



Università  
Ca' Foscari  
Venezia

# Corso di Laurea magistrale in Lingue e istituzioni economiche e giuridiche dell'Asia e dell'Africa Mediterranea

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Tesi di Laurea

Ca' Foscari  
Dorsoduro 3246  
30123 Venezia

## **User co-created product's value:**

The case of *Mujirushi Ryōhin* brand  
community

### **Relatrice**

Dott.ssa Marcella Maria Mariotti

### **Correlatrice**

Ch.ma Proff.ssa Junko Kimura

### **Laureanda**

Maria Giovanna Moretti

Matricola 823569

### **Anno Accademico**

**2013 / 2014**

A mia madre,

che mi ha sempre sostenuto in ogni difficoltà  
insegnandomi cosa sia l'onestà e la correttezza.

## 要旨

本稿の目的は、顧客はどのようにして企業の発展に貢献できるであろうかを明らかにすることである。主としてユーザーは自分のアイデアと経験を企業に伝えることで、便利な新製品を作る貴重な情報源になることができ、メーカーとユーザー双方に有益な関係であることを検討する。本稿の構成は以下の通りである。

第1章では、研究の背景、問題意識、および論文の構成を説明する。

第2章では、既存の研究を整理し、本稿の仮説の導出を行う。文献展望を通じて「ユーザー・イノベーション」という概念を着目し、メーカーとユーザーの関係、「リードユーザー」という役割(自分の経験と知識を利用して製品を創作する個体、企業、協会である)と製品開発プロセスにおける役割を考察する。その上、オンライアン・ブランド・コミュニティと価値共創についても考察する。

第3章では、仮説を検証するために実施した二種類の調査の方法論に関して示す。具体的には、調査の目的、概要、および調査対象を述べる。調査は、オンラインアンケートと無印良品のサイトにある「モノづくりコミュニティ」というブランドコミュニティの5つケースの検討を行う。

第4章では、無印良品という日本の専門小売業者の歴史について述べる。

第5章では、収集したオンラインアンケートの回答およびブランドコミュニティの各ケースの情報をを用いてデータを分析し、既存の研究と仮説について比較、検証を行う。

第6章では、オンラインアンケートおよびブランドコミュニティの5つのケースの検討から収集したデータで発見物を説明し、理論的および実践的貢献、今後の展望についても述べる。今回のアンケートでは、1名のみだったが、実際にアイデアを伝えて、新商品を作れたことを確認できた。しかし、1ケースのみの確認しかできなかったため、より多くのケースを確

認することが今後の課題としてあげられる。それに対し、無印良品はブランドコミュニティを活用してアイデアや経験を商品開発している。無印良品のモノづくりコミュニティの各々ケースでは大勢のユーザーがブランドコミュニティを通じて自分の経験とアイデアを伝えることで、新商品を作ることができ、お互いに満足を得られ、本稿の研究の仮説を確認できたと言える。

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## **CHAPTER 1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

Are we sure that only makers can create new and original good products?

Until the end of the 1970s, we were convinced that only makers could create novelty and original products and that the developed product was unquestionable. However, in these last years, even if to the society this remains an unknown argument, many researchers have noticed that not only makers but also users could be a valuable source of innovation.

What kinds of instrument do makers have to understand the market trends? But the most important thing is who, better than the users, can understand consumers' needs?

With the spread of the Internet in the 1980s, everyone could get lots of information, could surf on the Internet and interact with people of other countries, and the line between makers and consumers it had been worn thin. Since that time a new world, in which anyone could become an inventor, has been opened. But not all people recognize their abilities.

If a firm introduced consumers to their own product development process, it will be a success or a waste of time? Moreover, what kind of relationship can be born between consumers and makers?

If a consumer could participate in the product development process by giving their information, experience and revealing their needs, maybe a firm could create new products without using unneeded resources and both firm and users could obtain what they really want.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

Its purpose of this study is to understand if users can be a valuable source of innovation in the firm's product development process by participating in the online brand community, as in the case of the Japanese retail company *Mujirushi Ryōhin*. In order to support the hypothesis in the literature review, different kinds of studies have been analysed, about user innovation, user who initiates innovation, brand community and value co-creation.

### 1.3 Paper configuration

This study wants to throw light on the possibility that users could be a valuable source of innovation and how they can participate in the firm's product development process.

The Chapter II, using researches made until now, focuses on the concept of “user innovation”, and gives an analysis of the relationship between maker and user, explains the role of the lead user – individual, organization or company that creates the most of the product by using their experience and knowledge – and its role in the product development process. Moreover, the online brand community and the value co-creation are analysed.

Chapter III gives a brief history of *Mujirushi Ryōhin* from this birth, its transformation and the relations with its consumers.

Chapter IV presents the hypothesis that users, through online brand community, could participate in the firm's product-development process, sharing ideas and experience. In this way firm creates new products that live up to the user's expectations. This is advantageous for both, firm and user, because the firm can increase their sales and profits without unneeded costs and resources, whereas the user can have higher satisfaction by using the products they really want.

Chapter V studies the case of *Mujirushi Ryōhin* through two researches. The first one is an internet questionnaire to the Muji's fans, aimed to understand if and how they cooperate with the company to create new products and how they consider the brand community; the second one is a data analysis of five researches made by *Mujirushi Ryōhin* about the online brand community *Monozukuri komyuniti* on the Muji.net.

Chapter VI discusses the results from the Muji's fan online questionnaire and the data analysis that support the above hypotheses. Moreover, limitation, theoretical implications, practical implications and future research are also discussed.

## **CHAPTER 2 Literature Review**

Until the end of the 1970s, all the researchers were convinced that only makers could create, develop and improve products by doing some market researches or other market studies. But from the 1976, Eric von Hippel, an American university professor, could affirm that not only makers, but also users can be a valuable source of innovation. Users rather than makers can face problems before the market about some products and users' needs on the base of their experiences. From the late 1970s, von Hippel and others researches started to analyse many kinds of cases in which users could do innovation, sometimes better than the makers. This study analyses how users can be a part in the product development process, interacting through the online brand community with makers by exchanging ideas, comments, experiences, opinions in order to create novelty and original products.

### **2.1. User Innovation**

Not only maker, but also user can be a valuable source of innovation.

According to von Hippel (1976) in the field of scientific instruments, who recognize the need, solves the problem via an innovation, creates a prototype and proves the prototype's value by its use, most of the times is not the manufacturer but is the user. Thus, not only the manufacturer can be a valuable source of innovation, but also the user, whose ideas can be an important source of novelty. Von Hippel analysed 111 scientific instrument innovations and he found that the locus of almost the entire scientific instrument innovation process is centred on the user (approximately the 80% of the innovation samples). He affirmed:

We have seen that for both major and minor innovations in the field of scientific instruments, it is almost always the user, not the instrument manufacturer, who recognizes the need, solves the problem via an innovation, builds a prototype and proves the prototype's value in use. Furthermore, it is the user who encourages and enables the diffusion of his invention by publishing information on its utility and instructions sufficient for its replication by other users – and by instrument manufactures. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eric VON HIPPEL, the dominant role of users in the scientific instruments innovation process, USA, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, 1976, p.227.

All around the world, there are many researches that support von Hippel's thesis. For example, the case of Seven-Eleven Japan can explain that affirmation. Seven-Eleven Japan invented a system to ascertain that the products ordered were delivered as they had asked; in one year the 70% of the products had been replaced with new products. But until the 1990, even if the ordered products arrived at the store, it was difficult to understand if they were in the delivered product list or not. (小川| Ogawa 2013). It caused some problems to the employees, because they could not check accurately if the ordered products were on the list, therefore they found out them randomly in the huge variety of products. Moreover, the part-time employees, who worked in the store only few hours per week, did not have the commodity knowledge to find immediately the products, wasting time in delivery and ordering. Thus, there was a proposal from a user who he said "Instead of wasting time in ordering try to spare lots of time and be able to deliver without having commitment knowledge". Seven-Eleven Japan decided to use a bar code to check them and they developed a scanner that reads bar codes and recorded inventory. Using only scanners, they could easily know the product's name and its number's order. This innovation was created by an employee of a distribution company, who observed the new part-time employees having trouble with delivery taking too much time and he/she thought that the insufficiency time for ordering was an everyday problem. (Ogawa 2000).

Luthje, Hersatt and von Hippel (2002) analysed the role of the user in the product development process of the mountain bike. Mountain biking began in the 1970's, when some young cyclists started to use their bicycles off-road, but those bicycles weren't suited for that kind of rough usage, so they decided to use their own equipment to create a bicycle that was suited for their needs. "These early users put together their own equipment out of strong old bike frames with balloon tires to which they added motorcycle lever-operated drum brakes for better stopping ability".<sup>2</sup> In the 1975 the commerce of the mountain bikes started, because some young users started to build bikes for others. It was developed in a tiny cottage industry and by the 1976 a half-dozen of small assemblers existed in Marin County, California. In the 1982 a firm called Specialized, an importer of bikes and bike parts, that supplied parts to the Marin County mountain bike assemblers, began to sell mountain bikes to the market (Luthje et als. 2006 pag.9). Others mountain bike manufacturers started to do the same, produce bikes and sell them to bike shops in the US. In the mid-1980s, the mountain bike was fully

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<sup>2</sup> Christian LUTHJE, Cornelius HERSTATT, Eric VON HIPPEL, "User-innovators and "local" information: The case of mountain biking", Research Policy, 2006, p.9.

integrated in the mainstream bike market. At the same time, lots of bicycle component manufacturers started to produce some components that were suited to off-road use such as *dérailleurs*, crank sets, tires and handle bars (Luthje et als. 2006).

Even if the mountain bike manufacturers started to produce and sell some kind of products, the mountain bike enthusiasts did not stop their innovation activities. They wanted to push mountain bikes into more extreme environmental conditions, creating forms of acrobatics, for example jumping with their bikes from the house to roofs and water towers. They also started to create components by themselves. The more generally valued of these innovations propagated among the user community and some of them were produced by manufacturers (Luthje et als. 2002). According to Luthje et als.' research (2002), the 38% of 287 respondents admitted to have developed one or more ideas; 40.5% of these reported to have built and personally using a prototype embodying their idea; the 9.1% of these users reported that their ideas were used by other bikers.

The user not only participates in the product development process of consumer goods but also in the development of online systems. OPACs, or Online Public Access Catalogs system, is a computerized information search system used by libraries. It was developed initially in the 1970s in Australia by advanced and technically sophisticated users of major university and library institutions in the US, as a replacement and improvement upon the "card catalogue" – a system that provides information on the contents of the library's collection in the form of an index made up of small paper cards. Later there were some important additional functionality into OPACs, giving better information search capabilities through the ability to perform library administration-related tasks. The OPACs that we have now can be used to search the Internet for information, or register borrowers looking to eligible to use a library. (Morrison et als. 2000).

In the 1978 the OPACs in use were the ones developed by users for their own use. The United States are the world leader in OPACs development, but Morrison et als. (2000) analysed the case of the "local" market in Australia and found that the 26% of the users modified the OPACs system one or more times after first installation in major and minor ways to satisfy their needs. The modifications involved both general library management and the conduct of information searches. For example, one modification was to created an interface between OPAC and Internet to allow the library patrons to access to the huge portal of information in conjunction with the library data. Another one modification was the "book

retrieval instructions for staff and/or patrons” (Morrison et al. 2000 p.7)<sup>3</sup>, because it was stacked up in a very complex way and it was difficult to find it without precise directions. Morrison et al. (2000) asked to the users who modified the OPAC system “what their information was regarding the novelty of what they had done” and in twenty-two cases users responded. In sixteen cases, they admitted that the modification they had made was new to the world when they developed it. The other six cases said that a similar was probably offered by some OPAC suppliers at the time they developed it. More than half of the modifications costs were quite low.

The cooperation between user and manufactures can see not only in the BtoC relationship, but also in the BtoB relationship.

An example is , the Seven Eleven Japan and its cooperation with the Nippon Electric Company (NEC), a Japanese multinational provider of information technology. During the period of Ogawa’s research, the Information System Development Group in SEJ had a staff of six people who didn’t have any engineering degree, or skills in software and hardware development. Therefore, NEC was the company selected by the SEJ to develop any new system and equipment. The Department that SEJ cooperated with to develop new systems for retail and services industries where the System Integration Department, which has 600 engineers specializing in computer hardware and software development. SEJ and NEX also have an agreement that NEC cannot sell to other competitors the innovations created for SEJ’s storage inventory management for 2 years after the first use in SEJ. For example, SEJ was given a prototype of the light-weight hand-held terminal, but it was too heavy to manage for periods of time by its workers (Ogawa 1998).

As von Hippel (1994) hypothesized, we can understand that the cooperation of the user in product development systems can be seen in various fields from 1970 until now.

The stickiness of information brought the users to create new products on their own.

