see different functionalities and techniques that were integrated to stimulate different purposes and fulfill a variety of experiences in a virtual environment.

4.2.1 Community site features and cooperation/competition. Cooperation and competition are two elements that help participants improve the quality of their ideas. In addition to the communitition term that highlights the value of having both types of community features integrated for successful innovation (Hutter *et al.*, 2011), coopetition which is known as the combination of both cooperative and competitive community dynamics and gamification design is worth to be explored (Zhao *et al.*, 2017; Leclercq *et al.*, 2018).

Game mechanics and reward mechanisms such as gamification badges are integrated in the platform in order to enable competition and cooperation among members. For example, while features such as thumbs up and thumbs down votes on an idea could have helped to eliminate unpopular ideas from the rest through cooperative behavior, it could also steer the competitive environment by encouraging contributions which are supported by the rest of the community. In terms of game mechanics, gamification badges (named as "socializer, lift off, super user, creative genius and photogenic") were granted to participants as rewards for generating ideas or just commenting on others' ideas. These badges were not only used to generate an enjoyable and fun task environment and strengthen hedonic experiences and engagement but also to steer competition (by generating the largest amount of ideas, for example). Competition was stimulated as each badge was achieved when a number of creative contributions are made by a community member. For example, badges give

recognition to those who share the biggest amount of creative ideas or constructive comments. Moreover, the limited time frame and the countdown given for each challenge were used to stimulate competitiveness (Anonymous market research company employee publication, 2013). Adding challenges and limiting the time, granting participants points, levels and stars as well as badges all combine to give participants challenging sense of challenge, which would fulfill the hedonic experiences.

The idea of status icons was used to stimulate cooperation among community members. When an idea was generated by mutual effort of members that idea received a status update from mining to rough diamond, polished diamond and eventually a diamond ring. This is also an example of how a rough idea could form its final situation through joint efforts of community members. They also were meant to steer cooperation (by generating a high amount of comments on each other's ideas) among members.

The focus on cooperation is important because prior work shows that consumers innovate when they cooperate with other people, when they receive feedback on their idea or additional comments to improve the initial thought (e.g. Füller *et al.*, 2007). Today, thanks to the growth of information and communication technologies, participants of cocreation projects are able to interact with each other, collaborate with their peers, discuss different aspects of an idea and shape it into a more successful potential innovation (Hutter *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, previous research shows that increasing communication, providing feedback to each other and social interaction enhance creative performance (Bullinger *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, cooperation, collaboration and the sharing among participants is to obtain the most innovative outcomes. While these components enhance the effectiveness of the innovation, we consider them as important elements of social experience as well.

The basic functionality of the platform which provides for "commenting on each other's ideas" is used to stimulate cooperation between members and refers to a social experience, it also points out a basic usability experience provided to community members. Other usability experience components also reveal themselves in the online platform. The community is organized in a simple manner that is easy for participants to navigate. Through the available site features, participants are able to search for information in an easy way and network with other participants whom they see as useful to interact with. Participants can see the most recent discussions and all activities on the home page. Moreover, a participant can track his or her own activities.

Other functionalities are provided to participants such as tracking of their personal activity (symbolized with stars), voting on a post or their like/dislike votes. They can also e-mail subscribe to discussion threads to track replies on a post that they are interested in following and easily arrange their profile information, manage their privacy and see their activities and blog posts on their profile page.

4.2.2 Online discussion rooms and creativity techniques. Ideation was enabled through different online discussion rooms integrated on the platform with discussions steered by the moderator. The moderator tried to strengthen the discussions with relevant questions in order to enhance the performance of the community members. Moreover, receiving frequent feedback from the moderator was helpful in the participants' learning process about customer experience-related topics.

There were five main discussion rooms: (1) a check-in room where customers shared their stories on previous customer experiences and (2) an idea journey room where participants with an innovator profile were asked to generate new ideas and comment on each other's ideas, and influencers were expected to only comment on the ideas generated by innovators. There was also a (3) trend connection room which was designed to focus discussion about trends such as technology trends. (4) A lounge room enabled participants to start up conversations about any idea or topic they wanted. Finally, (5) a gallery room enabled only

during the last, third week of ideation, participants could see the ideas the brands team generated on the base of the insights obtained through frequent customers.

Different rooms were meant to focus on different types of discussion content. Clear organization of these rooms was to facilitate the usage of the online platform for participants. This usability/functionality facilitated the customer's learning as well. The meaning behind this initiative was to separate the relevant discussions and ideas from the others. This way made the community more focused, it was easier to derive the necessary information and community members did not distract the discussion with irrelevant posts. Members made only the required contributions to each of the rooms in order to prevent off-topic discussions. Contrast would decrease the effectiveness of the primary goal, and this is a topic of concern during cocreation (Piller *et al.*, 2012).

