Who is the Active Consumer?

Insight into Contemporary Innovation and Marketing Practices

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Abstract

There are consumers who engage in innovation and who cocreate value together with other consumers, and with producers, in relation to products. This thesis has the purpose of exploring the nature of this ‘active consumer’ from a firm perspective, and thereby providing an answer to the thesis-level research question: ‘What are the implications of the active consumer on innovation and marketing practices?’ Four papers, drawing on research in the fields of consumer innovation and value cocreation, are presented that contain findings about the knowledge of the active consumer (Paper I), support (Paper II) and management (Paper III) of the active consumer, and challenges with the active consumer (Paper IV). The papers rest on two research efforts: a study of the video game industry that includes an investigation of a game developer and a netnography of its consumer community and a study of the entire development of a customer loyalty card by a leading grocery retailer. The insights into the active consumer gained from the four papers are analyzed against the thesis-level research question using an explanatory lens that is developed through the notion of practice, rendering a discussion about the implications of the active consumer on the scripts of innovation and marketing practices. The thesis is concluded with a discussion of its contributions and implications for innovation and marketing scholars and managers.

Keywords: Cocreation, Practice, Knowledge, Toolkits, Value, Value proposition

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‘The direction of all economic affairs is in the market society a task of the entrepreneurs. Theirs is the control of production. They are at the helm and steer the ship. A superficial observer would believe that they are supreme. But they are not. They are bound to obey unconditionally the captain's orders. The captain is the consumer. Neither the entrepreneurs nor the farmers nor the capitalists determine what has to be produced. The consumers do that.’

– von Mises, ‘Human action: A treatise on economics’, vol. 2 of 4, p. 269f
Acknowledgments

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I would like to extend gratitude to my family, both Swedish and Spanish, and to my friends who have had to undergo and endure what it means to be acquainted with someone who embarks on PhD studies. Of course, my utmost appreciation I extend to you, my darling Patricia, for sharing with me this awesome endeavor they call PhD studies. I can honestly say that without you I would never have started nor finished the journey. I thus, wholeheartedly, share this thesis with you. Gracias cariño!

Uppsala, 2013
Oscar Persson Ridell
This thesis is based on the following papers, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.


II Persson Ridell, O., Teigland, R., (2013) Facilitating knowledge sharing between consumer communities and hosting firms: Expanding the solution space to a virtual innovation platform. Submitted to Technovation.


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Foreword

With the purpose of depicting the problem with interpretations of quantum mechanics (more precisely a critique of the Copenhagen interpretations), Austrian physicist Erwin Schrödinger presented in 1935 a thought experiment that later became known as Schrödinger’s cat¹: A cat is locked up in a box that contains radioactive material placed in a Geiger counter, a hammer and a bottle of hydrocyanic acid. The radioactive material is tiny enough that during one hour one atom may perhaps have decayed (but with equal probability has not), bringing the Geiger counter to discharge and thus, through a relay connected to the hammer, to smash the bottle of hydrocyanic acid releasing it into the box. Leaving the box to itself for an hour, one would say that the cat lives if meanwhile no atom has decayed; if an atom has decayed the cat will have been poisoned and killed. After one hour, according to quantum mechanics the box encompasses a cat that is simultaneously alive and dead to the outside universe (that is, until an observation has been made).

Determining the state of rather ordinary things (under unordinary circumstances) may thus not be as straightforward as it seems at first. For instance, while there has previously perhaps been no reason to ever question the relationship between producers and consumers – that is, that the producer produces and the consumer consumes – recent years have seen an escalation in consumer activity in what has long been producer-exclusive domains. Today, that consumers for example assist firms with the marketing of their products and services has become so commonplace that most people are probably not even aware of it anymore (that is, if they ever were aware of it). Just log on to Facebook and have a look.
Producers and consumers are now interacting in unprecedented ways that make their seemingly straightforward relationship rather fuzzy, if not downright unclear. One may even reach the conclusion that consumers, as Schrödinger’s cat who resided in a superposition of being both dead and alive all at once, are nowadays occupying a superposition in which they are, simultaneously, both consumers and producers. Fascinating, isn’t it?
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Introduction

Arriving at the active consumer

Modern information technology has made it possible for almost anyone to actively engage in innovation and to cocreate value – from the general public, as when Goldcorp Inc. was aided in breaking its long-lasting dry spell of trying to encounter gold after having published its geological data onto its homepage, to a small bakery in Italy, where Proctor & Gamble found a solution via an ideagora to the problems it had been having with printing sharp images onto Pringles chips (see Tapscott and Williams, 2006). The development of solutions to wants and needs in the market, which has long been the very nucleus of the firm’s innovation and marketing practices, may now moreover come about through the activity of mass collaborations of individual developers innovating ‘openly’ (Chesbrough, 2003; Franke and von Hippel, 2003; Hertel et al., 2003; Lakhani and Wolf, 2003; Lakhani and von Hippel, 2003; Lee and Cole, 2003; von Hippel and von Krogh, 2003; Henkel, 2006; West and Gallagher, 2006; Dahlander and Magnusson, 2008; Dahlander and Gann, 2010; von Hippel, 2013).

Also end-users of consumer products (henceforth consumers) have been found active in innovating and cocreating value, as for example Lego’s launch of the Mindstorm series demonstrates (see Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004b; Tapscott and Williams, 2006). Shortly after the release of Mindstorm – a series of Lego building kits that combine the trademark bricks with a variety of mechanical parts, engines, sensors and software, allowing consumers to develop robots that autonomously perform different operations – various consumer groups started emerging that formed a community of Mindstorm aficionados. Members interacted and shared their experience with the robots, thereby cocreating the value of Mindstorm.
Some consumers also tinkered with the robots, reconfiguring and reprogramming their different parts, and, to the delight of other community members, the homebrew innovations that were rendered were typically shared freely by their creators within the consumer community for all of its members to enjoy.

Mindstorm exemplifies that a firm’s products may represent more than vehicles for satisfying the consumer’s practical wants and needs. Going back 50 years, Levy (1959) suggested that products, in addition to their functionality, carry significant personal and social meaning for consumers. Innovation and marketing scholars and managers could no longer see products only as material configurations that had the aim to satisfy practical needs. Instead, it was argued, products are also statements about how consumers see themselves, how others may perceive them, as well as statements about what consumers aspire to be; an idea that has since been extensively established in subsequent research efforts (e.g. Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Fournier, 1998; Muñiz and O’Guinn, 2001; Muñiz and Jensen Schau, 2005). In turn, Baldwin and von Hippel (2011) recently found that the paradigm of producer-driven innovation is challenged, head-on, by the emerging paradigm of user-driven and open collaborative innovation. This shift in locus of innovation from producers to those who use and consume products represents a further move away from products as mere vehicles for satisfying practical needs. Innovation and marketing scholars and managers now face that products moreover may represent occasions for consumer activity in what used to be firm-exclusive practices.

While the consumer may naturally be thought of as ‘active’ when consuming products, what I mean by active herein is different from the activity rendered through default consumption. It is also different from how, for instance, the prosumer was defined as an active ‘do-it-yourselfer’ who produces for her own consumption by Toffler (1980). Rather, what I mean with the active consumer is a consumer who engages in innovation and who cocreates value together with other consumers, and with producers, in relation to products (see Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004b; von Hippel, 2005; Tapscott and Williams, 2006).
As this thesis demonstrates, it appears as if to innovate and to cocreate value is becoming an integral part of this consumer’s wants and needs; as if the transformation from ‘passive recipient’ to ‘active participant’ moreover includes an alteration in the consumer’s DNA as to include also the wants and needs to engage in innovation and to cocreate value (cf. Beckett and Nayak, 2008). It is to this consumer – the active consumer – that this thesis is dedicated. However, my interest in this phenomenon was not in the research vista from the outset of my studies. Rather, my understanding of the active consumer has grown out of a consideration of consumers as research objects that the firm innovates for and markets to; that is, the passive consumer.

The passive consumer

When I first began working on this thesis I defined my research area as the process through which firms gain knowledge about the wants and needs of the market regarding innovation and marketing efforts. With this very definition, and with an extensive review of related literature as a guide, I embarked on my first investigatory journey into the empirical world. It included a series of interviews with managers in three multinational firms who, when hearing what my area of interest was, redefined it for me as having to do with what they called ‘consumer insights.’ I was intrigued. I informed myself about the procedures of market segmentation and targeting, the various techniques and methods, such as different forms of focus groups, polls and surveys, and observations both in real and artificial settings, used by these firms in their hunt for insight into the consumer. My first expedition into the empirical world thus enabled me to outline the contours of what consumer insights encompass.

As I was searching for a comprehensive understanding I decided to contact more firms about their work with consumer insights. I embarked on my second investigatory journey into the empirical world. It involved sending a letter to a variety of firms operating in different industries, in which I, in addition to asking rudimentary questions about how they work with market wants and needs, requested a fol-
low-up telephone interview with the respondent. I made a series of telephone interviews with managers within different industries, and it was here that I became increasingly interested in the challenges firms face in their work with consumer insights. The interviewees reported, for example, that consumers often do not know what they want or need, and that what they say they want and need will often not be what they later show in their consumption. ‘Consumers often say one thing but then do something different,’ one manager working in a global consumer goods firm briefly stated. ‘Organic food is a good example…consumers say that they want to purchase more organic food, but when you look at the figures for these types of products there is a huge difference,’ another manager working with fast moving consumer goods explained. It was also mentioned that consumers often find it difficult to reflect upon their upcoming wants and needs. ‘Consumers often have a difficult time breaking free from the past and the present…thinking into and about the future is usually very hard for them,’ one manager commented. Several interviewees further reflected on the issue of administering all the information that is generated in relation to consumer insights. ‘Sometimes there are too many studies, too much information, and too many truths…then it all comes down to a gut feeling anyways. It is one of the economy’s biggest problems that there is just too much information and too little time and manpower to process it all,’ a manager working with fast moving consumer goods clarified.

From passive to active
When I was muddling through all the data that my two expeditions into the empirical world had rendered, thinking about where the above challenges may be fundamentally rooted and whether they somehow could be forced to surrender to a solution, I became inspired by a stream of thought that was (re)gaining momentum within academia. Advocates of the notion of *practice* claim that knowledge is intimately connected to human practice, and I too became a believer in the situated nature of knowledge; an effect of this was that I started questioning whether insight into consumer wants and needs can be attained with-
out engaging consumers firsthand. I thought that maybe the above challenges would be surmounted if these firms instead attempted to cocreate together with consumers, and, instead of perceiving them as mere passive research objects, were to give them an active role in innovation. It was along with these thoughts that the question emerged regarding what innovation and marketing practices may include when the consumer becomes active.

Rogers (1983) has proposed that innovation is an idea, a procedure or an object that is perceived as novel by the entity who adopts it, and has further suggested that the development of innovation includes all the practices, and their outcomes, from the recognition of wants and needs, to research and development, to adoption and its consequences. In the light of these definitions, innovation for the firm in relation to the market may accordingly be understood as practices of knowledge creation (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) directed at the development of solutions to consumer wants and needs. These solutions arrive to the market as completely new products/services (radical innovation), or as improvements to existing products/services (incremental innovation). Marketing, in turn, according to Kotler and Armstrong (2010), has the aim of creating value for, and in return capturing value from, the consumer. It thus includes communicating value to the market; that is, unilateral practices of defining and delivering the value of the firm’s offerings to consumers. Jensen Schau et al. (2009, p. 30), among others, have consequently remarked that modern marketing logic promulgates a view of the firm and the market as separate in terms of value: ‘the customer is exogenous to the firm and is the passive recipient of the firm’s active value creation efforts, and value is created in the factory.’

Together then, innovation and marketing practices include developing, and communicating the value of, solutions to consumer wants and needs. In the active consumer, these practices will, it appears, face wants and needs that have to do with the consumer participating in these very practices. What, then, will innovation and marketing from the perspective of the firm encompass?
Concerning the so-called ‘participatory culture’ that has emerged in between media producers and consumers, Jenkins (2006, p. 3) states: ‘Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands.’ This postmodern culture that is evolving, coupled with advances in information technology, means according to Firat and Dholakia (2006, p. 150) that marketing has to become collaborative: ‘That is, marketing would need to collaborate, as a partner, with post-consumer communities in constructing their modes of life. Marketing’s role would be facilitating and coordinating the efforts of the community’s members. This is a co-performer, not a provider role.’ Given that the locus of innovation has been found to be shifting from those who produce to those who use and consume products (Baldwin and von Hippel, 2011) it seems safe to say that the same is likely to hold true also with regard to innovation.

