

Exploring the role of Feedback source and timing on the involvement of participants in crowdsourcing activities and platforms

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Cite as:

siala chaima, Abdelmajid Amine, Saied Ben Rached Kaouther (2020), Exploring the role of Feedback source and timing on the involvement of participants in crowdsourcing activities and platforms. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 49th, (63476)

Paper from the 49th Annual EMAC Conference, Budapest, May 26-29, 2020.



Exploring the role of Feedback source and timing on the involvement of participants in crowdsourcing activities and platforms

Abstract: Integrating internet users as part of a crowdsourcing contest, is a process often mobilized by companies to benefit from the creative ability of the crowd to generate original ideas. Crowdsourcing has been the subject of several marketing studies. This research focuses on understanding the role of platforms feedback as well as members of the community, on the commitment towards the platform and the participation. We explore the role of feedback in two different phases of a crowdsourcing contest (1) during the competition (2) after the announcement of the results. A qualitative exploratory study of 12 participants in a crowdsourcing competition shows that: (1) the lack of task-learning feedback from the platforms on the participants' submissions during the competition acts as an inhibitor of the possibilities for improving ideas, (2) the lack of feedback on the selection criteria for the winning ideas causes frustration among the participants (3) in case of loss of contributors, the lack of feedback from the platform after the the announcement of the results is a vector of defection of the participants.

Keywords: *Crowdsourcing, Feedback, Development of new products.*

Track: *This paper is intended for Innovation Management & New Product Development.*

Introduction:

Over the past decade, a change in innovation practices is perceived. On the other hand, companies that use crowdsourcing to generate new creative ideas and interact with consumers are increasingly numerous and innovative (Jeppesen and Laursen, 2009). As a result, many products, stemming from crowdsourcing competitions launched by major brands, have been a huge success. Like Frito-Lay, the “cheese garlic bread” that increased Lay's sales by 8% over the next three months is launched (BrandIndex, 2014). Or the line of laptops launched by Dell. The company received 23,300 ideas of which 2.4% were implemented, 747,000 votes and 101,000 comments.¹ Crowdsourcing ideas refers to "opening up a company's innovation process to outsource a task opened by employees in the form of an open call to a large group of people via specific platforms on the internet" (Howe, 2006). Participants are invited to contribute to development activities, such as generating and evaluating new ideas; or challenging concepts and creating virtual prototypes (Gebauer, Furrer, and Pezzeri, 2013). In addition to designing new ideas and improving innovation processes (Kozinets, Hemetsberger and Schau, 2008; Fuller et al., 2010; Afuah and Tucci, 2012), crowdsourcing can be seen as a way to create communities of "co-creator consumers" (Healy and McDonagh, 2013) and to establish good relationships with existing or potential customers of the company (Fuller, 2010). Nevertheless, despite the abundant literature on its positive effects on the company, the counter-effects of certain aspects of crowdsourcing, often overlooked by the organizers of creative competitions, remain little explored in the literature. As the platform's *Feedback* during the crowdsourcing contest to all participants. Analysis of the structure of several crowdsourcing platforms such as eYeka, Open Ideo, Braineet or Fanvoice, shows that the interest in feedback remains extremely varied from one structure to another. The result is that while it is a peripheral element for competitive structure platforms such as eYeka, it is still important to participants. The empirical study of Camacho et al. (2019), shows that the percentage of participants who update their ideas when they receive feedback in the final stages of the crowdsourcing competition is 20% lower than the percentage of participants who update their ideas when they receive this feedback from the early stages of the competition. However, for challenges, launched by the eYeka platform (principal actor of crowdsourcing activities) only creators with at least one accepted submission are eligible for the feedback system at the end of the competition.² Indeed, if one of the first objectives of companies and platforms, using the crowdsourcing of ideas is to create a community of "co-creator consumers", the second is to ensure

¹<https://www.destination-innovation.com/how-dell-and-starbucks-crowdsource-high-volumes-of-ideas/>