The idea of encouraging members to share their previous experiences in the check-in room was one of the essential creativity techniques. A core element of joint innovation in such online communities is members' act of sharing stories and experiences with each other (Füller *et al.*, 2007). This act fosters innovation by making participants understand and learn about experiences of other customers. On the other hand, learning about previous experiences is a way for the brands to listen to the voice of the customer and come up with service improvement ideas through the insights obtained in customers' experiences from their interaction with the brands or another provider.

Similarly, the meaning of the trend connection room – just like the experience sharing in the check-in room – is also a creativity technique to activate participants' minds and enable them to remember and make connections between the industry trends and customer experience improvement.

The idea journey room was the most essential space allocated for new idea generation. Connected to each insight that is found by the moderator/community manager through researching industry trends and news and placed on the online platform, a challenge was displayed for participants. For example, one challenge for an insight on the unhealthy impact of the customer experience that was tried to be improved "how can you transform the undesired experience time into a healthy experience? You can imagine new products, services, complete environments… The sky is the limit!" Receiving challenges and commenting on each other's ideas "proved to be particularly stimulating for the generation of ideas" (Anonymous market research company employee publication, 2013, p. 65), thereby making this an effective creativity technique during ideation. Participants were required to reply in a limited time, and there was also a countdown before the challenge closes. Creativity techniques to steer innovative contributions also appear in different forms in the community. Participants can also upload visuals (pictures, videos) in their replies as sometimes visuals can tell more than the words.

Usage of such creativity techniques and encouraging interactions among members relate to both the social and pragmatic (utilitarian) experience of members by learning from experiences of others and engaging in sharing stories with each other. Participants' utilitarian need would also arise from the fact that they are employed in a relevant sector and want to extend their knowledge on related topics. On the other hand, they could be lead users who would benefit first from an improvement in customer experience. Moreover, the participants were frequent customers of the brands and improving the customer experience was first of all for their own interest.

5. Findings from the framework

On the basis of the coding of interview transcriptions, we prepare a framework of cocreation experience. In this section, we will discuss each element in this framework in detail.

Antecedents define the nature (positive/negative) of the cocreation experience, which then defines the nature of the outcomes. If the antecedents described lead to an enhanced cocreation experience, meaning more positive for community members, then the cocreation experience will help to achieve more positive outcomes. The opposite can also be true if the cocreation experience is undermined and negative in nature, then the outcomes are likely to be more negative, as well. Mediating and moderating factors also have an impact on the nature of the cocreation experience and outcomes. Cocreation experience in Figure 1 has four dimensions (pragmatic, sociability, usability, hedonic) as different types of experiences that can be evoked through different antecedents.

During the interviews, we uncovered those factors online community members felt were most important and that made their cocreation experiences more positive. Company executives who want to design and manage their communities more effectively need to make decisions based on which priority areas they will focus on, such as whether to invest more in gamification or other community engagement, collaboration and design tactics. The reason why we propose Figure 1 is because it shows the readers which attributes can gain priority in shaping a positive experience for participants during the cocreation process. It is highly important to make a shift in our research from cocreating value for and with customers in online communities for innovation toward how we can best manage and facilitate these communities practically (Akman *et al.*, 2019). In Figure 1, we can see a classification of each role the community moderator/manager and peers perform; this makes it specific and gives deeper understanding on each antecedent. This is also the case with the mediator, as group feeling/sense of community/sense of belonging is described with what constitutes it. While Figure 1 contributes to the theory, it is also more practical in usage as each specific factor makes it more clear how to evoke different types of cocreation experiences and therefore lead to more positive outcomes, while considering what types of negative outcomes can be present and how they can be eliminated.

5.1 Antecedents of the cocreation experience

5.1.1 Role of the moderator. The moderator's role was various in the community. Below we made a classification of these roles according to the specific actions taken by the moderator. This classification is generated through the analysis of the interviews. Interactions between the moderator and the community members helped to boost the members' motivation and their participation in ideation.

5.1.1.1 Facilitator/initiator. The initial role of the moderator as perceived by the community members according to the analysis of the interviews was to come up with the subject and to ask initial questions to start a discussion. The moderator gave direction by giving summaries of the theme and then asking "*what do you think*" and then participants could contribute further. This way the moderator saved time was in categorizing ideas afterward. The moderator's role in encouraging ongoing discussions with questions helped to generate more contributions from the members.

5.1.1.2 Coach/enhancer of creativity/provocateur. With this role, the moderator directed participants with topics and discussions. She steered the diversity in comments, made priorities among the topics to be discussed, switched the discussion elements on time and thus kept the discussion going. Through asking direct questions such as "*can you be more precise, what do you actually mean, what can you expand upon that idea?*", the moderator steered further thinking. More creative questions were available such as "how can you feel more in control during your customer experience, how can staff's activities or tools be improved to make your customer experience as smooth as possible?" from a script which was prepared by the moderator. The moderator also used "projective techniques" such as showing a picture of two passengers and asking community members to describe people depicted and what leisure

activities during customer experience they might be talking about in order to enhance creativity. This way, the community members were forced to think of the additional aspects, pros and cons of an idea and made it more complete and increased quality of ideas as they projected their feelings and thoughts on particular customer experience scenarios.

