The 30-60-90 Routine: Structuring Community Feedback for Value Co-creation

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

In the current competitive landscape, the paradigm of value creation has shifted significantly. The traditional view of the firm as the sole innovator has given way to a more permeable approach where customers are active participants (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Ciasullo et al., 2018). Digitalization has accelerated this trend, providing consumers with the technological capabilities to share feedback, modify products, and interact directly with R&D departments (Gupta, 2023). However, this accessibility creates a double-edged sword for organizations. On one hand, it offers a "sea of information" rich in potential (Chan et al., 2021). On the other, it generates a massive volume of unstructured data that can paralyze decision-making processes. The core problem addressed in this study is how Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), which often lack the resources of multinational corporations (Spithoven et al., 2013), can structure this chaotic flow of community insights to fuel continuous innovation without being overwhelmed (Yang, 2012; Lin et al., 2021).

Theoretical background

To interpret these dynamics, this study moves beyond the traditional Open Innovation framework to adopt the Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) lens (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; 2016). While Open Innovation explains that ideas flow across boundaries (west & Bogers, 2013), SDL explains why these ideas are valuable. According to SDL, a physical product (like in our case study a bicycle trainer) is merely a distribution mechanism for service provision (the training experience). Consequently, innovation is not just about improving technical specifications but about enhancing the value-in-use. This perspective redefines the customer from a passive recipient to an active co-creator of value (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). In this context, the most critical knowledge does not reside solely within the firm’s engineering department but emerges from the users' daily interactions with the product in real-world scenarios. Understanding why customers will to contribute is crucial for sustaining this co-creation. Recent literature challenges the assumption that users are motivated primarily by financial rewards. Chan et al. (2021) highlight that in digital crowdsourcing and community environments, intrinsic motivations often prevail. Users are driven by the quality of their experience, a sense of belonging to a community, and the desire to see their specific needs reflected in the product. This creates a specific type of feedback: unlike generic market research, community-driven insights are highly contextualized and technically detailed. However, leveraging this "experiential" knowledge requires specific technological and organizational capabilities. While Customer Feedback Acquisition Technologies (Gupta, 2023) provide the necessary channels to capture data (such as social media, support platforms, IoT data), technology alone is insufficient. The bottleneck is often organizational. Integrating external knowledge requires firms to develop absorptive capacity, that is the ability to recognize, assimilate, and apply new information (Zahra & George, 2002). Here, a theoretical

tension emerges. As noted by Lin et al. (2021), organizational routines can paradoxically affect innovation. Typically, routines are seen as sources of inertia and rigidity that stifle creativity. But in the context of high-volume feedback, the absence of routines leads to chaos and information overload. Lin et al. (2021) suggest that to operationalize external creativity, firms need flexible routines that structure the intake of information without constraining the novelty of the output. The present study builds on this premise, examining empirically how a specific organizational mechanism, that has been called the 30-60-90 Routine, allows an SME to resolve this paradox, transforming the noise of community feedback into a structured engine for continuous product evolution.

Methodology

The empirical investigation focuses on a longitudinal case study, as a prominent Italian firm highly specialized in cycling training equipment and accessories. Elite S.r.l. Società Benefit has been founded in 1979 and headquartered in Fontaniva (Padua), the company represents an ideal case study for several reasons. First, it operates in a highly competitive global market, exporting 90% of its production to over 70 countries. Second, despite being an SME (approx. 63 employees), it possesses a strong orientation to innovation, with a dedicated R&D team of 25 collaborators, and a history of technological milestones, such as the introduction of the first wireless trainers in 2004 and the Optical Torque Sensor (OTS) in 2016. Crucially, the firm has recently experienced a shift in its customer base. Following the post-pandemic boom in indoor cycling, the user profile expanded from professional athletes to a broader community of "prosumers" (active users willing to contribute to innovation). This transition challenged the firm's traditional feedback mechanisms, necessitating a more structured approach to listen to its digital ecosystem, which includes over 137,000 Instagram followers, a dedicated Facebook support group (11,000+ members), and a Strava club (6,000+ active cyclists).

