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## Crowdsourcing application in marketing activities

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### Abstract

Active deployment of information communication technologies between consumers' enables them contribute actively to various business activities. A crowdsourcing phenomenon is observed recently from perspectives ranging from users involvement in company's communication activities to various crowdfunding models. Aim of this paper is to explore crowdsourcing phenomena, analyse factors affecting consumers' involvement into crowdsourcing activities and explore crowdsourcing deployment in company's marketing activities. From the marketing perspective crowdsourcing might be deployed in various activities such as market research, communication, new products development and testing, innovative ideas development and others. Though companies should be aware of possible limitations and ethical issues related to crowdsourcing as well.

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### 1. Introduction

Information communication technologies (hereinafter – ICT) adoption grows intensively in the last decade. The ICT based solutions become more complex and sophisticated as well as correspond to enterprises needs in modern turbulent markets. We can observe ICT solutions dedicated completely to interior needs of enterprises and used by staff as well as solutions oriented towards consumers implying use of enterpriser's staff and consumers.

Besides the growing use of ICT between companies, use of ICT between consumers increases constantly as well. There are about 2.4 billion Internet users in the world (Internet World Stats, 2013) with prevailing majority of users in Asia.

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The growing use of Internet between consumers opens opportunities for enterprises to involve consumers in various enterprises' activities. This process, when ICT is deployed for various problems solving is named crowdsourcing.

Using Internet companies face possibilities for more interactive communication with consumers and higher involvement of consumers in various activities related to company. This brings the opportunities to harness consumers' activities and potential in various companies' activities. As Internet usually is accepted and communication and commercial channel first of all these activities becomes interesting to marketing managers – how consumers can be involved through crowdsourcing to support marketing activities and what marketing activities can be significantly improved through crowdsourcing marketing tasks through consumers? The *aim* of this paper is to find the answer to the second question, namely to explore crowdsourcing phenomena, analyse factors affecting consumers' involvement into crowdsourcing activities and explore crowdsourcing deployment in company's marketing activities.

Systematic, logical and comparative review of scientific literature and sources produced by practitioners in the area of crowdsourcing application in marketing activities is employed in this article.

## 2. Crowdsourcing conception

The term crowdsourcing the first time was used by Howe in 2006. At that time term was used to describe users' activities for content creation (co-creation). Content co-creation or user generated content became popular in 2005. In some cases this term is associated with similar term – “customer made“. However describing crowdsourcing refers to “the act of a company or institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined (and generally large) network of people in the form of an open call”, (Howe, 2006). The definitions of term crowdsourcing and related terms are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Crowdsourcing and related terms definitions

Term	Definition
Crowdsourcing	“Crowdsourcing is an online, distributed problem-solving and production model” (Brabham, 2008).
Customer made	“Phenomenon of corporations creating goods, services and experiences in close cooperation with experienced and creative consumers, tapping into their intellectual capital, and in exchange giving them a direct say in (and rewarding them for) what actually gets produced, manufactured, developed, designed, serviced, or processed” (Trendwatching.com, 2006).
User generated content	“User-generated content comes from regular people who voluntarily contribute data, information, or media that then appears before others in a useful or entertaining way, usually on the Web” (Krumm, Davies, & Narayanaswami, 2008)

Crowdsourcing phenomenon is widely addressed in scientific and practical literature. Estellés-Arolas & González-Ladrón-de-Guevara (2012) after studying about 40 different definitions in scientific and other literature suggested following definition: “Crowdsourcing is a type of participative online activity in which an individual, an institution, a non-profit organization, or company proposes to a group of individuals of varying knowledge, heterogeneity, and number, via a flexible open call, the voluntary undertaking of a task. The undertaking of the task, of variable complexity and modularity, and in which the crowd should participate bringing their work, money, knowledge and/or experience, always entails mutual benefit. The user will receive the satisfaction of a given type of need, be it economic, social recognition, self-esteem, or the development of individual skills, while the crowdsourcer will obtain and utilize to their advantage that what the user has brought to the venture, whose form will depend on the type of activity undertaken”.

