

# **Crowdsourcing Participation for Firms with Poor Reputations: The Role of Competitive Intensity and Firm-Oriented Motivations**

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# **Crowdsourcing Participation for Firms with Poor Reputations: The Role of Competitive Intensity and Firm-Oriented Motivations**

## ***Abstract***

Although prior research suggests that firms with a poor reputation should improve it before embarking on crowdsourcing, some companies have succeeded without doing so. This research thus examines when and why companies with poor reputations can successfully implement crowdsourcing for marketing outputs (e.g. new product concepts, creative ideas). Through four online experiments (including two with consumers of real companies), we demonstrate that market competitive intensity serves as a key boundary condition: consumers are more likely to participate in crowdsourcing hosted by firms with poor reputations operating in markets with limited competition. We find that firm-oriented motivation is crucial in driving participation in low-competition markets, whereas self-oriented motivation dominates in highly competitive environments, with downstream effects on participation and brand attachment. Results further show that in low-competition markets, existing customers participate readily without financial incentives, while non-customers require rewards for participation. This research challenges conventional assumptions about prerequisites for crowdsourcing success and demonstrates that crowdsourcing can serve as an effective reputation repair mechanism, particularly when alternatives are limited. It also provides strategic guidance for firms on both implementing crowdsourcing and framing related messages, based on their market and reputation contexts.

*Keywords:* crowdsourcing, motivation, reputation, competitive intensity, user-generated innovation, idea generation

# **Crowdsourcing Participation for Firms with Poor Reputations: The Role of Competitive Intensity and Firm-Oriented Motivations**

## ***Introduction***

In recent times many companies have taken to crowdsourcing as a means of gathering external knowledge and ideas from their audiences (Morgan et al. 2021) through open calls. Frito-Lay's "Do Us a Flavor" campaign is a prime example of this. In such tournament-based crowdsourcing situations (Afuah and Tucci 2023, 2012), participants use their skills, experience, and creativity to produce marketing outputs like creative ideas, marketing campaigns, logos, and new product concepts within a social and interactive online environment (Chan, Li and Zhu 2015; Salgado et al. 2020; Steils and Hanine 2019). While previous research suggests that firms with a poor reputation, and thus a low supporting brand community should first enhance their reputation before successfully harnessing such outputs (Bal et al. 2017; Kull and Heath 2016; Pollok, Lüttgens and Piller 2019), we argue that the benefits of crowdsourcing might be markedly different for these companies. Hence, we primarily seek to understand the conditions under which consumers are willing to participate in crowdsourcing initiatives launched by firms with poor reputations.

Notably, we postulate that market competitive intensity - *the degree to which consumers have alternative providers* - serves as a critical boundary condition in determining how consumers respond to crowdsourcing initiatives for firms with poor reputations. When alternatives are limited, consumers may feel more dependent on the firm's offering, which could motivate them to participate in crowdsourcing initiatives with the goal of improving the firm's offerings. In contrast, in highly competitive markets, where consumers can easily switch to other providers, they might be less likely to invest effort in helping firms with poor reputations improve. As such, competitive intensity would not only moderate the relationship

between reputation and participation but would also fundamentally impact how firms with poor reputations can leverage crowdsourcing as a means of repair and innovation. We contend that examining this overlooked but pivotal factor helps explain when and why crowdsourcing may still work for poorly reputed forms.

Participation can, in turn, strengthen brand attachment - *the cognitive and emotional bond connecting the brand with the self* (Park et al. 2010) - which is particularly relevant for firms with poor reputations as it can serve as a reputation repair mechanism. Reputation – *the consumers' comprehensive assessment of a company, influenced by its products, services, communications, interactions, and known activities* (Walsh and Beatty 2007) – is an intangible asset and a valuable resource that not only facilitates market entry but also provides a competitive edge (Barney 2002; Roberts and Dowling 2002; Stravinskiene, Matuleviciene and Hopeniene 2021). However, a poor reputation presents substantial hurdles, often leading to less positive consumer attitudes and lower consumer engagement and behavioral intentions (Dowling 2004; Fombrun and van Riel 1997). This is evidenced by the fact that 90% of online shoppers avoid companies with poor reputations (Trustpilot 2020), and up to 69% of job seekers would decline a job offered by such companies, even when unemployed (CR Survey 2016).

These challenges are not limited to consumer purchasing decisions; they also extend to crowdsourcing participation, where participants need to feel assured that their intellectual and creative resources will be valued and treated fairly (Kull and Heath 2016). This sense of assurance is a critical driver of participation in crowdsourcing initiatives (Faullant et al. 2016; Walsh and Beatty 2007). Firms with poor reputations often struggle to provide this assurance, potentially discouraging skilled individuals from offering their ideas and resources (Chang and Taylor 2016; Kull and Heath 2016). This hesitation potentially contributes to the persistent issue of low participation levels in creative crowdsourcing (Dahlander and Piezunka 2014; Faullant et al. 2016; Frey, Lüthje, and Haag 2011; Steils and Hanine 2022). While some

research suggests that firms with poor reputations should avoid crowdsourcing (Kull and Health 2016) due to weak crowd support (Bal et al. 2017), some companies have successfully implemented such initiatives despite their poor corporate reputation. For example, SNCF, the French railway company, ranked last in terms of reputation among major French corporations (Posternak IFOP Barometer 2021), nonetheless operates a crowdsourcing platform with over 12,000 active members who contribute without any financial incentives. Similarly, despite its low Harris Poll Reputation Quotient ranking, in 2015, AIG, the American insurance corporation, conducted a successful crowdsourcing campaign, receiving over 200 submissions in two weeks, while operating in a market with low customer switching rates due to bundled contracts.

Our research examines why and when firms with poor reputations can benefit from utilizing crowdsourcing for marketing purposes. We suggest that the number of alternative providers available in the market (Lei et al. 2012) may shed light on this question. Through four experimental studies, we examine how reputation and market competitive intensity influence participation in crowdsourcing, with downstream impacts on brand attachment. These studies focus on (1) the role of reputation, (2) the influence of market competitive intensity, and (3) the underlying motivations that prompt consumers to participate under such conditions

The contributions of this research are threefold. First, it challenges assumptions about poorly reputed brands and crowdsourcing (e.g., Bal et al. 2017; Kull and Heath 2016; Pollok, Lüttgens and Piller 2019) by identifying competitive intensity as a critical boundary condition. Second, this study extends the existing literature on crowd motivation. It introduces firm-oriented motivation as an alternative driver for participation and shows how it is more attractive than a financial reward, for customers of the firm. Third, we show that a lack of alternatives may indirectly increase brand attachment through participation. This suggests that the competitive

environment can significantly impact the effectiveness of crowdsourcing as a reputation repair mechanism.

In a business environment where corporate reputation is increasingly viewed as a critical asset for long-term success (ICCO World PR Report 2023-2024), understanding when firms with poor reputations can benefit from creative crowdsourcing is crucial. Our findings offer managers clear guidance on when to benefit from crowdsourcing and how to frame participation appeals in the context of this interaction with the public.

### ***Theoretical Background***

#### *Crowdsourcing, corporate reputation and consumer participation*

Through online platforms and open calls (Howe 2008), firms engage with large groups of consumers and non-consumers via crowdsourcing (Chan, Li and Zhu 2015; Gruner, Homburg, and Lukas 2014; Terwiesch and Xu 2008). While organizations leverage crowdsourcing across multiple domains, from innovation to complex problem-solving (Hossain and Kauranen 2015), our research focuses specifically on tournament-based crowdsourcing for marketing purposes. This form of crowd creation, also known as creative crowdsourcing (Howe 2008; Steils and Hanine 2019; Afuah and Tucci 2023), specifically involves delegating creative tasks such as developing new product concepts, marketing campaigns, or logo designs (Gruner and Power 2017). This practice continues to expand as consumers' roles evolve (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004a, b). Contemporary consumers increasingly seek active engagement in their consumption experience and desire greater control over, and impact on, a firm's decisions, which were traditionally made internally (Labrecque et al. 2013). Whether managed through proprietary platforms or intermediaries such as Eyeka, crowdsourcing activities encompass both one-off and recurring contests (e.g., Doritos Superbowl Ad versus Frito Lay's Do us a Flavor), as well as ongoing projects (e.g., Dell IdeaStorm). This type of crowdsourcing distinctively harnesses the collective intelligence and creativity of a large, diverse talent pool in competitive and/or

collaborative settings (Riedl et al. 2024). However, in competitive settings, it often offers either no financial compensation (e.g., MyStarbucksIdea platform, Ogink and Dong 2019) or only rewards the winner(s) (e.g. Knorr for “a revolutionary hot savory snack, or Frito Lay for a new potato chip flavor contest, Acar 2018).

Consequently, crowdsourcing represents a powerful tool for firms as it enables direct engagement with crowds and provides access to their collective creativity. Nevertheless, building and motivating an active crowd of participants presents substantial challenges (Djelassi and Cambier 2023; Djelassi and Decoopman 2013), particularly for firms with a limited reputation (Bal et al. 2017). While the role of corporate reputation in crowdsourcing participation remains unclear in the literature, emerging evidence suggests its potential significance. Some studies indicate that firms with positive or neutral reputations may be better positioned to invite consumer participation, as a negative reputation can trigger backfire effects that ultimately impact brand attachment (Kull and Heath 2016). This aligns with broader findings that high-status firms tend to attract greater participation (Pollok, Lüttgens, and Piller 2019).

