A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION APPROACH TO SERVICE INNOVATION IN NETWORKS

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Abstract

The emergent service-view of innovation in networks has led to rethink how service innovation shapes value creation, rather than services per se. The attention shifts from the content of the innovative offering to the processes through which the innovation is created in service networks. In this study we explore service innovation as a collective phenomenon of new meanings creation and sharing. Empirically we present the cases of three innovative companies operating in the food industry: Diet to Go, Eat' s and Gambero Rosso. We find out that service innovation becomes a story of social construction through a process of sense-making, where boundary objects assume a relevant role in coordinating values, norms, ideas and actions of the different actors. The process of service innovation occurs through actors collectively participating in and sharing new ways to create value . Our study also sheds some light on the relevance of the service support system for service innovation and thus value creation in networks.

Keywords: Service innovation, business networks, social construction, case studies

1. Introduction

Service innovation is a multidimensional construct that in the today's service-centered economy has been the objective of a growing consideration both from researchers and practitioners (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Ordanini & Parasuraman, 2011). The complexity that characterizes service innovation has been addressed over time by adopting various conceptual and analytical frameworks (Sebastiani & Paiola, 2010; Rubalcaba et al., 2012). However, comprehensive frameworks for integrating the service innovation multiple dimensions remain scarce (Frei, 2008).

Early approaches, fostered by the emergence of the industrial innovation theory in economics (Freeman & Soete, 1997), contributed in fact to emphasizing the centrality of technological development and scientific improvements not only in the case of products but also in the case of services. These approaches mainly refer to the conventional idea of innovation by focusing on how scientific discoveries or technical inventions are transformed into commercial innovations by skilled entrepreneurs (Jamison, Christens, Botin, 2011).

Over time, however, the community of scholars and practitioners has shown an increasing interest towards the nature, types and causes of innovation in services (Oke, 2007). According to Sundbo (2006) "both society and the market have changed and with them the art of innovation management has changed" (p. 1), which means that "the factors (innovation research, basic research in natural sciences and classic entrepreneurship) that classically have been thought to ensure innovation, firm development and economic growth are too limited for the present situation" (ibidem). In other words, studies on service innovation have to adopt new and more contextually anchored perspectives (Paswan et al., 2009).

Recent studies invite to look at how service innovation shapes value creation, rather than services per se (Möller, Rajala & Westerlund, 2008). In this regard, some scholars talk about an emerging service-logic view of innovation (Michel, Brown & Gallan, 2008).

Service innovation does not reflect anymore the service offering itself but rather the "service system, which is a configuration of resources including people, information, and technology, connected to other systems by value propositions" (Vargo et al., 2008, p. 145). Using the IMP terminology, innovation is generated from the interaction between several actors, activities and resources (Hakansson & Olsen, 2012). Innovation involves collective efforts; it is not a simple linear sequence of stages. This implies that adopting a service system-level perspective, innovation should include the views of the different participants (Rampersad et al., 2010). Moreover this approach expresses the increasing quest for an integration of

sociological and anthropological theories in service innovation research, in order to have a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon (Rubalcaba et al., 2012).

In particular, social construction theories may help in better understanding social reality, and consequently service systems, by shedding light on how actors collectively and individually create, realize and reproduce social situations and structures (Giddens, 1984) and on the process by which individual explain subjectively and inter-subjectively the world in which they live (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

What is emerging is that reality is the result of human sensemaking activities occurring in social interaction (Edvardsson, et al. 2010). This impacts on value, which is more and more related to meanings and bonds, and to a lesser extent to the physical performance of the material object purchased. In the current global supply chains and value networks, the integrated critical functions that create and capture value are primarily those that have to do with knowledge and with relationships, two intangible assets that have become the propulsive heart of the most advanced business models both in manufacturing and services (Snares et al., 2012).

By adopting a socio-cognitive perspective new questions raise about how service innovation as a socially constructed phenomenon shapes value creation. This is even more relevant considered the diffusion of a value creation logic that goes beyond the service content, the collective nature of many innovations, and also the increasing role assigned to the context in affecting the service innovation process.

The aim of the paper is to investigate service innovation in networks adopting a social construction approach. By doing this, we will also shed some light on the role of actors and meanings in collective value creation.

In order to pursue our aim, we have analyzed the case of three companies operating in the food industries - Diet to Go, Eat's and Gambero Rosso- where the collective and relational view of service innovation was particularly evident.

