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Dark Side or Bright Light: Destructive and Constructive Deviant Content in Consumer Ideation Contests*

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Firms use ideation contests to generate ideas from consumers. This type of collaboration provides access to new knowledge and reveals latent consumer needs. But it also is risky, as firms give up control to an unknown crowd. Some contestants use ideation contests to post content that is unintended and unwanted by contest hosts, a behavior that represents deviant co-creation. Drawing on literature from sociology and consumer research, deviance is defined as a relative, norm-violating behavior that has the potential to activate others. We report the results from a netnography study to define the phenomenon of deviant co-creation in ideation contests. Based on these findings, we provide a theoretical foundation for deviant co-creation and conceptualize and empirically illustrate various patterns of deviant content, ranging from destructive to constructive. The study reveals that deviant content in ideation contests includes illegitimate as well as legitimate content. Legitimate content includes five themes: humorous, provocative, unique, violation from technical, and social norms. Deviant content usually bewilders evaluators and draws their attention to the content. Destructive deviant content may trigger visible and malicious protests or result in mocking and ridicule on the contest platform and other social media, thereby exposing the contest host to reputational risks. Constructive deviant content can lead to positive discussions in comment sections and other social media outlets, as well as foster further development of an initial idea, thereby contributing to the firm's innovation potential. This article provides managers a deeper understanding of deviant content raising awareness for the dark side risks as well as indicating how to leverage it to achieve constructive co-creation.

Practitioner Points

- Firms should not host ideation contests lightly. They need to be aware that in consumer ideation contests, they give up control to an unknown crowd, which can create destructive deviant content to harm the host.
- Firms should install a contest (community) manager who continuously monitors the contributed content to react to destructive content to limit its impact and who can boost a contest's chances for success by highlighting positive, i.e. constructive deviant content.
- Firms should take participants' contributions seriously and not camouflage marketing activities as innovation interests. As the contests are usually publicly visible, missing authenticity toward contributors can quickly

result in destructive deviant content and reputational risks.

Introduction

In 2011, the German consumer goods producer Henkel launched a design contest known as “my Pril, my style.” The company invited the public to design a new product label for its category-leading Pril dishwashing liquid. In addition to submitting their own designs and slogans, contestants could vote for their favorite entry. One contestant posted a design that featured a grilled chicken, including the slogan “Tastes deliciously like chicken.” The unconventional entry quickly went viral, making it the top design in the contest. But Henkel disqualified the quirky design and promoted a more conventional entry as the winner. However, it was obvious to contributors as well as interested observers that the vote had been manipulated. Henkel was unable to cope with the resulting media dynamics. When even the national press reported the incident, Henkel was left with a social media disaster.

The Pril case illustrates the growing power of consumers. Supported by the connectedness and transparency of social media, consumers are entering into more exchanges with companies and gain a greater role in

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firms' value creation (Roberts and Candi, 2014). Research on social media shows the great opportunities of online company–customer communication (e.g., Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), such as positive impacts of firm-generated content (e.g., Kumar, Janakiraman, and Kannan, 2016), user-generated content (e.g., Smith, Fischer, and Chen, 2012) and the value of networked narratives (e.g., Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, and Wilner, 2010). Consumers appear less fulfilled by the act of consumption itself and more inclined to engage in creative contributions (Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel, 2006). At the same time, this research stream also addresses the associated corporate reputational risks (e.g., Aula, 2010). For example, consumers are developing a deepening distrust of marketing communications (O'Hern and Rindfleisch, 2010). News coverage of corporate scandals (e.g., *JPMorgan's London Whale*), muckraking documentaries (e.g., *Super Size Me*), and anti-corporate websites (e.g., *adbusters.org*) have ignited more active forms of consumer resistance, such as anti-

corporate blogging, brand avoidance, and culture jamming (O'Hern and Rindfleisch, 2010).

The objective of our research is to study the back-handed role of co-creation for innovation. On the positive side is the increasing application of social media technologies, providing an opportunity to support the innovation process of firms (Roberts and Piller, 2016). Internet tools connect individuals to each other and with firms, empowering consumers to co-develop innovative products and services that better suit their needs (Kohler, Füller, Matzler, and Stieger, 2011). By involving consumers in their ideation efforts, companies can realize a higher commercialization potential (Poetz and Schreier, 2012). To this end, firms commonly use ideation contests to tap into consumers' creative potential. Such contests are defined as firm-hosted competitions in which external contributors provide ideas and suggestions for specific topics (Piller and Walcher, 2006). Ideation contests usually use online platforms that display all contributions, allowing all participants (i.e., hosts and external contributors) to read and comment on one another's ideas. To date, research in this domain has focused on the positive aspects of ideation contests, investigating the general performance of contests (Terwiesch and Xu, 2008), novelty of generated ideas (Poetz and Schreier, 2012), personal characteristics of contributors (Bayus, 2013), problem-solving effectiveness (Jeppesen, 2005), and designs of incentive schemes (Füller, Hutter, and Fries, 2012).

However, as seen with the Pril case, co-creation also can be risky (Di Gangi and Wasko, 2009). Izberk-Bilgin (2010) shows that the rate of unexpected and unwanted ideas generated through co-creation is increasing. By providing an open online platform for external contributors, firms give up a substantial amount of control to an unknown crowd. Some consumers use ideation contests to publish positive and negative content visible to the world. Problems arise when they post contributions that range from incongruous to the contest subject or its host to obscene and illegal. We apply the term *deviant co-creation content* to describe such contributions. Reports in the trade press indicate that managers are struggling with unwanted content and do not know how to react (Breithut, 2011). For example, companies might face the risk of brand identity dilution, as customer-created parodies and criticisms can result in adulterated brand associations (e.g., Thompson et al., 2006). Spreading ridicule via an ideation contest might also be emotionally contagious, so that other participants act in a

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similar vein and post additional mockeries. Also, participants who observe inappropriate content on the ideation contest sides might feel repelled by this content and attribute these to a mismanagement of the ideation contest. Finally, deviant content has the potential to reach widespread media attention, becoming featured in blogs, on Twitter and Facebook, and even in the popular press (consider again the Henkel contest). As social media is characterized by interactivity and connectedness, negative content quickly disseminates and constitutes a reputational risk (Aula, 2010). While research in social media acknowledges these risks, extant innovation literature rarely considers the negative behavior of some consumers in ideation contests—the “dark side” of co-creation (Chylinski and Chu, 2010). Research so far lacks a deep understanding of the characteristics of deviant content and its potential to harm or foster companies’ innovation efforts. Our objective is to address this theoretical and managerial gap by identifying and classifying deviant content in ideation contests.

To understand the phenomenon of deviant content, sociology and consumer research on opposing behavior helps to transfer the constructs and findings to co-creation research. We also explore conspicuous contributions in a nonparticipatory netnography study of 37 ideation contests to define and understand various forms of deviant co-creation activities in such contests. The contribution of our article is threefold. First, we provide a theoretical foundation for understanding deviant co-creation content by establishing the phenomenon’s legitimacy and facilitating a clear understanding of the various forms of deviant content. Second, we identify and empirically illustrate various patterns of deviant content in ideation contests, which range from destructive to constructive. Third, we discuss the impact and innovation potential of the various patterns. These findings raise awareness and stimulate the discussion of the phenomenon of deviant content among researchers and managers, thereby counterbalancing the so far overly positive view on consumer ideation contests.