²<http://support.en.eyeka.com/knowledgebase/articles/358853-what-is-the-feedback-circle>

the vitality of this community. This implies that the organization of crowdsourcing competitions must be carefully set up, in order to ensure a pleasant experience for participants, allowing to unite a community of committed "co-creators" who are inclined to return to the platform later. Indeed, it seems important in this study, to examine the role of feedback in the participation of contributors in the platform. To complete the literature, we explore this role during the various phases of a creative crowdsourcing competition; (1) During the contest and (2) After the results are announced. These issues are crucial because they are highlighted by the majority of participants, involved in crowdsourcing competitions as well by the practitioners but little explored in the literature.

Conceptual framework:

In crowdsourcing activities where specific tasks and objectives are assigned to participants (Afuah and Tucci, 2012), several researches have examined the factors influencing the quality or quantity of ideas in this case, number of participants or the number of ideas generated. These studies show that the majority of ideas generated are of poor quality (Girotra, Terwiesch, and Ulrich, 2010; Reinig, Briggs and Nunamaker, 2007). However, these ideas can be improved by using feedback from others (Lorenz, Rauhut, Schweitzer and Helbing, 2011). During the crowdsourcing competition one can refine his proposal based on the feedback received on the creative performance of his idea. Feedback according to Camacho et al., (2019) refers to "*all the information provided by one agent regarding the performance aspects of another agent,*" and corresponds according to Salgado et al. (2016) to "*a given comment on the quality or relevance of an idea proposed by a consumer*». Previous studies have studied the effect of different types of feedback, such as cognitive feedback (Sengupta and Abdel-hamid, 1993), social (Moon and Sproull, 2008), corrective (Yeh and Lo, 2009), community (Hildebrand et al., 2013) on the performance of participants' contributions such as the quality of ideas (Potter and Balthazard, 2004) or on participant satisfaction (Hildebrand et al., 2013). The Feedback Intervention Theory (FIT) (Kluger et DeNisi, 1996) suggests that different types of feedback in turn trigger different types of cognitive processes on creative tasks. FIT distinguishes between two types of feedback; the « *task-motivation feedback* » and the « *task-learning feedback* » (Kluger et DeNisi, 1996). The first type of feedback is comments in the form of praise (e.g. "Very good idea, congratulations on being today's featured contribution") to trigger emotional processes (Kluger and DeNisi, 1996) that lead to motivation and engagement in participation (Kluger and DeNisi, 1996). The second type of feedback takes the form of suggestions for correction or improvement (e.g. "It may be useful to do some research on how current headphones are treated and see how these materials

can be used/replaced in this process as a starting point. ³⁾ are associated with cognitive learning processes that facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge (Kluger and DeNisi, 1996; Seeber et al., 2017). Thus, Feedback is considered a way for participants to deduct the necessary resources to be allocated to reduce the gap between achieving the expected goal and their actual performance perceived by the feedback (Seeber et al., 2017) in order to continually improve their ideas during the crowdsourcing competition and to remain actively involved in the platform (Wooten et Ulrich, 2017). Bayus (2013) shows that participants who submit more ideas to a crowdsourcing platform are likely to generate quality ideas (chosen and implemented by the company). On the other hand, Wooten and Ulrich (2017) show that feedback from the platform during a crowdsourcing competition stimulates participation and increases the quality of ideas. Finally, for Finkelstein and Fishbach (2012), the platform's feedback is a way for participants to assess the intensity of the effort to invest in improving the quality of their submissions. It is also seen as an element to actively engage participants in the platform by regularly showing them their own ideas pages to update their proposals (Camacho et al. 2019). Camacho et al. (2019) found that negative feedback on the quality of submissions at the beginning of competitions positively influences the intensity of participation. Nevertheless, despite this work studying the effect of feedback on the quality and quantity of ideas from crowdsourcing competitions, the counterproductive effects of lack of feedback remain little explored.

