A COMMUNITY-AMPLIFIED CROWDSOURCING METHOD UTILIZING “THE CORRESPONDENT” MODE IN SERVICE INNOVATION. LESSONS FROM QUALITYHUNTERS2 OF FINNAIR AND HELSINKI AIRPORT

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Abstract

Customer integration is becoming increasingly important for innovating new or improved services. Recently, the development of ICT and especially the participatory social media platforms have created unprecedented potential for service innovation enabling the involvement of existing or potential customers in the process. From the service sector the transport and logistics industry has been found to feature a smaller share of innovative firms when compared to the other subsectors. The passenger airline industry, however, is one of the largest and most commoditized service industries. As a consumer business, it entails huge potential for customer-centric service innovation, which has gained increasing attention in the innovation management research. This research depicts a case study and lessons learned of integrating customers in air travel service development utilizing the correspondent mode in service innovation. Specifically, the case concerns the QualityHunters2 crowdsourcing initiative of Finnair and Helsinki Airport during Fall 2011. The goal of this research is to advance knowledge of crowdsourcing used in service innovation. In particular, we aim to answer whether the typical crowdsourcing process offered by many intermediaries can be improved with an online community-augmented correspondent approach. Our results are based on observations, interviews and a web survey directed at the community participants.

Keywords: Service innovation, Customer Integration, Crowdsourcing, Social Business, Airline Travel Services
1 Introduction

“Customer integration is becoming increasingly important for the development of service. It is no longer enough to simply follow customers nor can companies expect to lead them; the route to the future lies in walking together with the customers in ‘pari passu’ to accomplish this, the use of appropriate methods for customer integration is essential.” (Edvardsson et al., 2012)

The service sector, including such areas as transport, government, education and healthcare, has rarely been portrayed as being at the innovation forefront or containing the most innovative companies (Rothkopf, 2009). Especially the transport and logistics industry has been found to feature a smaller share of innovative firms when compared to the other service subsectors (Gleich and Richter, 2008). This is also reflected in service industry innovation research, which has mostly been conducted with respect to knowledge-intensive business services, IT, and financial services (Rothkopf, 2009). The passenger airline industry, however, is one of the largest and most commoditized service industries (Rothkopf, 2009) and it would benefit from more customer-centric service innovation research. In a commoditized industry the services on offer are very similar to each other, which limits the value-based competition, and price is typically the key purchase criterion (Rothkopf and Wald, 2011).

Recently, the development of ICT and especially the participatory social media platforms have created unprecedented potential for service innovation enabling the integration (involvement) of existing or potential customers in the process. Such concepts as community based innovation (Füller et al., 2006, Bragge et al., 2009), customer co-creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004), open innovation (Chesbrough, 2003, Chesbrough, 2011), user innovation (von Hippel, 2005) and lately especially crowdsourcing (Brabham, 2008, Estellés-Arolas and Gonzáles-LadrÓN-de-Guevara, 2012, Howe, 2006, Zhao and Zhu, 2012) have all received intense interest by businesses and public organizations. “Serious companies are carefully thinking about ways to integrate crowdsourcing into their marketing efforts”, captures Bayus (2012) the current trend in the economy.

However, prior IS research has not yet paid sufficient attention how to design effective crowdsourcing initiatives and processes (Pedersen et al., 2013, Zheng et al., 2011). Namely, companies are facing considerable challenges in deciding in which phase(s) of the innovation process they should use social media and what platforms to consider in their strategy (Helms et al., 2012). Aitamurto et al. (2011) and Ainasoja et al. (2010) add to these challenges the following decisions: what is wanted from the participants (e.g. ideas, information, solutions or brand enhancement), what way of involvement suits best for the objectives and participants at hand, is direct interaction required in order to reach the stated objectives, how long commitment is needed for the process of involvement, what is the degree of competitive vs. community processes utilized, and how to support the participants that are involved. At the more practical side a big issue for companies using crowdsourcing is how to efficiently evaluate all the noisy input that it typically generates (Bayus, 2012). Many open questions are thus to be answered when involving customers or users via crowdsourcing initiatives.