In the marketing literature, Walsh and Beatty (2007) define customer-based corporate reputation as the “*customer’s overall evaluation of a firm based on their reactions to the firm’s goods, services, communication activities, interactions with the firm and/or its representatives or constituencies (such as employees, management, or other customers), and/or known corporate activities*” (p. 129). Reputation as a concept is distinct from corporate identity (a collection of symbols), corporate image (impressions of the firm), or corporate capital (an economic asset), in that it emerges from collective judgment and assessment over time. Firms acquire good reputations through an accumulation of favorable events that shape brand-customer relationships (Barnett, Jermier, and Lafferty 2006). This accumulation creates a “love is blind” effect (Khamitov, Grégoire, and Suri 2020; Van Vaerenbergh et al. 2019), facilitating

the acceptance of future actions whether positive or negative. Corporate reputation can also serve as a pledge of quality, motivating firms to prioritize the delivery of high-quality products and services to their customers with honesty and integrity (Walsh and Beatty 2007). Conversely, poor corporate reputation constitutes a significant liability in accessing critical resources (Barney 1991).

Several factors support the potentially crucial role of corporate reputation in crowdsourcing processes. Strategy scholars assert that reputation serves as a valuable asset that differentiates firms in the marketplace, while its absence may lead to customer penalization (Fombrun and van Riel 1997). Seminal research on brand communities indicates that active brand communities typically emerge around brands with compelling narratives and established market positions. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) argue that strong brand communities predominantly associate with brands that have rich histories and face significant competitive threats. Moreover, people prefer to associate with entities that enhance their self-image (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003).

Conversely, negative brand associations can precipitate brand avoidance (Fournier and Alvarez 2013) and reduced participation in creative initiatives, particularly when significant effort is required (Djelassi and Cambier 2023). Fair treatment emerges as crucial for participation (Faullant et al. 2016), while consumers actively seek value alignment (Keiningham et al. 2020) and may hesitate to invest resources in less reputable firms (Djelassi and Cambier 2023). In a CSR context, Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, and Schwarz (2006) identify a “fundamental attribution error” phenomenon (Ross 1977), whereby consumers tend to negatively interpret any actions initiated by firms with a poor reputation, while viewing similar actions positively when undertaken by well-reputed firms. Poor reputation can trigger concerns about idea misuse, project mismanagement, and lack of transparency (Djelassi and Cambier 2023), potentially deterring participation in time-consuming creative activities. This raises

important questions regarding the capacity of firms with weaker reputations to effectively leverage crowdsourcing for innovation purposes, leading Bal et al. (2017) to advise firms against implementing crowdsourcing when the crowd exhibits weak support and brand love.

However, given the limited empirical support for the relationship between corporate reputation and participation in crowdsourcing, we seek to establish evidence regarding the difficulty firms with poor reputations face in attracting participants. We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

**H1:** Firms with a poor reputation generate lower crowdsourcing participation intention than firms with a good reputation.

*Crowdsourcing participation and the interplay of corporate reputation and market competitive intensity*

The relationship between corporate reputation and market competitive intensity has been extensively explored in the management literature. Research demonstrates that the strategic value of a reputation varies significantly with the competitive context (Barnett and Hoffman 2008; Deephouse 2000). The resource-based view suggests that in highly competitive markets, reputation is a resource that functions as a crucial differentiating factor, and a source of competitive advantage (Roberts and Dowling 2002), leading firms to invest more heavily in reputation-building activities (Walker 2010). Such a legitimacy signal (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) helps reduce consumer uncertainty when choosing among multiple alternatives (Walsh et al. 2009). Conversely, in contexts of lower competitive intensity, reputation may serve more as a mechanism for maintaining stakeholder relationships and social license to operate (Rindova et al. 2005; Boyd et al. 2010).

Market competitive intensity can be defined as *the degree of rivalry among firms within an industry, manifesting through the extent to which competitive entities offer product and service similarity (Eldor 2020), the number of alternative providers available in the market (Lei et al.*

2012), and market share distribution (Jaworski and Kohli 1993). Market competitive intensity exists along a spectrum. At one end lies monopoly, where a single firm dominates the industry, exerting significant control over pricing and supply. In a monopoly, there are no close substitutes for the goods or services offered by the firm, allowing it to operate with minimal competition. US utilities exemplify this, with electric companies and water providers serving as sole providers in specific geographic regions. At the opposite end of the spectrum, intense competition prevails, with multiple firms offering similar but differentiated products or services. Such a scenario grants firms some degree of market power, albeit limited, as customers can choose from among closely substitutable options. Examples of US firms thriving in intensely competitive markets include fast-food chains such as McDonald's, Burger King, and Wendy's. While they manage to differentiate themselves through branding and menu variation, the types of products they offer nonetheless remain very similar.

In crowdsourcing contexts, potential participants may apply stricter criteria – including reputational considerations – when evaluating participation opportunities in highly competitive markets. This aligns with findings that consumers are more selective in their brand relationships when market alternatives are abundant (Fournier 1998). Conversely, in markets with lower competitive intensity, fewer alternatives may lead stakeholders to place less emphasis on reputational signals (Weigelt and Camerer 1988) and be more motivated to engage when making participation decisions. Several factors could drive this counterintuitive effect. First, research has shown that monopolistic firms with a poor reputation can still perform well by mimicking well-reputed firms through regular marketing efforts (Hertzendorf 1993). Second, the lack of alternatives increases stakeholders' reliance on the firm, creating stronger incentives to improve its offerings through direct participation (Pfeffer and Salancik 2015). Third, participants might believe the potential impact of their contributions would be greater, given the difficulties a poorly reputed company usually faces in accessing critically valuable resources

(Barney 1991). Fourth, the absence of competitive alternatives might make stakeholders more willing to invest in improving the existing offer rather than seeking alternatives (Van Vaerenbergh et al. 2019).

This aligns with research showing that consumer participation can significantly improve perceptions of, and satisfaction with, firms with negative reputations, particularly when alternatives are limited (Dong et al. 2008; Michel and Meuter 2008). In short, in less competitive markets, potential participants might view crowdsourcing as an opportunity to influence and improve firms with poor reputations' practices. Therefore, we hypothesize that market competitive intensity moderates corporate reputation's effect on participation intention. Hence we posit that:

**H2:** When reputation is poor (versus good), low (versus high) competitive intensity will lead to greater intention to participate in creative crowdsourcing.

While the interaction between competitive intensity and corporate reputation influences participation intention, this relationship may ultimately affect consumers' emotional connection to the brand. Crowdsourcing fundamentally transforms the traditional consumer-brand relationship by enabling active participation in brand-related activities (Karpukhina et al. 2024; Ind et al. 2013). This transformation occurs as crowdsourcing reduces the psychological distance between consumers and brands through direct interaction and co-creation, positions consumers as active partners rather than passive recipients of brand offerings (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004) and provides a platform for meaningful engagement (Brodie et al. 2013).

Brand attachment and participation in crowdsourcing are intricately linked, with each potentially influencing the other. Brand attachment can act as a driver of participation when consumers with strong emotional bonds to a brand are motivated to engage in co-creation activities (Wang et al. 2024; Sarkar and Banerjee 2021). However, our research focuses on the reverse relationship: how participation can enhance brand attachment, particularly in the context of firms with poor reputations. This perspective is especially relevant because

consumers may not already have strong emotional bonds with poorly reputed brands, making participation a critical mechanism for building these connections.

Brand attachment, defined as *the strength of the cognitive and emotional bond connecting the brand with the self* (Park et al. 2010), develops through meaningful interactions that demonstrate brand responsiveness to consumer needs. Prior research demonstrates that participation in co-creation activities fosters intrinsic motivation, emotional engagement, and self-brand connections—all of which contribute to greater brand attachment (Brodie et al. 2011). Participation enhances the brand experience, strengthening emotional bonds with the brand, while also evoking emotional reactions such as pride or excitement that deepen the consumer's connection to the brand (Suo et al. 2024). Additionally, engaging in creative crowdsourcing initiatives fosters a sense of belonging and commitment, which enhances attachment (Zhang et al. 2013).

In the context of firms with poor reputations operating in low competitive intensity environments, crowdsourcing may serve as a particularly powerful mechanism for building brand attachment for several reasons. First, when competitive intensity is low, consumers have limited alternative channels for influencing firm behavior, making crowdsourcing a rare opportunity for direct impact on the firm's offerings and practices (Füller et al. 2011). Second, the significant cognitive and emotional investment required for participation (Nambisan and Baron 2009), combined with the firm's demonstrated willingness to incorporate consumer input, despite its dominant market position, can create a stronger bond with the brand (Pierce et al. 2001). Thus, crowdsourcing becomes not merely a tactical source of ideas but a strategic tool for rebuilding consumer-brand relationships and moving toward loyalty and advocacy (Ind, Iglesias and Markovic 2017) through participation.

This cognitive and emotional investment, even at the intention stage, can transform negative or neutral relationships into positive ones through increased perceived brand responsiveness,

and goals shared by consumers and brands (Harmeling et al. 2017; Park et al. 2010). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

**H3.** In low competitive intensity environments, creative crowdsourcing by firms with poor reputations positively influences brand attachment through the mediating effect of consumer intention to participate.