Table 2. Companies deploying crowdsourcing in their activities

Company	Crowdsourcing based activities
Facebook	<i>Translation.</i> Facebook is a social networking site launched in 2004. Since 2008 it used crowdsourcing to create different language versions of its site. According to company, employing wisdom of crowds is offering the advantage of providing site versions that are more compatible with local cultures (Hosaka, 2008).
Minted	<i>Product design.</i> Minted is an American e-commerce company based in San Francisco, California, that crowd-sources design from independent artists and sells the designs as “fine products such as stationery, wall art, and décor for the home, holidays, and occasions. Minted was an early pioneer of crowdsourcing product design and has held open art and graphic design challenges monthly since 2008” (Minted, 2013).
Clickadvisor	<i>Consumer research.</i> Clickadvisor provides a range of crowdsourcing based research services by using “consumers as brand advisors who review products, decisions and concepts – and offer advice on how they can be improved”. Results of consumer research carried out by Clickadvisor can be used for identifying unmet needs of customers, for informing marketing decisions and to optimize innovation concepts and marketing campaign ideas (Clickadvisor, 2013).
Idea Bounty	<i>Creative ideas and marketing solutions.</i> Idea Bounty offers a crowdsourcing platform for companies to crowdsource creative ideas and marketing solutions to over 20 000 registered creative idea generators, who are ready to take on challenging client briefs. Companies offer a specified bounty in return and only pay it to the best idea they intend to use. Idea Bounty has worked with brands including FNB, The World Wildlife Fund, Unilever, Chevrolet, The Financial Times and South African Breweries. (CrunchBase, 2013)

Companies might deploy crowdsourcing in various activities (see few examples in Table 1), which lead to different crowdsourcing conception implementation. Brabham (2013) proposed four different crowdsourcing approaches:

- Knowledge Discovery & Management – for information management problems where an organization mobilizes a crowd to find and assemble information. Ideal for creating collective resources
- Distributed Human Intelligence Tasking – for information management problems where an organization has a set of information in hand and mobilizes a crowd to process or analyze the information. Ideal for processing large data sets that computers cannot easily do
- Broadcast Search – for ideation problems where an organization mobilizes a crowd to come up with a solution to a problem that has an objective, provable right answer. Ideal for scientific problem solving
- Peer-Vetted Creative Production – for ideation problems where an organization mobilizes a crowd to come up with a solution to a problem which has an answer that is subjective or dependent on public support. Ideal for design, aesthetic, or policy problems.

Crowdsourcing.org (2011) in order to redefine the crowdsourcing industry taxonomy gathered a team of crowdsourcing practitioners and experts, including taxonomy and categorization professionals and offered seven categories of crowdsourcing: Open Innovation (uses of sources outside of the company to generate, develop and implement ideas), Community Building (development of communities through active engagement of individuals who share common passions, beliefs or interests), Collective Creativity (tapping of creative talent pools to design and develop original art, media or content), Civic Engagement (collective actions that address issues of public concern), Collective Knowledge (development of knowledge assets or information resources from a distributed pool of contributors), Crowdfunding (financial contributions from online investors, sponsors or donors to fund for-profit or non-profit initiatives or enterprises) and Cloud Labor (leveraging of a distributed virtual labor pool, available on-demand to fulfill a range of tasks from simple complex). This categorization of crowdsourcing activities employs

other concepts having broader meaning than one used in this taxonomy, like open innovation and civic engagement, which relates closely to e-Participation, without clearly set boundaries.

Alternatively Dowson and Byngal (2011) proposes Crowd Business model framework which identifies 22 categories of crowdsourcing services and 8 business models, such as media and data (covering creation of media, content and data by crowds), marketplaces (matching buyers and sellers of services and financing through mechanisms including bidding and competitions), platforms (including software and processes to run crowd works and crowd projects, for use with internal or external crowds), crowd services (services that are delivered fully or partially by crowds), crowd ventures (ventures that are predominantly driven by crowds, including idea selection, development, and commercialization), crowd processes (services that provide value-added processes or aggregation to existing crowds or marketplaces), content and product markets (sale of content or products that are created, developed, or selected by crowds), and non-profit (tapping to create non-financial value). The model differs in value creation and monetization aspects from the perspective of business model, but all of them utilize crowdsourcing as a mechanism ensuring value creation. Other research performed by Saxton, Oh and Kishore (2013) identifies different types of crowdsourcing model – intermediary model, citizen media production model, digital good sale model, collaborative software development model, product design model, peer-to-peer social financing model, consumer report model, knowledge base build model, collaborative science project model.

