

Co-creation fashion brands: a case study

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Structured abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand co-creation in and perceive potential benefits and constraints that might affect consumers and brands, having into account the available literature. There is also the need to gather knowledge of how fashion brands already working with co-creation are managing their business and what are the adopted guidelines namely, Threadless and Awaytomars, as well as, how they are creating new products and value with consumers and in which way are they benefiting themselves and the consumers in the process.

Design / Methodology / Approach: The theoretical research approach for this study is based on the literature review method and based on scientific papers from journals mainly related with fashion. To better complete the literature review must be included a case study of brands that work or worked with co-creation within a fashion context. Based on a descriptive and exploratory approach (Yin, 1993), this case study must include several entities (Gerring, 2007) and different processes (Yin, 2001). Having into account a qualitative methodology (Fortin, Coté and Fillion, 2009) the case study method (Yin, 1993, 2009; Stake, 1995; Gerring, 2007) must consist in a complete and detailed examination of the entities. Once that is not much information regarding co-creation in fashion, it is appropriate to understand this about a particular phenomenon (Fortin, Coté and Fillion, 2009).

As for the selected entities, two or more cases can be designated for the same study (Yin, 1993) in order to obtain a single set of cross case conclusions (Yin, 2009). For this study where selected three brands, Nike, Threadless and Awaytomars, having into account their relevance in the current or past use of co-creation.

Findings: This study allowed understanding that the consumer/community-brand interaction is the basis of co-creation and the creation of value and also the mean to create products in line with the consumers' needs and desires while giving them an experience during the process. Brands will be able to reduce costs on staff and on the development of new products while saving on overstock and getting ideas that they would not be able to get in house. Also brands acquire in the process the proprietary rights of the products or services while the contributors get rewards.

But for that there is the need for the brand to hear the consumer and understand their expectations and motivations in order to create the right co-creation experience or have the risk to fail and loose consumers' support for the process, even more, when the consumers' engagement will only happen if the process is considered rewarding (Füller, 2010) and worthy time-wise. Although, in the process there will be the risk of the brand going into a different direction from the brand image due to an eventual loss of control over aspects of the value creation chain.

It was also found that both, Threadless and Awaytomars work in similar ways, although they have different product ranges and prices. This applies to the creation, idea submission process and voting.

Although there are also similarities in the product sale and in the prize system for the contributors on the process there are also differences in the way they are managed.

Finally, regarding the available offer, at Threadless the concept of co-creation is explored in a way that lets the brand give extensive use to the submitted ideas. On Awaytomars the contrary happens and the offer is more limited but in some cases, for example, the same print is applied to different pieces giving extra use to a single idea.

Research limitations/implications: The research can be complemented in the future with a more complete study in terms of the full brands' website in order to understand the full scope of the business. Also submitting ideas in both brands, Threadless and Awaytomars would be positive to understand how they work in the backstage with the co-creators and how the whole process of co-creation works. Finally contacting directly the brands would give a real insight about how they are working with co-creation and which are for them the benefits and constraints found till now in the whole process. This study can be a good source of knowledge for brands looking into working with co-creation and is a step forward in the study of brands working with co-creation, because few studies were made.

Originality / value: This study is a plus for theory and practice as few studies have been conducted regarding real cases of already working co-creation brands. These information's will be useful in order to understand the improvements that can be made in the processes and in last instance to develop a more agile and functional co-creation model for the fashion business.

Keywords: Co-creation, brand, consumer, value, product, engagement

Article classification: Literature review; Case study

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1. Introduction

Looking onto the current social and economical situation, where consumers' routines needed to adapt to physical-distancing and to the temporary closure of several businesses, it is possible to see changes happening in the buying behavior (Achille and Zipser, 2020) and an acceleration on the usage of online platforms. Besides the changes regarding the buying environment, changes in the buying behavior are also visible being reported that luxury brands sales on the high-end and low-end priced products are being more resilient (Achille and Zipser, 2020) leaving aside medium priced products. Also, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) reports also suggest that we could see a move towards a supply chain focused on advanced technologies or on the other side on cost-cutting, suggesting also that highly priced products and low priced products will be dominant in the market in years to come, erasing part of mid range offer of products, price-wise (Uddin, 2020).

So, the current crisis urges changes more than ever in order to avoid this segmentation in the fashion market, while providing the possibility of rerouting the fashion system ^[1], so that we don't end up again tied to a system based on low quality and low prices and massive production that the consumers were already trying to avoid.

Currently the fashion system is less and less creative and is not beneficial neither for designers, nor retailers, nor customers, nor the planet ^[1]. Issues such as a fashion calendar that is not synced with customers, that is not sustainable for the industry and that damages sales, along with an outdated format for fashion shows and on top of that, an addiction to discounts from the consumers ends up damaging brands profitability and equity ^[1].

