

CO-CREATION IN FASHION INDUSTRY: THE CASE OF AWAYTOMARS

Adriana BUJOR¹, Silvia AVASILCAI², Lidia ALEXA³

¹“Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iasi, adbujor@gmail.com

²“Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iasi, silvia.avasilcai@tuiasi.ro

³“Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iasi, lidia.alex@tuiasi.ro

Abstract—Over the past 10 years, as a result of social media development, co-creation has begun to grow and has become increasingly used by companies to produce innovative products. Involving consumers in the process of producing new products does not mean that companies have a lack of ideas. What they want is to get closer to their consumers, to listen to them, creating a unique value for them, and replacing the traditional way of thinking.

The aim of this paper is twofold: first, to identify the business models used by creative industries, by means of a case study approach focused on fashion industry, and second to emphasize the crowdsourcing's importance as an open innovation tool for creative industries. The foreseen result is to highlight the way the crowdsourcing platforms support the co-creation process for new products development.

Keywords—creative industries, crowdsourcing, co-creation, fashion, innovation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The recent developments, in terms of organizational growth or extended value network, have shown the relevance of collaboration or/and competition enhancement. Highly innovative and creative tasks became the core for value creation within an emerging industries, such as creative industries. This new approach requires a better understanding of value transition, from the co-produced value (supply chains) to co-created value (value networks, constellations, business ecosystems), as it was identified by E. Galateanu (Avram) and S. Avasilcai [1].

Business models in creative industries, as in other industries, have to change over time in response to either internal or external pressures.

Disruptive business models concentrate on creating/recreating, refining or optimizing a product or service, a role, a function or a practice, market, sector, or even an industry. Most businesses incorporate disruptive thinking into their activities, including in the management ones, with the purpose to obtain distinctive competitive value propositions, and to ensure

sustainability for the company, M. Myatt [2].

A disruptive business model is based on the innovation that determines the creation of a new market and value network [3], the concept focusing more on „the impact of the innovations than opposed to their novelty”[4]. Being considered the most influential business idea starting with the 21st century, was first defined and analyzed at the end of 20th century, in 1995 more precisely, by the Clayton M. Christensen, an American scholar, together with his collaborators [3].

This new and revolutionary business model has also been embraced by creative industries' sectors, such as fashion design. As mentioned by A. Bujor and S. Avasilcai, fashion design fluctuates over place and time being mainly influenced by cultural and social attitudes, A. Bujor, S. Avasilcai [5]. These variations are provoked by the changes of the consumers' desires, and tastes, at a certain period of time. Because of these changes, fashion designers must always be on guard, prognose, and find new ways to satisfy markets' changing tastes and desires.

AwaytoMars fashion platform has found a way to get closer to fashion lovers, by using co-creation as an open innovation tool. The idea behind the platform is to engage and empower people in the innovation process of fashion products realization, by both:

1) *Crowdsourcing*: the innovation work is done online by a crowd of people (creative community)

2) *Crowdfunding*: the money for products' manufacturing is donated, also online, by people.

Social communities engagement, collaboration within different actors, experience sharing, assessment and compliance with standards, knowledge sharing, trust building and use of open access type technologies represent important value creation activities, as it was illustrated by E. Galateanu (Avram) and S. Avasilcai [6].

II. CROWDSOURCING PLATFORM DEVELOPMENT WITHIN CREATIVE INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF AWAYTOMARS (FASHION SECTOR)

A. *AwaytoMars overview*

AwaytoMars Limited is a private company, founded in 2015, with headquarter in London, UK. The company's specialties are:

- 1) *fashion*;
- 2) *co-creation*;
- 3) *innovation*;
- 4) *profit-sharing*.

AwaytoMars platform was founded by Alfredo Orobio, being CEO of the first brand in the world totally co-created/generated by users. He studied both economics and international relations, and fashion school. Alfredo Orobio has also a business partner, a marketing consultant in Italy and Brazil, namely Carlo Valentino the co-founder of the platform [7].