To capture the complexity of this ecosystem, the study adopts a mixed-method approach. This design is particularly effective in innovation management research as it allows for triangulating quantitative patterns of user behavior with the qualitative nuances of experiential knowledge (Bracio & Szarucki 2020). By combining survey data with unstructured digital feedback, we aimed to overcome the limitations of single-method studies, providing both the magnitude of user interest (quantitative) and the meaning behind their suggestions (qualitative). Data collection was conducted through a multi-channel strategy involving both structured instruments and unstructured data harvesting. The primary sampling frame consisted of the firm's newsletter subscribers (approximately 269,000 contacts, segmented into active user groups) and customers interacting via the Zendesk support platform (customer care software). To structure data collection and avoid systematic bias, the target mailing list was split randomly into two distinct clusters:

- *Cluster A* (Quantitative Focus) - This group received a closed-ended questionnaire designed to measure interest in co-creation, preferred touchpoints, and usage habits. The survey generated 41,349 opens and 1,652 clicks, resulting in 1,037 valid responses. This instrument utilized Likert scales (1-5) to quantify the users' propensity to collaborate and their satisfaction with current touchpoints.

- *Cluster B* (Qualitative Focus) - The second group received an open-ended instrument aimed at eliciting rich narratives. Users were asked to describe specific friction points, desired features, and the reasons

behind their feedback. This instrument generated 34,341 opens, 901 clicks, and 392 full narrative responses.

To incentivize participation without compromising the intrinsic motivation discussed in the theoretical background, a gamification element was introduced: respondents were offered a one-month free trial of the "My E-Training" software. This ensured that the sample was composed of active users interested in the product experience. Additionally, unstructured feedback was harvested from post-use touchpoints.

We analyzed interactions on the Zendesk platform (which boasted a 97.4% satisfaction rate) and discussions within the Strava community. These channels were selected because they represent what we called ‘moment of truth’ where value-in-use is experienced and reported. Following the core quality criteria for mixed methods research (O’Cathain et al., 2008), data analysis proceeded through a convergent design where quantitative and qualitative data were integrated during the interpretation phase. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends in channel preference and co-creation willingness. Qualitative data (open-ended responses and social media comments) underwent a thematic analysis. Responses were manually coded into three categories derived from the literature: (i) Functional Feedback: reports, hardware issues, and feature requests (such as calibration drifts); (ii) Relational Feedback: comments on customer support speed, brand trust, and community belonging; (iii) Symbolic Feedback: Narratives related to identity, achievement, and the pains & gains of training. To ensure interpretative reliability, the quality of the feedback was assessed using a standardized five-point scale (1=low, 5=high) evaluating three dimensions: richness, diagnostic value, and implementability. This evaluation was triangulated across two researchers and the firm’s product managers to mitigate subjective bias and ensure that the insights were actionable for the R&D department. Throughout the study, top managers were continuously involved, actively ideating and implementing organizational changes in pursuit of a new Open Innovation model. To validate the findings, a qualitative check was performed: product managers evaluated the relevance of the collected insights through a specific 1-5 Likert scale questionnaire and subsequent in-depth dialogue with the researchers.

