Crowdsourcing: Which is the Development Stage of the Crowdsourcing Practice in Romania?

Carmen Balan

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies
carmen.balan@ mk.ase.ro

Abstract

During the last decade, crowdsourcing gained ground at global scale. Numerous companies provide individuals various opportunities to participate in specific projects. Worldwide, both small and large companies provide examples of successful crowdsourcing. At the same time, a new category of service providers emerged under the form of crowdsourcing platforms. They act as "bridges" between the organizations that seek support for different projects and the communities of individuals able and willing to participate in the projects. The goal of the research presented in this article was to identify the present stage of development of the crowdsourcing practice in Romania. The research objectives were to discover the major dimensions that may be used for the assessment of the development stage and to study the present status of the crowdsourcing practice based on each of the identified dimensions. The study had an exploratory nature and the research method was based on the analysis of secondary sources of information available in the online environment. This approach brings added value compared to previous reflections on this topic in Romania. The need for such research was triggered by two factors. The former was the absence of published findings of other studies relative to the present state of the crowdsourcing practice in Romania. The latter was the extremely limited number of scientific articles on this topic. Conclusions relative to the development stage are drawn based on the eight major dimensions. Recommendations suggest precise further steps for practitioners and researchers.

Keywords: crowdsourcing, platforms, tasks, contests, exploratory research.

JEL classification: M30, M31, O33.

1. Introduction

The practice of crowdsourcing is not new. In 1714, an Act of the British Parliament established the Longitude Prize of 20,000 pounds for the person who would identify a way to determine the longitude at sea (Boudreau & Lakhani, 2013). After many trials, John Harrison – artisan carpenter and clockmaker – designed the marine timekeeping device that solved the problem (Royal Museums Greenwich, 2016). That was a crowdsourcing contest.

The term "crowdsourcing" is relatively new. It was mentioned for the first time by Jeff Howe in an article published in 2006. In that article, he referred to examples of practice based on the input of a large number of persons, like iStockphoto, Wikipedia, Web Junk 20, InnoCentive platform of the pharmaceutical company Elli Lilly and Amazon Mechanical Turk (Howe, 2006). In 2008, the same author developed the concept in a distinct book (Howe, 2008).

For the organizations that initiate crowdsourcing projects, the benefits are faster design and prototyping, higher quality, increased agility, appetite for tedious tasks, access to new pools of external talent, better retention and engagement of the internal talent and sometimes lower costs (Deloitte, 2016).

Worldwide, crowdsourcing witnesses an ascending trend. In Romania, the practice exists, but there is no clear image of how crowdsourcing evolves and of the extent to which opportunities were turned into value. This article presents the findings of an exploratory research aiming to identify the present stage of development of the crowdsourcing practice in Romania. The need for the study was generated by the deficit of published research on this topic, even if crowdsourcing has both practical and scientific value.

2. Crowdsourcing practice

According to the eYeka report (2015), the year 2005 is the first when prominent global brands started to use crowdsourcing. Almost 85% of the 2014 Best Global Brands have applied crowdsourcing at least once.

In 2005 and 2006, only the technology and automotive best global brands used crowdsourcing. In 2007, fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) brands started to use crowdsourcing and their number increased progressively. In 2015, among the best global brands, 60 from the FMCG sector and almost 50

from the consumer electronics sector used crowdsourcing (eYeka, 2016a). The number of brands engaged in this practice was smaller for the other sectors: automotive, media/entertainment, finance/insurance, industry/energy, restaurants/hotels, retail etc.

During the period 2004-2015, Coca-Cola was the best global brand that used crowdsourcing the highest number of times, respectively more than 40 times. The Top 20 ranking according to the number of crowdsourcing projects since 2004 continues (in decreasing order) with Danone, Nestle, Pepsi, Samsung, Hewlett-Packard, Ford, Nokia, Toyota, General Electric, Microsoft, Google, Johnson & Johnson, Budweiser, Chevrolet, Shell, Intel, Philips, Santander and Nescafe (eYeka, 2016a).

Multinationals express their interest in crowdsourcing and create communities of various individuals and start-ups engaged in innovation processes. A recent example is provided by Unilever Foundry (Unilever, 2015). In 2015, Unilever officially launched the platform Foundry Ideas^{TM} for the generation of solutions to sustainability problems. The platform facilitates peer-to-peer communication between members of a large community consisting of consumers, key opinion formers and innovators.