Theoretical Background

This section provides an overview of relevant literature to establish a first concept of deviance. We first define ideation contests, before turning to broader sociology and consumer research literature to delineate deviant content in customer co-creation.

Ideation Contests

Following the paradigm of open innovation (e.g., Chesbrough, 2003), many firms are using external input and contributions at the front end of their innovation processes, “outsourcing” their ideation efforts in an attempt to obtain novel ideas (Terwiesch and Xu, 2008). Customer ideation contests are a commonly used form of co-creation, providing access to the contributions by a worldwide pool of talented people (Piller and Walcher, 2006). Typically, contestants can submit their own designs and comment on their designs and those of other contributors. These options offer contributors the space to publish positive and negative content (ideas, comments, opinions), including posting contributions not intended by the company host. Posting of such unexpected and potentially harmful deviant content is surprisingly common (Gebauer, Füller, and Pezzeri, 2013). Several cases in the general press report on how “the crowd” responded with destructive responses to firm-hosted co-creation campaigns (Breithut, 2011), and where these incidents became known to a wider public.

Insights from Sociology

Sociology has a long tradition of studying deviant behavior, mainly in the context of crime and inappropriate societal behavior. Common themes in deviance literature include street crime, prostitution, drug use, family violence, mental illness, sexual deviance, and white-collar crime (Clinard and Meier, 2010). Historically, sociological research connects deviance implicitly or explicitly to morally bad or neutral behavior (Wolf and Zuckerman, 2012). More recent literature, however, postulates that this traditional understanding of deviance has been incomplete and that deviance should be regarded as any departure from social situation expectations (Fowler, 2007; Heckert and Heckert, 2002; Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2004; Wolf and Zuckerman, 2012). Hence, deviant behavior could also include positively evaluated behaviors such as surpassing or overconforming. We follow this more recent perspective to provide a full-spectrum view of deviance.

Sociology literature offers multiple definitions of the phenomenon of deviant behavior. For example, Moschis and Cox (1989) define deviant behavior as differing from some norm or standard. Amine and Gicquel (2011) conceptualize deviant behavior as a discrepancy in relation to what is normally expected by

society. Most definitions of deviant behavior can be assigned to either the normative approach, emphasizing the violation or lack of conformity to norms, or the reactive approach, focusing on the role and expectations of the social audience as determinants of deviance (Heckert and Heckert, 2002). Konty (2006) argues that the perspectives should be combined, suggesting conformity to norms and expectations of a social audience are both valid indicators of deviance.

Accordingly, with regard to consumer behavior in ideation contests, we can combine normative and reactive approaches. Ideation contests usually have clear terms, conditions, and norms that serve as a framework for acceptable behavior. Disregard of these norms constitutes deviant behavior. Ideation contests also typically state a task or challenge for contestants. Firms and participants thus build common expectations about the appropriateness of contributions. Violation of these common expectations comprises another form of deviance. By integrating normative and reactive approaches, we derive a preliminary definition of deviant content in ideation contests as *content differing from some norm or standard or deviating from audience expectations*. Furthermore, some researchers argue that these violations should be “important enough to elicit a strong reaction” (Heckert and Heckert, 2002, p. 451). Also, Douglas (1977) acknowledges that although deviance is often destructive, it is also an important element of creatively altering routines toward new situations. Thus, change in routines and practices often come from deviant behavior.

Sociology literature has begun to examine how new technologies—particularly the internet—foster new forms of deviance (e.g., Durkin, Forsyth, and Quinn, 2006). Social media and online communication provide new possibilities for the pursuit of deviant behavior. Talking to strangers and the often anonymous nature of the internet decreases concerns about reactions to public offenses and legal sanctions and instead encourages communal discourse. At the same time, individuals who want to publish deviant content are socially consolidated as social media bring together like-minded peers, that is, peers with deviant proclivities (Durkin et al., 2006). Our research contributes to this area by identifying and transferring the notion of deviance to the context of deviant content in internet-based ideation contests. These contests can be used for communal exchange of deviant content, which is beyond most norm systems and posted without evident constraints.

It is important to note that deviance should also be considered from a constructionist view (e.g., Ben-Yehuda, 1990; Wolf and Zuckerman, 2012), such that the evaluation of whether a behavior is deviant must be contextual and can change over time. Social responses to specific behaviors influence connotations associated with deviance (Wolf and Zuckerman, 2012). If deviance is defined in reference to situational expectations, the expectation will vary with the situation. What is deemed deviant in a certain situation or period of time can be regarded as perfectly acceptable in other situations or at other times. Most sociologists agree that deviance is a fluid or relative concept and an outcome of changing norms.

Insights from Consumer Research

Consumer research literature in marketing augments our sociological definition of deviant behavior and helps us understand the characteristics, intentions, activities, and effects of deviant contributors. This literature has identified several dysfunctional behaviors and their impacts on firms. For example, consumer researchers note the characteristics of atypical consumers who proactively adapt, modify, transform (e.g., Berthon, Pitt, McCarthy, and Kates, 2007), or boycott proprietary offerings or marketing campaigns (e.g., Cova and Dalli, 2009). Other scholars examine the behavior of cynical (Chylinski and Chu, 2010), complaining, or abnormal (e.g., Denegri-Knott, 2006) consumers. This literature again recognizes the role of social media. By engaging in online communication, consumers and other stakeholders become empowered to voice their positive and negative opinions and to actively share their anti-corporate behaviors about companies (Chakravorti, 2010). This offers consumers the opportunity to alter company-induced information and to co-create new meaning for communication messages, thereby engaging in networked narratives about a brand (Kozinets et al., 2010).

From a theoretical perspective, consumer research has associated these dysfunctional behaviors with the concept of consumer resistance (Harris and Reynolds, 2003). Penalosa and Price (1993) define consumer resistance as a set of attitudes and countercultural behaviors that challenge the capitalist system and oppose oppressive forces. The term has been used to describe various forms of active behaviors, such as public online complaining (e.g., Gregoire, Tripp, and Legoux, 2009), culture jamming (e.g., Thompson

et al., 2006), consumer misbehavior (e.g., Fullerton and Punj, 2004), and negative word of mouth (e.g., East, Hammond, and Wright, 2007). It also has been used to refer to less active reactions such as boycotts (e.g., Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006) or anti-consumption campaigns (e.g., Hogg, Banister, and Stephenson, 2009).