Edvardsson et al. (2012) have recently constructed an insightful framework that companies can use as a decision tool for choosing between appropriate methods of customer integration in service innovation. Besides informing how customer integration can be carried out, their research enlightens also why and when companies should integrate customers in service innovation. Edvardsson et al. (2012) propose that those methods that allow users to identify their own needs and solutions/ideas – and which are also obtained in the natural use context – are most likely better at providing influential information regarding the preconditions for firmer value creation in service. Moreover, they recommend the development and deployment of dialog-based methods. These duplex methods include a feedback loop to the respondents encouraging a learning process, as the information in this way is not only devoted to the company but it is fed back to the respondents. This means that the respondents are not only passive informants, but involved also in the interpretation of the information, the prioritization, and the actions to be taken. (Edvardsson et al., 2012)
According to Edvardsson et al. (2012) much of the information used in service innovation practice comes from users who are not in the service situation or do not necessarily have an actual need for service, but who have previous experience from the service’s resource context. The information is thus coming from customers that report by reflecting from the armchair a previous service experience. Instead, the “correspondent” mode that consists of methods where the participants report live from the service situation have been seldom used in innovation processes (Ainasoja et al., 2010, Edvardsson et al., 2012). Also research is scarce from this mode of customer integration. Yet the real-time web phenomenon enables now any-time any-place interaction even from 30,000 feet above the ground, providing new and affordable means also for live reporting. Outside the realm of innovation, valuable live crowdsourcing has been used often when gathering natural disaster information collectively.

This study aims to fill in the gap found in the IS literature by analysing a case study and lessons learned of integrating customers in air travel service development utilizing the aforementioned correspondent mode in service innovation. Specifically, the case concerns the QualityHunters2 (QH2) crowdsourcing initiative of Finnair and Helsinki Airport during Fall 2011 (www.qualityhunters2.com). The goal of this research is to advance knowledge of crowdsourcing used in service innovation. This is especially vital in a commoditized industry, although “every company that sells services needs innovation to differentiate and to grow” (Chesbrough, 2011). In particular, we aim to answer whether the typical crowdsourcing process offered by many intermediaries can be improved with an online community-augmented correspondent method. Aitamurto et al. (2011) have contemplated that service innovation might benefit from a different type of a crowdsourcing process than product innovation.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews relevant earlier literature on service innovation and crowdsourcing to build a solid background. Section 3 depicts the methodology, analysis and findings of the case. The paper ends with discussion and conclusions in Section 4.

2 Background for research

Toivonen and Tuominen (2009) define service innovation and the process of it as follows: “A service innovation is a new service or such a renewal of an existing service which is put into practice and which provides benefit to the organisation that has developed it; the benefit usually derives from the added value that the renewal provides to the customers. In addition, to be an innovation the renewal must be new not only to its developer, but in a broader context, and it must involve some element that can be repeated in new situations, i.e. it must show some generalisable feature(s). A service innovation process is the process through which the renewals described are achieved.”

Although research on service innovation and new service development is already abundant, Chesbrough (2011) claims that the fact that we know much less about how to innovate in services than about how to develop new products and technologies is a key problem for advanced economies. He suspects that the customer may need to participate throughout the innovation process as tacit knowledge, which emerges during the innovation process, cannot be collected in advance. This may partially be explained by the nature of services, as the users have a more prominent, interactive role in the actual service provision (Menor et al., 2002). Edvardsson et al. (2012) have recently constructed an insightful service innovation framework anchored in the service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008), which sees that customers should be involved in service development and that use situations are critical for understanding value creation. The framework depicts a two-by-two matrix consisting of four modes based on the information related to the use situation (either in situ or ex situ) and the resource contexts (either in context or ex context) that are available to the customer.

Several methods are available for customer integration or involvement when innovating services. Many of the methods are utilized especially in the fuzzy front-end of innovation (Alam, 2006), that is, in the early phases of the process. Figure 1 presents several customer integration methods used in service development, based on Edvardsson et al. (2012). The methods in Figure 1 are divided into four quadrants based on the use situation and resource context. For example, the correspondent mode includes methods such as empathic design (Leonard, 1995), the lead-user method (von Hippel, 1986)
and the CUDIT method (Magnusson et al., 2003). A correspondent is a customer who is in or has experience in a real service context and who is in or just about to enter a real-life, value-creating situation. Edvardsson et al. (2012) suggest that the correspondent mode methods are excellent for capturing live data regarding use value experience and service failure, while these methods may be inferior to the reflective practitioner mode methods in relation to the ability to generate creative solutions. This is due to the finding in creativity research (e.g. Dodds et al., 2002) that there normally is an incubation period between facing the problem and creating the solution (Edvardsson et al., 2012).