But fortunately, and not only coupled with the current pandemic, consumers were already getting more aware of the deep impacts of the excess buying of cheap and impersonalized fashion products. According to Tamara Charm senior expert at McKinsey, the search for value at this time is huge and the consumers are buying in a more mindfully sense and not just looking for prices, being this a good indicator for brands working with co-creation ^[2].

Part of the motivation to actually buy clothes comes from a desire to differentiate ourselves from others and give expression to our own selves. But, consumers today have more choices of products and services than ever, but they seem not to be pleased anyway. Firms invest in product variety but they are almost unable to differentiate themselves from the competition. In this general picture the topic of co-creation makes even more sense. The will of self expression, along with social and economical environments changes, became the reason of the constant changes in fashion and co-creation foundations are also based on the need of self

expression, being this one of the main focus points that gives co-creation the possibility of gaining great importance in the fashion business context.

2. Literature review

2.1. Co-creation

Co-creation has different definitions given by different authors but the definitions, although different from each other, all focus on the main goals of co-creation that are communication and interaction between the involving actors.

For (Ramaswamy and Gouillart, 2010) co-creation is the practice of developing systems, products or services by means of collaboration with clients, managers, employees and others that have interest in the company. For Maltzahn (2016), co-creation refers to the different ways companies try to connect with their target consumers by incorporating key consumer values into retail concepts and marketing strategies. As for Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004), they considered various topics of what they consider as co-creation and what they don't consider co-creation as described in the following table:

WHAT CO-CREATION IS	WHAT CO-CREATION IS NOT
Co-creation is about joint creation of value by the company and the customer. It is not the firm trying to please the customer	Customer focus
Allowing the customer to co-construct the service experience to suit her context	Customer is king or customer is always right
Joint problem definition and problem solving	Delivering good customer service or pampering the customer with lavish customer service
Creating an experience environment in which consumers can have active dialogue and co-construct personalized experiences; product may be the same (e.g., Lego Mindstorms) but customers can construct different experiences	Mass customization of offerings that suit the industry's supply chain
Experience variety	Transfer of activities from the firm to the customer as in self-service
Experience of one	Customer as product manager or co-designing products and services

Experiencing the business as consumers do in real time	Product variety
Continuous dialogue	Segment of one
Co-constructing personalized experiences	Meticulous market research
Innovating experience environments for new co-creation experiences	Staging experiences
	Demand-side innovation for new products and services

Table I – What co-creation is and is not

In this sense Maltzahn (2016) and Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004), say that the most pertinent aspects involved in the process of co-creation are dialogue, access, risk-return and transparency. All of these will make companies turn into more communicative and also more assertive regarding customer's needs and desires.

So, co-creation also attempts to find out about what motivations led consumers or communities to purchase acts and what are the value connections that they think that are the most important ones (Maltzahn, 2016). When this is doable it can be of help for marketers that are facing nowadays an increasingly disconnect between what companies think the consumers values are and what consumer values actuality are. Traditional marketing still seeks to sell by looking at consumers as targets of whatever is put for sale following a company-centric model (Maltzahn, 2016) as opposed to co-creation that will allow the increase of using unused resources in consumer marketing as the concept offers a completely different approach to the consumer's ideas, desires and needs. Co-creation expects to be able to discontinue this company-centric model and has already been recognized as an area of consumer behavior that can't be ignored in the process of gathering information (Rowley, Kupiec-Teahan and Leeming, 2007).

2.2. Brands and co-creation

Regarding brands and how they have been evolving, Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) refers that there has also been a transformation of the relationship between brands and consumers, segmented in the following table:

From	To
One-way	Two way

Firm to consumer	Consumer to firm
Controlled by firm	Consumer to consumer
Consumers are “prey”	Consumer can “hunt”
Choice? buy/not buy	Consumer wants to/can impose her view of choice
Firm segments and targets consumers; consumers must “fit into” firm’s offerings	Consumer wants to/is being empowered to co-construct a personalized experience around herself, with firm’s experience environment

Table II - Brand consumer relationship transformation

Although, and unfortunately, many companies and brands still work within a company centric model even when the interaction between the firm and the consumer is becoming the center of value creation. Brands cannot continue designing products, developing production processes, creating marketing contents and controlling sales channels with scarce input from consumers (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Partnering with consumers should be the focus instead of neglecting their opinions. Brand consumer interactions increase the value for the consumer and also the brand value (Gentile, Spiller and Noci, 2007). Quality interactions that enables a consumer to co-create with the brand is the key to gain advantage (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

Some brands such as for example Awaytomars have already seen the potentialities associated to co-creation and have been implementing services and features capable of reaching the costumers and bring into the company new ideas and solutions and at the same time give new contents and experiences to the consumers. In co-creation, direct interactions with consumers and communities are essential. Consumer needs are best understood when the brand is there, co-creating with them (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004) and the communities are very important as contributors of ideas and also as indicators for forecasting the possible success of the products.