*Motivational triggers to participate in creative crowdsourcing and their relationship to market conditions*

In crowdsourcing, where participation is self-selective, companies face the challenge of persuading consumers to engage actively (Karachiwalla and Pinkow 2021) regardless of their corporate reputations, often resulting in a lack of participants (Dahlander and Piezunka 2014). Different motivational pathways may explain how the interaction of reputation and competitive intensity affects participation intention. This is consistent with the self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci 2000), which suggests that situational factors (like competitive intensity and corporate reputation) influence behavioral intentions through different types of motivations, ranging from purely intrinsic to purely extrinsic (Füller 2010). While intrinsic motivation stems from the human inclination “to seek novelty and challenges, expand one’s capacities, explore, and learn” (Ryan and Deci 2000, p. 70), extrinsic motivation focuses on “performing an activity to achieve a separable outcome” (Ryan and Deci 2000, p. 71). However, crowdsourcing research reveals the limitations of financial incentives (i.e. the most common form of extrinsic reward in creative crowdsourcing, Acar 2018). Such rewards may attract participants who are less persistent in challenging situations (Patel et al. 2023), they are often perceived as unfair (Djelassi and Cambier 2023; Schlagwein et al. 2019), and typically rank lower than other motivational factors (Zheng, Li, and Hou 2011).

Between purely intrinsic and purely extrinsic motivations lie internalized extrinsic motivations, where behavior, initially driven by extrinsic factors, becomes integrated into an individual's value system and sense of self (Ryan and Deci 2000; Füller 2010). Drawing from

co-creation and volunteering research (Leclercq, Hammedi and Poncin 2016; Fisher and Ackerman 1998), these motivations can be categorized as altruistic (i.e. seeking to help others) or non-altruistic, with altruistic motivations further divided into personal (i.e. self-oriented) and social (i.e. other-oriented) dimensions.

In the crowdsourcing context, self-oriented motivation is evidently directly linked to the participants themselves. We propose that other-oriented motivation can be further subdivided into firm-oriented and peer-oriented, reflecting the other primary actors involved (Fuchs and Schreier 2011): (1) the non-participants who eventually benefit from crowdsourcing outputs, namely other customers (e.g., peer-oriented ), (2) the crowdsourcing firm (i.e., firm-oriented). First, the self-oriented motivational pathway primarily encompasses personal benefits such as personal need, competence and information seeking (Füller 2010). Second, peer-oriented motives represent the participants' desire to benefit other consumers (Fisher and Ackerman 1998). Third, firm-oriented motives reflect the participants' desire to help improve the firm's offerings (Füller 2010). Research showing that individuals often have multiple, simultaneous motivations for participation (Von Krogh et al. 2012; Zheng, Li, and Hou 2011) supports the parallel nature of these proposed mediating paths.

However, we may expect that different pathways operate depending on competitive intensity and corporate reputation. In highly competitive markets with reputable firms, self-oriented motives dominate through potential prestigious brand association and learning opportunities (Garcia Martinez 2017), while firm-oriented motives may stem from a desire to maintain or strengthen brand relationship quality (Kull and Heath 2016). However, when reputation is poor in highly competitive markets, both self-oriented and firm-oriented motives weaken due to limited potential for recognition (Füller 2010), the participants' reluctance to associate their personal values with firms with poor reputations (Keiningham et al. 2020), and skepticism about improvement implementation (Zheng, Li, and Hou 2011). In low-competition

environments we expect to see a notable shift in the dynamics. With reputable firms, motivation remains moderate as consumers already receive satisfactory service (Salgado et al. 2020). However, in the case of firms with poor reputations in low-competition markets, each pathway should intensify for distinct reasons: self-oriented motives are reinforced due to direct self-condition improvement opportunities, supported by the self-transcendence theory (Kitson et al. 2020) suggesting that consumers aspire to contribute to larger purposes while serving their own interests. Peer-oriented motives increase through the desire to help fellow consumers with limited alternatives (Dahl, Fuchs and Schreier 2015). The scarcity of competitive options creates a sense of shared experience among customers. Firm-oriented motives might also become particularly important as improvements directly contribute to the firm's success and ethical conduct. This aligns with the social responsibility literature (Harrison and Freeman 1999), which suggests that customers feel compelled to assist firms vital to their community. As both customers and community members, they have a direct stake in the firm's success (Parmar et al. 2010). Eventually, as motivations act as mediators that ultimately affect brand attachment (Yang et al. 2022), we build on H3 and formulate the two following hypotheses:

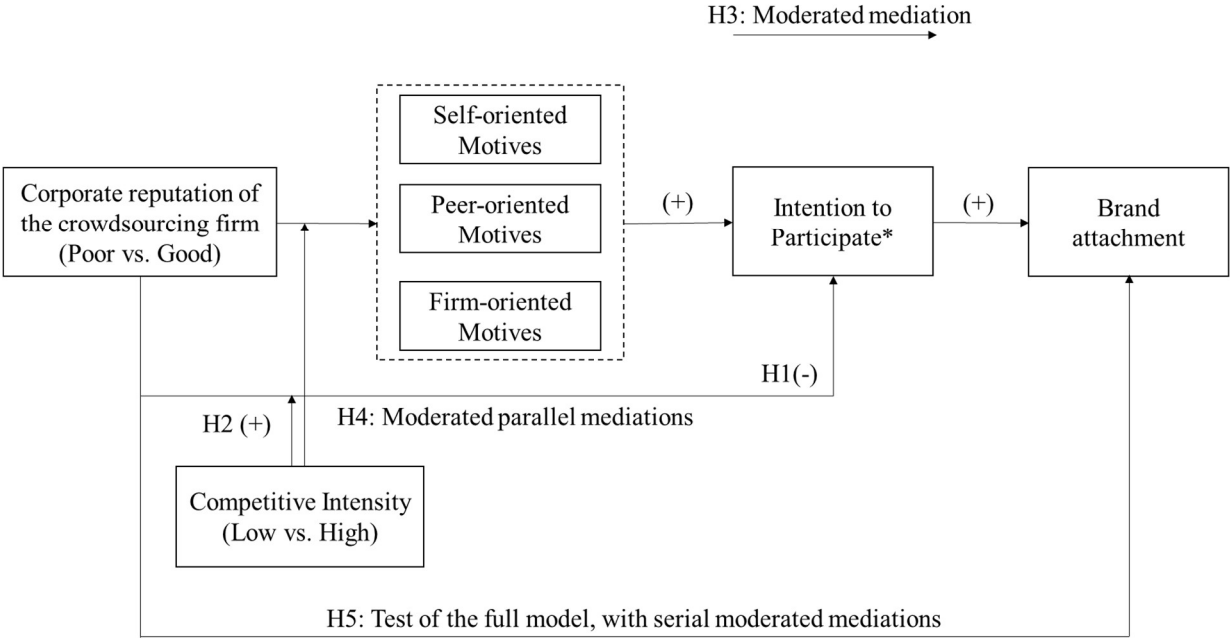
**H4:** The interaction between corporate reputation and competitive intensity influences participation intention through three parallel mediators: (a) firm-oriented motives, (b) peer-oriented motives, and (c) self-oriented motives.

**H5:** Motivation types (firm-oriented, peer-oriented, and self-oriented) first influence participation intention, which subsequently leads to brand attachment, forming a serial mediation chain.

The empirical package investigates the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1 through four studies. These studies, conducted in diverse settings, aim to enhance external validity (Lynch 1982) and replicate the core findings to bolster internal validity. Study 1 serves as a pilot study, probing the relationship between reputation and participation in crowdsourcing, with a focus on competitive intensity (H1-H2). To assess our findings based on actual reputations, we used real and existing companies. In Study 2, we replicated the findings from Study 1, but in a more controlled setting. We mitigated extraneous factors, such as category

involvement or prior usage experience, by using a fictive brand (H1-H3). Study 3a investigates the motivation-based mechanism to explain the interaction between corporate reputation and competitive intensity and how this influences the intention to participate, and indirectly, brand attachment (H4-H5). Finally, Study 3b offers a refined understanding of participation for firms with poor reputations in a monopolistic context. Using a real brand and asking participants to really submit ideas, we explore how financial rewards (vs. no rewards) may modify their actual participation and motivation.

Collectively, these four studies offer a comprehensive analysis of the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1.



\* Actual participation in Study 3b

**Figure 1 – Conceptual Framework**

## *Study 1*

Study 1 aims to approach real-world conditions by engaging with established firms whose reputations have been assessed using a recognized reputation barometer. The primary objective is to investigate whether competitive intensity influences the relationship between corporate reputation and the intention to participate in crowdsourcing. Notably, our study mostly involves respondents who are genuine users of the firms we selected, as described below. Such real data enhance the ecological validity of our research.

### *Method*

We conducted a between-subjects experiment using a 2 (competitive intensity: low versus high) x 2 (corporate reputation: good versus poor) design with well-known brands in France. To select the four firms to be manipulated (i.e., good reputation in a highly competitive market; good reputation in a market with low competitive intensity; poor reputation in a highly competitive market; poor reputation in a market with low competitive intensity), we first used the quarterly barometer that monitors the reputation of large French firms, published by POSTERNAK/IFOP. Our aim was to select established and renowned service firms. For companies with a strong reputation in low competition markets, we chose the national postal service operator. In high-competition markets, we selected the foremost food-focused retail chain. For firms with poor reputations in competitive markets, we opted for the second largest telecommunications company. Lastly, the national railway company, engaged primarily in passenger and freight transportation, represented poor reputation in low competition markets.

A total of 237 adult respondents (70% women,  $M_{AGE} = 35.0$  years, and 81.4% non-students) were recruited by business school students in exchange for course credits and randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. First, each respondent was shown a random firm logo and asked to rate the extent to which they had already heard of this brand (1 = Never, 7 = Very much), they use or have ever used the firm's services (1 = Never and 5 = Always).