However, the question nevertheless remains as to what being a ‘co-performer,’ as the above authors have chosen to call it, involves in practice for the firm. And, as I came to realize, answering questions about what innovation and marketing practices involve vis-à-vis the active consumer requires primarily that the (missing) pieces of what this consumer represents for the firm be put in place.

Exploring the active consumer
In light of the above discussion then, this thesis proposes to explore the nature of the active consumer from a firm perspective. As such, it contains four research papers that provide insight into four different aspects of this consumer:

- **Knowledge** of the active consumer (Paper I)
- **Supporting** the active consumer (Paper II)
- **Managing** the active consumer (Paper III)
- **Challenges** with the active consumer (Paper IV)
The insights gained from these research papers together provide the foundation for answering the following thesis-level research question:

- **What are the implications of the active consumer on innovation and marketing practices?**

The reason why I consider this question to be of such importance as to place it stage center is because of what it may tell us about our current understanding of the distribution of roles, tasks and knowledge between firms and consumers, as well as our views on competitiveness. Imagine: in a world where innovation and marketing practices are firm-exclusive, the development and communication of solutions will come about as consumer wants and needs are combined with the firm’s means to satisfy those wants and needs. It is the firm, as the party responsible for the task of capturing wants and needs, which is acknowledged as the developer of solutions. In the world of the active consumer, conversely, wants and needs will not need to be captured by firms, and, as a consequence, the means for competing may significantly change. As consumers become active in these practices, competitiveness is likely to be less about trying to satisfy wants and needs through relatively superior in-house innovation and marketing. Instead, firms might very well find themselves acting as co-stars to the active consumer, and discover that competitiveness is rather about facilitating the latter’s innovativeness and cocreativity in relation to the former’s products.

**Thesis outline**

While this introduction has presented the purpose and the research question in this thesis, the subsequent chapter – *Theoretical backdrop* – discloses the genesis of the four papers that together constitute the thesis. The primary aim is to portray why each paper was written, and to illustrate the theoretical underpinnings of the papers and clarify the central concepts that they draw on. Further, the chapter includes a presentation of the notion of practice, which has been essential in ar-
riving at the findings in the papers. Practice, as here explained, is cen-
tral also on the thesis level; it is from here that the ‘explanatory lens’
is established that will be used to evaluate the findings about the ac-
tive consumer in the four papers against the research question in the
thesis.

The next chapter – *Research method* – describes the method used
in the two studies, of the video game industry (Papers I, II and III) and
the grocery retailing industry (Paper IV), respectively, upon which the
four papers rest. Particularly the outline of the study of the video game
industry is herein considered as it was found to be highly advanced as
regards consumer engagement in innovation and cocreation of value,
and was thus from whence significant findings about the active con-
sumer were derived (and consequently also where the principal limita-
tions of the applicability of the findings in the thesis reside).

Preceded by a review of their genesis, the four papers are subse-
quently presented in successive order, and each paper is followed by a
summary of its contribution in relation to the thesis-level research
question (see Table 1 below).

The final chapter – *Conclusions* – is introduced with a summary of
the findings about the active consumer from the four papers and a re-
visitation of the passive consumer, which is followed by a discussion
about the implications of the active consumer on innovation and mar-
keting practices. Three aspects are presented that relate to the scripts of
these practices. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the con-
tributions and implications of the thesis.
Theoretical backdrop

Genesis of the four papers
To procure a theoretical backdrop for understanding the active consumer I have drawn on literature within the research fields of consumer innovation and value cocreation; the outcome of which is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 – Overview of the four papers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Theoretical backdrop</th>
<th>Research focus</th>
<th>Connection to thesis-level research question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper I</strong></td>
<td>Consumer innovation</td>
<td>The becoming of knowledgeable members of an online consumer community</td>
<td>Knowledge of the active consumer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper II</strong></td>
<td>Consumer innovation</td>
<td>The facilitation of knowledge sharing vis-à-vis innovation between an online consumer community and the hosting firm</td>
<td>Supporting the active consumer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper III</strong></td>
<td>Value cocreation</td>
<td>To provide a perspective on management of value creation</td>
<td>Managing the active consumer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper IV</strong></td>
<td>Value cocreation</td>
<td>The intricacies of cocreating value propositions with consumers</td>
<td>Challenges with the active consumer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The research fields of consumer innovation and value cocreation portray the consumer as an innovator and a cocreator of value, respectively. In addition to their depiction of the consumer as active, however, I draw on these two fields for theoretical underpinnings moreover because I believe that they can significantly benefit from a merger. The main reason for my belief is that, whereas value cocreation is grounded in well-established theoretical foundations but falls short in empirical application of those underpinnings, consumer innovation is conversely rather rich empirically by dint of its ancestry but has been found lacking in solid theoretical foundations (Bogers et al., 2010). Further, motivated by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004b), yet another reason why I consider that the fields may significantly benefit from a merger stems from my understanding of them as essentially centered on overlapping aspects of the firm-consumer relationship; while consumer innovation predominantly focuses on consumer use of firm products as foundations for expressing innovativeness, value cocreation principally focuses on the experience that develops between consumers and firms and among consumers.

The origins of each of the two fields are briefly discussed below. Beginning with consumer innovation, the discussion is followed by a clarification of the reason why Papers I and II were written and of the central concepts that they draw on. The same follows for value cocreation, and for Papers III and IV. The notion of practice is subsequently addressed, and it is explained how it has been adopted in Paper I, II and IV and how it forms the explanatory lens for analyzing the findings about the active consumer in the four papers against the thesis-level research question.

Consumer innovation
Following von Hippel’s (1988) extensively adopted definition of user innovation as minor or major improvements of manufacturer solutions, consumer innovation is herein defined as minor or major consumer-developed improvements/modifications of producer solutions.
Research within the field of consumer innovation, as Table 2 demonstrates, extends a variety of consumer product areas.

**Table 2 – Overview of research on consumer innovation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product area</th>
<th>Source(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extreme sports/outdoor activities (e.g. mountain biking, kite surfing and kayaking equipment)</td>
<td>Franke and Shah (2003), Lüthje (2004), Lüthje et al. (2005), Tietz et al. (2005), Baldwin et al. (2006), Hienerth (2006), Franke et al. (2006), Raasch et al. (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video games (e.g. mods and in-game commerce)</td>
<td>Jeppesen and Molin (2003), Jeppesen (2005), Prügl and Schreier (2006), Chandra and Leenders (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wristwatches</td>
<td>Franke and Piller (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infotainment systems for cars</td>
<td>Füller et al. (2006), Füller and Matzler (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music-making software</td>
<td>Jeppesen and Fredriksen (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile goods (e.g. stroller-related equipment)</td>
<td>Shah and Tripsas (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball shoes</td>
<td>Füller et al. (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking services (e.g. planning solutions)</td>
<td>Oliveira and von Hippel (2011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Mods are consumer-made modifications of content (see Flowers, 2008).

Beginning some 20 years ago, the supremacy of manufacturers in driving industrial innovation was put under the loupe by innovation management scholars (e.g. Rothwell and Gardiner, 1985; von Hippel, 1986; Foxall and Johnston, 1987; Holt, 1988; Urban and von Hippel, 1988). Among them, von Hippel (1988) illustrated that advanced users of industrial products and processes – such as, scientific instruments and the assembly of semiconductors – had made both minor and major improvements to the manufacturers’ initial solutions. He suggested that these innovative users typically share ‘lead user’ characteristics in relation to the product or process they improve; they experience needs before they become general in the marketplace, and will significantly
benefit from a solution to those needs (von Hippel, 1988). Since its introduction, lead user theory has been further established and developed into a method for predicting industrial user innovation (see e.g. Urban and von Hippel, 1988; Herstatt and von Hippel, 1992; Morrison et al., 2000; Lilien et al., 2002; Lüthje and Herstatt, 2004; Lettl et al., 2006). The lead user notion has also been adopted by researchers to study innovation by consumers.

Research focus of Paper I

Drawing on lead user theory, Franke and Shah (2003) found in a study of four consumer communities dedicated to different extreme sports and outdoor activities that innovating community members exhibited lead user characteristics to a greater extent than non-innovating members. As many as one third of all members of the studied communities had made attempts to innovate at least one time. While the majority of these attempts were only minor improvements to the equipment used by the members of the respective community, as many as 14% were major innovations, several of which were considered to be commercializable. When innovating, consumers of mountain biking equipment were by Lüthje et al. (2005) shown to rely on knowledge they had obtained by engaging in the activity (that is, mountain biking), and knowledge they had due to their profession. In consumer communities, Franke and Shah (2003) further revealed that innovating members draw extensively on knowledge residing in the community; consumer innovators are typically devoted members of the community as it represents a pool of both problem- and solution-related information for innovation.

Scholars have employed lead user theory also to study innovation in online consumer community settings (e.g. Jeppesen and Molin, 2003; Füller et al., 2006; Jeppesen and Fredriksen, 2006; Füller et al., 2007). Researching online communities dedicated to consumers of basketball shoes, Füller et al. (2007) found that, while members were generally very positive towards discussing their experience and issues with their products, few were creative and skilled enough to design innovative basketball shoes (cf. Franke and Shah, 2003). The authors
reported however, by confirmation from professionals from the foot-
wear industry, that some consumer ideas and designs were sufficiently
innovative to be attractive for shoe manufacturers to commercialize
(similar findings about the quality of consumer innovations were pre-
sent by Füller et al. (2006) in a study of an online community within
the automotive industry). Consumer innovation in online community
settings has further been studied in the video game industry, which is
generally recognized to be a forerunner industry with regards to utiliz-
ing the internet to gather consumers into communities and thereby
support them in satisfying both their social and commercial needs (see
Rheingold, 1993; Armstrong and Hagel III, 1996; Sproull and Arriaga,
2007). Studies of communities in the video game industry (Jeppesen
and Molin, 2003; Jeppesen, 2005; Prügl and Schreier, 2006; Arakji
and Lang, 2007; Paper III; Chandra and Leenders, 2012) have re-
vealed that they are settings that often house consumers who innovate,
who engage in different entrepreneurial activities, who provide exten-
sive consumer support and who also share knowledge with the game
developer.

Research on consumer communities has thus provided insight into
the characteristics of innovating and knowledge sharing members,
who have been found different from the average consumer with re-
gards to their needs, knowledge and innovativeness. However, a cen-
tral issue yet to be addressed is how consumers become such members
of online consumer communities. Looking at other types of online
communities, such as open source communities (Raymond, 1998;
Fleming and Waguespack, 2007) or virtual communities of practice
(Wasko and Faraj, 2000, 2005; Mathwick et al., 2008), it seems highly
improbable that consumers simply become knowledgeable members
of consumer communities overnight, or by happenstance. In an effort
to address this issue then, Paper I is dedicated to explore the becoming
of knowledgeable members of an online consumer community, which,
on a thesis level, in turn aims to elucidate the knowledge of the active
consumer (see Table 1).
Research focus of Paper II

Innovation encompasses for producers the arduous capturing of product users’ wants and needs. It may be both costly and inaccurate: need-related information is typically complex and therefore incurs high costs as it is transferred between different contexts (see von Hippel, 1994; Szulanski, 1996; Ogawa, 1998; von Hippel, 1998), and the needs of consumer groups may essentially be heterogeneous, thus putting pressures on producers to understand and satisfy consumers on an individual level. And, on top of it all, wants and needs change over time – at an increasing pace, it seems. Consequently, methods for reducing costs of ‘sticky’ information in relation to innovation have thus been sought after, and the toolkits approach has been found effective in this regard. Innovation toolkits are product-specific tools for customization (von Hippel, 2005) that may, for instance, be represented as a webpage with a number of combinable design options (Franke and Piller, 2004), as an editing application (Jeppesen, 2005), or as a set of separate, mixable, ‘precomponents’ (von Hippel, 2001).

‘Economical production of custom products and services is only achievable when a custom design falls within the pre-existing capability and degrees of freedom built into a given manufacturer’s production system. We may term this the “solution space” offered by that system,’ von Hippel (2001, p. 251) has explained. Innovation toolkits provide users of industrial products (e.g. von Hippel, 2001; Thomke and von Hippel, 2002) or end-users of consumer products (e.g. Franke and Piller, 2004; Jeppesen, 2005; Jeppesen and Fredrikson, 2006) with a gateway into such a space, thus supporting a shift of the locus of innovation from the producer to the user/consumer sphere. Relating this to the above examples of innovation toolkits, the solution space may from a consumer perspective be thought of as the number of design options for customizing, and the possibility of combining the options among each other, that the toolkits offer. For producers, in addition to transferring the locus of innovation to the consumer sphere and thus reducing the costs associated with capturing need-related information (see Jeppesen, 2005), innovation toolkits ‘allow users to undertake innovative work in a way that is structured by the firm,’
(Jeppesen and Fredriksen, 2006, p. 48). Producers are hence assumed to be able to direct consumer innovativeness using toolkits as a sort of funnel.

