**Proposed Research Topic:** Social networking and Innovation

The rapid trends and changes in the process of innovation, and research and development, have made organizations look to engage consumers with the aim of value co-creation. Value co-creation is spurred by the ability of a firm to co-create knowledge and value with their consumers (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). The process of value co-creation underpins the view of open innovation, as proposed by Chesbrough (2003); which suggests that organisations hoping to remain competitive at present and in the future, are those organisations that adopt innovation as the core ingredient of its existence (Sanghamitra and Mathew, 2005:371, Fitcher,2009:357). Open innovation has been identified as a new paradigm and the future for the management of innovation (V. vandeVrande et al. 2009:423; Chesbrough, 2003; Gassmann, 2006). Innovation that takes place within an organisation is called closed innovation, while one that spans across firm boundaries is termed open innovation (Chesbrough, 2003). Chesbrough et al. (2006:1) defines open innovation as the “use of purposive inflows and outflows of knowledge to accelerate internal innovation, and expand the markets for external use of innovation respectively”. The purposive inflow process refers to innovation activities carried out to gather and gain from external sources and knowledge while enhancing internal capacity, whereas the purposive outflow of knowledge process reflects activities carried out to exploit and leverage existing capabilities outside the organisations boundaries.

**Literature Review**

The literature review begins with theoretical foundations of social networking, and innovation. It then highlights the link between social networking and innovation. The literature review concludes by highlighting the role of external actors and/or consumers in the process of innovation.

**Social Networking**

Community is the “core construct” of any social thought (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001:412). Etymologically, the word community comes from a combination of two latin words; “com” with English interpretation of “together” or “with” and “unus” meaning “one” (Rousseau,1991:3; Delanty, 2010). Thereby forming “together” and “one”; however, there is a clear disparity between the two words where one reflects the involvement of multiple individuals and the other refers to a single entity. Rousseau, (1991:4) proposed that the word community can be referred to as a “unified” one or multitude, while Delanty(2010:2) describes community as a form of social interaction. The concept have evolved over time; beginning in the early 1800’s, researchers and social scientists have explored and tried to explain the phenomena (Putnam, 1995:664; 2004:15; Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001:412; Zomeren, et. al., 2008:504). Early research was focused on “how” and “why” humans act, behave, and/or react the way they do in “social relationships”, and in relations between each other (Therborn, 1991). The research led to diverse revelation by authors, researchers and scientists; however, the relevant theories for the purpose of this paper is “collective action” (Melucci, 1996:8; Marwell and Oliver, 1993:2), because it helps clarify and shows the relationship between cause and effect in social networking. Collective action is underpinned by the theory of “social action” (Weber & Runciman, 1978:7), and social action originated from human will (Tonniies, 1957:4). An “action” is said to be “social” if the acting individual considers the behaviour of others (Weber cited in Secher1962); whereas it is termed as “collective” when an action or activity is carried out by individuals, contributing on the basis of mutual interest (Marwell and Oliver, 1993:4; Melucci, 1996:20). Social action seeks to understand the human interaction and relationship process from an individual point of view,
while collective action sheds light on the human interaction and relationship process from a group, shared or community perspective. The “will” as proposed by (Tonnies1957:7) can thereby result in a group of individuals working together to attain a common gain or purpose.

Innovation
Etymologically the word innovation was first used in the 15th century. It was birth from the Greek word “innovatus”, a verb translated to English language as “innovate” meaning to “introduce as new”; “renewal”; and/or “restoration”. The Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary (1903:472) also gives the definition of innovate as to “renew”; “introduce novelty”; “make changes” and “introduce something new”. From the above translations and definition, the word innovation can be described as the process of creating something new, introducing novelty, uniqueness, make changes, alter and/or amend outputs.

From the business, economics, and entrepreneurial perspective however, the most common origin for innovation identified, and cited in literatures is “creative destruction” (Hospers, 2005:20 ; Hartshorn et al. 2005:171; Hart,2005:24; Johnston, et al. 2009:117; Gudeman, 2010:3; Xu et al. 2007:11). Schumpeter (1942:82) notably described creative destruction as an “evolutionary process which incessantly revolutionizes economics structures from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one”. Although used as a means of explaining why and how economic growth occurs, the Schumpeter’s definition of creative destruction is seen as the cornerstone of modern day innovation and capitalism. It can be deduced from the Schumpeter (1942:82) definition that creative deduction is an evolutionary process that continuously (incessantly) revolutionises structures from within, thereby replacing the old with the new. Schumpeter, (1939:82) defined innovation as the introduction of new products and services successfully into the market. He paved way for research into innovation theory (Xu et al. 2007:11). Following the introduction of creative destruction, many scholars shifted the focus of innovation from economics and economic growth, to innovation and innovation within organisations (ibid). As a result of the shift from economic growth to innovation within organisations diverse definition of innovation has been introduced. Chun-Chu, (2007:31) referred to innovation as the “driving force” of an organisations growth and survival, while Xu (2011:33) describes it as the “central value” of economic growth whereas Sanghamitra and Mathew, (2005:371) proposed that innovation is the “major source” of competitive advantage. The new definitions of innovation suggest that innovation has now become the “core ingredients” for an organisations survival and growth in the market.