Transferring the consumer resistance perspective on deviant behavior in ideation contests, a contributor is an active, creative actor who feels empowered to interact with organizations in a critical manner rather than be manipulated by them (Cova and Dalli, 2009). Such contributors are not happy about participating in marketing campaigns camouflaged as ideation contests that invite their contributions but do not take them seriously. In reaction, contributors devise tactics to counteract the intentions of the contest's host, regarded as a powerful corporate player who tries to influence their credibility (Denegri-Knott, 2006). Deviant contributors may show discontent by organizing anti-branding communities, engaging in culture jamming, or creating satires within ideation contests that later spread via social media and other websites. Doing so, they often hope to find and activate like-minded peers in their anti-branding pursuit.

However, not all intervening actions of contributors negatively affect organizations. For example, when consumers rip and bleach new clothing as a fashion statement (Harris and Reynolds, 2003), they positively change the meaning and intention of the product by transforming it. They co-create products with altered meanings while showing their fan status to other consumers. When consumers alter products and spread messages about them, they cause a range of effects on companies, from extreme damage to positive, heightened reputations. In ideation contests, deviant contributors use co-creation tools to create unexpected ideas. Their actions may harm contest-hosting organizations (as in the Pril case), but they may also help them. To better understand the range of deviant content in ideation contests, it hence is important to investigate various forms of such content empirically and assess their potential effects. This is the objective of our empirical study.

Methodology

We applied a two-stage research layout to learn more about deviant content in ideation contests. In our first phase, we conducted exploratory interviews with

deviant contributors, co-creation agencies and hosts of ideation contests. Second, a netnography study of 37 contests and 66 recorded instances of deviant content followed.

Exploratory Interviews

First, to identify the principles, dynamics, and possible outcomes of ideation contests and contributions of both deviant and compliant co-creators, we participated in three ideation contests as contributors to experience the tasks and nature of these contests (“Stil:sicher unterwegs” by Deutsche Seniorenliga e.V., “einfach telefonieren” by Emporia Telecom, and “ideabird” by Deutsche Telekom). Second, we reviewed social media and popular press broadly to identify documented incidents of deviant content. We also screened professional blogs and online magazines on co-creation, social media, and marketing to reconstruct deviant incidents and identify the people involved. Through this screening process, we identified several deviant contributors. Eight of them became available for an interview so that we could learn more about their intentions in posting deviant content, their relationships to hosts, and the reactions of the hosts. Take as an example our interview with the contributor of the “chicken flavor” dishwashing liquid in our opening example of Henkel's Pril. The contributor told us that he intentionally “contributed a totally inappropriate drawing that had nothing to do with Pril, but complied with the terms of conditions: “my design had an ugly color and idiotic text. It was evil and innocent at the same time.” He further explained that he totally underestimated the potential reach and impact of his contribution when he posted a link to his contribution on his Twitter account, which asked his followers to take a look at his design and vote for it. In general, we noticed from our interviews with deviant contestants that their intention can range from unconsciously creating and sharing deviant content to purposely producing legitimate, but deviant content which is submitted to express critique or provocation.

To gain a better indication of the scale of deviant instances in co-creation, we interviewed five professionals from co-creation agencies and providers of ideation contest platforms. From these interviews, we learned that extreme cases of destructive deviance happen, but that they are rare (about 1% of all submissions). Cases of deviant content, which are not against terms of conditions, but still rather inappropriate and

not in the original intention of the host, happen more frequently (about 5% of submissions). While these numbers may appear low on a first glimpse, our interview partners all confirmed that just one critical incident can harm an entire contest. According to the co-creation professionals, the amount of deviant contributions depends on the “crowd” targeted for participation and the openness of a contest. In contests where participants are coming from a curated community of the agency, deviant content is rare. In contests, however, which resemble the original idea of open innovation and crowdsourcing (Piller and Walcher, 2006), and where participation is open to everyone, deviant content is more common.

Finally, we interviewed six managers from companies who hosted ideation contests. One of the interviewees, an open innovation leader in the automotive industry and the host of several ideation contests, told us that these rare cases did have a strong impact on the company. There had been cases of deviant content, which “have been treated as noise in the system [...] we (the contest hosts) wanted to minimize or filter out by assigning low scores.” But he also experienced cases of deviant content, which “have been treated as threats and stopped.” Overall, the interviews confirmed the relevance of the phenomenon and its multiple facets.

Netnography Study

Following the first stage of delving into the topic, we conducted a large netnography study to gain a clear understanding of the various forms of deviant co-creation activities in ideation contests. Netnography is a qualitative empirical method that adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities emerging from online communications (Kozinets, 2002). The method consists of nonparticipatory observation of postings and participation patterns in user forums, blogs, social media streams, websites, and other forms of online communication (Kozinets, 1998). Netnography is effective in gaining insights into the characteristics of online-generated content and the intentions and preferences of online community participants (Xun and Reynolds, 2010).

Selection of contests. We conducted a nonparticipatory netnography, that is, we did not actively participate in any of the discussions. To generate a suitable sample, we randomly collected an initial set of 66 ideation contests via Google search and the website

innovation-community.de, a repository of ideation contests from different industries. We checked access to the contests and found that 37 of the initial set of contests were still available for empirical data collection.

Collecting reference content. We browsed the contests to get an overview of the standard content and the expectations of the hosting organization. Using a prepared template, we recorded the top three winning contributions of each contest. We also recorded the following items for each contest: (1) the host; (2) description and task of the contests; (3) title, description, idea (design), and links of each winning contribution. This procedure allowed us to build a reference profile for each contest, outlining the content expected and honored by the hosting organization. Next, we thoroughly reviewed all contributions in each contest to identify and categorize deviant content examples (Spiggle, 1994). We used two coding schemes, one to identify deviant contributions among all contributions and another to categorize the deviant submissions into different themes.

Identification of deviant content. We based our coding schemes for deviant content on our analysis of opposing behaviors in sociology and consumer behavior research, serving as the theoretical foundation to sort and label all content (Ziebland and McPherson, 2006). The codes mirrored specific concepts such as “differing from norms,” “differing from audience expectations,” and “differing from hosts’ expectations.” We screened all contest contributions to identify contributions that showed deviant elements and compared those with the collected reference content or with general norms. We found 66 contributions with deviant elements in 25 of the 37 contests. Abnormal content was then recorded in the same way as the winning contributions. The resulting catalog of reference content and contributions with abnormal elements served as the groundwork for our data analysis.