5.1.1.3 Idea screener. The moderator tried to make a selection of the ideas provided in order to avoid duplication, restructured, organized and rewrote them to ensure quality and clarity. Since the participants did not have professional experience in creating ideas, the moderator's efforts made the ideas clearer. This was especially important as the ideation outcomes were going to be presented to the clients (brands involved).

5.1.1.4 Gatekeeper. The moderator provided the link between the community members and the brands. This included acknowledging the community on what came out of the offline workshops with the brands' internal teams and what the executives thought about the community's ideas. As an outcome, this enhanced the positive experience and participation of the community members as they were receiving some type of feedback from the brands. This also helped the participants form a positive attitude toward the brands. Some community members did not find this feedback sufficient, as noted by some of the respondents, they felt like they wasted their time. This led to disappointment as a negative outcome of cocreation. As one of the respondents mentioned "*could be interesting if they [the brands] take over a bit*" *meaning that they could be involved more.*

One of the aims of such developmental feedback is to communicate useful information to community members that would help them to learn and improve their task (Joo *et al.*, 2012). Providing client feedback should improve idea quality as it conveys the client's likes/dislikes and expectations in a constructive way.

5.1.1.5 Integrator. The moderator encouraged active participation by making participants check different topics and join discussions, reading and building on each other's ideas and comments. The moderator did this by acting as a liaison and integrating the community members with each other such as by asking their thoughts on fellow community members' contributions. And by doing so, she managed to keep the participants focused on a specific topic. The respondents mentioned that the moderator did this by prompting and giving inspiration by asking questions like "*did you see this, what are your thoughts on that?*"

Creating a group feeling was a way to integrate the community members with each other. The moderator tried a couple of ways to achieve this. For example, when the moderator named a community member, this created a curiosity in others to look for that person's profile (e.g. who this person is, where does he/she come from). The moderator greeted the community members in order to create a group feeling. Being greeted made each participant feel welcomed and therefore increased their motivation to engage in the community and participate. Moreover, a group feeling made participants feel like they needed to make a contribution through the feeling of reciprocity (Wu *et al.*, 2007) and commitment (Fernandes and Remelhe, 2016) as it created a sense of obligation to reciprocate, thus leading to active participation.

Appreciation by the moderator was also a motivating factor. "*Moderator acknowledges that you are making a contribution*" said one of the respondents, pointing out the importance of being recognized and appreciated for a contribution in front of peers. Appreciation and recognition enhanced motivation to participate. Some scholars have suggested that recognition is an intrinsic motivation for online community members to participate and to provide their ideas (Jeppesen and Frederiksen, 2006; Boudreau and Lakhani, 2009; Antikainen *et al.*, 2010).

5.1.1.6 Feedback giver. "One of the major characteristics of supportive leadership is developmental feedback" (Joo *et al.*, 2012, p. 80). Since the moderator should be the leader in the online community, his/her feedback was essential. Receiving some feedback gave community members the feeling that the moderator was participating. When the moderator

replied frequently and ensured that everybody received an individual reply, this made for a better experience and encouraged more participation. In the end, this attitude contributed to joint idea formations/innovations through the enhanced participation of community members. This feedback was sometimes in the form of a basic response, but sometimes more detailed with questions that could increase further thinking and improvement of an idea.

5.1.1.7 Reminder. The moderator sent e-mails and reminders to update the community and ask the community members to be online at specific times. The moderator sent topics to be treated in advance, and this gave the participants a time to think on what to write. Moreover, reminders also kept a personal link/communication between the moderator and each community member. Personalized communication encouraged the community members for more participation. Besides, the moderator kept the interest of the community by reminding what needed to be done and saying "*check this out as well*" worked well in order to enhance active participation.

5.1.2 Role of peers. What leads to joint innovation/idea formation is cooperation/collaboration between community members (Hutter *et al.*, 2011). Cooperation in a private online community is defined by the community as expressing one's own opinion on the topic as while participation was voluntary, a fellow community member being cooperative is explained by the fact that he/she adds on the idea by sharing their own point of view with the aim of making a positive contribution.

> . . .I felt that everybody was trying to offer something that they felt was relevant and useful.

There are several peer-related factors which stimulated cooperativeness and contribution in the community as we explain below.

5.1.2.1 Constructive feedback. When the peers were constructive in their comments, this enhanced participation and cooperation of other members. Even when community members did not agree with an idea or comment, they appreciated constructive disagreement of others. This was defined by the community as encouraging people to participate even when you disagree, as one of our respondents mentioned as below.

> . . .when you want to criticize somebody you do it in the way that the person likes your idea, when you want to change something, you have to make it more positive and say "yeah it's a great lalala; but I would like to do things in this way differently."

