

Virtual co-creation

A mixture between control and freedom

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Abstract

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Purpose: The purpose with this study is to enhance our knowledge about virtual co-creation by investigating in the underlying role of the co-creating consumer and how companies manage co-creation as well as studying how power is distributed within this consumer-company relationship.

Method: The research undertakes a qualitative research strategy with an abductive methodological approach. Netnography is the chosen research method for collecting primary data and a literature study for collecting secondary data.

Theoretical perspectives: The theoretical dimension is built on theories regarding virtual co-creation, the roles of production and consumption, space and place and post-modernistic views of co-production and the management of free labour.

Analysis: Empirics are collected through online observations taking the part as complete observes of the chosen empirical site, LEGO “DESIGNbyME”. Empirical results are analyzed with a base in the theoretical dimension by applying theories regarding the role of the consumer and the management of free labour on the “DESIGNbyME” site.

Conclusions: Co-creation is a mixture of control and freedom, where companies can by strategies control the place but only to some extent in order to not limit the space of the consumer to enfold their creativity.

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Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Pre-literature review	3
1.3 Problem discussion	6
1.4 Purpose and Research questions.....	8
2. Method	9
2.1 Research philosophy	9
2.2 Research strategy	10
2.3 Methodological approach	11
2.4 Research method	12
2.5 Data collection and analysis	13
2.5.1 Use of primary and secondary data	13
2.5.2 Online observations	14
2.5.2.1 Empirical sites	14
2.5.2.2 Collection and interpretation of data	15
2.5.3 Literature study	16
2.6 Ethical issues of the research	16
2.7 Concept of Trustworthiness.....	17
2.8 Methodological reflections.....	18
3. Theoretical Framework	20
3.1 The roles of production and consumption	20
3.2 The consumer as a labourer	21
3.2.1 Immaterial labour	21
3.2.2 Producer versus consumer.....	22
3.2.3 The postmodern consumer	24
3.2.4 Co-creation	26
3.3 The management of free labour	26
3.3.1 Space and Place.....	26
3.3.2 The concept of modern corporate power.....	28
3.3.3 Means of consumption and production.....	28
3.4 Summary	30

4. LEGO “DESIGNbyME”	32
4.1 “DESIGNbyME”	32
4.1.1 Welcome page	33
4.1.2 LEGO Digital Designer	33
4.1.3 Gallery	35
4.1.4 Competition	36
4.1.5 Message board	36
5. Analysis	38
5.1 The social space of "DESIGNbyME"	38
5.2 Consumers free and creative labour	39
5.2.1 The creative LEGO consumer	39
5.2.1.1 Activity	40
5.2.1.2 Motivation	44
5.2.2 The LEGO creativity process	45
5.2.2.1 Enchantment of the “DESIGNbyME” site	46
5.2.2.2 Utilization of the given tools	46
5.2.2.3 Creation of personalized experiences	48
5.3 LEGO’s strategies to manage free and creative labour	50
5.3.1 Online ambience	51
5.3.2 Censorship	51
5.3.3 Consumers self-control	51
5.3.4 Consumers Self-Reward	52
5.4 Analysis discussion	53
6. Conclusions and Future research	54
6.1 The roles of virtual co-creation	54
6.1.1 Virtual co-creation and value	54
6.1.2 Virtual co-creation – A mixture of control and freedom	55
6.2 Contributions	57
6.3 Delimitations and Future research	58

Index of figures

Screenshot 1: Welcome page.....	32
Screenshot 2: LEGO Digital Designer.....	33
Screenshot 3: LDD software.....	34
Screenshot 4: DESIGNbyME Gallery.....	35
Screenshot 5: DESIGNbyME Contest.....	36
Screenshot 6: LEGO Message Board.....	37

Abbreviations

DMB:	DESIGNbyME
E.g:	for example
LDD:	LEGO Digital Designer
MLN:	My LEGO Network
RPG:	Role-play game

1. Introduction

In this first chapter we will outline co-creation in comparison to similar concepts and present an overview of existing literature in the research field of co-creation, which is influenced by implications of interaction studies, creativity psychology as well as labour theories. This reflection provides a basis for the following problem discussion, from which the purpose and research questions are evolved.

1.1 Background

The recent advanced development in information technology has enabled consumers to interact in ways that was not possible a decade ago and consumers have come to turn to computer-mediated communication to base their buying decisions (Kozinets, 2002). The enhancement regarding the usage of Internet with the development of information-exchanging platforms has made people more used to interact with each other in social networks (Wu and Fang, 2010). Nowadays, companies have to face the fact that consumers have the opportunity to share their experiences of a brand or a product in online communities and social networks, hence have come to have another type of influence on a brand. Companies have to realize the value that is included in this online communication and in order to not be left out of this communication, they have to find new ways to interact with their customers (Cova and Pace, 2006).

Traditionally, face-to-face surveys have been used to generate consumers' ideas or complaints. Nowadays, the Internet offers tools like online brand communities, which has proved to be a more convenient method for interacting with consumers in order to benefit of their shared knowledge (Sawhney et al., 2005). Firm-managed online brand communities consist of knowledgeable members who all share the same passion for a brand and thus are an appropriate tool to motivate consumers to engage in co-creation (Füller et al., 2008). Consequently this kind of including the consumers through the social web in business processes is called "virtual co-creation" (Füller, 2010) and will be in-depth researched in the context of firm-managed brand communities in this Master thesis.

Although virtual co-creation is a rather unexplored area in business research, different branches of trades have already applied this strategy to create value and receive benefits. The first roots of co-creation can be found in the software industry. In the open-source movement, consumers

have used freely available online information to develop successful new software products in communities (Wu and Fang, 2010). Consumer goods companies have also started to apply the marketing concept of co-creation where they include consumers in different business processes. One interesting example of a company that have gained success by virtually co-creating is the Danish toy company LEGO. LEGO faced some major financial losses in 2003 but through a clever cultural change where the company put more emphasis on the consumer and started to look at LEGO as a creative medium, the company enabled a turn-around. Today LEGO is one of the most successful companies in the toy industry and their success goes in line with a strong social media strategy that focuses on engaging the most enthusiastic fans in experiencing the brand through new tools (McKee, 2010). The LEGO website shows a broad range of different tools e.g. a social network and a model-design software, which attract consumers to create new models, but also to interact with other fans (LEGO, 2010). As LEGO has considered the consumer as a partner, LEGO shifted from simply developing within the available resources in the company to co-creation. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) define this phenomenon as including consumers in the business performance in order to generate value out of their experiences with the brand. Thereby, the development in the information technology has had a major influence on the possibility to engage consumers in organizational processes (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008). LEGO is one of the outstanding examples of how virtual co-creation can have impacts on the turn-around of a company, which demonstrates the relevance to study the topic based on the LEGO case.

From a theoretical perspective co-creation has implications for scientific researchers because it challenges the traditional view of labour in the society. Additionally, it also has practical relevance, as virtual co-creation can be a meaningful tool for companies when applied in an appropriate way and brings attention to the changing roles of the consumer. The topic of virtual co-creation covers two interesting aspects regarding the changing roles of the consumers and according to it the distribution of power between the company and the consumer. Firstly, some researchers have argued that virtual co-creation represents an example of the changing relationship between consumers and companies, where the distinctions between who is the consumer and who is the producer are blurring (Tapscott and Williams, 2006 in Humphreys and Grayson, 2008). Other researchers talk about the consumer-as-creator revolution (Nadeau, 2006) and that there has been new resurgence of the word “prosumer”, where the roles of consumer and producer are mixed (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008). Secondly, companies have recently come to recognize difficulties in taking control over the market, as their customers have changed in their buying behaviour due to technical, economic and social drivers. The usage of the Internet as a tool to exchange information about brands with other consumers was fostered

by the widespread access to the Internet and the development of tools that allow the consumer to publish online content. The massive amount of young people, who are tech-savvy and eager to participate in the virtual environment, had also an impact on the shift from simply reading to active creating content in the Internet (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009). This development has led to an empowerment of the consumer. In order to not be left out from online communication between consumers, companies have to find strategies to use the social media as a tool to engage customers in a new brand experience within this virtual setting and thus regain control over the customer.

This paper aims to explore virtual co-creation from a labour perspective, as well as from existing place and space theory and more specifically the underlying roles of companies and consumers within this marketing instrument to get valuable implications for scientific researcher. Moreover, we would like to analyze the power relation between companies and consumers based on their delivered input in co-creation. This thesis is therefore addressed to companies who want to apply this strategy for their businesses in order to generate value.

1.2 Pre-literature review

Co-creation is a phenomenon that has been researched from several other research fields and the notion of co-creation has been treated in spheres with terms such as open innovation, crowd sourcing, lead-user innovation and prosumption. Open innovation describes the strategy to use next to internal ideas also ideas, generated by external resources in a company network (Chesbrough and Crowther, 2006). Another term that is nowadays widely spread is crowd sourcing. This expression was firstly coined by Jeff Howe in 2006 as a method to solve problems by approaching a public group, rather than finding appropriate companies or agencies, which are specialized to deliver a solution (Brandel, 2008). Within the lead-user innovation concept Urban and von Hippel (1988) argue that lead users are aware of needs that can improve the business performance and which will later on be demanded by a larger group. The term prosumption evolves from labour theories and includes such as the word implies both production and consumption and is a process where consumers engage in value creation activities, which result in the production of products (Xie et al., 2008).

These concepts relate and have similarities to co-creation as they all deal with the appropriate source of gaining knowledge beside the traditional view to use knowledge, produced inside a company. Nevertheless, these terms have key differences concerning the approach to the

customer and in contrast to these concepts; co-creation is based on a shift in the marketing logic that states that value is developed through the consumers' experience of using a product. Hence, companies should especially involve consumers in the business process in order to generate ideas and innovations (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

During recent years, a general shift in marketing can be recognized, from a goods-centred to a service-centred dominated logic. Vargo and Lusch (2004) argue for a new service definition as "application of special core-competences (knowledge and skills) through deeds, processes, and performances for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself", which also includes producing companies as a provider of services, rather than just products in order to better meet the expectations of the customer (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The focus therefore lies on intangible resources and if companies do not possess these resources, it is necessary to build strong relationships with partners in their networks. Moreover, companies have to realize that value does not arise prominently from the developed product; rather value appears when the consumer is using the product, hoping to achieve the desired value. In order to generate "value-in-use" Vargo and Lusch (2004) suggest that companies should work in interaction with the consumer to ultimately meet their needs. The service-centred logic accomplishes the new marketing instrument co-creation, firstly defined by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), which enables companies to reach the consumer as a subject, rather than to approach a homogenous group of consumers. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) state that companies have to increase the quality of the interaction with the consumer in order to attract him/her for collective working from which personalized experiences can evolve. They argue that the level of dialogue, access, risk-benefits and transparency influences the quality of the interaction and hence have an impact on the consumers' involvement.

As the engaging consumer takes a special part in co-creation, researchers have defined two appropriate types of consumers who are suited as co-creators. Researchers distinguish between lead users and creative consumers, who can contribute to idea generation. Lead users are characterized as consumers who are able to identify early needs, that later on will be demanded by a broader audience. Lead users utilize new products in order to generate ideas and they are mainly interested to get an outcome by their new inventions (Urban and von Hippel, 1988). In comparison creative consumers occupy with all products, even if they are not new on the market and they are driven by personal interests. This type of consumer group does not expect any reward for their work, cause the main focus lies on the pleasure while experimenting with products (Berthon et al., 2007).

Several researchers have been interested in discovering strategies based on consumers' expectations and motivations, to attract consumers to participate in co-creation projects. Nuttavuthisit (2010) have developed four strategies: choice, complement, cause, and communality, which approach the different consumer behaviours participation-for-self, participation-for-others, creation-for-self, and creation-for-others. Füller (2010) states that consumer personality and the level between intrinsically and extrinsically driven motivations influence the expectations and the perception of the virtual design. Nambisan and Baron (2009) focused on consumers' participating in virtual co-creation from a benefit-based perspective and state that consumers are driven by four different benefits: learning, social integrative, personal integrative and hedonic, rather than just of altruistic motives.

Co-creation has also been explored with regard to the special task that consumer have to solve in collaboration with the company. Dahl and Page Moreau (2007) discovered that consumers feel the greatest enjoyment when companies assure their autonomy and competence. Companies are able to influence the competence in solving the task by providing a set of instruction. If companies forbear to define a target outcome the customers feeling of autonomy can be strengthen. Many co-creation projects take place in a virtual environment as the Internet enables a two-way dialogue with the consumer, a rich interaction based on the numerous community members as well as on size and scope of the audience compared to face-to-face engagement with the consumer (Sawhney et al., 2005). Füller et al. (2010) state that the perceived enjoyment of an online co-creation task is mainly dependent on the design of the virtual tools, which should facilitate the ability to solve the task.

As the above-mentioned studies deliver an insight in how co-creation generally works the following researchers studied co-creation based on labour theories and came up with findings about the co-creating consumer and the generated value in co-creation. Arvidsson (2005) argue for that consumers produce immaterial labour while consuming and communicating with other consumers, which leads to some extent to the construction of brands. Furthermore, the function of the organizational department of brand management has changed from building brands to providing an ambience, where consumers are able to engage in co-creation. Moreover, he critical recognizes the exploitation of the consumer when taking part in co-creation (Arvidsson, 2005). Arvidsson (2008) claims that social production, aroused through Internet technology, takes place within the logic of an ethical economy. Generally, consumers are driven by self-realization instead of money and thus want to share their knowledge in communities. He defines the ethical economy as an economy, where consumers build ethical ties in communities and thereby will create value for companies (Arvidsson, 2008).

Cova and Dalli (2009) state, based on Marxists labour theories, that the co-creating consumers produce work and generate value, but mostly just get social instead of financial reward. They also explain the existence of exploitation with the Maussian concept of a primary and a secondary sociality that demonstrate the absorption of “value-in-use” produced by the consumers between these two levels and turning into “value-in-exchange” (Cova and Dalli, 2009). Contrary to the stressing of exploitation in the aforementioned studies Zwick et al. (2008) confirmed that exploitation is not negative as long as the consumer enjoys the co-creation activity. They focused more on researching the importance of the necessity of governance in co-creation in order to achieve control over the consumer.

1.3 Problem discussion

The existing literature on co-creation grounded in labour theory states that the role of the consumer has come to a new dimension as the consumer is also producing while consuming (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Humphreys and Grayson, 2008). Some researchers have justified this fact by looking at what kind of value the consumer is producing and state that the consumer can only be regarded as a producer when the company makes profit out of the value (Cova and Dalli, 2009). A central issue in the literature evolves around the topic of how the consumer should get rewarded in co-creation and according to that could be regarded as a producer. Some researcher (Cova and Dalli, 2009) agree on that financially reward should be a necessity when companies can make profit out of the “value-in-use” of the consumer by turning it into “value-in-exchange”.