In the 1994 von Hippel coined the term “sticky” information and he said

We define the stickiness of a given unit of information in a given instance, as the incremental expenditure required to transfer that unit of information to a specified locus in a form usable by a

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<sup>3</sup> Pamela D. MORRISON, John H. RORBERS, Eric VON HIPPEL, “Determinants of User Innovation in Innovation Sharing in a Local Market”, *Management Science*, 2000, p.7.

give information seeker. When this cost is low, information stickiness is low; when it is high, stickiness is high (von Hippel 1994, pp. 3).<sup>4</sup>

Von Hippel (1995) argued that product innovation requires the combination of some information, but that information may not be in the same place. Therefore, an information transfer is necessary, but its cost may be either high or low.

Von Hippel (2005) affirmed again that users and manufacturers tend to create a different kinds of innovation because the information they have is different. There is an asymmetry between users and manufacturers. Users know better their needs than manufacturers, however manufacturers are more specialized in solutions models. To make an innovation those kinds of information must be combined, but the cost to transfer that information from users to manufacturers or vice versa may be high. The user needs and habits change year after year and it is difficult to transfer the necessary information to manufacturers (von Hippel 2001).

“When the stickiness of information about necessary innovation is high, the transfer is difficult, thus the innovation it will be made by user” (Nakamura 2012 p.53).<sup>5</sup>

The stickiness of information brought the user to give a new solution to the problem which the user actually has, called need design.

Ogawa (1997) studied the relationship between the stickiness of innovation-related information and the locus of innovation analysing 24 innovations for the Japanese convenience-store industry. He studied the innovation in store inventory management systems developed by Seven-Eleven Japan, the leading firm in the Japanese CVS industry, and the Nippon Denki, one of the leading manufacturers of computer hardware and software in Japan. He analysed the number of problem solving done by users in regard to user need design and technological design. Generally, the product innovation can have two kinds of designs: “Need design” is a design that gives a new solution to the user need which the user actually has; “technological design” is a design that gives a new technological solution (Ogawa 1998).

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<sup>4</sup> Eric VON HIPPEL, “Sticky information and the Locus of Problem Solving: Implication for Innovation”, *Management Science*, 1994, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> NAKAMURA Tomoya, “Inobēshon puroseshu nikansuru kenkyū : yūzā inobēshon no seisei puroseshu” (Study concerning the Innovation Process: the generation process of the User Innovation), *Hiroshimadaigaku manejimento kenkyū*, 2012, pa.53. イノベーションに必要な粘着性の高い情報がユーザーの側に存在するとき、情報の移動が困難なため、ユーザーが当該イノベーションを起こす場合が多いのである。

Ogawa (1998) created three levels of stickiness of information about both need design and technological design. The three levels of need information stickiness are: low stickiness, if innovation does not affect the user's activities that were not already known by the manufacturers. For example, faster printout speeds of order entry record. In this case the level of stickiness has been low because the innovation had done by the user was already known by the manufacturers; medium stickiness is when an innovation affects a single user's activity that was not already known by the manufacturers. For example, input ordering the data by bar-codes and pen-reader. In this case the level of stickiness is medium because the bar-code and pen-reader innovation was developed after used NEC equipment; high stickiness, if the innovation affect lots of user's activities that were not already know by the manufacturers. For example, graphical data display on the electronic ordering books. Before that innovation the SEJ could not do order, graphical data analysis and visual check of inventory simultaneously.

The three levels of technological stickiness of innovations are: low stickiness, which is an innovation that does not affect any technology that was not already known by the user. For example, developing a new printer for the order-terminal has a low stickiness because SEJ already used a printer like that; medium stickiness, is an innovation that affects a single innovation that is not already known by the user. For example, developing a new language software. In this case it has a medium stickiness because SEJ hasn't not already known that kind of product; high stickiness, is an innovation that affects many innovations that are not already known by the user. For example, employing a battery and a liquid crystal display, using it in one hand. In this case the stickiness is high because SEJ has never used a battery and a liquid crystal display for portable order entry equipment (Ogawa 1998). As Ogawa (1998) affirmed:

The stickier the user need information is, the more of the need design is done by the user [...] the stickier the information on technology, the less of technology design is done by users; consequently, more of the technology design is done by the manufacturer.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Susumu OGAWA, "Does sticky information affect the locus of innovation? Evidence from the Japanese convenience industry", *Research Policy*, 1998, p. 24.

## 2.2. Lead user

The users who make innovations, know the user's need before the market and create a prototype are not usual users, but they are a "lead users".

According to von Hippel:

lead users are users whose present strong needs will become general in a market-place months or years in the future. Since lead users are familiar with conditions which lie in the future for most others, they can serve as a need-forecasting laboratory for marketing research. Moreover, since lead users often attempt to fill the need their experience, they can provide new product concept and design data as well.<sup>7</sup>

Lead users are the users who create the most of the products by using their real-world experiences. They are companies, organization or individuals that know the market trends and they have needs that go far beyond the others users. (von Hippel et al. 1999).

They have two important characteristics: 1) they face need that will show in the marketplace months or years before the maker; 2) they are positioned to earn a benefit by obtaining a solution by those needs (von Hippel 1986; 1988). Both of two characteristics are important to obtain precious information on new product and opportunities.

The first is important because, as studies of problem solving has shown, user who has real-world experience can give an accurate description of the data about it. And when needs change rapidly, as in the case in many high technology product categories, only used at the front of the trend will have experience with "tomorrow's needs today". The second Lead User characteristic is important because [...] those who expect a high benefit from a solution to a need tend to experiment with solutions on their own – and so can provide the richest need and solution data to inquiring market researchers.<sup>8</sup>

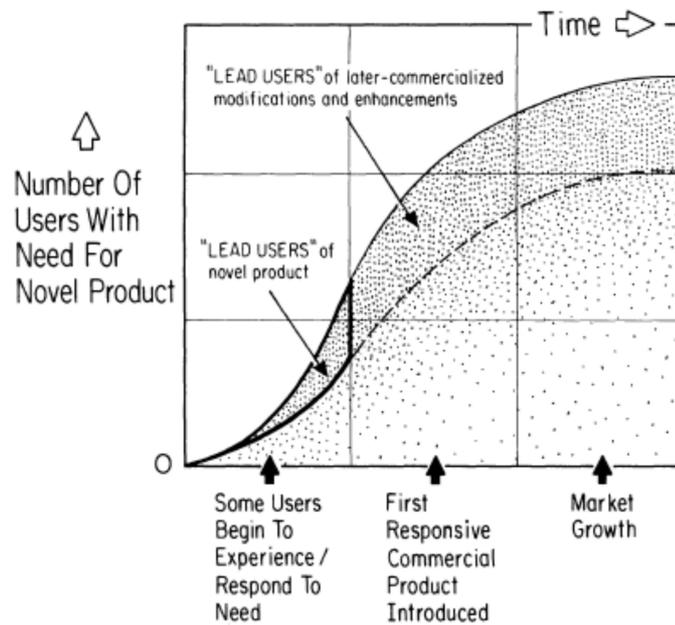
To explain these two characteristics von Hippel used this figure.

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<sup>7</sup> Eric VON HIPPEL, "Lead User: A Source of Novel Product Concepts", *Management Science*, 1986, p. 791.

<sup>8</sup> Cornelius HERSTATT, Eric VON HIPPEL, "Developing New Product Concepts Via the Lead User Method: A Case Study in a "Low-Tech" Field", *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 9, 1992, p. 214

**FIGURE 2-1-1 Novel Product Concept from “Lead User”**



von Hippel (1986) p.797

Von Hippel (1988) found that more than 87% of the PC-CAD system innovations were made by lead users. It means that a fair chunk of the innovations is made by the lead user.

Lead user is in many fields, for example, in the medical field.

According to von Hippel et al. (1999), they analysed the case of 3M, a company long known for its successful innovations. But by the mid-1990's, the 3M's top manager noticed that lots of the innovations were only the modifications of existing products. Therefore, they found a new strategy to create successful innovations and they set a bold objective: 30% of the sales had to be of products that had not existed in the four years earlier. To achieve that object some employees thought to use a new method for developing breakthrough products by using lead user process.

They want to create a breakthrough in the area of surgical drapes – an infection preventing material during the surgery. In the early 1990s the division spent three years developing surgical gowns – safeguard surgeons and patients from dangerous viruses – but they didn't see a wide market to grow the sales. Due to the high cost of the gowns it was

difficult to penetrate less-developed countries and declining margins on already existing products. For this reason, in 1996 Rita Shor, a senior product specialist in 3M's Medical-Surgical Markets Division, convinced senior management to try the lead user process. She and her project co-leader, Susan Hiestand assembled a group of six people from the R&D, marketing and manufacturing department. 3M's Medical-Surgical Markets Division was the first group to test the ability of lead user.

Their first goal was “find a better type of disposable surgical draping”.<sup>9</sup> But after many interviews and researches they understood that they didn't know enough about the surgeons and hospitals' needs. Therefore, they decided to travel to different hospitals in some countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Korea and India to understand how they attempted to contain infection in the operating room. Even if the 3M cut radically, the cost of surgical drapes many countries would not be able to afford them and the 3M's goal changed in “find a much cheaper and much more effective way to prevent infections from starting or spreading that does not depend on antibiotics – or even on surgical drapes”.<sup>10</sup>

The team members started to contact innovators and the final step of the project was inviting some lead users to a workshop. They divided the participants in small groups letting them exchange ideas for several hours and then changed the composition of the groups. At the end of the workshop they had six new product lines and a new general approach to infection control. The team chose the three strongest product-line concepts to present to senior management.

中村 (*Nakamura* 2012) analysed the case of Linux and how the lead user could participate in the system development process. Linux is an operating system based under the model of free open source system and it can be distributed and modified by everyone. It was created in January 1991 by Linus Tovalds, a university student of the Helsinki University. Linus at that time, was interested in the MINIX, but before using it, he studied his PC system, Intel386 and learned PC's language. He would create a better version of MINIX, removing the unsatisfactory things of MINIX and creating a system that was suitable to his needs. He re-wrote the Minix's source code and he improved the actual MINIX. After that, he distributed that source code to other users for free and he received some feedback.

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<sup>9</sup> Eric VON HIPPEL, Stefan THOMKE, Mary SONNACK, “Creating Breakthroughs at 3M”, *Harvard Business Review*, 1999, p.7

<sup>10</sup> Eric VON HIPPEL, Stefan THOMKE, Mary SONNACK, “Creating...”, *Harvard Business Review*, 1999, p.8

The hackers who had a high technological strength and special interest contributed to system development and in December 1991 the 0.11 version was released and an indication of community in the development process could be seen. From version 0.12 to 0.95 the number of users grew rapidly and some of users let Linus know about their contribution in kernel code by sending emails. Thanks to the internal structure being revealed, the users could find the problems by themselves and think of solutions to resolve those problems. It means that Linux is not a Linus' invention, but it is an innovation of all the users that contributed in its development process. (Nakamura 2012)

Linus as lead user improved the MINIX and used his needs to create a prototype of the operating system. His system development process didn't end here, but he shared his innovation with other users and a part of them cooperated to develop a better system creating samples. The other users who participated in the system development process created a community to share their problems and interests. Nakamura (2012) can say that Linux is a lead user's innovation, affirming that Linus developed a study concerning the distinction of the needs, made a prototype and continued it until the creation of a new operating system.

### **2.3. Product Development Process**

Until the 1970s the product development process was done by the manufacturers.

The traditional market research involved a group of consumers and tried to understand the needs of that group of consumers. Afterwards, they would find a user sample and do the market research on him/her. They assumed that the user sample's needs represented the needs of the usual consumer, therefore they developed a new product based on those needs. The key of the traditional market research was the medium user's need that represented the whole target market (小川 Ogawa 2002).

But in late years, there are also methods allowing lead users to participate in the product development system.

According to 小川 (Ogawa 2006) there are two kinds of method to participate in the product development system methods for users: 1) user-driven method (UD) and 2) the lead user method (LU).

UD method: the lead user makes an innovation with the support and the cooperation received from other users as a community. There are 3 steps in this method. 1) The consumers write on the company's online site "bulletin board" or platform the product that they wish to have; 2) The other users will evaluate the product's idea presented by expressing their opinions, votes and the advance orders; 3) The company will evaluate the possibility of the product development by examining the responses of the users to that product's idea. To make the product a minimum purchase volume is necessary, therefore the firm will publicize the product in the company's online site and evaluate how many users are willing to buy it. If they collect the minimum purchase volume they will make it. This kind of method needs the use of internet (Ogawa 2006).

LU method: In this method, lead users participate actively in the product development process and they aim to realize a high product development outcome. In the traditional product development process the firm does a market research on the normal users, which become a target, makes a valuation of the market dimension and the creation of a product idea. On the other hand, in the LU the maker finds out the user who has the lead user's characteristics and those who face with problems participate in the product development to consult for a solution (Ogawa 2006).

In the both UD-method and LU-method, the users participate actively in the product development process, but they present five differences as described in FIGURE 2-2.

**FIGURE 2-2 Characteristics of LU and UD**

	LU-method	UD-method
1) The starting point	Maker	User
2) Research target unit	Individual user	User community
3) Timing of demand explicit	After development	Before development
4) Use of internet	Not indispensable	Indispensable
5) Ease of specific user	Not ease	Ease

小川 (Ogawa 2006) p.5

First, in the LU method the starting point of the product development is the maker. It is the maker who encourages the user to participate. On the other hand, in the UD method, it is the user the starting point of the product development.