2.3. Creating value and products

Currently, consumers don’t want to be only product users. They instead aim to additionally create a relation and a connection with a brand and participate in development process of the products (Hidayanti, Herman and Farida, 2018). Hsieh & Chen (2005), showed that the

development of new products can be improved by interacting with users, and capitalizing on the users input.

With co-creation, products, besides being developed by the consumers will also be evaluated by the consumers reducing in this way the risks of launching new products and additionally the company will offer an experience instead of just offering a product.

Also important is the consumers' feedback that helps identifying and integrating consumer preferences in the beginning of the product development. Integrating those reactions and knowledge will help finding real solutions and in this way approach consumers on a more personal level (Maltzahn, 2016).

As for the experience, an immersive and focused experience is essential to inspire consumers to create contributions for the brand (Füller, 2010). It is about providing the customer with an experience. Instead of attempting to make consumers active collaborators in the design process, turning co-creation viable in the fashion industry means to look for individual rather than universal needs, focusing on micro instead of macro level of consumer segments. Brands that will be able to provide this will be able to better guarantee costumers loyalty and longer term relationships by appealing to value connections (Maltzahn, 2016). Basically, there is the need to partnering with consumers instead of neglecting their opinions. And dialog besides being an important element in co-creation can be also a mean to attain those opinions. Access and transparency are critical to have a meaningful dialog (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004), and listening carefully to what consumers think is crucial, concerning product and service value that is also of great importance (Maltzahn, 2016).

Additionally Rowley et al. (2007) that said that (Kristensson, Gustafsson and Archer, 2004). examined the benefits of involving consumers in inputting new product ideas, found that individual consumers created significantly more original and valuable ideas than professional developers. But, professional developers and advanced users created more easily reliable ideas.

Opportunities for value creation will be enhanced significantly for firms that embrace the concept of co-creation as a source of unique value. The interaction between the company and the consumer is becoming the center of value creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Video games, for example, could not exist without active co-creation with consumers (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Traditionally, the value of a product is the result of a brands creation. But brands, now, need to be more creative and innovative more to reach as well as maintain their costumers even more when in modern marketing value is more important than the product, mostly because brands need now to sell not only products, but also values to consumers (Hidayanti, Herman and Farida, 2018).

Today's consumers want to be part of the process of value creation, a process that is known as the co-creation value concept. This concept states that value can be created together by the brands and the consumers resulting from the interaction between both parties (Hidayanti, Herman and Farida, 2018).

Literature also offers different views about the definition of value creation, as it does with co-creation. The service-dominant logic, for example, treats value creation as co-creation and considers both, brands and consumers, as being creators of value (Lusch and Vargo, 2006). Grönroos and Voima (2013) has a different perspective in that an ongoing process is behind value creation but co-creation only happens when there is the interaction of the parties.

The meaning of value and the process of value creation are then changing from a product and firm centric view to personalized consumer experiences. What consumers want is to work with companies and so, co-create value together (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

The occurrence of brand–consumer interactions increases, with no doubt, both value for the consumer and brand value (Gentile, Spiller and Noci, 2007). And high-quality interactions that enable an individual consumer to co-create experiences with the company are the key to have competitive advantage (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

Co-creation in the development of new products allows consumers to be in a central role along the process (Hoyer *et al.*, 2010). The success of the development of new products depends of the understanding of the consumer needs. New products are likely to be more valued by consumers when they are actively involved in the process and so the probability of creating a successful product is also higher (Kristensson, Gustafsson and Archer, 2004). The process of development of new products includes the creation of the idea, development of the concept, design of the product, testing and market introduction (Füller, 2010).

2.4. Consumer engagement

All of the previous (development of new products includes the creation of the idea, development of the concept, design of the product, testing and market introduction) can be included in the process of co-creation with the consumers. But to do this, initially brands need to understand what consumers' expectations are to be engaged in co-creation and how their motivations might influence those expectations (Füller, 2010).