Next, they rated two manipulation checks: their brand attitude, used as a proxy for measuring corporate reputation (4 items: bad/good, dislike it very much/like it very much, pleasant/unpleasant, poor quality/high quality; 5-point bipolar scale; Mitchell and Olson 1981;  $\alpha = .95$ ) and the number of alternatives they perceive they have in this category of services, to assess the competitive intensity (7-point bipolar scale: very few/a lot). All the respondents were then presented with a scenario in which a company asked the crowd to contribute various ideas to enhance service quality. Individuals were told that the call was published on the firm's website and that they might submit ideas, irrespective of their scale or novelty, with the aim of improving overall satisfaction and experience with the company's services (See material used in Web Appendix A). Participants were not informed of any reward for participating in the firm's initiative. After the scenario, we measured their intention to participate (3 items, Kull and Heath 2016,  $\alpha = .95$ ) on a 7-point Likert scale. No respondents were excluded from the study.

### *Results*

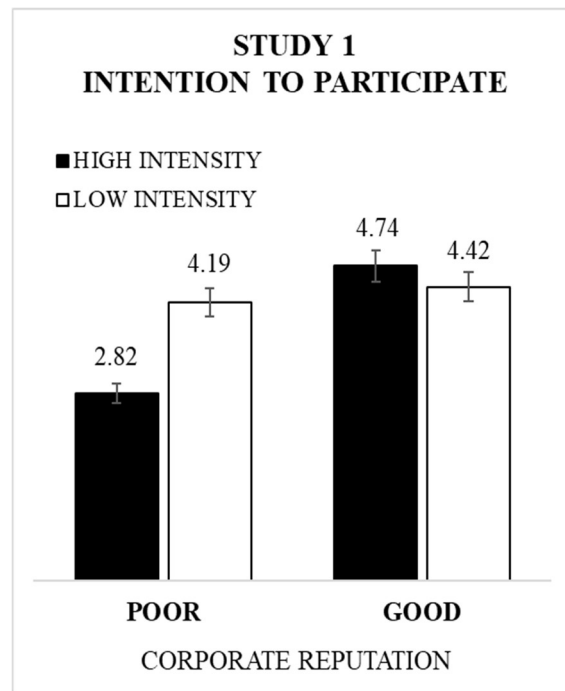
Preliminary analyses indicate that 97% of participants are either very or very much aware of the brands selected for this study. A significant portion of the sample consisted of brand users, with 85.4% of participants assigned to low competitive intensity scenarios reporting regular or very regular use of the brand services, and 61.7% of participants exposed to treatments with high competitive intensity also reporting regular or very regular use. The inclusion of these brand awareness and patronage variables as covariates did not yield a significant impact on the pattern of the results. Consequently, we do not include these covariates with our results.

Using one-way ANOVAs, the manipulation checks showed that participants perceived they had more alternative firms in the treatments with high (versus low) competitive intensity, as expected ( $M_{\text{HIGH\_INTENSITY}} = 6.16, SD = 1.24 > M_{\text{LOW\_INTENSITY}} = 1.59, SD = .75, F(1, 235) = 1179.74, p < .001; \eta^2 = .83$ ). Further, they reported that the firms with a poor corporate

reputation we selected scored lower on brand attitude than the firms with a good corporate reputation ( $M_{\text{POOR}} = 2.63$ ,  $SD = 1.16 < M_{\text{GOOD}} = 3.89$ ,  $SD = .90$ ,  $F(1, 235) = 87.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .27$ ). These results proved our manipulations to be effective.

To test for H2 and H3, we used a two-way ANOVA on intention to participate, with competitive intensity and corporate reputation as independent factors. The results reported a significant interaction effect ( $F(1, 233) = 14.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ ) such that in the poor reputation conditions, intention to participate was significantly higher for a firm when competitive intensity was low as compared to high ( $M_{\text{LOW\_INTENSITY}} = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 1.54 > M_{\text{HIGH\_INTENSITY}} = 2.82$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ ;  $F(1, 233) = 19.56$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .08$ ); but this was not true in the good reputation conditions ( $M_{\text{LOW\_INTENSITY}} = 4.42$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ;  $M_{\text{HIGH\_INTENSITY}} = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ;  $F(1, 233) = 1.07$ ,  $p = .30$ ; H2 partially supported; see Figure 2). In addition, the analysis yielded significance for both main effects: (1) corporate reputation: ( $M_{\text{POOR}} = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.80 < M_{\text{GOOD}} = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ;  $F(1, 233) = 24.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .09$ , H1 supported) and (2) competitive intensity : ( $M_{\text{HIGH\_INTENSITY}} = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 2.02 < M_{\text{LOW\_INTENSITY}} = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ;  $F(1, 233) = 5.69$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ ).

These initial observations confirm previous research indicating that creative crowdsourcing elicits greater intention to participate for firms with a good corporate reputation (e.g., Kull and Heath 2016). Our results also demonstrate the usefulness of creative crowdsourcing for firms with a poor reputation and the conditions under which they attract intention to participate. In particular, our findings emphasize that the intention to participate in such initiatives depends not only on the firm's corporate reputation (H1 supported) but also on the competitive intensity of the market in which it operates. Thus, firms with a poor reputation benefit from greater intention to participate when they are the sole actor on the market, as compared to firms with a poor reputation in a highly competitive environment (consistent with H2).



**Figure 2** – Study 1: Impact of competitive intensity and corporate reputation on intention to participate

### *Study 2*

Study 2 was designed to confirm the initial findings (H1-H2) and test the downstream impact on brand attachment (H3). Furthermore, it can be argued that the results of Study 1 may be flawed as they are based on an experimental design with different firms. The relationship between the firms and the consumers could influence their judgment in various ways that are not necessarily measured. While that setting showed increased external validity (Lynch 1982), Study 2 aims to increase internal validity by using a fictitious firm in a controlled experimental setting.

### *Method*

We conducted a between-subjects experiment with a fictitious telecom firm, using a 2 (competitive intensity: low versus high) x 2 (corporate reputation: good versus poor) design. Telecoms are an ideal market for studying the impacts of competitive intensity, particularly in the USA, as the number of competitors can vary greatly from state to state, making the scenarios more realistic. Previous crowdsourcing research (e.g., Cambier and Poncin 2020), as well as

press articles and US brand reputation rankings published online, guided our selection. Additionally, the Harris Poll (2022) Reputation Quotient 100 confirmed the suitability of telecom/television service providers as they could score both highly and very poorly in the US rankings.

We recruited 301 US adults (49.3% females,  $M_{AGE} = 38.4$  years) from Prolific and randomly allocated them to one of four experimental treatments. To manipulate competitive intensity, participants read that the firm was either “*the only subscription TV provider in the city where you live*” (low) or “*one of the many TV providers in the city where you live*” (high). The good (versus poor) corporate reputation manipulation consisted of two different statements:

Good reputation description: “*Over its 35-year history, its customers have highly appreciated the company for its excellent customer service, advantageous bundle packages, and very attractive fees.*”

Poor reputation description: “*Over its 35-year history, its customers appreciated the company very little, owing to its poor customer service, unfavorable bundle packages, and universally high fees.*”

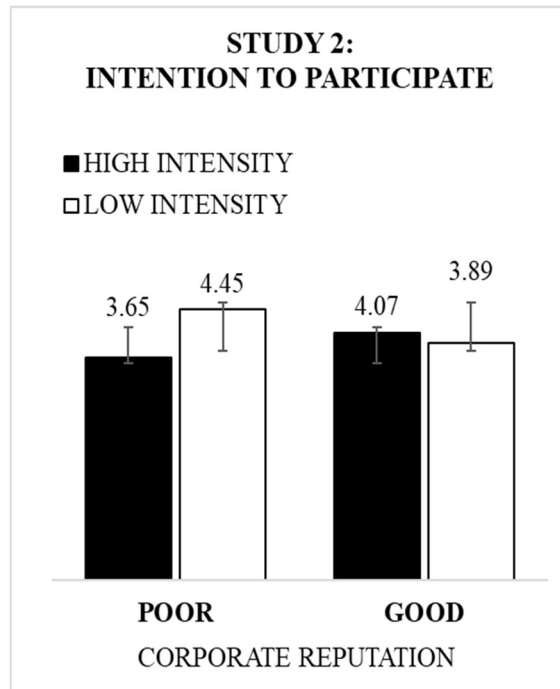
Like in Study 1, all participants read the scenario to imagine they were invited to submit innovative ideas to improve the quality of the firm’s services, hence answering the question “*What would make your experience perfect?*” (See material used in Web Appendix B). After receiving their treatment, the participants responded to an intention to participate measure (same as Study 1,  $\alpha = .94$ ) and a brand attachment measure (three items, Kull and Heath 2016;  $\alpha = .94$ ). We also measured participants’ expertise in the product category (3 items, Aurier and N’Gobo 1999,  $\alpha = .84$ ), category involvement (3 items, Strazzieri 1994,  $\alpha = .94$ ), and credibility of the scenario (3 items, Prendergast, Liu and Poon 2009;  $\alpha = .96$ ) as potential covariates. To assess the competitive intensity and corporate reputation after treatment, we asked participants how many other TV providers were available in their city (1 = none; 7 = a lot) and how much the company is appreciated by its customers (1 = very poorly; 7 = very highly) according to the scenario they read. All multi-item scales used are reported in Table 1.

We dropped one participant whose comment about the study in the optional suggestion box at the end of the survey was very negative, leaving us with 300 responses for analysis.

### *Results*

One-way ANOVAs reveal successful experimental manipulations for the number of providers available in the city ( $M_{\text{HIGH\_INTENSITY}} = 3.99$ ,  $SD = 1.86 > M_{\text{LOW\_INTENSITY}} = 1.76$ ,  $F(1, 298) = 149.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.33$ ) and the firms' reputations ( $M_{\text{GOOD\_REPUTATION}} = 5.71$ ,  $SD = 1.69 > M_{\text{POOR\_REPUTATION}} = 1.89$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ,  $F(1, 298) = 408.9$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.58$ ). Confound checks suggest no differences in category involvement, age, or expertise ( $ps > .05$ ) between the groups. An ANOVA on scenario credibility supported the realism of our scenario overall ( $M = 4.89$ ,  $t(299) = 10.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ) but also yielded a significant difference among the groups ( $F(3, 296) = 3.49$ ,  $p = .02$ ). Given the test significance, we covary scenario credibility in all our subsequent analyses.