Second, in the LU method the examination is made on individual users. Whereas, in the UD method, it is addressed, to a group of users – that is a community. The first idea is to publish on the company site's wall and, even if there is only one consumer, the other users can write a propose revision. The important part of this method is not to vote the product, but user contribution to ideas and demand distribution.

Third, in the LU method, it is necessary to do a market research before producing a product. The demand concerning the innovation is revealed after development and the production of the product. On the other hand, in the UD method consumers are asked to vote the product before making it, if they want to buy it or not, so the demand is actualized before developing and making the product.

Fourth, in the LU method the user of the internet is not dispensable because not always internet is necessary user internet as a contact with the development entity. On the other hand, in the UD method the use of internet is necessary because it is used as an interactive media to know the users' votes regarding their willingness to buy a product, their preferences and the product purpose.

Finally, in the LU method, the consumers who become a provider about product ideas is easier rather than the specific lead user, because the users write their ideas a product on the company's site wall and other users give a comment or suggestion. In this way the product prototype is created. On the other hand, in the LU method the process is more difficult because the firms must understand the market trend, find the lead users that face it in that moment and start a collaboration with them.

山下 and 古川 (Yamashita and Furukawa 2002) analysed the case of Elephant Design, a Japanese company of home electric appliances, started up in the November 1997 by Kohei Nishiyama. At the core of the digital mock-up business that is based on 3D technology of computer graphics, Elephant Design offers a website 空想生活 *Kūsō Seikatsu* that develops products by involving the consumer on the net based CG – computer graphic – technology. The first participation in the product development process occurred in the July 1998 with the innovation of cell phone cover, but they couldn't reach the number of lots. Therefore, there was a proposal from *Daiei* – one of the largest supermarket chains in Japan - that wanted to support the sale of various kinds of product in a combination of media and convenience store and it had decided the publication of the project ラクダス *Rakudasu*, that was distributed for the convenience store Lawson. This project was an attempt to decide a method by collecting

the postcard survey of readers on paper. When “Pq-1” has projected they realized the product development by focusing on the most important readers, that is teenagers. But the cost of postage cost was high, therefore they thought to create a web site where readers could give their responses.

Nishiyama invented the DTO system – Design-to-Order system – a business model based on the product development involving the consumer participation in *Kūsō Seikatsu* that Elephant Design created as a platform. In the traditional product industry, manufacturers, while estimating the users’ needs, develop, produce and sell products. Before selling the products it needs an estimate of needs, number of products and for doing it, the business project is speculative and it takes on the risk that the manufactured product cannot be sold. The DTO system reduces those risks by allowing the manufactures to wait until the number of products amount to the break-even point. This transaction is done by using the CUUSOO system – it is a system created by the combination of Elephant Design’s computer graphic and the DTO. Based on the DTO’s concept the first field was the electric appliances. When a questionnaire was given to consumers, a big part of them asked for products they are willing to buy, but are in the store. (Yamashita and Fukukawa 2002)

The user who wants to offers his/her ideas can write it on the *ほしいものの提案室 Hoshii mono no teian shitsu* – the proposal room for the wished product. The idea will be published on the site for 30 days from the registration. The proposal that has been published it will be commented and voted from the other users. Based on the result it will verified if it is an “attention item”. During that time the user will exchange opinions about the products in the BBS platform. The “attention item” based on the designer registered on the Elephant Design will make the design of that idea. Then, these designs will be published on the site and the users will be decided by vote which one is better. The details about the design that was chosen to become the project will be decided between Elephant Design, designers and maker and the design, function, price and the lowest production lot will be determined. This information will be published on the site and the user will vote for the last time. However, in that time, there is no obligation of purchase by the user. By the number of votes the company will decide the minimum purchase volume. Elephant Design will create a list of users who want to buy that product and will send the product to the sale company that take a contract. The sales company that purchases the list will take a formal order with the user on that list

and do the order with the manufacturers. The products produced will be sent to the users of the sales companies (Ogawa 2002 who cited 小宮 *Komiya* 2001).

小川 (Ogawa 2002) analysed the case of the Tanomi.com. It started in the 1999 and, in the same way as Elephant Design, it offers a platform on the Engine's site for users to write their ideas. It covers a huge variety of products, from tableware to cars. Tanomi.com has some similarities with Elephant Design. Until now, the number of requests is 10000. It needs the registration on the site like Elephant Design. Until now, the users who registered on the site are 20000. The registered users who want to ask for a product have to write it on the platform *たのむ！ 作ってくれ！ Tanomu! Tsukutte kure!* ("Please! Make it!") and the other users who are interested in it, will write their opinions about that idea. They will be registered with the number of the votes about that idea. There was a request for a lighter based on a character of an anime. At the beginning, the members of the Tanomi.com thought that the user could have the capacity to post in details the product development about that request, but contrary to that thought, the number of users who wrote their ideas increased considerably. (Ogawa 2002).

Once in a week a business meeting will examine the idea that got the highest votes and studies the possibility to the develop them in a product. The main points are the possibility to borrow the copyright and the manufacture. It is because they are two obstacles. There is a problem concerning the possibility to being able to borrow the copyright for the user who proposed the idea and then if this first step is overcome, the second problem is the need of a cost's degree to produce that product. For example, the one of the products developed by using this strategy is "Suzuki Cappuccino", requested from a user who asked "I want a minicar of Suzuki's Cappuccino" on the site's platform. The other users who read that announcement wrote 200 comments and some of them were "Even if it is expensive I want it", "If it is realized I'll buy it", "I beg you please make it".<sup>11</sup> The staff saw a great interest in that idea and decided to make it. (Ogawa 2002).

Nevertheless, there were two kinds of problems. The first one was the copyright. Who is the owner of that copyright and can it be loaned or not? In the case of Suzuki Cappuccino minicar the permission to make it came from Suzuki. The second problem was the production. To cover the cost to produce the minicar, it needed a minimum number of users who wanted to buy it. In the case of Tanomi.com there is a limited build-to-order manufacturing number.

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<sup>11</sup> 「高くても欲しい」、「出れば買う」、「お願いだから作って」 *Takaku te mo hoshii, Dere ba kau, Onegai da kara tsukutte*, in OGAWA Susumu, "Enjin-tanomi.com (Tanomikomu)" *Ichi kyō bijinesu rebyū*, Vol.50, No.2, 2002, p.183.

To achieve it the key is a balance between sets price and necessary number of buyers. If the cost of the production is high, to realize the project it needs high number of users who want to buy the product and high cost setting. It means that it becomes difficult to secure a number of users that will buy the product to balance the high costs. Therefore, the idea cannot be developed and is given up. On the other hand, if the copyright and production's problems are overcome, the product idea will be published in the Shopping section called "Tanomi.com branch" and sample, sale price, number of orders needed to fit it will be published as well. When the minimum purchase volume is achieved, it will be made the order for the manufacturers will be made and the product can be sent to the users. Moreover, the first product is given for free to the user who invented it. (Ogawa 2002).

### **2.3.1 The relationship between firm and user**

What kind of relationship will be born from the interaction between users and makers? In this study it is assumed that a mutual trust relationship and a win-win relationship will be born.

#### **2.3.1.1 Mutual Trust Relationship**

After the user shares information and experiences with the company in the online community for some time it will begin a relationship of mutual trust.

According to Fuller's et al. (2006) about the Audi Infotainment case the 80% of the participants expressed their willingness to participate in the future product development initiatives and after an ongoing series of interaction, which this can birth a virtual relationship of mutual trust between the firm and the users.

Porter and Donthu (2008) refers to trust-based relationship, where the trust toward the firm increases the user's willingness to participate in the product development process, to share information, and loyalty. They affirm that for the firm it can be a good opportunity to achieve valuable outcomes by using the online community and cultivating trust-based relationship with consumers.

According to 木村 (*Kimura*)'s research (2006) in a second period, in which the fellow feeling becomes stronger and users begin to worry about each other even if they've never met before in their lives, it begins a mutual trust relationship, that shows in two ways: 1) the users become the company's bulwark, for example, when someone writes in the community that the prices are too high and he (she) doesn't want to buy CUOCA's product. Before the CUOCA's admin can reply, CUOCA's users take up the defence of CUOCA 2) the CUOCA's fans increase and that feeling leverage the development of CUOCA's original products. Therefore, CUOCA community becomes a place where by give to users more satisfaction.

### **2.3.1.2 Win-win relationship**

Between company and users will be born a win-win relationship and it can be a valuable source of innovation.

Wuggetzer et al. (2010) analysed the case of Airbus Cabin and in particular the department "Cabin Innovation & Design" and found out that this company uses different kind of channels to gain lots of ideas and information from outside the company's place and put them in the idea generation process. Wuggetzer et al. (2010) affirm that win-win situation is the best criterion to search potential partners. Among the various types of support in outside the company, there are also lead users – passengers. "Cabin Innovation & Design" collects approximately 500-600 ideas every year that pass through two stage-gate analysis and evaluation process. The 10 % of them become pass those stages and become potential ideas for the company. By using win-win relationship, the company can collect valuable knowledge, information, competence and technology from partners to combine with its resources.

The win-win relationship can be established also among the brand community members who create value.

Pongsakornrungrungsilp and Schroeder (2007) analysed the case of TIA – ThisIsAnfield fan site in which members are supporters of Liverpool FC, an online brand community formed in the 1892. It is the oldest and most successful one in the history of English football. They studied how the consumers can create a value through a win-win relationship between all the participants, by interacting on the online brand community in which all of them can

gain benefits and value. Members can participate as beneficiaries and as providers. Being a beneficiary means they share experiences, information and comments about the team formation, who might be the better player of the match, goalkeeper, defenders, midfielders and so on and the sense of community.

In short, as beneficiaries, TIA members enjoy experimentalism alongside their fellow members in order to satisfy their individual level of consumption and form a strong relationship with other members.<sup>12</sup>

Being a provider means they contribute information, experience, well-analysed comments and stories about Liverpool FC to the community. They demonstrated that it is possible to co-create value by using the win-win relationship where all parties can gain profit by helping each other (Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder 2007).

## **2.4. Brand Community**

Brand community is a place where firm and consumers can exchange information and interact with each other.

Until now, there have been many definitions of brand community, but the first who introduced this concept were Muniz and O'Guinn affirming, "A brand community is a specialized, non-geographically, bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand."<sup>13</sup> It combines the same group admirers who share the interest in a brand and feel a connection to it and the other members, even if they do not know each other and knowing their features.

Also von Hippel (2001) affirms that user communities clearly make innovations and the products they develop, compete with the products developed by manufacturers, having the capability to beat them in the marketplace.

Brand community has three important features. First one is the consciousness of kind: members have a strong connection between each other and toward to the brand. They feel that they "sort of know each other" at some level, even if they have never met, and feel part of a

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<sup>12</sup> PONGSAKORNRUNGSILP Siwarit, SCHROEDER Jonathan, "Understanding value co-creation in a co-consuming group", UK, the University of Exeter Business School, 2007, p.18.

<sup>13</sup> MUNIZ Albert M., O'GUINN Thomas C., "Brand community", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2001, p. 412.

large, unmet, but easily imagined community (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001). But at the same time they are convinced to be “different” in respect to the members of other brands.

The second one, is the shared ritual and tradition. Ritual and traditions in which using shared product experiences combine the user in a group and they maintain the meaning of the brand. For example, the importance of the history of the brand and the stories related to the brand.

The last one is the presence of a moral responsibility. Moral responsibility whereby members feel they have a duty towards the community and each member. “This sense of moral responsibility produces collective action and contributes to group cohesion”.<sup>14</sup>

Thanks to these three characteristics the brand community differs from other not-brand-related communities situated in the “commercial and mass-mediated ethos”, making them unique social entities (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001).

TIA – ThisIsAnfield fan site analysed by Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder (2007) exhibits these three characteristics mentioned by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001). The consciousness of kind is expressed as the participants not only share information about themselves, but also aspects of their personal lives, such as birthdays and holidays, even if they haven't seen each other in the real life. Furthermore, the red colour and Liver-bird crest are the symbols of Liverpool FC by which they express their sense of community.

Innovation communities can increase the effectiveness and the speed with which users and manufacturers can develop and diffuse innovations.

Innovations by users usually is not concentrated among few very innovative users, but they are shared among all users by using Internet-based innovation community. Direct, the informal user-to-user relationship is common, and it also common is the organized cooperation that provides a good way for user-interaction and the distribution of innovation. Innovation communities can increase the speed and the effectiveness with which users and also manufacturers can develop and test and diffuse their innovations. Free and open source software projects are a well-developed and very successful form of Internet-based innovation community (von Hippel 2005).

Jeppesen and Frederiksen (2006) analysed the community of Propellerhead, a music software company, by which they could understand that user innovation was highly evaluated

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<sup>14</sup> MUNIZ Albert M., O'GUINN Thomas C., “Brand community”...cit., p. 413.

by the firm. At the beginning the firm didn't have the financial resources to publicize their product toward traditional and costly distribution channels in music instrument stores. Therefore, it decided to use internet to distribute its products and in the 1999 lots of users joined the internet-based chat hub and they "hacked" the ReBirth software – company's product. Thus, the firm thought to encourage the users' innovative efforts and opened up part of the product code allowing users to modify it. The most typical user innovation is the mods. The users created approximately 100 mods and it means that they had a big part in the product creating process.