Co-creation also has monetary and non-monetary costs for the consumers, and they balance the costs with the benefits of enrolling in the co-creation process (Hoyer *et al.*, 2010). Engagement happens only if the process is considered rewarding (Füller, 2010). Also the willingness to co-create has the need of interest in terms of product involvement (Fernandes and Remelhe, 2015). Additionally the consumers engagement comes from the motivation

related with their expected goals, possibilities and what they expect in terms of value outcomes (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012). So, contributions from the consumers with the sharing of ideas can only be expected when there is willingness and interest, and, only a part of them will effectively be fully engaged for that (Hoyer *et al.*, 2010). And the consumer participation is essential when the brand is aiming to produce customer-based services or products. These interactions will prove to be beneficial for both, consumer and brand, being that for the consumer there is the possibility of interaction with a community by sharing knowledge about the products and the brand and the brand can pass onto the consumers' information about the products (Hidayanti, Herman and Farida, 2018).

2.5. Becoming co-creative

As for when a brand decides to become co-creative, the brand can go under a substantial process of organizational changes, during which there will be the need of development of new capabilities centered in the collaboration of the intervenient involved in the value creation. There will also be the need of identifying the motivational factors so that the interest of potential contributors can be maximized and also for the brand to be able to create virtual innovative experience environments (Nambisan and Baron, 2009) that can also maximise the level of cooperation that can possibly be attained. Without previous identification of crucial factors for the implementation of co-creation, brands can fail when creating an experience that aims to motivate potential contributors, and so, there is the risk of not being able to capture the attention and the interest needed to support the process (Füller, 2010).

Fontana *et al.* (2012) refers that some authors have been researching about the difficulties that the co-creation process has been facing that can influence the success of the project being one of them Piirainen *et al.*, that listed those difficulties:

Shared understanding: where it is necessary to ensure the shared understanding among all the intervenient parties in the collaborative design process of a product.

Satisfactory quality: where is necessary to reach positive results as for the stipulated quality balancing individual needs and limitations of the intervenient when making choices in the collaborative design process.

Balance between accuracy and relevance: where is needed to balance the accuracy of the design methods with the relevance of the participation of all the intervenient in the process.

Organization of the interaction: where is imperative to do an efficient organization ensuring the interaction between the parties in order to reach rationality in the process and finding ways and means to better reach the goals of the project.

Guarantee the property: where is necessary to guarantee to the organization of the project the implementation of the process with the transfer of its property to the organization.

In order to overcome these difficulties, companies will need to let changes flow easily and support themselves in their internal organization and on consumers' knowledge. Engaging in a one-on-one relationship with the consumers' can also risk the brand into going on a different direction from the brand image. An eventual loss of control over aspects of the value creation chain can also happen because it will be required to lose some if the brand goes forward with implementation. Although, there are doubts to what extent brands will want to give up control or disclose all the information available. It is possible that brands will only disclose the information that they seem to be indispensable to captivate consumers' into the process and onto the products (Maltzahn, 2016).

One way to captivate consumers' is by given users credit for the product development that will be available for the whole community. Other is monetary rewards for the development or involvement in the co-creation of products or services. So, having this in mind, Maltzahn (2016) questions if the power over products is actually going into the consumers' side and how co-creation can be actually implemented in fashion businesses with a positive outcome. The concept offers really a different view when it comes to understand consumers' needs, ideas and desires (Maltzahn, 2016) and the joint development can largely benefit both sides while providing new value that is not focused only on the sale/purchase act.

Consumers want to have a voice and want products that suits them with the right value (Maltzahn, 2016) and being the willingness of consumers' to contribute the co-creations' bedrock (Zwass, 2010) it will be essential to built the best experience possible. However, limited research exists on consumers' willingness to engage in co-creation (Fernandes and Remelhe, 2015), so interacting with them strongly on the initial stages should be crucial for the positive outcome of the development of the brands' co-creation process. And consumers' will not only need to share knowledge, ideas or the ability to improve products, but they will also need to be willing to give the brand and the process time, that nowadays is an important asset for most consumers' (Etgar, 2008).

Resuming, brands that implement co-creation can be benefited by the consumers' knowledge. For Bujor, Avasilcai and Alexa (2017) co-creation makes the process of design inclusive, and helps producing only what is needed and desired. This will allow reducing costs of development of new products and at the same time receive more ideas than they would be able to get internally and to reduce the internal means and staff, overstock as well as keeping part of the proprietary equity of the products developed by the consumers'. And consumers

are now on the front line as they want to be decision makers of what products and brands are or can be (Maltzahn, 2016).

3. Case studies

3.1. Methodology

The study of the brands was made based on a descriptive and exploratory approach (Yin, 1993), including several entities (Gerring, 2007) and different processes (Yin, 2001). Having into account a qualitative methodology (Fortin, Cotê and Filion, 2009) the case study method (Yin, 1993, 2009; Stake, 1995; Gerring, 2007) consists in a complete and detailed examination of the entities, regarding the topics that are most important in the co-creation context, in order to obtain a single set of cross case conclusions (Yin, 2009).