To test our hypotheses, we first conducted a two-way ANCOVA on intention to participate, with competitive intensity and corporate reputation as independent factors. The results yielded the expected interaction effect ( $F(1, 295) = 6.98$ ,  $p = .009$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ ) such that in the poor reputation conditions, intention to participate was significantly higher when competitive intensity was low (versus high):  $M_{\text{LOW\_INTENSITY}} = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 1.75 > M_{\text{HIGH\_INTENSITY}} = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 1.72$  ( $F(1, 295) = 7.99$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ , H2 supported, see Figure 3). The results were insignificant in the good reputation conditions ( $M_{\text{LOW\_INTENSITY}} = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ;  $M_{\text{HIGH\_INTENSITY}} = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ;  $F(1, 295) = .57$ ,  $p = .45$ ). The analysis does not return significance either for the competitive intensity main effect ( $p = .10$ ) or for the main effect of corporate reputation ( $p = .71$ ).



**Figure 3** – Study 2: Impact of competitive intensity and corporate reputation on intention to participate.

Next, we computed a moderated mediation model using the Hayes process macro (2021, model 8, 5.000 bootstraps) to assess how intention to participate mediates the relationship between corporate reputation x competitive intensity and brand attachment. Our findings indicate that the indirect effect of poor corporate reputation on brand attachment through intention to participate is positive and significant in the case of low competitive intensity ( $a \times b = .2153$ ,  $CI_{90\%} [.0363; .4122]$ , H3 supported), but negative and significant in the case of high competitive intensity ( $a \times b = -.1620$ ,  $CI_{90\%} [-.3305; -.0078]$ , see all relevant paths in Table 2). In other words, a poor (versus good) reputation enhances brand attachment through an increased intention to participate in a low competitive setting. Conversely, it indirectly undermines brand attachment through intention to participate in a highly competitive setting.

In short, both Studies 1 and 2 demonstrate the crucial roles of competitive intensity and corporate reputation in the potential success (in terms of participation) of the creative crowdsourcing activity. Importantly, they have positive downstream effects on brand

attachment. Below, we present Studies 3a and 3b, which provide explanations of this phenomenon based on individuals' motivations to participate.

### ***Study 3a***

Study 3a aims to extend current knowledge on the motivations for participating in creative crowdsourcing, with a particular focus on the motivations underlying participation and the downstream impacts of intention to participate (H4) and serially on brand attachment (H5).

#### *Method*

We replicated the design and stimuli of Study 2 on Prolific, ensuring that any previous participants were excluded. The experiment followed a 2 (competitive intensity: low versus high) x 2 (corporate reputation: good versus poor) design with individuals randomly assigned to a treatment, in which participants read a scenario inviting them to participate by submitting innovative ideas to improve the service quality of one of the four crowdsourcing firms described. Participants completed the intention to participate measure (same as in previous studies,  $\alpha = .92$ ), the brand attachment measure (3 items, Kull and Heath 2016;  $\alpha = .93$ ) as well as measures of self-oriented motivation (3 items; Gerbasi and Prentice 2013;  $\alpha = .95$ ), peer-oriented motivation (3 items, Gerbasi and Prentice 2013,  $\alpha = .89$ ), and firm-oriented motivation (4 items; Alexandrov, Lilly, and Babakus 2013;  $\alpha = .90$ ). We also added the same three potential covariate measures, namely credibility of the scenario (3 items, Prendergast, Liu, and Poon 2009;  $\alpha = .94$ ) expertise ("I would feel competent to suggest ideas for a TV provider like firm x") and category involvement ("I give special importance to the services of subscription TV providers"). Finally, we used the same manipulation checks as in Study 2. The final sample included 301 US adults recruited on Prolific (49.5% females;  $M_{AGE} = 37.52$  years).

<b>Table 1 – Measures and Cronbach alphas across studies</b>				
	S1	S2	S3a	S3b
<b>Scales and items</b>	<i>Cronbach alpha's</i>			
<b>Intention to participate (Kull and Heath 2016)</b>	.95	.94	.92	
- I am motivated to participate in this call for consumers' ideas.	X	X	X	
- I feel encouraged to participate in this call for consumers' ideas.	X	X	X	
- There is a high probability that I will participate in this call for consumers' ideas.	X	X	X	
<b>Brand attachment (Kull and Heath 2016)</b>		.94	.93	
- I feel personally connected with [Firm X].		X	X	
- I feel emotionally bonded with [Firm X].		X	X	
- [Firm X] reflects who I am.		X	X	
<b>Self-oriented motivation (Gerbasi and Prentice 2013)</b>			.95	.91
- I am concerned about improving my own situation with [Firm X].			X	X
- I care about my own outcomes with [Firm X].			X	X
- I mainly care about my interests with [Firm X].			X	X
<b>Peer-oriented motivation (Gerbasi and Prentice 2013)</b>			.89	.90
- I am most concerned about the overall benefit that customers receive from this crowdsourcing.			X	X
- I am concerned with the best interests of all those who subscribed to [Firm X].			X	X
- I would be happy to give up some of what I have if my participation means that everyone who subscribes to [Firm X] is better off in the long run.			X	X
<b>Firm-oriented motivation (Alexandrov et al. 2013)</b>			.90	.96
- I would like to participate to help [Firm X] learn the standards acceptable to their customers.			X	X
- I would like to participate to help [Firm X] understand their customers' values.			X	X
- My participation would help [Firm X] understand how we, as its customers, tell right from wrong.			X	X
- By participating, I would help [Firm X] learn a moral story/lesson from our experiences as customers.			X	X
<b>Expertise in the product category (Aurier and N'Gobo 1999)</b>		.84	<i>n.a.</i>	
- I feel competent about suggesting ideas for a firm operating in this product category.		X		
- I know how to evaluate the quality of good ideas submitted for a firm of this product category for this type of contest.		X		
- People around me consider me an expert when it comes to suggesting ideas for a firm operating in this product category.		X		
<b>Product category involvement (Strazzieri 1994)</b>		.94	<i>n.a.</i>	.96
- I am interested in this product category.		X		X
- This product category is very important to me.		X		X
- I give special importance to products in this category.		X	X	X
<b>Scenario credibility (Prendergast, Liu, and Poon 2009)</b>		.96	.94	<i>n.a.</i>
- Credible		X	X	X
- Plausible		X	X	
- Realistic		X	X	

**Table 1 – Measures and Cronbach alphas across studies**

## Results

Confounding analyses reported equivalence among the four groups ( $p > .05$ ) in terms of scenario credibility, expertise, age and category involvement. One-way ANOVAs confirmed that the manipulations for perceived available alternatives ( $M_{\text{HIGH\_INTENSITY}} = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 1.90 > M_{\text{LOW\_INTENSITY}} = 1.63$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ;  $F(1, 298) = 170.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.36$ ) and corporate reputation ( $M_{\text{GOOD}} = 5.97$ ,  $SD = 1.12 > M_{\text{POOR}} = 1.90$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ;  $F(1, 298) = 653.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.69$ ) were successful.

Our analysis began with a 2-way ANOVA examining how competitive intensity and corporate reputation affect intention to participate. Again, the results highlighted a significant interaction effect ( $F(1, 296) = 7.19$ ,  $p = .008$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ ). In poor reputation conditions, intention to participate was significantly higher under low competition versus high competition situations ( $M_{\text{LOW\_INTENSITY}} = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 1.59 > M_{\text{HIGH\_INTENSITY}} = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ;  $F(1, 296) = 4.95$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.2$ , H2 supported again). This effect was not present in good reputation conditions ( $p = .13$ ). None of the main effects were significant ( $F_s < 1$ ).

A moderated mediation analysis (Hayes PROCESS macro, 2021, model 8, 5000 bootstraps) confirms that poor (versus good) reputation had an indirect positive effect on brand attachment through increased intention to participate ( $a \times b = .1762$ ,  $CI_{90\%} [.0224; .3409]$ ) in low competitive settings (H3 supported again) but a negative effect in high competitive environments ( $a \times b = -.1748$ ,  $CI_{90\%} [-.3350; -.0228]$ ). This relationship was further explored through a moderated serial mediation analysis examining different types of motivations and the serial downstream impacts on intention to participate (H4) and brand attachment (H5). Using the Hayes process macro (2021, customized model, 5.000 bootstraps), we included in the model three parallel paths through self-oriented, peer-oriented, and firm-oriented motivations (i.e., corporate reputation  $\times$  competitive intensity  $\rightarrow$  self-oriented motivations // peer-oriented motivations // firm-oriented motivations  $\rightarrow$  intention to participate  $\rightarrow$  brand attachment). Table

3 reports all the paths tested.

