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Participatory New Product Development – A Framework for Deliberately Collaborative and Continuous Innovation Design

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Abstract

Participation of all relevant stakeholders to the New Product Development (NPD) process is an important issue for the democratization of the use of goods and services and promoting responsible research and innovation. Although participatory NPD is becoming a hot topic in recent years, most of the studies concentrate on the participation of users as individual entities—customers and neglect that production-consumption cycle is constituted as a network of stakeholders. Besides their role as customers, individuals play different social roles in their daily lives. Social roles are not determined according to some essential behavioural characteristics but emerge within a structure constituted as a network amalgamated according to a set of relations. Individuals can have different norms depending on their position in the network structures constituted according to different types of stakes. Organizing and coordinating stake based roles is a complex and fuzzy issue as these are constantly in making and involves “politics” in the sense of persuading other people to some form of action. In this paper, we have discussed the possibility of an integrative online platform built upon the principles of Web 2.0 revolution that would act as a “democratic assembly” for negotiating, coordinating and integrating the fuzzy cycles of the innovation process. Social media offers great opportunities for organizing and coordinating participatory NPD activities as they provide means for bringing large number of participants to form a virtual community within an electronic platform. Building upon these principles we have outlined some important challenges that can be important during the conceptualization of such a platform. Our conceptual framework can offer a guideline for future research with the aim of turning this concept into a product. This paper has some limitations which could be complemented with some empirical research on how actors experience these challenges in their everyday organizational context. Future work needs to be focused on discovering the concerns from the emic view points of the stakeholders.

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1. Introduction

In today's fast changing and competitive marketplace, innovativeness in new product development (NPD) is an essential element for a sustainable business. Innovativeness in NPD is not only a key aspect of value creation, but it also offers evolving value-in-use opportunities for the ever changing needs and requirements of an organization's stakeholders. Innovation research translates user's needs, desires, images and feelings for a product into technological design elements. In this sense, it is a bridge between engineering and consumer research tasks. As such, innovativeness in NPD has been of great interest to academics and practitioners from a wide variety disciplines and industries. However, these efforts usually remain in independent domains and have not been concerted enough to provide an inter-disciplinary spanning. The need for an integrated framework for the design and coordination of the NPD activities with the participation of all the relevant stakeholders remains a gap in the literature.

Three key developments in the contemporary marketplace fuel the urgent need for such an integrative and participative approach to NPD:

First, according to Smith et al. (2010, p.4) businesses are suffering from a 'new marketing myopia,' because of ignoring the broader social context in favor of a narrowly defined customer centricity (Smith et al, 2010). The new marketing myopia risks a rigid vision of the customer only as a consumer, without acknowledging his/her other roles in the society as 'a citizen, a parent, an employee, a community member, or a member of a global village with a long-term stake in the future of the planet'. Looking from a stakeholder perspective is essential for understanding the complex and dynamic relationships and roles among various actors in the marketplace.

Second, there is an increasing concern by consumers for the recognition of their different stakeholder roles by the businesses for following more responsible practices that care for and nurture environmental and social welfare. Academicians and business circles have realized this concern as an opportunity to redefine their performance criteria in such a way to balance profit growth with societal and environmental considerations (Munro, 2013; Schwartz and Saiia, 2012). Corporate Social Initiatives (CSIs) are increasingly gaining ground for integrating societal and environmental concerns to core business values in order to form sustainable partnerships with the stakeholders. Hence, social entrepreneurialism is on the rise to bring together innovative and entrepreneurial activities with social initiatives during the NPD cycle (Munro, 2013).

Finally, marketing theory and practice have started to evolve into a new paradigm considering new marketing strategies that would be able to respond to the uncertainties of today's complex marketplace. This new paradigm calls for an appreciation of the co-creative and participatory nature of the NPD cycle. Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic) emphasizes the role of service provisions (application of skills and knowledge by relevant actors) rather than the role of physical products in the realization of value by the participant stakeholders (Vargo and Lusch 2004). From this perspective, NPD should not be evaluated solely based on the end product but rather on iterative and participative relational processes. NPD is a continuous and cyclical process involving interactive stages going between idea generation to value in-use by the consumers and back to ideas.

