
The emergence of a new responsible and collaborative business model in the textile sector

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Abstract:

The textile industry is currently experiencing a development that disrupts the purchasing policy and leads to questioning the social responsibility (CSR) of its actors. This research paper attempts to answer the following question: can we find a solution that can reconcile the need for high-speed textile production and a bigger responsibility from the buyers? Starting from highlighting new practices such as collective intelligence, web 2.0, or crowdsourcing, we are laying the foundations for a new model of collaboration allowing the actors of the textile supply chain to offer innovative 3.0 strategies as well as the integration and collaboration of stakeholders, including consumers (end-users). Our academic study describes the foundations for a model of innovative textile supply chain combining the emergence of collective intelligence and the development of responsible consumer.

Keywords: responsible purchasing practices; web 2.0; collective intelligence; consumer; CSR;

Contribution type:

Presentation of an academic perspective to support innovative solution tested towards buyers, suppliers and consumers. In parallel of a Leonardo da Vinci project - named "RESPECT Project" (www.responsible-practices.eu) -, different hypothesis are tested in term of academic perspective to develop a new field of research to reinforce responsible purchasing practices and innovative relationship in the supply chain ; and using collective intelligence and web 2.0 theories.

*** Problem: What specific innovation management problem does the submission tackle?**

This research paper explores new strategies for 3.0 innovation based on the use of collective intelligence applied to socially responsible purchasing practices. We test a model in which the responsible consumer could become a key player in the textile supply chain. The high-speed development of new textile collections led to a transformation of the relationship between buyers and suppliers bringing the "Purchasing Function" at the heart of business strategy. Additionnally, we observe the emergence of a new form of responsible consumption. The latest, largely facilitated by the expansion of new technologies and the Web 2.0, is assigning a real means of power to the consumer. Our study attempts to determine which strategic factors could lead textile companies to collaborate with their stakeholders to implement more responsible practices through Web 2.0 tools.

*** Research question: What is the submission's goal?**

Our literature review will highlight the links between the rise of collective intelligence, the emergence of a new responsible consumer and the objectives of the responsible supply chain. Thus, starting from these theoretical observations, we intend to answer the following question: " Could the emergence of collective intelligence and the development of responsible consumer reverse the current pattern of the textile supply chain? ". This general problem leads to the following subsidiary questions: "Could the process of collaborative and open innovation change the business model in the textile industry? Especially on the issue of supply chain and corporate social responsibility practices? Could we imagine a new process of open innovation in the global textile supply chain?"

Research design: How precisely was the study/work executed - describe your methodology or approach

To test our hypothesis, we conducted our study in two steps. In a first step, we focused our analysis on the new phenomenon of consumption induced by the new technologies and the Web 2.0, which leads the consumer to become an actor (Keck and Sikkink 1998). In order to test this, we must verify whether the consumer may be interested in ethics as part of its purchasing choice. Then, we will try to understand which leverage can lead them to go into action in favor of ethical causes, among two levers: the fact that the consumer wants to get a "social identity" (Lori, 2008) on the one hand; the fact that the consumer needs information on the other hand. Thus, the results obtained allowed us to

consider that the concept of "Innovation 3.0" or "Embedded Innovation, or "Collaborative Innovation" (Errasti et al., 2010; Hafkesbrink and Schroll 2011) was applicable to consumers, and that they are willing to collaborate with companies through web 2.0 tools. To obtain these results, we chose to conduct a quantitative survey through a close-ended questionnaire. This method of field study is justified because we want to provide hard data that will allow us to check our problem. In addition, this statistical study will give us a concrete vision of reality. We obtained more than 200 consumer answers in the first part of the study.

In a second step, we focused on the supply chain. This part allowed us to compare the views of different stakeholders (buyers / suppliers) to refute or confirm our main issue on responsible purchasing practices. There were more than 50 companies with more than 20 buyers and 30 suppliers from different countries around the world in our target industries in the second part of the study. The results allow us to be very optimistic about the emergence of an approach inspired by the concept of collective intelligence, to facilitate collaboration between stakeholders (buyers/suppliers/consumers). The goal is to reach a solution - through communication via the Internet – that may foster the emergence of best practices between buyers and suppliers. The results of this study should help us understand what are the advantages and limitations of such an approach, but also to start thinking about the tools that can be used, as well as methods that can be implemented.

The data were collected during 2012.

*** Findings: What are the main outcomes and results?**

Collective intelligence and the emergence of the phenomenon of a responsible consumer are two variables, which together can change the current model of the textile supply chain. The results of our study validate various steps necessary to validate this result.

Firstly, the consumer must be sensitive to the social quality of a product. We found that consumers were interested in information related to the social quality of a product (Gendron et al., 2003), and we extended this observation to their purchasing choice of clothes. This is opposed to the vision of Ford (1950), which boasts the "functionality and efficiency of consumer goods." The results show a new type of consumer, halfway between the classical consumer and the responsible consumer interested in a personal need of responsible information and respect of ethical awareness. Secondly, we demonstrated that the consumer could be an actor and become an active stakeholder in the supply chain. Our results allowed us to define indivisible factors which lead consumers to implement collective intelligence. Finally, the results and the model confirm that we could design a model of "pyramidal collective intelligence" (Noubel, 2002).

Contribution: What do the outcomes and results add to current understanding or theory in the innovation management community?

Firstly, our paper empirically confirms the theoretical relationship between the collective intelligence theory and the social innovation process.

Concerning the concept of collective intelligence, our results and our model do not lead us to consider it in the same broad way as Lévy (1994), but to rather consider the "pyramidal collective intelligence" as Noubel (2002) that resides in "horizontal transparency" and "vertical communication". In addition, we have demonstrated that using the tools of Web 2.0, communication between different stakeholders was facilitated.

Secondly, the literature highlights the importance of new theory in terms of innovation like crowdsourcing, web 2.0 which are totally outside the CSR discussions. Our research has shown that...

We cannot speak about "Crowdsourcing of inventive activities" (CIA) described by Burger-Helmchen and Pénin (2011), or even crowdsourcing as an alternative to the internal realization (Pisano and Verganti 2008). However, we have demonstrated how collective intelligence can be mobilized in order to make consumers an actor of responsible consumption. The objective of our problem is to consider the collective intelligence as Errasti et al. (2010), ie by the "collective collaboration" in the sense of "Network-centric innovation that will extend the innovation processes beyond the boundaries of the organization" within the sub-model "User innovation" introduced by Von Hippel (1988, 2005). We can also compare the concepts of "Crowdsourcing of routine activities" (CRA), or "Crowdsourcing of content" (CC) as described by Burger-Helmchen and Pénin (2011), because they refer to the contribution of information.

Practical implications: Who will gain, why and in which way from the findings

We believe that our empirical findings are an important contribution to the literature and are of utility to practitioners who could mobilize their consumers to enhance their innovative supply chain. It also represents the academic basis for suppliers to become aware of their roles in the supply chain beyond the mere production-on-order position. Our research also constitutes an eye- and mind-opener for Suppliers and Buyers towards new collaborative and innovation joint processes. In order to convince buyers to go towards more responsible purchasing practices, our paper implemented different stages and actions to illustrate possibilities of innovation (technical and social), their impact on quality and sustainability and how they could as well benefit to buyers (in terms of lead time, regularity, faster understanding of buyer needs, contribution to environmental issues, contribution to CSR reporting for buyers in their supply chain...).

References and Notes

Full reference should include all authors' names and initials, year of publication, title of paper, title of publication (*italics*), volume and issue number (of a journal), publisher and form (book, conference proceedings), page numbers. References and citations should be in the Harvard style.