The experience of the informants may vary from very experienced (lead-users) to ordinary users and even greenhorns - all types are valuable in different but complementary ways (Edvardsson et al. 2012). For example, lead-users may come up with new, innovative solution ideas, which may be tested and validated by ordinary users. Greenhorns are often free from restricting constraints in ideation (ibid.).

**Figure 1. Framework for relating use information to methods for service development with method examples in each mode. Source: Adapted from (Edvardsson et al., 2012).**

Spurred by the developments of ICT and especially social technologies, a new method has surfaced in the arena of service innovation: crowdsourcing (Bayus, 2013, Zhao and Zhu, 2012, Zheng et al., 2011). According to Bayus (2012), cost savings via voluntary workforce is often the reason why many companies first become interested in crowdsourcing. However, the speed of getting input and the potential for fresh and original ideas that come outside the company are also important drivers. Moreover, crowdsourcing allows for freer communication and better input than for example traditional focus groups, and it can tap into a more diverse population of interested individuals. (Bayus, 2012)

Crowdsourcing is not a single method per se, but it can be viewed as a paradigm, process or platform. Pedersen et al. (2013) define crowdsourcing as follows: “A collaboration model enabled by people-centric web technologies to solve individual, organizational, and societal problems using a dynamically formed crowd of interested people who respond to an open call for participation.” Two of the most common crowdsourcing models employed today involve one-time challenges and ongoing communities (Bayus, 2012). Various types of contests are popular as one-time challenges (for instance, designing a new logo), whereas ongoing communities typically involve groups of customers or passionate individuals for a particular brand (Bayus, 2012, Jeppesen and Frederiksen, 2006, Leimeister et al., 2009, Marchi et al., 2011, Zheng et al., 2011). According to Bayus (2012) one-time activities are often easier to set up and there are numerous crowdsourcing intermediaries that can facilitate online contests, whereas building up communities involves often more planning due to their long-term proposition. Participants in ongoing crowdsourcing communities are usually asked to keep on proposing any ideas that might improve the organization’s products and services (Bayus, 2013). Dell’s IdeaStorm and Starbucks’ myStarbucksIdea are two of the most well-known initiatives in this class. Marchi et al. (2011) have done a thorough search and summarized numerous other examples of online brand community innovation from the research literature.
Pedersen et al. (2013) have recently conducted a broad literature survey on crowdsourcing research in IS literature, and they have built a conceptual framework based on the common input-process-output model for guiding research in the area. The authors found no research specifically related to understanding the process used in crowdsourcing applications. They define the process as the design of a step-by-step plan of action for solving a crowdsourcing problem. Typically, the process consists of three main phases (ibid.): crowd creation (generating ideas), crowd wisdom (reducing, clarifying and organizing the ideas), and crowd voting (evaluating ideas and building consensus).

Similarly to traditional user-centered innovation studies, crowdsourcing cases are much more abundant in the realms of physical/digital products or digital services. Crowdsourcing examples from traditional service fields have only recently been reported. For example Ainasoja et al. (2010) depict an interesting service innovation case at Tallink Silja, which is one of the largest passenger and cargo shipping companies in the Baltic Sea region. The company selected 1,000 cruise travellers (out of over 56,000 applicants) to innovate new service ideas in 2009. The participants delivered their ideas electronically via a web form after their courtesy test cruise; there were no interaction with the product developers or with the other participants. The objective with collecting the ideas only after the cruise was that no sporadic or momentary issues would be emphasized, but those that were most strongly stuck in their mind. Ainasoja et al. (2010) characterized that the campaign resembled a traditional customer satisfaction survey, but it did manage to produce more deliberated customer feedback and ideas for developing the cruise service. This model had elements of in situ crowdsourcing as the ideas were obtained in the natural use situation. The participants assessed it successful that the ideas were collected only after the cruise and not in the midst of the experience. Overall, the way of participation was regarded experiential by itself: the participants felt great being chosen as a test user, they enjoyed both the cruise and their developer’s role during it, and they believed they would remember the experience even after ten years. The company got a massive amount of feedback and ideas whose impact to its service development it did not properly anticipate beforehand. Ainasoja et al. (2010)