The studied brands were chosen because among the few that are already working with co-creation these are the ones that most invested in becoming co-creative in terms of fashion brands.

As for the study, having into account the main points found on the literature, mainly, consumer engagement and the creation of products and value products it is proposed the following question of study: What methods and means are used by co-creation brands to engage consumers in the creation of products and value?

To answer this question the case studies design analyses has multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2009) and the study focused on understanding the methods and means the brands use regarding the submission of ideas and its approval as well as its timelines and what prizes and proprietary rights are offered in return. Additionally the available offer in terms of products was also done to understand how the creation of products was worked by the brand by using a descriptive and exploratory approach (Yin, 1993). the design for the case studies are embedded with multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2009).

3.2. The brands

Although, Nike changed the way they are interacting with consumers it is important to acknowledge and understand their approach to co-creation as this was one of the early examples of major fashion brands taking the initiative to become co-creative. Besides Nike, the other two studied brands were Threadless, also a brand that has been working on a co-creation model for many years and Awaytomars, the most recent one, that implement the co-creation concept full-circle from the initial idea till the product purchase. For Threadless and Awaytomars that are completely active at this time, co-creation wise, it was made a comparison of how they work and what they offer to consumers.

Nikes' most well know initiative regarding co-creation was through NIKEiD. Nikes' website represents an interesting case by letting consumers co-create footwear through multiple templates and a series of choices in terms of colors, materials and others. When implemented, in the beginning, Nike offered this service in their flagship stores and some other selected ones. Costumers could then personalize their footwear, however, besides the implementation of personalization concepts into the business consumers were incentivized to submit their designs in a competition where the three wining models would later be sold in limited series. In this way Nike accomplished to create a unique experience to the consumer, making possible uniqueness, instead of only offering a mass produced product. Also, Nike had the input of a number of new designs that could be used in the future and also got information about the consumer trends [3].

To manage the co-creation of value Nike initially based its process on the DART model, already referred previously, dialogue, access, risk-return and transparency. Among many projects connected to co-creation, NIKEiD was one of the most well known. Back in 2006, for example, twenty individuals related with the sneaker culture were invited for a competition to design new sneakers that were later voted by the Nike's community. These initiatives were in the beginning a challenge for Nike but the later acknowledgment of gaining competitive advantage through the creation of value based on experiences, made the brand start a path to distance itself from a product-centric culture that was at that time the basis for Nikes' product development. Nike also won knowledge from the input of its consumers reducing possible failures in the launching of products and being misalignment with the market. The consumers gained valuable experiences in which they were able to participate in the creation and design of products and services and interact with other consumers (Ramaswamy, 2008).

Currently Nike still offers the possibility to create products in their website but it now works more as a customization of a product.