### **3. Marketing and crowdsourcing conception**

Marketing can be defined as a process dedicated to relations with customers establishment, facilitating exchanges and leading to both sides satisfaction. Marketing functions can be named as this (Urbonavicius, Dikcius & Kasnauskienė, 2007):

- Product management
- Pricing
- Distribution management
- Communications management
- Marketing planning
- Marketing research

As usually internet is widely accepted as communication channel so most companies seek to deploy crowdsourcing in communication activities. Although companies also can deploy crowdsourcing in others marketing related activities, like ideas for marketing campaigns, video contests for TV or online commercials, design contests for products, application contests. Three examples of deploying crowdsourcing in these marketing related activities are discussed further.

A brand campaign run from July to September 2013 and executed by Holler Sydney for Audi asked its users in Australia what “Land of Quattro” meant to them. Company asked users to create produce their own version of the company's TV commercial with footage of the Audi Q5 shots from every conceivable angle, using state-of-the-art aerial tracking technology and car mounted GoPros. During the campaign over 150 000 unique visitors interacted with brand more than 880 000 times on specially developed microsite (<http://www.landofquattro.com.au>) and 2 275 unique TV commercials were produced for competition. TV commercial of the winner Jem Downing, was aired on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2013 crediting him as a director besides other prizes he received (Brockington, 2013).

Intel® Corporation and Toshiba’s Digital Products Division (DPD) in 2012 created “The Beauty Inside”, their second social media film following on from the success of Inside (2011). For this movie company announced public casting call in July 2012 year to play the lead role of Alex – a shape shifter who wakes up in a new body everyday and documents his identities in a Toshiba Ultrabook. Over 4 000 people worldwide auditioned for the lead role of Alex. 26 people were cast in the web series, and 50 more were featured on “The Beauty Inside” Facebook page via photos and videos. Movie attracted 5 million views, and a following of 14,531 subscribers on YouTube and 95,500 fans on Facebook (Makhija, 2012). The campaign won a Cannes Lions Award in the “Cyber” category in 2013.

UK’s leading tissue brand Kleenex in cooperation with Talenthouse invited artists and designers to create fashionable, unique and innovative box designs for the chance to see them on-shelf as one of three boxes available

to buy in the 2013 Autumn/Winter design refresh. Design voted highest on Talenthouse page was promised award of 250 GBP. Nearly 200 submissions were designed and entered. Winning design was chosen in July 2013 (Michelle, 2013).

Although crowdsourcing as a term appeared in 2006 (some sources mentions 2004) it's application in marketing activities is not very widely analysed from scientific perspective.

Alberts, Campbell and Louw (2010) in their paper analyses crowdsourcing impact on marketing research providing example of UK-based online insights agency, Brain Juicer, which applies principles of crowdsourcing to predict the success of products and ideas based on consumers opinions. From their perspective such situation causes real challenges for advertising and research companies leading them to face embrace of this phenomenon in their activities. As authors note "marketing research agencies are going to need to reassess the value that they bring to clients, in an age where brand managers can easily go directly to consumers themselves. From authors' perspective marketing research agencies might turn to "consulting crowdsourcing experts, equipped with the knowledge and skill to guide clients in their crowdsourcing endeavours".

Whitla (2009) suggests three areas of crowdsourcing application in marketing activities:

- Product development
- Promotion and advertising
- Marketing research

In product development case companies utilize potential of ICT in getting input or (and) advice towards their products development from existing or potential users. In other cases companies reach experts identifying problems which can be solved through certain products. In some cases companies (e.g. Fiat) challenges consumers to provide design for the products selecting the best design and partnering with the author. Whitla (2009) also notes some companies deploy "another form of 'product development' ...turning crowdsourcers to provide not just the idea but the very products or services (often written 'content' or information) that the firm then offers to its own customers".

In promotion and advertising activities Whitla (2009) distinguish two cases of crowdsourcing deployment – looking for experts who can perform task (create design, create flyer, create banner, etc.) or "use of crowdsourcers for rather laborious, menial tasks which the hiring firm has neither the time nor manpower to complete themselves". It might be noted some companies, such as Coca Cola or Lincoln, is using Tongal, Poptent, or GeniusRocket crowdsourcing platforms, asking the crowd to create the ads from scratch and rewarding the best ads with a cash prize.