The company's objective is to be a reference and inspiration in design, form, and concept, in order to interpret the wishes of its customers. The goal is to promote creative thinking, innovation, and high-quality aesthetics through a platform that empowers a community [8].

AwaytoMars wishes to change how people interact with the design process and how to buy fashion products online. The premise, a simple one, is to make things as collaborative as possible and to imagine that anyone who wants or is interested have access to the best manufacturing techniques when developing the own ideas online [8].

Being a crowdsourcing platform that allows anyone to "play fashion designer" [9], basically to make fashion without having any studies or experience in the field of fashion design, we are practically dealing with a transformation innovation in the fashion sector of creative industries.

In an interview for Ecouterre, a website devoted to the future of the sustainable fashion design, the founder of the fashion crowdsourcing platform stated that AwaytoMars was created with the main objective of making sure good and innovative ideas for fashion products got the support they need to go to the market [9].

In order to create this brand, Alfredo Orobio has spent almost a year doing market research, meeting fashion professionals, and visiting retail spaces.

The result of this sustained effort was the first co-created fashion collection in the world, that manages to bring fashion to a new frontier, to a totally different level.

The name of the platform originated from the founder's desire to best express what it does, what is its idea, but in a fun way. He considers that "Everything we do with AwaytoMars is new and quite disruptive. Mars for us is distant but is something that we have very close to us" [9].

B. *AwaytoMars Platform Structure*

The AwaytoMars platform greets its visitors with the following message: "Welcome to co-creation where none of us are as strong as all of us" [10], pointing out exactly from the beginning what kind of strategy it uses in order to produce value outcomes together with a community: co-creation.

The platform is structured into seven main sections: five on the left and two on the right, as it follows:

- 1) *WOMAN*: where all created products for women are found, divided into the following product categories: *Limited Edition, Dresses, Scarves, Shirts, Shoes, Sweatshirts, and T-shirts, Trousers*;
- 2) *MAN*: where all created products for men are found, divided into the following product categories: *Limited Edition, Scarves, Shirts, Shoes, Sweatshirts, and T-shirts, Trousers*;
- 3) *MARS*: contains two sub-sections: Press, and About.

Clicking on PRESS one will be able to find out which press took interest in the platform and wrote about AwaytoMars (e.g.: Vogue: "Brings a refresh much needed in the industry", Elle: "Game-changing, industry disrupting online fashion", The Guardian: "The future of fashion", Harper's Bazaar: "A new way of thinking fashion" etc.) [11].

Clicking on ABOUT a page with little information on what AwaytoMars does opens.

- 4) *COLLABORATE*: contains four sub-sections: How it works, AW/2018, Melissa, Submit.

HOW IT WORKS – starts with an explanation about what co-creation means for the brand, continues with the 6 steps of the project that needs to be followed by those who want to collaborate with them: 1. Registration; 2. Terms of Use; 3. Submission; 4. Co-creation; 5. Pre-order; and 6. Wear-it, and ends with the reasons why to co-create with them.

AW/2018 – invites co-creators to design for AW18, with the theme of space. The deadline for ideas submissions was 29.10.2017. At the time of the research undertaken for this paper, there were no more details about this campaign on the platform.

MELISSA – this section is the result of the collaboration between AwaytoMars and the fashion footwear brand Melissa, in order to co-create, with anyone who wants to get involved, 8 pairs of shoes. The submission ideas started in September 2017, and the winning pairs will be revealed and presented for the first time during the London Fashion Week in February 2018, and then they will be used at the AwaytoMars ready-to-wear fashion at Lisbon Fashion Week.

SUBMIT: user-friendly designed for anyone that wants to participate with an idea, which will then be the subject of the co-creation process. The one who wants to share his / her idea has to fill-in 7 mandatory fields, starting with the product's name, and continuing with idea tagline, the writing of a couple of selling paragraphs that will appear the product's page, gender, suggested fabric / materials, additional information, the image submitting (10MB max), and ending with the supporting image (back and front of the item). The final submitting

step that must be done by the one that shares the idea is to click on the post button.