In the video game industry, game developers typically support consumer innovativeness by distributing toolkits freely within their firm-hosted communities, something which has led to consumer-created games that have become commercial blockbusters for game developers (see McLean-Foreman, 2001; Paper III). Communities in the industry have further been found to contain toolkits users who go beyond the official solution space offered by the game developer by creating tools themselves, by modifying the official toolkits, or by adopting tools from other fields (Prügl and Schreier, 2006). Thus, in some consumer communities innovation toolkits may not be able to completely structure innovativeness, nor be able to provide a solution space that satisfies consumer wants and needs for innovative freedom. While toolkits facilitate consumer innovation (that is, within and beyond the official solution space), the question emerges, however, as to what other, additional, facilitators there may be that can render a more extensive innovation process emerging between consumer communities and firms? With the aim to address this question, Paper II investigates the facilitation of knowledge sharing vis-à-vis innovation between an online consumer community and the hosting firm, which, on a thesis level, in turn aims to shed light on the issue of supporting the active consumer (see Table 1).

Value cocreation
What is value? Even though my intention here is not to provide a universally acceptable answer to this question I do consider it pertinent to at least succinctly pay heed to the complexity of the concept before I offer my view of value creation with regards to the firm-market relation. With respect to this relation, value and its creation has been equated with, among other things, the sales and profits that are brought about through investments in customer relationships (e.g. Palmatier, 2008) and the payments rendered following improvements
in consumer benefits (e.g. Priem, 2007). The price mechanism has frequently been invoked to reflect value, in turn leading to the locus of value being positioned in the exchange between the firm and the market – that is, value-in-exchange (see Vargo et al., 2008).

Explaining value simply through ‘services offered and returns rendered’ means, if one adheres to von Mises’ (2007, p. 96) teachings, abandoning any satisfactory illustration of the inherent complexity of the concept: ‘Value is not intrinsic, it is not in things. It is within us; it is the way in which man reacts to the conditions of his environment. Neither is value in words and doctrines, it is reflected in human conduct. It is not what a man or groups of men say about value that counts, but how they act.’ In addition to this innate complexity, I believe that value has become an increasingly difficult concept to address in any somewhat fruitful manner also due to the rapidly growing value lexicon within academia; particularly within the management disciplines (see Lepak et al., 2007). There are now a number of values to consider and the value concept – and, by extension, thereby who creates value, for whom and how – is consequently becoming more and more diluted.

Consistent with von Mises’ view of value, my understanding of value creation with regards to the firm-market relation is aligned with the view that has gained momentum within marketing during the last decade; but the genesis of this goes further back in time. Contrasting a perspective on value as determined by the price consumers are willing to pay for a firm’s products and services and of value as created throughout a firm’s chain of value-adding activities (e.g. Porter and Millar, 1985; Porter, 1998), Normann and Ramirez (1993) have suggested that firms participate in constellations of value-creating actors. Firms cannot manufacture value, and their offerings, as opposed to readymade value bundles, are rather ‘frozen’ manifestations of the knowledge and activities of the actors comprised within such constellations (Normann, 2001). Among them is the consumer, who thus is a co-producer of value (Wikström, 1996b; Wikström, 1996a; Normann and Ramirez, 1998; Ramirez, 1999). The notion of consumers as value
co-producers has been adopted by Prahalad and Ramaswamy in a series of articles (see 2000; 2003; 2004a) in which it is proposed that the meaning of value creation has shifted from firm-centric to consumer-centric. Among other examples, they show consumer-centric value creation in how Sumerset, the world’s largest manufacturer of houseboats, develops its products through ongoing dialog between employees and consumers. The authors suggest that it is the interaction per se between Sumerset and the consumers that forms the foundation of value creation (2004b, p. 22): ‘The basis of value for the customer shifts from a physical product (with or without ancillary services) to the total cocreation experience, which includes co-designing as well as all the other interactions among the consumer, the company, and the larger community of houseboaters.’

**Research focus of Paper III**

That the consumer is an indispensable part of, and participant in, value creation is also an essential idea in the service dominant logic (SDL) of marketing (Vargo and Lusch, 2004); the introduction of which has sparked yet further interest in value creation within academia (see Vargo and Lusch, 2006a). According to the SDL, value is equivalent to value-in-use (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008), meaning that the value of a firm’s offerings cannot be manufactured by the firm, nor be simplistically defined through the price mechanism, but can only be determined by consumers when in use. A consequence of this value-in-use perspective is thus that the consumer is a cocreator of value to whom the firm ‘cannot deliver value, but only offer value propositions,’ (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, p. 7).

A central notion within SDL is the distinction that is made between operand and operant resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Arnould et al., 2006; Lusch et al., 2007); while an operand resource is a resource that is acted upon, and is thus inherently passive, an operant resource is a resource that is capable of acting upon other operand and operant resources. The consumer is according to the SDL an operant resource whose participation as a resource integrator of physical, social and cultural resources is indispensable for the creation of value (see Ar-
nould et al., 2006; Vargo and Lusch, 2006b; Baron and Harris, 2008). Without the consumer’s participation the value of a firm’s offerings – that is, value-in-use – cannot be experienced, and can therefore neither be determined. From a firm perspective this consequently means that a fundamental resource with regards to value creation resides outside the boundaries of the firm.

Scholars who have theorized about the firm (e.g. Coase, 1937; Penrose, 1959; Williamson, 1979; Wernerfelt, 1984; Conner and Prahalad, 1996; Grant, 1996; Spender, 1996) have usually assumed that necessary resources reside within the firm’s realm; the firm manages required resources through internalization and legal agreements, thus abiding by a managerial perspective that is characterized by ownership and control. However, as seen above, such a perspective is evidently incommensurable with the understanding of resources vis-à-vis value creation according to the SDL; to control consumer knowledge, activities and deeds, through internalization and legal agreements is an illogical approach for firms to abide by in attempting to manage value creation. From a SDL perspective then, firms must accordingly adopt another mindset with regards to the management of needed resources. What will such a mindset encompass? Can the firm simply abandon its inherent prerogative to manage resources through unilateral control? If so, how then will it approach the question of management with respect to value creation? Finding its inspiration in these questions, Paper III sets out to provide a perspective on management of value creation that is commensurable with the view of value and the understanding of the consumer as an operant resource as proposed by the SDL, which, on a thesis level, in turn aims to render insight into the matter of managing the active consumer (see Table 1).

Research focus of Paper IV
As mentioned above, the firm cannot unilaterally deliver value to consumers but can only offer propositions of value according to the SDL. The value proposition concept was popularized by Lanning and Michaels (1988) in a McKenzie staff report in which they state that the formation of such propositions entails three steps: analyzing what
concrete features of the product or service customers value, and forming segments of potential buyers; evaluating the opportunities to deliver superior value to each segment; and selecting segments and value propositions that promise the best results. In turn, according to Anderson et al. (2006) firms adopt the value proposition concept in either of three ways: as ‘all benefits,’ meaning that an extensive list is made of all the benefits that a product/service may bring to customers without paying attention to customer needs; as ‘favorable points of difference,’ which includes identifying the benefits of the firm’s products or service relative to those offered by competitors, or; as ‘resonating focus,’ which encompasses identifying the key benefits that customers value the most and that can be delivered (cf. Lanning and Michaels, 1988). Researchers contributing to the development of the SDL have argued, contrary to the above understanding of value propositions, that they are cocreative in nature; value propositions are reciprocal promises of value operating between actors (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006). Following this view, value propositions may be understood as initiated and formed when resource integrators, such as firms and consumers, interlink their individual value perspectives through activities of reciprocal exchange of knowledge (Paper IV).

Having become a focal issue within the SDL (e.g. Ballantyne et al., 2011; Kowalkowski, 2011; Lusch and Webster, 2011), scholars have lately commented that there is a dearth of empirical studies exploring the formation of value propositions from an SDL perspective (Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Ballantyne et al., 2011; Frow and Payne, 2011). Frow and Payne (2011), for instance, recently remarked that researchers ought to consider the activities through which value propositions are established, and address how the individual value perspectives, knowledge, and contexts of resource integrators may affect the formation of them. Can the cocreation of a value proposition between a firm and consumers be expected to follow a neat and effortlessly manageable process through which their value perspectives, contexts and knowledge are unproblematically interlinked with each other? Or, will it more justly be described as a practice of intricacies that reflects the complexity of interlinking diverse resource integrators?
Research on the consumer’s dual role in cocreation (Cova and Dal-li, 2009; Cova et al., 2011), and the change in power and control over marketing processes that may follow cocreation (Zwick et al., 2008; Fisher and Smith, 2011; Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011), indicates that the latter description will be the more accurate one. Connecting back to the Mindstorm example, at first when consumers began cocreating and innovating in the community Lego became apprehensive about issues of liability vis-à-vis faulty products and thus announced that it intended to file lawsuits against those who tinkered with the robots. Following a rebellion in the consumer community, Lego had no other alternative but to adopt a more lenient attitude towards the consumers’ cocreation of the Mindstorm experience. Today, the manufacturer hosts a forum in which it openly fosters consumer innovation and cocreation by, for example, providing tools and guidelines for consumers to further develop the robots (see lego.com). For firms then, cocreation may bring about certain conundrums; it is in these conundrums where Paper IV finds its inspiration to explore, in-depth, the intricacies of cocreating value propositions with consumers, which, on a thesis level, in turn aims to reveal challenges with the active consumer (see Table 1).

The notion of Practice

As mentioned in the introduction, while I was knee-deep in data on consumer insights that I had attained through my two journeys into the empirical world, I began taking an interest in prominent research on human work and organization (e.g. Barley, 1986; Zuboff, 1988; Hutchins, 1991; Weick, 1993). This interest led me in turn to practice. Practice is a central notion in different fields and in studies of various phenomena, of which examples are organizational learning/knowledge (e.g. Orr, 1996; Wenger, 1998; Cook and Brown, 1999; Brown and Duguid, 2001; Carlile, 2002), information technology/systems within organizations (e.g. Suchman et al., 1999; Orlikowski, 2000, 2002, 2007), consumption and consumer behavior (e.g. Holt, 1995; Shove and Pantzar, 2005; Warde, 2005), strategy/strategizing (e.g. Chia,
2004; Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009), and recently also value cocreation (e.g. Korkman, 2006; Jensen Schau et al., 2009; Echeverri and Skålén, 2011).

Below follows an overview of the notion of practice. I explain how it has been adopted in Paper I, II and IV, and describe how it forms the explanatory lens for analyzing the findings about the active consumer in the four papers against the thesis-level research question.

Practice theory
Social reality is, according to practice theorists (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; Schatzki, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002; Rouse, 2006), constituted by arrays of practices. Bourdieu (1977), one of the early practice thinkers, presented in his concept of habitus an explanation to the dialectic relationship between the objective (structure) and the subjective (agent) with regards to practice. Habitus, ‘the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisation’ (ibid., p. 78), is the ‘scheme of principles’ that the agent assumes through ongoing practice, which, as it is continuously reproduced, turns into dispositions for future actions. Habitus is a part of the agent, who is unaware of it and is thus unknowing of its effects on the ordering of actions. Contemporary practice theorists have drawn inspiration from the notion of habitus in their work on practice, as for instance is seen in Schatzki’s (1996) thoughts about practice as both a ‘coordinated entity’ and as ‘performance.’

About practice as a coordinated entity, Schatzki (1996, p. 89) states that practice is ‘a temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings. Examples are cooking practices, voting practices, industrial practices … To say that the doings and sayings forming a practice constitute a nexus is to say that they are linked in certain ways.’ The linking is according to the author accomplished through three avenues: understandings of how to act, explicit rules and guidelines, and what he calls teleoaffec tive structures of ends, purposes, beliefs and emotions. About practice as performance, Reckwitz (2002)
suggests that a practice can be thought of as a pattern of actions that are executed by individuals who thereby reproduce the practice (cf. Bourdieu, 1977). The individual, as an agent of physical and mental properties, is the carrier of the practice; both in terms of bodily activities and the routinized ways of understanding and knowing which the practice invokes. Reckwitz further consider that these routinized mental aspects of a practice are not qualities of the individual agent, but rather qualities of the practice in which the individual participates. He concludes (ibid., p. 250): ‘A practice is thus a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood. To say that practices are “social practices” is indeed a tautology: A practice is social, as it is a “type” of behaving and understanding that appears at different locales and at different points of time and is carried out by different body/minds.’