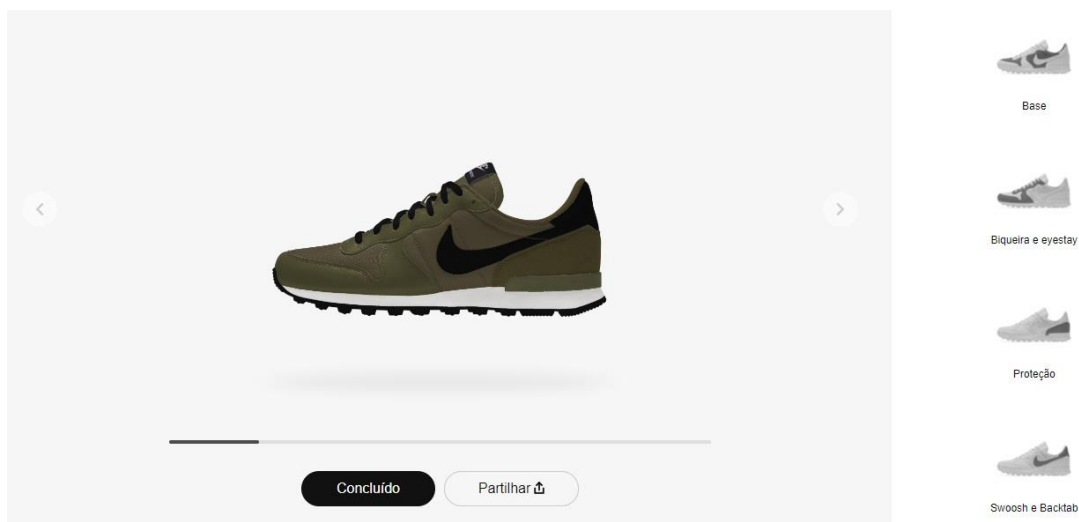


Figure I – Nike By You / NIKEiD website

The possibility of choosing a model and change the colors or materials of its integrating parts is still possible but the early contests or competitions are no longer part of the experience. So, the co-creation side of the process might have been lost along the way. Although, Nike still has the inputs of its costumers regarding purchase trends and still keeps proprietary rights over the inputted ideas from its consumers that can be used for the creation, development, modification, improvement, manufacturing or commercialization of products or services ^[4]. As for brands that are currently working and gaining input from co-creation, Threadless is one of the cases that has been on the market for years. Based in Chicago since the year 2000, Threadless is a brand that has been working with the concept of co-creation for 20 years in a successful way. The brand gives users the possibility of submitting print designs through challenges. These are usually launched on a weekly basis and there is the chance to participate for around three weeks.

The screenshot displays the Threadless website interface. At the top left, there is a section titled "DESIGN CHALLENGES" with a sub-header "HOW IT WORKS!" featuring a graphic of a pencil and a ribbon. Below this, a text block explains the submission process: "This is where the magic happens. If you've got an awesome idea for a design, submit it here. If your design is chosen for print, it could end up for sale as a real product that people all around the world can have! [How it works](#)".

The main content area features a large banner with the text: "Our never-ending, no-themes, no-holds-barred, open-ended design challenge". Below this banner, there are two statistics: "475,758 designs submitted" and "9,692 designs printed". A prominent blue button labeled "SUBMIT A DESIGN" is centered. Below the button, a link reads "Need help with your design? Submit for Critique".

Below the banner, a section titled "NEED INSPIRATION? CHECK OUT OUR THEMED CHALLENGES" lists three challenges:

- Shoes**: 3837 designs, Weekly winners! (Submit a design)
- WELLNESS**: 0 designs, GC, 18 days left (Submit a design)
- MODERN CLASSICS**: 56 designs, GC, 11 days left (Submit a design)

At the top right of the themed challenges section, there is a sorting option: "By Name / Prize / End Date".

Figure II – Threadless challenges

If the design is approved by the Threadless team it will be available for the voting stage in a few days. The most voted products can be put up for sale. According to Humphreys and Grayson (2008) and Daamen (2015) at Threadless, users can have all the control when submitting ideas and can also vote on the designs they would like to see on sale.

DESIGNS FROM THIS CHALLENGE



Figure III – Designs submitted for a Threadless challenge and available for voting

Also, in order to help the ideas submission, there are templates available to use to put the print up to vote.

Design art for custom shoes

Create unique designs specifically for slip-ons. In partnership with [Bucketfeet](#), Threadless is excited to offer custom slip-on shoes to showcase your art. All Bucketfeet shoes are handmade-to-order, featuring a classic slip-on silhouette, rubber sole for traction, removable cushioned in-soles, and machine-washable material. Designs are sublimation printed on the fabric for high-quality, long-lasting colors. Add your aesthetic to a fresh pair of Bucketfeet and help customers kick up their heels while wearing your art.

Optimal files should be 25" wide by 20" tall, 300 dpi, raster or vector file

Share: [f](#) [t](#) [t](#) <https://www.threadless.cc>

YOU COULD WIN [Legal stuff](#)

- Earn up to \$10 on each pair of shoes their design sells on Bucketfeet.com! [Read more...](#)
- \$150 Threadless gift code

SUBMIT A DESIGN [Submission kit](#)

[DOWNLOAD THE TEMPLATE](#)

Figure IV – Available template for idea submission at Threadless

Besides the normal voting there is also the possibility to fund a design when prospective purchasers indicate a desire to purchase a product featuring the design. If so, there will be the opportunity to reach the funding threshold in the following 10 days.

On the challenges there is a fixed prize or prizes in the form of money (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008) or others as for example gift vouchers, and also, when selling, the designer will receive a share of the sale of every item that includes its design.

When submitting ideas the rights to use, portray, display and publish the name, appearance, voice, likeness, photographic image, and biographical information of the user are automatically granted to Threadless. Although, regarding the design, the user own and will maintain ownership of the Design but at the same time grants Threadless a worldwide, irrevocable, non-

exclusive, right and license to use, upload, modify, reproduce, copy, exhibit, create derivative works of, distribute, sell, advertise, and display the design in any manner.

As for the products, Threadless uses the same print in different products, so, a print can either be available on home décor products, footwear or clothing among others. On clothing the same print can also be available, in some cases, for menswear, womenswear and kidswear in a wide range of material qualities, models and sizes although there is only offer for tops without choices for bottoms.