Ogawa (2002) analysed the case of Tanomi.com the company that offers a platform on its site where users can write their ideas about the products and then, after some steps the company can realize the product and sell it to the users. In this case the presence of a community site free became a good key to increase the product development process and the number of the orders, because in these communities the admirers of the same product gather together and exchange ideas with each others. Rather than many small community sites, it was better a unique big community site that increases the possibility of achieving a minimum purchase volume of the product. For example, in the case of the Suzuki Cappuccino minicar, the inventor created a fan community and it upsurge.

Brand community's members not only share the same passion toward the brand, but also they feel to be like a family and they help each other to solve problems.

For example, according to Muniz and Guinn (2001) in the Macintosh's brand community members solve problems and improve the computer's functions by sharing knowledge with each others. They usually have extensive product knowledge and engage in product-related discussions; they support each other in solving problems and generating new product ideas.

木村 ( Kimura 2006) affirms that in the COUCA online community the relationship between users became deeper and they were preoccupied about one of them who had disappeared.

The relationship between firm and user is not only one-way, but also the user helps the firm to solve problems about products.

The relationship between members and brand is not only one-way. Using online brand community, the company can interact with the members, asking them what they think about the brand or a specific product, building a better connection with the users and benefiting from the consumers' knowledge. They also can help companies to solve problems and create new product thanks to their experience and knowledge by writing their ideas on the company site's wall. If a firm gives to its consumers the possibility of creating a brand community and give them the freedom of modifying the products, they will do it (Schau, Muniz and Arnould 2009).

When a firm releases a new product, the users are the first to notice errors or bugs, they support each other in the development of new ideas, as well as comment the design created by the users (Jeppesen et al. 2006).

According to 木村 (Kimura 2006), CUOCA online brand community was created as a place where the consumers can explain and find a solution to their worries and problems about the product. But over the years this community wasn't only a place where users could satisfaction satisfaction to their needs, but for the company it was also a good way to know precious information given form users about products, recipes, how to cook, what it is better to buy and ideas about new products. The relationship between user-user and user-company became stronger, until they could trust each other even if they had never seen their faces and the users had complete trust in the brand. CUOCA company asked to its consumers to explain their ideas about the apron, what was it not good in their apron and what it would be better for the new apron, how much is better to sell it.

Among lead user there are users who reveal freely information about innovation by using communities.

Allen (1983) examined the characteristics, consequences and causes of the existence of the collective invention in the eighteenth-century iron industries. Allen was the first one who affirmed that the precondition of collective invention is the free exchange of information about new techniques and plant designs between firms. In that way it could be possible a technical advance.

Even if the firm finds the lead users, it doesn't mean that they can get a collaboration with him/her. But among lead users, there are some who share freely information with the

company and thanks to their innovative ideas and their cooperation with it, they can be a new way to create value. For example, Lego's company, established in the 1932 by Ole Kirk Christiansen, can get freely a lot of information by the consumers, amateurs who enjoys creating Lego blocks. These consumers have an abundant knowledge about Lego's products and work hard on the weekend or during the week after their job in product development studies. From the 1995 the number of scholars interested in those consumers who made innovation increased. James Jessiman in the 1995 invented the LDraw a program by which create designs of Lego. Thanks to LDraw now the consumers can see their designs in the list of Lego parts in the online site BrickLink. Furthermore, they can order the part of Lego they need for creating the model. The interesting thing is that the amateurs who join the Lego's communities are adults, fans of Lego. They joint the communities to find friends and share knowledge and the aim is not only to make a profit for themselves, but also because they like and enjoy making innovation and to have a personal satisfaction (小川 Ogawa 2013).

Frank and Shah (2003) analysed four communities of sport's fans where they found out that the community members develop sport equipment innovation. They do not innovate alone, in isolation, but they help each other giving advices and assistance. The members who help the communities' inventors don't do it to gain a profit, but the most important motivation that incite them to innovation-related assistance is the feeling it as a social norm. Franke and Shah found out three characteristics about community inventors. 1) They have the tendency to reveal freely the information about their innovation; 2) they don't innovate alone, but they can receive the support of the other members; 3) the members who assist their community innovators do it not for profit, but because they have fun and they feel it as a social norm.

Research revealed that users share information freely with other users and even to manufacturers. By using the open-source software communities, they post the information, code and development on the project Web site that everyone can download for free. They reveal innovations because the benefits are higher than the cost to share them, or because they cannot hide the innovation. (von Hippel 2001).

## 2.5. Value Co-Creation

The role of consumers has changed in these last years and it passed from isolated to connected, from unaware to informed and from passive to active.

Phahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) introduced the concept of value co-creation, saying that now the business competition is not like the 1960s and 1970s years. Now everyone can be part of the action. This shift has already started in the business-to-business relationship, but researchers and scholars have no take into account the role of consumers. Thanks to Internet consumers get an active role in the business market and change the dynamics of the marketplace. “The market has become a forum in which consumers play an active role in creating and competing for value.”<sup>15</sup> The dialogue, which until now was controlled by corporations, now is not controlled by them any-more, because consumers can start a dialogue with manufactures and providers, thus becoming a new source for creating value. The rules of competence are changed and the “competence now is a function of the collective knowledge available to the whole system – an enhanced network of traditional suppliers, manufactures, partners, inventors, *and* customers”.<sup>16</sup>

Now the consumers have many kinds of information, knowledge and they can make more decisions. Humans have the desire to share their interests, what they like, and information about a brand and thanks to the explosion of the Internet this tendency is increased as well as the communication among consumers in the internet communities. In these communities, the consumers share ideas and experience and it has a strong power because they are independent from firms. “Consumers now seek to exercise their influence in every part of the business system. Armed with tools and dissatisfied with available choices, consumers want to interact with firms and thereby co-create value.”<sup>17</sup> (Phahalad and Ramaswamy 2004 p.5).

O’Hern & Rindfleisch (2009) analysed the origins of the paradigm shift from firm-based activity to costumers as active co-creators and their participation in the new product development. “In this newly emerging co-creation paradigm, customers are central and vital participants in the NPD process, and in some cases, are capable of creating new products with little help from firms.” (O’Hern & Rindfleisch 2009 p.2). Customer co-creation “is a

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<sup>15</sup> PRAHALAD Coimbatore Krishnarao, RAMASWAMY Venkatram, “*The future of Competition: Co-Creating Unique Value With Customers*”, 2004, p. 80.

<sup>16</sup> PRAHALAD Coimbatore Krishnarao, RAMASWAMY Venkatram, “*The future of Competition...*” p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> PRAHALAD Coimbatore Krishnarao, RAMASWAMY Venkatram, “*The future of Competition...*” p. 5.

collaborative NPD activity in which customers actively contribute and/or select the content of a new product offering.” (O’Hern & Rindfleisch 2009 p.4).

Co-creation experience is the basis of value creation.

According to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), an interaction, that gives to a customer the possibility to co-create a unique experience with the company is the key to create a value and new sources of competitive advantage. In the last twenty years the managers gave some roles that belonged to firms to consumers. This is done “by communities of connected, informed, empowered, and active consumers.” (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004 p.8). Until some years ago consumers didn’t know anything about products, treatments etc. and believed in the makers. Now the consumers search on internet products characteristics, compare them with others and interact with multiple communities in the network, becoming competitive. Therefore, they can discuss about those things with the markers. For the consumers it is the experience of co-creation with the markers. (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004).

By collaborating with consumers, companies can create novel and original products.

Von Hippel (2005) affirms that the user can create different and more novel products than manufacturers because they know better their needs, wants and because sometimes it is difficult to transfer that informations the maker, thus they produce it by themselves.

O’Hern & Rindfleisch (2009) affirm that the customer co-creation is a successful opportunity to make researchers and practitioners in a new alternative paradigm to the traditional development process viewed until now.

小川 (Ogawa) affirms that “From the point of view of the product created by users are novelty and originally many studies results showed us that the users' products surpass the makers' products”.<sup>18</sup>

Ogawa (2006) analysed the case of Nakamura, and found out that the users co-creation with makers can be a way to create original and novel products.

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<sup>18</sup> OGAWA Susumu, “*Yūzā inobēshon: shōhi sha kara hajimaru mono zukuri no mirai*”(User innovation: the future of the manufacturing initiates by consumers), Tōyōkeizaishinpōsha, 2013, p. 83.

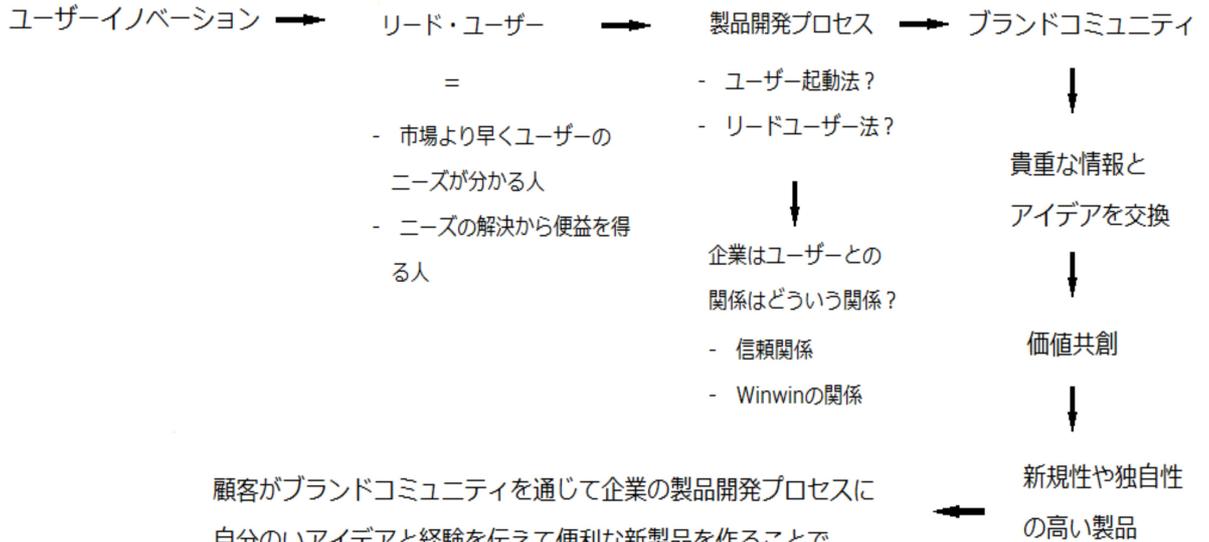
## **2.7. Hypothesis**

In the user innovation, the lead user has an important part in helping the firm to create new products and service by freely revealing solutions to problems that no one thought of, experiences and information. Users can be people who support the firm, who have value and reveal freely that information that is a new resource of profit. They can support the firm in many parts of the product development process by engaging a mutual trust relationship, where they trust each others. Moreover, they can engage a win-win relationship with the firms, where they combine their strength the firm can understand more about users' needs and wants, and on the other hand, users can have the product or service who he/she expected to have. The way through which they communicate is the online brand community, where there is an exchange of precious information for both, firms and users. After that it will start the value co-creation that creates original and novel products. In other words, the users in online brand communities participate in the firm product-developing process, giving their ideas and experiences and they can create new and innovative products. This relationship is advantageous to both firms, that can increase their sales and profits without wasting cost and resources, and users that can have higher satisfaction by using the products they really want.