As a result of our study,service innovation is interpreted by companies as a collective phenomenon based on the creation and sharing of new meanings among actors. Moving the attention from the innovative outcome (the new service offering) to the process of service innovation in networks, companies has the opportunity to focus onservice innovation as a process of co-construction and sense-making that involves the company itself, the customers and the other partners as inter-subjective actors in a social, economic, cultural context, thus impacting in an effective way in the value creation processes The paper is divided into the following sections: first we review the literature on service innovation, in particular in a

social-constructivist perspective. Then we describe the methodology and present the three cases. We end the paper with discussion and implications for research and practice.

2. The evolution towards a 'service view' of innovation

Following a long period when innovation as a theme was basically investigated within manufacturing, the topic of service innovation has been the object of an unprecedented amount of research which has involved researchers of different disciplines (Gadrey & Gallouj, 1998; Gallouj, 2002; Bryson & Monnoyer, 2004; Akehurst, 2008). In particular, in the last decade both the community of scholars and practitioners have shown an increasing interest towards the nature, types and causes of innovation in services (de Brentani, 2001; Dreyer, 2004; van Riel, 2005; Oke, 2007).

As Gallouj and Weinstein pointed out, non-technological service-oriented innovation studies acknowledge that "innovation can exist where the "technologist gaze perceives nothing" (1997: 538). This is the reason why, also in recent years, some scholars – although recognizing the importance of early streams of research - have pointed out the need to invest in better comprehension of innovation in services (Tether, 2005; Sundbo, 2006). Even though the topic still lacks a general frame of interpretation (Tether, 2005; Howells, 2006), there is a general acknowledgement of the relevance of innovation for services and a broad frame of evolution of this stream of research can be identified (Gallouj and Weinstein, 1997; Miles, 2003; Droege et al., 2009).

The growing and multifaceted role of services in the modern economies has progressively led to the emergence of various contributions (Metcalfe and Miles, 2000; Gallouj, 2002; Carlsson et al., 2002) that share a common effort to take into account the crucial role of resource integration in innovation processes and the consequent relevance of the need for adopting a service view when considering innovation (Gallouj, 2000; Lovelock & Gummesson, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2008).

Consistently with these assumptions, the concept of service itself is evolving (Gummesson, 2007) and a "service view" is emerging as "a perspective on value creation rather than a category of market offerings" (Edvardsson et al.,2005: 118).

In this line, scholars are increasingly highlighting the inadequacy of adopting goods-centered approaches to capture service-specific issues (Lusch et al., 2007; O" Cass et al. 2012), especially when considering innovation as one of the primary sources for value creation.

The S-D Logic has contributed to this debate by affirming that service, rather than goods, is

the focus of economic and social exchange; in other words, service is exchanged for service, where service (and not services) is the application of competences for the benefit of another entity (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; 2008). According to S-D Logic all economies are service economies, and all businesses are service businesses.

This view of economic (and social) exchanges builds on a fundamental distinction between operand resources (goods) and operant resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The latter are basically knowledge and skills that employees, partners and customers integrate in value (co-)creation processes. Organizations and customers, like other social and economic actors, are resources integrators that interact through the mutual provision of service. Value is created collaboratively in interactive configurations of mutual exchange, namely service systems (Vargo et al., 2008), characterized by diverse economic, social and cultural contexts.

Consequently, innovation has to be considered at a service system-level and occurs when service systems are enabled to co-create value differently. The approach to innovation thus shifts from the traditional attribute-based views of innovation to a resource integration-based view of innovation. In this regards, Michel et al. (2008) affirm that all innovation should be considered as service-logic innovation. In service innovation new knowledge is integrated by the firm into service offerings, which directly or indirectly results in value for the firm and its customers/clients (Salunke et al., 2011)

Even in business to business marketing literature, it has been asserted that customer involvement in product and service innovation offers significant benefits and, accordingly, continued to attain a notable research interest (Anderson et al., 1994; Fang, 2008; Fang et al., 2008, Gruner and Homburg, 2000; Von Hippel and Katz, 2002). Understanding the interaction in buyer-seller relationships during the service innovation process is needed for facilitating the management of co-innovation (Berthon et al., 1999; Desouza et al., 2008; Roy et al., 2004). Dyadic interactions are then part of a wider network of interdependencies and can be depicted in terms of a continuous set of actions, reactions and re-reactions, which appear as a reciprocal problem-coping process (Ford & Mouzas, 2010). This process assumes particular significance when interpreted in a service perspective. Companies are dealing with the challenge of establishing and managing relationships and interactions among the actors, using and combining resources, and performing activities in order to increase the value created by the network, especially in service networks. This requires applying the service perspective to the context of business networks.