Figure V – Some products available with the same print at Threadless

Other ranges of products are also available among the many option, such as, for example, phone cases, backpacks, masks, socks or travel mugs.



Figure VI – Other ranges of products available at Threadless

Awaytomars was founded in 2015 and also works with co-creation but on a different model that gives the users the possibility of proposing a full product in terms of style, silhouette, color, print, etc. It is possible to submit garments and/or artworks for prints among others. Although these submissions can only happen having into account challenges with pre proposed themes or challenges that involve collaborations with other brands, such as, more recently, Missoni or Harvey Nichols/The Woolmark Company in order to create capsule collections.

Submission of ideas is usually available for around three to four weeks through a submission form and templates are also available to help designing the products.

The image shows a web form for submitting ideas to Awaytomars. The form is divided into several sections:

- Gender Selection:** A section labeled "GENDER:" with radio buttons for "UNISEX", "WOMEN", and "MEN".
- Fabric Selection:** A section labeled "SUGGESTED FABRIC / MATERIALS:" with a text input field.
- Additional Information:** A section labeled "ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?" with a text input field.
- Image Upload:** A large area labeled "SUPPORTING IMAGE. PLEASE SUPPLY BACK AND FRONT OF ITEM." with a plus sign icon in a square, indicating where to upload a file.
- Navigation:** A "POST" button is located below the form fields.
- Header/Menu:** At the top, there are navigation links: "AWAYTOMARS", "WOMAN", "MAN", "ABOUT US", "COLLABORATE", "FIND US", "NEWSLETTER", "ACCOUNT", and "SHOP".
- Product Name and Campaign:** Fields for "CAMPAIGN:" (with a dropdown menu showing "M-MISSONI") and "PRODUCT NAME:".
- Idea Tagline:** A section labeled "IDEA TAGLINE:" with a text input field.
- Image Upload (Front/Back):** A section labeled "SUBMIT IMAGE (10MB MAX):" with a plus sign icon in a square, indicating where to upload a file.
- Footer/Disclaimer:** At the bottom, there is a small disclaimer: "We accept all kinds of images but if you're an expert in image layout, our standard specs are: JPGs at 72dpi and RGB."

Figure VII – Available submission for and templates at Awaytomars

After the submission the Awaytomars team will select the best ideas and regardless of whether the members of the community shared an idea or not, they will be able to vote, comment and adapt the ideas to improve the designs in the co-creation phase that takes place after the end of the submissions. This phase usually lasts around one week.

After the co-creation phase is finished the most voted designs are made available to pre-order among the members of the community. All products are usually available to the general public in around two months.

PRE-ORDER WOMEN



Figure VIII – Available offer for pre-order at Awaytomars

The prize that the participants get, according to Bujor, Avasilcai and Alexa (2017) is 20%. The other 80% is divided between Awaytomars for its services (20%), 50% to manufacture the products and 10% is divided between the members of the brand's website that made a contribution onto the development of the product.

When submitting ideas the rights to use the users' name and photo are automatically granted to Awaytomars. Regarding the design, the user will automatically transfer all the property rights in a nonexclusive way. The rights will be royalty-free, irrevocable, and sub licensable right to use, modify, adapt, create derivative works from, reproduce, publish, and display the design worldwide.

As for the products, Awaytomars has a range of products for man and woman that include clothing (tops and bottoms), accessories and footwear.



Figure IX – Part of the available offer at Awaytomars website

4. Conclusions

According to the literature review one of the main benefits of co-creation for brands and consumers are the increase of the value for the consumers and also the brand value (Gentile, Spiller and Noci, 2007). Consumers' feedback helps identifying and integrating consumer preferences in the beginning of the product development and integrating those reactions and knowledge will help finding real solutions and in this way approach consumers on a more personal level (Maltzahn, 2016) offering them products that will be more in line with their desires. Besides the individual consumer, the communities are also very important as contributors of ideas and also as indicators to forecast the possible success of the products. Although, the focus on the community can also diminish the scope of available consumers. So, products, besides being developed by the consumers will also be evaluated by the consumers reducing in this way the risks of launching new products and additionally the company will offer an experience instead of just offering a product.

Additionally, besides getting an experience in creating additional value, the consumers also get the benefit of being given credit for the product development that will be available for the whole community. Other benefit is usually monetary rewards for the development or involvement in the co-creation of products or services.

For the brands, Bujor, Avasilcai and Alexa (2017) indicates that co-creation helps producing only what is needed and desired, allowing the reduction of costs of development of new products and at the same time being able to receive more ideas than they would be able to get internally. It can also help with the reduction of internal means and staff, overstock as well as keeping part or the whole of the proprietary equity of the products or services developed by the consumers.