The number of crowdsourcing platforms reached the number of 2,000 worldwide. In the United States, the estimated value of the market of crowdsourcing service providers is estimated at USD 6.5 billion for 2016 (The Fung Group, 2016).

Crowdfunding developed substantially compared to other forms of crowdsourcing. In 2015, the total fundraising volume of the global crowdfunding industry was USD 34 billion, out of which USD 17.2 billion in North America, USD 10.54 billion in Asia and USD 6.48 billion in Europe (Massolution, 2016).

The future of crowdsourcing will be marked by specific trends related to the information technology, to online communities. In addition, more dynamic evolutions may be expected in the generation of ideas and solutions and less in the performance of micro-tasks at convenient costs for the project initiators.

3. Crowdsourcing definition and taxonomy

One of the first definitions of crowdsourcing is that formulated by Howe (2006). Essentially, he considered that crowdsourcing is the act of outsourcing a job to a large group of people (external to the organization), based on an open call. The definition relied on three pillars: outsourcing, crowd (large number of persons) and open call.

As the practice evolved, researchers refined the definition of crowdsourcing. Several researchers underlined that crowdsourcing is a type of participative online activity (Estellés-Arolas & González-Ladrón-de-Guevara, 2012). The crowd became a "virtual crowd" and the call was predominantly based on advanced Internet technologies (Saxton, Oh & Kishore, 2013). Thus, the key elements in the definition of crowdsourcing became outsourcing, crowd and social web.

The evolution of crowdsourcing materialized into the emergence of several approaches and models. The potential approaches were classified as follows: knowledge discovery and management (for creating collective resources); distributed human intelligence tasking (for processing large data sets); broadcast search (for scientific problem solving); peer-vetted creative production (for design, aesthetic and policy problems) (Brabham, 2013). As regards crowdsourcing models, on of the most detailed taxonomy suggests the following: intermediary model; citizen media production model; collaborative software development model; digital good sales model; product design model; per-to-peer social financing model; consumer report model; knowledge-base building model; collaborative science project model (Saxton, Oh & Kishore, 2013).

One of the forms of crowdsourcing is crowdfunding. Researchers underlined the role of crowdfunding in the commercialization and financing of innovation (Mollick & Robb, 2016).

Lately, from the various types of crowdsourcing, idea generation attracted the attention of researchers. Findings revealed that in the idea generation stage of the new product development, crowdsourcing may complement the ideas of firm's professionals (Poetz & Schreier, 2012).

Initially, crowdsourcing was fundamentally related to the idea of outsourcing from a crowd of individuals external to the organization. Nevertheless, research shows that internal crowdsourcing may ensure a companywide dialogue (Stieger, Matzler, Chatterjee & Ladstaetter-Fussenegger, 2012).

The scientific articles/papers that were published by Romanians on this topic are recent, but few. They study crowdsourcing from a very specialized perspective focused on small tasks (State, Popescu & Toancă, 2015), crowdfunding (Ilie & Iie, 2015) or on the implementation in a sector such as tourism (Popescu, State, 2015). In addition, crowdsourcing was a tool applied for data collection (Toancă, Popescu, State & Petruş, 2015).

Crowdsourcing is a fairly recent field of research. The dynamics of practice will very likely impact research in order to identify better models and improved effectiveness.

4. Research

The present article is based on an exploratory research relative to the crowdsourcing practice in Romania.

4.1. Methodology

The research was based on the hypothesis that even if crowdsourcing emerged in Romania, the present stage of evolution is far from its full potential.

The goal of the research was to identify the present stage of development of the crowdsourcing practice in Romania. In order to achieve this goal, the main research objectives were the following:

a) to discover the major dimensions that may be used for the assessment of the development stage of the crowdsourcing practice in Romania;

b) to study the present status of the crowdsourcing practice based on each major dimension identified.

The study had an exploratory nature. The research method was based on the analysis of secondary sources of information available in the online environment.

The need for such a research on crowdsourcing was triggered by the extremely limited number of scientific articles published in this field, relative to Romania. Moreover, a major reason was the absence of published findings of other studies relative to the present state of development of the crowdsourcing practice in Romania.