However, services in the extant research on innovation has received little attention compared to goods (Ulaga and Reinartz, 2011, p. 6), meaning that a systematic approach to service

innovation is lacking.

The picture we have drawn here testifies that service innovation is a multifaceted issue (Sundbo, 2006; Droege et al., 2009; Rubalcaba et al., 2012) and that it increasingly requires an interdisciplinary approach. On that, despite the fact that interest in innovation in services is growing globally, there is resistance in overcoming the barriers between different disciplines in order to understand the phenomenon in its overall complexity (Bitner and Brown, 2008).

In particular, few studies have focused on the collective nature of innovation as an implication of the contextual character of value co-creation (Chandler & Vargo, 2011). In business to business it has been asserted that interactions occur among different actors and within a diverse economic, social, political, cultural, and geographical context (Kash and Rycroft, 2002). Innovation networks are thus formed by heterogeneous groups of actors including representatives of firms, universities, technology centers, and development organizations (Pekkarinen and Harmaakorpi, 2006). kansson and Olsen (2011), the dominant dimension of innovation management is to deal with the "importance of others" (H kansson and Olsen, 2011:8). In studying innovation networks, only some studies have focused on the role of business actors in innovation networks or on human action as the key explanatory factor in the formation of networks (Leonard-Barton, 1984; Shaw, 1998). Such studies share a common understanding: different members of the network are full participants in the organization's processes of the innovation system. Innovation is created by a community of different and committed stakeholders and it is the cooperation and interaction between them and their commitment that produces something new or different (Estrin, 2009). By considering innovation as a socially constructed phenomenon, we decided to adopt social construction as a theoretical lens to investigate more in depth the service innovation process and how it shapes value creation in heterogeneous contexts.

3. Social construction and service innovation

Social construction is a social and epistemological theoretical approach that analyses phenomena in social contexts (Burr, 2003). Instead of seeing the reality as a given external object to be discovered, social construction aims at understanding the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the creation of the perceived social reality and analyses how people engage themselves in interaction and social practices. The emphasis is on the processes rather than on the structures (Burr, 2003).

Luckmann and Berger (1991) see social construction as the process through which people create a common and sharing reality. According to these scholars by acting and interacting people can transform their subjective meanings in artifact, giving meaning to reality and therefore constructing it.

Within innovation literature few scholars have been studying innovation as a socially constructed phenomenon (Colurcio et al., 2010). By adopting the socio-cognitive perspective De Rosa et al. (1999) see market offerings as "socially constructed knowledge structures that are shared among producers and consumers" (Rosa et al., 1999, p. 64). This sharing enables the interaction among market actors. By interacting producers and customers make sense of each others' behaviors. The sense-making process is revealed in the stories that market actors tell each other.

More recently Jamison, Christens, Botin (2011) highlights that innovation can be framed as a story-line of social construction, emphasizing social process rather the economic one: "Story tellers employ a language or vocabulary of sociology, anthropology and social philosophy to recount their tale of networking" (p.22). Actors co-construct innovation also with the contribution of non-humans to satisfy social and economic interests, whereas the expertise of innovators are not purely technical or scientific, but involve forms of social competences. The story-line of social construction focuses on actors, networks and consensus building. In a similar vein other studies highlights the role of sense making theories as useful to understand the influence of knowledge and cognition on innovation (Thrane et al. 2010), where actors are both active constructor and are shaped by the innovative context.

Actors matter as networks of people and organizations lead to new understanding, networks of ideas, beliefs routines, conventions and novelty. On that, for instance, Möller (2010) studied actors with respect to the construction of meanings for new products and services, while other scholars investigated the way innovation is negotiated in ongoing communicative processes that occur through relationships in networks (Hardy et al., 2003).