Another issue in the existing literature deals with the distribution of power between consumers and the company. Nowadays, consumers seem to be more critical and empowered through the Internet technology that have enabled a sharing of brand experiences in online communities and hence the consumers benefit from the given inputs of other community members. As a result, companies cannot have the same influence as through traditional media and some researchers argue that the application of co-creation seems to be an effective way to gain control over the consumer again. According to Vargo and Lusch (2004), companies have to interact with consumers in a two-way communication and as Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) stated to include consumers in the business process in order to generate value and finally gain control over the market again. Furthermore, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) claims that conditions like transparency and access to all information foster the quality of the interaction between the consumer and the company. That gives an impression of an equal relationship between

companies and consumers and where the power is balanced, as both parts should have the same initial position. However, companies can influence the creativity of the consumer by providing appropriate tools and according guidelines to foster the dialogue and ensure getting an output of the unfolded creativity, which leads to an empowered company (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

Researchers of labour theories (Zwick et al., 2008; Cova and Dalli, 2009), who state that the consumer is working in co-creation, also argue for that companies become empowered by co-creating. This due to the fact that they can use the labour of consumers for free, without giving any financial reward and are therefore exploiting the consumers through co-creation. Marx argued that companies are able to exploit the worker cause they are in possession of the means of production, which the worker needs to perform labour and get monetary rewarded (Ritzer, 2005). Even in co-creation the companies own the tools that enable the consumers to unfold their activity while consuming and at the same time producing.

In contrast to the above-mentioned empowerment of the company there are also some tendencies in the current literature, which give the impression that the consumer still has the power when co-creating. Firstly, Arvidsson (2005) claims that brands are to some extent made through the immaterial labour of consumers. Co-creating consumers become valuable to the company as companies cannot produce the value that can be generated through consumers' shared common in communities. Hence, as companies seem to be depending on the consumers, consumers still have the power in co-creation. Moreover, consumers' likelihood of a co-creation activity depends on the perceived enjoyment, which is influenced by the feeling of autonomy and competence (Dahl and Page Moreau, 2007). This means that if companies control consumers too much, consumers will not be inspired to participate in co-creation projects. This stance is also supported by the space and place theory of de Certeau (1984) who claims that humans are always able through tactical behaviour e.g. resistance to weak the power of an institution or a government or even able to find new ways to unfold their creativity undetermined of a company within a given setting.

We find the relationship between the co-creating consumer and company very interesting and want to further investigate if the co-creating consumer can be referred to as a producer and if co-creation can be regarded as exploitation. Virtual co-creation is still a rather unexplored topic and we believe that there is a need to further investigate in the role of the co-creating consumer as well as studying how companies manage co-creation. We believe that an in-depth study of this consumer-company relationship can bring some contributing findings to the existing

literature since we will explore virtual co-creation from a labour perspective both studying the value of the co-creating consumer as well as the management of free labour. We have therefore studied how free the consumer is in unfolding her creativity or if she is fully determined by the company through researching in task and motivation as well as the relationship to company and community members depicted on one case, the LEGO Company's "DESIGNbyME" site. According to that it is also interesting to see if and how the two parties are depending on each other as this has also has an impact on the distribution of power. We decided to apply space and place theory (Lefèbvre, 1991 and de Certeau, 1984) as it emphasis on the distinction between the architectures of space and the actual users as well as covers the according influence when it comes to the creation of space, which would be in our sense the creation of value.

1.4 Purpose and Research questions

The purpose with this study is to enhance our knowledge about virtual co-creation by investigating in the underlying role of the co-creating consumer and how companies manage co-creation as well as studying how power is distributed within this consumer-company relationship.

We have specified our purpose with three research questions that will work as a base for our research.

- *How does virtual co-creation work in practice?*
- *What is the underlying role of the co-creating consumer?*
- *How are companies managing creative free labour?*

2. Method

In this chapter we will present and argue for the methodological reasoning behind this research. Firstly, our ontological and epistemological considerations will be presented following by the chosen research strategy, the methodological approach to the study as well as the chosen research method for collecting data. Furthermore, we will present how the data collection and analysis have been conducted and discuss the concept of trustworthiness. Lastly, we reflect over the chosen method and again motivate our choices.

2.1 Research philosophy

There are several different research philosophies that affect the methodological approach to a study, why epistemological and ontological assumptions cannot be separated from business research (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Methodology does not only evolve from practice but is also influenced by existing assumptions regarding worldview, beliefs and attitudes (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), which is why we would like to present our epistemological and ontological considerations for this study.

We have an interpretive approach to the study as we seek to understand the social phenomenon of virtual co-creation by studying the humans involved in it rather than external forces. Moreover, we are interested to explore the distribution of power in co-creation, which requires also the study of the involved consumer and company in co-creation. We hope that the results of the research can give us the opportunity to come up with new surprising findings since virtual co-creation is a rather unexplored topic, which also goes in line with having an interpretive stance (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Both virtual co-creation and the focus on labour within this concept are topics that have evolved during recent years. When taking an interpretive stance the researcher focus on how humans behave and perceive things by investigating in those humans that are involved in the social phenomenon (Bryman and Bell, 2003), which is in accordance with this research, where we seek to understand the connection between consumers, the company and virtual co-creation.

We also argue for having a constructive approach to the study, as we want to explain that consumers as well as the company socially construct the phenomenon virtual co-creation. Furthermore, we seek to discover the feelings and experiences of consumers engaging in virtual

co-creation, which also a constructive approach aims (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). It also states that social phenomena are continuously changing (Bryman and Bell, 2003) and it is an approach that is suitable for this study since it is often used when wanting to understand and explain the different constructions and meanings people feel and experience (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Having an interpretive approach to the object of study, a constructive approach appeared as favourable against other ontological positions, such as objectivism where reality, social phenomena and categories are independent of social actors (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

2.2 Research strategy

Research strategy is the general orientation to the conduct of a research (Bryman and Bell, 2003) and the most suitable strategy for a study depends on the study's research problem and purpose (Jankowicz, 1991). Research may be categorized into two main strategies; qualitative and quantitative, where the former place a considerable trust on words and attempts to understand people's meanings behind actions (Bryman and Bell, 2007). In contrast, the quantitative approach emphasizes a focus on numbers rather than words in order to explain opinions or concepts (Amaratunga et al., 2002).

A qualitative research strategy proved to be favourable to this study due to several circumstances. The qualitative and quantitative strategies have fundamental differences regarding the epistemological and ontological orientations as well as the connection between theory and research. Qualitative studies often have an interpretive epistemological orientation and focus on understanding the social world by interpretation of its participants and their perceptions (Bryman and Bell 2007), while quantitative studies are common in researches that have positivistic and objectivist orientations (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Having an interpretive and constructive approach to the object of study, a qualitative research strategy is suitable for this study. Moreover, adapting a qualitative approach is useful when wanting to understand people's meanings and raises the ability to adjust the study to new ideas or issues that may emerge (Amaratunga et al., 2002), which was helpful in this study since virtual co-creation is a rather unexplored topic and we did not know in beforehand what findings we would come up with. Furthermore, a qualitative research strategy proved to be favourable against a quantitative research strategy with the focus on statistical results, since we wanted to receive in-depth knowledge about the role of the co-creating consumer and the company.

Another important reason for why we have adapted a qualitative approach to the research is that a qualitative research allows the researcher to get an inner experience of its participants (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), which means we have been able to capture the feelings of the consumer when she/he is co-creating. Additionally, a qualitative research strategy have been useful since we wanted to investigate in the symbolic world that underlies people's meanings (Levy, 1959), as we have studied the virtual environment in which the consumer is able to co-create with the company.

2.3 Methodological approach

Associated with qualitative and quantitative research strategies is the matter of having an inductive or deductive methodological approach to the connection between theory and research (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Inductive research is often related to qualitative research since it is based on empirical findings where theory is the outcome of the research unlike to deductive research, which is based on logic and derives from testing existing knowledge (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Hyde (2000) argues for that researchers can adapt both inductive and deductive reasoning and recognizes deductive processes in many qualitative researches. The inductive and deductive reasoning can be combined to a third methodological approach, abductive reasoning (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000). In abductive reasoning, data is gathered from several sources such as observations, interviews and literature reviews (Shuttleworth, 2008) and it is preferably to be used when coming up with best guess arguments and combines testing existing logic with empirical findings to create new knowledge (Kolko, 2010).

Qualitative studies often have an inductive approach with a focus on generating theory rather than testing theory (Amaratunga et al., 2002). We have combined the inductive approach and deductive approach since we wanted to draw general conclusions both from empiric observations as well as by using existing knowledge about co-creation that can be equivalent to the study (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Moreover, theory about space will be a framework to our analyses of the distribution of power between consumer and company that demonstrates that we will let the theoretical dimension and the empirics of the research support each other carried out through different stages of the research. By adopting a qualitative and an abductive approach to this study it has enabled us to go back and forth between empirics and theories, which have helped us to come up with new findings and theories.

2.4 Research method

In qualitative studies there are several different research methods that can be used for collecting data. When deciding on what method to use we started from our research question and thought about what data that needed to be generated in order to help us answering our research questions.

A well-used qualitative research method is to use documents as sources of data, called document studies (Bryman and Bell, 2007), where the researcher collects already produced documents such as diaries, newspapers, and magazines. However, we believe that it would be challenging only to use secondary data as a base for answering the research questions (Bryman and Bell, 2007). One of the perhaps most recognized qualitative research method is doing varied designs of qualitative interviews (Bryman and Bell, 2007), which enables the researcher to ask questions and get an understanding of the informants' perceptions and feelings. Qualitative interviews could be conducted in this research, especially if the focus was to understand why consumers co-create, however the main focus is to investigate in how consumers co-create and whether or not the work can be seen as labour. Mostly important is that we use a method that captures how consumers are engaging in virtual co-creation and since we put emphasis on "listening" and "understanding" people in a natural environment it seems appropriate to use a method that derives from anthropology (Pettit, 2010).

We have chosen a method that enables us to capture interactions between people where micro-level interactions can be studied in order to understand how virtual co-creation works and to analyze it from a critical labour perspective. Ethnography is an anthropological approach (Kozinets, 2010) and a method that may capture people's interactions. It could be conducted in this study since it focuses on understanding meanings behind what people say and do (Goulding, 2004) where the ethnographer immerses him/herself in a social setting and observes behaviours (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Ethnography has several advantages such as flexibility (Kozinets, 2010) and enables the researcher to get an insider perspective (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The method has gained popularity due to the open-end and the rich qualitative content (Kozinets, 2002). However, ethnography as well as qualitative interviews has one major disadvantage in accordance to this investigation, which cannot be ignored and that is the fact of the presence of the researcher. This could interfere with the research since the presence of the researcher may influence the context of where the research is set, why we have chosen to conduct a netnography.

Netnography is a form of ethnography that is adapted to the Internet (Pettit, 2010) and it is an interpretive method that specifies on behaviours of cultures that exists within on-line communities (Kozinets, 1998). The further development of the Internet has provided a new platform for communication. One example is online communities as a platform where people can interact regardless to distance and in real-time. This has given rise to opportunities for researchers to observe and collect a wide range of data concerning different topics that are interacted and communicated upon (Kozinets, 2002). We have conducted netnography in the form of qualitative based on-line observations where we take the form of a complete observer. There are two main advantages with netnography that was evident for us when deciding upon research method. Firstly, it has enabled us to collect data that is entirely unobtrusive since the researcher will not have any influence on the research context and secondly the method is less time consuming then traditional ethnography (Kozinets, 2010). The advantage of unobtrusiveness have enabled us to collect and analyze data that we can be sure is not affected by our presence. We reflected upon blending ethnography and netnography as a research method since it would enable us to have a mixture of data gathered both from online observations as well as from face-to-face interaction. However, due to time aspects and since Kozinets (2010) states that when studying an online community a “pure” netnography is entirely complete within itself, we have chosen to specify our research focusing on one online community and do a netnography.

2.5 Data collection and analysis

2.5.1 Use of primary and secondary data

In order to generate data that was relevant to the study and could help us in the investigation of virtual co-creation we have chosen to gather data both from primary and secondary sources. As previously presented, we have had an abductive approach to this study, where we had the aim to come up with findings based on empirical results as well as from using existing knowledge about co-creation that can be equivalent to the study. The usage of both primary and secondary data was therefore equivalent to this study since it gives a mixture of information. Primary data is data that has never been collected before and can be gathered by using different research methods such as doing qualitative interviews or quantitative questionnaires. As previously mentioned, we have conducted a netnography where observations of a company website was the source for our primary data. There are several advantages with primary and secondary data (Bryman and Bell, 2007) One significant advantage with using primary data is that it is consistent with the research problem and is collected for a particular research area (Easterby-

Smith et al., 2008) Secondary data will be gathered from doing a literature study on existing knowledge and theories regarding co-creation, labour and space theory. The main advantage with using secondary data is that it can provide historical data and wide information of a subject (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). We believe that the usage of mixed data, where we have analyzed findings from empirics with a base in the theoretical dimension and applied theories of space in order to analyze the distribution of power, have helped us to explore new patterns in existing knowledge regarding areas that relates to co-creation.

2.5.2 Online observations

We have conducted observations where we took the part of complete observers (Bryman and Bell, 2007) and did a passive online analysis (Eysenbach and Till, 2001) of an online community and the virtual environment. Taking the part as complete observers have prevented us to interfere with the empirics and we could capture natural interactions and discussions, which were not affected of our presence. This capability of ensuring unobtrusiveness was one of the deciding factors for us when choosing to do online observations as well as that it could enable us to come up with empirical results that would have been hard to come up with by using other methods such as interviews. The object of study is the roles of consumers and companies within virtual co-creation, which is a topic that we believe would be strongly affected by the informants self-identity, why observing, rather than actively participating, is a suitable method.

2.5.2.1 Empirical sites

When thinking about virtual co-creation and online brand communities, we wanted to choose a community that could provide us with rich data concerning the topic. We searched for and looked at several communities such as Starbuck's and Nike's online brand communities, but the structure and context of those community did not perfectly fit our research. We have chosen to use one of LEGO's online communities called "DESIGNbyME" as the empirical site for this study. We have chosen LEGO and the site "DESIGNbyME" due to several reasons. Firstly, LEGO's target group are consumers, who have a pronounced play instinct and prefer to create and share things, therefore we believe that this target group are appropriate research informants for our thesis and we can generate thick data from studying them and the tool "DESIGNbyME". Secondly, the co-creation is very evident and free to observe on this site, why again we believe this will help us to generate rich data.