Methodology:

To answer our research question, an exploratory qualitative study was conducted in the form of semi-directive individual interviews with 12 subjects of an average age of 32 years (7 Male and 5 Female). All of our interviewees participated in a creative challenge of crowdsourcing, on platforms, eYeka, Open Ideo, Tric trac, Fanvoice and agreed to collaborate in our investigation. Since the structure of the majority of platforms does not allow contact of participants, we solicited active contributors on the platforms through social networks (Mainly LinkedIn and Twitter) in order to enlist them in our empirical study. Respondents report having participated in at least 3 competitions in the past five months. Our interviews were conducted by Skype as crowdsourcing participants are geographically dispersed. The creative crowdsourcing competitions in which our informants participated, covered a variety of product categories; such as board games, candy, ice creams, but also social contests such as the one launched by Nike to find a solution to transform the waste of the brand's sports shoes into a reusable product for environmental protection purposes. The respondents were asked about the importance of receiving feedback during two

<https://challenges.openideo.com/challenge/nike-design-with-grind/review/grind-headphones/comments#comments-section>

phases of a creative crowdsourcing challenge (1) during the competition and (2) after the announcement of the results we are exploring in this research. The number of respondents was determined by theoretical saturation and the average duration of our interviews is 55 minutes. All data from the interviews was coded and categorized (Bardin, 2007) by using the Nvivo 10 software and was the subject of a vertical and horizontal content analysis (Allard-Poesi, 2015). The participants' speech, as evidenced by the content analysis proposed in the following section, reveals several themes.

Analysis and discussion of the results:

1. “Task-learning Feedback” of the platform and community members during the creative crowdsourcing contest is a source of recognition and a vehicle for involvement in participation.

Analysis of our interviews showed that participants in the crowdsourcing competition would like to receive feedback from the platform about their submissions from the start of the competition. On the one hand, this expectation reflects their desire to improve the quality of their proposals for the current competition as indicated by Antoine, 32 years old « *(..) Having regular returns would be much better it would allow you to progress on your ideas and necessarily make a better proposal because when you see something finally a proposal and you have the result at the end that is progressed a lot finally you can no longer change it while having regular feedback would be better* ». Samira, 48 years old, « *If there's a good idea but it's not super well laid out for anything it's still a great idea as much improved from the beginning before it's too late* ». Thomas, 26 years old « *The first one I took, it was just fun. But importantly, I think, it's the way I can ask for their advice* ». Jake, 32 years old « *I think a lot of what the community manager was doing, basically, shepherding the participants along the stages of the competition, because the platform is different from other platforms, so you need people explaining “this is what you do, so go and do that”, That's how I saw the community manager's help, it's a reminder that you need to take an extra step in this competition, it's not just you submit it once and you step away, because that what I'm used to. she was just helping to point me in the right direction* ». Having feedback from the platform and community members not only improves contributions but also allows for initial validation of the idea which encourages participants, and gives them more confidence to become more involved in participation as stated by Tanushri, 36 years old, « *To see what people, think about this, I have been working on it for last 8 months, but maybe I have put it out and everyone says it is rubbish. so, I better go back and think about it reasonably. But the fact that we got positive feedback that we got shortlisted. To me was kind of reassurance that what I'm doing is good* ». Jake, 32 years old « *I think what I got from the competition is that: yes, there are people*

that are interested in things like this. It's nice that I got recognition from this competition (...) I guess part of it could be that you can build on that validation. You submit an idea; the community can validate whether or not the idea makes sense. That is what makes it different from other standard design competitions where, basically, you just submit something and never hear about it, and then three months later you hear whether you've won, or you've lost and that's it! It is nice to have a little bit more interaction ».