Link between Innovation and Social Networking
“Every society is built around relationships” Agapitova (2003:1), and “anthropology tells us that contemporary and traditional societies thrive or perish based largely on innovation” (Kozinets, et. al., 2008:340). Innovations were initially viewed as a result of an organisations research and development (Salman and Saives, 2005:203; Chan, 2010:50). However, in recent times there have been advances in research to suggest that innovation cannot be achieved without considering the external relationships an organisation maintains with numerous partners, stakeholders and consumers (Salman and Saives, 2005:203; Davies and Kova, 201:96; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004:6). Christensen (2003) proposes that due to high competition and global sourcing, organisations providing customer requirements may still end up losing market share as they fail to adapt to the changing trends in world markets as a result of globalisation. With these in mind, researchers and organisations considered initiating a research and development process in which the end users participation is paramount (Mäkipää et al., 2005:19; Füller et al., 2007: 62; Fang, 2008:91). The approach of collaborating with consumers was labelled as ‘co-creation’ (Prahalad and Ramaswamy,
In recent times organizations look to integrate consumers in the research and development process of new products and services in order to benefit from their knowledge, skills and get a better understanding of their needs. The co-creation process is seen as a means through which consumers become an integral part in producing a product or service, thereby creating value together with the company (ibid).

Innovation at an elementary level is a “social process” (Xu, 2011:38) that bridges the gap amongst individuals of diverse disciplines, competencies, vocabularies all for a unique purpose (Feldman, 2002:48). It is a creative and cognitive process that relies on knowledge creation and deployment (ibid). The view that the consumer (user) might play an important role in the value co-creation and innovation process has led researcher to reconsider the role of the user in the whole process of innovation. Dahlander and Wallin (2006:1245) suggests that users can be seen as strategic and complementary assets in the innovation creation process.

**Research Question**
The overall aim of the research is to answer the question: How can organisations in Emerging Nations use innovation and social networking to stimulate growth? However, this core research question will be analysed using the following three guiding questions:

1. How is social networking used to facilitate innovation?
2. What practises can be used outside organisational settings to create innovation?
3. What are the impediments to innovation?

**Objectives of the Study**
The objectives are developed around theories of value creation, innovation and open innovation developed by hippel (1989), Chesbrough (2003), Schumpeter (1939) and Prahalad and Ramaswamy, (2004). The intent is to use the theories as the rationale to answer the research question, while drawing on and analysing an exemplar organization from a number of viewpoints to arrive at a conclusion. The objectives of the research are:

- generate a body of knowledge on practices of co-creation in British organisations
- explicate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges of different forms of co-creation in British organisations
- experimenting with forms of co-creation in a Nigerian organisation to understand what practices are applicable to the Nigerian context
- generate guidelines for the fostering of successful forms of co-creation in Nigerian organisations

The aforementioned objectives of the study were selected to help determine the role of social interactions in the process of value co-creation to stimulate growth and innovation. It also shows the level of influence community has on the participating consumer collectives and an organization.

**Methodology**
The research would be carried out with using an in-depth study of an innovative organization regarded as the exemplar in terms of sustained organizational growth through the impact of social networks and high technology. To achieve the aim of the research a qualitative approach will be adopted. Ethnographic inquiry would be carried out in two different forms: physical and virtual. Netnography as coined by Kozinets (2002) is virtual ethnography or ethnography on the Internet, and it adapts ethnographic research techniques to study consumer behaviour, cultures and communities. Netnographic inquiry in the ‘chosen’ organization’s online community involves observing participating consumer interactions and interacting with the consumers also to gain total immersion and understanding of the culture,
while the ethnographic enquiry would involve carrying out physical observations in the same organisation. The data collected will be used to categorise observations into emic themes and then the themes will be interpreted using the etic understanding of the researcher.

The methodological approach adopted for the research ensures rich, descriptive and unobstructive expressions of participating consumer views. Although this approach has numerous advantages, it is essential for the researcher to ensure complete immersion into the community culture to avoid misinterpretation of data.

**Benefits of the Research**
1. Knowledge transfer from developed to developing countries
2. Assist in the development of new theoretical observations in online and offline organisational-consumer interaction
3. Practical observation of managing online and offline sections
References


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