This view is close to S-D Logic's perspective on service innovation. According to Vargo and Lusch (2008) innovation is a value-enabling process. It is an innovative way of creating value through intangible and dynamic resources. Within S-D logic, the newness of innovation does not have to be technological, can be a new use linked to different context, place or time as the value of innovation is determined by each beneficiary through integration of resources, context, and experience (Vargo & Akaka, 2008). Service innovation is seen as a continuous process performed by a group of actors who are interrelated in a dense network (Mele, Russo Spena & Colurcio, 2010; Corsaro, Cantù & Tunisini, 2012). It is addressed as the application

of resources (knowledge, relational, physical and economic) through learning cycles that foster the development of core competencies via actors' relationships in order to enable value co-creation.

By interacting a conversational process among actors occurs. As Mengis and Eppler (2008) conversations are not a means to exchange information, but a process for social knowledge practices and sense-making in networks "where new configurations of meaning are constructed" (Steyaert, Bouwen & van Looy 1996, p.67). The result of conversation is that the actors learn and act through a process and elaboration of multiple perspectives, information and experience given by the comparison and collaboration among them. Discourses and conversations produce new shared knowledge and meanings able to build the social reality as a common experience. As already pointed out by Carlile (2002) : "The social constructionist perspective views knowledge no longer as an object that can be brought into companies from outside but emphasizes that knowledge is transformed in learning processes between innovation network partners across organizational boundaries" (Colurcio et al., 2010). Learning and acting become social processes developed in a social context where actors by interacting construct knowledge as a basis for innovation. A collective knowledge in practice (or knowing) is sustained by social interactions through boundary objects.

According to Carlile (2004) through boundary objects knowledge is transformed and collective learning can be achieved. In this view knowing becomes, an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 31). By interacting actors feed learning and knowing as a basis of service innovation through which constructing new value creation processes.

Wenger (2000) indentify three different types of boundary objects: artifacts, discourses and processes. Artifacts correspond to standardized forms, methods, objects, model and maps; discourses represent a common language that allows people to communicate and negotiate meanings across boundaries, and processes include explicit routines and procedure in an organization. Boundary objects perform a brokering role involving translation, coordination, and alignment between of the different parties. These objects don't create a perfect language for translation but they mediate between several groups without providing common consensus. Boundary objects serve a dual function: they serve to distinguish differences as well as they also supply common points of reference (Harvey, 1997; Harvey and Chrisman, 1998).

In sum, the adoption of a social construction view could help in framing service innovation as collectively generated in networks.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This research is part of a wider research project on service innovation carried out by CFMT (Training Center for Service Management), in Italy. The project's aim is to highlight factors behind value creation processes through service innovation.

. An interactive, qualitative, case-study approach was adopted to gain insights into the complex phenomena described in the conceptual framework (Gummesson, 2000, 2003). The researchers went back and forth between theory and empirical evidence during the research process (Dubois and Gadde, 2002) with the final aim to develop theory through analysis and description of new phenomena (Baker et al., 2008) and not necessarily to reach an objective truth. In other words, we aimed at creating a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

In this paper findings concern three cases operating in the food industry -Diet to go, Eat's and Gambero Rosso In line with exploratory research guidelines, these cases have been selected since the collective and relational view of service innovation is particularly evident and the role that actors collectively play in service innovation and in value creation processes is assumed as central. .

4.2 Data collection and analysis

We collected data through 12 in depth interviews with people which are considered highly knowledgeable such as entrepreneurs, founders and other key informants both inside and outside (e.g. media partners and consultancy) the companies. During the interviews, audiotaped recordings were made and detailed notes and observations taken. This information was supplemented by documentary analysis of relevant company reports, brochures, and other business literature.

An interview guide, which was prepared specifically for this study, was structured around three main themes: (i) the firms" innovation strategy and philosophy; (ii) the firm's orientation to value creation processes; and (iii) the firm's network perspective.

Data analysis was a two-stage process. First, an intra-case study was conducted to evaluate each firm's approach to the management of the investigated phenomena. Secondly, a cross-case analysis was conducted to analyze similarities and differences among cases. The aim of this two-stage process of data analysis was to establish consistent findings across the case-

study firms and thus to identify theoretical and managerial implications.

Reliability requirements were assured first, by using a protocol for each case which included transcripts of the audiotape recordings from all the interviews, field notes and observations as well as secondary data.

Findings were discussed within a workshop with other researchers and managers.

