

# THE FREQUENCY AND NATURE OF IDEAS IN ONLINE COMMUNITIES: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

SLADJANA V. NØRSKOV - LARS FREDERIKSEN - YUN MI ANTORINI

# IDEAS: FROM FUNCTION TO ART

- › LEGO minifigs
  - › Welder, Hazmat Unit,...



- LEGO Architecture
  - “...truly mind-blowing pieces of art.”



# HOW FREQUENCY & NATURE OF IDEAS CHANGE OVER TIME IN OCs

## > So far;

- > Identifying innovative individual traits: lead users (e.g. von Hippel 1988, Lilien et al. 2002)
- > Identifying innovative relational issues: between core and periphery (Dahlander & Frederiksen, forthcoming)
- > Integrating user contributions into corporate NPD (e.g. Füller et al. 2006, Schreier and Prügl 2008)
- > “Given that it is the ideas rather than people that undergo rapid change in OCs, future research should consider studying the connections and dynamics of ideas along with the flow of people.” (Faraj et al. 2011: 12)

## > Hence;

- > A need to explore the **interdependencies between the community and its environment *over time*** and their influence on ***ideas***

→ We follow ideas, rather than individuals, over time as the social structure and content of the community mature

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

---

1. What types of ideas do online community members propose to companies whose brand and products they have centered “their” community on? How do the nature and frequency of ideas change over time?
2. How do strategic, financial and organizational changes in the company, whose brand the community is centered on, influence the nature and frequency of ideas proposed by users to the community?

# RESEARCH SETTING & METHODS

---

## > Forum 'Dear LEGO':

- > Located at the site LUGNET (LEGO User Group Network)
- > 3.957 members by May, 2011
- > Organic brand community centered on the LEGO brand
- > Independent site, but part of a larger online community structure
- > Was formed in the early days of the community. Experienced a decade of growth. Is currently in decline.

## > Web log of ideas

- > Panel data; over 12 years; 5.666 postings
- > Content analysis

# PRELIMINARY HYPOTHESES

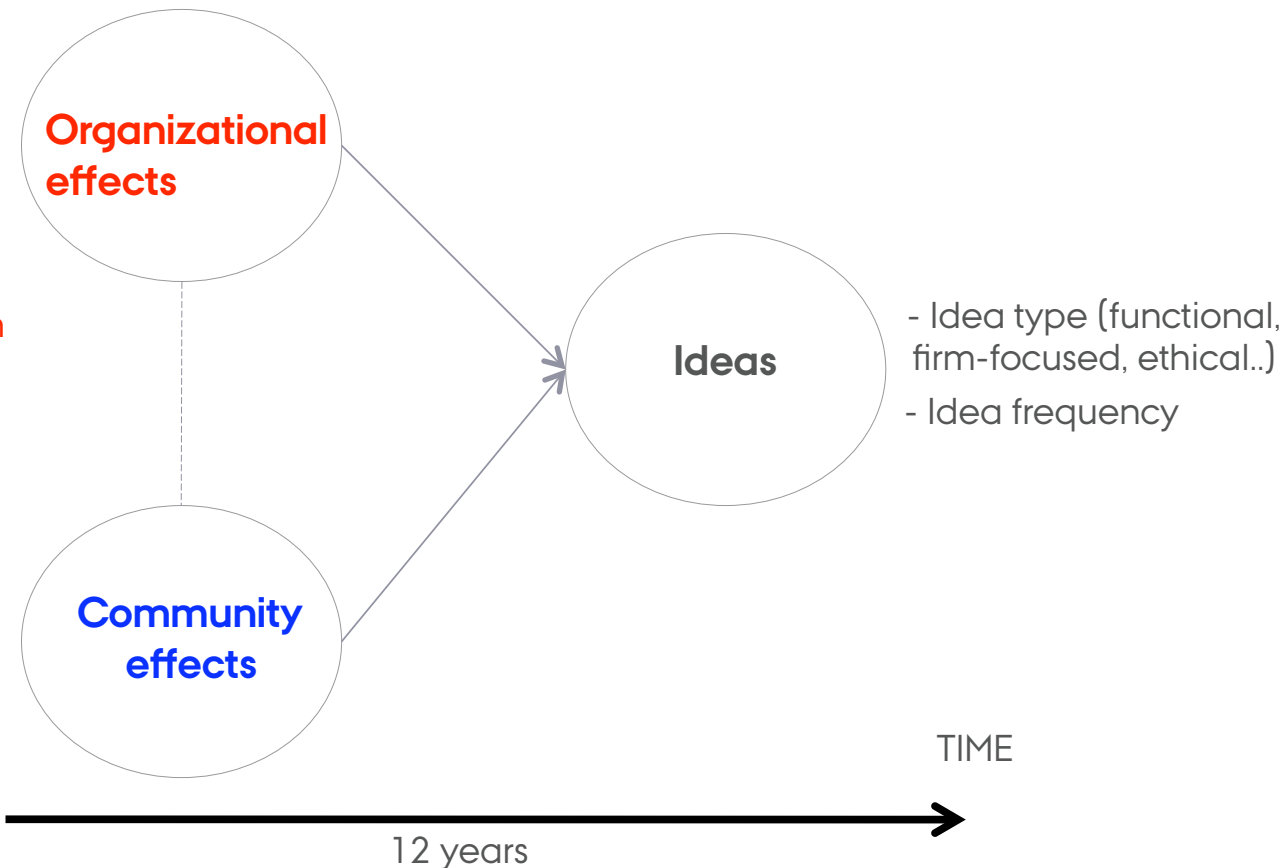
---

- › H1: Most ideas in OCs are related to the functional dimensions of the product at the early stages of the community life cycle (Franke and Shah 2003, von Hippel 2005)
- › H2: As the community matures additional types of ideas expand and they will complement each other (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001)
- › H3: Community contingencies affect the nature and frequency of ideas (Burt 1992, McFadyen & Cannella 2004, Perry-Smith 2006)
- › H4: Organizational contingencies affect the nature and frequency of ideas (McAlexander et al. 2002, Muñiz and Schau 2005, Amabile 1988, Kanter 1988)

# CONTINGENCY EFFECTS ON IDEA GENERATION OVER TIME

- Revenues & net income
- New product introductions
- Strategic initiatives (e.g. changes in business models)
- Trends in the overall market
- Intensity of competition

- Number of users
- Traffic
- Membership turnover
- Average tenure
- Average post length



# EXPECTED CONTRIBUTIONS & IMPLICATIONS

---

- › Longitudinal study
- › A dynamic perspective on ideas proliferation and change
- › Connect organizational and community contingencies to certain types of ideas and frequency of ideas
- › How the episodes of crisis and prosperity in the company influence the pool of community ideas (nature and frequency)
- › Enable companies to work more strategically with user communities, e.g. to determine where to aim the community-related efforts in the times of prosperity as opposed to the times of crisis or shifts in strategic positioning.