This research contribution has a double value. Firstly, it is the first to explore the development stage of the crowdsourcing practice in Romania. Secondly, the findings of the study led to several recommendations for practitioners and researchers in this field.

4.2. Research findings

The findings of the exploratory research are detailed hereinafter.

4.2.1. Major dimensions

The first objective of the research consisted in the identification of the major dimensions of the evolution of the crowdsourcing practice in Romania. The term "dimensions" expresses the various facets of the crowdsourcing activities deployed in Romania, as well as by Romanians which allow the assessment of the present stage of evolution. The dimensions identified based on the exploratory research are presented in the figure 1.
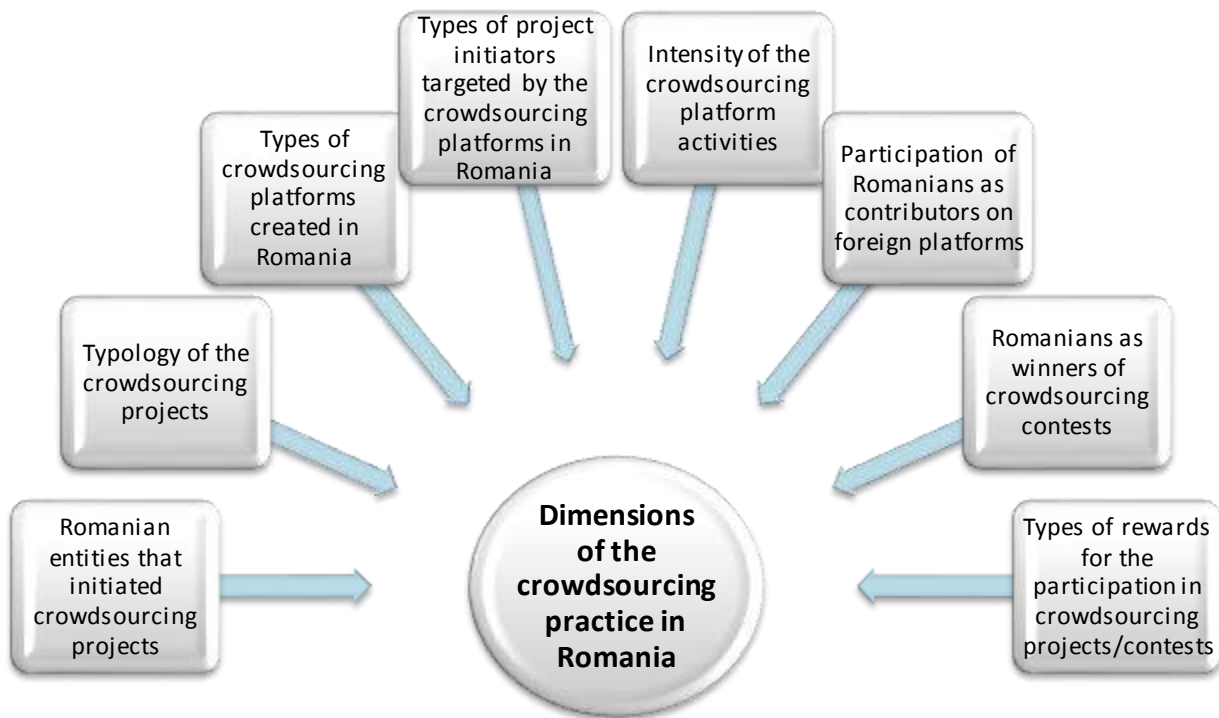
Figure 1. Major dimensions of the crowdsourcing practice in Romania
Source: Own exploratory research

The major dimensions refer to stakeholders and highlight both the "supply" and "demand" on the crowdsourcing market. On one side, they refer to the companies that initiate crowdsourcing projects and to the companies that act as intermediaries between the "resource-seekers" and the "resource-providers". On the other side, some dimensions refer to the participants that are "resource-providers", which offer their input to potential or actual initiators of crowdsourcing projects. Besides these dimensions, several others may be added, such as legal, taxation and information technology dimensions.