The situated view of learning
An adoption of the notion of practice is encountered in the field of education. The situated view of learning, which originates from an understanding of learning as dependent on the activity, context, and culture in which it transpires (see Chaiklin and Lave, 1996), advocates that practice is the locus of learning. Scholars adopting the situated view argue that competence, as opposed to some abstract knowledge that is possessed by practitioners, is knowledge that is constituted and appropriated through the practitioner’s engagement in practice. Subsequent this view of learning, knowledge is hence considered to be anchored in the very fiber and contours of human practice.

Empirical support for the situated view has been provided in studies of such diverse settings and phenomena as adults’ problem-solving in math (Lave, 1988), Yucatec midwives in Mexico (Lave and Wenger, 1991), blacksmiths (Keller and Keller, 1996), students of Islamic law in Egypt and beginner tailors in West Africa (Lave, 1996), as well as quartermasters onboard US naval vessels (Hutchins, 1996). Through extensive ethnographic studies of Liberian apprentice tailors,
Lave (1996) showed how novices learn the trait of tailoring by engaging in practice with experienced practitioners. However, the novice tailors not only learned to perform the focal trait but also learned the formal competence of how to do math, which in the tailor shop was just as situated a practice as tailoring. For the apprentice tailors, as for quartermasters and blacksmiths, a focal aspect of learning is to assimilate the ‘props’ of the practice. Hutchins (1996), who describes naval navigation as a distributed knowledge system of minds and artifacts, argues that the activity exemplifies how human practice may be mediated by a variety of tools. Much of the interaction between navigators in the distributed system emerged through the use of technologies that thus became an integral part of the system and the practice itself.

While the situated view of learning emerged within education as a theory about how beginner practitioners learn through apprenticeship, it has further inspired scholars within the field of management, such as in research on organizational learning and knowledge (e.g. Brown and Duguid, 1991; Tsoukas, 1996), who have become advocates of the situated view usually through the ‘communities of practice’ concept.

**Communities of practice**

Introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991) as an explanation to the situated view, communities of practice are informal gatherings of people that are connected to each other through what Wenger (1998) defines as mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. Members form a mutual identity in sharing an endeavor, interests, a knowledge domain/expertise, different kinds of artifacts and stories. Research on communities of practice include, for example, studies of work practices in firms, such as insurance claims processors (Wenger, 1998), service technicians (Orr, 1996; Wenger and Snyder, 2000), IT professionals (Pawlowski and Robey, 2004) and equipment assemblers (Beckky, 2003). Studies of communities of practice have moreover captured online communities, such as electronic networks of associated, but geographically dispersed, practitioners (Wasko et al., 2004; Wasko and Faraj, 2005; Wasko et al., 2009), and different types of online groups (Wasko and Faraj, 2000; Mathwick et al., 2008).
A fundamental idea within the communities of practice concept is that newcomers are not immediately granted community membership. Beginners have to prove themselves at the periphery of a practice in a state Lave and Wenger (1991) termed legitimate peripheral participation. Novices learn at the periphery what membership entails by performing minor tasks, by getting acquainted with the artifacts and the tools of the practice, and through the stories told about the practice by experienced practitioners (Orr, 1996; Wenger, 1998). Thus, it is membership – that is, becoming a community member – that is central, as among others Brown and Duguid (1991, p. 48) explain: ‘Learners are acquiring not explicit, formal "expert knowledge," but the embodied ability to behave as community members…Workplace learning is best understood, then, in terms of the communities being formed or joined and personal identities being changed. The central issue in learning is becoming a practitioner not learning about practice.’ This means, in turn, as the authors further remark, that communities of practice are emergent, as opposed to created or acquired; they are shaped and re-shaped (reproduced or reformed) as members and newcomers continue to jointly engage in practice.

An example – becoming a PhD – may help shed some further light on the aspect of membership with respect to communities of practice. When embarking on PhD studies, one is, at first, at the periphery of the community of those who hold a PhD. In my experience, this peripheral membership involves, among other things, acquainting oneself with the ‘discourse’ that is underway within the community. What I mean hereby with discourse is simply the different topics of discussion that community members engage in with each other (the status of publications is an example of one such topic). At the periphery the PhD student is moreover familiarized with the different procedures that are in place in the community. These procedures, along with the traits of research, include how to interact with members without committing a faux pas. Through continuous socialization with these and other such aspects of the community of PhDs, a PhD student successively moves from the periphery towards becoming a community member. There are different signs that help illustrate the transition, the
most evident of which is perhaps the change in title from student to candidate. And, in order to fully enter the community of PhDs, the PhD candidate will have to go through a final rite of passage – the thesis defense – during which community members will judge whether the PhD candidate is eligible for attaining full membership in the community. Becoming a member of a community of practice, such as that of PhDs, thus entails competence beyond the formal knowledge (Brown and Duguid, 1991). In Paper I, membership as described in the communities of practice literature is adopted to explore the becoming of knowledgeable members of an online consumer community.

It is important to remark, however, that communities of practice are neither inherently benevolent nor malevolent (Wenger, 1998). For a firm, communities of practice may represent core capabilities or core rigidities (Leonard-Barton, 1995), depending on whether they form barriers and become impervious to outside influence. Difficulties may arise since knowledge is deeply situated in the practice and in the identity of the community (Orr, 1996; Wenger, 1998; Carlile, 2002), making the sharing of knowledge between different communities of practice challenging. Rather than directly absorbing knowledge from other communities of practice, novel insights may be adapted so as to fit the current knowledge structure of community members (see e.g. Bechky, 2003). Reconnecting to the example of the PhD community, it holds individuals who have been schooled and are active in different academic fields who, along with sharing a membership in the community of PhDs, may understand and draw on things with respect to research quite differently. The PhD community is thus an example of a constellation of communities of practice, or, as Brown and Duguid (1991) have called organizations, ‘communities of communities.’ For a firm, learning and innovation is according to Brown and Duguid (1998) dependent on flows of knowledge being enabled between its diverse communities of practice. Connections that are needed to achieve knowledge flows can according to the authors be forged through different social strategies, two of which, particularly relevant for the thesis, are boundary objects and brokers6.
While a boundary object is a reification, such as an artifact, a technique or procedure, around which communities can arrange interconnections between practices (Star and Griesemer, 1989; Wenger, 2000), a broker is an individual with memberships in different communities who thus can link, and thereby transfer elements in between, practices (Wenger, 1998). Again relating to the community of PhDs, some academic fields share, for instance, research techniques and methods, and some even share theoretical concepts (even though they may perceive one and the same concept somewhat differently) that may be used to link researchers from different fields together. And, there are scholars who are interdisciplinary and so are positioned to understand similarities and differences between fields within the larger PhD community. Whereas studies of firms have demonstrated that brokers and boundary objects afford connections for knowledge to flow in between firm practices (e.g. Bechky, 2003; Pawlowski and Robey, 2004), these two social strategies are adopted in Paper II to investigate knowledge sharing between an online consumer community and the hosting firm.

Practice and the consumer
Since Holt’s (1995) famous study of spectators at Wrigley Field, in which it was shown that baseball entails consumers engaging in several consumption practices in which different consumption objects are drawn on as they interact with each other, the notion of practice as per the above practice theorists has been more explicitly adopted in consumption research. Warde (2005) argues that practice theory may inform research on consumption and offer support for theoretical consolidation. Inspired by Schatzki (1996) and Reckwitz (2002), he defines practice in relation to consumption as a temporal and dispersed nexus of behaviors including practical activities, representations or talk, and performances, and further states that consumption should not be seen as a practice in itself but rather as an element in all practices.

Shove and Panzar (2005), considering there to be a shortage of research on what consumption involves in practice, draw on the work of the above practice theorists for exploring consumers’ and producers’
role in the development of Nordic walking. Viewing it as a situated social practice, they maintain that Nordic walking is not diffused from its country of origin to other countries but that it, and other situated practices like it, is a ‘homegrown’ practice that has been (re)invented in local contexts by consumers and producers together. The producer’s role in this reinvention is to ‘promote the diffusion of the elements or ingredients of which practices are made’ (ibid., p. 62), and the authors thus conclude: ‘This analysis has the further effect of reminding us that consumers and producers are both involved in constituting and reproducing practices, the successful accomplishment of which entails specific forms of consumption. From this point of view, discussions about how consumer goods are appropriated and domesticated do not go quite far enough. What is missing, but what is required, is a more encompassing account of the co-production of practice’ (ibid.). For the producer then, innovation may be seen as involving, alongside the development and distribution of consumption objects, a collaborative (re)invention, together with consumers, of the practice(s) in which the innovation is to be used (see Pantzar and Shove, 2010).

Also inspired by the above contemporary practice theorists, Jensen Schau et al. (2009, p. 31, italics added) in their study of consumer communities have offered a definition of practices that is central herein: ‘Practices are linked and implicit ways of understanding, saying, and doing things. They comprise a temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of behaviors that include practical activities, performances, and representations or talk. Practices link behaviors, performances, and representations through (1) procedures – explicit rules, principles, precepts, and instructions, called “discursive knowledge”; (2) understandings – knowledge of what to say and do, skills and projects, or know-how (i.e., tacit cultural templates for understanding and action); and (3) engagements – ends and purposes that are emotionally charged insofar as people are committed to them.’ This definition of practices is adopted as a template in Paper IV upon which practice as a script is defined vis-à-vis the intricacies of cocreating value propositions with consumers. It is therein explained (p. 1556): ‘Taken together, these characteristics [understandings, procedures and engagements]
constitute the script that each resource-integrating actor draws upon when engaging in a practice of forming a value proposition. Thus, in a co-creative practice of forming a value proposition, the script that each resource-integrating actor draws upon mediates (enables and delimits) the reciprocal exchange of knowledge between actors.’

The explanatory lens
Drawing on the above literature, the explanatory lens that will be used for evaluating the findings about the active consumer in the four papers against the thesis-level research question encompasses the understanding of social reality as constituted by arrays of practices. Practices are, in turn, understood following the definition provided by Jensen Schau et al. (2009). Practitioners – their sayings and doings (Schatzki, 1996), their bodily activities and routinized ways of knowing and understanding (Reckwitz, 2002), their talk and representations and practical activities and performances (Warde, 2005) – are thus seen as linked through shared procedures, understandings, and engagements (cf. Schatzki, 1996); the three of which constitute what can be called the script of a practice (Paper IV).

The lens further comprises a view of knowledge as anchored in the fabric and contours of human practice. Knowledge is fundamentally social; it is constituted and appropriated by individuals as they engage in practice. Consequently, contrary to positivist thoughts and beliefs, knowledge, as well as the practice in which it is situated, is not an ‘object’ that can be somewhat effortlessly acquired and transferred in between diverse social settings. To become knowledgeable (that is, to learn), and then in extension to assume an ability to enable flows of knowledge between social settings, necessitates participation in practice(s), which in turn is a matter of membership(s). As shown above in the example of the community of PhDs, membership involves, however, more than assimilating the formal knowledge about, for instance, how to tailor, how to navigate or to how to research. It entails also appreciating the community’s identity; the discourse, procedures, artifacts, etc., that the community has emerged upon and draws on.
Research method

Capturing the active consumer

Methodology has a tendency to present a researcher with intricate and often time-consuming questions to contemplate. It is, however, an aspect of research, and arguably also of becoming a researcher, that deserves considerable attention and thoughtfulness. This thesis has come about, exclusively, through a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis, and it consequently rests on the amenities, and suffers the limitations, of this approach to the study of social phenomena. The adoption of a qualitative approach was thoroughly considered. However, if one believes, as I do, that the outline of a research effort should be based on the phenomenon of interest, the research question through which the phenomenon will be studied, as well as the predilections of the researcher(s), then the decision was nevertheless rather easy.

This thesis has the purpose of exploring the nature of the active consumer from a firm perspective, and, on a thesis-level, is spearheaded by the research question: ‘What are the implications of the active consumer on innovation and marketing practices?’ In turn, regarding the predilections of the researcher(s), I – the one partly responsible for the studies that comprise this thesis – subscribe to the understanding of knowledge as situated in human practice. This view resides within, but is not an exact reflection of, the interpretive paradigm to social science research as defined by Burrell and Morgan (1992), thus making my methodological stance ideographic in nature. ‘The ideographic approach emphasises the analysis of the subjective accounts which one generates by ‘getting inside’ situations and involving oneself in the everyday flow of life – the detailed analysis of the insights generated by such encounters with one’s subject and the
insights revealed in impressionistic accounts found in diaries, biographies and journalistic records. The ideographic method stresses the importance of letting one’s subject unfold its nature and characteristics during the process of investigation’ (ibid., p. 6). All things considered then, the most suitable and appropriate approach to data collection and analysis was arguably a qualitative approach.