Being constructive is also relevant to displaying a positive spirit. The communication style of the peers matters. If peers were writing their posts and expressing their negative opinions about a service in a positive way rather than in an angry or arrogant way toward the service providers/brands, this was much more appreciated by the community members.

Then again, according to another respondent, if there is no feedback or response from peers, other members think that nobody is interested. This decreases the willingness to participate and contribute input in order to build joint ideas.

> I thought it (my role) was worthwhile. Because when I was making comments people were responding. This is probably the most important thing. If you do participate, you must receive some type of feedback. If you do not receive feedback you just think well nobody is interested. The worry then people stop participating. So I think the communication both ways is very important.

5.1.2.2 Counter arguments. It was important that peers gave balanced feedback to each other. As one of the respondents mentioned, "*You need to tell people when they are not conforming*." There should be counter arguments. The community members appreciated the diversity in people's perspectives. The comments provided by peers should not always be positive or show agreement since this is the way to form more feasible and qualified ideas (Füller *et al.*, 2007). Peers should be able to see the shortcomings of an idea and present their

own points of view and learn from each other (Hemetsberger and Reinhardt, 2006) to improve that idea. Community members' previous experiences in brainstorming ideas in a team as noted during the interviews can be an important factor in contributing more qualified arguments and feedback. The moderator may not have a lot of influence on this aspect unless the screening process is done more strictly to sort out candidates with creation experience. On the other hand, the downside of this could be eliminating a person who has highly innovative ideas but does not have the required experience. However, participants can be provided with a training exercise and some practical information at the very beginning of the project. The information session could be on how to form ideas in a group by pointing out the importance of different perspectives, constructive feedback and counter arguments as well as cooperation.

5.1.2.3 Engagement of peers (taking the task seriously, contributing. . .). Peers' engagement and motivation in contributing their input enhanced other members' participation as well. Peer community members appreciated it when the other members were taking the tasks seriously, providing their opinions and putting effort in improving the customer experience with suggestions and criticism. In this case, community members tended to give more ideas, make more comments and speak out more which resulted into more qualified and feasible ideas.

The moderator expressed the effect of peers' engagement and involvement in these words: "*I think that if there are several reactions and large–you know story writers on a community it really affects others. If the community is really active, it's a complete different story, if they looked up staff online, searched for extra information and that also drives the rest to do it as well.*"

5.1.2.4 Peer pressure. Peer pressure was defined by our respondents as "*feeling compelled to participate*" because other members were offering their opinion in an open manner. Here, the moderator should pay attention to increase the group feeling and a sense of belonging in the community. In this way, the participants will feel more compelled to make a contribution and cooperate. The moderator took specific initiatives to trigger this behavior.

When the moderator pointed out ideas from peer community members, this activated peer pressure (described as feeling "if others contribute, I also should"). Activation of these feelings led to more willingness to cooperate and contribute within the community.

5.1.2.5 Competitive spirit/personal achievement. Competitiveness was defined by the respondents as the feeling of "*I can also do it.*" So, if the peers were contributing, this triggered a need for personal achievement by showing that the person could also do it better as the other members did. We see competition here in a different sense: "*. . .in the sense that you wanted your ideas to be heard and you wanted to offer a point of view as well*" in one of the respondents' words. When the moderator highlighted ideas from peer community members such as by asking "*did you see the idea that sounds. . .?*", it activated a competitive spirit as well.

5.1.2.6 Peer agreement/appreciation/support (commenting on, liking each other's input). If the peers agreed with a member's comments and liked or voted on his/her ideas, this gave the feeling that the peers liked the way this person thought about things and they appreciated his/her opinion. This gave a positive feeling to the member and enhanced his/her willingness to contribute more which led to cooperation, cocreation and formation of ideas at the end.

5.2 Intermediary effect of group feeling/sense of community/sense of belonging

The moderator thought that her role in the community diminished when the group feel(ing)/responsibility is high. People who feel more responsible to the community will contribute more. What can we do to increase this group feel(ing)/responsibility? What are the antecedents of group feeling/feeling like a part of group and giving back to the community?

Group feeling is also described as a sense of community and a sense of belonging by the community members. As one of the respondents said, "*We do not know each other but we got a*

feeling we could work together," group feeling facilitated the relationship between the antecedents and outcomes of the cocreation experience in this community. Previous literature in human resources and team creativity has investigated a similar construct, "team cohesion" as the degree that team members show commitment to the group and the task and motivation to achieve shared team goals (Joo *et al.*, 2012). Likewise, group feeling will also trigger commitment (Fernandes and Remelhe, 2016). Such commitment leads to more contributions and the desire to work toward common goals as well as altruism and reciprocity (Wu *et al.*, 2007), which lead to the helping behavior and giving back to the community.

We discovered that homophily ("communality" was another way the members named it) was the main factor that enhanced the group feeling in the community.

Moreover, it was defined by five triggers that were present in this community.