5) *Find us*: in this section, the addresses for both the headquarters and the pop-shop are written down.

6) *Account*: for either to submit an idea or to get involved in the co-creation process, as a part of the creative community, one must Create a Profile, to officially become part of the AwaytoMars. Continue with the Facebook button also allows becoming part of the platform, using this way one's Facebook profile.

7) *Shop*: clicking on this section's button the online shop page will separately open, presenting all the products, mixed together (women and men). In order to make a purchase, one must first log in.

III. THE BUSINESS MODEL BEHIND AWAYTOMARS

Headquartered in London and Lisbon, the company changes how clothing is conceived, produced and sold using crowdsourcing, starting from the early stages of its creative process: concepts, sketches, prototypes for anyone and everyone, regardless of the design experience in fashion.

A. *AwaytoMars's disruptive business model: overview*

AwaytoMars is the first online platform in the fashion design industry 100% user-created that has managed to gather 10,000 active users from 90 countries, setting the foundation of a successful creative community, a collaborative bridge between producer and consumer.

Using this disruptive model, that gives people total control over the value chain, building this way a fair and strong relationship between producers and consumers [8], the brand has attracted the attention of industry experts. Thus was named Fast Tech Pioneer at the Centre for Fashion Enterprise, the University of Arts London and nominated among the 100 most disruptive brands [16].

This collaborative platform promotes:

- 1) *design-thinking*;
- 2) *co-creation*;
- 3) *crowdfunding*;
- 4) *profit-sharing*.

The business model used by the brand, a revolutionary and new one, aims to change the future and does not need exaggerated stocks, myopic creative visions, and too many intermediaries. Through direct engagement of the global community, AwaytoMars and its team of technical experts reduce the fashion industry's entry barriers and offer to the general public the opportunity not only to create a brand but also to share profits [9].

One might think that this is an amateur approach, but AwaytoMars is far from being that, as this business model approach makes sure that the process of design is inclusive, produces only what is desired, especially what consumers desire (consumer-driven), nothing too avant-garde, focusing more on fabric than the silhouette, modest but beautiful clothes. In one word: risk-free!

At AwaytoMars the power to create is in the hands of people, from students, artists to professionals, ideas

replace hierarchy and inspiration can come from anywhere: any age, any continent, and any field. Implementing this approach:

1) *the first collection, which debuted at Lisbon Fashion Week in March 2016, was the common product of the 400 people involved, some 14 years old, from 67 countries, and*

2) *the second complete collection, presented in October 2016, was realized by the multidisciplinary talents of over 500 contributors [12].*

The company believes in the power of the people, also in the power of crowd-funding and online shopping. One of their focuses, as the founder states, is to get people, of any kind, to access the online shop, and purchase products at wholesale prices, through their crowd-funding campaigns [7].

B. *How does it work?*

The business model uses the principles of crowdfunding and sharing economy (fig. 1). Anyone can present a sketch of concept, not being important or required to have experience in design or drawing skills. These rough ideas are posted on the platform where others can make suggestions in order to progress the design.

The particularity of this model is the lack of a creative director, not considered necessary. There is a "unique co-creation board" [10], formed of the general public, and the team of worldwide peer designers who meet every six months when the platform for ideas is reopened. The community is allowed to get involved in the stage of the process, being given to everyone equal opportunity to express themselves.

Each designer is individually crowdfunded, allowing AwaytoMars to experience popularity before production. Finished items are then sold to the public through the website. Instead of having a seasonal range and throwing things off, Awaytomars simply adds them to a permanent collection [13].

The sales price is equally divided, and all the designed products are manufactured by European factories that are verified by the company. The factories must reach the AwaytoMars standards and share the same values regarding the way they treat employees. At the moment, the brand produces clothes in factories from Portugal, Italy, and United Kingdom.