In this vein, in this paper we propose the outlines of a conceptual framework for facilitating and maintaining an open ended, participative, integrative CSI based NPD process for innovation. Our framework is open ended as it does not have a beginning or an end with linear and hierarchical stage gates, but rather offers a collaborative platform where participants can share their varying knowledge and skills. We emphasize the potentials offered by Web 2.0 revolution and social media in terms of organizing and coordinating the fuzzy nature of such a platform[†].

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2. Literature Review

2.1. Challenges to Stakeholder Participation in NPD

Marketers are increasingly seeking collaborative innovation opportunities with their existing and prospective customers and users (Greer and Lei, 2011). Literature is abundant with various user participation instances in new product development (e.g. Kujala, 2003; Sharp et al., 2006; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; von Hippel, 2005). Most of these studies cover business-user interaction during the NPD process. However, successful innovations involve the interaction of stakeholders other than individual customers (Driessen and Hillenbrand, 2013). Existing rare studies with the stakeholder perspective on NPD usually focus on one of the stakeholders at a time rather than considering their relationships as a network of actors. A limited number of researchers have examined the participative nature of innovations from a stakeholder perspective by focusing on a particular stage of the NPD process such as stakeholder collaborations during the design (e.g. Menguc, et al, 2014) or diffusion (e.g. Talke and Hultink, 2010) stages. Besides these sporadic attempts, majority of the user participation methods discussed in the literature only allow for either face-to-face interaction among a small group of participants or limited feedback from a larger group of audiences (Markus and Mao, 2004).

Despite the invaluable benefits of stakeholder participation in the NPD process such as higher rates of user adoption, formation of brand communities, sustainable product development and responsible research and innovation, this manifests a number of challenges. First, identifying key stakeholders and especially marginalized end-users and involving them in the process is not an easy task. Second, firms have limited time and financial resources as well as competences for initiating and maintaining stakeholder participation in practice. There is often not enough time and space for large number of members from each stakeholder group to participate in the NPD activities. Third, physically reaching and involving stakeholders in a global context is practically very difficult if not impossible. Last but not least, even though stakeholders can be reached and involved in virtual environments such as using online tools, organizing and applying these efforts in the NPD process can still be a very complicated and formidable task (Friedrich, 2013).

Potentials offered by social media in terms of overcoming these challenges by bringing together a variety of separate online tools within an integrative collaborative platform have been started to be discussed in the literature. These studies emphasize that such platforms could overcome the application challenges and help stakeholders to feel an integrated part of a community and take ownership of the NPD process and activities (Nambisan, 2002). However, these studies are limited to the use of online collaboration tools at the enterprise level to support physical design spaces for mutual learning and collaborative NPD (Buur and Bødker, 2000). There still remains a gap in the literature in terms of taking collaborative platforms to social media based virtual spaces. Social media can offer significant opportunities for engaging different stakeholders to the NPD into a virtual space without the limitations of physical space and time boundaries. Social network services logic can provide insights for building a virtual platform able to manage relations among people sharing common interests, concerns, activities, background or actual connections.

2.2. Service-Dominant Logic

Service-Dominant Logic of marketing offers a paradigmatic basis for the organization and coordination of collaborative NPD in virtual space according to the social network services principles. Vargo and Lusch (2004) in their seminal article defined S-D Logic as the new paradigm of marketing theory and practice. S-D Logic has several key characteristics aimed at responding to the changing nature of the marketplace and managing the network of relationships among various stakeholders. First, S-D Logic regards service as the common basis of exchange between stakeholders and espouses a process orientation (‘service’) rather than an output orientation (‘goods and services’). Furthermore, customers and other relevant actors are inextricable from value creation as value is always co-created with stakeholder participation and only realized in use by the customers (Vargo et al., 2009).