(1) Shared experiences

Since all participants were frequent customers, they shared a similar customer experience.

(2) Being selected exclusively for the project

This created a sense of belongingness as they shared this in common.

(3) Shared topic interest/working toward a common goal

They all had a common goal or a common interest in the topic which was to improve the customer experience.

(4) Liking same ideas/thinking in the same way/supporting the same thoughts

Liking and supporting the same ideas gave the feeling that people supported the same thoughts and thought in the same way and therefore gave the feeling that they shared something in common.

(5) Discussion of common topics encountered by everyone

> Okay, we are talking about this food, but I just need to come smoothly from x (spot) to another, thank you very much.

Talking about more common topics of interest to the group enhanced the group feeling. These topics received many more responses from the peers. As the respondents mentioned, all subjects which are close to people, which people have encountered, there was much more group feeling and participation.

One of the respondents described his motivation for more participation as ". . .some topics were more interesting than others–some topics you would see more involvement" "*Of course I would say first point would be the topic or what is discussed, if I can really feel that my opinion can make a change*," emphasizing the importance of the topic interest and self-knowledge on that topic.

Group feeling/sense of community/sense of belonging is considered as mediator in Figure 1 because, for example, the stronger the sense of community is, the more participation a community member will display. The reason for this is that an individual who feels a part of the community will feel connected to the community and to the goal of the community which is the cocreation of ideas. While feeling a sense of community will enhance the sociability experience of the participant, it will lead to more positive outcomes as reflected, for example, in the number of contributions. Research in psychology and more specifically social identity theory shows that a person will consider themselves a part of a group if they see shared identity. A feeling of belonging to a group makes the sense of community stronger, and

therefore, it is invaluable to think of ways to help people connect and form relationships in collaborative innovation (Zhang *et al.*, 2015).

5.3 Moderating effect of a supportive online platform

Since the online platform is the home of an online community, the usability/functionality of this platform is crucial for the success of such a project. The online platform should be easy to navigate and supportive in offering functions that enable cooperation between the peer community members. Voting/liking (thumbs up)/commenting functions are basic examples of this. In addition to these, the platform could enable the integration of game mechanics. For example, the community had functions such as "the diamond ring" which showed the progress of an idea (from mining to the creation of a diamond ring). This function could also help to enhance cooperation between the members as the community members built upon each other's comments to improve a specific idea. Other than these, as the moderator and some respondents mentioned, if they experienced a technical problem (e.g. if the pages get frozen and do not get renewed), this could be very frustrating and they could give up on trying. Thus, ensuring that the platform works perfectly is the most essential consideration that allows online cocreation to happen. A supportive online platform is considered a moderator in Figure 1, for the above reasons and in summary because it has a crucial impact on how the cocreation experience is perceived by participants. Figure 1 shows us that if the online platform is supportive, pragmatic, sociability, usability and hedonic experiences are enhanced as community features, tools and mechanisms are very related to evoking each experience type/dimension from (and not limited to) enabling brainstorming ideas to social connections. This in turn is likely to lead to more positive outcomes.

5.4 Outcomes of cocreation experience

5.4.1 Positive outcomes. 5.4.1.1 Joint idea formation/joint innovation (chance to lead complete, improved, shaped ideas). One of the core aims of a cocreation project is obtaining qualified ideas which are complete, structured and in line with business objectives. Ideas can be shaped into more qualified and complete forms through joint efforts of online community members. The process that leads to joint innovation involves many actions by community members. If the members of a community cooperate well with each other by contributing their input on the ideas provided by the others, there is a bigger chance of generating feasible innovations (Füller *et al.*, 2007). There are several ways that online community members can share their knowledge and learn from each other within a community (Hemetsberger and Reinhardt, 2006). The community members strengthened an idea provided by their peers by sharing their previous experiences and irritations and giving recommendations on how to improve the service on the basis of ideas seen from the other providers. Moreover, members shared their opinions on what an ideal experience would look like for them. Members showed agreement with an idea or offered different points of view. They built upon peers' input through the commenting and voting functions of the online platform. By offering supporting elements to an idea, through counter arguments and constructive feedback, the community steered further thinking and led to the improvement of ideas.

5.4.1.2 Customer feedback/voice. The benefit of this outcome was two-sided. Firstly, it was positive for the brands as they got the chance to learn from their customers' experiences, needs and wants, their experiences with other service providers and their ideas for improvement. Secondly, this was a chance for the participants to get their views across and contribute to the improvement of a subject which was a concern to them (a better customer experience in this case). Thereby, this gave customers a positive feeling of being able to do so. All respondents tried to describe this feeling in similar words: "*. . .my main interest was to try*

to help better these brands because I use the brands". "*I am . . . a lot . I think I had a lot of things to say about my experience*."