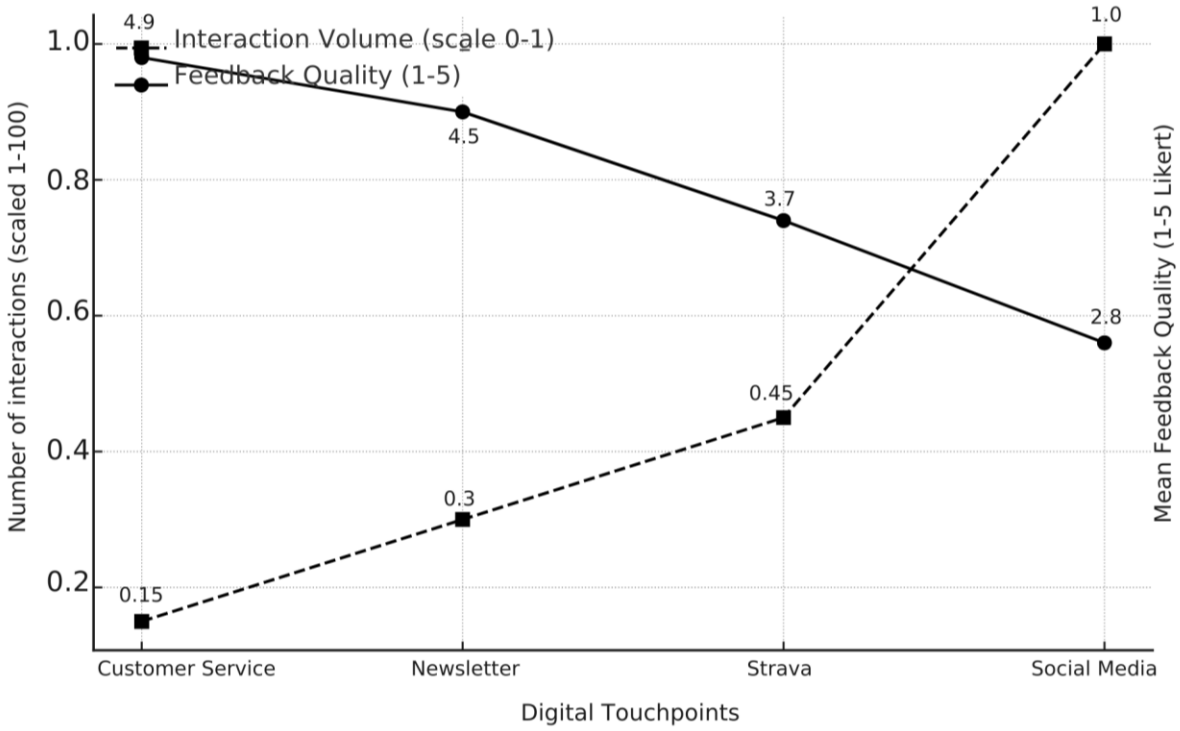
Findings

The quantitative analysis reveals a pronounced willingness among customers to contribute to innovation processes. Data from the closed-ended survey indicate that approximately 75% of respondents expressed a high or very high interest in taking part in co-creation activities. Specifically, when asked: *How motivated are you to contribute to product development?*, 552 respondents (53%) selected the highest rating on the Likert scale (5), while another 41% expressed moderate to high interest.

The qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses clarifies the nature of this motivation. Consistent with Chan et al. (2021), participation was largely driven by intrinsic factors rather than financial incentives. Although a symbolic reward (a one-month free software trial) was offered, the narrative responses highlighted a ‘sense of belonging’ to the cycling community and a desire to improve the tools they use daily. Users did not act as paid consultants but as passionate “prosumers” seeking to enhance their own value-in-use. This confirms that the firm’s community represents a latent repository of competence that goes beyond mere brand loyalty. While the willingness to participate was widespread, the study reveals that the diagnostic value of the insights was unevenly distributed across digital channels (see Figure 1). The analysis of social media channels (Instagram and Facebook) showed high interaction

volumes (the Instagram profile alone generated over 19,000 interactions in the observation period) but low diagnostic quality (rated 2.8/5). Comments here were often brief, emotional, or related to brand image (symbolic feedback), useful for engagement but less actionable for R&D. Conversely, post-use touchpoints such as the Zendesk support platform and the Strava community produced the most substantive feedback (rated 4.9/5 for quality). These channels provided what we define as 'contextualized knowledge': detailed reports on calibration drifts, noise levels at specific wattages, and firmware inconsistencies. This feedback emerged from actual usage experiences (value-in-use) rather than pre-purchase expectations. For instance, the Strava group discussions often contained technical telemetry data that internal R&D could not replicate in laboratory settings, validating the SDL premise that value is determined by the beneficiary during usage.