**Table 2 - Studies 2 and 3a - Mediation role of intention to participate in the relationship between corporate reputation x competitive intensity and brand attachment.**

		<b>Coeff.</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	
<b>S2</b>	X (Corporate reputation: poor versus good)	-.75	.22	-3.48	<.001	
	M (Intention to Participate)	.38	.05	8.33	<.001	
	W (Competitive Intensity: low versus high)	.19	.19	.99	.32	
	Covariate: credibility of the scenario	.10	.05	1.94	.05	
	Interaction effect (X × W)	-.78	.30	-2.63	.009	
	Constant	1.12	.29	3.83	<.001	
	<i>Model Summary: R<sup>2</sup> = .37, F (5, 294) = 34.55 p &lt; .001</i>					
Poor reputation: Indirect effect on brand attachment through intention to participate:						
- In the case of high competitive intensity: a × b = -.1620, CI <sub>90%</sub> : [-.3305;-.0078]						
- In the case of low competitive intensity: a × b = .2153, CI <sub>90%</sub> : [.0363;.4122]						
<b>S3a</b>	X (Corporate reputation: poor versus good)	-1.18	.20	-5.88	<.001	
	M (Intention to Participate)	.35	.04	7.95	<.001	
	W (Competitive Intensity: low versus high)	-.24	.20	-1.18	.24	
	Interaction effect (X × W)	-.50	.29	-1.74	.08	
	Constant	2.20	.23	9.37	<.001	
	<i>Model Summary: R<sup>2</sup> = .37, F (4, 295) = 44.07 p &lt; .001</i>					
	Poor reputation: Indirect effect on brand attachment through intention to participate:					
- In the case of high competitive intensity: a × b = -.1748, CI <sub>90%</sub> : [-.3350;-.0228]						
- In the case of low competitive intensity: a × b = .1762, CI <sub>90%</sub> : [.0224;.3409]						
Hayes (2021) MACRO Process (Model 8, 5.000 bootstraps)						

**Table 2 – Moderated serial mediation analyses (Study 2 and Study 3a)**

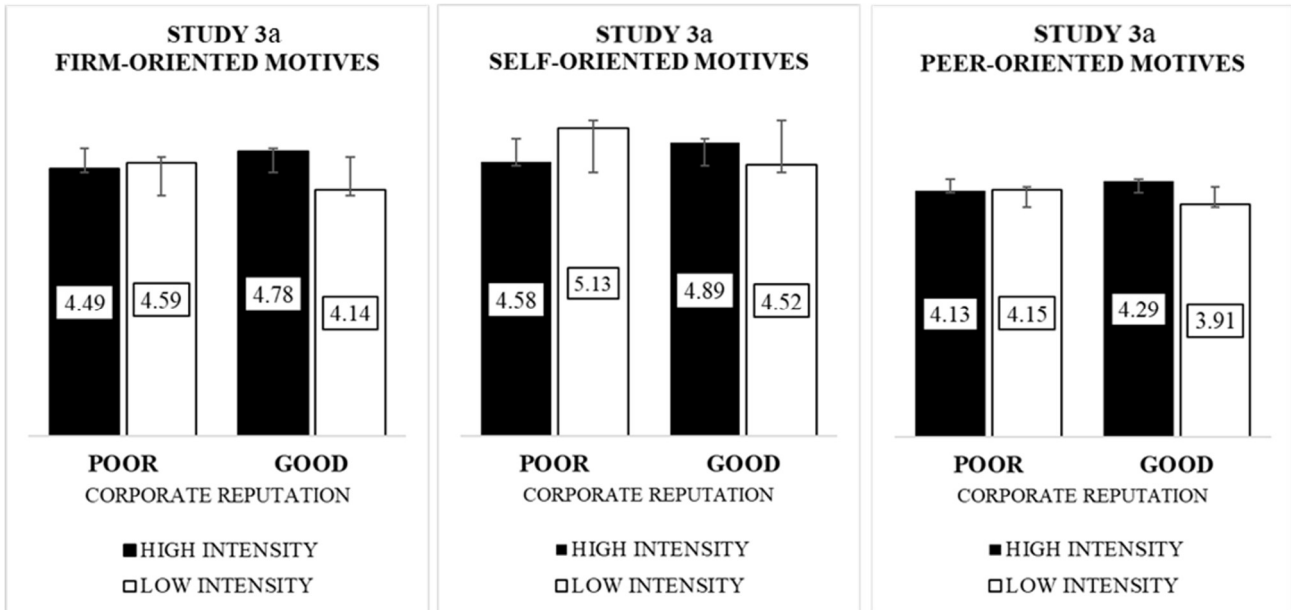
For self-oriented motivations, we found a significant interaction between competitive intensity and corporate reputation ( $INT_{\text{SELF-ORIENTED}} = .92$ ,  $t = 3.02$ ,  $p = .003$ ). In highly competitive markets, poor corporate reputation negatively affected self-oriented motivations ( $\beta_{\text{HIGH\_INTENSITY}} = -.54$ ,  $t = -2.54$ ,  $p = .01$ ), with participants showing lower motivation levels for firms with poor reputations ( $M_{\text{POOR\_REPUTATION}} = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) as compared to those with good reputations ( $M_{\text{GOOD\_REPUTATION}} = 5.13$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ). Conversely, in low-competition markets, self-oriented motivations were marginally higher for firms with poor reputations ( $M_{\text{POOR\_REPUTATION}} = 4.89$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ) than for those with good reputations ( $M_{\text{GOOD\_REPUTATION}} = 4.52$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ,  $\beta_{\text{LOW\_INTENSITY}} = .37$ ,  $t = 1.74$ ,  $p = .08$ ).

Firm-oriented motivations showed similar interaction effects ( $INT_{\text{FIRM-ORIENTED}} = .74$ ,  $t = 2.23$ ,  $p = .03$ ), but with different patterns. In low-competition environments, poor reputation

positively influences firm-oriented motivations, with participants showing stronger motivations toward firms with poor reputations ( $M_{\text{POOR\_REPUTATION}} = 4.78$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ) as compared to those with good reputations ( $M_{\text{GOOD\_REPUTATION}} = 4.14$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ,  $\beta_{\text{LOW\_INTENSITY}} = .64$ ,  $t = 2.82$ ,  $p = .007$ ). This effect disappeared in highly competitive settings ( $p > .10$ ). Notably, peer-oriented motivations showed no significant interaction effect or main effects ( $p > .10$ ).

The mediation analysis revealed that in highly competitive markets (only), self-oriented motivations negatively mediated the relationship between corporate reputation and intention to participate ( $a_{\text{SELF-ORIENTED}} \times b_{\text{SELF-ORIENTED}} = -.21$ ,  $CI_{95\%} [-.40; -.05]$ ), with this indirect effect extending to brand attachment ( $a_{\text{SELF-ORIENTED}} \times b_{\text{SELF-ORIENTED}} = -.07$ ,  $CI_{95\%} [-.14; -.02]$ ). In contrast, firm-oriented motivations (only) positively mediated the relationship between corporate reputation ( $a_{\text{FIRM-ORIENTED}} \times b_{\text{FIRM-ORIENTED}} = .28$ ,  $CI_{95\%} [.07; .54]$ ), with this indirect effect extending to brand attachment ( $a_{\text{FIRM-ORIENTED}} \times b_{\text{FIRM-ORIENTED}} = .10$ ,  $CI_{95\%} [.02; .19]$ ) but only in low-competition settings. The 95% confidence intervals of all the other mediational paths include 0 (see Table 3).

Overall, these findings are consistent with our theoretical foundations in several key ways. First, they demonstrate how market structure influences consumer motivation and participation (H4a and H4c supported), with subsequent effects on brand attachment (H5 supported). They also reveal the conditions under which a poor reputation can stimulate rather than inhibit participation (H2 and H3 supported again). Surprisingly, despite the importance of social factors highlighted in previous research, peer-oriented motivations played no significant role (H4b not supported). Moreover, one-sample t-tests indicate that peer-oriented motivations do not significantly differ from the neutral midpoint (4) in any of the experimental conditions ( $p > .10$ ). This result suggests that reputation-competition dynamics create a more direct consumer-firm relationship, that may overshadow peer-related considerations.



**Figure 4** – Study 3a: Impact of competitive intensity and corporate reputation on motives

### *Study 3b*

To refine our understanding of stimulated participation for firms with poor reputations in low competitive settings, we conducted Study 3b. This last study also aimed to examine the role of the frequently researched financial rewards (e.g., Acar 2018), when compared to our motivational drivers, in stimulating participation in such a context. Additionally, it enhances the ecological validity of this research by involving a real brand, its actual consumers and real participation in idea generation activities.

### *Method*

Study 3b is a between-subjects online experiment that manipulated the presence of a financial reward (yes or no) for the selected winner. French participants were solicited online through Cloudresearch, and presented with a creative task related to the same national railway company as in Study 1. Their eligibility to take part in the survey hinged on their awareness of the company (awareness: yes or no). The railway company, functioning as a public monopoly, is the only service provider in the French railway market. Moreover, no alternatives for regional train transportation are available. Historically, this company has faced negative perceptions due

to staff strikes, train delays, cancellations, and high-ticket prices, ranking last in the latest IFOP/Posternak reputation barometer.

After confirming their eligibility, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: no reward or a financial reward for the winner (a €50 voucher). Participants were then invited to join an idea generation contest designed to enhance the travel experience on regional trains. Except for the reward part, all other information provided was identical (See material used in Web Appendix C). Following the briefing, participants decided whether they wanted to submit an idea (yes or no). On the next screen, those who had answered the previous question in the affirmative were prompted to write their ideas. Subsequently, they reported their motivation (self-, peer-, and firm-oriented) using scales from prior studies (all  $\alpha$ s > .90), reported their recent customership with the company (within the last two years: yes or no), completed an attention check regarding the presence or absence of a reward and a manipulation check about perceived alternatives on the market (on a 7-point binary scale where 1 = very few and 7 = a lot), answered questions similar to those asked in previous studies (i.e. scenario credibility and category involvement) and provided demographic details (i.e. age and gender).