5.4.1.3 Customer learning/utilitarian benefit. The biggest motivation of customers getting involved in the community was the pragmatic/utilitarian benefit. The topic concerned something which was very important to these customers. They were all frequent customers and they could benefit from the improvement of the customer experience. The respondents reported that they gained different perspectives from other community members that will help them to improve their own customer experience. From a company's point of view, it is a great benefit if the company's customers can provide each other with the right solutions to similar problems encountered.

> . . .the discussion was valuable and interesting that it was getting for myself interesting ideas. . ..

5.4.1.4 Favorable attitude toward the brands. The attitude of community members toward the brands was favorable considering the brands' interest in listening to the voice of their customers and initiating this cocreation project at the first place. Moreover, a favorable attitude was formed because the community members appreciated the community experience and the creative nature of the community that is much different than the long, boring surveys often used. Thus, cocreation through a private online community can increase customers' innovative and caring brand image perception.

> I really appreciate the experience and creativity of your user community, it is very positive.

5.4.2 Negative outcomes. 5.4.2.1 Unqualified and unshaped ideas. According to the moderator of the community, since not all the community members had experience in creating and ideation, this sometimes led ideas that were not feasible or "shallow," meaning which lacked careful thought. Typically, such ideas did not receive many likes/votes from peers.

5.4.2.2 Need for moderators' additional input (in rewriting, structuring, organizing). Ideas provided by the community mostly needed to be shaped by the moderator to ensure a more clear form. This meant additional time and input from the moderator's point of view. The ideas were rewritten, structured and organized to make them more presentable to the client brands.

5.4.2.3 Disappointment caused by the lack of after-community follow-up. All the respondents mentioned their disappointment in not having heard about what happened with their ideas. Until the ideas are visible, it is difficult to know whether any of them have been implemented. The moderator also comments that overpromising the community and under-delivering about the ideas provided is also a factor that leads to disappointment. This situation can result in unfavorable attitudes toward brands very easily, and it can make the whole community experience a negative one. Therefore, it is crucial for the brands to give feedback and do some follow-up after a cocreation community is ended.

> "The goal of reaching a saint of proposal or action that would improve the experience I guess that's definitely achieved. I think at the end we have a good sample or a good set of actions." ". . .but I would judge that for me only a part of the impact of the outcome because what I would like to see is that the set of actions are implemented in practice."

5.4.2.4 Disappointment caused by the community's end. Since the community members got used to providing their ideas and experiences over a three-week period, when the community suddenly ended, this caused a disappointment among the members. In addition, the end of the community was only signaled with a "*thank you message*" and the members did not hear anything more. The respondents described the end as "*strange*" because it was an unexpected way of ending. "*I think when it closed down it was a bit strange because it was like* "*ok, it is done*". *And I got an email* "*thank you very much*". *But it was also strange that it closed*

down, and then no news", says one of the respondents. Another respondent mentioned the short community period with the following words: "*. . .to me it seemed really short because it is something you do at the side*."

If a continuous community is not possible, asking for a frequent after-experience feedback from customers is a suggestion by one of the respondents for the improvement of this point. This would mean that the brands are at least doing a follow-up on whether there are any changes in the perceived customer experience of participants.

6. Discussion and conclusions

Companies can profit in various ways from cocreation through online communities. Customers who are interested in being a member of an online community can offer great ideas for service and product improvements and innovations. Companies not only tap into their customers' ideas and learn from their feedback but also get an opportunity to make a good impression on the customers and create a favorable attitude toward their products and brands. If the cocreation process is managed well, it leads to very fruitful outcomes, such as innovative ideas built through joint efforts of online community members, communication of a company's innovative and caring image to their existing and potential customers. Customers who are involved in cocreation might create a positive WOM about the brands, even turn into evangelists of those brands (a stronger term for WOM) (Kohler *et al.*, 2011) and make other potential customers get involved in the cocreation activities of these companies. Even though the main purpose is innovation, creating advocates is also a large benefit one could pursue from such online community engagement by inspiring influencers to be evangelists of your product/company or brand. This is because other consumers are more trusted sources of information for other consumers than companies themselves.

Cocreation in the community led to 700 unique ideas through the efforts of the online community members, client companies and the inspiring moderation of the market research company.

The project helped the client brands understand their customers' experiences, detect their needs and gather insights and ideas in forming the ideal customer experience.

In order to manage the cocreation process well, the market research company or the company that hosts the online community should be aware of the importance of providing the community members with a positive cocreation experience. The quality of the cocreation experience has an impact on the innovation and customer relationship management (CRM)-related outcomes. The intensity of customer participation in cocreation activities and the customer attitudes toward the product and the company depend on this experience (Nambisan and Nambisan, 2008).

The main contribution of our study is building a conceptual table and framework on antecedents and outcomes of cocreation experience in online communities, as illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 1. Table 1 was built mainly on the basis of the literature. Figure 1 is built on a combination of theory, discussions with the project manager and in-depth community moderator/manager and customer interviews. We proposed Figure 1 because it provides readers with a deeper understanding of the factors online community members attributed the most importance to during our interviews, as enhancers of their cocreation experiences toward more positive which were also confirmed by the observations of the community moderator/manager. Table 1 integrates important cocreation-related constructs from the literature. Figure 1 contributes a classification of the roles community moderator/manager and community members as peers perform during the cocreation process and gives specific guidance to company executives on how a more positive cocreation experience of customers can be created, aiming more positive outcomes of the collaborative innovation initiative.