5. Findings

CASE 1. Diet to Go: Diet is a pleasure

Diet to Go is company settled in 2005 and specialized in home delivery service of health meals, for people who desire to lose weight, but without renouncing to a grateful experience. The proposal behind the Diet to Go offering is very simple: diets are often punitive and sad. Rather, food is a pleasure, especially in the Italian culture. The Diet to Go' service consists in delivering to the customer' s place (or at the office) the 'Diet to Go' termed bag, containing all the just cooked meals and snacks to be consumed during the entire day. Each bag includes the breakfast, lunch, and dinner meals, along with an afternoon light meal. Compared to diffused dietary plans, in the Diet to Go case portions of food are not small, they satisfy one's appetite, and are also nice to see, but with a maximum content of 1200 calories for women and 1500 for men.

The food is contained in special boxes suitable to be used in the microwave. There exist four different menus, based on different food needs and tastes. Customers can order on-line or by phone.

In 2005 the entrepreneur who had the business idea, also realized that she had not enough money to invest in the new business, and neither any skills on diet and nutrition, as well as on food related services. Thus, she decided to find externally all the resources needed and to involve external actors in the new service provision. The first relationship she activated was with Nutritionists (doctors), who helped to study diet programs to lose weight in a correct way and without any health damage. In particular one of them, Dr. Tibaldi, was specialized in the relationship between high quality cousin and diet. His role was so critical for the development of the business, that he became immediately a partner of the company. After this moment, dr Tibaldi and the entrepreneur chosen together another important player, chefs. They selected the top ones, those that were those more committed with the innovative content of the offering and, at the same time, interested in learning from the continue experimentation

with food.

Kitchens, catering services and providers of raw materials were then selected to grant the overall quality of the output. The delivery service of the Diet to Go bags was chosen too; this was a very important player, especially considered that people that deliver the bags are the only ones who have a physical contact with customers, even more in a delicate moment of the day like early morning is.

To guarantee the provision of the service all over the country, a network of franchisees has been created. Franchisees coordinate the service provision, maintain the relationships with customers and also develop the market locally, for instance creating relationships with gyms, hairdressers, beauty centres and pharmacies. Then, there are also communication agencies, which are changed quite frequently to boost the emergence of new ideas.

Customers cover different targets, mainly professionals with medium-high spending power, above all open towards innovative foods habits and the use of on-line services. But there are also elderly people and housewives. The target represented by offices is becoming more and more important, in particular in terms of business lunches. The majority of customers use the diet to go services for specific periods, but there are also those who use the service continuously.

The business model of the company is totally flexible. As for menus, at the beginning they were based on a method called 'ASI'. Later on, however, they recognized that this method was too complex to be understood and communicated, adding further complexity to a new service whose content was already very innovative. Thus, they removed the ASI and introduced four different menus: the Mediterranean, the Vegetarian, the Zona, that follows the principles of the Zona diet, and the Marc Mességué menù, this last one originating from the collaboration with a well known herbalist. Dishes in the menus are changed every week.

In general the key elements that allowed for this innovative service to be successful and rapidly diffuse all over Italy consist in the sharing of a common idea: Diet to go does not only provide healthy food to lose weight, but its people also dialogue with customers on how they can use foods to improve health and pleasure, something they can do by themselves even after the Diet to Go plan has been concluded.

To do that, in the first delivery Diet to Go includes a book where the company philosophy is presented, the Diet to Go method described and it is explained how such method can help to change the customers' mindsets about food habits, along with brochures containing some suggested recipes. Second, an intranet platform for information sharing has been created, to check for new menus, downloads photos and catalogues, find tags to be printed on the meal

boxes. In these platform franchisees can also upload new orders, know-how on new trends in nutrition, and any other information interesting for someone in the Diet to Go's network. The company also adopted a very rigorous system to know and learn about the customers' experience and modify the offering based on the feedback received.

All actors involved in the provision of the innovative service are trained first about the Diet to Go philosophy, and then also on how to cook meals, how to present them, how to label, to package, etc. This is very important considered that kitchens have different structures in the different places. The service content, however, has to be exactly the same, as well as the meanings to be transferred to customers. Moreover, before the end of the dietary plan, Diet to Go's consultants submit on-line surveys and also call each customer to get further feedbacks and to get acknowledged about the weight he/she lost. In this sense, customers have shown to be very pro-active in providing suggestions to the company on how to improve their menus. In addition to that, when a person does not like a specific meal, the Diet to Go's consultants support the customer in choosing an alternative one.

Interesting enough, at a certain point Diet to Go's people observed the tendency from employees to buy one bag at lunchtime and share it with a colleague. This pushed the company to launch a new service, a unique meal dish to be consumed at the office, obviously cheaper than the full bag.