FIGURE 2-3 Hypothesis Model

仮説

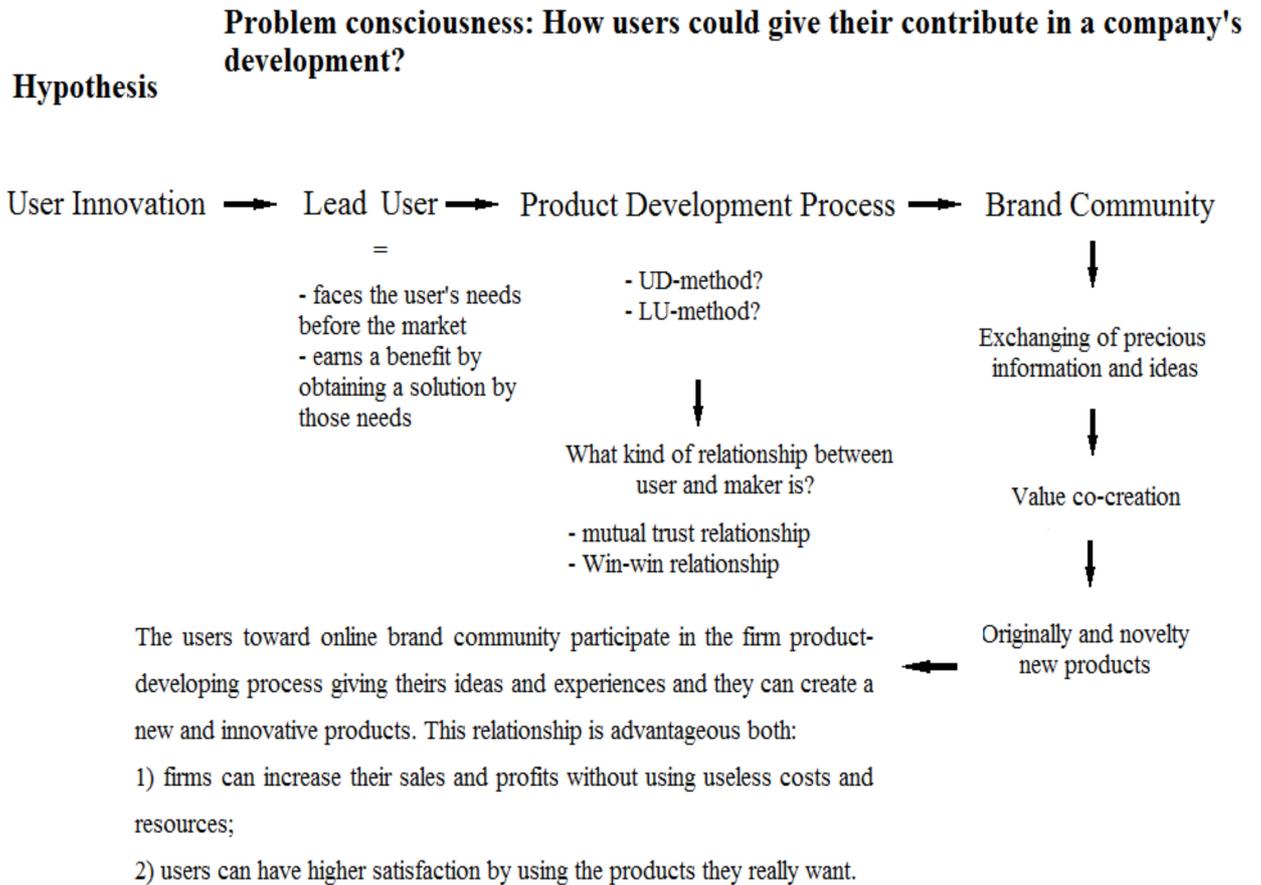
問題意識：顧客はどのようにして企業の発展に貢献できるであろうか。



顧客がブランドコミュニティを通じて企業の製品開発プロセスに自分のアイデアと経験を伝えて便利な新製品を作ることで、

- 1) 企業は無駄な経済的費用と資源を使うことなく売上と便益を上げることができ、
- 2) 顧客も満足を得ることができる。

**FIGURE 2-4 Hypothesis Model (English version)**



## CHAPTER 3 Methodology

The goal of this research is to understand if and how the fans of *Mujirushi Ryōhin* take part in the product development process by revealing their ideas and information to the company; it is interesting to know what kind of ideas they proposed, if Muji accepted them and if the company made a product by using them; if the relationship between Muji and users is changed, making a better co-creation between and if their dialogue and ideas exchange took place in some brand communities.

To confirm the above hypothesis two kinds of researches have been used. The first one is an online survey, whereas the second one is a research based on the some surveys submitted by *Mujirushi Ryōhin* to its consumers by using the online brand community *モノづくりコミュニティ Mujirushi komyuniti* (Monozukuri community) in Muji.net site opened in the 2007 until 2010.

### 3.1. RESEARCH 1: Survey's outline

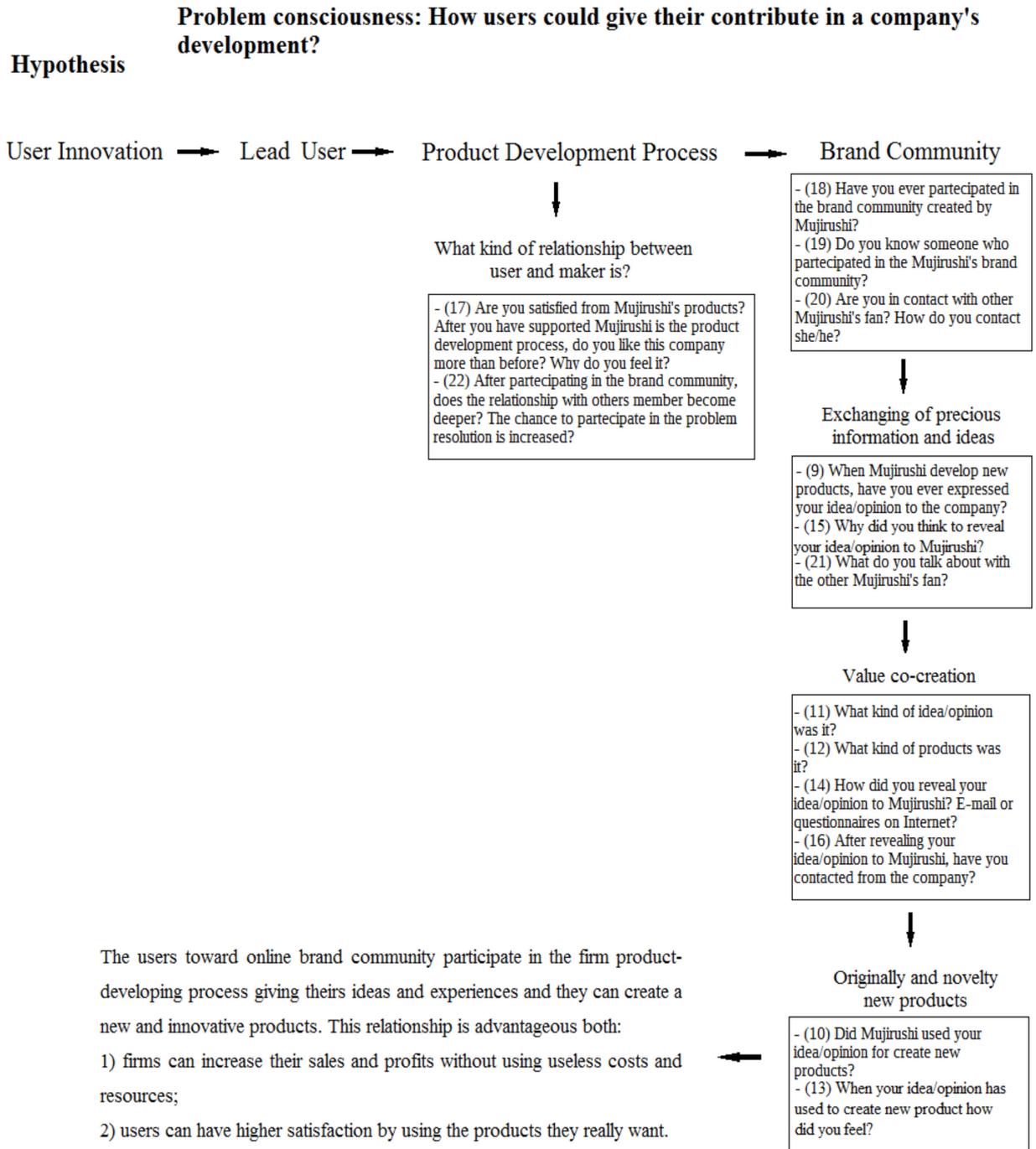
*Subject.* The online survey has been sent to Japanese nationals who live in Japan. The targets are both male and female, with a wide age range, younger than 20 years old to older than 60 years old.

*Procedure.* The survey has been described as a research concerning why users prefer Muji than any other firm, if they have ever proposed their ideas to Muji and if Muji has accepted them, involving the user in the product development process creating novel and original products. After presenting the survey, one case (Case A) has been analysed.

*Questionnaire setting.* The hypothesis has been tested by using a Web based questionnaire from April 2014 to July 2014. The questionnaire is composed of 23 questions, and the web site used to create the survey is LimeSurvey. The first seven questions are about gender, ages and when users started to use Mujirushi's products. Then the questions are more specific about the relationship between user and firm, if and how users have revealed their ideas to the company and if the company has used those ideas to create new products. In the

last part of the questionnaire, the questions are about if the users have participated in the Mujirushi's brand community and if they have created a deep relationship between each other and with the company.

**FIGURE 3.1.1 Hypothesis Model and Question**



### 3.2. RESEARCH 2: Case Analysis' Outline

*Subject.* The study concern the analysis of the *Mujirushi Ryōhin's* brand community called *Monozukuri komyuniti* in which the company asks to users if they are satisfied by Muji's products or if they needs some improvement. Muji also asks users for some ideas or comments about how improvement could be done by using their experiences; in most of the cases after submitting the survey, the firm chooses various users and directly to discuss about some samples, from the results of the survey and analysing possible improvements.

*Procedure.* The procedure of this study is the analysis of 5 cases searching dates that could fit in every point of the literature review and through those dates, it could confirm the above hypotheses. The five cases regarding different products:

Cave V: two surveys about underwear, undershirt against the cold and man's boxers;

Case W: survey about carrier bag;

Case X: survey about apron;

Case Y: survey about Valentine's Day Kit;

Case Z: survey about children's baggage.

By analysing these five cases, this study tries to understand if users are “lead user”; if between users and maker is born a mutual trust relationship and a win-win relationship; if users participate in the brand community by giving free information, ideas, comments to improve the products, what kind of brand community it is, and if at the end the firm could develop novel and original products by using the information received by users.

## CHAPTER 4: Mujirushi Ryōhin

### 4.1. Firm's profile



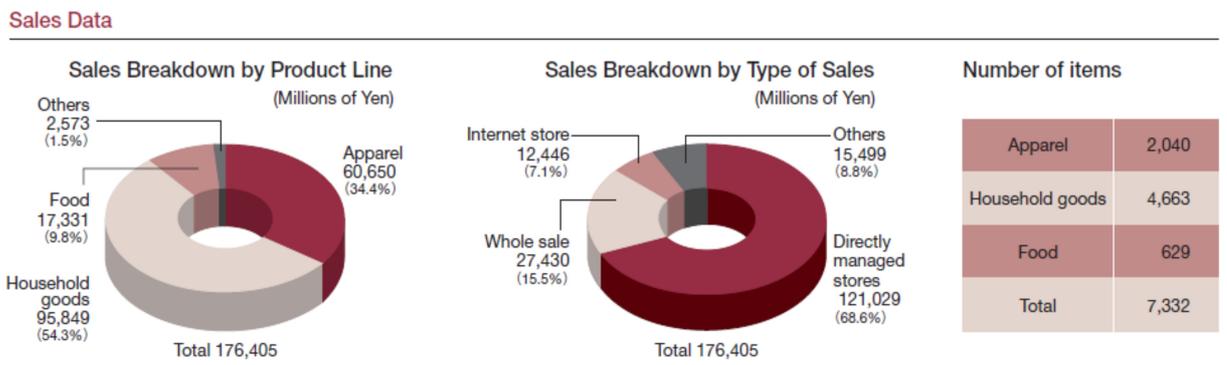
*Mujirushi Ryōhin* established was established in 1980 with only 40 articles, 9 household products and 31 foods as a private brand of the supermarket chain The Seiyu, whereas today it has become a big enterprise with 7,000 products, 262 MUJI stores and 117 licensed stores in Japan with 379 stores in total and 206 stores in 21 countries/regions in the world.

The primary Muji's business involves outlets, product planning, development, manufacture, wholesale, and sales. In the 1983 the first direct store was established in Aoyama. *Ryohin Keikaku Co., Ltd.* became the manufacturer of Muji and, after becoming independent in 1989 by separating from The Seiyu Ltd., developed a wide diversity of daily necessities from clothing, household goods to foods and it dealt with planing, design concept, distribution and sale. After two years Nakamura opened the first international store in London, UK. The company aimed to develop new, simple products at a reasonable prices, so the consumers could obtain the best use.

The concept of Muji is “Lower price for a reason”. The company tried to sell its products at a lower price but still offering a high quality. “Through the careful selection of materials, streamlining manufacturing processes, and simplifying our packaging, we have continually introduced high quality Muji brand products into the market, at lower than usual prices [...] Focusing on the true quality, Muji’s manufacturing processes eliminate waste and reduce costs”<sup>19</sup>.

Thirty years after the launch, Muji develops products by the slogan “Naruhodo (Ideed) MUJI” developing products that can be used in the everyday lifestyle. Muji focuses its products on tasty and healthy foods, comfortable clothing, household goods easy to use and its searches raw material in the world, to utilize the most suitable of high quality eliminating waste and reducing costs in the manufacturing processes. About reducing waste the Muji's products that are exposed in the store in simple packaging with only a price tag and product-related information.

**FIGURE 4-1 Muji's Sales Breakdown 2014**



(Ryohin Keikaku Co., Ltd. 2014)

As it is shown in the FIGURE 4-1 the most sold products are the household goods and successively apparel, then food. The most part of the products are sold in the directly managed stores located in the country. Following wholesale, others and Internet store.

In the 2000 was established the Muji.net Co., Ltd the Muji online community. Until now some researchers have analysed the case of Muji, finding out that Muji collaborates with its consumers to develop new products. Ogawa (2006) studied the case of Muji through the

<sup>19</sup> “What’s Muji?” <http://www.muji.de/en/store/contents/ryohin/>

UD-method from the 90's when the Internet became popular and the contact with the users and the co-creation increased. The first attempt was in the 90's through the project called みんなの声からモノづくり家具・家電 *Minna no koe kara mono zukuri kagu.- kaden* (From the voice of everyone manufacture household furniture and household electrical appliances). This project starts from the consumers' ideas to develop products, and every month one theme was chosen with a deadline of one year.