Figure 1 - Interaction Volume vs Feedback Quality across Digital Touchpoints.



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

A concrete example of how this feedback loop materializes is the development of the so-called 'Zwift Cog & Click' compatibility update. Through the analysis of support tickets and community discussions, the firm identified a recurring friction point: users with older trainer models felt excluded from the new virtual shifting features introduced by the virtual cycling platform Zwift. This was not a hardware failure, but a gap in the service experience. Initially, this dispersed feedback was treated as noise or simple complaints. However, by applying the structured listening routine, the firm re-categorized these inputs as a prioritized innovation opportunity. This led to the development of a specific firmware update released which enabled older direct-drive trainers to support the new virtual shifting protocols. The impact of this user-driven innovation was immediate. In the weeks following the update, the company registered a

15.3% increase in website traffic, with the specific news page generating over 1,600 unique views in the first few days. More importantly, the sentiment analysis on social channels shifted from frustration to gratitude, reinforcing the trust bond between the firm and its user base.

At this stage, the mixed team of researchers and product managers analyzed the results to assess the efficacy of each touchpoint in generating actionable ideas (see Table 1). This joint evaluation revealed a clear distinction in the efficacy of different channels, validating the Open Innovation model the firm intended to experiment with.

Table 1 – Perceived effectiveness of touchpoints in generating customer ideas.

Touchpoint	Customer journey phase	Type of interaction	Efficacy in generating ideas
Instagram Stories	Engagement / Post-use	Survey answers (closed and open-ended)	Medium
Facebook	Engagement	Comments and link to survey	Medium
Strava	Engagement / Use	Participation in events and groups	Medium
Reddit	Consideration	Free discussion (no direct link)	Low
Newsletter	Post-use	Direct link to the survey	High
Website	Consideration / Use	Informative visits (no interactions)	Low
Reviews	Post-use	Product feedback	Medium
Shop visits	Use	QR code	Medium
Events	Awareness / Engagement	Tablet or QR on-site	Medium
Zendesk	Post-use	Tickets (email)	High
Chat bot	Use / Post-use	Chats (like/dislike)	Low
Knowledge base	Use	Article reads	Medium
Phone calls	Use	Spontaneous conversations	Medium
Focus group	Post-use	Interviews	High
Ambassador	Awareness / Engagement	Distribution through personal communities	High

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

From an organizational perspective, the transition to this open innovation model was not painless. The sheer volume of feedback initially triggered the organizational paradox, described by Lin et al. (2021): the R&D team, accustomed to internal roadmaps, faced cognitive overload and potential inertia (the so-called Not-Invented-Here syndrome). The turning point was the formalization of a new organizational six-months routine, called "the *30-60-90 Routine"*. This simple yet rigid temporal framework provided the necessary structure to channel external creativity without disrupting internal efficiency:

- 30: day 0-30 (one month of Listening & Filtering) - Dedicated to the aggregation of unstructured data from Zendesk and Community Managers. Feedback is coded and prioritized based on frequency and feasibility;
- 60: day 31-90 (two months of Testing & Feasibility) - The selected insights (like the Zwift compatibility issue) enter a rapid prototyping phase. Here, the firm verifies technical constraints and runs micro-tests, often involving the "Focus Group" of 33 elite cyclists identified in the research context;
- 90: day 91+ (three months of Implementation & Communication) - The innovation is released (for instance, the firmware update) and the outcome is communicated back to the community, closing the loop.