Initial characterization of deviant content. To identify conceptual patterns of deviant content, we reviewed all abnormal contributions and compared them, according to name, description, and illustration, with the collected reference content. Deviant examples were tagged with any associations that came to mind (Dey, 1993), for example, “funny,” “unconventional,” “absurd,” “surprising,” “bizarre,” “provoking,” “rebellious,” “protesting,” or “threatening.” Ideas were tagged with multiple associations. This iterative procedure revealed clear differences between the reference and the deviant

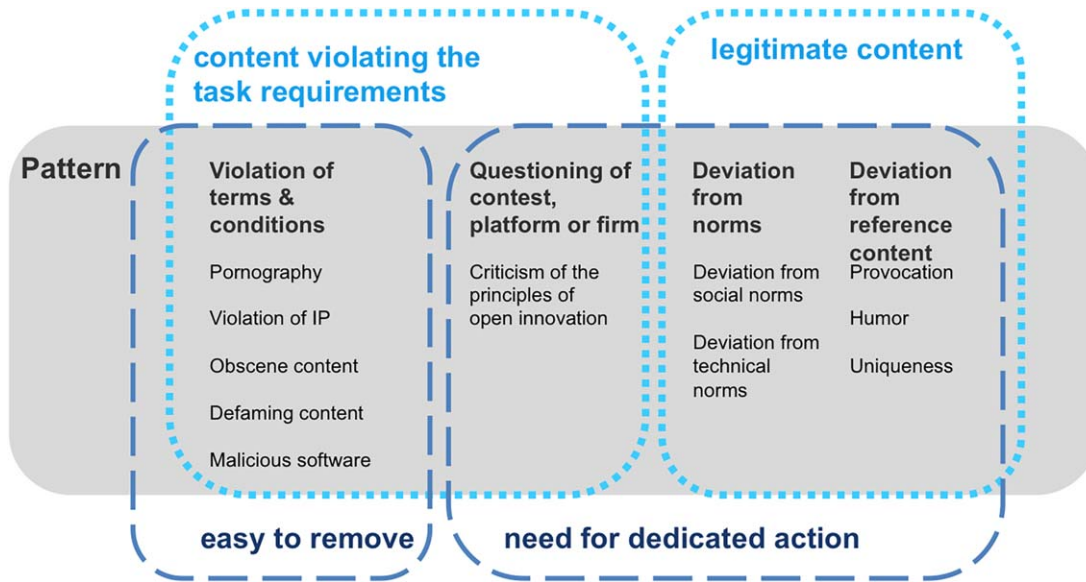


Figure 1. Patterns of Deviant Content [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

content. We found that deviant ideas were distinguished by characteristics such as having a funny, quirky arrangement or subject; being disruptive or highly visionary; or even seeming to arise from science fiction.

Verification of pattern development. Next, we held a coding session to analyze the catalog of potentially deviant contributions versus the reference content. The coding team included the authors (incorporating both innovation and marketing backgrounds) and a topic-related expert with a background in consumer sociology. During this process, the task of the contest, the reference content, and the deviant contributions were presented. The coders shared their associations with the items and their characterizations of deviant ideas relative to the reference content. If no one disagreed with the initially identified codes, the code was confirmed. If members of the group had different associations or disagreed with the initial code, they discussed questions such as “Is the contribution abnormal?” and “In what way is the contribution abnormal compared to the reference content and compared to the remaining potentially deviant contributions?” (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Through several rounds of re-reading and discussion about the meaning of the content, we looked for non-confirming cases, launching an iterative process of grouping content examples with similar characteristics and comparing them to other content examples and groups. Disagreement during these discussions spurred dialogue about the coding (codes were questioned,

changed, and added) and produced opportunities for theory building. To generate consistency between codes and build comprehensive patterns of deviant content, overlapping codes were merged to superior constructs. Subdivisions were made as distinctive patterns emerged. The joint coding meeting ensured that multiple perspectives were taken into account. Finally, we discussed our results with three managers of ideation contests to further verify our emerging patterns and themes.

Results

Detailed analysis of the ideation contests revealed many incidents of deviant content. As we will describe in more detail in the following, we could categorize deviant content into four patterns (Figure 1): (1) violation of terms and conditions; (2) questioning of contest, platform, or host of the contest; (3) deviation from norms; and (4) deviation from reference content. It is important to note that the boundaries between these patterns can be fuzzy, that is, we found content that both violated the terms of conditions and deviated from norms. Still, these four patterns are the main categories of deviant content that we found in the contests and constitute analytically different patterns.

Patterns of Deviant Content

The most *destructive deviant content* was content such as pornography, or content violating IP rights, trading

secrets, or confidential information of third parties. These kinds of contributions were invalid, inappropriate, and illegal. Other destructive content included obscene, defaming, or affronting statements and content containing malicious software. This kind of content did not match contest tasks and was far from appropriate. One example of destructive content occurred in the case of a contest hosted by the Villa Fresh Kitchen company for their brand Mountain Dew, which used the market launch of a new beverage as an occasion to conduct an ideation contest to find a name for the new product. In this contest, the slogan “Hitler did nothing wrong” became the most-voted, top-ranking suggestion. It was visible to every visitor to the contest site and reached over 11,250 votes in 24 hours and provoked others to flood the contest with a wave of affronting naming ideas. Not only was the contest filled with obscene content, but the contest platform was also later hacked.

In addition to these highly destructive forms of contribution, we identified plenty of other *unexpected content*. Participants used the blank space in comment fields to complain about the selfish exploitation of consumers’ ideas by organizations. Comment fields were also used to criticize the presumptuousness of the purely sales-promoting intentions of a contest and to attack the products, services, or image of the hosting organization. Participants used contest platforms as places to position criticism of the concept of crowd-sourcing, without contributing to the tasks of the contests. For this type of deviant behavior, we noted that an initial deviant action of a lone deviator often prompted other contributors to aggregate their resources to form a powerful force against the contest-hosting organization. Isolated impulses acted as triggers to influence the spirit of the entire contest. For example, contest participants challenged Kraft Foods Australia when the company asked them to find a new name for a Vegemite-based cheese snack. When Kraft chose the name “iSnack 2.0” out of nearly 50,000 suggestions, without involving the participants in the final decision, it encountered widespread ridicule from the crowd and eventually was forced to abandon the name as more and more contributors vented their disappointment, posting angry statements and cartoons on Twitter and international blogs (Creamer, 2009). Other observers of the contest joined in the counter-movement and posted further text and graphic contributions (Wilcox, 2009).

In some cases, deviant contributors used the given solution space to generate *legitimate* ideas—both constructive and destructive—that did not correspond to

the standard of contributions. These contributions caused a risk to the hosting organization: even though the ideas were not in accordance with the expected outcome of the organization, they could not be easily removed as they were legitimate according to the contest’s terms and conditions. The focus of our remaining analysis to disentangle deviant content is on these legitimate patterns, as they deserve special attention from contest managers.

Themes of Legitimate Deviant Content

When we analyzed the legitimate content pattern in detail, two different groups of themes emerged. The first group included the themes *humor*, *provocation*, and *uniqueness*—instances in which the deviant content is remarkably different from the reference content. The second group deviated from established, general norms (independent from the context of the particular contest) in two ways: *deviation from technical norms* and *deviation from social norms*.

Humorous deviant content. The occurrence of humorous content was high. For example, the contest “Osram/Siemens LED: Emotionalize your light” (www.led-emotionalize.com), hosted by Siemens AG, asked for new and innovative ideas and designs for LED lighting solutions with a wellness and well-being focus. The contest’s guidelines stipulated that solutions should give rise to emotions and moods, be easy to implement and use, and be customizable and affordable for everyone. The winning contribution of the contest (reference content) was a nicely designed lampshade (Figure 2a). In contrast, a deviant contribution, called “enlightening orthodontics,” was the idea to equip orthodontic brackets with LED lights. In the description of this submission, its originator addressed the purpose of the idea and its intention “to make horror and pain fun at the very least.” One of the accompanying pictures showed a goat wearing braces (Figure 2b).