4.2.2. Present status of the crowdsourcing practice
In order to evaluate the present status of the crowdsourcing practice in Romania, the exploratory research focused on each of the eight major dimensions presented in the figure 1.

The *first dimension* referred to the Romanian entities that initiated crowdsourcing projects. The findings relative to the first dimensions are the following:

a) data availability. Online data about such projects are rather scarce. Few companies mention them in newsletters, press releases, interviews of management representatives or articles on Web sites specialized in business, marketing etc. This situation may reveal either a low interest in crowdsourcing or a reticent attitude about disclosing these projects. In addition, the companies (platforms, licensed distributors) which act as intermediaries between project initiators and contributors refrain from disclosing information relative to such partners, for confidentiality reasons, especially in the case of projects requiring the support of the crowd for micro-tasks and collection of market insights.

b) identity of entities. In Romania, there are at least three categories of entities that initiated crowdsourcing projects. First category consists in large players like Carrefour Romania, PepsiCo Romania and Samsung Romania. The second category consists in small entrepreneurs that rely on crowdsourcing to get ideas and solutions related to their business dilemmas. The third category comprises non-profit organizations such as the "Civic Alert" Association and the social movement project "Let's Do It Romania!".

c) number of entities. To estimate the number of entities that initiated crowdsourcing projects is a difficult and prone to error endeavor. This is due to data scarcity caused by both confidentiality protection and weak communication of the extant projects.

d) local vs. international approach. The entities that initiate crowdsourcing projects do not necessarily address their briefs to Romanian potential contributors. For example, Carrefour Romania used fairly recently an international platform for a project relative to its activities on the Romanian market (Carrefour Romania, 2015). This approach could lead to the hypothesis that crowdsourcing in Romania is less developed than in other countries or regions of the world. Preference for international platforms may be explained by the objective of achieving higher project effectiveness.

The *second dimension* refers to the typology of the crowdsourcing projects in Romania. The exploration of the available Web information led to the identification of the following types of crowdsourcing projects:

a) crowd-labor projects based on micro-tasks. These projects require the participation of a large number of contributors that accomplish very well defined and relatively simple tasks based on general skills. Platforms like *viespar.ro* intermediate such projects.

b) crowd-labor projects based on macro-tasks. This type of projects refers to strategy development or other consultancy tasks which are accomplished generally by freelancers. The platform *microjoburi.ro* may facilitate projects initiated by small entrepreneurs. There are also Romanian creators – rather few – who accomplish online branding and communication projects for international customers, being registered members of global communities such as eYeka.

c) knowledge building and sharing projects. An example is the crowdsourcing project implemented by Samsung Romania in 2014 (MSL Group The Practice, 2015). The aim was to collect pieces of advice from users of smart accessories for smart living (time and money economies, convenience etc.). Following the crowdsourcing project, the mobile application Live SMART 365 was developed based on 2,000 pieces of advice collected during a two-week period from 1,500 users (Vasiliu, 2014). The lifestyle application could be downloaded on free basis from the Google Play store. Another example is related to the site *www.civicalert.ro* and the mobile application "Civic Alert" of the Association Civic Alert (Civic Alert, 2016). The "crowd" consists in individuals and organizations that acknowledge authorities in real time of critical aspects or suggestions relative to urban infrastructure, parks, constructions, environment, cleaning etc.

d) information and insight projects. One of the latest trends in research is the integration between crowdsourcing and mobile applications installed on the smartphones of consumers. The aim is to collect real-time market data and to get insights during the interaction of the buyers with the offering at the point of purchase. In Romania, a recent example of company that accomplishes information and insight projects is Mobinsights SRL which is licensed distributor of Field Agent Inc. from the USA (Field Agent Romania, 2015). The customers of Field Agent Inc. are large global players such as Coca Cola, Johnson & Johnson, Procter & Gamble, General Electric, Unilever, as well as smaller companies.