2. The platform's "task motivation" and "task-learning" Feedback during the creative crowdsourcing contest is a source of creation of a complicity with the brand and platforms. It is also a key factor showing the serious involvement of the platform and the brand initiating the contest. This feedback received during the competition improves their attitude towards the brand and platform, and encourages participants to invest more in the creative task by giving the best return. « *I also saw that people at NIKE and people like you were taking seriously, there was a lot of feedback and taking so it was not just the competition in which you submit, and you never get feedback. That actually for me was particularly attractive. So, initially I just kind of put in a submission whatever. When I saw I am getting feedback and responses, I started getting serious as well » (Tanushri, F, 31 years old). « Also, when we had our webinar, they organized a webinar for all the shortlisted companies and there were two executives from NIKE in that webinar. For me that was also a good sign that they are taking it seriously » (Carla, F, 29 years old). « And the platform is also helping designers improve their level in various ways, indicating that their founders have a sense of responsibility » (Ada, F, 36 years old). The feedback pendant the competition: humanizes the relationship, creates a complicity with the brand and the platform and involves the participants to get involved « *With time one feels that there is feedback when there are changes one sees that this feedback comes from the customer who remains human even if it is only a platform one means digital or digital but the relationship in the end is humans with time there is always some complicity » (Samira, F, 48 years old)**

3. Feedback from community members during the crowdsourcing contest is a stimulus factor for participants' creativity.

The analysis of our interviews also shows the willingness of participants to receive feedback from other participants in the same competition « *I like to participate with other people or with people because I think that final research is richer insight or it's better looking or more useful, I think working with another person's in this kind of contests is the best or it is better » (Efren, M, 27 years old). This type of feedback impacts their involvement in different ways. Seeing other people's ideas stimulates creativity during the competition and builds relationships "I like to have a little feedback from others on my ideas of being in a creative sphere, it allows to stimulate and*

find new ideas, to exchange with people also it allows to create but also to meet people" (Antoine, M, 32 years). *"It makes this richness in ideas and then there is human contact we will say why not"* (Margot, F, 24 years old).

Seeing the ideas of others feeds the curiosity of the participants allowing them to enrich themselves, to acquire new knowledge, to better understand the creative brief, and to avoid the redundancy of ideas, *"It was a bit broad as a topic and it was interesting to see what the other participants had thought, based on the same question what ideas had been proposed what were the games created for this idea."* (Antoine, M, 32 years old). *"You can see, for example, the first competition I did, I had never seen what could produce people as much in quality as in graphics, I had no idea what was going on behind but seeing the other proposals I understood that it's useless to get too tired on the rendering most of the stuff is a little simple so it's useless to find to be 3D it's not interesting they're looking for the idea and also see that you can go super far away (..) or repeat the same proposals"* (Emilie, F, 27 years old).

4. Lack of feedback on the criteria for selecting winning ideas when announcing results, a source of frustration and discontent:

In competitive structure platforms such as eYeka, participants' proposals are not visible to others during the competition and are considered confidential. This strategic choice for this type of platform is justified by the latter's desire to limit the risk of the disclosure of ideas (Roth, 2016). Participants do not have the opportunity to see the winning ideas until the results are announced. However, it turns out that the platform still does not explain the criteria for choosing selected ideas and does not display all submissions received. Nevertheless, if the timing of the announcement of the results is a mere formality for these platforms, it turns out that it represents for creatives an important moment often criticized for lack of clarity as stated by *Thomas, 26 years old* « *So when they open a feedback circle, it would say a 150 people participated, but you can only see 20 entries, so why can't you see the other 130? Why have they chosen to hide them? There doesn't seem to be any reason, it doesn't make sense. It's not a huge annoyance, but yeah, why create a system and then prevent people from using or seeing it?* ». On the other hand, participants want to understand the reasons for choosing winning ideas in order to self-assess, but also to understand the reason for their failure if necessary, as *Emilie, 26, years old* said « *Sometimes we don't know too much why the brand chose this or that proposal, what it had in addition to the others what seduced them, I find it interesting when the platform or the brand after it gives the results it says well listen we chose it because it sticks serious lying with what we expected because it is a variation of our process of (..) it's interesting to know why you the or that idea won, it has what especially compared to the initial brief we still do not know why such proposal and not another*