In literature, humor is defined to refer to anything that people say or do that is perceived as funny and tends to make others laugh (Nash, 2014). It is the result of mental processes that both create and perceive an amusing stimulus; it includes the affective response of the enjoyment of the content (Morrison, 2012). More precisely, humor involves ideas, images, texts, or events, which are in some sense incongruous, odd, unusual, unexpected, surprising, or out of the ordinary (Martin, 2010). Several theories try to explain

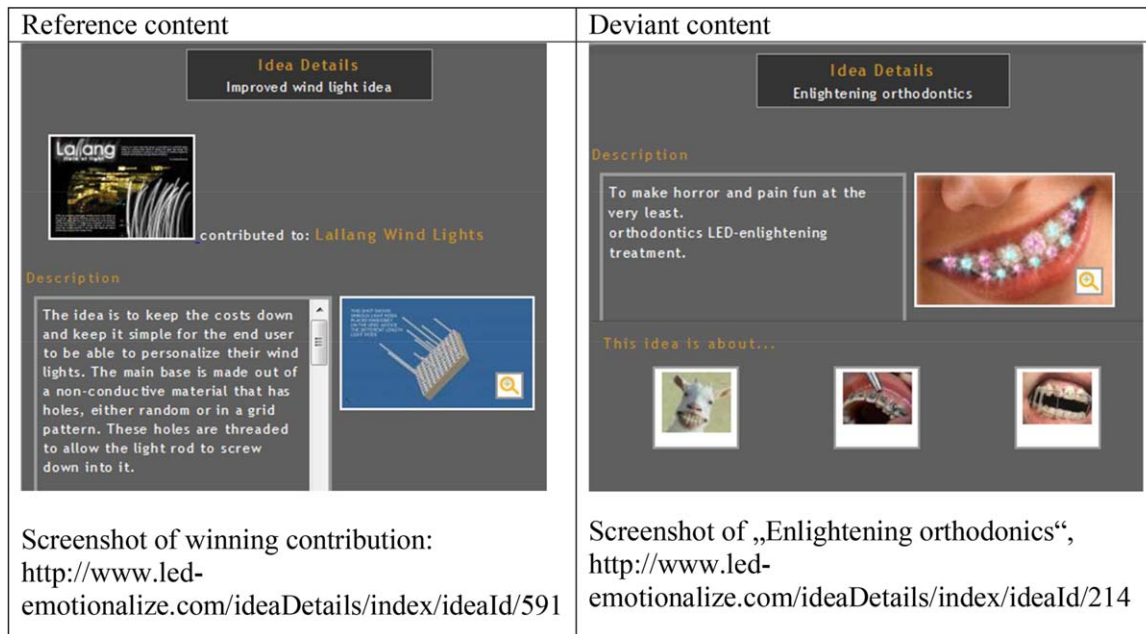


Figure 2. Humorous Deviant Content [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

how humor originates in the minds of those experiencing it. From the perspective of relief theory, people laugh because they need to reduce tension (Meyer, 2000). Superiority theory notes that people laugh at others when they feel some sort of triumph or superior toward their peers (Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2004). Incongruity theory postulates that people laugh at what surprises them or is unexpected and odd—close enough to the norm to be nonthreatening, but different enough to be remarkable (Meyer, 2000).

These reactions were also observed in the OSRAM contest. Other contest participants reacted to the deviant idea of enlightening orthodontics with comments such as “too funny ... gives a whole new meaning to a grill,” and “This is a cool idea and hilarious. This will definitely attract a lot of attention.” Other participants responded to the contributor directly: “I like your ideas. They are eccentric and very different to all the other; -).” One participant further developed the idea by suggesting the LED lights be used as tooth jewels. Another participant expanded the idea by suggesting the lighted braces be combined with UV lights to kill bacteria in the mouth.

Provocative deviant content. Other deviant content built on provocation. For example, in the contest “Bavaria on the move” (archiv.aufbruch-bayern.de/start.php), hosted by the Bavarian government, citizens of this German state were invited to submit ideas and

suggestions for topics such as “family,” “education,” and “innovation.” The winning idea of this contest (reference content) was a suggestion for increasing the number of educators in day nurseries. As a deviant contribution, an idea entitled “Requirement profile for parents” caught our attention. It demanded that parents meet a minimum set of criteria to raise children. The idea description also included the statement, “everybody has an individual moral concept and should act in this way in the best of one’s knowledge and belief.” The connection between the provocative title and its description was weak.

Traditionally, provocation has been studied in social psychology as an antecedent of aggressive behavior (Berkowitz, 1993). Hynan and Grush (1986) show that provocation leads to increased shock levels. In line with these findings from social psychology, research in advertising discusses provocation as a deliberate attempt to create attention and awareness (Pope, Voges, and Brown, 2004). A provocative advertisement contains elements of distinctiveness, transgression of social or cultural taboos, and ambiguity (De Pelsmacker and Van Den Bergh, 1996). That is, provocative content stimulates thinking and initiates heated discussions in which participants voice diverse opinions and reactions. In the contest by the State of Bavaria, the deviant contribution raised many questions among participants and initiated a heated dialogue in which participants discussed



Reference content	Deviant content
<p>Application details</p> <p>DUDE</p>  <p>The DUDE is an adorable, little helper, that informs you about all the important information that you need to improve your driving-skills and to take care of you, your car and the environment. He won't bombard you with menus or statistics and he won't distract you from driving. It's simply his look, his mood and the color of the</p> <p>App submitted: 30.06.2010</p> <p>Comments:</p> <p>thx for your comments :D User3293</p> <p>I love DUDE!! hahahaha nice app Page :) User2830</p> <p>Aww nice one :D I Love the DUDE when he is scared. User3316</p> <p>funny app:) User2852</p> <p>Screenshot of “DUDE”; http://www.app-my-ride.com/profile/index/mode/app-details/appId/146</p>	<p>Idea details</p> <p>Worst Possible Front Seat Passenger</p>  <p>Driving alone? Getting bored? Here is your special companion. The Worst Possible Front Seat Passenger is moaning on everything you do not do perfectly, e.g. getting too close to the car in front, driving too fast, fuel-expensive acceleration, driving too slow, don't indicate,</p> <p>Idea submitted: 07.05.2010</p> <p>Screenshot of "worst possible front seat passenger"; http://www.app-my-ride.com/index.php/profile/index/mode/idea-details/ideaId/55</p>

Figure 3. Unique Deviant Content [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

the consequences of incompetent parents and alternative models of childcare.