The LEGO website consists of several tools that should attract the consumer to experience the brand LEGO in a virtual environment such as LEGO Club or My LEGO Network. However, our focus is on the specific co-creation tool “DESIGNbyME”. This tool allows consumers to digital create their own model made of LEGO bricks, to share pictures of it and also to participate at special contests with the digital created model. LEGO provides a special design software that can be downloaded for free on the website. In addition the consumer can upload his pictures in a gallery and vote for pictures of creations by other fans. Moreover the user can communicate about “DESIGNbyME” through the forum called message board. Everyone can download the LDD software for free and if the consumer want to present a creation or post something at the message board they have to be logged in at the website. Nevertheless, the content is for everyone visible, regardless of being logged in or not. The focus on this special part of the website allows us an in-dept description and analyses how the company structures the page in order to attract and to retain consumers engaged in this kind of co-creation projects and to guide the creativity of the consumer in the desired direction of the company.

2.5.2.2 Collection and interpretation of data

We have conducted online observations during three weeks, where we observed, downloaded and collected data between 2-3 hours per day. The primary data collection is disposed into two parts cause we wanted to collect a rigorous amount of data that could help us analyzing how co-creation works from a labour perspective. Firstly, we studied the structure of the webpage to understand how it worked and the activities that went on. We observed and took screenshots of the content, structure and symbols on the webpage including tools and studying colours and receiving a picture of the virtual atmosphere. We did this in order to collect a systematic amount of data as a base for analyzing the different tools the company provides and terms for encouraging but also controlling the co-creation processes. The second part of the data collection took the form of observing and downloading postings made by online users, where we collected comments from 100 threads to give us a rigorous base for analyzing how consumers are engaging in co-creation. WE used the method of discourse analysis, as this method focuses on the inner psychological, world created by using language within a discourse (Bryman and Bell, 2007). A discourse analysis also relates the gained data within a broader social context (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Therefore we interpreted the comments of the Lego consumers depending on their meaning regarding our topic virtual co-creation. The comments took some time to interpret since the online LEGO-users spell and write in a special sense using symbols and shortenings. We read all the comments several times and kept our research

questions in mind and tried to seek for sometimes visual and sometimes hidden answers in order to find categories, which we could interpret more in-depth.

2.5.3 Literature study

Coming from an abductive approach we wanted to gather both primary and secondary data, where we could analyze empirical findings with a base in the theoretical dimension with the goal to come up with new exiting findings. The secondary data was gathered by doing a literature study on relevant literature concerning topics and theories that relate to the roles of virtual co-creation and could help us understand the phenomenon from a labour perspective as well as from space and place theories. The literature study worked as a complementary method to doing online observations and by doing a literature study we wanted to identify relevant concepts and theories as well acknowledge the contribution of this study and position the study.

Having an interpretive approach to the research, literature can be a helpful tool in receiving an insight to the topic, why we will do narrative review since it is wide-ranging in scope and the researcher may change the review of the theory as a result of the data analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2007), why we have chosen to do a narrative review due to its flexible advantages. Furthermore, we have studied literature on topics that relates to virtual co-creation with regard to the roles of production and consumption as well as labour theories. The theoretical dimension is thereby built upon theories about virtual co-creation, the roles of production and consumption, space and place and post-modernistic views of co-production and the management of free labour.

2.6 Ethical issues of the research

Ethics represent moral principles and values that influence the way a researcher collects and use data (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). There is not a clear agreement of how the procedures for when doing qualitative online research should be ethically conducted (Kozinets, 2002) and there are some ethical concerns with conducting online research that we have put to regard. The problematic issue that we have come to deal with is whether or not comments on online communities should be categorized as private or public, and what constitutes “informed consent” on the Internet (Kozinets, 2002).

Eysenbach and Till (2001) means that there are three measurements to estimate whether or not a community is public or has the degree of privacy. Firstly, the amount of members in a community determines how public the community can be perceived. Secondly, if there is a demand of some type of registration for accessing the community, the community should probably be categorized as private. Thirdly, the level of privacy is determined by the community's culture, such as norms and codes, members and aim. We have had these reflections in mind when collecting data to ensure an ethical research process. However, information consent is not required if we do a passive online analysis of the community and comments and if the collected data is made anonymous at earliest possible stage (Eysenbach and Till, 2001). The "DESIGNbyME" site consists of a lot amount of users and is open for everyone to register and participate in co-creation. The user can download the design software called "LEGO Digital Designer", which is free and available for everyone. The only time one has to register is when wanting to upload pictures and to post comments. This means that the data we have collected is free for everyone and downloaded comments from the site are comments that anyone can read. Moreover our observation of the structure of the site is something that anyone could do as the access is free to this area.

2.7 Concept of Trustworthiness

The criteria of reliability and validity are often used for evaluating the quality of a study, but both criteria are more relevant to discuss when doing a quantitative research, as this research results in statistically findings, which means that a fixed cluster with defined variables is available to repeat the study under the same conditions. Thereby, also causality can be assessed of the existences of two variables. Based on that some researchers argue to use the concept of trustworthiness in order to evaluate qualitative research. This concept consists of four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Credibility is achieved in our study by ensuring a prolonged engagement and a persistent observation. As we have not been familiar with the virtual world of LEGO, we had at first to read up on the terms, which gave us important hints e.g. rank system of members according to their amount of posts, which had a significant influence on the consumers behaviour in the threads. Additionally, we began our data collection by reading over several threads according a topic e.g. role-play games but without having a cluster in mind, just to get an understanding of the approach, the consumers behaviour and their LEGO specific used words. Moreover, we used next to netnography also a literature study in order to be able to present interesting findings, as

the literature study consists of important information, which provide a basis for the interpretation of our empirical findings.

Transferability is understood in sense of a qualitative research as a thick description that enables interested readers to decide if the findings could also work for other organizations. Transferability will be achieved in our research, cause we are focusing on one co-creation tool of the toy company LEGO and trying to gain in-depth knowledge about how the company and the consumer contribute to co-creation. (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Based on our findings we have deduced strategies, which LEGO is using and which could work in a generalized version also for similar organizations and branches.

Dependability ensures that a social phenomenon is stabile in the interpretation. We therefore visit the message board of LEGO several times in order to see if topics like role play games are still the most interesting ones and could therefore assert that consumers still create value when using the provided tools of LEGO and communicating with each other.

The last element of the concept of trustworthiness is confirmability, which is about ensuring that the data have been interpreted from an objective view (Wallendorf and Russell, 1989). We have therefore used an internal audit defined also as a mutual examining, where both of us looked at the field-notes and the drawn conclusions in order to check if the interpretations are plausible.

2.8 Methodological reflections

All research methods have strengths and weaknesses and when choosing one method in favour of another the researcher always come across some advantages and disadvantages with the chosen method. The main and most important advantage for why we have chosen to do a complete observational netnography is the aspect of unobtrusiveness. As complete observers, we will not interfere with the context that is being studied for why we can collect data that is not influenced by our presence (Bryman and Bell, 2007). This method is also time efficient since we will limit the data collection to observing how the community is structured and take screenshots as well as observe and download postings by users.

However, there are some disadvantages with doing a complete observational netnography. When taking the role as a complete observer and in order to be sure that we are not influencing

the research context, we cannot interact with the informants in any way. This means that the strength of being unobtrusive and not interfering the research context could also be seen as a weakness. Within other traditional qualitative methods such as interviews or ethnography, the researcher can have face-to-face communication, which allows collecting complementary data in the form of observing body language, sense of tone and mood (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Another weakness with being completely unobtrusive is that when the data is collected without any interaction it consists of already constructed text. As a complete observer we do not have the possibility to contact the informants and ask questions concerning certain topics or comments that appear relevant to the object of study. All interpretation is left to the researcher alone and by no interaction we cannot steer the informants in any directions.

Nevertheless, we believe that the strengths with this method will surpass the weaknesses. It should be noticed that we are not primarily interested in the different personas and backgrounds of the co-creating consumers, as for many other qualitative researchers. Our focus is to investigate in how co-creation works both by studying the website features as well as the positions that the users take and how they use it. The fundamental choice that made the advantages exceed the disadvantages was that by doing netnographic observations, we can gather rich data that is not influenced by our presence. The data is thereby naturally occurring and collected from a natural setting (Kozinets, 2010), which makes it possible for us to come up with findings regarding how virtual co-creation works and is the reason for why this method is favourable compared to other traditional qualitative methods.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework will be presented in two major sections. First, the roles of production and consumption are discussed from a consumer perspective with regard to theories on the consumer-producer relationship and the changing role of the consumer. The chapter continues with presenting theories from a company perspective focusing on how labour is managed and regulated. The chapter begins with an introduction and presentation of the theoretical dimension and ends with a summary.

3.1 The roles of production and consumption

Co-creation is a new marketing instrument, which challenges the traditional views on production and consumption as well as the according roles of consumers and producers. It therefore becomes necessary to study the value creation and the convergence of consumers and producers from existing labour theories in the context of co-creation. The theoretical dimension in this thesis consists of two parts “Consumer as a labourer” and “The management of free labour”. As some researchers claim that consumers are working and contributing to value creation it becomes interesting to discuss the role of the consumer and if he/she can be regarded as a producer. We have therefore studied different theories that deal with the terms of the roles of the consumer and the producer as it affects the level of reward and governance by the company.

In this thesis the focus lies on the relationship between the end consumer, the co-creating consumer and the producer, the company in which the consumer is engaging in co-creation processes with. The first part of the theoretical dimension presents theories on the producer-consumer relationship with a base in Marx’s thinking and then goes on to describing the role of the consumer from a post modernistic view. Marx’s theory on “value-in-exchange” and “value-in-use” can be applied on the producer-consumer relationship. The distinctions of each value can help us to understand how the “value-in-exchange” and “value-in-use” have a potential impact on co-creation and on the roles of production and consumption. Finally, we will present co-creation based on the influences of the previous mentioned literature. The theories in the first part were chosen to help us understand the changing roles of the consumer and how consumption is connected to production. Additionally, the structure of starting out with presenting Marx’s theories and then continue on to postmodernism is to show how co-creation

derives from immaterial labour and how it affects the distinctions between consumer and producer. The second part of the theoretical dimension describes theories on the production and the control of space and place as well as the distribution of power involving the means behind production and consumption. The theories in the second part were chosen to show how the company controls and manages free labour possibly evolving in co-creation and how both parts are depending on each other.

3.2 The consumer as a labourer

3.2.1 Immaterial labour

In order to understand how the consumer contributes to value creation in general, the underlying concepts of labour theory by different post-Marxists researchers will be presented. Virno (2004, in Zwick et al., 2008) argued that social cooperation is used for capitalist production and therefore he based his concept on Marx coined term “general intellect”. The “general intellect” that everyone has, consists of competencies that enables the human to communicate with others. If a task includes fostering cooperation, the ability of sharing knowledge between workers becomes necessary and thus the production will be more efficient. As a result of this development labour is mainly driven by linguistic-communication between workers and the social communication has been turned into living labour (Virno, 2004 in Zwick et al., 2008). Negri (1989, in Arvidsson, 2005) has introduced an according term to it - “socializing worker”, whose main skill is his communication ability.

Lazzarato (1997 in Arvidsson, 2005) has looked into the topic of immaterial labour with regard to the source and outcome of it and also refers to Marx term of “general intellect” as a symbolic resource for the immaterial labour. He states that if the “general intellect” will be used then all individuals will create immaterial labour, and thereby an ethical surplus or value will develop. Moreover, he claims that individuals can produce immaterial labour within or outside a capitalist organization. If it happens outside, then immaterial labour normally occurs in the form of consumption. Consumers are therefore working in sense that they give meaning to goods or create social relations and hence create value every time they are consuming products (Lazzarato, 1997 in Arvidsson, 2005).

Hardt and Negri (2004 in Arvidsson, 2005) have focused on understanding how consumers perform immaterial labour and state that consumers can produce cultural and affective value. If consumers try to find a solution to an existing problem, they are working analytical and thus

generating ideas, through which primary cultural value will be added to the final product. Furthermore, if the consumers interact with each other, they add affective value to the market offering. Hardt and Negri (2004 in Arvidsson, 2005) coin the term “common” as a result of social interaction, feeling of affiliation and a shared meaning between people, when they produce immaterial labour. Moreover, it is this shared common between consumers forms the ethical surplus or value.

3.2.2 Producer versus consumer

The recent development of information technology with new communication platforms such as firm-managed online brand communities, have enabled consumers, organizations and companies to interact in a new way (Kozinets, 2002). Co-creation processes between consumers and companies have transformed the different roles a consumer or a company has and made the terms producer/consumer or production/consumption less distinctive since the practices that underpin such distinctions or definitions are less clear (Beer and Burrows, 2010). There is a shift that is currently emerging in the consumer-producer relationship, a change that addresses the fact that the distinctions between consumer and producer are changing. Some researchers claim that it is a new revolution where the consumer is the creator (Nadeau, 2006), others talk about how the gap between consumer and producer are blurring (Tapscott and Williams, 2006 in Humphreys and Grayson, 2008) and some suggest that the power and control between producers and consumers is more and more coalescing (Pitt et al., 2006).

The producer-consumer relationship can be characterized as an exchange relationship where each part exchanges one kind of value with another (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008). Traditionally, consumer equals user and a company will be referred to as producer. The Oxford English dictionary define producer and consumer as follows:

Producer: A person, company, or country that makes, grows, or supplies goods or commodities for sale. Opposed to consumer.

Consumer: A person who uses up a commodity; a purchaser of goods or services, a customer. Opposed to producer.

In Marx’s theories producers produce products expressly for their “value-in-exchange” and consumers concentrate on the “value-in-use” of products (Corrigan, 1997). The “value-in-

exchange” of a product is relative to the value of another product (Marx, 1867 in Humphreys and Grayson, 2008), for example the “value-in-exchange” of a chicken may be equivalent to the “value-in-exchange” of one gallon of wine. The “value-in-exchange” represents a commodity’s relationship to all other commodities in a marketplace and wine and chicken will have the same “value-in-exchange” if they can be sold for the same amount of money. “Value-in-exchange” is therefore realized at the point of sale, but there is another type of value that goes beyond what can be notified on the marketplace and specifies on the one that is consuming the product. Marx refers this type of value as “value-in-use”, which comes to realization when the consumer is using, consuming the product. Humphreys and Grayson (2008) state that an object that is bought with a high price and has a high exchange value on the marketplace may have high use value for the buyer but low for the one who sold it, the producer. Alternatively, a product that has a significant use value to a person may have an exchange value of zero on the marketplace.