The goal of this project was to develop novel products of high quality with methods not used until that moment. Muji didn't want only to use the internet to find new trade but also to create new products, with the user as a tool to develop products and business never been seen in the company before. This project's aim to develop new features and refine those already known in the company. Until now Muji had developed the label, so the consumers could recognize the features of a product and buy it without having to a seller in the shop. But this project aimed to create a new feature. By using internet Muji could explain the new feature and how to use it to consumers. The project *Minna no koe kara mono zukuri kagu - kaden* started in the September 2002 and ended in the December 2003. To join the project users had to sign up on the site and then could write on the platform. After users wrote in the platform, the firm developed a pattern theme and published it. Users collaborated by suggesting their ideas about products, Muji.net reorganized and collected them and users cast a ballot for the product they were interested in. For the idea that obtained the higher votes Muji.net gave some designs and users cast a ballot for their favourite one.

The pattern that obtained the higher vote would be examined about its development, details, the maker who could create it, the minimum develops volume and the selling price. After that process Muji.net would take the orders, and if the number of those orders reached the minimum develop volume, it would start the development of the product. But if the number of the orders couldn't reach the minimum develop volume in 3 months, the product wouldn't be developed. After that the users who ordered the product could buy it in the store and then Muji.net could improve the product's features from the users' comments after buying it.

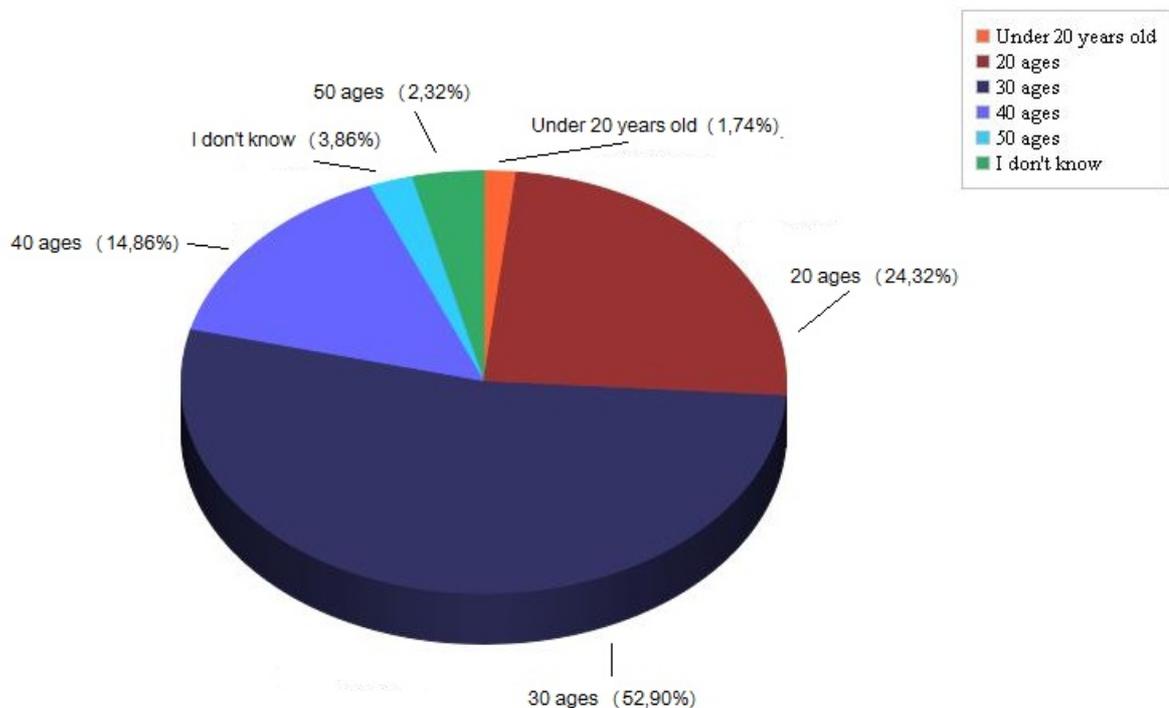
## CHAPTER 5 Data analysis

Two types of researches have been done. One through a survey to Japanese users who live in Japan. The survey has been submitted to some Muji's fans' blog. The second one is an analysis of five studies are done by Muji where it can be seen the collaboration among users and companies.

### 5.1. Research 1: Survey's Result

The questionnaire published on one of Muji's blogs and on Facebook got in total 516 responses. The responder's age who gained the highest percentage was 30 years old, with the 52,91%. Than 20 years old with 24,22% and 40 years old with 14,92%. Finally, the lower percentage was gained by 50 years old with 2,33%, younger than 20 years old with 1,74%. There were responders who didn't want to reveal their age 3,68%, or who didn't respond to this question 0,19%.

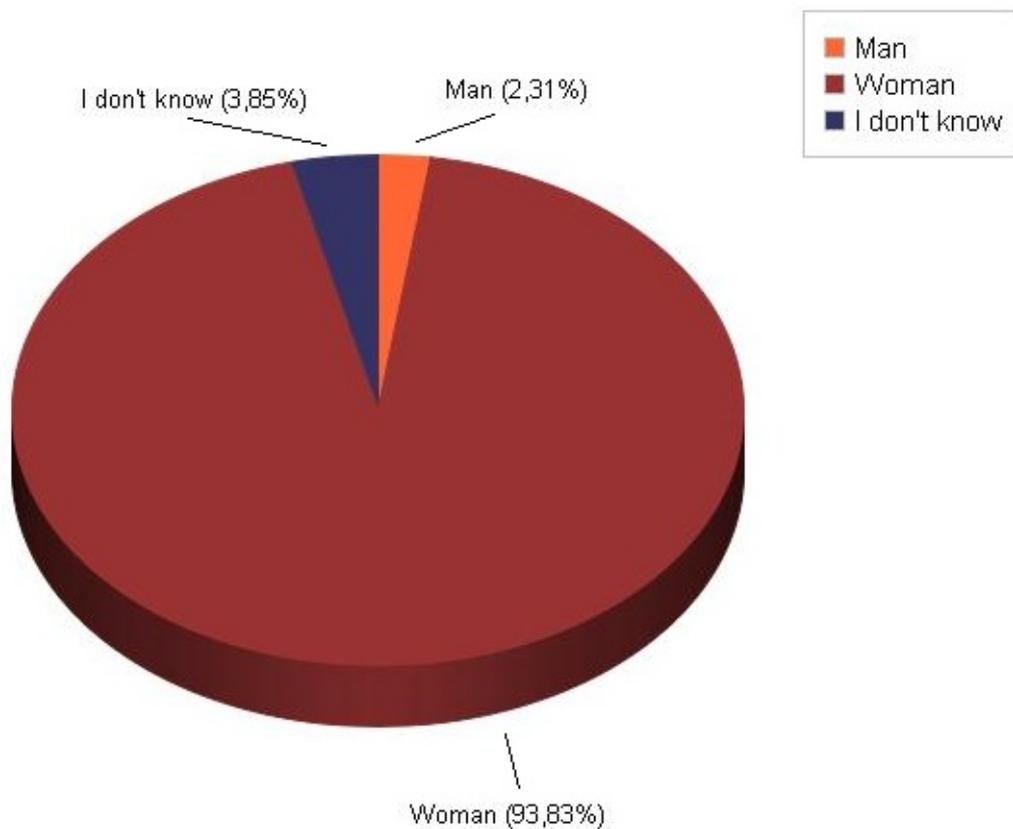
**FIGURE 5.1.1 – Percentage of answers from question 1**



Created by the author through the online survey

A Muji's fan who published the questionnaire on her blog, after one day could get approximately 300 responses. The higher responder's gender was women 93,99% with 485 responses, and only men 2,33% with 12 responses. Finally, there was 3,68% who didn't want to reveal their gender with 19 responses.

**FIGURE 5.1.2 – Percentage of answers from question 2**



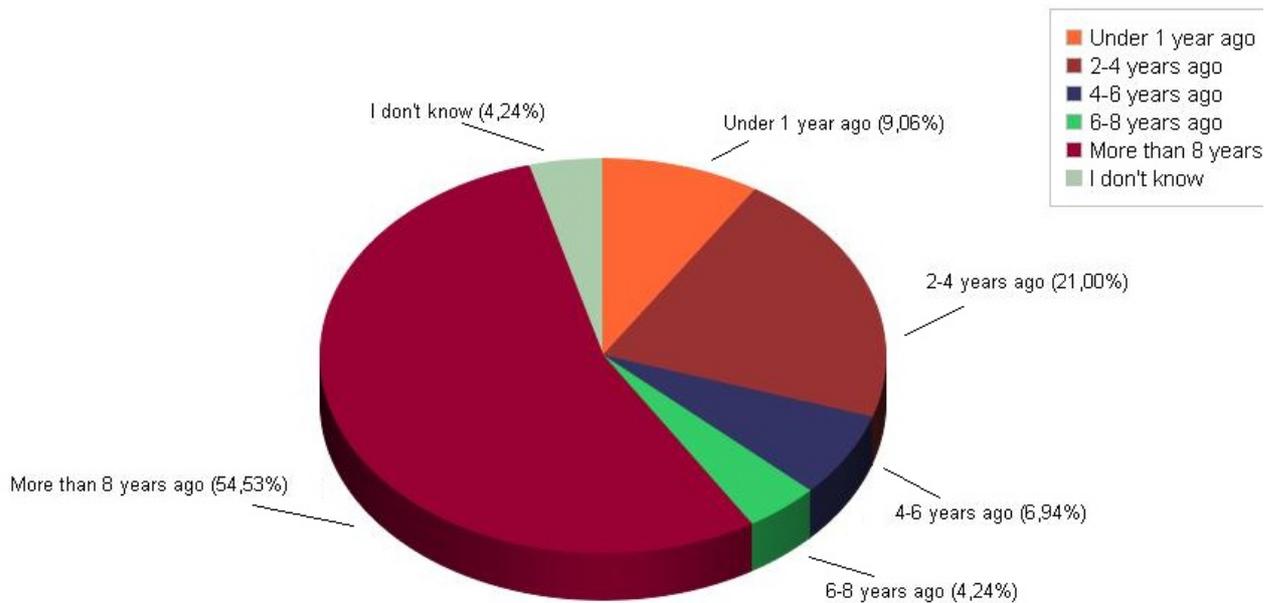
Created by the author through the online survey

This huge difference between women and men can be considered from the point of view that 300 responses were gained from a woman's blog. Responses about marital status were 72,48% married and the 23,64% were not married yet, the job that obtained higher percentage was housewife with 39,15% and then employees with 34,30%. About children the 3,79% didn't have one, 28,68% had two children and 23,84% had only one child. Thus, most of the responders were women, married and are housewives, they were 30 years old and didn't have children. It is clear that they had more time to surf on Internet than men, who worked every day. The sectors they were interested in were household goods, clothing and

food. The cities with the highest percentage of Muji's users were Tokyo with 15% and Kanagawa with 10% and Chiba with 8%.

After this these general questions, it started those regarding the relationship with Muji. When did they become a fan of Muji and why do they like it? The 54,65% responded that became Muji's fans more than 8 years ago. It is a very long relationship. A trustful relationship between company and consumers can be seen. Then there is 21,12% who responded 2-4 years ago. Finally, 9,11% one year ago, 6,98% 4-6 years ago, 4,07% 6-8 years ago and 4,07% who didn't want to reveal it.