Another insightful crowdsourcing case on traditional service innovation is presented by Swiss researchers from the field of retail (Dubach Spiegler et al., 2011). In this study ideas were sought for the “kiosk of the future”. The company, Valora Retail, chose a Swiss crowdsourcing intermediary company (Atizo) to perform their project using a web-based platform. At the time of their 7-week crowdsourcing project in early 2010, the Atizo platform had a community of 6,400 enrolled participants. The question posed for the community was phrased as: “The Kiosk with its many locations will become the hub between the physical and digital world. Which surprising ideas, products and services can you imagine in the context of the Kiosk of the Future?” Altogether 626 ideas were submitted by Atizo community members; 64 ideas of those were evaluated to be relevant for the project, and the 19 best ideas were rewarded and considered for further internal analysis and development. Dubach Spiegler et al. (2011, p. 5) report unexpected challenges for the crowdsourcing team at Valora Retail. Firstly, “During the rating of the ideas many repetitions and ideas building on each other were discovered. This presented an unexpected and significant amount of work for the Crowdsourcing (CS) team.” Moreover, “The number of ideas submitted, the duplications and the need for several clicks per rating meant that the CS team had to invest more time than had been planned for this phase. Consequently, a few actions that might have increased the quality of ideas, such as dialogues with innovators, could not be performed simply due to lack of time”. After the ranking of the ideas, the crowdsourcing team also grouped the 626 ideas received into seven larger topic areas, which was yet an additional task requiring extensive time resources. Could this typical process of crowdsourcing be streamlined for the benefit of the CS company? We depict next a case from the air travel industry where this was aimed at, and the lessons learned.

3 Crowdsourcing case: Qualityhunters2

Qualityhunters2 (QH2) is a service development initiative by Finnair and Helsinki Airport launched in Fall 2011. The first version of this initiative, Rethink Quality, whose goal was primarily related to
brand building, had taken place in a smaller scale by Finnair a year earlier in Fall 2010 (Jarvenpaa and Tuunainen, 2012). For QH2 Finnair and Helsinki Airport hired via social media seven theme-focused Quality Hunters (QH’s) to travel the world and seek out fresh ideas on quality and how to improve air travel and the airport experience. There were over 2,000 public applications on the website for the QH’s seven positions. One of the hunters was announced to be directly chosen based on votes received for their public online application. This raised international awareness of the QH2 crowdsourcing initiative and the companies behind it. The seven QH’s eventually recruited were from all over the world; only one of them was from Finland. Their seven themes were: on the move, socializing, entertainment, shopping, food & drink, business class, and services.

In addition to hiring the seven hunters as temporary employees, Finnair and Helsinki Airport companies wanted to hear everyone’s opinions and ideas. At the heart of the initiative was a tailor-made blog-based website www.qualityhunters2.com (see Figure 2), which was designed so that anyone could take part in the discussion. The QH’s communicated additionally via their individual twitter accounts. Also a hub twitter account (@qualityhunters) was keenly employed to augment everybody’s participation. Active contribution of the crowd was incentivized with a prize of becoming the 8th QH for one week at the end of other hunters’ 7-week travelling period, entitling to free travelling with VIP treatment in Finnair’s intercontinental flights.

Figure 2. The Qualityhunters2 home page during the recruitment phase (October 14, 2011)

For three intensive months, the website was the digital home for QH’s and the community. The QH’s produced texts, photos and video of their adventures and their ideas on how to make air travel better.

In addition to the digital home a Quality Hunters’ lounge was opened at Helsinki Airport for anyone to visit. Helsinki Airport and Finnair received hundreds of suggestions on how to develop their service. The ideas were prioritized by the crowd, but all ideas were carefully investigated. The intention of both companies was to relay the benefits of the project to the passengers by putting into practice as many ideas as possible as soon as possible. First ideas were implemented already in early 2012...
(Artport gallery, design showroom and celebrating cultural events such as the Chinese year). (QualityHunters, 2011). In addition, several ideas have later been developed with the help of the still ongoing QH community utilizing twitter, the website, and a newer social platform – the Pinterest.