that had won, there is necessarily a real good reason but it is interesting to know how they have apprehended by what in fact sincerely sometimes I think that my idea was completely better than the one that won after if they retained it is that there is a real good reason ». Explaining the selection criteria on the platform after the results are announced and giving participants access to see other people's ideas during the competition avoids negative reactions and perceived sense of injustice, caused by dissatisfaction with the jury's decision, as Ada, 36, years old says « *Information disclosure is the basis of ensuring fairness. Everyone has the right to know what happened in the process of competition*». Thus the return on the criteria for selecting the best contributions to genus a sense of justice among participants inherent in a perception of fairness in the treatment of proposals as declared Thomas, 26 years old « *Occasionally, when people win, and their submissions don't really meet the category of the brief, while there are others that do (...), the provider of the innovation competition will have to present a way that everyone is fairly treated in that open system*».

5. Lack of feedback in case of loss, a vector of defection of participants and an inhibitor of participants' opportunities for improvement:

Participation in creative competitions is an uncertain activity, and participants know that they have no guarantee of winning (Gebert, 2014). For some, it is a leisure activity that they practice in their free time, but for others more involved a challenge. Analysis of our interviews shows that when the results were announced, the lack of feedback to lost participants generates frustration and reactions that even discourage some of them from returning to the platform. "If you lose all the time you are a little frustrated but the fact of, sometimes you win sometimes you lose, it allows you to say that you can win back the contest but if you lose all the time and you do not know why it is not stimulating (...) we always get a generic email saying sorry you weren't selected it was a bit disappointing and hard at times. Maybe send a message a little more personalized or in two or three sentences that allow a little humanization we will say the return in relation to participation, I stopped participation in some platforms because of that" (Antoine, H, 32ans), « *Practically how they tell you, they'd email the participants saying we have announced the winner, and if you haven't been emailed that you have lose* » (Jake, H, 32 years old). « *I must admit, one criticism I have of eYeka is the lack of formal feedback. Sometimes, it's nothing, and, at best, it's almost an acknowledgement 'thank you very much'* » (Thomas, H, 26 years old). It is important to note that participants sometimes invest considerable resources in terms of time and energy in the realization of creative tasks, and the lack of feedback on the reasons for failure is countered by participants' desire to improve and build on the stages and results of the competition. " *I invested more energy in competitive competitions because in the end the final goal behind and getting edit*

his game or trying to have the best chance of getting edit (..) so it would be interesting if they explained why they accepted such a proposal and not the other, it allows me to progress and improve,(...) I personally would like to know why I could not win, what could I improve for the next time for example"(Antoine, H, 32 years old).

Conclusion:

This qualitative study allowed us to show the importance of the role played by the Feedback of the platform and community members during two different phases of a crowdsourcing competition. As a result, we complement Wooten and Ulrich's (2017) work on the impact of feedback on the quality and quantity of ideas from the crowdsourcing competitions and show that this feedback improves participants' relationship with the platform, reduces the tension associated with failure and increases the intensity of participation. We showed that the motivation of participants who received feedback during the competition from the platform had increased their involvement in participation. Our results are thus in line with the work of Camacho et al. (2019), in the sense of the source (platform, community member) and the timing of feedback two main factors of involvement in the crowdsourcing contest. Thus our results show that the lack of feedback type « *task-motivation feedback* » or « *task-learning feedback* » during the crowdsourcing competition (the first stages of the competition) accompanied by the lack of communication of the platform on the main criteria for selecting the winning ideas remain main sources of dissatisfaction with the announced result resulting in frustrations, disappointments and feelings of injustice that can provoke negative reactions among some participants who stop coming back to the platform. Our study highlighted the role of platform feedback (1) during the competition (2) and after announcing the results on the intention to return to the platform. Nevertheless, this study was based on a limited number of in-depth interviews related to a small sample of participants. Although a significant overview of important information on the subject is provided, generalization cannot be made at this stage. Future research should confirm qualitative results based on an experimental design that will help theorize the impact of feedback from the platform and community members at different phases of a crowdsourcing competition.

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