As for the constraints or issues brought by co-creation, now there is the need of listening to what consumers think is crucial, concerning product and service value (Maltzahn, 2016) and there is also the need to understand what consumers' expectations are to be engaged in co-creation and how their motivations might influence those expectations (Füller, 2010). If this is not done the co-creation process will be disrupted and most likely fail. There is now the need of identifying the motivational factors so that the interest of potential contributors can be maximized and also for the brand to be able to create virtual innovative experience environments (Nambisan and Baron, 2009). Without previous identification of crucial factors for the implementation of co-creation brands can fail when creating an experience that aims to motivate potential contributors, and so, there is the risk of not being able to capture the attention and the interest needed to support the process (Füller, 2010). As for the experience, an immersive and focused experience is essential to inspire consumers to create contributions

for the brand (Füller, 2010). The consumers' engagement will only happen if the process is considered rewarding (Füller, 2010). Besides the engagement, consumers will not only need to share knowledge, ideas or the ability to improve products, but they will also need to be willing to give the brand and the process time (Etgar, 2008). Also interacting with them strongly on the initial stages should be crucial for the positive outcome of the development of the brands' co-creation process coupled with the need to have shared understanding among all the intervenient parties in the collaborative design process of a product (Fontana et al., 2012). It is also necessary to guarantee to the organization of the project the implementation of the process with the transfer of its property to the organization or so running the risk of having problems with consumers and even damaging the brands' image. Finally, the risk of the brand going into a different direction from the brand image is a possibility due to an eventual loss of control over aspects of the value creation chain that can happen because it will be required to lose some if the brand goes forward with implementation.

As for the studied brands Bujor, Avasilcai and Alexa (2017) states that Awaytomars has made possible for anyone to make fashion even without having studies or experience, meaning that it is really an innovation on the sector offering the common user the opportunity to create the brand and at the same time share the profits. This also applies to Threadless, although, the consumers only give ideas for prints and not for the whole of the garment.

Regarding the idea submission, both brands have similar means. Threadless launches contests with themes, as Awaytomars do and both have available templates and guidelines for participation. Threadless has more challenges, on a weekly basis that are held for around three weeks, than Awaytomars, which can be an incentive for more continuous participation by the community, but, Awaytomars manages partnerships with other well known brands which can be a plus in terms of adding value for the consumer experience. Awaytomars also gives the possibility for users to submit ideas for around three to four weeks. One problem in the idea submission on Awaytomars is that the website information introduces the users to the co-creation of garments but not accessories or footwear as opposed to Threadless that supplies templates for all the products available for sale on the website.

After the initial stage of the idea submission both brands give the community the possibility to vote the choices made by the brands team in order to select the ones that will be put up for sale. On Awaytomars the most voted ones will be put up for pre-orders which means that the delivery will take some time. On the other hand the community have instant access to be the first buying but on the other it will take around two months to receive the purchased items.

As for the prizes, both brands rely on incentivize consumers with monetary rewards. Awaytomars gives a percentage of the sales revenues to the co-creator and also to the

intervenient in the development process and on Threadless it can be in the form of vouchers or fixed money prizes besides a value that varies depending on the item and the price at which is sold. On Awaytomars it is not clear the rewards that the contributors might get while on Threadless all the information is available and easily accessible on the website.

Regarding the proprietary rights, both brands will own the rights of the submitted ideas. This is positive and in legal terms almost essential for the brands, but if the incentives are not the right ones this can make some users automatically not want to cooperate with the brand with newer designs.

Finally, regarding the available offer in terms of products at Threadless the concept of co-creation is explored in a way that lets the brand give extensive use to the submitted ideas, although, this also reverts in an excess in terms of offer that can be overwhelming for the consumers. On Awaytomars the contrary happens and the offer is more limited but in some cases, for example, the same print is also applied to different pieces giving extra use to a single idea as it happens in Threadless.

The concept behind Threadless allows, most likely, the brand to produce only what they sell in most product ranges. The concept behind Awaytomars allows the brand to fund the manufacturing of some garments put for sale on pre-order that might also be a help to fund the acquisition of other products that will be put up for sale later.

5. Research limitations/implications

The research can be complemented in the future with a more complete study in terms of the full brands' website in order to understand the full scope of the business. Also submitting ideas in both brands, Threadless and Awaytomars would be positive to understand how they work in the backstage with the co-creators and how the whole process of co-creation works. Finally contacting directly the brands would give a real insight about how they are working with co-creation and which are for them the benefits and constraints found till now in the whole process. As for the implications, this study can be a good source of knowledge for brands looking into working with co-creation and is a step forward in the study of brands working with co-creation because few studies were made.

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