S-D Logic thus elevates the role of consumer from just user/destroyer of value to a co-producer/creator of value. According to this logic, value is realized in a given context through a series of service exchanges among collaborating stakeholders (Merz et al., 2009). Firms do not deliver value to passive consumers but only make value propositions in an interactive context (Grönroos, 1994; Gummesson, 1998). End user actively creates the “value-in-context” by mobilizing and integrating various market, public, and private resources (Vargo et al., 2009). Hence, value creation occurs in a context of complex networks that form dynamic service ecosystems made of not only firms and consumers but their contextual communities and other stakeholders.

2.3. Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory offers a framework for managing the complex network of actors with a wide variety of interests in the dynamic and ever-changing contemporary marketplace ecology (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholders can be defined as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). Therefore, an organization’s stakeholders are not limited to its customers, but include a wide array of internal and external groups including suppliers, employees, shareholders, intermediaries, special interest groups, and members of the society at large. Stakeholder theory thus explains and prescribes the “simultaneous attention to the legitimate interests of all appropriate stakeholders” which has stakes in an organization’s activities (Donaldson and Preston, 1995, p. 67).

Stakeholder theory pioneered the addressing of non-commercial issues such as the environment and social welfare. It acknowledges the stakes consumers have in the present and future well-being of the planet as they play different social roles in their daily lives. Stakeholder theory posits that the interests and priorities of these diverse roles may sometimes conflict with each other and it is increasingly important for organizations to balance these conflicts (Hill and Jones, 1992). While balancing conflicting issues requires some special decision support tools (Winn and Keller, 2001), research in this area is scarce (Kaler, 2006). Although stakeholder theory proposes stakeholder integration to incorporate different voices to the organization’s decision processes (Hart, 1995), this has not been formally conceptualized nor empirically studied in the context of NPD.

2.4. Corporate Social Initiatives

Edelman Trust Barometer (2013), the annual study that globally ranks a list of most trustworthy sources of information for consumers, reports that Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are the most trusted institutions for the sixth year in a row. The same institution previously found out that 70% of consumers trust a company more when it partners with an NGO (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2011). The reflection of these customer sentiments can be found in the increasing number of firms forming more and more sophisticated partnerships with NGOs across the globe (Baur and Schmitz, 2012; Baur and Palazzo, 2011; Holmes and Smart, 2009). The increased number and quality of partnerships between firms and NGOs is due to the increasing needs for better addressing societal challenges in a more decentralized way as an alternative to inefficient bureaucratic government efforts (Rondinelli and London, 2003; Berger et al., 2004).

In this respect, stakeholder theory offers some insights about how firms can survive in contemporary dynamic and ever-changing marketplace by engaging different stakeholders to negotiate and to balance their often conflicting needs and priorities. Freeman (1984) argues that a firm’s survival ‘depends in part on there being some “fit” between the values of the corporation and its managers, the expectations of stakeholders in the firm and the societal issues which will determine the ability of the firm to sell its products’ (p. 107). As societal challenges start to take center stage in people’s lives, CSIs become a strategic concern for firms. In order to preserve or enhance their social legitimacy, firms are increasingly looking for innovative and relevant CSIs, for which they are increasingly turning towards engagement with diverse stakeholders, particularly with NGOs (Holmes and Smart, 2009; Yaziji, 2004).

2.5. Stakeholder Integration in NPD for CSIs

As marketing theory and practice evolve toward the new S-D Logic of value co-creation through interactive and participative service exchanges among networks of stakeholders, the locus of innovation is also shifting away from the internal boundaries of the firm to a relational network of diverse stakeholders (Chesbrough, 2003). The use of more collaborative processes in order to facilitate these relational exchanges for the purposes of developing new products and services compatible with the needs and requirements of multiple stakeholder groups is fast becoming one of the most distinctive features of successful firms (Holmes and Smart, 2009). Von Hippel (2005) coins such efforts as the ‘democratization of innovation’ where various operant resources are combined and coordinated in a multi-stakeholder relational domain. CSIs are important as they encourage a diverse range of stakeholders to tap their distinctive skills and knowledge to the innovation process (Holmes and Smart, 2009, Pittaway et al., 2004). Firms that collaborate with multiple stakeholders and consider their conflicting needs in NPD activities have been more successful in the adoption of their innovations (Talke and Hultink, 2010; Urban and Hauser, 1993; Wind and Mahajan, 1987).