e) competition projects based on contests. An illustrative example is the contest organized within the global campaign „Pepsi Challenge", in April 2015 on the site *www.acceptaprovocarea.ro* (IAA Romania, 2015). The aim of the crowdsourcing contest was to create a new design for the Pepsi can. Three proposals won the contest and a limited edition of one million cans was manufactured and distributed in Romania (Golin Romania, 2015). The selection criteria were originality, creativity and identification with the personality of the Pepsi brand. Another example is the contest organized by Carrefour Romania through the crowdsourcing platform eYeka between 11 December 2015 and 10 January 2016 (Carrefour Romania, 2015a). The brief was presented under the title „Bring to life the great shopping experience that people love, offered by Carrefour!". The creative challenge consisted in the design of a slogan and a poster. The results presented on the platform show that three proposals were selected from those submitted by the 104 contributors (Carrefour Romania, 2015b). Competition projects of crowdsourcing based on contests aim to discover innovative ideas and engage consumers in the process.

f) crowdfunding projects. Startups and NGOs developed projects to attract donors and

achieved various success rates. An example is the software FaceRig created by the Romanian startup Holotech Studios that raised USD 307,015, in 2014, on *indiegogo.com* – the largest crowdsourcing platform globally. The objective of USD 120,000 was accomplished 256% (Holotech Studios, 2014). The funds were necessary for the development of software able to allow humans to embody a video character of choice that expresses their body language and emotions, in real time, by means of a webcam. Another example of crowdfunding is related to the mobile application and two software platforms of the NGO "Let's Do It Romania!" – a large social movement for the ecology cause in Romania, related to the foundation "Let's Do It World!". The two online platforms were "The Waste Map" and "Register of Notifications of the Authorities". The donors were invited to contribute to the collection of a total amount of USD 36,170, through the platform *indiegogo.com,* during a 40-day period. In addition, the software company Qualitance agreed to donate one dollar for each dollar received from the civil society (Let's Do It Romania, 2015a). The total amount generated by crowdfunding and sponsorships received from several companies reached USD 20,000 (Let's Do It Romania, 2015b). **"Let's Do It Romania!"** applied the "crowdsourcing" concept on two levels. On one side, the funds required for the development and launch of the "Let's Do It!" mobile application and platforms were raised by means of crowdfunding. On the other side, Romanian citizens participate in the process of detecting and reporting of waste pollution cases and in the periodic waste collection campaigns.

Most of these projects are accomplished by means of crowdsourcing platforms.

The *third dimension* refers to the types of crowdsourcing platforms created in Romania. The extant platforms may be integrated in the following major types:

a) crowd-labor focused on micro-tasks, including information and insight projects. The company Digital Workforce SRL launched the platform *viespar.ro* in 2012 (Digital Workforce, 2016a). The types of solutions provided to customers are data collection, cleaning and categorization, sentiment analysis, audio-video transcription and market studies (Digital Workforce, 2016b).

b) crowd-labor focused mainly on macro-tasks. Several such platforms exist in Romania. An example is *microjoburi.ro*. The platform services are provided by the company Matash Media SRL (2013). On this platform, the term "microjob" defines an activity or a service that a provider wishes to perform for a buyer in exchange for a specified amount of money (more than RON 50). Examples of microjobs intermediated by the platform are: graphics and design, marketing online, editing and translation, video and animation, music and audio, programming and technology, business etc. Other examples of sites for microjobs are *18lei.ro* and *zerodesk.ro,* that present activities and services provided by freelancers, but not actual job offers.

c) crowd-mentoring and peer-learning. An example is *babele.co* established by the company Babele create together SRL, in 2014. The aim is to provide solutions to social enterprises from different countries, not only from Romania. The platform serves various communities. Each of them can initiate own projects of crowd-mentoring and peer-learning. In addition, the platform facilitates the collaboration between communities for common projects. The vision of the founders relative to the future of "Babele" is to transform the platform into a cooperative, the beneficiaries becoming its stakeholders (Babele create together, 2015). This platform is a singular example in Romania, in terms of orientation towards various communities and social entrepreneurship.

d) crowdfunding platforms. Recently, several platforms were developed in Romania to crowdfund projects. Examples are the following: *www.crestemidei.ro* (Crestem Idei Association, 2016a), *www.wearehere.ro* (Asociația We Are Here Crowdfunding, 2016a), *www.multifinantare.ro* (Registrul Miorita, 2016a), *www.PotSiEU.ro* (Asociatia Pentru Proiecte Sociale Sustenabile, 2016). There are several other platform/sites for crowdfunding business or non-business projects.