**FIGURE 5.1.3 – Percentage of answers from question 7**



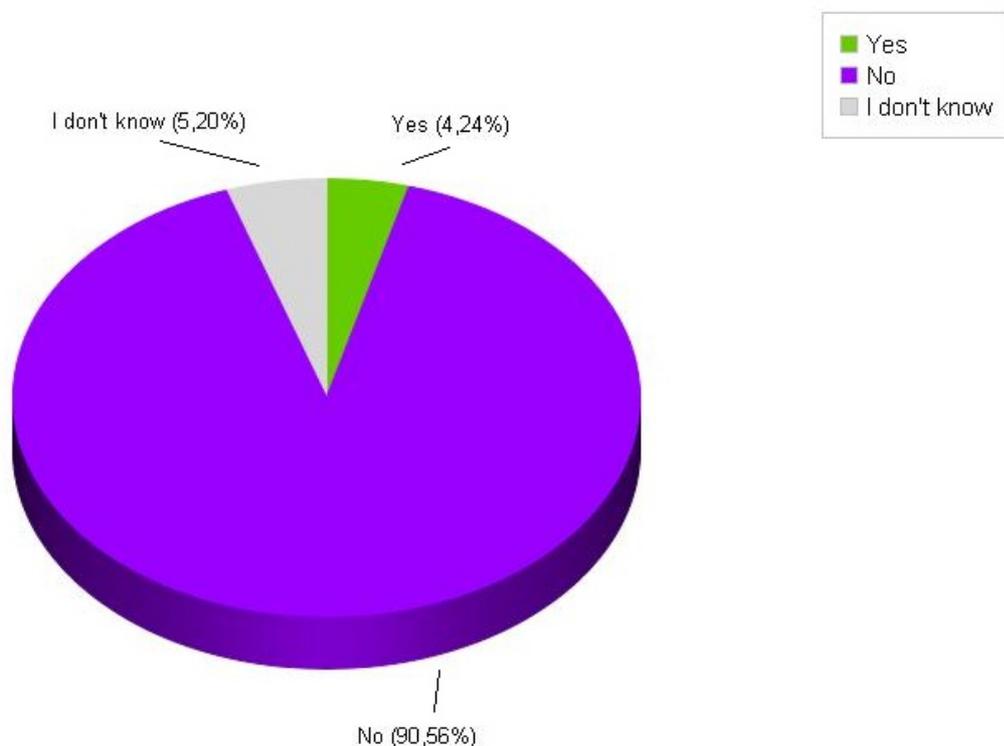
Created by the author through the online survey

All 516 responders commented in the question about why they chose Muji over any other company. Except some responders, all of them explained that Muji has a simple design that can be combined easily with other products and are in harmony without creating confusion of colour or design, for example about the household goods. Due to their simplicity, the products are easy to use for everyone, and even the main feature of Muji's products is the simplicity they have and their elegance. Muji's products don't have only a

simple design, but their price is low or adequate, the quality and effectiveness is high, thus the balance between price and quality is good. Furthermore, thanks to their simplicity the consumers who buy Muji's products are not bored and can use them for a long time, and additional purchase can be done both because the products are simple, so it is easy to add others, and because Muji sells for a long time the same product, thus consumers could buy the same products whenever they want.

One of the most important questions was about if the responders have ever sent their idea or opinions to Muji. Only 22 responders replied “yes” with 4,26% and 468 replied “no” with 90,7%. The 5,04% didn't want to reveal it. Before publishing the questionnaire on Facebook, the 5% of responders replied “yes”, then the percentage decreased. Thus, who really had a deep interest in Muji, who for example, had a blog about it, was led to cooperate with Muji and co-create new products.

**FIGURE 5.1.4 – Percentage of answers from question 9**



Created by the author through online survey

Among these 22 responders, 17 revealed why they wanted to share their ideas to Muji, and the main reason was because they needed a product that it was not yet in the market. If that product was developed, they would buy it. Most of the 17 responders didn't participate in Muji's brand community like Facebook or Muji fans, but a small part did. In the same way, most of these responders didn't know anybody who participated in brand community, only a small part knows. All the responders were women around 30 years old and 13 of them became a fan of Muji more than 8 years ago, and only 4 between 2~8 years ago.

### 5.1.1. Case of Informant A

Only one of those 22 responders who explained their idea to Muji, saw the product that she had requested be made. She was a woman, married, a housewife with 2 children and she was 40 years old. She lived in Chiba and she became a Muji's fan more than 8 years ago.

*“Lead users are users whose present strong needs will become general in a marketplace months or years in the future. Since lead users are familiar with conditions which lie in the future for most others, they can serve as a need-forecasting laboratory for marketing research. Moreover, since lead users often attempt to fill the need their experience, they can provide new product concept and design data as well” (von Hippel 1986 p. 791).<sup>20</sup>*

There aren't dates that can affirm Case A is a lead users because she didn't create a product by herself. But she notices before any other a problem and she revealed her information to Muji because she wanted an improvement. She desired a new hook that supports the usual Ransel, the backpack usually used by Japanese elementary school children. There are no dates about how she contacted Muji. But she noticed that the hook wasn't good and she asked to Muji to improve it. 子供の学習机についているフックの形状の提案。一般的なランドセルをかけられるように改良を希望 *Kodomo no gakushū tsukue ni tsui te iru fukku no keijō no teian. Ippan teki na randoseru o kakerareru yō ni kairyō o kibō* (Proposal of a hook that is attached to the study desk for children. I desired an improvement applied to the general school bag). She thought that other people could have the same problem.

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<sup>20</sup> Eric VON HIPPEL, “Lead User: A Source of Novel Product Concepts”, Management Science, 1986, p. 791.

## 2) Product Develop Process

*Until the 1970 the product development process it has done by the manufacturers. (小川 2002). But in these last years there are also methods towards them lead users can participate in the product development system toward two kinds of methods: 1) user-driven method (UD) and 2) the lead user method (LU). 小川(2006)*

**FIGURE 2-2 Characteristics of LU and UD**

	LU-method	UD-method
1) The starting point	Maker	User
2) Research target unit	Individual user	User community
3) Timing of demand explicit	After development	Before development
4) Use of internet	Not indispensable	Indispensable
5) Ease of specific user	Not ease	Ease

小川( Ogawa 2006) p.5

This study cannot affirm these two methods. Case A contacted Muji for asking some improvements, Muji accepted the request and developed the product. The starting point is the User, she didn't join any brand community, the timing of demand is before development, there are no dates about the use or not of the Internet, the this kind of development is not difficult. The method is different from those created by Ogawa (2006).

*After some time that user share information and experiences to company toward the online community it will begin a relationship of mutual trust. According to Fuller's et. al. (2006) about the Audi Infotainment case the 80% of the participants expressed their willingness to participate in the future product development initiatives and an ongoing series of interaction and this can birth a virtual relationship of mutual trust between the firm and the users.*

Since Case A doesn't join any online community this study cannot affirm the Fuller's et al.'s affirmation.

Nevertheless, Case A affirmed that she feels trust toward Muji. 満足していないものも、ユーザーの声が届くシステムができていますので、いずれ改良されるという信頼があるから *Manzoku shite inai mono mo, yūzā no koe ga todoku shisutemu ga dekite irunode, izure kairyō sa reru to iu shinrai ga arukara* (Even if there aren't satisfactory products, since it was developed a system through that receive the users' voices, I trust in any improvement). 品質の良さも信頼して *Hinshitsu no yo-sa mo shinrai shite iru* (I also believe in the product's good quality). Muji evaluated Case A's ideas good and developed the new product. It means that also Muji trusts in the user's information and there is mutual trust.

*Between company and user will be born a win-win relationship and it can be a valuable source of innovation. By using win-win relationship the company can collect valuable knowledge, information, competence and technology from partners to combine with its resources. (Wuggetzer 2010).*

The win-win relationship could be seen in the exchange of information between user and firm. Muji could collect valuable knowledge, information and could developed new product. On the other hand, Case A could have the product she desired. I can confirm the Wuggetzer (2010) affirmation.

### **3) Brand Community**

*Brand community is a place where firm and consumers can exchange information and interact each other. "A brand community is a specialized, non-geographically, bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand"<sup>21</sup> (Muzin and O'Guinn 2001 p.412).*

Case A didn't joint any brand community.

*Innovation communities can increase the effectiveness and the speed with users and manufactures can develop and diffuse new innovations (von Hippel 2005).*

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<sup>21</sup> MUNIZ Albert M., O'GUINN Thomas C., "Brand community...", 2001, p. 412.

Since Case A didn't join any Muji's community this study cannot confirm if the effectiveness and the speed increase thanks to the communities.

*Brand community's members not only share the same passion toward the brand, but also they feel to be like a family and they help each other to solve problems. (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001)*

Case A didn't joint any brand community.

*The relationship between firm and user is not only one-way, but also user help firm to solve problems about products. Using online brand community, companies can interact with the member, asking them what they think about brand or a specific product relating a better connection with the users and benefit from the consumers' knowledge. They also can help companies to solve problems and create new product thanks to their experience and knowledge by writing their ideas in the company site's wall. If a firm gives to its consumers the possibility of creating brand community and give them the freedom of modifying the products, they will do it (Schau, Muniz and Arnould 2009).*

Case A didn't joint any brand community.

*Between lead user there are users who reveal freely information about innovation by using communities. Allen (1983) was the first one who affirmed that the precondition of collective invention is the free exchange of information about new techniques and plant designs between firms. In that way it could be possible a technical advance. But between lead user there are some who share freely information to the company and thanks to their innovative ideas and their cooperation with a company they can be a new way to create value (Ogawa 2013).*

Case A didn't joint any brand community.

#### **4) Value co-creation**

*By collaborating with users, company can create novelty and original products. Ogawa (2006) analysed the case of Muji, and found out that the users co-creation with makers can be a way to create original and novelty products.*

By collaborating with Case A Muji was able to develop a new and original product. Until that time Muji didn't notice that the hook for support schoolchildren' bag was a problem for some users. This affirmation could be affirmed.

## 5.2. Research 2: Case Study's Results

On the Muji's site, there is the *Monozukuri komyuniti*, a Muji's community in which there are some surveys that Muji submitted to its consumers in order to interact with them to create and improve products.

### 5.2.1 Case V: a survey about underwear, undershirt against cold and man's boxers. 「みんなのインナー」 *Minna no innā* (Everyone's underwear)

This survey concerns the development of undershirt to protect by cold and man's underpants. *Mujirushi Ryōhin* asked to users who hold several undershirts, ideas and desires about the warmth and the temperature regulation's function applied to those products. Moreover, Muji asked to men ideas and desires about the underpants that they usually use. After the development of some samples, Muji chose some users and arranged a meeting in which they could practically touch the samples and give some comments and ideas in order to improve them.

#### 1) Lead User

*“Lead users are users whose present strong needs will become general in a marketplace months or years in the future. Since lead users are familiar with conditions which lie in the future for most others, they can serve as a need-forecasting laboratory for marketing research. Moreover, since lead users often attempt to fill the need their experience, they can provide new product concept and design data as well” (von Hippel 1986 p. 791).<sup>22</sup>*

By using an online survey submitted by Muji, users could appear and express their experiences and new ideas to improve both the products, undershirt to protect by cold and man's underpants, but this study cannot affirm completely that those users are “lead users”. This study can confirm it only partially because the users didn't face problems and need before the company have asked them to do it. In this case Muji asked to its consumers if they noted something wrong with the products and what would be better to change. Muji found those users that have the lead user's characteristics. This kind of users can help Muji to create new products because they explain their ideas, comments, experiences to the firm but they are

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<sup>22</sup> Eric VON HIPPEL, “Lead User: A Source of Novel Product Concepts”, *Management Science*, 1986, p. 791.

not the innovator. They just help firms to develop new and useful products by explaining information based on their experiences.

For example, in the first survey about underskirt users said:

1. Maybe because the hygroscopic property is not good, or because the water runs a temperature, when I sweat it's become hot and I don't feel good.<sup>23</sup>
2. When I do shopping in an indoor, due to I am wearing the underskirt I feel hot.<sup>24</sup>

In the second one some comments are:

1. While I am walking the hem would come up to the upper and this makes me trouble.<sup>25</sup>
2. On the many patches is sewing in three different shapes, but there are few underpants that hold properly while I am wearing them.<sup>26</sup>

## 2) Product Develop Process

*Until the 1970 the product development process it has done by the manufacturers. (小川 2002). But in these last years there are also methods towards them lead users can participate in the product development system toward two kinds of methods: 1) user-driven method (UD) and 2) the lead user method (LU). 小川(2006)*

Users by using brand community can participate in the product development process. In the first survey, underskirt to protect by cold, 18.439 users responded to survey, and in the second survey, men's underpants 6.582. This study can affirm that users express their ideas,

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<sup>23</sup> 汗をかいた時に、吸湿性が悪いのか、水分で発熱するからか、汗をかくとどんどん暑くなって、気持ちが悪い *Ase o kai ta toki ni, kyūshitsu sei ga warui no ka, suibun de hatsunetsu suru kara ka, ase o kaku to dondon atsuku natte, kimochi ga waru*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」Minna no innā 2009, in Mokokuzuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>24</sup> 屋内での買い物中など、着ているせいか暑過ぎることがある *Okunai de no kaimono chū nado, ki te iru sei ka atsu sugiru koto ga aru*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」Minna no innā 2009, in Mokokuzuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>25</sup> 歩いているうちに裾部分が上方に上がってきってしまうことがあって困る *Arui te iru uchi ni suso bubun ga kamigata ni agatte ki te shimau koto ga atte komaru*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」Minna no innā 2009, in Mokokuzuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>26</sup> センターを立体縫製しているのは多いが、着用中ずっとホールドしてくれるしっかりしたものが少ない *Sentā wo rittai hōsei shite iru no wa ōiga, chakuyō-chū zutto hōrudo shite kureru shikkari shita mono ga sukunai*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」Minna no innā 2009, in Mokokuzuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

comments, experiences as Ogawa (2006) affirmed, but the method used by Muji doesn't fit with those explained by Ogawa (2006).

The nature of the community is different among those analysed until now. Unlike Ogawa (2006) and others researches illustrated, *Monozukuri komyuniti* is only a community where Muji asks to its consumers if they are satisfied about some products or if there are some lacks, not good points about those products through some surveys.