At the beginning of this study, our research questions were as follows:

(1) What are the antecedents of customers' cocreation experience in online communities?

(2) What are the positive and negative outcomes of customers' cocreation experience in online communities?

These questions are answered and below we would like to give further insights.

Figure 1 gives insights in the different roles stakeholders undertake in forming a cocreation experience and how companies can eliminate the negative outcomes this experience may result in. As discussed earlier, outcomes such as the disappointment caused by lack of follow-up and feedback throughout and after the project can be handled by being aware of these negative outcomes and taking timely actions toward them by the companies behind the cocreation project.

In Figure 1, the antecedents of the cocreation experience mostly depend on social interaction and communication-related factors caused by the actors involved in cocreation. Briefly, the antecedents of the cocreation experience in the community consist of the moderator and the peer community members. The role each of these actors play has an impact on making the customers' cocreation experience more positive (or negative). The behavior and actions of these actors facilitate positive outcomes such as jointly formed ideas/innovations, favorable attitude toward the brands, obtaining customer feedback/voice and enabling customer learning/utilitarian benefit. On the other hand, if the process is not managed well, negative outcomes are inevitable, such as unqualified and unshaped ideas, need for additional input from the moderator in enhancing the quality of ideas, disappointment due to the lack of follow-up, disappointment due to the community's end. Furthermore, the presence of the five triggers of homophily/communality intermediates this process by increasing or decreasing the group feeling/sense of community/sense of belonging, while the supportive nature of the online platform would have a moderating effect.

In the cocreation experience typology of Nambisan and Nambisan (2008), there were four components: pragmatic, hedonic, usability and sociability. These components were present in the online community under investigation. However, the antecedents of the first three experience components were not perceived as the most important ones of participants' experience during cocreation of ideas in the present study.

When we examined the community's online platform and the project data which were made available by the market research company, we could see that some factors gave the participants a positive hedonic and sociability experience. For example, a virtual environment which would make the tasks more fun and enjoyable was provided through game mechanics (e.g. collecting points with idea submission, winning a creativity badge, seeing how much an idea is completed by community members with different statuses that show progress (e.g. mining, diamond ring, etc.). Moreover, there were different online chat rooms integrated where participants could talk about their experiences in order to facilitate a social environment. On the other hand, the pragmatic dimension was present, in that the community members could read each other's comments and learn from each other's experiences and perspectives. The online platform was supported with many functions in order to facilitate discussions among the participants.

However, in the community, the social experience was more highly valued by participants over other components. For example, during our interviews, we noticed that participants did not feel that gamification such as achieving an expert status through obtaining online badges (these are usually earned through a points system by the number or nature of contributions) was the most important attribute of their positive experiences. We also noticed during our interviews that different roles participants were assigned to at the beginning according to their personalities as influencers and innovators did not make a high difference on their experiences and the outcomes.

Social interactions did not consist of off-topic conversations between the peer community members. They actually referred to all the communication between the actors during cocreation. The effects of how communication between different stakeholders was managed throughout the cocreation process were the most vital factor for successful cocreation outcomes. Actually, the experience was shaped in the same way that a leader would shape the experience of his/her team members and how team members interact with each other to contribute to that experience. Team dynamics and leadership skills are highly important to shape a pleasant experience. The moderator's role in steering and motivating the community members and the attitude of peer community members in collaborating and encouraging each other for creative contributions (Amabile *et al.*, 1996) and creating a group feeling by all parties are examples that lead to a more positive experience.

We also discovered the importance of homophily among peer community members. Homophily facilitated their interactions and had an impact on their experience as well. We noted that homophily was a factor that increased group feeling/sense of community/sense of belonging among the community members. We also discovered five elements (shared experiences, being selected exclusively for the project, shared topic interest/working toward a common goal, liking same ideas/thinking in the same way/supporting the same thoughts, discussion of common topics encountered by everyone) that made community members feel that there was a communality/homophily between them.

Overall, Figure 1 suggests us to select the right community moderator/manager who will especially come up with and execute strategies on how to integrate online community members with each other and create a strong group feeling/sense of community/sense of belonging among them. It also suggests to select either the right profiles of community members who are collaborative with others or if a preliminary selection is not made, create strategies in building cooperation/collaboration among participants. One way to do this will be to enhance a feeling of homophily/communality.

7. Limitations and recommendations for future research

An important issue to point out for future research is the attention that still needs to be payed to the topic of homophily within the online community context. As Nambisan and Watt (2011) had also suggested, the relation between homophily among community members and their social experience inside the online community still offers fruitful areas to discover.