As for the intellectual property rules, everything that is submitted on the platform by the Users, from texts, comments to photos and videos, can be used and modified by AwaytoMars and its partners, in any way they consider [15].

However, all patrimonial copyrights on the materials submitted by the Users remain their property and their names will be quoted whenever the material is used by AwaytoMars, informed by the User unless space or physical media in which it appears does not allow this quoted. It is not compulsory to AwaytoMars to use all the materials submitted by the User and is authorized to edit the User's comments [15].

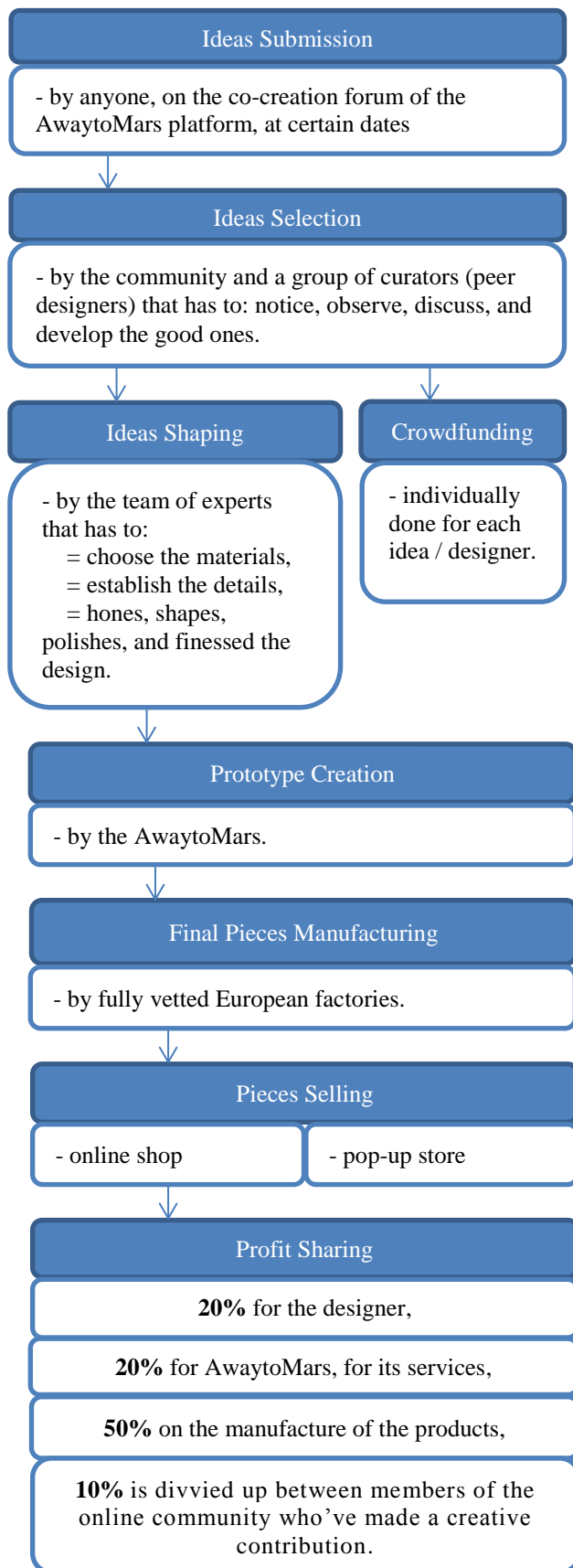


Fig. 1. AwaytoMars Business Model [6]

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Ten years ago, the disruptive business model would have been unsuccessful as it relies on smartphones, and social media (Facebook, Instagram). With the help of these two instruments, the result / benefit of co-creation is a universe of ideas coming from different people, with different backgrounds, and different life experiences. The biggest challenge for those using co-creation is how to organize this universe in order to obtain the best results.

The benefits of co-creation, presented in this paper (AwaytoMars case study), are not useful only for the fashion industry, but also for any type of industry, or activity that seeks for innovation.

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