A total of 190 French participants were initially recruited. As a preliminary step, we evaluated all submissions to determine whether they constituted genuine ideas rather than non-responsive comments such as “I don’t know,” “no idea,” or other irrelevant remarks, as discussed in Poetz and Schreier (2012). Based on this criterion, 22 submissions were excluded from further analysis. The remaining dataset included 168 participants (57.1% female,  $M_{AGE} = 50.6$  years), who, as intended, perceived the dearth of alternatives ( $M = 1.87$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ). Of these, 64.8% reported having used the company’s services or travelled by train with this company in 2023 or 2024.

### *Results*

As previously described, participants were asked if they would like to actually submit an idea. Responses to this question were coded as 0 if a participant chose not to participate, and as 1 if they chose to participate. We conducted a binary logistic regression analysis with 1,000 bootstraps to address the large imbalance between idea submitters (i.e. “participants”, 70.8%) and non-submitters (i.e. “non-participants”, 29.2%). This analysis, assessing the impact of reward conditions for participating in the idea contest compared to the intercept-only model, yielded non-significant results:  $\chi^2 (1) = .80, p = .37$ . In a second step, we added the motives (self-, peer-, and firm-oriented) to the previous model (see Table 4 for a full report). We find that the full model versus the intercept-only model was significant ( $\chi^2 (4) = 49.46, p < .001$ ) and a clear improvement on the previous model ( $\chi^2 (3) = 48.66, p < .001$ ). Firm-oriented motives showed a positive and significant effect ( $B = .47, \text{odds ratio} = 1.59, p = .02$ ), while self- and peer-oriented motives were not significant ( $ps > .19$ ), hence replicating the effect found in Study 3a on intentions to participate in the case of a (fictitious) poorly reputable firm (H4a supported). Therefore, firm-oriented motivation remains the greater motivational trigger, more so than financial rewards.

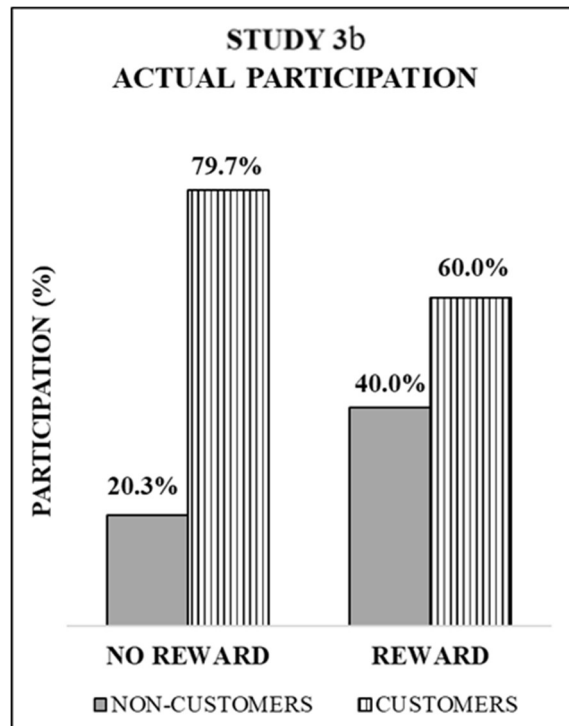
**Table 3 – Study 3a - Mediation role of self-, peer-, and firm-oriented motivations in the relationship between corporate reputation and intention to participate according to competitive intensity.**

	Mediating variables			Dependent variables	
	Self-oriented motives	Peer-oriented motives	Firm-oriented motives	Intention to Participate	Brand Attachment
<i>Direct effects</i>					
<b>Independent variables</b>					
Corporate reputation (Poor versus Good)	-.543*	-.021	-.099	-.254	-1.195***
Competitive intensity (High versus Low)	-.605**	-.241	-.451	.033	-.240
<b>Interaction</b>					
Corporate reputation x Competitive intensity	<b>.916**</b>	.400	<b>.74*</b>	.286	-.499
<b>Corporate reputation (simple) effects</b>					
<i>Low intensity</i>	.372		<b>.641**</b>		
<i>High intensity</i>	<b>-.543*</b>		-.099		
<b>Mediating variables</b>					
Self-oriented motives				.370***	
Peer-oriented motives				.157**	
Firm-oriented motives				.430***	
<b>Dependent variable: Intention to Participate</b>					<b>.349***</b>
<i>Indirect effects</i>			<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>95% CI-LL</b>	<b>95% CI-UL</b>
<i>Corporate reputation → Self-oriented motives → Intention to Participate → Brand attachment</i>					
<i>Low intensity</i>			.048	-.007	.115
<b><i>High intensity</i></b>			<b>-.070</b>	<b>-.137</b>	<b>-.018</b>
<i>Corporate reputation → Peer-oriented motives → Intention to Participate → Brand attachment</i>					
<i>Low intensity</i>			.020	-.005	.065
<i>High intensity</i>			-.001	-.031	.026
<i>Corporate reputation → Firm-oriented motives → Intention to Participate → Brand attachment</i>					
<b><i>Low intensity</i></b>			<b>.096</b>	<b>.023</b>	<b>.188</b>
<i>High intensity</i>			-.015	-.083	.055

n = 300 - \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$

*Additional analyses.* Then, we studied how being a customer or not affects participation in crowdsourcing projects, particularly when the company has a poor reputation and holds a monopoly position. This examination is particularly relevant given recent discussions (e.g., Patel et al. 2023; Acar 2018) on the varying profiles attracted to crowdsourcing depending on whether or not a reward is offered to the winner. We conducted another binary logistic regression analysis with 1.000 bootstrap, adding being a customer (yes-no) as an independent factor, as well as its potential interaction effect with the reward (yes-no). A comparison of the full model against the intercept-only model was significant ( $\chi^2 (3) = 10.32, p = .02$ ). We observed a significant interaction effect between reward and being a customer ( $B = -1.59$ , odds ratio = .20,  $p = .03$ ), accompanied by significant main effects of both the reward ( $B = 1.32$ , odds ratio = 3.75,  $p = .02$ ) and being a customer ( $B = 1.51$ , odds ratio = 4.52,  $p = .003$ ). As shown in Figure 5, more customers than non-customers participated when no reward was offered (79.7% versus 20.3%,  $\chi^2 (1) = 9.50, p = .002$ ). In the case of a reward, while a larger percentage of customers than non-customers participated (60% versus 40%), the difference was not significant ( $\chi^2 (1) = .024, p = .88$ ).

Then, focusing on customers, again we find that only firm-oriented motives are significant in predicting participation ( $\chi^2 (4) = 24.97, p < .001$ ; firm-oriented motives:  $B = .66$ , odds ratio = 1.93,  $p = .04$ ; See Table 3). Analyzing non-customers, we find that the full model versus the intercept-only model was also significant ( $\chi^2 (4) = 28.79, p < .001$ ); however, none of the motivations were significant ( $ps > .20$ ), though the presence of a reward was significant ( $B = 2.22$ , odds ratio = 9.21,  $p < .001$ ). These analyses serve to further unravel the motivations behind participation in creative crowdsourcing for firms with a low reputation in a non-competitive environment, according to customer status: Customers are motivated to genuinely help the firm, while non-customers are primarily attracted by the reward. This pattern has significant theoretical and managerial implications.



**Figure 5** – Study 3b: Actual participation in creative crowdsourcing for a poor reputation firm in a low competition setting

**Table 4: Study 3b - Results from the LOGIT regression analyses**

	DV = Actual participation (dichotomous)			
	Customers + non-customers (n = 168)		Customers only (n = 109)	Non-customers only (n = 59)
	B	B	B	B
	(Exp (B))	(Exp (B))	(Exp (B))	(Exp (B))
Constant	<b>.75***</b> (2.11)	<b>-3.28***</b> (.037)	<b>-2.39*</b> (.092)	<b>-5.27***</b> (.005)
Reward (yes-no)	.30 (1.36)	.62 (1.86)	-.12 (.89)	<b>2.22**</b> (9.21)
Self-oriented motivation		.31 (1.36)	.37 (1.45)	.56 (1.74)
Peer-oriented motivation		.10 (1.11)	-.24 (.78)	.40 (1.49)
Firm-oriented motivation		<b>.47*</b> (1.59)	<b>.66*</b> (1.93)	.15 (1.16)
$\chi^2$	.37	49.46***	24.97***	28.79***
Nagelkerkes R <sup>2</sup>	.007	.36	.31	.52

<sup>a</sup>Bootstrap Sig. level (2-tailed) - \*Sig. level <.05; \*\*Sig. level <.01; \*\*\*Sig. level <.001

## *Discussion*

Prior research suggests that higher status signals and confidence in fair idea treatment are prerequisites to attracting participants to crowdsourcing initiatives (Faullant et al. 2016; Pollok, Lüttgens, and Piller 2019). This has led to recommendations that firms with poor reputations should first improve their reputation before embarking on crowdsourcing (Chang and Taylor 2016; Kull and Heath 2016). This narrative might discourage firms from exploring this avenue, or they might have to navigate potential failures.

However, our research challenges this assumption by demonstrating that under specific market conditions, poor reputation need not be a barrier to customer participation, hence to crowdsourcing success. Following the recommendations of Afuah and Tucci (2023) to investigate the seeker's characteristics, we conducted four experimental studies and showed that market competitive intensity serves as a critical boundary condition in determining how consumers respond to crowdsourcing initiatives launched by firms with poor reputations. With this, we address significant gaps in the existing literature and calls for research in interactive marketing and brand management. Our contributions are threefold.