A significant difference between use “value-in-use” and “value-in-exchange” is that “value-in-use” is oriented to an object, while “value-in-exchange” is oriented to others. This means that use value and exchange value products can be very different from one and another, one is produced to serve special needs of a person and to enjoy the process of creating use value. The main focus of creating exchange value however is to produce an object that can be sold to others. Marx talks about the “sphere of consumption” and “the sphere of exchange” where the former is about pleasing one self and the latter pleasing someone else. The traditional company-consumer production often takes the form of producing “value-in-exchange” (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008). However, in a community the members always contribute to “value-in-use” for the group (Muniz and Schau, 2005). When consumers produce something for themselves, creating “value-in-use” in “the sphere of consumption”, they will receive the total value from their own labour. However when consumers are being asked by companies to engage in activities that create “value-in-exchange” and help them to improve on the marketplace, the received value of labour will change from “value-in-use” into “value-in-exchange”. Humphreys and Grayson (2008) argue that when consumers produce something for someone else, that they themselves will not use, they are producing “value-in-exchange” since the company will sell these objects. Their labour will produce value that the company will exchange, which changes the role of the consumer turning him or her into a labourer. Ultimately, if a consumer produces “value-in-exchange” the labourer, the consumer, should be owed a portion of that exchange value (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008).

3.2.3 The postmodern consumer

The postmodern view of the consumer-producer relationship is contrasting to Marx's view of the consumer either being a producer or a consumer but never both. Humphreys and Grayson (2008) argue for that the more companies are engaging consumers in co-production processes, the less clear will the separation be between consumers and producers. Vargo and Lusch (2004) stated that companies must shift to a "continuous-process perspective" where the distinction of production and consumption is not the most important issue rather than understanding the consumer as a co-creator of value.

Consumption is a productive process because consumers use consumption as a way to express their identities (Baudrillard, 1988 in Firat et al., 1995) and hence production is continuing during the moments of consumption, instead of being finished after the product has left the factory (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008). In postmodernism, production is no longer viewed as the domain for creation of value or the most meaningful activity as it was in modernism, rather the researcher state that consumption is not an end activity but a productive process where value is created and produced (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Production is therefore continuing within consumption, since in every moment of consumption something is being produced such as self-image (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008).

Humphreys and Grayson (2008) stated that the "value-in-exchange" and "value-in-use" are connected and before a "value-in-use" can be experienced, work is always required to produce the product that will generate "value-in-use". Consumers are a part of the "value-chain" since they are engaging in activities that produce value. An example of such activities is when a consumer purchases a computer, he or she cannot use it, leaving it in the package box, instead the consumer needs to setup components, Internet connections and install personal software (Xie et al., 2008). Some of the steps in the value chain is often performed by the producer while other activities lie in the role of the consumer, however Humphreys and Grayson (2008) argue for that what is interesting and relevant is not who is doing what, but whether these different activities produce use value or exchange value. Even though consumers are a part of the value chain and consumers are producing, they will not elaborate their role as consumers and become producers. Some kind of use value will always be generated when using a product, whether it is cooking from a bunch of groceries or washing clothes, which means that the consumer is still generating "value-in-use" even when being a part of the value chain as a producer. The concept of consumption involving work is not new but was discussed even as early on as in Marx's time Marx (1867 in Humphreys and Grayson, 2008), where he stated that the consumer that satisfies

his own wants with own labour is producing “value-in-use” but in order to produce “value-in-exchange” the consumer must produce “value-in-use” for other. Summarily, it is only when the consumer takes over steps in the value chain that produce “value-in-exchange” that the role of the consumer will be affected.

Cova and Dalli (2009) have made researches on the consumer role, where they focus on the underlying sociocultural and socioeconomic dimensions. Cova and Dalli (2009) recognize that the consumer can only be regarded as a producer, as long as she/he gets monetary reward for participation in co-creation. First of all Cova and Dalli (2009) states with referring to Lazzarato, that independent if the consumer is co-creating or resistant to consumption, all individuals are working and producing value by immaterial labour, but as they want to explain when socio-cultural and socioeconomic aspects occur in the co-creation process they use the concept of primary and secondary sociality developed by Mauss (1923–24, in Cova and Dalli, 2009). The primary sociality includes all direct relationships between familiar people, but it also includes relationships within a community, enabled through technology of a company. If consumers share value, then it happens as a gift and hence this value is free. The consumers in a brand community benefit from each other information or experiences around a product. In this part of the process companies are not in the need to monetary reward the consumer, as the consumer independently share information between each other. In contrast the secondary sociality consists of all impersonal interactions within a state or a market and efficiency becomes important rather the personal relationship as in the primary sociality. When brand communities interact with companies and thus companies sell products based on the value produced by the community, value is transferred from the primary to the secondary sociality. In case companies gain financial benefit from the produced value of the consumers and do not financially reward them for their immaterial labour, exploitation evolves. Companies even double exploit consumers, when these are charged to pay an even higher price for products that are produced on their own value creation. But as other researcher from post-modern streaming argued for the relationship between “value-in-use” and “value-in-exchange”, Cova and Dalli (2009) also recognized that “value-in-use” provides a basis for the “value-in-exchange”. And hence the consumer can be regarded as producer, when the “value-in-use” will be absorbed by the company and products will be sold at the market.

3.2.4 Co-creation

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) coin the term co-creation as joint creating of value by the consumer and the company, where the consumer develops unique experiences through interacting with the company. The co-creation process has its roots in Marxist's theory. Marx already claimed that the consumer is responsible for the creation of "value-in-use", when he is consuming a product. Additionally, in postmodern economy researchers argued that consumption is at all a productive process, where the personal identity or new experiences can be produced (Baudrillard, 1988 in Firat et al., 1995). The consumer also fulfils the task of a producer, when the "value-in-use" will be absorbed by the company and sold embedded in a product or service at the market and turning into "value-in-exchange". Hence, co-creation consists of the working consumer, who adds value through personalized experiences to the product while consuming and the company sell this value at the market and benefits of it (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Humphreys and Grayson, 2008).

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) claim that these experiences comprise the value, which leads to a competitive advantage nowadays. Within the co-creation process the consumers should construct their personalized experiences, as these are dependent autonomously on their creativity and therefore represents the value, that cannot be produced, neither the company cannot control it. But the company can provide an environment that fosters an interaction between the company and the consumer. Hence the consumer is able to create different experiences with the same product. Moreover, in the sense of co-creation problems should be identified and solved simultaneously by the company and the consumers.

3.3 The management of free labour

3.3.1 Space and Place

Lefèbvre (1991) studied the space in order to understand it from a perspective of social relations rather than to perceive the space as something empty. Firstly, he states that each society has its own space. He differentiates between natural and social space, where the natural space has almost disappeared and nowadays every space is occupied by a sociality. He claims that the production of space is a social product and hence the final outcome of produced space is communication. Lefèbvre (1991) used three elements to explain the production of space. Social space evolves through spatial practice, representations of space and representational space. Spatial practice includes the daily course of life by the people who are living within this space

and their perceptions as well as their experiences concerning this space. The representation of space deals with the abstract construction of space by scientific expertise e.g. architects. The space is first conceived and then later on lived through the people who experience this space. The pre-structure of a space should give a first impression how to understand the space. The representational space represents the reflexive thinking based on symbols and meanings of the experienced space by the users of this space. In his sense space results always from the pre-structure, giving through scientific expertise and the experienced space through spatial practice. Lefèbvre (1991), who was influenced by Marxist theories, connected the dimension representation of space with capitalist methods to govern people by influencing them through the strategically pre-structuring of space. That again has an impact on the spatial practice as people behave according to the perceived space. Therefore the production of space can also be regarded as a way to demonstrate the power relations e.g. between a government and inhabitants in a city (Lefèbvre, 1991).

De Certeau (1984) was also interested in understanding how humans behave in the society and thereby create new space. In order to explain how power influences this phenomenon he used the two terms strategies and tactics. Strategies are in his sense institutions, which deliver a pre-structure of the power. However, tactics can be applied by consumers to reject or to follow the given pre-structure of the institutions. Similar to Lefèbvre (1991), de Certeau (1984) tries to clarify his thoughts with the example of cities. These are built by the government, which can be seen as the institution that uses strategies to give the city a typical form. Maps present the mentally constructed model of the city. People that are walking through this city can behave tactical and de Certeau (1984) claims that these tactics are always independent and can never be totally guided by maps, because people are able to use places for other purposes as of those intended by the government (Morris, 2004). Moreover, he distinguished between place and space. Place is defined as the physical environment, which is strategically ordered by the government through certain rules, also called the law of the proper. This law describes how places are built by the institutions according to the intention to control and surveillance the environment (Jenlink, 2007). However, space describes the social context. Therefore, space results from the usage or rejection of places in practice by people and their given meaning to it. Hence, de Certeau (1984) stated that space gets only a meaning by social practices, which are dependent on the rhetorical ability of the people, that occur within places (Morris, 2004).

The physical environment, defined as places is always dependent on the strategies made by the institutions or government. In contrast, tactics are never fully determined by places but they are influenced by the experienced time. Spatial practice is especially exercised by reflecting on

events, which occurred in the past and therefore dependent on the given meaning to it. Hence, that can result in rejecting the strategically pre-structure by the government. Thus humans create spaces through moving within places and then recreating places by letting time flies in which they give meaning to the experienced places. De Certeau (1984) argued that place is therefore tactically transformed into space, but again also space is turned into place, when people make sense of their experiences.

3.3.2 The concept of modern corporate power

Zwick et al. (2008) argues for that the value of co-creation is enabled through a new way of govern-mentality, which is based on the freedom of the consumer rather than by disciplining the consumer. They suggest that companies should govern consumers from below, as proposed by Foucault (1991 in Zwick et al., 2008) instead of trying to discipline them from top-down with rules and orders to influence their actions. The consumers should perceive a sense of freedom when voluntary unfold their creativity in co-creation projects rather than feeling solely dominated by companies. The value of consumer labour lies in their competencies and skills, as well as producing a shared common, that companies are not able to generate within their organization. Companies should therefore provide a certain ambience that builds a framework within which the consumer can be creative and share their special know-how. In order to attract and retain the consumer, the ambience should aim to support contingency, experimentation and playfulness among them. Moreover, Zwick et al. (2008) claim that nowadays co-creation is the best strategy that contributes to capital accumulation and market control in sense that the gap between consumption and production will be closed. That statement is based on the changing role of marketing as it supply free, unpaid and more or less autonomous consumer labour due to expropriation of their productive value. Furthermore, people who are resistant to a brand are invited to participate in the co-creation process, as valuable information can be gained from them. Co-creation can therefore also be used, as a tool to reduce the risk that consumer will behave in an unwanted way (Zwick et al., 2008).

3.3.3 Means of consumption and production

Ritzer (2005) coined the term new means of consumption as entities that enable people to buy commodities and hence gives companies the ability to control and exploit their consumers. Ritzer (2005) understands settings as means of consumption, which should evoke the consumer to spend more time and money within the buying environment. He compares the new means of

consumption with a “cathedral of consumption”. A cathedral is also a place where people in a community get enchanted by the Christian religion and feel a certain spirit that strengthens them in their belief. The cathedral of consumption could be regarded as the point of sale, where people finally consume. In accordance to the spirit within a cathedral, companies have also to create a certain ambience within the shop to enhance the spend time and money by the consumer and to ensure them that their needs can be realized. As in line with the existence of a community in a cathedral, it is also possible that a setting can foster the building of a community. If companies want to attract and keep more consumers over a longer time, they have to reproduce the enchantment of the setting over and over again. Only when the consumer will be within the setting and gets enchanted the company is able to control the consumer (Ritzer, 2005).

As consumption was claimed as a productive process in the postmodern view (Baudrillard, 1988 in Firat et al., 1995), the means of consumption can also be regarded in co-creation as means of production. Avidsson (2005) argued that the task of companies and especially the department of the brand management have changed in order to turn “value-in-use” to “value-in-exchange” by means of the brand. They have to influence the consumer in ways so that she/he will perceive the freedom to feel enabled to rebuild or to innovate the brand. Thus the brand management have to motivate consumers to share the same feelings and experiences regarding consumption in a special brand community and thereby capture this emerged ethical surplus or value. The company is aware of keeping the autonomy of consumers, when they want to engage the consumer in co-creation projects and to unfold their creativity. As marketing general search for ways to control the consumer, brand management is looking for less obvious ways to govern the co-creators. However, firstly brand management has the task to put the brand in the consumers’ life and to motivate the consumer to share experiences in order to create an ethical surplus or value. As previously mentioned, the ethical surplus has to be turned into “value-in-exchange” that companies can monetary benefit of it. Brand management therefore need to provide a platform with raw materials in which creativity can be autonomous unfolded. To attract the customer to participate in co-creation within this environment, brand management has to choose tools and create the design of the space according to the possibility that it enables the customer to produce experience, shared emotion and a sense of community based on the brand. The brand therefore becomes a means of production and hence a premise for a community to create a common, as defined by Hardt and Negri (2004 in Arvidsson, 2005). When companies subsume consumers, their immaterial labour leads to a surplus value, but mostly consumers do not get any reward for it, when companies sell these products at the

market. This is also the moment when the surplus value, created by the consumers turns in monetary value of the brand (Arvidsson, 2005).

3.4 Summary

In this theoretical chapter two main parts have been presented “Consumer as a labourer” and “The management of free labour”. In the first section the roles of production and consumption were discussed by presenting theories on the distinctions between a consumer and a producer and how these distinctions have come to be less clear due to immaterial labour and activities such as co-creation. We began with introducing the concept of immaterial labour (Arvidsson, 2005) and how consumers by using their “general intellect” (Virno, 2004 in Zwick et al. 2008) can contribute to value creation. Then Marx’s theory on “value-in-use” and “value-in-exchange” were outlined to show the differences between a consumer and a producer, stating that a consumer can be a producer but never a consumer and a producer at the same time (Marx, 1867 in Humphreys and Grayson, 2008). Then we continued by presenting a contrasting view of the roles of production from a postmodern perspective, stating that consumption is a productive process, where the consumer produce and reproduce self-identity (Baudrillard in Firat et al., 1995). The more companies are engaging consumers in co-creative processes the less clear become the distinctions between a consumer and a producer (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008). Furthermore, different approaches when the consumer produces “value-in-exchange” and hence becomes a producer were presented. Cova and Dalli (2009) argued that the kind of value is dependent on the relationship among the consumer and with the company, while Humphreys and Grayson (2008) says that the consumer only becomes a producer when he/she takes part in the value chain and therefore produces “value-in-exchange”, equally bringing value to a product so that it can be sold on the market.