3.1 Research methodology and analysis

Our research is based on a case study design, containing triangular data from daily observations throughout the initiative and a survey targeted at the crowdsourcing participants (other than the hired community managers, the QH’s). Additionally, we have interviewed the person responsible of the campaign. From the observations we have gathered more than 75 pages of field notes with screenshots. The invitation to respond to our web survey was placed on the QH2 website and additionally marketed through twitter during the campaign (via @qualityhunters, @Finnair, @HelsinkiAirport and the researcher’s twitter account @johannabragge). The survey included multi-item constructs derived from prior research literature as well as open-ended and demographic questions. We received 95 answers, of which 7 were removed as the answerers mentioned not having visited the QH2 site or not knowing anything about the QH2. The final sample size is thus 88. The amount is not large in absolute terms, but it covers the majority of the active community members. We did not seek answers from occasional one-time visitors. We analysed the qualitative data bearing especially the crowdsourcing process viewpoint in mind, although other issues that emerged from the data were also deliberated.

As the final sample size is not adequate for advanced statistical modelling (our original aim), we will not focus in this study on our research model behind the survey, but instead, we utilize the quantitative survey data as supplemental research material providing descriptive statistics. As an overview, 66% of our respondents were male and aged 34 years on average. Thirty-three (37.5%) of the respondents were from Finland, 8 from UK, 5 from USA or Sweden, and 3 from Germany, India, Japan, Russia or Spain. The rest 22 were from 18 other countries. Over 61% worked full time, and others were evenly either working part-time, in education or unemployed. Almost 20% worked in the travel industry.

3.2 Findings

The QH2 initiative resembled at the outset a one-time contest (Bayus, 2012) with a pre-planned three-month process, which was managed by a communications consultancy (Milton.fi). Yet, the initiative had elements of an ongoing-community type of crowdsourcing right from the beginning with a steady use of the @qualityhunters account of behalf of the companies’ permanent employees. Moreover, the prize, being selected as the 8th QH, was given based on active community participation, not on submitting the best idea. After the QH2 campaign was officially at its end, Finnair and Helsinki Airport announced that they will continue communicating with the active community built around the initiative. The companies have employed this channel since, e.g. for refining the crowd-created service ideas to be implemented. For instance, a book swap lounge was built at the airport and the community was asked to submit more ideas for its interior decoration and for the labels to be attached to the recycled books at the book swap lounge (see http://pinterest.com/qualityhunters/helsinki-airport-book-swap/). When asking the survey respondents’ perception about the QH2 initiative and forums, 16% perceived it as an ideation contest, and 10% as an online brand community (multiple choices were allowed). Most answerers (33%) perceived it as an online story of the seven QH’s, and 27% thought it was for people interested in travelling. A forum to complain about airlines was chosen by 2%, and a forum for Finnair’s fans received 1% of the choices. Eleven percent chose to phrase the initiative using their own words. For example, QH2 is “the way that Finnair uses to improve itself with the help of the 2.0 community”, “an innovative project with 8 travelling researchers that are using social media”, “a forum to discuss various quality hunting topics, discuss new ideas, and seek out the best. It should be an ongoing platform!”. A couple of respondents saw it as a plain marketing or PR effort.

In comparison to the Valora Retail CS process (Dubach Spiegler, 2011), which turned out to be more burdensome in the idea organizing phase for the crowdsourcing team than it had anticipated, the initial thought behind the QH2 was to decide on the broader categories (themes) of ideation beforehand, and
to hire a “flying community manager” (QH) with extensive experience on the topic to manage the discussion and ideation on their particular themes. The QH’s job was to fly on Finnair flights during seven weeks, and concurrently spur and nurture the online innovation discussions on their theme. The QH's could thus be regarded as “correspondents” or “reflective practitioners”, depending on whether they reported their service experiences and ideas live on the service situation or somewhat afterwards. Also the community members might have been commenting in a service situation as correspondents, but they were reporting also as reflective practitioners or even dreamers – without any experience from Finnair flights. The initial plan was also that after the crowd creation phase, the QH’s should collect and combine the key service ideas of their own theme for the subsequent crowd voting phase.