Unique deviant content. Another theme related to the uniqueness of content. An example is the contest “App My Ride” (www.app-my-ride.com), hosted by Volkswagen. Participants were asked to develop apps and concepts for a future Volkswagen infotainment system. To communicate their ideas, participants were able to describe their ideas and apply an app prototype via an easy-to-use toolkit. Contest evaluation criteria were the idea itself, joy of use, fit to the automotive domain, and the ability to realize the idea. Among the 96 suggested prototypes was a “worst possible front seat passenger.” The app consisted of a virtual avatar, which should help to improve drivers’ skills and prevents them from getting bored; it included characters such as “mom” or “husband.” Coincidentally, the top winning contribution of the contest, “DUDE,” included similar features and was therefore ideal for comparison (Figure 3). In contrast to the deviant content, DUDE used a neutral virtual avatar with a smiley-face to simulate a mood as a reaction to the manner of driving. The comparison of the two contributions illustrates the uniqueness of the avatar in the deviant contribution when compared with the avatar in the winning

contribution. The coders agreed that the deviant contributor was acknowledging that everybody knows an over-cautious, interfering “front seat passenger” who can be annoying but still play an educational or protective role. However, only a few people would confess that the guidance of such a passenger could be helpful. By integrating a virtual simulation of such a person, the contributor was exposing the love–hate relationship with such passengers, thereby attracting special attention.

Unique content is characterized by its originality and contains unusual elements (Reinig, Briggs, and Nunamaker, 2007). Literature on originality and creativity has shown that original ideas are the outcome of creative thinking (Runco and Basadur, 1993). Creativity describes the process of bringing something new into being, by combining things in an original way, seeing something old in new light, taking an unusual approach to solving a problem, coming up with an alternative course of action, or applying lateral thinking to take a sideways step (Gryskiewicz, Holt, Faber, and Sensabaugh, 1985). It has also been defined as the ability to generate ideas that are novel and appropriate (Gino, Ayal, and Ariely, 2009). In ideation contests however, contributors do not necessarily care about their ideas being appropriate to the task. Literature on consumers’ need for uniqueness shows that uniqueness is


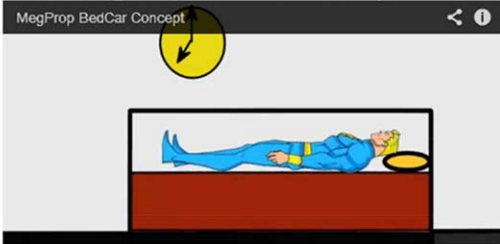
Reference content	Deviant content
<p>ID: 367</p> <p>Title: Autosshuttle</p>  <p>Screenshot of winning contribution: http://youcity.bombardier.com/idea.php?id=367</p> <p>Winning contribution of autosshuttle on major streets which carries cars</p>	<p>ID: 244</p> <p>Title: MegProp Bedcar Concept</p>  <p>Jérôme Morin-Drouin Haha, Great! It's funny, and it explains the concept very well. It raises several questions: - Did the guy skip breakfast and shower, using the MegProp? - Can his wife accidentally roll into the MegProp during the night and then wake up at her husband's office the next morning? <small>Date: 08/08/12 23:00 View profile</small></p> <p>Screenshot of the “MegProp Bedcar Concept”; https://youcity.bombardier.com/idea.php?id=244</p> <p>In the idea description, the contributor says: “I am sharing this Video about my Megprop Bedcar Concept. I created this video to show how difficult it is to live in big cities due to traffic problems. And I want to present how MegProp will solve it to become the least hassle of our lives. It gives birth to the concept of BedCars, in which people will be able to travel to their office in sleep....”</p>

Figure 4. Deviation from Technical Norms [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

characterized by noncongruence with the norm of the reference content (Tian, Bearden, and Hunter, 2001). When customers want to differentiate themselves from others, they experience a counter-conformity motivation and behave outside the norm of the reference content.

Deviation from technical norms. An illustration of an ideation contest where deviant content was characterized by being different to technical norms can be found in a mobility contest hosted by Bombardier Transportation (youcity.bombardier.com). Participants were asked to submit proposals about the evolution of mobility in fast-growing urban areas. Contest evaluation criteria were the overall innovativeness of the idea, clarity of the proposal, risk and feasibility, and “coolness” of the idea. The winning idea was a magnetically suspended shuttle for cars, designed to carry cars between cities with a speed of 180 kilometers per hour. One of four deviant ideas identified among the 204 overall submissions was the concept of a “Bedcar,” in which “people will be able to travel to their office in sleep” (Figure 4). The idea was to ship sleeping people, in their own beds, straight to their offices. This utopian idea was obviously technically unfeasible and impossible to execute. *Feasibility* is a term used to determine whether a proposed idea, option, or project is possible in economic, technical, and organizational terms and can be

implemented easily (Moenaert, Robben, Antioco, De Schampheleere, and Roks, 2010). In the new product development literature, the theme of feasibility is important because it helps to assess the ease with which an idea can be transformed into a commercial product (Ulrich, Eppinger, and Goyal, 2011). In this context, Poetz and Schreier (2012) compared the quality of ideas created by users and professionals. They found that user ideas typically score lower in terms of feasibility, but higher in terms of novelty and customer benefit as compared to ideas generated by professionals. Product ideas developed by professionals thus are more workable, but co-creation with users complements the professional development process with new and possibly disruptive concepts. Content that deviates from technical norms may have a stimulating effect on internal product development activities.

Deviation from social norms. Findings revealed content that deviates from common social norms. The Volkswagen “App My Ride” contest generated an idea for an app called “Mix your own cocktail,” a collection of recipes for alcoholic drinks. Irrespective of whether the driver or other passengers would drink the suggested cocktail, the idea of mixing or drinking alcohol while driving a car does not correspond to common social norms. Other participants commented

on the suggestion of looking up cocktail recipes in a car with statements such as “You must be kidding,” and “In the car?”

Social norms are standards about what is allowed (Hechter and Opp, 2005). They are supported by shared expectations about what should or should not be done in different types of social situations. These behavior-guiding principles serve as a way to deal with conflicts caused by the inability to satisfy everyone’s interests simultaneously (Koford and Miller, 1991). When someone deviates from social norms, people perceive the deviating behavior as an expectancy violation (Levine et al., 2000). Such behavior provokes increased scrutiny and attention (Burgoon, Le Poire, and Rosenthal, 1995).

Discussion

Our initial interviews with deviant contributors and ideation contest managers, followed by an extensive netnography study and qualitative analysis of the identified content, allowed us to explore the occurrence and impact of deviant content in customer ideation contests and to gain a better understanding of the range of deviant behavior. We could derive a nested model of deviant content, differentiating four patterns of such content to classify content violating the rules and conditions of a contest and content that is deviant, but still legitimate. It is the latter form of deviance that calls for dedicated management actions to consider the potential effects of such content on other participants, the general public, and the hosting organization. Our netnography study could identify five themes of such legitimate deviant content.