This thesis is founded on two separate research efforts in the form of two longitudinal studies (Remark: Röndell, 2012 is also based on these two studies):

- Study I – Papers I, II and III – is an investigation of the video game industry that was initiated with an exploratory pre-study of the industry at large, followed by an in-depth study of a Sweden-based game developer (henceforth referred to under the pseudonym Gameco) and its consumer community. The study lasted approximately two years, and was conducted by a group of four researchers.
- Study II – Paper IV – is an investigation of the development of a customer loyalty card by one of Northern Europe’s leading grocery retailers. The study lasted approximately a year and a half, and was conducted by a group of four researchers.

The methodological outline of both research efforts, their design and execution, was founded on the work of recognized theorists on qualitative method (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Dey, 2005; Yin, 2009; Silverman, 2010), and conventional procedures to the collection and the analysis of qualitative data were thus followed.

Overview of Study I
As described above, the video game industry is a setting that contains consumers who innovate and who cocreate value together with each other and with game developers, all of which occurs in research-accessible online consumer communities. The industry thus represents a suitable research setting in relation to the purpose of this thesis.
The exploratory pre-study

Study I was initiated with an exploratory pre-study of the video game industry that had the purpose of gaining an understanding of the industry at large and initial insight into gaming communities. The pre-study advanced through a series of interviews with six key informants (see Table 3). Using key informants is a way to obtain data in a short period of time from knowledgeable sources, making it a suitable technique when insight into a research object cannot be expected through, for instance, surveys (Kumar et al., 1993). ‘Key informants, as a result of their personal skills, or position within a society, are able to provide more information and a deeper insight into what is going on around them’ (Marshall, 1996, p. 92).

Table 3 – Overview of interviews in the pre-study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee (1-3)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration (min.)</th>
<th>Interviewee (4-6)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration (min.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Journalist specialized in the video game industry</td>
<td>Mar 2010</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4. CEO of Swedish game developer</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Journalist specialized in the video game industry</td>
<td>Mar 2010</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5. CEO of Swedish game developer and publisher</td>
<td>Jun 2010</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Paper II

The informants were considered key in that they were individuals with general knowledge about the global video game industry, and with detailed knowledge about the Swedish video game industry. In-
cluding both industry observers – the journalists – and industry participants – the CEOs – in the sample rendered a welcomed nuance to the pre-study data that allowed for an evaluation of the reliability of the informants’ statements.

Due to the research group’s limited experience of the industry the informants were contacted following a snowball sampling procedure (Goodman, 1961; Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004) that was initiated with a scanning of industry-related press/magazines. Semi-structured interviews were performed in order to gain illustrative accounts and exemplifications. The interviews were founded on earlier research on the video game industry (e.g. Jeppesen and Molin, 2003; Jeppesen, 2005; Arakji and Lang, 2007), and research on industries exhibiting similar characteristics (e.g. Jeppesen and Fredriksen, 2006), thereby enabling questions to be asked about previously encountered industry phenomena. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

**In-depth study of Gameco**

The exploratory pre-study was followed by an in-depth study of the Sweden-based game developer Gameco and its firm-hosted consumer community. Gameco was founded in 1998, and is internationally renowned for its portfolio of multifaceted warfare strategy games that contains five game-series, each including three to twelve titles, and four single game titles (as of November 2012). Gameco was considered conducive to study in-depth for three main reasons (see Paper II for a more elaborate explanation):

- Gameco is in direct contact with the consumers of its products through the gaming community that it hosts.
- Gameco’s games are extensively modifiable, meaning that consumers can, on their own, virtually develop entirely novel gaming experiences in the form of ‘mods.’
- Gameco’s consumer community has some 450 000 members (as of November 2012), and is acknowledged by the industry as well-organized and well-managed.
A series of semi-structured interviews that were recorded and transcribed were made with different employees at Gameco (see Table 4) who were all contacted following a snowball sampling procedure that was initiated with a recommendation from the CEO of Gameco (Interviewee no. 6 in Table 3). Also in relation to the series of interviews at Gameco was a snowball sampling procedure considered appropriate in that it allowed the employees to direct the research group to whom to talk to in line with the group’s evolving need for more in-depth insight into certain aspects of Gameco.

**Table 4 – Overview of interviews at Gameco**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee (1-4)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration (min.)</th>
<th>Interviewee (5-8)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration (min.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Community manager</td>
<td>Nov 2010</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>5. Designer</td>
<td>Apr 2011</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Paper II

The series of interviews was allowed to successively become more focused as completed interviews helped structure ensuing interviews. Thus, what started with respondents providing feedback from Gameco with regards to the findings in the exploratory pre-study subsequently became in-depth explanations about how Gameco is working together with its consumer community in developing and publishing its games.

**Netnography of the consumer community**

Acknowledged qualitative research on consumer groups and communities has often adopted ethnography as a principal method for data collection (see Arnould and Thompson, 2005). As consumer communities then began migrating online, researchers followed suit and de-
veloped the netnographic approach. Netnography has been used to study such diverse groups as coffee connoisseurs (Kozinets, 2002), consumers of cosmetic surgery (Langer and Beckman, 2005), cross cultural brides-to-be (Nelson and Otnes, 2005), and the Apple Newton brand community (Muñiz and Jensen Schau, 2005; Muñiz and Jensen Schau, 2007; Jensen Schau et al., 2009). It has moreover been found a viable approach for the identification of lead users (Belz and Baumbach, 2010).

Netnography, or online ethnography, according to Kozinets (2002), is the adaptation of ethnographic research techniques for the study of cultures and groups that socialize and proliferate through computer-mediated communications (that is, in online communities). He states (ibid., p. 62): ‘As a marketing research technique, netnography uses the information that is publicly available in online forums to identify and understand the needs and decision influences of relevant online consumer groups. Compared with traditional and market-oriented ethnography, netnography is far less time consuming and elaborate.’ Netnography may also be less intrusive than a traditional ethnographic approach since the researcher has the possibility to act solely as a lurker\(^{10}\) in the community that is being studied. Naturally, this raises questions about what may be considered ethical/unethical behavior in relation to the netnographic approach (see Langer and Beckman, 2005).

Research ethics, along with entrée, data collection and analysis and interpretation, forms the stages included in the netnographic approach as outlined by Kozinets (2002, 2010). Before engaging in a netnography the researcher will also have to gain a rudimentary understanding of the community that is to be studied in order to be able to appropriately adapt ethnographic techniques to the online setting. Before the research group embarked on the study of Gameco’s consumer community, such an understanding of the community was rendered through the series of interviews with Gameco employees, during which, for instance, it was revealed that there is an ongoing debate among community members about how Gameco ought to develop its
games (see Paper II). Below follows a description of how the entrée and data collection, as well as the issue of ethics, were handled in the netnography of Gameco’s community (the analysis of the Study I data is addressed in a separate section).

The steps of entrée and data collection entail the identification of a suitable forum to study and the capture of various data from that forum, respectively (Kozinets, 2010). As online communities may contain many forums in which members participate simultaneously the ethnographic study of such a setting, in its entirety, is somewhat like being in the audience of the 1980s play Tamara.\textsuperscript{11} Herein lies a notable drawback with the netnographic approach – that is, the risk of suffering information overload in the study (Kozinets, 2002). Gameco’s community, with its 450 000 members (as of November 2012) and an extensive constellation of web-based forums in which theses members interact with each other incessantly, is a setting in which the risk of information overload was deemed significant. Measures for mitigating this risk were thus sought, and the research group decided to adopt a ‘seeding’ type of strategy (Kozinets et al., 2010) in the form of posting a thread\textsuperscript{12} in a selected forum to capture data from the community. After advice from Gameco’s community manager, who ensured that the forum was representative for the community at large, the thread was posted in the forum dedicated to one of Gameco’s most popular game series. The community manager further supported the netnography by openly endorsing the thread.\textsuperscript{13}

Inspired by the notion of narratives and storytelling as instances of individuals’ sensemaking and organizing of themselves in the world (see Boje, 1991; Czarniawska, 1997), in the thread, community members were, as Figure 1 illustrates, asked to provide a story – a CAR\textsuperscript{14} – about their experience in the community. Members who provided a CAR were then contacted via a Personal Messaging function in the community, and were asked open-ended follow-up questions based on what they had written in their individual CAR.
Hi all Gameco\textsuperscript{a} gamers,

Gameco and a team of researchers from Uppsala University are collaborating in a study of your gaming community, especially in relation to […]\textsuperscript{a}. The collaboration aims to arrive at a better understanding of your experience and use of the community and its related forums.

We would therefore greatly appreciate to hear about your interaction with the community of gamers and with the Gameco team. For example: *What is your involvement within the gaming community? What is your use of the Gameco forums, and what is your experience of interacting with other gamers and with the Gameco team through them?*

All comments, short and brief as well as elaborate and detailed, are highly appreciated and of interest to us. And, if you so please, it would be great to read about your experiences and use of the community in the way of an AAR (or rather, a CAR – “Community Action Report”).

Looking much forward to reading about your experiences!

/Pynchon\textsuperscript{b}

PS: If you would like to know more about our research, or if you have any other questions, don’t hesitate to contact us (the research team) via the private message option.

\textsuperscript{a} To maintain anonymity, the game developer’s name is herein replaced by Gameco while the targeted forum’s name is replaced by […].

\textsuperscript{b} Pynchon was the research group’s username, and it was thus the name by which the group was known within the community.

Following recommended research ethics for the netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2010), the research group made it clear from the outset, as Figure 1 testifies to, that the thread had a research purpose, and community members were moreover presented with the possibility of asking about the research. As a strategy to limit bias in respondents’ input – that is, that they would direct their stories towards what they thought was sought by the research group – and thus to strengthen reliability, the exact research purpose was not disclosed in the ini-
tial post in the thread. Further, in an attempt to avoid misinterpretations of lurking behavior, the research group confirmed its presence in the forum by more or less immediately posting in the thread after any community member had made a post. And, to incorporate the aspect of ‘member check’ (Kozinets, 2002, 2010), the research group published its own CAR in the thread that informed respondents about the group’s experience with, and input from, the thread. The posts that followed the research group’s CAR were enthusiastic and cheerful, and some community members also commented that similar initiatives of collaboration between Gameco and researchers ought to be made more often in the future.

With regards to the outcome of the thread, which is elaborately described in both Paper I and II, the community manager mentioned that it had exceeded initial expectations in terms of how many, and how much, members had contributed to it. Notable with respect to the outcome of the netnography is also the additional inputs that were gained, of which one example is a thread that was started in parallel with the research group’s thread that was to ascertain the average age of Gameco community members. Out of the 295 members who had responded the average age in the community was calculated by the thread starter to be 34.5 years, with the youngest respondents having an age of 13 years and the oldest an age of 70 years (arguably rather surprising numbers coming from an industry which is generally thought to cater predominantly to older children and adolescents). Further additional input during the netnography was a four-page essay titled ‘Fifty years of war gaming,’ in which the history of the video game industry, with a focus on warfare strategy games, was illustratively described by a seasoned community member. This historical expose, and others like it addressing other topics, were spontaneously handed to the research group throughout the netnography.

Analysis in Study I
As explained above, Study I was initiated with an exploratory pre-study of which one of the aims was to gain an understanding of consumer communities in the video game industry. A result of the pre-
study was thus an outline of practices in which consumers may engage when participating actively in gaming communities (see Table 5).

**Table 5 – Outline of practices in gaming communities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderators</strong></td>
<td><em>Moderating</em> entails aiding the developer with upholding the code of conduct and standard in the community forums. Community members become moderators of a forum, or a sub-forum, through appointment by the developer, or after suggestions from fellow community members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Posters</strong></td>
<td><em>Posting</em> entails providing the community forums with discussable content. Community members post everything from mundane comments to descriptions of gaming experiences, gameplay advice and tutorials, and the threads that emerge are the “lifeblood” of web-based communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beta-testers</strong></td>
<td><em>Beta-testing</em> entails assessing a video game prior to its official release. Community members who beta-test consider theoretical and/or evaluate practical aspects of the beta-version of a game, and they become “betas” by signing up or by accepting the developer’s invitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modders</strong></td>
<td><em>Modding</em> entails using a developer’s designs as a template for creating improvements or novel content. Community members who mod usually share their creations freely within the community forums for all to enjoy. Modding is made possible when the developer relinquishes parts of a design’s code, but not the “engine,” so that it can be edited by users.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Paper I

While the outline was essentially derived inductively, founding the pre-study interviews on previous research meant that the definition of modding, which has dominated earlier research (Jeppesen and Molin, 2003; Jeppesen, 2005; Jeppesen and Fredriksen, 2006; Arakji and Lang, 2007), was rendered through what can be compared with dialogical reasoning (see below). Hence, previous accounts of modding were used as a template for an early definition while respondents’ accounts of modding from different community contexts enabled the early definition to be updated and made more generally applicable.
Also notable with regards to the outline is that the provision of dis-
cussable content – that is, posting – has been made a separate practice. Although posting represents the principal form of communication in online communities, the pre-study respondents commented that some members of gaming communities typically dedicate most of their community time to, for instance, aid other members with their gaming or with their adoption of the gaming community (see Papers I and II). The practice of posting in the outline thus refers to this kind of members. In turn, the definitions of moderating and beta-testing were es-
tablished through refinement of respondents’ statements; their defini-
tions of each of the practices were combined together and ‘condensed’ (for instance, ‘code of conduct’ and ‘standard’ as regards moderating). The outline was validated through the series of interviews at Gameco and the netnography of the consumer community, leading to only mi-
nor revisions of the established definitions.