The *fourth dimension* refers to the types of project initiators targeted by the crowdsourcing platforms created in Romania. The table 2 presents the crowdsourcing services provided to each main type of project initiator.

Type of project initiators	Types of crowdsourcing services provided	Examples of platforms targeting the project initiators
E-commerce stores	product descriptions; product categorization; product tagging; internal search engine optimization, development of databases for newsletters, social media buzz	www.viespar.ro
Companies interested in data collection and analysis	data collection; data cleaning; data categorization; A/B testing; usability testing	www.viespar.ro
Digital agencies	validation of the participation in social media contests; sentiment analysis; A/B testing; research based on questionnaire	www.viespar.ro
Service providers*	promotion of own services over the Internet	www.microjoburi.ro
Social entrepreneurs and innovators	crowd-mentoring and peer-learning	babele.co
Start-ups, NGOs, individuals looking for financial support	crowdfunding	crestemidei.ro www.wearehere.ro www.multifinantare.ro www.PotSiEU.ro

Table 1. Main types of project initiators targeted by the crowdsourcing platforms in Romania
Note: * Services: legal, accounting, plumbing, translation, baby-sitting, online marketing, web-design etc.
Source: exploratory research.

The *fifth dimension* refers to the intensity of the crowdsourcing platform activities. The data provided by the existing crowdsourcing platforms relative to their activities show some disparities. Some platforms succeeded to achieve good results, while others did not reach their full growth potential. For example, the crowdsourcing platform *www.viespar.ro* has more than 200,000 participants and finalized more than 4,000 campaigns, consisting in more than 4 million micro-tasks accomplished (Digital Workforce, 2016b). The platform *www.microjoburi.ro* has 14,214 registered users and 1,237 finalized collaborations (Matash Media, 2016). In contrast, sites like *zerodesk.ro* and *18lei.ro* do not specify the number of job offers that have actually been completed. The platform *babele.co* declares on its home page 8,306 members and 777 projects (Babele create together, 2016). The crowdfunding platforms report fewer projects. For instance, *crestemidei.ro* reached a total of 80 projects, out of which 42 were funded, respectively 52.5% (Crestem Idei Association, 2016b). The platform *www.wearehere.ro* had a total of 78 projects, out of which 33 were funded, respectively 42.3% (Asociația We Are Here Crowdfunding, 2016b). The site *www.multifinantare.ro* reported a total of 60 projects, out of which only eight were funded, respectively 13.3%. (Registrul Miorita, 2016b). Other crowdfunding platforms/sites have a smaller total number of projects submitted for support.

The *sixth dimension* refers to the participation of Romanians as contributors on foreign platforms. The crowdsourcing platforms provide almost no demographic information about their "crowd" of registered contributors. However, there is information about the activity of some contributors. For instance, the crowdsourcing platform eYeka provides a ranking of the creators with the best creative scores. Within the context of this exploratory research, a search for top creators of Romanian origin was made on the eYeka leaderboard of top 500 creators during the period July-September 2016 (eYeka, 2016b). Only creators stating they are from Romania were considered. Out of the 500 entries on the leaderboard, three were from Romania (see table 2).

Indicator	Leaderboard position (period July-September 2016)		
	118	143	202
Name	donjuan_star	Abstraaact	alicecoralie
Age (years)	37	33	45
Gender (M/F)	M	M	F
Member of eYeka since	2014	2016	2016
Creative score	82,280	17,380	28,970
Number of points during the period	19,810	15,370	9,150
Number of entries accepted	36	2	11

Number of contests joined	208	5	17
Number of prizes won	-	1	-

Table 2. Top Romanian Creators on the eYeka platform during the period July-September 2016
Source: eYeka, 2016b.