The survey data on how many times the participants had approximately visited the QH2 website or the twitter accounts include interesting insights. The average number of times the respondents reported they had visited the QH2 website was 34 and the twitter accounts 43 (the complementary QH forums employed, Flickr and Youtube, received only 1.2 and 3.7 visits on average). Detailed distribution data on the self-reported number of visits is shown in Figure 3. Sixty per cent mentioned they were more active in the website/blog commenting, whereas 30% were more active in twitter, and only 10% were equally active in both. The averaged absolute difference in the number of visits in website and twitter accounts a respondent mentioned was relatively large, 48.2, indicating that a multi-platform choice might not have been an optimal choice from the campaign organizers. This was reflected also in the open-ended answers related to the QH2 forums used: “great but complex to keep track and follow multi media simultaneously”. Digging deeper into the respondents’ opinions revealed that the technical implementation of the tailor-made website was not perfect for seamless communicating: several respondents wished better mechanisms for keeping on track on their comments (notification feature, registration with my page info) and a “tweet this” button for the blog posts. Interestingly, Facebook and G+ like buttons were implemented at the blog posts, although these were not used as platforms in this initiative. Also moderation in the website was seen as deterring feature: “I understand they might need to screen through all the posts and filter out spam, but it's slightly inconvenient that all post need to 'await moderation' before going on public. This slows down the flow of conversation. I'd suggest to simply post everything immediately and have a moderator to delete inappropriate posts”.

![Figure 3. Number of self-reported visits in QH2 web site and twitter.](image)

Regarding the twitter accounts, several respondents mentioned that they would have expected more active conversation from the QH’s, instead of them mostly tweeting from a new post on the website. Yet, the team behind the hub twitter account (@qualityhunters) was praised in several comments, as the community members were regularly invited to attend online chats about a variety of travel-related topics: “Really enjoyed the daily discussions, around a relevant subject and think it would have been interesting to have the QHs take part in them..” “The interaction is very personal, because they single you out for questions or chats – and they always reply!” and ”.. a good sense of community (thanks mainly to the friendly guiding hand of the Twitter team)”.

When asked what would have increased the respondents interest in the QH2 forums, several participants mentioned a proper map showing e.g. with connecting dots where the QH’s have been or
are going, instead of showing only their current location. Some wished for regular polls and contests with more rewards. Also the timeline of the initiative was shown only at the launch, and several respondents indicated they were unclear how the CS process really proceeded. Even after the official campaign finished, some persons remained uncertain what happened to the prize with intercontinental flights for participating in discussions (see last comment at http://www.qualityhunters.com/qh2/?p=6245). There was clearly room for better informing on the progress of the process, specially for new entrants.

Considerable mix-up was caused during the phase when the crowd voting phase started. The original plan of having the 7 QH’s collect and combine the service ideas of their theme for the voting phase was not implemented. Instead, a new technical voting widget was employed and the community was first asked to submit their ideas anew to this idea meter (see Figure 4). Some of the regular community members felt extremely annoyed with this, reflected in this comment to our survey: “Now- what happened is that I feel sucked due to tossing all my great ideas in to the discussions and hoping to becoming chosen as the 8th QH- but no- it was not enough that I posted so many great ideas whilst this project- Finnair and Helsinki Airport announced another competition after the selection of the 8th QH- Now I was supposed to go through all the blogs and re-post my ideas- that someone already now added them as their own ideas in to the final 'idea-contest'. That is one-big-cheating-project now. Thank you. I had enough of this kind of marketing sucking project. No more free ideas for this.”

Figure 4. The Idea Meter widget

Despite the deficiencies in the campaign process transparency and the technical implementation of the website, it became evident from the respondent opinions that the initiative as a whole was extremely appreciated by a great majority of them, with comments such as brilliant idea, extremely useful, fantastic concept, almost excellent, engaging, fun, direct, personal, innovative, looking forward to reading new stories, very interesting and informative, love it!. Also the answers to our quantitative survey questions related to the motivation to participate confirm this (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question (scale 1 = Strongly disagree – 7 = Strongly agree)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>STD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy following the QH2 forums</td>
<td>6.22</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following the QH2 forums is interesting</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following the QH2 forums is fun</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The QH2 forums contain useful information</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to participate by commenting in the QH2 forums for fun</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of survey items related to motivation to participate.