The interview data from the in-depth study of Gameco and the data gathered from the consumer community were analyzed, in both Paper I and II (Paper III is exclusively founded on the data gathered during the pre-study), following conventional qualitative research procedures. This meant, in line with Miles and Huberman (1994) and Dey (2005), first ‘cleaning’ the data in order to assure a focused and effective analysis. The analysis in Paper I and II are consistent with the notion of dialogical reasoning (Klein and Myers, 1999); research literature was adopted as a guide in the analysis rather than as a predetermined framework, thus linking the analysis to previous research without impeding the emergence of possible novel insights (see Pawlowski and Robey, 2004). The development of categories progressed, however, in somewhat different ways in Paper I and II. Paper I adopted the outline rendered through the pre-study as a ‘compartmentalizer’ for developing categories (the outline was thus employed as presented above in Paper I). Paper II relied on a process of examining recurring themes in the data sources, creating tentative categories, reexamining these cate-
gories and ‘freezing’ them, and the above outline was adopted in this process as a template from which practices occurring between Game-
co and the consumer community were derived.
Overview of Study II

Study II, as mentioned above, lasted approximately a year and a half and was conducted by a group of four researchers. It involved following the complete development of a customer loyalty card that was presented to the market on 17 August 2011 by one of Northern Europe’s leading grocery retailers. ‘What made this offering unique was that it had been co-created together with students. By the end of September 2011, the card had already gained the retailer an approximate 16% share of the student segment and had generated 26,000 ‘likes’ on Facebook’ (Paper IV, p. 5).

Study II had an exploratory research approach that was informed by multiple data sources:

- Formal interviews with five key employees at the grocery retailer.
- Unobtrusive participant observations and informal meetings (Remark: I did not personally participate during the participant observations or the informal meetings, but was granted insight into them through discussions with my research colleagues who had participated).
- Examination of project-related documentation.

The formal interviews, which were semi-structured in nature, were made with the five employees at the grocery retailer who constituted the project group that was responsible for the progression of the development of the customer loyalty card. They represented key informants (op. cit.), and were therefore interviewed throughout the entire extension of the development in order to ‘tap the knowledge and experience’ (Churchill Jr, 1979) that they were successively accumulating. All formal interviews were recorded and transcribed. Informal meetings with the project group, and then also with representatives from the IT, marketing, and sales departments at the retailer, occurred both before and after the participant observations.
The term participant observation covers a wide variety of ways of participating, and not participating, with the purpose of studying a phenomenon, and some scholars therefore maintain that all social research is a form of participation (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). According to Silverman (2006), the idea behind doing participant observations is that, in order to understand the world, the researcher should experience the world directly, as the research instrument, instead of observing it from a distance through various kinds of proxies. Dey (2005, p. 38) maintains that participant observations are an appropriate technique for exposing connections and relationships between actions and outcomes, and remarks that the data generated is ‘descriptive of social relationships and interchanges which unfold in the succession of actions and events in which the actors are engaged.’ Approximately 50 hours of participant observations were made during Study II. The observations, which were unobtrusive in nature in order to limit the possible effects of researcher presence, took place during meetings between:

- The project group and the students; three presentations in which the students presented concepts, ideas, and feedback to the project group.
- The project group and intra-organizational departments; four meetings held by the project group and the IT, marketing, and sales departments.
- The project group, intra-organizational departments, and the students; a 24-hour case competition, at the end of which the students presented conceptual solutions to a case in front of the project group and representatives from the IT, marketing, and sales departments.

Study II moreover included examination of various documentations and records, such as the students’ reports from the 24-hour case competition, PowerPoint presentations from meetings and presentations, ‘creative briefs’ showing the progression of the development, and numerous policy and legal documents.
Analysis in Study II

The analysis in Study II progressed in parallel with the collection of data, and the two processes consequently informed each other. Following the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1994), understandings emerging throughout the dual process were treated cautiously, but with openness, thus letting them gradually become more explicit as the study advanced.

A peer-evaluation-style process for categorization – identification and labeling – was adopted for the analysis of the complete data set. The process had an approach ‘between either wholly inductive or completely confirmatory’ (Brown et al., 2007, p. 9), and the successive development of the identification and labeling was allowed to progress upon:

- A pre-established thematic focus in ‘reciprocal knowledge exchange’ (see ‘Research focus of Paper IV’ above).
- A theoretical foundation in the form of previous research on knowledge creation and sharing (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) and knowledge management (Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Alvesson and Leidner, 2001).

Thus, Study II also found analytical inspiration in the notion of dialogical reasoning, and the peer-evaluation process was continued until significant consensus (see Perreault Jr and Leigh, 1989) in the identification and labeling of categories was accomplished between the members of the research group. As Paper IV demonstrates, the process was rather iterative in its progression since, for instance, the research group found that the theoretical foundation did not completely capture the facet of reciprocity that was found in the data regarding the exchange of knowledge, and neither captured the fact that this exchange was not sequential but rather interchangeable and multifaceted. A relabeling procedure was therefore considered necessary, as Paper IV further explains.
Applicability of findings

This thesis is based on two studies, and two studies alone (if my journeys into the world of consumer insights are not included), of two essentially different contexts. One of these contexts – the video game industry – is highly developed in terms of the active consumer, whereas the other – the grocery retailer – involves a setting in which cocreation is in its infancy. Thus, while Study I meant investigating a setting where innovation and cocreation among consumers, as well as between consumers and firms, has developed into an innate industry characteristic, Study II meant investigating a setting that has little history in this regard. While the purpose of the thesis may allow that the studies are drawn on together, as opposed to compared, and the differences in between them consequently may be considered strengthening with regards to generalizability on a thesis-level (that is, in that the two studies offer nuances to what consumer activity may encompass), they are nonetheless studies of contexts with peculiarities that may limit the applicability of the findings that they have rendered.

Focusing on the video game industry, whence the majority of the findings presented herein have emerged, it possesses certain characteristics that make it a prime setting for studying the active consumer. Particularly two, related, characteristics arise as central in this regard:

- The industry has been a forerunner in using the Internet, and has pioneered the adoption of modern information technology (such as in relation to the toolkits approach). Gamers are often dispersed all over the world, and the Internet has thus meant that communication costs among consumers, and between consumers and developers, can be kept to a minimum. During the netnography of Gameco’s community, one member, as mentioned above, provided the research group with additional input in the form of a four-page essay with the title ‘Fifty years of war gaming.’ The veteran member described how profoundly gaming has developed as forums for gaming went from print to electronic with the entry of the Internet in the mid-90s: ‘I’ve been a
gamer for 50 years. I’d pore over the “Opponents Wanted” [a column for war-gaming] of The General [a gaming magazine published by Avalon Hill] hoping to find someone nearby. I remember my delight when I discovered a schoolmate who also played. … Today, all I have to do is visit a website.’

- As the seasoned community member’s essay thus explained, the Internet entailed that gamers no longer had to play against each other via magazines/newspapers, but could get immediate access to other gaming aficionados through websites. Game developers were quick at perceiving the benefits, and began hosting constellations of online forums for the consumers of their video games. The online consumer communities that developed have become, in many cases, as big a part of the gaming experience as playing the actual games (there are even gamers who spend most of their ‘game time’ just roaming the forums); it is where the active consumer engages in innovation and cocreates value together with other consumers, and with developers, of video games.

The question then is whether these characteristics make the findings presented in this thesis relevant only for the video game industry? The answer is no. Besides industries exhibiting much the same characteristics as the video game industry (see e.g. Jeppesen and Fredriksen, 2006), there are many, and somewhat diverse, industries today that have developed considerable competence in using the Internet and information technology to enable consumer involvement and communities. The automotive industry is one noteworthy example (see Füller et al., 2006; Füller et al., 2008; Marchi et al., 2011), and the sports apparel and footwear industry is another (see Füller et al., 2007). Looking beyond the consumer, in the introduction of the thesis it was briefly mentioned how Goldcorp Inc. used the Internet to distribute and share mining information with the general public, and how an online ideagora helped Proctor & Gamble find a small bakery in Italy that had a solution to the firm’s issue with printing sharp images onto Pringles. While the video game industry is a forerunner, conditions for the active consumer are rapidly spreading across different industries, and with them the applicability of the findings presented in this thesis.
Paper I

Recap
Research on consumer communities has found that community members who innovate and share knowledge are different in terms of their needs, knowledge and innovativeness, but little attention has been paid to understand how consumers become such members of online consumer communities. Research on other types of online communities, such as open source communities, lends support to the notion that the becoming of knowledgeable consumer community members is not serendipitous. Paper I, as Table 1.1 displays, therefore explores the becoming of knowledgeable members of an online consumer community, which, on a thesis level, addresses the knowledge of the active consumer.

Table 1.1 – Overview of Paper I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Theoretical backdrop</th>
<th>Research focus</th>
<th>Connection to research question in thesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper I</td>
<td>Consumer innovation</td>
<td>The becoming of knowledgeable members of an online consumer community</td>
<td>Knowledge of the active consumer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper II</td>
<td>Consumer innovation</td>
<td>The facilitation of knowledge sharing vis-à-vis innovation between an online consumer community and the hosting firm</td>
<td>Supporting the active consumer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper III</td>
<td>Value cocreation</td>
<td>To provide a perspective on management of value creation</td>
<td>Managing the active consumer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper IV</td>
<td>Value cocreation</td>
<td>The intricacies of cocreating value propositions with consumers</td>
<td>Challenges with the active consumer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Knowledge of the active consumer

The traditional view of the consumer as a recipient of that which emerges from the firm’s chain of value-adding activities contains few expectations regarding the knowledge of the consumer – that is, other than the ability to ‘destroy’ the value created by the firm (see Ramirez, 1999). However, in forwarding the consumer as an indispensable resource for the creation of value (Normann and Ramirez, 1993; Vargo and Lusch, 2004) and as an innovator of commercializable products (Franke and Shah, 2003; Füller et al., 2007), marketing and innovation management scholars have raised the expectations, considerably, on the consumer’s knowledge beyond the mere ability to consume. Paper I adds further to these heightened expectations by illustrating that the active consumer represents essential knowledge with regards to innovation and value cocreation.

In relation to an online consumer community, Paper I reveals that the active consumer makes what can be called a knowledge journey in which community lore and collaborative efforts with other community members represent central facets of learning. Throughout this journey, the active consumer becomes knowledgeable about the consumer community per se (its members and practices) and about engaging in innovation and value cocreation together with other consumer community members.

From a firm perspective then, the active consumer possesses knowledge about:

- The consumer sphere; its characteristics and peculiarities, and wants and needs.
- Innovation and value cocreation in the consumer sphere; how to innovate and cocreate value.

The active consumer thus carries knowledge about the what and the how of innovation and value cocreation, knowledge that will typically be shared freely with others in the consumer community.
Recap

The toolkits approach facilitates consumer innovation by enabling the customization of products by consumers, in the consumer sphere. However, in relation to consumer communities, toolkits may not be able to structure innovation within the official solution space or fully satisfy consumer innovativeness, consequently making the question emerge as to what other, complementary, facilitators there are for innovation between consumer communities and firms. Paper II, as Table 1.2 illustrates, thus investigates the facilitation of knowledge sharing vis-à-vis innovation between an online consumer community and the hosting firm, which, on a thesis level, addresses the issue of supporting the active consumer.

Table 1.2 – Overview of Paper II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper</th>
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Supporting the active consumer

Information technology, as Zuboff (1988) so elegantly described, supports translation of production activities into information, which in turn makes these activities visible to the firm. She called it informing, and its most significant consequence was the dual effect it had in both empowering and oppressing a firm’s workforce. The notion of informing is found also in other settings, in relation to other groups and activities, such as consumers and innovation. Innovation toolkits, by which design activities are made visible, have the aim of simultaneously enabling product customization in line with consumer wants and needs and structuring consumer innovativeness within the solution space determined by the firm. The active consumer holds, however, innovation-related knowledge that is pertinent beyond product customization, and so, as Paper II illustrates in relation to an online consumer community, other facilitators for knowledge sharing vis-à-vis innovation are therefore needed to support the active consumer.

