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How the Crowd's Creativity Differs and Transitions Across the Individual, Collective, and Platform Levels: A Theoretical Perspective to Explain Crowd Creativity

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How the Crowd's Creativity Differs and Transitions Across the Individual, Collective, and Platform Levels: A Theoretical Perspective to Explain Crowd Creativity

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The nature of tasks assigned to online crowds has rapidly evolved, shifting from low-cognitive tasks demanding objective feedback to those requiring creative thinking (Kittur, 2010). Although there is evidence demonstrating that online crowds are creative (Poetz and Schreier, 2012), more recent studies have begun to dispute the creativity of such crowds, especially when compared to that of corporate professionals. Consequently, it is imperative to derive a theoretical framework that elucidates the capacity of online crowds in engendering creativity.

Past studies accounting for the power of the crowd are situated in the context of crowd funding and crowd voting; insights from these studies may not necessarily apply to the domain of creativity because they tend to assume 'the more the merrier' mentality, what Surowiecki (2005) touted as the "wisdom of the crowd". Since online crowds comprise members who are decentralized, diverse, and independent, it is generally presumed that the collation of knowledge among members will allow online crowds, as a collective, to be superior to individuals in problem solving and that errors in individual judgement can be canceled out at an aggregate level. Having said that, overemphasizing the wisdom of the crowd could culminate in circumstances where novel or radical ideas may be treated as outliers. In this sense, engendering creativity in online crowds necessitates a rethink of how individuals, collective, and platforms collaborate to bring about co-innovation.

To this end, this study aims to contribute to extant literature on crowd ideation by coming up with theoretical explanation for how creativity can be engendered, especially with regards to how creativity transitions across the individual, collective, and platform level. Extending a classical creativity theory—Amabile's (2011) componential theory of creativity as the foundation—we describe how the organization of online crowds, can shape their creativity across individual, collective, and platform levels. Particularly, we articulate how creativity transitions across these three levels. In so doing, we prescribe guidelines for bolstering the creativity of online crowds across the three levels.

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