From marketing researches perspective crowdsourcing gives opportunity to reach large potential consumers groups. Of course, motivational or gamification elements are necessary for keeping respondents interest and involvement, but in many cases crowdsourcing offers cheaper and quicker opportunities for gathering market information.

According to Marsden (2009), companies can crowdsource the promotion of their brands to volunteer brand enthusiasts (by using some variation free-stuff-for-feedback model to drive word of mouth promotion for brands), to outsource content creation to the crowd (companies can reduce costs and often increase marketing effectiveness by curating user content rather than paying agencies to create content) and to outsource innovation ideas and solutions to the crowd. Marsden (2009) suggest important factors companies' needs to keep in mind pursuing crowdsourcing:

- The first experiments should be directed towards small crowdsourcing experiments.
- 90% of audience will be passive and only 10 will be active (90-9-1 rule).
- Fame, fortune, fun and fulfillment are key motivation factors in crowdsourcing (4F).
- "Surgeon's law" – the system separating interesting and useful content should be in place.
- The smart crowdsourcing deals with identification and attraction of key experts in the field outside the company.
- The participation should be as simple as possible (1 click rule).
- Communities are "social glue" for running crowdsourcing, so whenever possible crowdsourcing is built on existing communities.
- As all processes crowdsourcing needs to be managed, so management team needs to be in place.

- Intellectual property rights should be seriously considered as crowdsourcing always deals with transfer of rights.
- Every crowdsourcing initiative needs to be heavy promoted.

Although Marsden (2009) describes crowdsourcing as challenging activity for companies, he also suggest Open Marketing perspective, which is described as “brands make money not through inventing stuff, but by spotting and commercializing creative work”. The three companies pioneering such vision are Threadless, iStockphoto and Apple.

Vukovic (2009) analyzing crowdsourcing possibilities in enterprises’ marketing (and sales) identifies as one of key areas. Other three areas are design and innovations, development and testing, support. Vukovic (2009) also identifies crowd analytics possibilities describing the situation when companies use prediction platform that allows news readers to make a prediction on the topic, and have a discussion with other users on-line. In similar manner communities can be involves in review processes.

As the support example Vukovic (2009) mention Amazon’s Askville initiative, which might be described as “social community site”, which facilitates question answering as a game, where users earn or receive reputation in particular topics as they answer questions in those topics, depending on how good their answer is.

In supporting product development idea Kozinets, Hemetsberger and Jensen Schau (2008) analyze collective consumer creative idea describing towards innovative prosumers, multipliers and innotribes.

Beard (2013) in her research observes crowdsourcing deployment in content marketing activities. As the positive aspects might be mentioned possibility to deploy crowdsourcing in various sectors and in companies of any size, feedback from customer can provide valuable insights for company or its products and services, possibility to select from the best ideas rather than rely on offer from the single person or agency, possibility to save costs because of paying flat rate once. Author also indicated some important aspects to be considered then turning to crowdsourcing: connection to the crowd, listening to it, responding (acknowledgement), transparency, empathy.

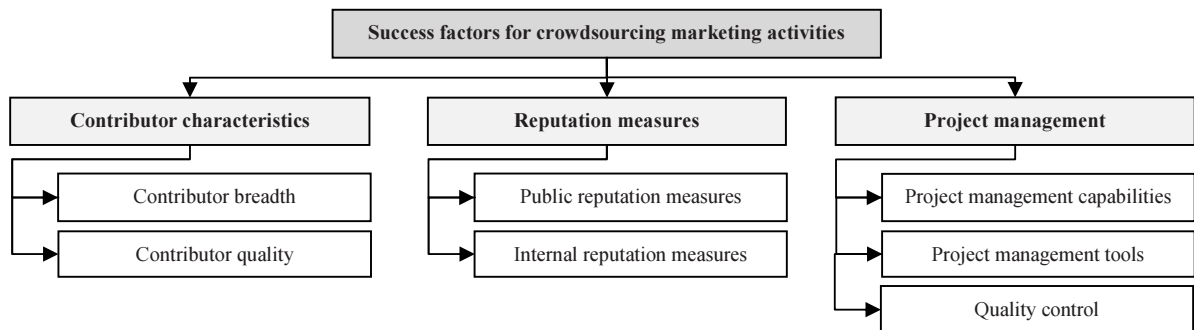


Fig. 1. Success factors for crowdsourcing marketing (adapted from Dowson & Byngal, 2011)