However, coordinating and organizing varying interests of multiple stakeholders makes the NPD process more complex. Therefore, a major task for managers is to decide which stakeholders are relevant for the design, development, and adoption of CSI innovations by users and other stakeholders. Organization of the collaborative activities during the different phases of the innovation process is an important issue (Driessen and Hillenbrand, 2013; Lehmann, 2006; Wind and Mahajan, 1997). These complexities can be handled by a participatory systems design approach which could help identifying the strategic value that should be afforded to CSI activities. Accordingly, managers could select and prioritize stakeholder requirements key to the development of such activities (Ludescher et al., 2012).

2.6. Systems design for participatory NPD

Conventional marketing theory and practice identify a number of models that explain and guide effective and efficient NPD processes from a managerial perspective. These models are originally formulated with goods dominant logic and as such they cannot fully respond to the emerging S-D Logic. S-D logic requires a process orientation rather than focusing on the outputs delivered in a linear fashion at distinct stages of NPD. The typical linear NPD models propose gated stages that follow one another, within which activities are performed by separate and distinctive members of the organization (e.g. idea generation, idea screening, concept development, concept testing, product development, test marketing, commercialization, and monitoring and evaluation). These linear and hierarchical stage models of NPD may not be able to allow for adequate integrated collaborative knowledge and skills exchange between diverse stakeholders. Particularly in developing products for CSIs, it is essential to integrate the participation of marginalized stakeholders. A network model of NPD would better address such a process where skills and knowledge of diverse stakeholders are accumulated in an iterative and continual fashion.

Systems design theory can be a fruitful field for conceptualizing such a network model. User involvement in systems design process has long been established in literature (Gulliksen et al., 2003). For example, user-centered design puts user needs in its core throughout the iterative systems design process (Gulliksen et al., 2003), whereas participatory design also considers the various roles of different stakeholders and the power structures among them (Schuler and Namioka, 1993). User-driven innovation takes its starting point from users’ needs and is based on user ideas for NPD (Wise and Høgenhæven, 2008). Whatever the different approaches, systems design thinking appreciates the fact that involving users in the co-creation process in every phases of the innovation process would increase the likelihood of product/service success (Hoyer et al., 2010).

Although there is no one single application model for user involvement in systems design, different approaches can be categorised on both a longitudinal as well as a lateral dimension (Kaulio, 1998). Longitudinal dimension considers the phases of the processes where the user involvement takes place from early phases such as idea generation, idea screening, and concept development to late phases such as developing prototypes, conducting

usability tests, and even during use (Kaulio, 1998; Botero et al., 2010). Lateral dimensions on the other hand, relate to the level of user involvement in the design processes such as determination of whether the products/services are designed for them, with them or by them (Kaulio, 1998).

As these dimensions may match in a plethora of ways, user involvement to NPD is a complex process and it is a big challenge to integrate these competing approaches to a single model (Buur and Matthews, 2008) that automatically guarantees the democratization of the innovation process. Singh and Gurumurthy (2013) argue that many ‘open’ innovation platforms are inherently confined by the boundaries set by the organizations as these organizations consciously or unconsciously limit (or even exclude) dialogue with all relevant users. Typical methodologies such as idea competitions, focus groups or idea platforms organized by companies may fail to represent a natural dialogue for people, who in reality communicate through narrative stories. Participatory innovation activities thus do not happen as planned and bounded activities, but rather evolve as all participants (including marginalized stakeholders) bring their own perspectives to the interactive relational exchanges in a naturalistic context.