The community was a focused private online community which was built for three weeks and the participants were preselected through a screening process. Therefore, that was simply not a group of people but more like a team which was gathered around a shared topic and with a common goal. Thus, the specific context of this community might have been an advantage to ensure innovative ideas for this cocreation project but could be considered as a limitation as well. Therefore, repeating similar studies in different types of online communities would help us gather new insights into the cocreation experience and its antecedents and outcomes.

Future studies could also include in-depth interviews with the client company executives in order to understand their perceptions on the cocreation outcomes. This would help to gain a more complete picture of the expected and perceived outcomes. Gaining insights in their cocreation experience might also be helpful to improve the management process of a cocreation project.

Another topic of interest could be to investigate the impact of different types of gamification mechanics (Leclercq *et al.*, 2018) (such as achieving a personal expert status in the community through collecting points and online badges) on the outcomes of cocreation, especially in terms of participation and the contributions made by community members.

As a final note, the differences between the nature of interactions of different types of participants (e.g. influencers and innovators) may be an area for further investigation. A

netnographic study on this online community members' comments (Essamri *et al.*, 2019) combined with a content analysis on, for example, the number of ideas posted or voted on could be complementary to the findings of this study. Coding the nature of content sharing within the community would provide insights in what type of content could be helpful in building ideas and leading to joint idea formations/innovations. This would help us to understand how an idea is shaped through joint development efforts, what the role of the nature of contribution is. In addition, whether the roles of participants during cocreation are distinct or further precautions are to be taken to set a clear line while selecting these profiles, whether assigning different roles to community members would be beneficiary for the experience and outcomes are topics of future consideration in how online communities for cocreation shall be designed and managed effectively for successful collaborative innovation projects (Guo *et al.*, 2017).

8. Managerial guide/implications

8.1 Give direction

The moderator should direct community members with specific themes to steer the discussion among the online community members. It is essential that the moderator communicates the project purpose and goals clearly and explains the online platform functions at the very beginning, as some people may not be as comfortable with technology as the others. This way, the community will know what is expected from them and how they can use the online platform effectively to achieve these tasks.

8.2 Provide training

The right training about innovation process and how to create ideas in teams should be given to the professional who will be responsible for the communication within the community. Moreover, some practical information to community members on how to collaborate on ideas by providing with constructive feedback and counter arguments could be useful.

8.3 Encourage client feedback and interaction

The moderator should ensure interaction between the client company and the community and encourage the clients to provide feedback to the community members from time to time during the ideation period and afterward. Involving someone from the brands' internal team in the online process would also be helpful.

8.4 Ensure clients' follow-up

In addition to communication during ideation, the moderator should push the client companies to do an after-community follow-up. This is the last but maybe the most essential step for both parties to end such a project in the best way. The members of the community did not expect rewards, but a follow-up from the brands on what has been done with their ideas. For example, they wanted to know whether something has been improved in customers' experience. On the other hand, if a follow-up is not provided (as in the case of the community), this results into a decrease in the positivity of the whole community experience. Companies should be sensitive about this as it can make or break the experience by causing disappointment, and unfavorable attitude toward the brands could be inevitable.

8.5 Break the ice

The moderator should encourage the community members to build on each other's ideas and comments. Encouraging community members to check out each other's ideas and highlighting member achievements may be some of the triggers to accomplish this.

8.6 Increase group feeling/sense of community/sense of belonging

The moderator should greet the community members, create a group feeling, make each individual feel welcomed and therefore increase their motivation to engage in the community

and actively participate. Pointing out that all the members were selected for a shared goal and they share similar experiences could raise a feeling of homophily and sense of community.

8.7 Motivation is the key

The moderator should know different types of motivational factors. She should acknowledge every individual who are making a contribution, for example. Recognition and appreciation are only two factors. Be aware that motivations may differ among individuals.

8.8 Give feedback

The moderator should reply frequently and ensure that everybody receives an individual reply. Besides, developmental feedback helps to improve the quality of the ideas.

8.9 Encourage counter arguments and constructive feedback

The moderator should highlight the essence of counter arguments and provide constructive feedback in building on each other's ideas.

8.10 Tailor the program to the needs of your audience

The community members who had busy schedules (especially with business profiles) did not find the time to go online and contribute as much as they wanted. Although it is difficult to consider the availability of all participants during the ideation process, this could/should be taken into consideration. For example, as one of the respondents suggested, Friday afternoons could be a time that many people would be able to check their e-mails. Tailoring the program to the availability and needs of your cocreators might increase participation.

8.11 Qualified online platform

Ensure that the technical sides of online cocreation are well considered such as easy navigation of the online platform. Basic functions that enable cooperation and a healthy amount of competitive spirit are essential to be able to vote, comment and so on. Technical problems should be avoided or handled as fast as possible.

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Corresponding author
Zeynep Didem Nohutlu can be contacted at: didemnohutlu@hotmail.com