According to Dowson and Byngal (2011) there are 10 key success factors for implementing crowdsourcing models and services. At certain extend these factors are important in crowdsourcing marketing activities as well (see Fig. 1):

- *Contributors breadth* – the large pool of contributors is necessary, as it makes base for crowdsourcing
- *Contributors quality* – the size of pool might vary, but important for company to have contributors which have expertise in the field and share relevant opinion
- *Public reputation measures* – enterprise ability tai maintain reputation (brand) maintaining capacity to attract most reliable and highest quality contributors
- *Internal reputation measures* – crowdsourcing is dealing with external companies services, so for company is important to select highest quality services providers, which also requires appropriate skills and capacities
- *Project management capabilities* – crowdsourcing marketing initiatives or certain marketing functions/actions might be treated as a project, so strong management capabilities are required for project implementation

- *Project management tools* – as the factor above implementation of crowdsourcing will need specific tools and software
- *Quality control* – the crowdsourcing should lead to high quality outcomes, so appropriate quality control procedures are needed

Vukovic (2009) outlines four stages each successful crowdsourcing process should contain:

- Registration and specification
- Crowdsourcing request initiation
- Crowdsourcing request implementation
- Completion of crowdsourcing request

These four stages are supported through 22 functions/activities enabling crowdsourcing process implementation (Vukovic, 2009).

Crowdsourcing of marketing activities might be done internally at the company's level, or company might outsource those activities through external partners. Having in mind the earlier research and factors for successful crowdsourcing of marketing activities we summarize opportunities to apply crowdsourcing for marketing in Table 3.

Table 3. Opportunities to apply crowdsourcing in marketing activities

Marketing activity	Crowdsourcing deployment opportunities
Product management	Widely accepted crowdsourcing is used to support new ideas and new products development as well as testing of prototypes.
Distribution management	Crowdsourcing especially might be successful in information product distribution, but also crowd labour might be applied for distribution tasks in physical market.
Communications management	Often addressed issue in research as Internet mainly serves as communication channel. Companies can allocate different communication tasks to users through crowdsourcing.
Marketing research	Crowdsourcing enables to get feedback and opinion from the crowd, however engagement and quality assurance issues are critical.
Content marketing	As examples of several companies (Intel, FedEx) show, crowdsourcing is actively deployed in content marketing activities.

Despite all the benefits and possibilities, there are issues related to crowdsourcing which should be considered by companies. Whitla (2009) questions results of applying crowdsourcing to consumer research because of respondent being paid for participation in research and for uncertainty of how representative of target audience a sample of respondents is then. Author also points out that in order to avoid noise returned by crowd, companies should prepare procedures for effective filtering and considering ideas that are supplied by the crowd. In respect to intellectual property rights protection of ideas submitted, legal issues also need to be clearly addressed. He also mentions two potential ethical violations in the marketing field identified by many practitioners: the practices of using crowdsourcing for purposes of gathering competitive intelligence and to engage in 'click fraud'. N. Beard (2013) adds that the process of managing crowdsourcing projects might be time consuming and might get complicated depending on the number of crowdsourcing projects executed and quantity of feedback from the crowd.

Sugget (2013) points out a number of issues relevant for advertising industry related to application of crowdsourcing. First, use of crowdsourcing devalues creative talents as only best ideas are paid and remaining majority of creators work for free in hopes for their idea to be chosen. Even if creative is paid for his idea, their wages are below average. Extensive use of crowdsourcing also skews the marketplace in favour of freelance based business models and that could negatively impact creative careers. Then using crowdsourcing there no continues working relationships neither between member of creative "team" nor between companies and their "staff".

#### 4. Conclusions

Since term of crowdsourcing was first time mentioned and defined in 2006, this phenomenon is widely addressed in scientific and practical literature. Companies apply crowdsourcing for variety of processes and functions to gain benefits of large numbers of people performing tasks for a relatively low.

From the marketing perspective crowdsourcing might be deployed in various marketing activities such as product management, distribution management, communications management and marketing research through application of various types of crowdsourcing opportunities. Contributors breadth, contributors quality, public and internal reputation measures, project management capabilities and tools as well as quality control could be considered as main factors for success of crowdsourcing projects related to marketing activities.

Companies should be aware not only of advantages and opportunities facilitated by crowdsourcing but of possible limitations and ethical issues related to it as well.

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