Based on the respondents’ answers, it was also evident that they understood fairly well how the ideas and comments were to be used in service innovation by Finnair and Helsinki Airport (see Table 2). This is naturally an important factor for any crowdsourcing initiative to be able to convey the purpose
of it clearly to the participants. An equally important factor is to keep the participants informed about how the service ideas are implemented in practice. This has been very well taken care of in QH2 after the campaign officially ended, by frequently posting progress updates to the website and twitter and even additional ideation challenges to fine-tune the selected new service ideas to be implemented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question (scale 1 = Strongly disagree – 7 = Strongly agree)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>STD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand how my comments on the QH2 forums will be considered or utilized by Finnair and Helsinki Airport.</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand what aspects of air travel and airport experience Finnair and Helsinki Airport are seeking new ideas for.</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that the QHs will generate new and useful ideas for Finnair and Helsinki Airport that will be also beneficial to me.</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
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Table 2. Means and standard deviations of survey items related to understanding of the service innovation initiative and how it will benefit also the participants.

4 Discussion and conclusions

Many service businesses nowadays strive to offer services tailored to fit people’s individual needs. This cannot be achieved without offering existing and potential customers a chance to have their say and engage in dialogue: customer integration is practically a must now. Recently, the development of ICT and especially the participatory social media platforms have created unprecedented potential for enriched customer integration. Online crowdsourcing, for example, has been found to be a good method for reaching a large, international group of users (Chang and Kaasinen, 2011). However, the correspondent mode, where the informants report live from the service situation, has seldom been used in innovation processes (Ainasoja et al., 2010, Edvardsson et al., 2012). This study investigated whether the typical crowdsourcing process can be improved with a community-augmented correspondent approach in service innovation. Our results were based on observations, interviews and a web survey directed at the Qualityhunters2 community participants.

As a key takeaway to the scholarly community, the present study shows that the in situ—in context method of crowdsourcing is a viable approach to user innovation, as it is capable of capturing the micro-level processes of a service through the users’ real-life participation. This correspondent mode appears superior to the other customer integration modes (the reflective practitioner, the tester and the dreamer of Edvardsson et al., 2012), which are partially based on superficial conditions and on participants’ imagination. However, the correspondent mode is often also the most expensive and time-consuming, and perhaps less employed for that reason. In this particular case, the correspondent’s task (flying around the world for seven weeks with Finnair flights) was so desired that it formed the basis for the magnitude and international visibility of the whole initiative. The campaign also utilized cleverly this desire (to be selected yet another correspondent as the 8th QH) to incentivize the community participation around the initiative.

At the outset the QH2 initiative had elements of both a one-time contest and an ongoing community. Based on our findings, it can be said that it is demanding to get newly-hired temporary employees (the QH’s) to perform optimally in the CS process as online community managers nurturing the conversations and chats. The QH’s were hired based on their knowledge and experience for the theme they applied for, although their social media skills were also emphasized. However, without a previous job history in the service company in question, it is self-evident that many tasks required from a professional community manager pose challenges in the CS process. What turned out to be one of the success factors of the QH2 initiative was that the QH’s were backed up with an active hub twitter account handled by a team of permanent employees. Community management is a full-time work, and requires attention for establishing the community, dealing with newcomers, regulating behaviour, and encouraging contributions and commitment (Kraut and Resnick, 2012).
The QH2 crowdsourcing process did not go exactly as planned beforehand, especially regarding the intermediate crowd wisdom phase, so this case study can’t give an exact answer whether the typical CS process can be streamlined with hiring theme-based community managers. However, Finnair and Helsinki Airport have declared that the initiative was a success and they received an ample amount of service ideas to be implemented – and they got a vibrant and ongoing online community as an unplanned side effect. The companies actually launched in March 26, 2013 a third season of the QH initiative building on this active community. Also an airline consultancy firm has listed QH2 as first in the top-10 crowdsourcing initiatives by airlines and airports in 2011 (SimplyFlying, 2011). A year after the initiative the financial figures of Finnair went markedly up – even in these tough economic times when close competitors have either declared or been on the verge of bankruptcy. This implicates that smart customer integration in service integration can be a winning strategy for commoditized industries. Obviously, more research evidence is needed on similar crowdsourcing cases.

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