Defining Deviant Content

Concluding the findings of our literature review and qualitative study, we can develop a more comprehensive definition of deviant content: *Deviant content in ideation contests is contributions that differ from expected content and/or from existing norms.* This definition is in line with recent sociological definitions in which deviance is considered to be any departure from social situation expectations (Amine and Gicquel, 2011). It combines the normative (Denegri-Knott, 2006; Moschis and Cox, 1989) and the reactive (Fullerton and Punj, 2004; Sandlin and Callahan, 2009) perspective on deviance. Both perspectives stress that deviant content is a *relative* phenomenon. The

perception of what constitutes “deviant” is related to the individual norms and expectations of a particular beholder. The degree of perceived deviance varies between individuals and over time. Just because the majority of people regard a behavior as “unacceptable” does not automatically make it deviant (Heckert and Heckert, 2002). The interesting question is why some norm violations engender negative evaluations, while other violations cause positive evaluations. Expectations and norms also change over time: reassessment of content formerly classified as deviant may eventually lead to a different conclusion. Therefore, we follow the constructivist view of deviance to define it as a relative phenomenon (Wolf and Zuckerman, 2012).

Range and Effects of Deviant Content

The themes of deviance identified by our study (humor, provocation, uniqueness, and deviation from social and technical norms) are not *mutually exclusive*. Contributions can be deemed deviant when they feature just one theme, but they can also contain two or more themes. For example, we noted contributions that were both humorous and deviated from technical norms. Also, uniqueness is often a core element of deviant content. While this might be expected for all content in ideation contests, deviant content is especially unique *relative* to the other content in a contest. Still, we also found content that was deviant, but not unique, for example, content violating social norms by repeating well-known racist arguments. Our results further confirm that deviant content can take on both negative and positive valence. The range of deviant content includes all types of destructive to constructive incidents.

As predicted by our literature review, we could observe a reactive view of deviance—the effect deviant content has on its social audience (Heckert and Heckert, 2002). In our study, the highest level of destructive deviant content consisted of pornographic postings and copyright infringements. This type of content is criminal and clearly outside norms and expectations. In terms of the governance of ideation contests, host firms can exclude infringing content by applying relevant laws. Because laws are a way to legitimately remove infringing content from a platform, managers have few challenges associated with these opposing contributions. Therefore, infringing content was not the main focus of our analysis. Similarly, obscene, defaming, or affronting statements and

content containing malicious software can be prevented and removed by suitable terms and conditions, as defined by the contest host. A proper preparation of terms and conditions, however, is a core task in setting up an ideation contest.

We further identified content that criticizes the host for making the ultimate decision about the winning contribution after the crowd invested a lot of energy in both idea development and evaluation of content. In these cases, the crowd complained about being exploited by a commercial organization. This type of content can also be regarded as destructive. Some contributors use the blank space of ideation contests to formulate general criticisms of the host, with intention to cause harm.

At the other end of the spectrum, deviant content has constructive potential. This type of content demands a different reaction from the host. Here, contributors use the solution space provided to generate valid but abnormal ideas that do not correspond to the standard of contributions. These ideas can be classified according to our themes of humor, provocation, uniqueness, and deviation from technical and social norms. They make a legitimate contribution to the task of the contest because they help to develop or improve something. However, such contributions may also pose a risk to the host institution, depending on the evaluator's system of norms and expectations regarding the contribution's appropriateness.

A critical factor is the effect of deviant content on other participants and observers of the contest. We expect both destructive and constructive deviant content will activate others, leading them to interact with the contest. In line with Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014), this state of activation is a condition with a heightened level of energy, effort, and time spent (on the deviant content). For example, humor significantly enhances attention (Weinberger and Gulas, 1992). Humorous content raises evaluators' arousal levels and activates other evaluators. Similarly, provocative content elicits shock and causes a sudden disturbance in the realm of expected ideas. It often elevates participant attention and activates discussion, as shown in the example from Bavaria. Unique content also leads to a state of activation, as it presents stimulating thoughts that might open up new thinking domains and ideas that are counter to expectations (Barone and Jewell, 2012). Deviance from social and technical norms represents a violation of the evaluator's system of (social and technical) norms and expectations. This violation usually bewilders evaluators and draws their

attention to the content. Destructive deviant content is often so extreme that it raises levels of attention and activates evaluators. For the contest host, this calls for immediate action.

This activation can also take on a different valence. Deviant content can trigger destructive activation, a condition that results in behavior driving the evaluator away from the initial intent of the ideation contest. It may trigger visible and malicious protests or result in mocking and ridicule on the contest platform and other social media. It also might prompt widespread online debates about the selfish exploitation of consumers' ideas by organizations. Provocative content can trigger aggression (Berkowitz, 1993). It is a double-edged sword that can lead to both constructive and destructive activation. Destructive activation harms ideation contests and their hosts and demonstrates the risks of giving up control to an unknown crowd. It is the "dark side" of ideation contests.

In contrast, constructive activation is behavior that reflects the original intentions of the ideation contest. It is the "bright light" of deviant content in ideation contests. Constructive activation can lead to positive discussion in comment sections and other social media outlets, as well as foster further development of the initial idea. In the Osram/Siemens contest, for example, one deviant suggestion spurred another participant to expand the idea into a promising application for home dental care. These reactions have value for the host when they lead to innovation opportunities. Constructive activation triggers questioning why things are the way they are and how they might be different. It is often the first step toward an innovative idea. Deviant content can serve as a stimulus to evoke thought-provoking questions and transcend the barriers of banal thinking. Sutton (2002) encourages counterintuitive approaches and weird ideas that help companies overcome their routines. He argues that companies should explore ideas that seem strange or even wrong-headed at first glance, to maintain their creative edge. When companies eliminate interesting ideas and radical concepts (Moenaert et al., 2010), they miss opportunities generated by external contributors who ignore conventional business constraints to create ideas free of the decision bias that is dysfunctional to radical innovation (Blair and Mumford, 2007). Ideation contests that display all valid contributions provide an environment that stimulates ideas and demands attention from contest hosts, thereby capturing creativity that would otherwise have been filtered out and forgotten.

Implications for Theory

Previous research on co-creation and open innovation with customers has outlined the positive effects of using ideation contests to tap into consumers' creative potential and enhance innovation activities for organizations (Bayus, 2013; Poetz and Schreier, 2012). Our investigation adds to this perspective by demonstrating some counterproductive effects of co-creation. We establish the construct of deviant content as a core element of the analysis of co-creation in marketing and innovation management. By describing its nature and potential effects, we build a framework to reveal the characteristics of deviant content and its potential to harm or foster companies' innovation efforts. Using insights from sociological and consumer research and results from a nonparticipatory netnography study, we provide a theoretical foundation of deviant co-creation activities to establish the phenomenon's legitimacy and facilitate a clear understanding its various forms.

We show that deviant contributions can provide opportunities and positive effects. The posting of unexpected content that challenges the host organization may be a source of inspiration and successful innovation. Deviant contributions can provoke other participants to think outside the box and add to a broader spectrum of possible ideas. As discussed with the case of the Osram/Siemens contest, one idea led to a series of modifications by other participants, leading to more radical ideas. Through a process of constructive activation, the consumer collective can deliver a fresh impetus for action. We contribute to literature on disruptive change and explorative thinking by showing how deviant content in ideation contests can trigger more radical ideas. To this end, we confirm findings by Poetz and Schreier (2012) that users can generate novel ideas, and Piezunka and Dahlander (2015), who show that crowdsourcing can lead to distant ideas from the organization's perspective. However, while these authors were concerned about the organizational evaluation of submitted ideas, our research addresses the perception of the submission from the perspective of other participants and the general public. Therefore, our results advance our understanding of which (deviant) content exists and how it impacts any recipient (community manager, ideation manager, other NPD managers, other participants, general public, media) in relation to their individual norms and expectations.