In the near future the company is planning to open Diet to Go stores, where people can consume their meals or take them away. This will imply to further expand the network of actors around this innovative service, and thus an increased need for coordination of meanings, values and activities.

CASE 2. Eat's: a matter of taste

"Because life should be savored", this is the claim of Eat's Stores, the new venture founded in 2009 in the North-East of Italy by Sergio Menegazzo.

Starting from its experience in grocery retailing, he progressively realized that in society the capability to distinguish the good and authentic food was decreasing as well as the pleasure of taste. Also thanks to the increasing widespread diffusion of the Slow Food philosophy, he eventually decided to create a new retail formula where people could appreciate the quality food in an holistic experience that they actively contribute to generate.

The aim of the founder was to create not just a conventional store, but a space between the shelves that represents a new agora, made of comfort, convenience and quality where all the

actors, customers, producers, food experts, chefs may interact. Thanks to the accuracy in the store design, the shopping is transformed in an appointment, which becomes a pause, a stop a ritual and perfectly translate the principles of Slow Food.

The Eat's distinctive formula is characterized by the high quality guaranteed through the active involvement of each of the artisans - sometimes small producers- of the excellences presented in the store. The result is a boutique where food authenticity and quality are protected by professional rigor and passion of great food artisans that intervene in the store by presenting their products and production processes and share with all the actors in the network, and in particular with customers, the meanings behind the authentic food production and consumption.

Thus, Eat's is become over time a place where customers can live a new shopping experience that allows them to engage and satisfy their senses, recover the tradition of the suppliers and mix it with the discovery of excellent food.

"We wanted to create a store unique, cutting edge, which would offer an innovative approach to food buying and consumption by supporting the interaction between consumption and production" (Sergio Menegazzo, Eat's founder).

Eat's embodies the food-store of the future where excellence and taste blend with familiarity and professionalism, where products are told to their customers, as in a living room with friends, through the voice of their producers. Therefore it is more than a market, it is a place where the protagonists are the customers with their choice, their willingness to learn, their desire to stop.

Eat's store has been projected to be a school of taste to experience every day through its various departments, from the fresh fish market to the fresh meat and cheese sold over the counter, from the areas designed for people who suffer from allergies to the eco-area with bulk products, fresh pastries, and the well-stocked cellar with over 600 labels from around the world and a choice of hundreds of craft beers.

Training activities, meetings with producers and experts, tasty experiences are daily organized in this space that opens up its physical boundaries towards a collective engagement of heterogeneous stakeholders.

Over time Eat's has evolved its formula by adding a restaurant at the store, in which a guest-chef each month imagines the menus. The new proposal is declined on three levels: a food store, a fast food quality takeaway for those who want to take home the good food, and a high

standard restaurant that adopts the Slow Food philosophy. Close and trustful relationships with suppliers guarantee the quality of the raw materials and the absence of other intermediaries allow the company to combine high quality with affordable prices.

Eat's is culture, is meanings, is tasting, is experiencing a new and more conscious way to buy authentic food products.

CASE 3. Gambero Rosso: telling food and wine

Gambero Rosso was settled 25 years ago as a publishing company specialized in the field of wine and food. It has built the current leadership through a complex strategy of service innovation. The value proposition - promoting and spreading out the Italian food and wine - is conveyed through a network of supply: magazines, books, guides, TV channel, web and mobile. There is also an ever-growing community of fans and players paying attention to issues related to a quality and sustainable way of life.

The company is one of the main actor in developing the culture of Italian food and wine all over the world. In this process it has been involving a wide number of other actors, namely producers, restaurateurs, artisans and other partners. Gambero Rosso develops relationships, activities and initiatives with and between the food communities, formed by all those involved in the production, processing and consumption of food and wine. The company also promotes and organizes educational activities through coordination and training, aimed at the development of a proper food culture. Furthermore it proposes and organizes food culture and sensory direct to shareholders, to all citizens and operators in the food and wine sector, for a broader knowledge of food and wine.

Gambero Rosso has a wide flexible business model through which it builds continuous innovation of its value propositions and value creation processes. The innovation strategy can be so summarized:

"The secret of the company is its ability to tell food and wine starting from the people. A way of doing that pushed the players to give the best. The company has created meanings and symbols of excellence (the three glasses for the wine, the three forks for the restaurants, three grains and three cups for the bar) that have become a hallmark of a coveted goal"
(Company's documents).