A meta-design approach (Fischer, 2009) to participative innovation strengthens and supports our contention that a CSI based NPD should also be continuous and iterative in nature. Drawing parallels with S-D Logic, meta-design approach assumes that future uses and problems of products/services cannot be completely anticipated during the designing process. Therefore, in order for value to be realized in use and in context, marketers should avoid developing products/services that offer complete solutions, and rather design open platforms operating in a natural setting that can be adapted to future user needs and requirements. According to Ye and Fischer (2007) there are a number of requirements for facilitating continuous user participation in designing such open platforms. We will next discuss these requirements in relation to innovations for CSIs and offer a framework for facilitating the coordination of stakeholders within a social media environment.

3. Conceptual Framework for a Deliberately Participative CSI design

3.1. Social Media as platform for participative CSI design

The concept of the Web 2.0 or social web is characterized by user participation, openness, and networking during the generation of the digital content (Musser and O’Reilly, 2006, p.4). Social web informs the new ideological and technological ways in which the World Wide Web is now being organized as networks of users (Yenicioglu and Christodoulides 2013). Social media in the Web 2.0 era then is the group of Internet-based applications that build on the foundations of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). These open source and interactive applications are aimed at expanding the skills, knowledge and power of users as participants in both commercial and social processes (Yenicioglu and Christodoulides, 2013). Social media applications encompass a range of channels including forums such as blogs, consumer rating/review websites, social networking websites, content sharing sites, virtual worlds, business networking sites, and collaborative sites. Developments in mobile technology enable affordable social media access to be anywhere and at any time providing a highly democratized and inclusive platform for participative instances. By allowing for anonymity, social media also can be encouraging for marginalized users. Stakeholders from a wide array of geographic, economic, political, cultural, and social realities flock to social media platforms to interact, collaborate, and co-create. Thus it is emerging as a virtual space that can take over from the physical collaborative design spaces. These virtual platforms with their geographically unbounded, timeless, anonymous, open, and inviting nature can provide an unprecedented opportunity for the application of the deliberately participative CSI design framework.

3.2. The Framework

Existing participative software systems (PSS) such as Wikipedia, Flickr, and Open Source Software (OSS) projects can provide a framework for organizing the collaborative virtual spaces for NPD through social media. These systems emerge through the collaboration of different actors each voluntarily contributing their skills and expertise for developing the components of the product (von Hippel, 2005). The software is not an end product as it evolves in a constant changing context of use, challenges, domains, and communities of users. These systems can provide working examples for participatory NPD practices as they emerge as a process where the user and developer roles interchange in an unstructured context. The major challenge for application of such systems to NPD is not the technical infrastructure but the organization of a collaborative social ecology allowing active participation of all stakeholders. This ecology does not come automatically but needs some conscientious coordination activities to face the challenges in the process (Ye and Fischer, 2007). These challenges can be summarized as follows in the context of NPD:

- Mapping the system's stakeholders

Mapping the system's key direct and indirect stakeholders as well as the relationships between them is a very important phase in participatory NPD, particularly if the firm would like to deliberately integrate the participation of marginalized stakeholders. Technical infrastructure to this mapping process using social media platforms and the available data therein is only one side of the process. For a truly participative NPD process, firms should allow for the bottom-up approaches which facilitates stakeholders' deliberate modifications to the stakeholder map through the social media platforms.

- Creating an interactive understanding and a learning environment for stakeholder issues and expectations

Coordination of collaborative NPD activities via social media requires knowledge sharing mechanisms that encourage mutual interactive learning. Social media can provide and maintain deliberative environments such as e-learning, mailing lists, wikis, forums, comments and chat rooms allowing vivid debates among the stakeholders. Stakeholder issues and their expectations from NPD processes will emerge naturally through these debates. Maintaining and nurturing such an environment is a key issue for an NPD process relevant to all stakeholders. .

- Negotiating stakeholder issues - who and what counts and why?