The second section of the theoretical dimension dealt with the management of free labour. In summary theories regarding the distribution of power in virtual co-creation were presented from the angle of space creation. Lefèbvre (1991) provides an understanding of the different components, which contributes to the production of space and hence claimed that the government, who is responsible for the pre-structure of space has therefore also the control over the consumer, as they can influence their behaviour. Then the framework of de Certeau (1984) were presented which concentrating more on the abilities of the consumers to contribute to space. He stated that the consumer could through tactical rejection still weaken the power of the government. Furthermore, theories on govern-mentality were presented and that companies

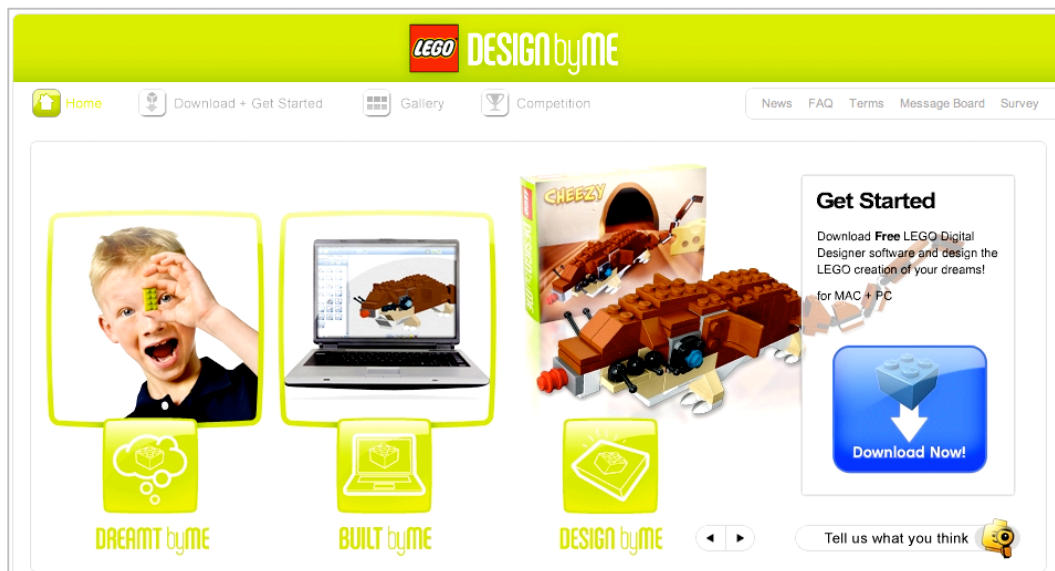
should have a below-based management (Foucault, 1991 in Zwick et al., 2008) and that companies should provide a certain ambience with a balance between freedom and control (Zwick et al, 2008). Finally, the task of the company within co-creation has been researched through the means of consumption and production, stating that companies must influence the consumer in ways so that he/she perceives the freedom to feel enabled to rebuild or to innovate the brand (Arvidsson, 2005).

4. LEGO “DESIGNbyME”

In the following chapter the empirical results will be presented, which we gained through observing the LEGO “DESIGNbyME” environment and the site’s different features, tools and content.

4.1 “DESIGNbyME”

The general design of the “DESIGNbyME” site is structured by an overall navigation board, which consists of four areas; Home, Download+Get Started, Gallery and Competition. In a separated box LEGO refers to general information around the “DESIGNbyME” site featuring News, FAQ, Terms, Message Board and Survey. The page is separated into four parts; one larger and three smaller boxes are framed in grey. A consistent colour concept of using green can be found in the sections Home, Gallery and Competition. At these pages the white headline “DESIGNbyME” and the according LEGO logo, which both are highlighted by a green box, stays the same. The symbol and the headline of the current area in the main navigation are also accentuated in green. There is a download symbol for the LEGO Digital Designer software, LDD software, is showing in all pages, consisting of a LEGO brick and a white arrow has the colour blue. The site is overall very colourful with pictures that show either creations or of LEGO consumers. Pictures and colours are dominating and if there is text, that is mostly consisting of clear instructions of how to use the site.



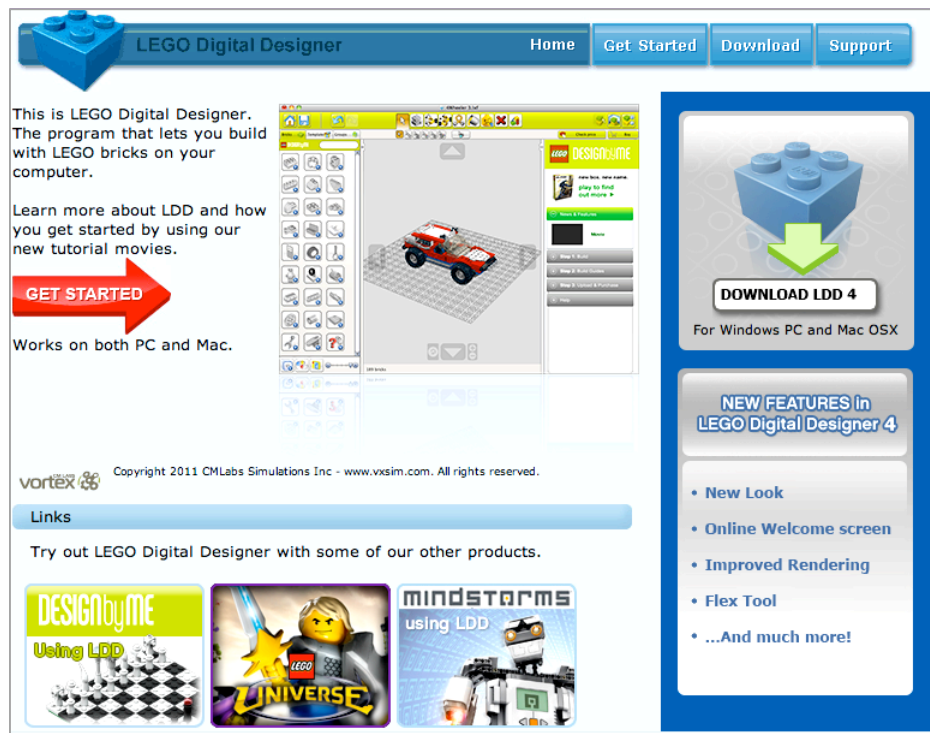
Screenshot 1: Welcome page

4.1.1 Welcome page

The welcome page of the “DESIGNbyME” site is divided into four boxes. The largest box is divided into three stages: “Dreamt by Me”, “Built by Me ” and “Design by Me”, where pictures are showing of the development from having an idea, to designing a model with a computer and finally to receive a model in a LEGO package. Each stage has its own headline and a picture of a person and thereby all three pictures change according to the age-level of the LEGO consumer that is showing. There is also a link integrated where the user can download the LDD software. Moreover, a smaller link refers to a survey, where users can express their opinions about “DESIGNbyME”. In three other smaller boxes LEGO reminds the consumer of Mother’s Day and the game Hero Recon. The pictures in the main section are framed in light green and the according symbols are as well in green small boxes.

4.1.2 LEGO Digital Designer

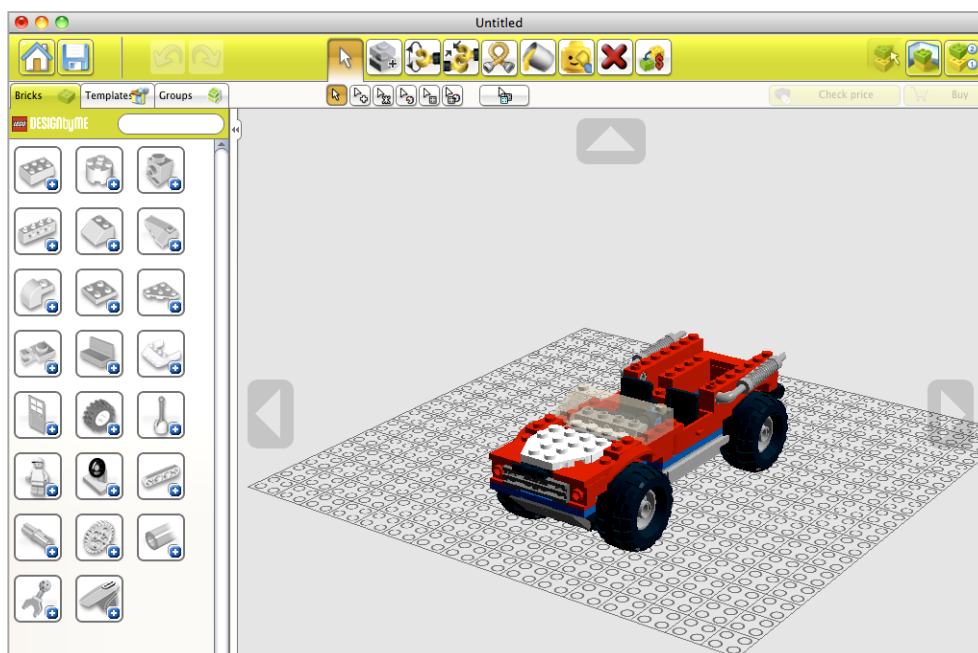
The “LEGO Digital Designer” part also has a navigation board, where the user can switch between four sections: Home, Get Started, Download and Support. At the home section LEGO presents a picture of how the software looks and advises the consumer to watch the tutorial movies in order to understand how to use the software.



Screenshot 2: LEGO Digital Designer

Moreover, LEGO makes the user aware of the fact that the software can be run on both PCs and Macs at several points. LEGO also stimulates the user to use the software in combination with other LEGO products in presenting animating pictures of these products. In a separated box the improvements of the newest version are pointed out and in a special download area all the system requirements are presented. Users have the ability to choose between two operating systems: Windows and Mac OSX. Furthermore, LEGO states that the software is for free but forbidden to use for any commercial usage. This means that if a consumer uses the tool not in an appropriate way, LEGO can restrain the consumer to create and share models. In the support section the most commonly asked question are listed and LEGO also refers to the Customer Service site. The LDD software area is dominated by the colour blue and has red arrows, which link to a page with 11 short instructions videos of how to use the LDD software.

When using the LDD software, the user can choose between different bricks and look at the creation from all directions. There are also templates on which the consumer can further build on. All creations can be saved and any time changed.

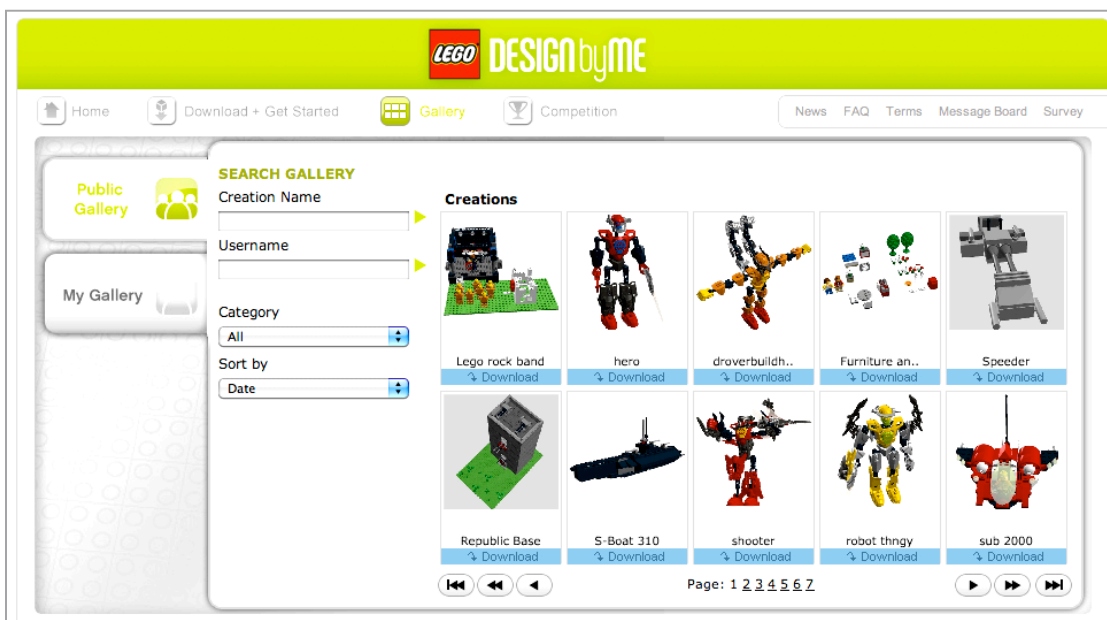


Screenshot 3: LDD software

4.1.3 Gallery

The “DESIGNbyME” gallery consists of a public and a personal gallery, where both galleries have search functions. The user can either enter a creation and a user name or he can choose between nine categories such as animals or vehicles and sort creations according to date or votes. On each page 10 creations are presented. The consumer has the possibility to download the pictures and to further work on them using the LDD software. This function is just available in the “DESIGNbyME” gallery. In all other LEGO galleries the user can only look at the creations. When clicking on a creation, the user receives information about the username, country, age, creationname, total votes and a description regarding the creation. There is also a button to vote for the creation and to show a larger picture of it. Moreover, LEGO advises users, who download a creation of another user and then adapt it, to give credit in the description of the adapted version for the original creation.

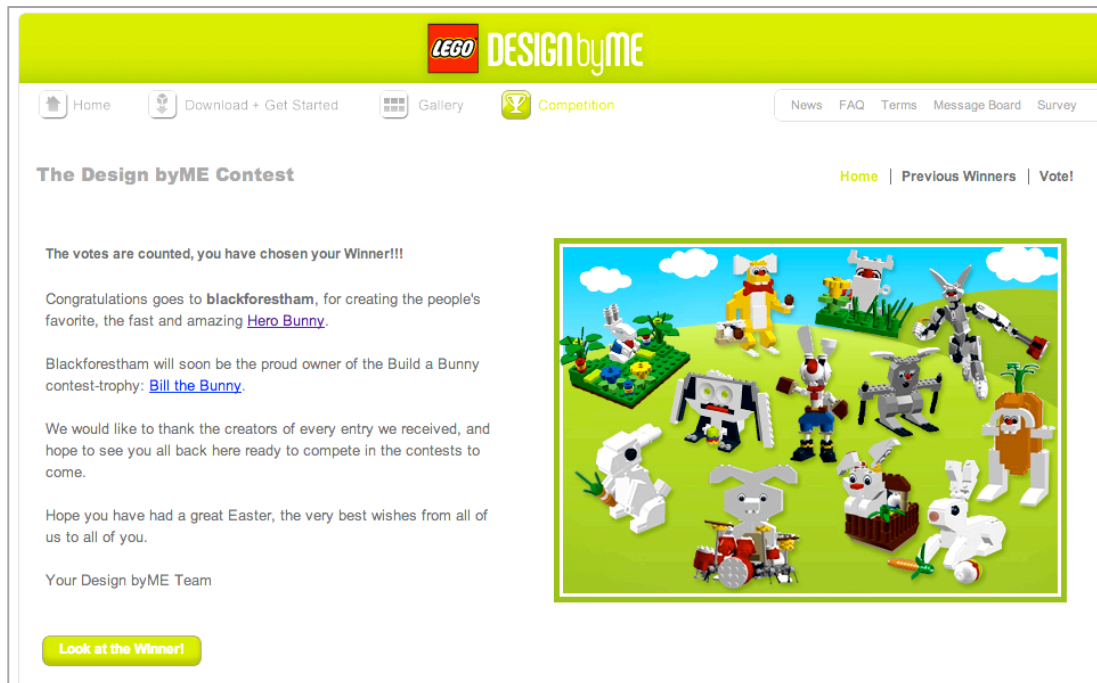
LEGO defines guidelines under which creations can be uploaded in the “DESIGNbyME” gallery. A moderation team checks all creations within 48 hours and if a creation is not made with the software, is a copy of an existing creation in the gallery, consists of copyright material or not appropriate to share between children, the LEGO moderators forbid the creation to be shown in the gallery. Users cannot upload pictures of creations, which contain other bricks than those available in the design software. The uploaded pictures will remain in the gallery for 12 months. When a creation is submitted to the gallery, the user automatically agrees to give all the rights to the LEGO Group, so that LEGO can use all material independently of the reason.



