

## Value Co-creation through *Service Related Online Communities*

Online Communities (OCs) were defined by Hagel and Armstrong (1997) as a group of people with common objectives (connecting, sharing, playing or trading) that join in the same online space.

The new era of Social Web, enabled by the continuous emergence of social tools that facilitate the development of OCs, created new opportunities for companies to enhance their offerings and co-create value with their customers. OCs generate a lot of information that enable firms to better understand their customers' needs and have the potential to increase the points of customer-firm interaction, allowing companies to enhance service experience (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004).

Finally, companies can also use OCs for *crowdsourcing*, involving consumers in service co-creation.

Previous research has studied participation in several kinds of OCs, such as *crowdsourcing communities* (Rafaeli 2008), *company communities* (Antikainen 2007) or *brand communities* (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006). However, literature on the factors that drive customers to participate in OCs specifically related to services is still scarce. Further research is needed on creating, managing and measuring the value created by customer communities (Ostrom, Btiner et al. 2010).

We define *service related communities* as groups of people that join in the same online space around a common issue that is the interest and/or the use of a specific service. These communities can be initiated and managed by a service company or by customers.

Based on the study of 127 OCs and literature review, this paper presents a framework of different forms through which OCs can create value for service firms. This paper also presents a conceptual model for understanding the factors of participation in *service related communities* and how this participation influences customers' attitudes and behaviors towards the service company.

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