Paper II reveals that brokers and boundary objects are facilitators that afford links for knowledge sharing between the firm and active consumers. These links can extend the entire innovation process – from generating product content, to testing product content, to finalizing for product release, to modifying product content – and brokers and boundary objects may thereby be complementary facilitators to the toolkits approach in establishing a complete innovation platform.

In relation to an online consumer community then, supporting the active consumer entails expanding the hosting firm’s innovation and cocreation platform, in addition to the technical facilitator that the toolkits approach represents, moreover to include social facilitators for knowledge sharing between active consumers and the firm (as well as knowledge sharing among active consumers). An initial step for the hosting firm in developing its platform may be to attempt to position a ‘man on the inside’ (see Dahlander and Wallin, 2006) of the consumer community, or, as Paper II describes, to incorporate active consumers from the community into the firm.
Recap

While firms have typically been assumed to be able to manage necessary resources through internalization and legal agreements, thus making management an issue of ownership and control, according to the SDL the consumer is a central resource for the creation of value. From a SDL perspective then, firms must consequently adopt another mindset as regards management of resources vis-à-vis value creation. Paper III, as Table 1.3 illustrates, therefore sets out to provide a management perspective that follows the understanding of value and the view of the consumer as an essential resource for the creation of value as proposed by the SDL, which, on a thesis level, addresses the matter of managing the active consumer.

Table 1.3 – Overview of Paper III

<table>
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</tbody>
</table>
Managing the active consumer

How firms deploy resources, competencies and capabilities in order to provide products and services superior to those offered by competitors is a question that has engaged many management scholars and gurus (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990; Barney, 1991; Hamel and Prahalad, 1991; Leonard-Barton, 1995; Teece et al., 1997). Competitiveness has typically been assumed to reside within firms, in how means for competing are cultivated and housed, and management has thus often been equated with terms such as unilateral control, ownership and authority. Firms that deal with the active consumer will have to reconsider this perspective on management, drastically, as Paper III illustrates.

When the active consumer innovates and cocreates value together with other consumers, the firm’s resources are displaced as the principal means for value creation, in turn affecting the industry dynamics as regards who produces and who consumes. As Paper III (p. 403) concludes: ‘These highly dynamic conditions thus render a situation in which control through internalization of necessary resources is impossible to attain, and might for the most part not be desirable. Instead, pivotal resources for value creation are to a considerable degree kept external to, and without being legally bound by, a developing firm.’

Does this mean that the firm should abandon its proclivity to manage when it comes to the active consumer? If by the word manage one means the traditional approach to management then the answer is yes. Another mindset is needed, one associating management with words such as inspiration, facilitation and attendance, rather than equating it with terms such as unilateral control and ownership. As Zwick et al. (2008, p. 185) have explained: ‘…the ideological recruitment of consumers into productive co-creation relationships hinges on accommodating consumers’ needs for recognition, freedom, and agency.’ Thus, to ‘manage’ the active consumer is not about finding ways to control knowledge and deeds, but is a matter of how the firm can strategically assist the active consumer’s innovativeness and cocreativity (both among active consumers and between active consumers and the firm).
Paper IV

Recap

Scholars who have contributed to the development of the SDL have recently called attention to the lack of empirical research exploring the nature of the formation of value propositions from an SDL perspective. How will cocreation of value propositions between firm and consumers evolve? Looking at studies of the consumer’s role in cocreation, and the example of Lego’s launch of Mindstorm herein, there are strong indications that such cocreation is bound to occasion various conundrums for the firm. Paper IV, as Table 1.4 demonstrates, thus explores the intricacies of cocreating value propositions with consumers, which, on a thesis level, addresses challenges with the active consumer.

Table 1.4 – Overview of Paper IV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical backdrop</th>
<th>Research focus</th>
<th>Connection to research question in thesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper I</td>
<td>Consumer innovation</td>
<td>The becoming of knowledgeable members of an online consumer community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper II</td>
<td>Consumer innovation</td>
<td>The facilitation of knowledge sharing vis-à-vis innovation between an online consumer community and the hosting firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper III</td>
<td>Value cocreation</td>
<td>To provide a perspective on management of value creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper IV</td>
<td>Value cocreation</td>
<td>The intricacies of cocreating value propositions with consumers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Challenges with the active consumer

Studying value creation by innovation toolkits, Franke and Piller (2004, p. 412) raised an interesting question: ‘...why users are willing to pay such a high price premium for their self-designed products.’ Since innovating and cocreating consumers are involved in developing the product they will consume, logic dictates that they should be compensated somehow for their effort, for example through a discount – but they usually are not. This conundrum, which has been termed the ‘double exploitation’ of consumers (Cova and Dalli, 2009), has spearheaded the chants of scholars who have critically assessed cocreation from a consumer perspective (e.g. Humphreys and Grayson, 2008; Zwick et al., 2008; Cova et al., 2011). However, Paper IV (p. 1566) demonstrates that the active consumer also may bring about conundrums from a firm perspective: ‘In relation to a co-creative practice, consumers are both “knowledge carriers” who participate in reciprocal exchange of knowledge and “troublemakers” who highlight issues of incommensurabilities between the scripts that resource-integrating actors draw upon.’

That the active consumer has two faces in relation to the firm may, as Paper IV illustrates, become apparent as they join forces in a cocreative practice; it is rather probable that incommensurabilities between the scripts that each actor draws on when engaging in the practice will be disclosed. Besides stifling the collaboration, this clash can have yet another effect on the firm – this is when the troublemaker inside the active consumer appears. Through the incommensurabilities the active consumer challenges the firm’s knowledge structures and procedures, and may thereby reveal a necessity for the firm to engage in the typically arduous process of double-loop learning (see Argyris, 1977). However, this is also when the other face of the active consumer appears. As organizational change is an essential competence for today’s firms to have, the active consumer may support the firm in its change work by acting as an external impetus and leverage; the active consumer brings the ‘bad news’ that change is necessary, and thus takes the blame for it.
Conclusions

Innovation and marketing with the active consumer

This thesis has the purpose of exploring the nature of the active consumer from a firm perspective, and set out to answer the thesis-level research question: ‘What are the implications of the active consumer on innovation and marketing practices?’ To answer this question then, the findings about the active consumer from the four papers, following a brief review of the insights and a revisiting of the passive consumer, are evaluated below using the explanatory lens (see Figure 2) that was formed above through the notion of practice.

Figure 2 – Recap of the explanatory lens

- Social reality is constituted by constellations of practices. Practices are both ‘sayings and doings,’ both ‘ways of knowing and bodily activities,’ both ‘talk and performances.’ Linking the behavior of practitioners is the script of a practice, which consists of shared understandings, procedures and engagements.
- Knowledge is constituted by people when they engage in practice, and is thus situated in human practice. Learning requires participation in practice, which in turn necessitates membership.
- Knowledge, and its corresponding practice, cannot be transferred between diverse social settings. Flows of knowledge between settings are enabled as practices share objects and individuals around which connections can be established.

The nature of the active consumer

Paper I reveals that the active consumer, in an online consumer community setting, makes what can be called a knowledge journey that entails learning about the consumer sphere and learning to innovate
and cocreate value together with other consumers. As such, the active consumer carries knowledge about the what and the how of innovation and value cocreation. Subsequently, Paper II, which draws on the findings presented in Paper I, demonstrates that support beyond the solution space that is provided by the toolkits approach is needed if the innovativeness and cocreativity of the active consumer is to be fully released and captured. It is shown that also social facilitators for knowledge sharing between the active consumer and the firm (as well as among consumers) are necessary. With regards to managing the active consumer, Paper III, in turn, suggests that the traditional management approach, which is founded on unilateral control and ownership of resources, is essentially inapplicable with respect to the active consumer. Instead, a firm’s management approach should be one that focuses on the strategic assistance of the active consumer’s innovativeness and cocreativity (among active consumers and between active consumers and the firm). Lastly, while previous research has critically evaluated cocreation primarily from a consumer perspective, Paper IV reveals that the active consumer, in relation to a cocreative practice, is a Janus-faced character for the firm; the active consumer is an agitator who may challenge the firm’s modus operandi, likewise a scapegoat who offers to take the blame for the ensuing organizational change.

Innovation and marketing vs. the passive consumer

Chants have long been heard about the inadequacies of conventional innovation and marketing practices (e.g. Levitt, 1960; Brown, 1991; Hamel and Prahalad, 1991). They have commonly expressed that consumer wants and needs deserve more thorough consideration than what firms employing traditional marketing techniques, methods and mindsets can afford to given them. It has been suggested that firms must direct their innovation efforts onto a path that satisfies the consumer’s future, and possibly latent, wants and needs. It has been argued that firms that will be able to compete are those who are proactive with regards to consumer needs, and who are able to gain a deep enough insight into those needs that they know of them even before the consumers themselves do.
It seems quite likely that these chants are the results of researchers’ recognition of the same issues that I had explained to me during my journeys into the world of consumer insights in the beginning of my studies. The managers that I talked to explained that gaining consumer insights is arduous work because simply asking consumers about their present wants and needs, or asking them to reflect upon their future wants and needs, does not guarantee accurate results. This then meant that consumer insights necessitate a great deal of research, which in turn leads to heaps of information being generated about consumers, the consequence of which, as one of the managers explained, is that ‘…then it all comes down to a gut feeling anyways.’

The passive consumer – the wellspring of consumer insights – constitutes a sizeable bunch of variables for the managers I talked to; variables that have an awesome tendency to elude any efforts to capture and measure them, and, to make things even more complicated, they are continuously changing. In a study of decision-making in relation to environmental uncertainty, Duncan (1972) found that managers are greatly affected by whether variables to consider in the environment are static or dynamic. Acting in a dynamic environment, even if the variables to take into consideration are few, means that managers cannot rely on earlier experience when facing novel situations. Consumer insights involve dealing with both numerous and dynamic variables, which is probably why the gut feeling mentioned above tends to take over sooner or later.

The active consumer vs. innovation and marketing
Viewed through the explanatory lens, the active consumer is a participant in practices of innovation and value cocreation. What is essential is the engagement in these practices, not the consumer; not the continuously changing variables that the passive consumer represents, and that managers exert such great effort to capture and measure only to arrive at the disappointing insight that what they have been able to capture has already changed. An appreciation of the active consumer as a participant in practices of innovation and value cocreation
prompts three aspects to emerge that arguably deserve particular consideration with regards to the implications of the active consumer on innovation and marketing practices. The three aspects, which relate to the scripts of these practices, are: (1) Perceiving the consumer as a resource, not a source; (2) Targeting consumer practices, not characteristics, and; (3) Development through participation, not acquisition.

**Perceiving the consumer as a resource**

What may perhaps be considered mere unpolished semantic play is, however, as I see it, an essential difference in terms of the mindset that innovation and marketing practices rest upon. The consumer has long been understood mainly as a source of information for innovation and marketing, information that is procured through the various techniques that are comprised within the consumer insights toolbox. As this thesis demonstrates, the active consumer is rather a resource, both for the firm and for fellow consumers, who is likely to go unexploited (and quite likely also unsatisfied) within the present innovation and marketing paradigm.

Reconsidering the consumer as a resource, as opposed to a source of information, in relation to innovation and marketing may, however, possibly involve a less than smooth endeavor and transition for firms. During the second journey into the empirical world in the beginning of my studies there were managers who revealed that firms are rather poor at considering consumer wants and needs, and who commented that it is something widely known but nothing that is likely to be placed on the agenda due to the widespread embarrassment that such a discussion would bring about. The managers pointed towards the underlying attitude and belief within the industry that innovation and marketing are matters strictly for the firm’s R&D and marketing departments, and that the consumer is only the recipient of what they do. This attitude was not limited to random firms and industries, but, as one manager who had experience working with consumer insights within various industries clarified, is a rather prevalent issue: ‘The fundamental problem in many firms today is the belief that consumers have little or nothing to offer. That is so damn wrong!’
The active consumer occasions a change in the underlying mindset of innovation and marketing practices. Examples of forerunners, such as the video game industry, provide ample proof that the active consumer should be perceived as a resource by the firm. Recent cases of cocreation between producers and consumers indicate that this is true also regarding producer-laden consumer experiences, such as music. Avicii, a famous DJ and music maker, recently produced a song together with admirers of his music. Answering the cocreation call were almost 4,000 enthusiasts, from 140 countries, who together yielded some 13,000 sound extracts for the song. It was put together by the artist following a vote among collaborators about which submissions should be included (see aviciixyou.com; fistintheair.com).