Screenshot 4: DESIGNbyME Gallery

4.1.4 Competition

In the competition area LEGO presents a special “DESIGNbyME” contest and explains the conditions as well as refers to current prizes and presents previous winners of the competition in separated boxes. The competitions have different themes regarding areas of what should be designed. The user can choose to compete in a competition or/and vote for the best creations. An example of a competition is “Build a Bunny contest”, where consumers competed by building their own models of LEGO bunnies. The winner receives a contest trophy.



Screenshot 5: DESIGNbyME Contest

4.1.5 Message board

The message board is an online community and consists of several topics regarding different products and services. Within each topic users have the opportunity to open a new conversation concerning a sub-topic. The community includes not only consumers but also moderators, who are working as speaking tubes for LEGO and transfer messages from LEGO to the consumers as well as hand on consumer comments to LEGO. Before a user can post something on the message board, the moderators will review each comment within 72 hours in order to ensure that the comments are in accordance with LEGO’s guidelines for the message board. Moreover, the users get different status dependent on the amount of posts but the needed amount for a higher status is kept secret. The ranks can be reach from the lower one Apprentice, Journeyman,

Initiate, Junior Builder till the more higher ranks as Master Builder, Craftsman, Artisan, Inventor, Old Timer and Maniac. Users can express their needs over words, but there is also a possibility to use symbols to clarify feelings regarding a topic. During our observations, it was noticed that users of “DESIGNbyME” have started to use the message board as a way to communicate with each other, as moderators forbid the user to include messages within the descriptions of their creations in the gallery.

The screenshot shows the LEGO Message Board interface. At the top, there are navigation links for help, rules, and my posts. Below this is the site title 'LEGO MESSAGE BOARD' with a smiley face icon and a welcome message. A registration notice follows, stating that registration is optional. A search bar is located above the forum listing table.

Forums	Last Post	Threads	Posts
LEGO Universe LEGO UNIVERSE (3 Viewing) Enter the world of imagination in the brand new <i>LEGO massively multiplayer online game</i> . The big launch is in October 2010. Subforum(s) Marketplace , Team Up! , Feedback & Suggestions , Roleplay , Archive	Re: New! Valient weapo... by Sam8715 Today, 5 42 AM	2,391	68,535
LEGO.com MESSAGE BOARDS Got a suggestion about these boards? Post 'em here! Subforum(s) MESSAGE BOARD EVENT AND PARTY FORUM MY LEGO NETWORK This section is for the <i>My LEGO Network</i> the pioneers of a brand new LEGO social networking, customizing, creativity enhancing website! Subforum(s) MLN Music and Bands , MLN IDEAS , MLN TRADES , MLN HELP LEGO NEWS Create your own LEGO newspaper or become a reporter and scoop your very own LEGO news stories for everyone to enjoy! ALIEN CONQUEST Alien Invaders are on the quest to conquer the Earth. Join the Alien Defense Unit forces to prevent the <i>Alien Conquest</i> ! CARS™ Ready for adventures with Lightning McQueen and Mater? Talk about it here at the <i>LEGO® Cars™</i> Message Board. MASTER BUILDER ACADEMY The <i>LEGO Master Builder Academy</i> is a fun and exciting way for you to learn new skills that will make you a better builder – join the conversation and share your ideas.	Re: INVENTOR LIST-part2 by campie1212 Today, 12 26 PM	114	115,519
	Re: EVER BEEN BLOCKED? by eagleeyedan2 Today, 12 14 PM	125	20,531
	Re: LEGO NEWS STATION ... by Dwarfminfan580 Today, 10 42 AM	78	40,231
	Re: ALIEN CONQUERERS HQ by personinfo Today, 8 53 AM	56	1,465
	Re: IF YOU COULD DRIVE... by eagleeyedan2 Today, 2 36 AM	75	2,704
	Re: LEGO Master Build... by hisnin4ever Today, 6 53 AM	10	89

Screenshot 6: LEGO Message Board

5. Analysis

In this chapter we will analyze our empirical results and connect the empirical findings to the theoretical dimension. The chapter begins with discussing the role of the LEGO consumer where a model on the LEGO creative process is presented. The chapter continues with an analysis of LEGO's management of creative and free labour. Comments downloaded from the message board are presented here and there to describe and strengthen our analysis. The chapter ends with a summarizing analysis discussion.

5.1 The social space of “DESIGNbyME”

The “DESIGNbyME” site shows clear processes of value creation within co-creation, which can be explained through the production of space by Lefèbvre (1991) and space and place theory of de Certeau (1984). Lefèbvre (1991) stated that the representation of space and spatial practice would lead to social space. Applying the concept on co-creation, the creative LEGO consumer and the firm-managed virtual environment contribute in interaction to social space and hence to personalized experiences in which the value is embedded.

Lefèbvre (1991) and de Certeau (1984) used the example of cities and moving inhabitants to explain how social space evolves through the representation of space and spatial practice. The “DESIGNbyME” site can be compared with a city, which is structured and designed by LEGO instead of the government. The site is therefore the representation of space and compasses the whole virtual environment consisting of the LDD software, the gallery as a sharing tool and the message board, where users can express their opinion and communicate with each other. The company uses different “strategies” such as providing a certain ambience, executing censorship, letting consumer control and reward themselves. These strategies give the site a typical form and animate different consumer groups to participate in co-creation as well as help ensuring the autonomy and enjoyment of the consumer. The used maps in the example of cities are in the LEGO case guiding features such as the gallery, the LDD software, the message board and competitions. The inhabitants moving around in this city are the LEGO consumers that are engaging in co-creating processes at the site and behave according to Lefèbvre (1991) dependent on the given pre-structure of LEGO.

Lefèbvre (1991) was convinced that an institution like LEGO has the complete power when producing space, as they are able to influence the creativity of the LEGO consumer through shaping the pre-structure of the virtual environment “DESIGNbyME”. In contrast, de Certeau (1984) argued that the consumer could weaken this power by employing tactics as a method to react against the given settings and the according guidelines. In sense of LEGO it means that the LEGO consumer can independently decide to either reject or to participate in co-creation activities. Moreover, the LEGO consumer is even able to find new ways to unfold his creativity within the given virtual environment e.g. creating role-play games, which have not been firstly intended by LEGO but are accepted as they go in line with the guidelines.

The functionality of co-creation can also be explained from a labour-perspective. The virtual consumption of LEGO bricks can be regarded as a productive process, where the LEGO consumer becomes a producer and LEGO provides the means of production. The consumer creates, by the means of the brand LEGO, a self-identity but also, through communication with other users, personalized experiences with the brand LEGO.

Co-creation aims to stimulate consumers to create unique experiences in interaction with the company (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). In relation to the term creative consumer we firstly analysed the activity and motivation of the LEGO consumer. In order to understand, which part of the creative input is especially valuable for LEGO, we further observed the underlying conditions of the consumers ability to unfold his creativity on the “DESIGNbyME” site and which role the consumer thereby have. Based on these findings we were able to point out the LEGO strategies to manage the free and creative labour of the consumer as a way to generate value.

5.2 Consumers free and creative labour

5.2.1 The creative LEGO consumer

The LEGO consumer can be regarded as a creative consumer, which is defined by Berthon et al. (2007) as a consumer for whom the enjoyment of the creation process is crucial and where the experimentation during the production should be a playfulness experience. The creative consumer is also prominently interested to fulfil his personal interests rather than getting monetary rewarded. We could find both characteristics when analysing the activity and the motivation of the co-creating LEGO consumer. The enjoyment of the activity could be

recognized when we looked at the given instructions and how the consumers are free to feel autonomous in unfolding their creativity (Dahl and Page Moreau, 2007).

5.2.1.1 Activity

After observing the environment of the “DESIGNbyME” site with pictures of different age groups and tools for sharing, it becomes apparent that the thought behind the site is that it should be a platform where any type of consumer can create and share models in a playful ambience with an outcome that LEGO potentially can use for production. We also believe that the site should work as a platform where consumers can connect with the LEGO brand. The LDD software offers an opportunity for consumers to design and buy customized products. However, after observing comments and topics in the message board it appears as though the users are prominently interested in creating models to share them with other users, rather than actually buying and receiving their creations in reality, where they just could enjoy the model by themselves. According topics show that users perceive that the price of the customized products are too high and that sometimes a customized creation does not satisfy the consumer in reality. The main perceived advantage for using the LDD software instead of real bricks are the unlimited supply of bricks and that they can realize all imagined models as expressed by the following comments of two “DESIGNbyME” users.

Comments on reasons to use “DESIGNbyME”

Posted By LEGO_Fan_3 on 08 November 2010:

“The main reason why I use Digital Designer or “DESIGNbyME” is because it’s a place where I have an unlimited supply of bricks. I prefer building in real life with normal bricks because I can fit things together more easy and imagine what I’m building. Even with my load of bricks I still don’t have the right amount of colour or shape.”

Posted By Grandsire on 28 November 2010:

“...it’s way too expensive! I just love the idea of making whatever I want. Most of my models come in at over £100, which is out of my price range.”

This advantage of “DESIGNbyME” over real owned bricks enables LEGO to attract consumers to participate in the co-creation activity (Pralhad and Ramaswamy, 2004). LEGO gives consumers access to an important resource, regarding the unlimited amount of bricks, and transfers the impression that the user has all abilities to realize their models. The LEGO

consumers are however limited in their freedom to unfold their creativity cause actually they can only use bricks, that are currently produced by LEGO and have therefore to act according the rules of the setting. By this example LEGO's technique of managing the space in order to ensure a usable outcome becomes apparent through structuring as well as regulating the environment and thereby influencing the spatial practice (Lefèbvre, 1991) of the consumer. The consumer still feels autonomous, as LEGO does not define a topic, which the user has to realize with the LDD software and therefore enjoys the creation process (Dahl and Page Moreau, 2007).

The enjoyment of the activity can also be expressed over the spent time of the consumer with "DESIGNbyME". Several messages of users state that the users need one till four days to build a brick model. Moreover, consumers motivate each other to build the largest digital model. Several users, mostly teenagers, comment that their parents forbid them to use the LDD software, as they cannot fulfil their school workload. Furthermore, users mentioned that they have to reject to participate in role-play games, as they cannot continuously follow the game, cause the map will hand on from one member to the other and will always be further build on. This consumer behaviour shows almost an addictive character and express that LEGO is able through the co-creating instrument "DESIGNbyME" to strengthen the relationship between the consumer and the brand LEGO.

Comments about spent time on "DESIGNbyME"

Posted by Torchwood13 on 13 June 2009:

"Correction, my biggest model is 4434 pieces. It is a battleship that took me four days to make."

Posted by Zas90 on 10 March 2011:

*"Well, I said I'd retire if my mom took away my internet but she won't if I get my grade up to a B in Math by Monday and I most likely can do that so I probably won't be retiring!*Panting*"*

Through the direct communication within the message board, users have developed by themselves two new activities, which both demonstrate the quest for talking about the realized creations and spending time with like-minded people and not just presenting creations in the gallery and waiting for votes of other users as aimed by LEGO to stimulate the creativity of its consumers. The users therefore developed role-play games and self-established contests called challenges, which are based on the usage of the LDD software and the gallery.

For the role-play games, one inventor set up a special topic e.g. of LEGO stories around “conquering the solar land”. Then the inventor as the leader of the topic defines rules and decides based on judging current creations of the possible participators who is skilled enough to join the game. When a certain amount of players is found, the leader loads up a map on the gallery and then in a defined order each player has time to construct his piece of land, but can also change creations of other players on the map in order to improve it. Afterwards the next player in order downloads the new map in the gallery and changes it. If all land is build on, the player can fight against each other on the map and virtually buy land of others. They have to give the owner of the land either a vote on creations in his gallery or give him credits for a message in the message board.

Comment on topic for role-play game

Posted by jock2 on 2 February 2011:

“Imagine this:your shipwrecked on an odd island(skull island)and you meet the citizens of the island,the “skullraiders,”you have a coice to be:friend or foe.foe:you battle the skullraiders and their allies and gain your own small cit y from the start but beware your city might get raided by the skullraiders them selves.friend:you help the skullraiders battle foes and move-up the ranks until your skull general.when your skull general,you can get your own small army to command and that’s the start of your own city.after that,your on your own. you alsow get loot (that’s the money in the game.)you use loot to buy stuff like:ships,weapons,cars and buildings. you start out with 10 loot.”

Another new activity initiated solely by the users is contests. One user set up a topic in the message board for a contest and then people can voluntary join with posting the names of the uploaded creations in the gallery, through which the leader or defined people are able to judge them. The winner will get a certain amount of votes or a picture of a trophy for his gallery.

Comments to the instructions of a “DESIGNbyME” challenge

Posted by JoeVB2 between 23 February and 10 March 2010:

“First Challenge: Build a Car, Challenge ends on the 29th

So far ive come up with one position: Judge

Requirments:

At Least Lol 4 in MLN

At least 100 posts on MB”

(Comment will continue on the next page)

Prizes:

*Grand Prize (1) - 40 Clicks
 First Prize (1) - 25 Clicks
 Second Prize (2) - 10 Clicks
 Third Prize (2) - 4 Clicks"*

In both cases LEGO only gets visible in the communication, when problems occur with the LDD software and as a certifier for every post in the message board and uploaded model in the gallery. That gives the users the impression that they are responsible for their contests as well as for their role-play games and are not other-directed by LEGO. However, LEGO can always stop the activity when they do not confirm a comment, which demonstrates the underlying power of LEGO. Lefèbvre (1991) was already convinced of this underlying power when it comes to the production of social space through institutions and humans.

By inventing these two new activities it becomes apparent that the LEGO consumers were not satisfied to enjoy solely creating new models, rather they searched for new ways to develop or to improve their building techniques in collaboration with other users. It can be recognized that both activities include playful-elements. In the role-play games, as well in the contests different roles e.g. leader or judge, are divided between the participants. And as well as a game normally has, also rules have been established. Including the virtually creation of new bricks models in a collaborating game leads to a new LEGO brand experience. The following discussion about the role-play games with the LDD software proves that the users enjoy the self-invented activity and even convince other users to join the game. These experienced users canvass new participants and doing therefore the job of LEGO to recruit and tie new customers, which in turn will also contribute to the production of space and finally to value.