First, we reveal that competitive intensity serves as a key moderator in determining crowdsourcing success for firms with poor reputations. Specifically, we find that consumers are more likely to participate in crowdsourcing efforts initiated by such firms, particularly in markets with low competitive intensity. Our study also addresses Ghezzi et al.'s (2018) call for research on conditions that enable successful crowdsourcing, while providing new insights into how market structure influences marketing strategy effectiveness, thereby enriching theoretical understandings of consumer behavior and interactive marketing in unique market contexts.

Second, we extend the literature on crowd motivation by demonstrating that firm-oriented motivation (i.e. the desire to help the firm) can be a powerful driver of participation. This insight is significant as there are fewer studies on firm-oriented motives in crowdsourcing than on other

forms of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation (e.g. Patel et al. 2023; Villarroel and Tucci 2010; Von Krogh et al. 2012). While previous studies emphasized self-oriented goals (Füller 2010), our findings suggest that firms with poor reputations in low competitive settings may activate more altruistic or higher-order goals among consumers. This supports Von Krogh et al.'s (2012) conceptual framework and indicates that consumers may prioritize long-term value creation over short-term rewards in such contexts..

Third, we demonstrate how competitive intensity influences the relationship between reputation and brand attachment through crowdsourcing participation. While existing research mainly focuses on brands in competitive scenarios, we explore the unique situation of a brand operating as the sole stakeholder. Our findings suggest that crowdsourcing can serve as an effective reputation repair mechanism, particularly when alternatives are limited. Drawing on the idea from Lei et al. (2012) that consumer perceptions can be shaped by the availability of alternatives, we found that low competitive intensity significantly influences consumer willingness to participate in crowdsourcing efforts, with downstream impacts on brand attachment. This extends our understanding of how market conditions shape the effectiveness of engagement strategies for reputation management.

Overall, this study responds not only to previous calls for research, it also encourages a reassessment of the tactics employed by brands with less than stellar reputations. It suggests that crowdsourcing can be a viable strategy under specific market competitive intensity situations. While pure monopolies are relatively rare in practice due to stringent antitrust laws and regulations aimed at promoting healthy market competition, there are many instances where competitive intensity is minimal. This is often the case in regional or localized markets, like a small town with a single grocery store or an area served by only one internet provider. A prime example is the dominance of Comcast in certain U.S. regions, where it is the sole provider of specific telecommunications services. Similarly, public companies such as utilities or

transportation often operate under regulated monopolies. Even though pure monopolies are uncommon, low competition scenarios are frequent and have a significant effect on consumer choices and market dynamics.

Our research broadens the theoretical understanding of crowdsourcing participation and its drivers, thereby offering practical insights for marketing strategists facing similar challenges (these insights are summarized in Table 5). First, managers of firms with poor reputations should assess their market competitive intensity before launching crowdsourcing initiatives. In markets with limited alternatives, we found that crowdsourcing can be a particularly effective way to engage customers and build brand attachment. When competitive intensity is low, firms with poor reputations can utilize crowdsourcing not only as a means to tap into external knowledge, consumer voices, and innovative insights (Morgan et al. 2021; Salgado et al. 2020) but also as a tool for repairing their tarnished reputation (Dong et al. 2008; Roggeveen et al. 2012). Moreover, under these conditions, crowdsourcing initiatives are more likely to attract customers of the brand. These customers are not only willing to support these firms, but are also keen to make a genuine contribution to their improvement. That is, firms operating in niche markets, or industries with few consumer alternatives, could highlight their crowdsourcing efforts as prioritized platforms for consumer interaction. Such a strategy may enhance initial low brand attachment for poorly reputed companies, while it may leverage existing brand strength and customer trust for well-reputed companies.

Second, managers should tailor their crowdsourcing-related communication strategies to the prevailing market conditions. In low-competition markets, firm improvement opportunities will resonate more effectively than financial incentives. Therefore, we advise crowdsourcing managers to stimulate customer participation by framing a brief that resonates with their firm-oriented motivations. For example, firms can emphasize how customers can assist them in gaining a deeper understanding of their values, offer insights on what they deem right or wrong,

and share their experiences. This approach allows firms to grasp the standards their customers find acceptable. For example, SNCF, the French railway company, highlighted how its customers could contribute to improving the firm's service quality through direct customer participation. By extension, well-reputed firms in low-competition markets (e.g., premium utilities, specialized service providers) can use crowdsourcing to maintain their positive reputation and deepen customer relationships and brand attachment. We advise managers to balance both firm improvement and personal benefit, as customers are already satisfied but may seek greater involvement.

Third, our research suggests that financial rewards have a different significance in crowdsourcing initiatives for firms with poor reputations depending on the market competitive intensity. We found that financial rewards may be less critical for attracting participation from existing customers in low-competition markets, which would allow firms to redirect resources toward implementing crowd-generated ideas.

Our findings also offer managerial guidance to firms operating in competitive settings. Well-reputed firms should capitalize on their strong reputation to differentiate their crowdsourcing initiatives. When soliciting crowdsourcing participation, these firms can emphasize both personal benefits (Hanine and Steils 2019) and the prestige of associating with a respected brand, while focusing on improved innovation outcomes (e.g. Poetz and Schreier 2012). The personal benefits that should be emphasized may include skill development, public recognition, greater satisfaction with the firm's offering or tangible rewards tailored to the nature and complexity of the task (Karachiwalla and Pinkow 2021). LEGO's Ideas platform exemplifies this approach by celebrating the creativity of individual participants and rewarding them for successful designs, thus showcasing the tangible benefits of engaging in their crowdsourcing efforts and distinguishing itself in the competitive landscape. Conversely, firms with poor reputations in highly competitive markets should anticipate lower participation rates and

carefully assess whether crowdsourcing is appropriate for them. It may be prudent for these firms to first focus on improving their reputation and building brand connections through other means. However, firms seeking innovative ideas might consider initiating smaller, targeted crowdsourcing projects to build trust. In their implementation of crowdsourcing, they should underscore personal benefits (e.g. skill development) to address participation barriers stemming from poor reputation. Additionally, they should ensure process transparency (Cambier and Poncin 2020) and provide participants with feedback (Djelassi and Decoopman 2013). Our results also suggest that in this situation financial incentives may play a crucial role in attracting participation, particularly as non-customers may be more likely to participate.

Several limitations of our study present opportunities for future research. First, while we focused on participation intention and actual participation as success measures, future research could examine other metrics such as participation intensity (Camacho et al. 2019), idea quality (Acar 2018) and media coverage (Steils and Hanine 2022). The importance of examining idea quality becomes particularly relevant given Study 3b's findings that different reward structures attracted different types of contributors. Second, our binary categorization of reputation (good/poor) may oversimplify this complex, continuous construct. Future studies could investigate more nuanced levels of reputation, including neutral levels or even the absence of reputation, and their origins (e.g. corporate scandals versus negative service experiences). Third, our findings are limited to ideation contexts for marketing purposes. Research could investigate how task complexity (e.g. idea selection vs. idea creation, Bullinger et al. 2010) influences the relationships between reputation, motivation and participation across different competitive settings. Fourth, while our study examines brand attachment as an outcome of crowdsourcing participation, we acknowledge the potential bidirectional relationship between these constructs. Future research should explore how existing brand attachment might influence participation intentions, potentially creating a reinforcing cycle where attachment and

participation mutually enhance each other over time (Wang et al. 2024; Sarkar and Banerjee 2021). Longitudinal studies examining this dynamic interplay would provide valuable insights into the evolving nature of consumer-brand relationships through repeated crowdsourcing interactions. Finally, our findings suggest interesting parallels between different types of customer dependencies. While we focused on market-structure-based dependencies, other forms exist through regulatory requirements or bundled services. For instance, even if customers do not explicitly want insurance (Robson 2015), insurance products may be legally mandated (e.g., car insurance) or required as a result of other purchases (e.g., mortgage-linked home insurance). As mentioned in the introduction, AIG, a poorly reputed US insurance company, managed to successfully revamp its innovation strategy through crowdsourcing. Future research could explore how these different types of customer dependencies influence crowdsourcing success for poorly reputed firm

**Table 5 - Overview of Managerial Recommendations**

		<b>CORPORATE REPUTATION</b>			
		<b>GOOD</b>		<b>POOR</b>	
<b>COMPETITIVE INTENSITY:</b>	<b>HIGH</b>	<b>LOW</b>	<b>HIGH</b>	<b>LOW</b>	
<b>CROWDSOURCING TARGET</b>	Engage with both with existing and potential customers, more attracted by self-oriented motives than firm-oriented ones.	Engage with existing customers (no absolute requisite).	Be prepared for less genuine engagement from customers and lower participation rates.	Engage with existing customers who are more likely to participate genuinely with firm-oriented motives.	
<b>SPECIFIC FIRM BENEFITS</b>	Average attraction of participants and brand attachment (potentially leading to innovation leadership).	Average attraction of participants and brand attachment (potentially leading to meaningful interactions).	Average attraction of participants and brand attachment.	Higher attraction of participants. Higher brand attachment improvement (potentially contributing to reputation repair).	
<b>FRAMING OF PARTICIPATION CALLS</b>	Focus on self-oriented benefits (e.g., highlighting opportunities for learning, portfolio building, brand association benefits).	Focus on self-oriented benefits (e.g., meaningful engagement, collaborative improvement).	Focus on self-oriented benefits (e.g., skill development opportunities, learning and portfolio building opportunities).	Focus on firm-oriented motives (e.g., on customer importance in service improvement, need to better understand customer values and experiences for service quality improvement).	

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<b>FINANCIAL REWARD</b>	(not studied)	(not studied)	Offer attract to attract non-customers and none to attract customers with firm-oriented motives.	No rewards help poor reputed firms to attract customers with genuine ideas driven by firm-oriented motives.
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