Recently to protect the identity of such a vast and rich wine and food heritage, the company

has developed the Gambero Rosso Travel consultant and tour operator, with the slogan "Gambero Rosso Travel, a world to savor, sip and taste in easy stages".

The company's media network is enriched by the initiative of Città del Gusto (Taste City) a place where the training of amateur and professional as well as the organization of events take place. Città del Gusto is a city founded on knowledge and flavors, a centre for food and wine to promote food culture both with experts but also to an audience of lovers. The company's idea was to build a unique place in the world, a "theme park" where cookery is the great protagonist: a source of ideas, trends and new talent from the wine and food world; a meeting place for enthusiasts and intellectuals, always open for tasting and debates. Within the Città del Gusto there are the schools of Gambero Rosso where different actors - from professional to amateurs - learn to cook, taste, know about wine and work in food and wine industry. There are many spaces dedicated to training, to cooking workshops, bakery and pizzeria; each with fully equipped workstations, where the lessons are held with the chefs. A collective process of learning and knowing happens.

"A multi-faceted reality Città del Gusto. Since the food and wine was just a hobby of a few, now, when it is considered the norm of cooking and wine. A cultural assimilation that forces people to constantly see, question and reinvent themselves" (manager's quote)

In this perspective Gambero Rosso spreads out a food and wine culture through its community. It is a social and cultural process of building quality, authenticity, legitimacy and value, by widening the roles and the meanings of food in the everyday practices.

6. Discussion of findings

The three cases analyzed stress how actors construct service innovation as something to be experienced in a social dimension, where it is difficult to establish a distinction between inputs and outcomes. They in fact provide empirical evidences for actors participating and sharing new value creation logics as a critical factor of their service innovation. In the Eat's case, for instance, the store is the platform for continuously sharing new meanings related to the shopping experience of authentic food between producers and consumers. In the Diet to Go case customers changed their mindsets from the of diet as something restrictive and punishable, to an enjoyable experience. In the Gambero Rosso the Italian food and wine culture is built up and spread out through collective actions and meanings by amateurs and

professionals actively involved by the company.

Service innovation thus emerges as a story told by its actors. It is a story of social construction through a process of sense-making, where actors actively participate in the production of meanings of what matters to them.

As matter of facts, the Diet to Go case shows how an idea can become a successful innovation through the sharing of an higher sense and meaning among the actors that form the network. These actors are not interested in providing the service through material aspects, like the transformation of raw materials in final meals, but rather their want to promote a learning process to the final customer so as to improve the quality of his/her life. This is in line with the notion of participatory sense making (De Jaegher, Di Paolo, 2007).

Connected to this point, our study also provides some evidences about the role of boundary objects in service innovation. As stressed by some scholars (Carlile, 2002) boundary objects – devices, artifacts, images, etc - support the construction of meanings by the different actors. Boundary objects translate, coordinate, and align the perspectives of the different parties (Klimbe et al., 2010). Our study shows that these objects are crucial for the effectiveness of service innovation in networks, and not only in the idea generation phase, but also in its implementation. Boundary objects have different meanings in different social contexts but their structure is common enough for all intersecting social worlds to recognize and to use them as a means of translation, bringing coherence across intersecting social contexts (Nenonen, Storbacka, 2012). Our study confirms the centrality of boundary objects in representing and constructing common knowledge (Carlile, 2002; 2004) and show that boundary objects become social mediators to service innovation. In the Diet to Go case, for instance, the kitchen represents an object shared among many players and around which, more or less consciously, they coordinate their activities and their thoughts. At the same time, however, this object is seen differently by the different actors in the service system: it is a space to experiment new receipts for chefs, a place to train for franchisees, a place to develop new knowledge for nutritionists, a place to transfer information from customers for people engaged in the service delivery, a place where the entrepreneur can get new ideas, and also the recipient of customers feedbacks on the quality of the service, and so on. Even though these different ideas, the kitchen and what it represents has led to an emerging common sense of diet, not anymore as the intangible content of the offering, but rather as a learning process for all the actors involved in the system. This allows for the final service to be provided effectively and the Diet to Go' philosophy and values communicated in a coherent and integrated way through all the different touch points in the network.