Conversation about virtually role-play games on DESIGNbyME

Posted by lovetails on 2 April 2011:

„Well, I’m confused. I’ve been seeing an incredible increase in RPG forums lately. I would like to know, what is this RPG, what is it about, and why there are so many. Thanks!“

Posted by gho8233 on 3 April 2011:

„In the DbM forum, they make it have to do something with DbM by making maps in LDD, making other stuff, etc. But it also has something to do with roleplay. Join one of theones I’m in and I can teach you!“

(Conversation will continue on the next page)

Posted by captainBrickmaster on 4 April 2011:

“Trust me, they are a lot of fun! I just started the DbM RPGs a few days ago, so i am brand new to them also. but i do have roleplay experience from other fourms, so that helps a bit. if you want, you could join the Conquer The Solar System RPG, and we could be allies!”

5.2.1.2 Motivation

We also were able to analyse the underlying conditions, which motivate the LEGO consumers to participate in these new brand experiences when observing their behaviour in the message board. Four benefits thereby could be recognized, which the researchers Nambisan and Baron (2009) already have discovered when studying the motivation to participate in customer service of two software companies. These four benefits, which drive the consumer to unfold his creativity on “DESIGNbyME” are social integrative, learning, personal integrative and hedonic. As the whole message board is a community, people set up topics to interact with other people in order to get something out of this communication, but for a successful interaction social ties must be developed over the time. The role-play games, as well as the contests connect a certain amount of people around the same topic for a while. The users of “DESIGNbyME” are social integrative, as they get to know each other and if someone is not anymore active in the game, the other will recognize the absence of him. Participating in a role-play game is also motivated by the fact that consumers want to learn from skilled players. The user *lovetails* expressed in the conversation about role-play games his quest to get information about functionality of these role-play games based on “DESIGNbyME” and to learn how to participate in such an activity. Other users thereby offered him to teach him and even convinced him about the enjoyment of this kind of activities. The personal integrity is achieved in the role-play games when it comes to trading with voting for land on the map. In exchange of land of someone, this person will get a certain amount of voting in his gallery or a post in the message board. Hence a person can get a higher rank, depending on the amount of posts or he is perceived as a skilled builder, when other members judge his creations with an already high amount of votes. That this kind of trading is involved in the game demonstrates the quest for reputation.

Conversation about judging each other creations

Posted by Zas90 on 10 March 2011:

“Gho, sorry but that doesn’t exactly make the cut. Why not try a land vehicle or something? Zerothehero0, you can join, your creations look good. Trashbarrel2020, the Humvee looks great. Can you build air vehicles though? Either way, you’re in. JJS495, I took a look at your creations and the air vehicles are great... However, the land vehicles are not so much so, especially the mechs. And could somebody else PLEASE join and be a monster?”

Posted by JJS495 on 10 March 2011:

*“Most of those are fairly old. I haven’t made something to upload to the gallery for around a year I think. I’ll be uploading a new land vehicle pretty soon. *Commences building.* I’ll let you know when it’s approved. Yeah, the Mechs aren’t all that great. I think for a little while I had a slight obsession with Mechs. If you’d like, I can make a monster. I don’t care that much. (And it might be a good challenge for me to try to make one.)”*

Furthermore consumers are also driven by hedonic motives in the role-play game as they enjoy to use the LDD software and to play with it. All in all it can be concluded that the users perceive the “DESIGNbyME” as a tool to unfold their creativity autonomous and thereby enjoy the experimentation with the LEGO bricks.

5.2.2 The LEGO creativity process



We have developed a model that explains the LEGO creativity process and describes the main steps a consumer is going through when he unfolds his creativity in the virtual environment of LEGO. This process can be compared with the production of space. Firstly, the consumer has to feel stimulated by the ambience of the site in order to be willing to engage in the creative activity. LEGO therefore needs to provide a certain ambience or according to Lefèbvre (1991) to create a pre-structure of the space. In the second step the consumer has to use his intellect to understand the given tools and even to use them in a more efficient way. An outcome of the second step, hence the result of unfolding the creativity, is the personalized experience, that

includes the added value around the brand LEGO, which can be aroused from just the interaction between the user and LEGO or in interactivity among the users in the virtual LEGO community.

5.2.2.1 Enchantment of the “DESIGNbyME” site

LEGO, who is responsible to give the virtual environment a pre-structure, creates an ambience, which should stimulate LEGO consumers to engage in co-creation activities and therefore to unfold their creativity. The created ambience of the “DESIGNbyME” site is in accordance with the conditions playfulness, contingency and experimentation suggested by Zwick et al. (2008) in order to attract consumers, but still be in control of the whole co-creation process. The playfulness is an overall and major characteristic of the site and is communicated through the colours and pictures of the site. An example is the different pictures that are showing in the home page of different LEGO consumers, from children to young adults. We see this as a way for LEGO to encourage and inspire several different consumer types, where they cover a broad leap of ages. We understand this structure of picturing different LEGO consumers as a message saying that everyone is invited to join in and engage in “DESIGNbyME”, which means that everyone is asked to share their experiences and unfold their creativity. In the same time LEGO assures to receive work from several different consumer groups.

Moreover, LEGO tries to get the attention of the consumer to engage in the activity and rather care about the underlying terms, as they are presented in the background of the page. Contingency takes the form of the different features of the site, both through designing with the LDD software and through entering competitions and uploading in the gallery. This arouses an opportunity and the possibility to have your co-created work recognized by others. Experimentation is also a clear characteristic of the ambience, where the designing process from using the LDD software is broad and the consumer has several options and “a lot” of different bricks to use at their proposal. They can both use existing models and change those or build entirely new models.

5.2.2.2 Utilization of the given tools

After the LEGO consumer feels attracted by the welcome page of “DESIGNbyME”, he has to use the provided LDD software and the gallery to invent new creations and later on share them with others as well as to be able to adapt on existing models. There are no other possibilities for the consumer to LEGO models and share them through other Internet platforms. In labour

terms, the LDD software, the gallery and the message board can be regarded as means of consumption and at the same time as means of production, cause they fulfil the task to raise consumption but also to enable a production of new experiences with the brand. It can therefore be stated that the consumption of LEGO bricks is a productive process (Baudrillard in Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Marx stated that companies are able to exploit workers cause they possess the means of production (Marx in Ritzer, 2005). Lefèbvre (1991) saw this also proved in his theory about the production of space, where institutions have the power cause they give the space a pre-structure. Hence, LEGO has the power over the user of “DESIGNbyME”. If the user wants to unfold his creativity and also wants to collaborate with others in order to be part in the role-play games or to adapt a certain creation, she/he is depending on the tools, as the pictures can just be downloaded from the “DESIGNbyME” gallery.

We also believe that LEGO aspires, next to an increased consume of LEGO bricks, that the consumer will use these tools in an efficient way to produce value. An example is the available instructions videos that could be a way to reduce the risk that the consumer will misuse the software and the creativeness is abandon. The message board however, shows that the consumers most of the time help each other without addressing LEGO. One example of this is when some users found out that there are shortcuts, while using the software and shared them in the message board, so that the usage got more efficient. Furthermore, the consumer perceive that less attention is paid for the gallery, hence they opened a thread in which they promote each of their creations and refer with the creationname to the gallery, that other consumers in the thread are able to look and judge at. This consumer behaviour demonstrates the existence of Marx term “general intellect” (Virno, 2004 in Zwick et al., 2008). The ability to work with the computer is necessary and the users of “DESIGNbyME” prove with interacting in the message board that they are able to communicate with each other and to use their intellect in order to improve their playfulness with the software and gallery. The consumers’ efficient management of the LDD software and gallery can be regarded as working performance, which is dependent on their communication skills (Lazzarato, 1997 in Arvidsson, 2005). Therefore the sharing of knowledge within the LEGO community about “DESIGNbyME” produces immaterial labour and hence the experience with the LEGO brand will be improved or even new unique experiences e.g. role play games and contests evolve through the communication between LEGO users.

5.2.2.3 Creation of personalized experiences

Firstly, consumers contribute solely to personalized experiences through adding cultural and affective elements to the brand LEGO. By solving problems or inventing ideas e.g. role play games based on the LDD software, the LEGO consumer thinks analytical and hence adds cultural value to the product or service. Moreover, affective value will be generated when LEGO consumers communicate with each other and changing the feelings regarding “DESIGNbyME” from disappointment e.g. caused by software-failure to excitement for further buildings during the conversation (Hardt and Negri, 2004 in Arvidsson, 2005).

Secondly, the consumers, who are communicating in the message board, create according to Hardt and Negri (2004 in Arvidsson, 2005) a common sense, which consists of the value that companies are not able to create by themselves. An example of common sense is that when the users of “DESIGNbyME” were not satisfied with the voting system in the gallery, hence as LEGO lacks in the ability to stimulate the consumers to vote, they created own contests and promotion for their creation in order to get attention, which has evolved through the community spirit. Furthermore, the gallery should be an inspiration for other consumers but instead the consumers start threads in the message board, where they ask members for ideas to get inspired for further buildings. It can therefore be recognized that the users of the LDD software share their personal experience with other consumers, but also indirectly with LEGO when suggesting topics with detailed descriptions to other members in the community.

Comment on an idea for specific themes to create

Posted by giantcrab8888 on 5 November 2010

“My theme is Mutant Wars. It’s about humans fighting mutants. Here is the storyline:

Hello everyone! I am Dr. Zachary Jones, one of the world’s greatest Mutologists!

What’s that you say? A Mutologist is someone who studies radioactivity! Something has caught my eye though. Astronomers have recently found a strange meteor. Why am I interested? Because they have found out it has huge amounts of radioactivity! I wish to study this.”

Additionally, most of the users refer to the uploading of pictures in the gallery, where other user can get a visual impression of the themes. Based on similar suggestions by consumers, LEGO can absorb the value and get an impression about the most favourite topics as an inspiration for further product development. All in all the consumer of LEGO contribute solely or as part of the community to value while using the LDD software and the gallery, as she/he

consumes the LEGO bricks and is at the same time producing new experiences, which are shared with other members.

Moreover, the virtual consumption of LEGO bricks and sharing them with others fans as an activity to produce value can be explained from a post-modern view, where consumers produce a self-identity during consumption (Baudrillard in Firat et al., 1995). Every consumer gets evaluated on the amount of votes that she/he obtained for the likelihood of his creations and quotes, given by other users, when they comment on his message. With increasing amounts of quotes the consumer can get a higher status in the message board. In some activities the consumer just want to have people involved that have a certain level of rank e.g. “old timers”.

Comment on the LEGO ranking system

Posted by Jock2 on 21 March 2011:

“hello to all those ldd old timers out there!this club is for the very experienced builders.and to all those old timers great to meet you.i noticed that there wasn't a topic like this so i made one.

P.S. for all the old timers i will have a special reward in my gallery for ONLY the members of this club to download and putt in their gallery and show off to everyone.”

This demonstrates that the consuming of the virtual bricks produces reputation as a skilled builder, even the amount of posts have an influence on the rank and not only the actual creation. The names e.g. Master Builder gives the impression of a skilled builder and therefore consumption is a productive process.

Finally, it can be stated that the LEGO consumer is working cause he contributes to value creation in the community. Moreover, it was proved that the LEGO consumers perform work, which LEGO was not able to perform by themselves. LEGO did not invent the role-play games either could the gallery attract consumers to vote for other creations or get them inspired enough by models. However, the users set up their own topics at the message board, in which they were able to receive attention for their creations in the gallery and voting through own organized contests as well as getting inspired by personal stories around a creation. It can therefore be stated that the consumer contributes an important part to the business process on which LEGO cannot relinquish.

5.3 LEGO's strategies to manage free and creative labour

The valuable part of the LEGO consumer's immaterial labour lies in the shared common evolved from the communication between LEGO like-minded people in the message board. They exchange their already made experience with "DESIGNbyME" for free as they build ties in the community and hence inspire each other to new activities and thereby create personalized experiences (Cova and Dalli, 2009). At this stage the users of "DESIGNbyME" have created "value-in-use" cause they pursued personal interests (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008) when creating and sharing their experiences, which we have already analysed, when we looked at the motivation of the consumer to engage in "DESIGNbyME". LEGO can make financial use of this value, when they absorb it from the LEGO consumer at the time the user submit their creations and post their comments and later on sell it embedded in a new product or service at the market. At that point the "value-in-use" will turn into "value-in-exchange", as the actual inventor of the model does not have a relationship to who LEGO is going to distribute the product or service (Cova and Dalli, 2009) and the model will be exchanged for financial profit on the market. However, it is still the "value-in-use", which takes the form of uploaded creations in the gallery or ideas in the message board, that builds the basis for the "value-in-exchange", cause without the produced value of the consumer, LEGO would not be able to produce this shared common and finally make money on the market. The consumer becomes a producer when vending of the new product or service at the market and should in that sense be financially rewarded. However, we found that a financial reward would not drive the production of value in the community.

When observing the structure of the "DESIGNbyME" site, referring to space and place and what strategies LEGO uses to guide the consumer, it becomes apparent that LEGO is governing their consumers from below, as they do not define an explicit target, which they want to obtain. The focus is on the consumer's creativity and to guide this in a desired direction, which LEGO successfully does. LEGO has managed to discretely influence the consumers in a way so that they engage in a creative process by themselves, but the overall process is still govern by LEGO but not to the extent that the consumers feel limited. In the following part we are going to present the main strategies, which enabled LEGO to capture the free and creative labour of the consumer. Moreover, it was proved that the LEGO consumer becomes a producer, but LEGO also managed to get the immaterial labour of the consumer for free without giving her/him the feeling of exploitation.

5.3.1 Online ambience

Lefèbvre (1991) stated that people behave dependent to the given pre-structure provided by the organization. LEGO can influence the users on “DESIGNbyME” by creating a certain virtual environment or ambience that fosters the interaction and finally enhances the experience of the brand (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). After observing the “DESIGNbyME” site we recognized the strategically usage of the structure, content and colour to attract the consumer and to stimulate hers or his creativity. On the welcome page it becomes apparent that LEGO emphasizes on attracting different consumers through the pictures of LEGO consumers and that the site is a playful place. However, LEGO keeps the terms in the background, as they could prevent consumers from participating. Furthermore, LEGO offer within the LDD software, an unlimited supply of bricks, but still they are only providing bricks that they are producing. Users cannot integrate bricks in their models that they have designed by themselves. This is also an example of how the creativity of the consumer is limited, but LEGO wants to ensure that produced ideas of the consumer can be realized by the mass production of LEGO. If the consumer wants to become creative he has to adapt to the pre-determined conditions. All in all the ambience of LEGO fulfils the conditions of playfulness, contingency and experimentation, which foster the consumers’ willingness to participate (Zwick et al., 2008).