Stakeholder theory maintains that in collaborative contexts the legitimacy, power, and urgency of stakeholder issues need to be identified, negotiated, and agreed upon by participating stakeholders. We should keep in mind that in majority of the cases some stakeholders might lack power or legitimacy although their issues may be urgent. This would lead to ignoring the interests/voice of these marginalized/vulnerable stakeholders even on socially mediated collaborative platforms. So a normative ethics perspective (Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Dunfee, Smith, and Ross, 1999) might indicate a prioritization of stakeholders different from the mainstream view.

- Providing a collaborative platform

The power of participatory NPD comes from the involvement of diverse stakeholders making their own contributions according to their requirements. This needs an integrative common platform so that they can share with each other and coordinate solutions of others. Participatory NPD efforts need to develop upon an online collaborative platform or exploit existing groupware widely available to all users to facilitate easy sharing and integration. Groupware are specialized collaborative online platforms integrating functionalities such as document sharing, wikis, group calendar, chat rooms, instant messaging and online conferencing. The philosophy behind groupware contributed to the development of the Web 2.0, bringing a host of collaborative features that were originally limited for use within the corporate networks.

- Enabling transparent governance of the collaborative environment

Ownership rights, policies and procedures for common products and digital content need to be transparent and legitimate. The management rights concerning roles also need to be granted according to the interests, skills and contributions. Nomination of authorities and empowerment should be commensurate with responsibilities. Rights management should not be determined simply as intellectual property and copyright protection issues but should cover the rights of all stakeholders. A participative consent approach should be applied to all shared data by the stakeholders (Nunan and Yenicioglu, 2013).

- Providing incentives for motivation to participate and contribute

In collaborative environments, motivations are primarily determined not by material rewards but intrinsic satisfaction which requires mechanisms for the recognition and visibility of the contributions. Especially reputation, trust, promotion in roles and influence in the community are important factors determining intrinsic motivations. Incentives should reflect and vary according to the interests of the stakeholders to encourage participation from all, especially marginalized stakeholders.

- Changing the established mindsets

People's mental model, organizations' structure and culture determine the adoption of a new technology. The underlying philosophy of collaborative platforms such as joint effort, cooperation and egalitarian participation may conflict with the established organizational practices such as individualism, limited organizational mobility, competitiveness and assertiveness. Hence, to change these established mindsets incentives or norms for cooperating or sharing expertise needs to be developed.

- Developing an effective knowledge management system

Last but not the least, collaborative platforms need an efficient knowledge management system to capture, develop, share and use the knowledge accumulated during the complex and non-linear processes of collaboration throughout the system. Knowledge management efforts typically focus on organizational learning through integration and organization of the accumulated knowledge. Such efforts are necessary to afford the organization and coordination of distributed nature of social media.

4. Conclusion

Participation of all relevant stakeholders to the NPD process is an important issue for the democratization of the use of goods and services and promoting responsible research and innovation. Although participatory NPD is becoming a hot topic in recent years, most of the studies concentrate on the participation of users as individual entities-customers and neglect that production-consumption cycle is constituted as a network of stakeholders. Besides their role as customers, individuals play different social roles in their daily lives. Social roles are not determined according to some essential behavioral characteristics but emerge within a structure constituted as a network amalgamated according to a set of relations. Individuals can have different norms depending on their position in the network structures constituted according to different types of stakes. Organizing and coordinating stake based roles is a complex and fuzzy issue as these are constantly in making and involves "politics" in the sense of persuading other people to some form of action.

In this paper, we have discussed the possibility of an integrative online platform built upon the principles of Web 2.0 revolution that would act as a "democratic assembly" for negotiating, coordinating, and integrating the fuzzy cycles of the innovation process. Social media offers great opportunities for organizing and coordinating participatory NPD activities as they provide means for bringing large number of participants to form a virtual

community within an electronic platform. Building upon these principles we have outlined some important challenges that can be significant during the conceptualization of such a platform. Our conceptual framework can offer a guideline for future research with the aim of turning this concept into a product. This paper has some limitations which could be complemented with empirical research on how various actors experience these challenges in everyday/organizational context. Future work needs to be focused on discovering concerns from the emic viewpoints of all relevant stakeholders.

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