**Targeting consumer practices**

Innovation and marketing practices have long relied on a procedure of segmentation and targeting of the market according to consumer characteristics. Simplistically described, it entails evaluating consumers along various geographic and demographic variables with the aim of developing representative groups of consumers who are comparable in terms of their wants and needs (see Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). These consumer groups, which are thus established on the basis of consumer characteristics, are subsequently targeted when the firm develops for, and communicates to, the market.

This approach rests on an understanding of consumers as stationary recipients whose wants and needs can in fact be captured, measured and appreciated as an extension of these variables, and who can be compartmentalized into groups together with other similar consumers, according to the variables – a mindset and approach that is, rightfully, suffering increasing criticism lately (e.g. Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Treating consumers as stationary recipients who can be targeted as an extension of their characteristics is troublesome since, as for instance Holt (1995) reveals in his study of baseball spectators, consumers may traverse the boundaries of these characteristics when they engage in consumption practices and use consumption objects together. The active consumer adds to this critique and calls for another mindset and
approach to be adopted in innovation and marketing practices; an approach that views the consumer as an active participant in practices of innovation and value cocreation.

In these practices, as this thesis demonstrates, consumers with innately different characteristics may join together to innovate and cocreate value, thus making the practice the common denominator. Papers I and II illustrate that the consumer community may include members of diverse geographical belonging, age, and socio-economic affiliation who, nonetheless, will innovate and cocreate value together. A particularly notable example in the study of Gameco’s community, although only one of several, of how active consumers traverse consumer characteristics was the longstanding collaboration to develop ‘mods’ between two community members (whose geographic belonging was revealed in the research group’s thread, and whose age was ascertained via the thread that was started during the netnography that had the purpose of capturing the average age of community members). While one of them was a man in his early twenties, from the south of Europe, who, for health reasons, had to constantly stay at home, the other community member was a highly educated middle-aged man from the north of Europe who was working, was married and had kids. Connected to them, through practices of innovation and cocreation, were numerous ‘contributors’ who came from all over the world and from all walks of life. These contributors moreover reveal yet further aspect to be considered in innovation and marketing practices as regards understanding the active consumer; namely that of practice membership (see Paper I).

**Development through participation**

When the market has been segmented into representative groups of consumers, and has been sized up and measured, what follows is the procurement of knowledge about consumer wants and needs through use of the various techniques and methods that are encompassed within the consumer insights toolbox. Innovation and marketing practices thus become, in line with positivist thoughts and beliefs about knowledge as a moveable ‘object’ (e.g. Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995),
a question of acquiring knowledge from consumers to the firm’s R&D and marketing departments. The insights gained through the use of the consumer insights toolbox, in line with the view of the consumer as a stationary recipient, represents the foundation for what the firm will develop for, and communicate to, the market.

The active consumer, as a participant of practices of innovation and value cocreation, is at odds with founding innovation and marketing practices on the acquisition of knowledge from the consumer sphere. Rather, it is engagement in practice that is essential, and what the active consumer consequently calls for are endeavors of participation in practices of innovation and value cocreation on behalf of the firm. Paper I explains that the active consumer carries knowledge about the consumer sphere, and about the nature of innovation and value cocreation therein. Paper II, in turn, demonstrates that appropriation of this knowledge, as opposed to acquisition, requires participation in practices together with active consumers, something which moreover may lead to disparities between the two spheres being revealed and understood (see Paper IV).

From a managerial perspective, consistent with how the firm can unlock open source communities as complementary assets for innovation and hence ‘influence the direction of development in these communities’ (Dahlander and Wallin, 2006, p. 1256), it is notable that participation in consumer communities is moreover how the firm may strategically assist the development of practices of innovation and value cocreation. Firm representatives may pursue membership in the consumer community in established practices of innovation and value cocreation, or may, alternatively, co-establish such practices with the active consumer (cf. Shove and Pantzar, 2005). Having attained membership via its representatives, the firm is then in an advantageous position to strategically assist the active consumer’s participation in practices of innovation and value cocreation, which is fundamentally what innovation and marketing practices in relation to the active consumer are all about.
Contributions and implications

While imminent in some industries, the era of the active consumer has already begun in others. This thesis has therefore had the purpose of exploring the nature of this consumer from a firm perspective. In its effort, research in the fields of consumer innovation and value cocreation has provided the theoretical backdrop to the four papers that constitute the thesis. These papers include findings about the knowledge (Paper I) of the active consumer, the support (Paper II) and management (Paper III) of the active consumer, and challenges (Paper IV) with the active consumer. Evaluated through the explanatory lens that was formed through the notion of practice, the insights gained from the papers about the nature of the active consumer enabled, in turn, an answer to the thesis-level research question: ‘What are the implications of the active consumer on innovation and marketing practices?’

This thesis contributes to our understanding of the phenomenon of the active consumer by demonstrating that this consumer is not only a knowledge carrier, not only an innovator or a cocreator of value, but is rather a **multifaceted resource** for fellow consumers and for the firm who epitomizes each and every one of these characteristics. As such, the active consumer is a prime resource for competitive advantage; it is valuable, rare, and cannot be purchased or acquired on an open market (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1986; Dierickx and Cool, 1989; Barney, 1991). There is another contribution of this thesis that deserves mentioning as it arguably has implications both for scholars and managers. Theories of why consumers innovate have typically revolved around the expected costs and/or benefits of local innovation. Studies have shown that the need to transfer ‘sticky’ information from consumers to producers, and vice versa, has a significant impact on the locus of innovation (see Bogers et al., 2010). Instead of engaging in costly information transfer, consumers may draw on local need- and solution-related information to tailor solutions to more accurately fit their wants and needs (Franke and Shah, 2003; Lüthje, 2004; Lüthje et al., 2005). Regarding benefits, it is notable that expected financial rewards have been found to have rather wage explanatory power as
regards why consumers innovate and engage in entrepreneurial activities (see Lüthje, 2004; Shah and Tripsas, 2007). In online consumer communities, members who innovate and contribute have moreover been found to be driven by recognition from the hosting firm and from fellow members (Jeppesen and Molin, 2003; Jeppesen and Fredriksen, 2006), as well as by the ‘pleasure of innovating’ (Jeppesen and Molin, 2003). In light of these explanations then, this thesis lends support to the notion that to innovate and to cocreate value is nowadays in some consumers’ DNA; their wants and needs to engage in innovation and to cocreate value together with other consumers, and with firms, has become integral to their consumption of products and services.

As it appears to be a contribution to theoretical explanations of why consumers innovate and cocreate value, what then could the practical implications of this notion be for innovation and marketing managers? The brief answer is that the active consumer represents a multifaceted resource both for fellow consumers and for the firm. More elaborately put: since research has shown that it is typically only a small part of the entire consumer pool that is active in innovating upon solutions developed and communicated to the market by the firm (e.g. Franke and Shah, 2003; Lüthje, 2004; Füller et al., 2007), it seems reasonable to ask why managers should attempt to accommodate the active consumer’s wants and needs and thereby become ‘co-performers’ who ‘collaborate, as a partner, with post-consumer communities in constructing their modes of life…facilitating and coordinating the efforts of the community’s members’ (Firat and Dholakia, 2006, p. 150). While perhaps relatively few consumers can be expected to be active, research has nevertheless shown that the entire community – also passive consumers – may benefit significantly from the efforts of active members (e.g. Lerner and Tirole, 2002; Franke and Shah, 2003; von Hippel and von Krogh, 2003). In light of this ‘ripple effect’ then, efforts to accommodate the active consumer’s wants and needs to innovate and cocreate value may be considered a way also to satisfy the wants and needs of the passive consumer; something that my two journeys into the empirical world in the beginning of my studies revealed, if anything, should be much appreciated by firms.
Two final words

To formally conclude this thesis I would like to cordially thank you – the reader – for having come to this point in my text. I hope that your effort has not been dull and tiresome, but rather enjoyable and insightful.

*Thank you!*
References


Raymond, E.S. 1998. The cathedral and the bazar. 3-2 March.


Notes

1 For the original version see Schrödinger (1935). For a version translated into English see Trimmer (1980).

2 An ideagora is a setting on the Internet where firms and individual innovators can converge to exchange ideas, challenges and solutions (Tapscott and Williams, 2006). A well-known ideagora is InnoCentive (www.innocentive.com).

3 The prosumer is a character of an earlier epoch who had gone into hiding, but who is rising again thanks to modern technology (exemplified largely by the author through the increasing use of do-it-yourself medical products, such as the home pregnancy test). The modern prosumer is typically exemplified as the consumer who substitutes for: the bank teller, when withdrawing money from the ATM; the supermarket clerk, when scanning, bagging and paying for groceries; and the travel agent, when booking the travel itinerary, airplane tickets and accommodation over the Internet (see Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010).

4 I started my first investigatory journey by going through newspapers focusing on news about industry and economy. Through my search I encountered, in relation to my area of research at the time, interesting news about Firm I – a Swedish multinational in the consumer durables industry. I looked through Firm I’s annual reports for the last ten years to corroborate what was said in the newspapers, and I subsequently contacted the first interviewee at Firm I. In line with a snowball sampling effort (Goodman, 1961; Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004), I finished each interview asking the interviewee for referral to colleagues that would be relevant to talk to. I continued the interview series at Firm I until ‘saturation’ in the newness of the information provided was experienced. Firm II – a north European cooperative within the fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry – and Firm III – a Brit-
ish/Dutch multinational within the consumer goods industry – were studied following a similar process.

**Overview of interviews at Firm I, II and III**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee (title)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration (min.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Firm I</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Global Consumer Insight Manager</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product Line Manager</td>
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<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Firm II</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Future Creation Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Process Development Scientist</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Firm III</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer and Market Insight Manager</td>
<td>Mar 2010</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Brand Building Director Marketing Director</td>
<td>Apr 2010</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Brand Manager</td>
<td>Apr 2010</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Interview done with both interviewees simultaneously.

5 I started my second investigatory journey by forming the questions that were to be sent out in the letter, for which the basis were the data gained from the interviews in my first investigatory journey. The purpose of also asking rudimentary questions in the letter was to gain an initial understanding – that is, to provide me with a guide – of each firm’s way of working before telephone interviews were conducted with the respondents. In this way, the telephone interviews could be dedicated to providing information, beyond the rudimentary, about the firms. The sample of firms to which the letter was sent was bought from PAR (www.parguiden.se), which offers customized address registries for research purposes. The customization of my registry was
based on the data gained during the first investigatory journey. For instance, as all interviewees in Firm I, II and III worked within marketing or R&D, the letters were addressed to the head of the marketing or R&D department in each firm. Recipients who considered a colleague more adept at answering the questions in the letter were asked to redirect the letter to the latter. A letter was sent to 455 large to medium-size firms operating in Sweden. I received a total of 114 responses (25%), and randomly chose 45 of the respondents (10% of the total sample) to subsequently make telephone interviews with.

**Overview of telephone interviews**

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Duration (min.)</th>
<th>Interviewee (title)</th>
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<th>Duration (min.)</th>
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<td>May 2010</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>May 2010</td>
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</tbody>
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* Interview not recorded.

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6 *Brokering*, or boundary spanning (Perrone et al., 2003; Levina and Vaast, 2005), has moreover been described as a strategy for knowledge transfer and innovation on an industry level (see Hargadon and Sutton, 1997; Hargadon, 1998; Hargadon and Sutton, 2000), and as a strategy for acquiring knowledge from customers through the use of virtual environments (Verona et al., 2006).

7 *Nordic walking* is a type of ‘speed walking’ in which the practitioner uses poles similar to those used by cross-country skiers.

8 The research group initially consisted of Mikael Gidhagen, David Sörhammar and me. Jimmie Röndell joined the group after the exploratory pre-study.
The research group consisted of Jimmie Röndell, David Sörhammar, Christian Kowalkowski and me. A lurker is ‘One of the ‘silent majority’ in an electronic forum; one who posts occasionally or not at all but is known to read the group's postings regularly’ (Nonnecke and Preece, 2001, p. 1).

Tamara was a play during the 80s in which actors simultaneously performed in different rooms in a large house. The audience could thus not experience the play in its entirety, but had to choose one actor to follow around the house (see Boje, 1995).

A thread is an iterative discussion in an online forum among community members, entailing everything from a simple question-and-answer exchange, to, in the case of Gameco’s community, an elaborate discussion about gameplay or how a game can be modified.

The community manager announced a competition in the thread; the three community members with the best CARs were each to be given a Gameco game of their choosing.

The term Community Action Report (CAR) was chosen by the research group because of its similarity to “After Action Reports”, which is a highly appreciated feature of Gameco’s community (see Papers I and II).

While I did not participate in all formal interviews, I was, through the recordings, able to gain an understanding of the progressive experience of each interviewee throughout the development of the customer loyalty card.