5.3.2 Censorship

LEGO defines guidelines for the gallery, where only models, which fulfil the trademark rules can be uploaded. LEGO therefore controls the behaviour of the consumer when she/he is unfolding hers/his creativity by checking every creation before it can be uploaded in the gallery in order to ensure that the creation does not infringe the trademark of other brands and also that the creation is build with producible bricks. This means that even though the user is provided with a wide range of bricks and can build imaginary models, the consumer is still limited since LEGO only provide LEGO bricks. This in order to ensure that everything the consumer produces could have some relevant usage for the company. Furthermore, LEGO reviews every comment, before it becomes visible on the message board, which is another way to keep an eye on the creation process and shaping the creativity towards the desired direction.

5.3.3 Consumers self-control

LEGO accepts self-developed activities e.g. contests and role-play games by consumers. Within this contests and the role-play games the participants set up their own rules and the judge

defines guidelines, which make sure that the contest will be fair for all participants. The inventor of the game or contest decides who can join and in case of the contest how long the competition will run. The consumers thereby feel autonomous in their decision-making, as LEGO does not interfere. As these activities are popular among LEGO consumers, the feeling of self-control within “DESIGNbyME” will be widely spread. As LEGO allows this perceived feeling of self-control, it distracts from the fact, that LEGO controls the whole creativity process with reviewing every uploaded creation and posted comment and that it is the company that have provided all the used tools.

5.3.4 Consumers Self-Reward

LEGO does not financially reward the LEGO consumer; instead the consumer receives social reward from their building of brick models and the ability to share them in the gallery. This again is an example of how LEGO gives control to the consumer, as they reward each other. LEGO provides a voting system in the gallery, where users can vote for creations and therefore receive credit for their work. Since the voting opportunity in the gallery does not give the users enough attention, they are looking for other possibilities to catches the eye of other users. They organize within the message board their own contests and some even have conversations in which they promote their buildings for each other in order to receive more voting’s in the gallery and personal recognition in the forum. If a user presents hers/his brick model and refers to the gallery, other members will evaluate it and can praise the work or offer helpful advices. As understood through our observation the motivation of the consumer to participate in “DESIGNbyME” is driven by social benefits gained through the relationships within the community and therefore the common sense is dependent on the social reward (Arvidsson, 2008). If LEGO would financially reward new ideas, then consumers may not perceive consuming LEGO bricks as a playfulness activity; rather they would identify the co-creation process with production in the traditional sense. As the value evolves from ideas developed in threads and consisting of the contribution of several members, monetary reward could prevent consumers from sharing their knowledge with other consumers.

5.4 Analysis discussion

In contrast to Lefèbvre's (1991) thinking, that consumers' behaviour is fully determined by the environment, de Certeau (1984) states that the consumers have "tactics" to reject or to follow the structure of the site and that these tactics are independent of the given environment. The role-play games and self-developed contests are examples of situations where the users have behaved in accordance to the guidelines but still were able to create new online experiences. The consumers use the message board to communicate with other users on "DESIGNbyME" and invented these activities, which are still based on the usage of the given software and the gallery but are organized almost independent from LEGO. Hence, the consumers use the given capacity and unfold their creativity. The main usage of "DESIGNbyME" is not a game, but rather a customization and sharing tool to create a new experience with the LEGO brand. In contrast to Lefèbvre's (1991) general opinion that the government, here LEGO has the power over the consumer by determining the pre-structure cannot be fully proved, as the consumer can still independently create experiences. Moreover, the consumers are the ones bringing life into the place, the virtual environment created by LEGO and turning as the consumers engage in co-creative processes they turn the place into a space. Space only gets meaning by social practices and the "DESIGNbyME" site is an example of how space and place goes together. LEGO designs the place, which is the virtual environment "DESIGNbyME" with tools that can enable them to control the co-creation processes and activities going on at the site. The consumers create a communication based on the given tools. Within this communication new space, which includes new experiences will be created. However, at the same time the consumer give through their conversation about the likelihood of the tools also meaning to the place, the LEGO environment.

Nevertheless, an important fact is that LEGO controls and read every comment in the message board before other users can take part of it. This means that in the end it is finally LEGO who decides which idea that they give the chance to grow in the community of the message board. The "DESIGNbyME" site is an example of a place where consumers can unfold their creativity and hence produce space, which consists of the value, that companies are unable to produce by themselves. We are convinced that LEGO has succeeded to provide create a place where the consumers feel free to be creative and share their competencies. However, after observing and reading terms carefully, the "DESIGNbyME" it is not as free as it appears to be but we think that LEGO has managed to build a perception of liberty through providing a playful, experimental and contingent environment.

6. Conclusions and Future research

In this final chapter we will summarize the main findings from this research and present the conclusions that we could draw from accumulating the empirical material with the theoretical dimension. The conclusions are seen as a compilation of a discussion that answers this study's purpose and research questions. Furthermore, we will discuss the theoretical contribution of this Master thesis as well as suggestions for further research.

6.1 The roles of virtual co-creation

The purpose with this study was to enhance our knowledge about virtual co-creation by investigating in the underlying role of the co-creating consumer and how companies manage co-creation as well as studying how power is distributed within this consumer-company relationship.

The purpose was specified with three research questions that have worked as base during the development of this study and that will be further discussed in this chapter.

- *How does virtual co-creation work in practice?*
- *What is the underlying role of the co-creating consumer?*
- *How are companies managing creative free labour?*

6.1.1 Virtual co-creation and value

Based on our findings from the empirical results and the literature study, it can be concluded that that the co-creating consumer is a labourer since she/he contributes to value. The co-creating consumer can also be regarded as a producer in the sense that she/he produces exchange-value. This value takes the form of personally designed products that the company can use and sell on the market. The real value however, generated within the co-creation-process taking place in a firm-managed virtual environment, lies in the common sense of a community. A member of this community performs immaterial labour based on his communication skills within the community and can thereby share ideas and emotions with other members, which contribute in interactivity finally to the actual value. A company cannot produce this evolved shared common of the community by themselves, as we have observed on

the case of LEGO. LEGO was not able to fully stimulate consumers to vote in the gallery, the consumers therefore developed methods such own contests or specialized promotion threads to receive attention of other consumers in the gallery. Consumers can therefore be regarded as labourers and producers since they within co-creation become a valuable part for the business process.

It can also be stated that the co-creating consumer is a creative consumer who seeks to fulfil personal interests. These interests are about self-realization when sharing experiences, instead of getting monetary rewarded. This means that although the co-creating consumer contributes to value and can be regarded as a producer and in that sense should get some kind of monetary reward from the company that is not something that the consumer is looking for. Instead when looking at the motivation it can be recognized that consumers use the provided tools by the company to unfold their creativity in order to receive attention from other members or to pursue their own interests. This reasoning goes in line with Arvidsson (2008) logic of an ethical economy, where consumers form ethical ties in the community in order to achieve self-realization and thereby create value through sharing their knowledge among the members of the community. We can therefore conclude that the common sense and the according sharing of information or experiences are based on the prospect of getting social reward. The consumer is thriving on the experience of being creative and the sharing experience and to receive social recognition. When talking about co-creation and reward researchers and companies should therefore refer to social reward in the form of social recognition. We are convinced that financial reward therefore would not support the value creation in a community. If companies would announce a monetary reward for ideas the consumer would not produce in the first way value for themselves but for others. However, the “value-in-use”, which builds the basis for the “value-in-exchange” evolves through pursuing of personal interests and sharing information and experience for free between familiar people. It is therefore not advisable that companies financially reward consumers since the value creation in a community could be inhibited.

6.1.2 Virtual co-creation – A mixture of control and freedom

In order for companies to capture the value of the co-creating consumers they have to find ways to attract consumers to engage in co-creation processes. From the observation and analysis of the LEGO case we found that these types of communities are working as a base for co-creation but a conclusion from this is that such platforms need a mixture between control and freedom in order to generate co-creation or at least a perception for the consumer that there is a balance.

The company uses strategies to encourage consumers to take part in co-creation processes. These strategies take the form of pre-structuring a place with tools and guidelines to unfold the creativity of consumers and lead them in desired directions. Next to providing co-creation tools, the company can influence the creativity as they design the tools in the way to receive a desired outcome and therefore hoping that the consumer will, in accordance to the given setting, behave and create value. However, the company has to be aware of that the desired outcome should only be regulated to some extent, so that the consumer still perceive the freedom to unfold his creativity and to not totally determined by the company.

On the one hand, the company needs the control in order to benefit from the consumers work, but on the other hand the consumer needs the freedom to unfold his creativity. As companies are dependent on the consumer's work, cause they know they cannot produce the created common sense of the community by themselves, they have to create an ambience, which attracts consumers and that arouses an impression of a free place where the consumer can be an independent and autonomous actor. Companies should also keep in mind that the consumer will build ties in the community on which they do not want to abstain from. That in turn makes the consumers dependent on the firm-managed brand community and possibly consumers are able to deal with given guidelines in order to pursue their personal interests in the community. It is therefore important how companies design the virtual environment in order to attract the consumer and enhance his enjoyment during the co-creation process. It could be recognized that beside the influence through the virtual environment by the company, the consumer has still the choice not to join in the co-creation process or she/he can create something independent of the company when his inventing creations, which match the guidelines of the company. The consumers can only be controlled in some extent; even through structuring a place with certain tools the company can never ensure that consumers use these in desired directions. This because of the tactics a consumer possess, which means that they can use a given structure or a tool in a way that firstly not was intended.

It can be concluded that the co-creating consumer generates value that companies cannot produce themselves and therefore becomes valuable. Stating that the consumer produces value means that the consumer is a valuable part of the co-creation process and furthermore that it is a marketing tool where the company and the consumer are depending on each other. The company use strategies to design a virtual place that attracts consumers to engage in co-creation activities. Since it is the company who structures and designs what tools that should be available they have the power to control the co-creation process and can guide consumers in desired directions in order to influence the outcome. However, one major finding is that the

consumers have consumer tactics and can follow or reject these guidelines. This means that the company's power is weakened to some extent since the consumers have a major power and a decisive influence since it is they themselves who decide whether or not they want to participate in co-creation. Moreover, even when participating in co-creation they have a power influence since they can use tactics and come up with new ways to use tools that maybe are not initiated by the company. Our study therefore argues for that even if it is the company that has the final call in deciding what products that can be used or what comments that can be said like in the LEGO case, the consumer has the first and a very important call deciding whether or not to reject or follow and engage in co-creation and therefore determines whether or not co-creation processes can occur.

This means that co-creation is a process where both parties, the consumer and the company are depending on each other. By using strategies and construct a platform with certain tools and guidelines the company can influence the creative behaviour of the consumer guiding him or her in a desired direction so that the outcome becomes relevant. However, we have strong managerial implications for that these strategies do not become too evident and limit the space of the consumer and in that sense ruin the playfulness of co-creation. Co-creation is therefore a mixture of control and freedom where the company controls the consumer by strategies such as pre-structuring the virtual environment, but at the same time companies have to provide an ambience that perceives free and where they do not limit the space for the consumer to independently unfold their creativity. This ambience with a mixture of control and freedom can by structure and given tools ensure the work of the consumer but the control should only be to some extent leaving space for the consumers to control themselves and having the perception of a creative and free place.

6.2 Contributions

Previous researchers talked about the rising importance of creative consumer as a source of innovation (Berthon et al., 2007). This study has partly focused on the role of the co-creating consumer and how she/he contributes to value. We could recognize that a creative consumer can increase hers/his potential to create value when taking part in a brand community. The LEGO case showed us that the social motives and the perceived enjoyment of the task induced the consumer to a collaborative work, in which finally new activities have been created based on personalized experiences around the brand.

Looking at virtual co-creation from the angle of labour theories we came up with findings that contributes to the existing distinctions between consumers and producers, where our study argues for that the co-creating consumer can still be regarded as a producer even he does not get financial reward as previous mentioned researcher (Cova and Dalli, 2009) claimed as a necessity for being a producer. Our observation of the community around the co-creation activity educed that the sharing of knowledge in the community is driven by social reward with the contributing finding that co-creating consumers are not thriving for financial reward. A financial reward could instead inhibit the members to share their knowledge for free and hence could stop the production of the important shared common, which consists of the value a company is not able to produce by themselves.

This study also contributes to previous research about virtual co-creation since we have studied the topic from a new angle, applying space and place theories developed by de Certeau (1984) and Lefèbvre (1991), which have helped us to contribute with an understanding of the management of co-creation and how power is distributed between the co-creating consumer and company. A contributing finding is that within co-creation there is a mixture of control and freedom and we have shown how the consumer and the company are depending on each other. On the one side, the company has to control the co-creation process in order to be able to make use out of the consumers' contribution. We have defined two strategies; creating an ambience and censorship for companies in order to provide an environment with guidelines. However on the other side, we recognized that the consumer could also tactical weaken the power of the company by rejecting the task when they do not perceive enjoyment during the activity, which evolves when they feel restricted in their freedom. Hence, through our observation at LEGO, we also could point out two other strategies of letting consumers decide and reward themselves within accepted spaces by the company. That helps companies to transfer a feeling of freedom and self-control towards the consumer, but also ensures the continuity of unfolding the creativity by the consumer in a desired direction, but without defining an exactly target that should be achieved through the consumers performance.

6.3 Delimitations and Future research

We acknowledge that this study is limited since the findings are generated from studying one case and one Internet platform from one industry. The findings can however be generalized on similar platforms and within the business-consumer industry as well as be extended to an offline scenario or to a broader perspective. During the development of this study we came

across areas that may be interesting for future exploring. We suggest that our findings could be tested on a larger scale, studying several companies and communities through a quantitative research study for example. We have taken the part as complete observes with no direct contact with the research informants and we have made a study both from a consumer and a company perspective. It would be interesting to further investigate in the co-creating consumer doing for example in-depth qualitative interviews and study how consumers perceive co-creation discussing topics such as reward and free labour. In the same way a study of the company could be conducted to study their thoughts on the co-creation process and how it is governed discussing topics such as guidelines, value and output. Furthermore, a similar study to ours could be conducted focusing on how these power relations between the consumer and the company differs in different industries using several empirical sites. A concept that could be further explored is censorship and a study could be conducted specifying on studying company strategies and consumer tactics, either in-depth or conduct a comparison between different companies or industries.

Finally, what we have found the most interesting after studying virtual co-creation is the role of the co-creating consumer and the value that she or he can generate. We have analyzed the consumer in comparison to a producer stating that the co-creating consumer can become a producer, however, a suggestion for further research is to further investigate in the role of the consumer and the distinctions between the co-creating consumer and an employee for example studying if the consumer can be regarded as a member of the organization, investigate more in what reward he receives and time spent with the brand.

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