The *seventh dimension* refers to Romanians as winners of crowdsourcing contests. The exploratory research led to the identification of several examples of Romanians that succeeded to range among the winners of crowdsourcing contests. Two such examples are related to the following contests:

a) BMW: "Urban Driving Experience Challenge". In 2012, the BMW Group and Local Motors started this first collaborative design and development project (BMW Group, 2012a). The project had two phases and aimed to identify innovative and premium features and functions for the BMW and Mini automotive brands for the horizon 2025 (Local Motors, 2012). The objective of the second phase was "to transform the car into a value-adding, socially responsible machine that contributes to our global well-being" (BMW Group, 2012b). The second phase lasted three weeks (15 November – 6 December 2012). The first prize was awarded to Cosmin Mandita from Romania, who received a USD 7,500 cash prize and a trip to Munich (Germany) to meet with the Managing Director of BMW Group Research and Technology (BMW Group, 2012b). The first place winning idea was presented under the title "BMW Light My Way". In essence, the proximity sensors of BMW cars may recognize walkers by night and activate a light. This idea could save energy consumed by street lights.

b) Pepsico Mexico Foods: "Munching partner". In 2014, on the crowdsourcing platform eYeka, Pepsico Mexico launched the challenge "Invent a new snack that will help working men and women get through long working hours!" (Pepsico, 2014). The challenge consisted in the development of an original product idea, respectively: product concept, name, ingredients and packaging. The contest period was 10 November – 1 December 2014. The winners came from Mexico, Russia and Romania (Innovation Excellence, 2015).

c) Procter & Gamble**: "Ariel Extreme Challenge".** In 2016, Procter & Gamble launched a challenge on the crowdsourcing platform eYeka. The contest focused on the Ariel detergent brand. The creators were required to produce an original and authentic video to illustrate the superior performance of Ariel without any comparison to other brands (Procter & Gamble, 2016a). The video content was used as inspiration for the development of digital content for platforms such as YouTube. The Romanian creator Abstraaact won the third prize of EUR 2,000 for the project "There's no mess Ariel can't handle" (Procter & Gamble, 2016b).

The cases of Romanian winners are rather few. Based on these findings, one may formulate a number of hypotheses according to which the main causes of the low number of Romanian winners on the foreign crowdsourcing platforms could be the following: lack of knowledge about the foreign platforms; low number of contributors registered and active on the foreign crowdsourcing platforms; lack of information about the running contests; motivation to participate related only to larger prizes; lack of appropriate creative skills; no interest in crowdsourcing projects.

The *eighth dimension* refers to the types of rewards for the participation in crowdsourcing projects/contests. The rewards are very different depending on the type of project and the skills required. The research findings relative to this dimension were the following:

a) moderate level of the financial reward for crowdsourcing contests. In the case of contests that require creative skills, the financial rewards are more attractive, especially in the case of challenges launched by multinational companies. According to the results of the contest organized on the crowdsourcing platform eYeka, Carrefour Romania awarded three prizes of USD 3,000, USD 1,500 and respectively USD 500 (Carrefour Romania, 2015a).

b) low level of the financial reward per micro-task. Most crowd-labor projects based on micro-tasks reward contributors with a low fee for each task. Consequently, only the accomplishment of an extremely large number of tasks can bring a significant amount to the person that performs the tasks.

c) symbolic reward. The financial equivalent of these rewards is small. An example is provided by the crowdfunding platform *www.crestemidei.ro*. According to the "Terms and Conditions"

of this platform, a project which does not specify the reward for the supporters is not eligible for the submission on the site. The reward must have symbolic value and small financial value (Crestem Idei Association, 2016). The value consists in the official recognition of the participation of each supporter.

d) non-financial rewards with high value and utility for the contributors/supporters. Crowdfunding practice provides such examples. For instance, the supporters of the software FaceRig by Holotech Studios on the platform *www.indiegogo.com* have received "perks" according to the amount they contributed. There were twelve tiers of potential support amounts. The first tier corresponded to a contribution of USD 1 and the associate perk was "Thumbs Up", the supporter's name being mentioned in the hall of fame. In the highest tier were included support amounts of USD 5,000. The perk associated with this top support amount was "FaceRig Trailblazer", according to which the supporter got all the perks of FaceRig forever and the company promised to every such supporter that "upon the conclusion of the Beta we shall schedule time to work with you to build an ultimate quality custom digital actor, designed by you and named in your honor" (Holotech Studios, 2014). The perks were designed to suit the various levels of expertise and expectations of the supporters.