Deviant content can increase the delight associated with ideation contests and motivate others to engage. It can raise awareness to the contest by generating

attention when being spread through social media because it is different and quirky. Although previous research has investigated the motivations and incentives for participants in ideation contests (e.g., Füller et al., 2012), it primarily has focused on extrinsic incentives, such as monetary rewards or personal job advantages. Our research indicates that unique and playful contributions can have a motivating effect by activating other participants to further develop constructive deviant ideas.

However, deviant ideas also can spark negative effects and lead to harm for the host organization. Deviant contributions may deter other contributors from posting ideas or comments, by making the contest seem frivolous, unproductive, or unprofessional. Such contributions may signal a lack of control by the host, demonstrating poor organizational management and extending to negative perceptions about the organization's products or services. The racist incident at Villa Fresh Kitchen, for example, was quickly picked up by digital journalists (e.g., Huffington Post, TIME Newsfeed), again boosting its widespread diffusion, but also bringing the host company in context with such behavior. Deviant contributions demand additional managerial capacity to balance negative effects with the goodwill of contributors.

Our insights hence advance research in co-creation in general and on ideation contests in particular by providing a balanced view on the positive and negative effects that arise when consumers use the given space to publish destructive and constructive deviant content. The continuum between the bright and the dark side of co-creation is broad and fuzzy. Hence, theory development in the entire domain of open innovation needs to better differentiate between destructive and constructive deviant content and further detect when deviant ideas spark innovation. Our results present a basis for investigating the impact of contest design elements on the probability of producing constructive and destructive content. They could be used to study the motivations of deviant contributors. Ultimately, host organizations need to develop dedicated capabilities to prevent destructive deviant content while fostering the occurrence of constructive deviant content. This is an area with plenty of opportunities for further research.

Implications for Practice

Our results suggest that organizations should not take the decision to host an ideation contest lightly. Hosts

need to be aware that co-creating with consumers can result in destructive deviant content. Using our patterns of deviant content and the five themes of legitimate content can support organizations when scanning contributions for deviant content. By identifying and separating constructive from destructive deviant content, hosts can transform disruptive ideas into useful sparks for innovation. This possibility calls for a dedicated co-creation governance structure, with a contest (community) manager who continuously monitors the contributed content to react to destructive content and limit its impact. Contest managers can enforce existing laws and deviance from stated rules and conditions to legitimately remove infringing content from the platform. At the same time, they also need to boost a contest's chances for success by highlighting positive, that is, constructive deviant content. However, in our interviews we learned that few organizations seem to have sufficient contest management skills and resources—and also in most instances are still lacking the insight that they have to build such skills. Hence, carefully selecting the agency or ideation contest provider supporting a host is to be of utmost importance. Managers should challenge potential agencies on their experience and ways to deal with deviant content—and not just on their software solution for the ideation contest.

Ideation contests also need to be prepared well to decrease the probability of destructive deviant content and foster constructive contributions. Host organizations need terms and conditions governing contest participation that allow them to delete destructive content. To avoid provocation, they should not remove content that violates terms and conditions without consultation with contributors. Managers can send requests to offending contributors to change or remove violating contributions. If there is no response, hosts can delete the disturbing content according to established terms and conditions.

In line with complaint management and webcare literature (e.g., Davidow, 2003), we suggest having procedures in place to show quick reaction. Managers need to *expect* deviant contributions and should not underestimate their participants and the interactional dynamics within ideation contests. They should take complaints of unfairness and dissatisfaction seriously and react with speedy, personal responses. Research has shown it is important to address consumers' critiques and complaints directly (Mattila and Mount, 2003). When contests trigger participant frustration (e.g., due to task description, wording or content of terms and conditions, execution of community management) and result in protests, organizations should

quickly reconsider their approaches and address protesters transparently. The aim is to regain the trust of participants and prevent them from derailing the contest. Hosts also need to clearly show their seriousness about participants' contributions and not camouflage marketing activities as innovation interests. As the contests are usually publicly visible, missing authenticity toward contributors can quickly result in destructive deviant content and reputational risks.

Limitations and Further Research

Our research is of exploratory nature and followed a corresponding methodological approach. Although the netnography approach delivers insightful results, it is limited by its narrow focus on online communities and the subjective process of interpreting the data. However, the phenomenon of deviant content in ideation contests appears solely in online platforms; the focus on online communities hence should not lead to incorrect conclusions.

The ideation contests examined in our study included a broad mixture of products and services, ranging from fast-moving consumer goods to business-to-business activities. Our study did not focus on the quantitative effect of the contest subject as an influencing factor on the occurrence of deviant content, but that factor may be worthy of future research. Although our coding approach allowed us to classify the content, we were not able to extrapolate the nature and intention of contributors of deviant content. We suspect deviant innovators are inclined to reflect on, and defy, the institutional nature of ideation contests. They are creative and playful contributors who use the tools provided in a different way, to challenge the intention of the ideation contest (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Denegri-Knott, 2006). Focused, exploratory research in this domain could study the personality traits and socio-demographic characteristics of deviant contributors to reveal likely triggers of deviant behavior.

Our definition of deviance is based on normative and reactive approaches. The limitations of these perspectives must be taken into account (Heckert and Heckert, 2002). We cannot objectivize the notion of deviance as long as norms are abstract constructs that depend on the context of the considered group. Determinations of deviance shift with norms and expectations. Additional research could examine cross-cultural differences in assessment of deviant content, according to varying values, norms, and behaviors.

Due to the relative nature of deviant content, it will be challenging to measure deviant content in larger quantitative studies. First, when measuring deviance, researchers need to install an “anchor” point that serves as comparison basis for the deviant content (we used the winning contribution as such an anchor point in our study). However, selecting these anchors will always be a rather subjective decision. Second, deviant content needs some context information to be judged by respondents. Finally, we would need to understand respondents’ norm perceptions when considering their evaluation of deviant content. It may be helpful to confront contest participants and managers with deviant content of varying degrees to survey their opinions, attitudes, and reactions. To assess the valence of deviant content, researchers could use software solutions to conduct a sentiment analysis of the deviant content post and all related comments. Especially the comment section could reveal how other participants think about the posted deviant content and whether they are likely to be constructively or destructively activated. Furthermore, once a deviant content measure has been established, researchers could investigate the impact of deviant content on the performance of an innovation contest, such as the number of ideas and comments generated (Malhotra and Majchrzak, 2014), the quality of ideas generated (e.g., Poetz and Schreier, 2012), or number of ideas implemented by the hosting firm (Bayus, 2013). Future research could also design a series of experiments to find the “sweet spot” on how much deviant content is needed to spark innovation in a constructive way before deviant content distracts other participants from the original purpose of such a contest.

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