In the Gambero Rosso the food is the media that talks about itself and makes sense in a wide social context, through a multiplicity of boundary objects, namely the symbols of excellence, the forum, the journals, etc. Each of these artifacts allow to grasp and spread out new meanings for the different actors. For example the symbols of excellence (the three glasses for the wine, the three forks for the restaurants, three grains and three cups for the bar) mean a recognition (and a mark) for the operators, a reference for the customers, and an acknowledgement for the media. A same meaning of excellent food and wine within different perspectives enables the process of social construction. Città del Gusto is also a place where different expertise (professionals, amateurs, customers, etc.) can meet and join to Gambero Rosso's experience. It becomes an experience factory. In this case the same food is seen as instrumental in highlighting the differences between groups and cultures, and serves to strengthen the group identity, to separate and distinguish "us" from the "other" (Bourdieu 1983).

The focus on shared experience is a distinctive trait also in the Eat's case. Eat's has concentrated all its efforts in terms of service innovation toward an overarching boundary object represented by the store. As a matter of fact, it is the platform that constantly supports the meaning sharing on authentic and good food among different actors. They are the producers, that may present their products, discuss about the production processes and interact in the network; the Eat's managers who, through the accurate product selection, the original store layout, and the appealing in-store communication, have the opportunity to spread their food philosophy; the store staff members, thanks to whom the 'sociable' store design may provide additional information on food origins and production processes and counseling about products specificities; the customers that can increase their knowledge on authentic food, by tasting it, learning how to distinguish and cook it, and buying it in a unique space, provide information about their food habits and concur to improve their shopping experience; experts chefs and sommelier, but also journalists, amateurs, bloggers who meet in the store, during both in formal and informal meetings to share suggestions, ideas and meanings on food production and consumption.;

Finally our cases give evidence for companies" need to provide an effective and efficient service support system (Lusch & Webster, 2011) to help all actors becoming effective and efficient in value co-creation in networks. In all the three cases, around the shared value co-creation logic other services have been organized to enable value co-creation: the intranet platform in the Diet to Go case, the Gambero Rosso's community, and the counseling service in the Eat's case.

7. Conclusions and managerial implications

Innovation has often been recognized as an outcome of interaction between a firm and several external organizations (Roy et al. 2003). Few studies, however, have been recognizing innovation as a socially constructed phenomenon (Colurcio et al., 2010), with empirical evidences being quite scarce. This issue becomes even more relevant with respect to service contexts. In fact, the recent diffusion of a 'service view', that moves the attention from service as a category of market offering to value creation processing between a multitude of actors, is leading to a greater need to rethink the process of service innovation accordingly.

In this study we have shed some light on service innovation as a process of construction of new meanings that arise through interaction. Creating collective meanings implies enacting new opportunities together. Service innovation cannot be considered individually, and neither imposed by producers or customers, it evolves from complex interactions that occur at network level. For instance, in the Diet to Go case, costumers themselves unconsciously generated an innovation: the seen a Diet to Go bags as something that can be shared between two persons. The company then only translated this new meaning associated to a bag in a specific offering.

Service innovation thus requires some form of collective intelligence, based on relationships and social networks. The sharing of projects, investments, risks is one of the most important sources of sense making where the joint meanings generate ties, conveniences, desires that give value to things and processes.

Our study also show the importance of sharing a common idea of how value is created in order to coordinating the activities of the different actors in a recursive on-going process where meanings are created collectively.

In this perspective innovation emerges as conceptual systems shared by market actors through a process of sense-making within social networks. These networks are based on a new type of relational intelligence, capable of holding together in a shared journey a multiplicity of ideas, desires, skills and insights on the social context.

In terms of managerial implications, it is important for companies to recognize the boundary objects involved in the service innovation process and try to act on them in order to their potentialities of value co-creation. This would imply also making the system more attractive

toward new market players. In addition to that, we should consider that a boundary object does not create and communicate knowledge in itself. Rather it is the interaction around it that does it. It follows that companies should try to influence these interactions in a way that new knowledge is created, modified across the different sites, but at the same time without missing the super-ordinate value creation logic that guides the entire process.

Managers need to interpret the newness in service innovation, by using models and shared languages, so as to give meaning and direction to new spaces for innovation within social networks.

Further research is needed to better understand and describe which are the critical processes occurring in service innovation as socially constructed phenomenon, and in particular how new knowledge is generated and shared in such processes. Also, it would be interesting to further explore the role of narratives and story-telling in service innovation.

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