This routine acted as a selective valve allowing the firm to harness the ‘sea of information’ without drowning in it. It transformed the abstract concept of Open Innovation into a manageable operational process. Top management said that this protocol allowed the company to transform “Feedback Data into Good Data”.

Conclusion

The findings of this research offer significant empirical contribution to Open Innovation and Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) studies, particularly within the context of manufacturing SMEs. By analyzing the transition of Elite S.r.l. Società Benefit from a product-centric model to a community-driven innovation ecosystem, three major theoretical implications emerge.

First, this study addresses the organizational paradox highlighted by Lin et al. (2021). The literature often presents a dichotomy: rigid routines stifle innovation, while openness fosters it. However, our results demonstrate that in the digital age, openness without structure leads to cognitive overload and inertia. The ‘sea of information’ generated by 137,000 followers and thousands of support tickets creates a noise that can paralyze an SME's absorptive capacity. The 30-60-90 Routine identified in this case study functions as a dynamic capability that resolves this paradox. It provides the necessary rigidity (fixed timeframes) to manage the unstructured waves of external inputs. This challenges the assumption that Open Innovation requires loose organizational structures. But it also suggests that structured routines are the necessary antecedent to effectively operationalize co-creation. The routine transforms the Not-Invented-Here syndrome from a defensive psychological barrier into a manageable filtering process.

Second, the study deepens the application of Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; 2016) to physical product development. The discrepancy in feedback quality between social media (high volume, low diagnostic value) and post-use channels like Zendesk and Strava (lower volume, high diagnostic value) confirms that innovation is increasingly driven by value-in-use. While Open Innovation frameworks often emphasize the quantity of ideas (Big Data), an SDL perspective emphasizes the context of usage (Good Data). The Zwift Cog example illustrates this perfectly: the innovation did not come from a *blue sky* idea on Instagram, but from users experiencing friction during the actual service provision (the training session). This suggests that for manufacturing firms, the most valuable external knowledge is not creative in the artistic sense, but in the experiential sense, derived from the interaction between the user and the product.

Third, responding to the call for a broader understanding of innovation's social dimension, this study highlights how co-creation fosters social capital. As noted by Chan et al. (2021), intrinsic motivation is key. When Elite S.r.l. Società Benefit implemented the firmware update requested by the community, it did not merely fix a technical issue; it validated the users' expertise. This act of "listening and doing" legitimizes the community, transforming customers from passive buyers into active stakeholders. This reciprocal value creation strengthens brand trust and resilience, creating a social buffer that protects the firm even during market disruptions. From a practitioner’s standpoint, this study offers a replicable blueprint for SMEs navigating the complexities of digital feedback in three ways: (i) reimagining Post-Sales as Innovation Hubs: managers should stop viewing Customer Support solely as a cost center dedicated to troubleshooting. Our data shows that platforms like Zendesk and Strava are the richest sources of actionable innovation. Firms should integrate R&D personnel into support loops or create

structured reporting channels (like the "Day 0-30" phase) to capture these insights; (ii) implementing lightweight routines: SMEs often fear that Open Innovation requires expensive platforms or massive teams. The 30-60-90 routine demonstrates that a simple, time-based heuristic can be effective. It allows firms to "listen" without losing focus on execution; (iii) gamification and engagement: while this study utilized a simple incentive (free software trial), the high participation rate suggests that users are eager to engage. Managers should explore advanced gamification strategies such as badges for lead contributors or beta-testing leaderboards to sustain this engagement over the product lifecycle, turning sporadic feedback into a continuous dialogue.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without limitations. Being a single case study focused on the sports equipment industry, the generalizability of the findings to other industries (for example services or Fast-moving consumer goods) requires verification. The analysis focused primarily on digital touchpoints potentially overlooking insights from physical retail interactions. Future research should extend this work in two directions. First, by collecting data to evaluate the 30-60-90 Routine overall impact, as a value driver for different stakeholders. Then by investigating the long-term effects of willingness to contribute to co-creation.

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