The exploratory research revealed the major dimensions of the present stage of development of the crowdsourcing practice in Romania.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The initial hypothesis that triggered this research specified that even if crowdsourcing emerged in Romania, the present stage of evolution is far from its full potential. The research findings confirm the hypothesis. The present stage of development of the crowdsourcing practice in Romania may be labelled "between inception and early growth". This conclusion is supported by the findings relative to the major dimensions of the crowdsourcing practice:

a) Romanian entities that initiated crowdsourcing projects. For the moment, crowdsourcing is not a "mass" phenomenon; the practice is not widely spread. The number of entities that initiate such projects seems to be rather small. Several multinationals and associations are more visible as initiators of crowdsourcing projects. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that crowdsourcing is a periodic practice among those that experimented its benefits as project initiators. Thus, the crowdsourcing practice resembles an occasional activity.

b) typology of the crowdsourcing projects in Romania. The types of projects are relatively similar to those existing worldwide. They include: crowd-labor projects based on micro-tasks or on macro-tasks; knowledge building and sharing projects; information and insight projects; competition projects based on contests; crowdfunding projects. However, the exploratory research identified few projects that aim to stimulate skilled people to generate innovative and creative solutions for brand marketing.

c) types of crowdsourcing platforms created in Romania. Platforms are the interface between the project initiator and the potential task performer / supporter. Several platforms were set-up in Romania during the present decade. Their number is still small, both overall and by special types of crowdsourcing.

d) types of project initiators targeted by the crowdsourcing platforms created in Romania. The platforms target the project initiators that express a more stringent need to accomplish specific micro- or macro- tasks or to obtain funding. The main types of project initiators that are targeted by the platforms are: e-commerce stores, companies interested in data collection and analysis, digital agencies, service providers, social entrepreneurs and innovators, start-ups, NGOs, individuals looking for financial support.

e) intensity of the crowdsourcing platform activities. Not only the number of crowdsourcing platforms is small, but also very few report a significant level of activity. In principle, the existence of few platforms would not necessarily be an indicator of slow development. However, when the intensity of the crowdsourcing activities does not represent the strength of those few platforms, the development stage is still preliminary.

f) participation of Romanians as contributors on foreign platforms. Data about such

participation is scarce and difficult to obtain. The leaderboards of the platforms are a major source of information. The research findings revealed extremely few Romanians ranked on leaderboards. Nevertheless, there could be Romanians that are registered users either active or not-active on the foreign platforms and which are not on the leaderboards.

g) Romanians as winners of crowdsourcing contests. The crowdsourcing challenges raised by prominent global brands captured the attention of several Romanians. The winners are extremely few. The achievement of those who succeeded to get a prize is valuable because they faced international competition.

h) types of rewards for the participation in crowdsourcing projects/contests. The types of rewards resemble those corresponding to the global practice, more specifically very small fees per micro-task and moderate amounts for more complex tasks. According to the international practice, the crowdfunding projects grant supporters a symbolic reward.

The present stage of development of the crowdsourcing practice in Romania leads to several practice and research recommendations.

From a practical perspective, the present situation of crowdsourcing in Romania reveals the need to accomplish a set of major objectives: (i) to create awareness among potential project initiators of crowdsourcing projects, as well as among the potential contributors/supporters; (ii) to build a clear image of crowdsourcing in Romania, underlining the benefits for each type of stakeholder; (iii) to develop codes of conduct for the crowdsourcing platforms; (iv) to promote best practices/cases of crowdsourcing. These objectives require the converging efforts of the crowdsourcing stakeholders. In this respect, the creation of an association of crowdsourcing professionals may have a positive impact on the future evolution of this practice. In addition, another recommendation for practitioners refers to the opportunity to develop platforms focused on contests for creative solutions in the field of brand marketing. Competition crowdsourcing based on contests may attract young talents interested in branding and social media marketing.

From a research perspective, several areas of study emerge. Examples refer to aspects such as: (i) identification of the factors that stimulate and respectively diminish the interest of companies to apply to crowdsourcing projects; (ii) attitude of potential task-performers / contributors / supporters relative to various types of crowdsourcing; (iii) motivation of task-performers / contributors / supporters to participate in crowdsourcing projects; (iv) effectiveness of different types of rewards etc.

Does the crowdsourcing practice have the potential to develop in Romania? Is there a "crowd" interested in such projects? Are the benefits worthwhile? The future development of this practice will depend on the engagement of the various stakeholders and maybe on the orientation towards enhanced creativity and innovative ideas.

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