**FIGURE 2-2 Characteristics of LU and UD**

	LU-method	UD-method
1) The starting point	Maker	User
2) Research target unit	Individual user	User community
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小川( Ogawa 2006) p.5

In this case, the start point is the maker (i.e. Muji) that tried to find users with lead user's characteristics to involve them in the product development process. The research target is users registered on the Muji Community site, Muji.net. The timing of demand is before development, because Muji want to know what is wrong in their products in order to improve them. The use of internet is indispensable because only who is registered on the Muji.net could join in the product development process. The lack's recognition is not difficult but everyone could do it.

*After some time that user share information and experiences to company toward the online community it will begin a relationship of mutual trust. According to Fuller's et. al. (2006) about the Audi Infotainment case the 80% of the participants expressed their willingness to participate in the future product development initiatives and an ongoing series of interaction and this can birth a virtual relationship of mutual trust between the firm and the users.*

There aren't dates that refer to the birth of a mutual trust relationship, but 18.439 and 6.582 users responded to the two surveys by explaining their ideas. Moreover, five users,

among those who responded to the surveys have been chosen and they participated in the meeting arranged by Muji in order to try directly the prototype created and giving comments, suggestions, ideas, possible improvements. If so many consumers responded to the surveys giving personal experiences, ideas and suggestions in order to help Muji in the product's development, it means that they trust in the firm and firm trust in the users.

*Between company and users will be born a win-win relationship and it can be a valuable source of innovation. By using win-win relationship the company can collect valuable knowledge, information, competence and technology from partners to combine with its resources. (Wuggetzer 2010).*

The win-win relationship can be seen in the meeting arranged by Muji for 5 users chosen among the survey responders. The users not only gave ideas and comments through the surveys, but also go to Muji's meeting and collaborated directly with the Muji' staff.

The 9rd May 2009 has been arranged the meeting about 男性下着モニター会 *Dansei shitagi monitā kai* (Meeting about man's underpants). In this meeting users and Muji's staff talked about the various types of boxers and the underpants' fastidiousness. Muji asked to the five users questions about the underpants that they use during their daily life and gave to users some samples to try during the week.

Some comments are:

1. Even if it is a boxer it is long like the grandfather's underpants.<sup>27</sup>
2. The silhouette is trunks. It seems I grew fat.<sup>28</sup>
3. When I am doing laundry, it makes punes.<sup>29</sup>
4. It is better a product that when you sweat, the sweat doesn't make me sticky.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> ボクサーパンツなのに履くとブルマっぽい。おじいちゃんのパンツみたいって思いました *Bokusā pantsu na no ni haku to buruma ppoi. Ojīchan no pantsu mitai tte omoi mashi ta*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」*Minna no innā 2009*, in *Mokozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>28</sup> シルエットがトランクス。太ってみえるかも *Shiruetto ga torankusu. Futotte mieru kamo*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」*Minna no innā 2009*, in *Mokozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>29</sup> 何度か洗濯しているうちに、ゴムがねじれるんです *Nan do ka sentaku shi te iru uchi ni, gomu ga nejireru n desu*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」*Minna no innā 2009*, in *Mokozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>30</sup> フィットとはいえ、汗をかいた時に肌につかないもののがいいです *Fitto to wa ie, ase o kai ta toki ni hada ni tsuka nai mono ga ii desu*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」*Minna no innā 2009*, in *Mokozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

5. Recently, I had a fat stomach and I need an underpants that hold it.<sup>31</sup>

The bigger lacks was about man's underpants are:

1. There isn't the sensation of fitness.<sup>32</sup>
2. The texture wears out easily.<sup>33</sup>
3. The gum around the west is stiff.<sup>34</sup>

Users gave bad comments about the sample that have received from Muji. Moreover, they gave precious suggestions about some improvement. This study can affirm that in this case the win-win relationship is born as Wuggetzer (2010) affirmed.

### 3) Brand Community

*Brand community is a place where firm and consumers can exchange information and interact each other. "A brand community is a specialized, non-geographically, bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand"*<sup>35</sup> (Muzin and O'Guinn 2001 p.412).

This study can affirm that *Monozukuri komyuniti* is a place where users and Muji exchange information but don't interact each other. By using the survey Muji could obtain important information. For example, in this Case V Muji submitted two different surveys to users. In the first survey, about the underskirt, Muji understood that the 83.6% of consumers use the underskirt to protect from cold, and that product does not satisfy the 38.6% of them.

On the second one, about underpants Muji understood that the 88.80% of users bought the underpants by themselves and the most important point that users ensure is the form. Moreover, users let know to Muji what kind of lacks there are in the products. But this kind of community is different from those explained until now by Muzin and O'Guinn (2001).

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<sup>31</sup> 最近お腹が出てきたので、お腹を引き辞めてくれるもの。ゴムがきついものは、そういう機能があるといいかも  
しれない *Saikin onaka ga de te ki ta node, onaka o hikiyame te kureru mono. Gomu ga kitsui mono wa, sōyuu  
kinō ga aru to ii kamo shire nai*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」*Minna no innā* 2009, in *Mokozukuri komyuniti*,  
[www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>32</sup> フィット感がない *Fitto kan ga nai*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」*Minna no innā* 2009, in *Mokozukuri komyuniti*,  
[www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>33</sup> 生地が洗濯に弱い *Kiji ga sentaku ni yowai*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」*Minna no innā* 2009, in *Mokozukuri  
komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>34</sup> ウエスト部分のゴムがきつい *Wesuto bubun no gomu ga kitsui*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」*Minna no innā*  
2009, in *Mokozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>35</sup> MUNIZ Albert M., O'GUINN Thomas C., "Brand community...", 2001, p. 412.

In this community, users and Muji don't have a platform where they interact each other, exchanging opinions and ideas, but is a community where Muji post some surveys for users in order to gain precious information.

*Innovation communities can increase the effectiveness and the speed with which users and manufacturers can develop and diffuse new innovations (von Hippel 2005).*

Muji by using the online community was able to increase the effectiveness and the speed of the product development process. Both the surveys has been submitted the 23rd January 2009, the meeting with the users has been done the 9th May 2009 and the products have been sold the 30rd October 2009. In only six months Muji could improve the underskirt and the underpants by collaborating with users. The user community is more effective than a market research because the company could understand precisely the users needs in less time.

*Brand community's members not only share the same passion toward the brand, but also they feel to be like a family and they help each other to solve problems. (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001)*

This study cannot affirm what Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) understood by their analysis because the users didn't interact each other. Even if Muji arranged a meeting for only five users they collaborated together for only few times. There are no dates that can be use for affirm that.

*The relationship between firm and user is not only one-way, but also user help firm to solve problems about products. Using online brand community, companies can interact with the member, asking them what they think about brand or a specific product relating a better connection with the users and benefit from the consumers' knowledge. They also can help companies to solve problems and create new product thanks to their experience and knowledge by writing their ideas in the company site's wall. If a firm gives to its consumers the possibility of creating brand community and give them the freedom of modifying the products, they will do it (Schau, Muniz and Arnould 2009).*

Case V can affirm this definition given by Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009). In the *Monozukuri komyuniti* indeed Muji gave to users the opportunity to join in the product development process and explain their ideas, comments, experiences by asking through a survey what users think about a product. Some comments about the two surveys.

The **first** one about the underskirt that protect from cold:

1. Maybe because the hygroscopic property is not good, or because the water runs a temperature, when I sweat become hot and I not feel good.<sup>36</sup>
2. When I do shopping in an indoor, due to I am wearing the underskirt it feel hot.<sup>37</sup>
3. Due to it occurs static electricity, I feel itchy.<sup>38</sup>

Users also gave suggestions, ideas, requests in this survey:

1. I am interested in the materials. I want a warm underwear with natural materials.<sup>39</sup>
2. If I wash many times, it wears out. It creates a hole and I throw it away. Next year I think to buy a new one, but I would like there will be a low price and strong products.<sup>40</sup>
3. The product is not like an inner and that is good because I can wear it as if it is a cut and sew.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> 汗をかいた時に、吸湿性が悪いのか、水分で発熱するからか、汗をかくととどんどん暑くなって、気持ちが悪い *Ase o kai ta toki ni, kyūshitsu sei ga warui no ka, suibun de hatsunetsu suru kara ka, ase o kaku to dondon atsuku natte, kimochi ga warui*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」*Minna no innā 2009*, in *Mokozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>37</sup> 屋内での買い物中など、着ているせいか暑過ぎることがある *Okunai de no kaimono chū nado, ki te iru sei ka atsu sugiru koto ga aru*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」*Minna no innā 2009*, in *Mokozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>38</sup> 静電気が起きるせいか、肌がかゆくなる *Seidenki ga okiru sei ka, hada ga kayuku naru*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」*Minna no innā 2009*, in *Mokozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>39</sup> 素材が気になる。天然素材が暖かい肌着がほしい *Sozai ga ki ni naru. Tennen sozai ga atatakai hadagi ga hoshii*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」*Minna no innā 2009*, in *Mokozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>40</sup> 何度も選択すると、やぶけてしまった。穴が開いたりして、捨ててしまいます。また来年買おうと思うのですが、安くて丈夫なものがあればなあと思っています *Nan do mo sentaku suru to, yabuke te shimatta. Ana ga hirai tari shi te, sute te shimai masu. Mata rainen kao u to omou node ga, yasuku te jōbu na mono ga are ba nā to omotte i masu*, Survey 「みんなのインナー」*Minna no innā 2009*, in *Mokozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>41</sup> インナーっぽくなくカットソー感覚で着れるところが良い。オフ白を導入したが、色も使いやすくてよかった *Innā ppoku naku kattosō kankaku de kireru tokoro ga yoi. Ofu shiro o dōnyū shi ta ga, iro mo tsukai yasuku te*

In the **second** survey the comments of the users are:

1. The big rubber west is a mode, but because of my belly came out, the part of the rubber is likely to lose shape, something that becomes difficult to that sort of thing.<sup>42</sup>
2. While I am walking the hem come up to the upper and this makes me trouble.<sup>43</sup>

Also in the second survey, there are suggestions, ideas and requests:

1. I want an underwear with low price and fashionable like girls.<sup>44</sup>
2. I want a product with strong deodorization.<sup>45</sup>

With these dates Case V could affirm the Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009)'s affirmation. If a firm gives to its consumers the possibility to interact in the product development process by explaining their ideas and experiences they do it.

*Between lead user there are users who reveal freely information about innovation by using communities. Allen (1983) was the first one who affirmed that the precondition of collective invention is the free exchange of information about new techniques and plant designs between firms. In that way it could be possible a technical advance. But between lead user there are some who share freely information to the company and thanks to their innovative ideas and their cooperation with a company they can be a new way to create value (Ogawa 2013).*

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yokatta, Survey 「みんなのインナー」Minna no innā 2009, in Mokokuzuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>42</sup> ウエストのゴムの部分が大きいものが流行ってますが、ちょっとお腹が出ていると、ゴムの部分が型崩れしやすいので、そういったことになりづらいものだと思います Uesuto no gomu no bubun ga ōkii mono ga hayatte masu ga, chotto onaka ga de te iru to, gomu no bubun ga kata kuzureshi yasui node, souitta koto ni nari zurai mono da to ii desu, Survey 「みんなのインナー」Minna no innā 2009, in Mokokuzuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>43</sup> 歩いているうちに裾部分が上方に上がってきてしまうことがあって困る Arui te iru uchi ni suso bubun ga kamigata ni agatte ki te shimau koto ga atte komaru.

<sup>44</sup> 女性みたいに低価格でファッショナブルな下着が欲しいです Josei mitai ni tei kakaku de fasshonaburu na shitagi ga hoshii desu, Survey 「みんなのインナー」Minna no innā 2009, in Mokokuzuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>45</sup> 消臭結果の強いものが欲しいです。特に汗をかくシーズンに Shō nioi kekka no tsuyoi mono ga hoshii desu. Tokuni ase o kaku shīzun ni, Survey 「みんなのインナー」Minna no innā 2009, in Mokokuzuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consulted 2014.

In the *Monozukuri komyuniti* all users registered on the community site Muji.net and join the various communities. In this community, users gave freely their information to Muji. The users' profit is the developed product.

#### 4) Value co-creation

*By collaborating with users, company can create novelty and original products. Ogawa (2006) analysed the case of Muji, and found out that the users co-creation with makers can be a way to create original and novelty product.*

After gathering the dates given by users, Muji was able to develop new undershirts and new underpants for man.

About undershirts, Muji could develop three points:

- 1) **The underwear that considers the “air humidity”:** Through the survey, we had many problems like health being bad because of the variation of the temperature among indoor and outdoor. The repeatedly improvements are based on those voices, we use the function for performing temperature adjustment and we created a “Warmth inner – control series” comfortable any time.<sup>46</sup>
- 2) **The underwear that considers the texture:** by using fibers that have holes like macaroni, we were able to accumulate the warm air, and we created the “Warmth inner – hollow modal mixed”.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> 「気湿」を考えた肌着 'ki shime' o kangae ta hadagi: 室内外の温度着で体調を崩してしまうというお悩みをアンケートでは多く伺いました。そんな声をもとに改良をかさね、温度調節を行う機能系を使用して、いつでも快適な「めくもりインナー・温調シリーズ」ができました。また皆さまからのご要望が高かった、色・柄・かたちが豊富になりました *Shitsunai gai no ondo gi de taichō o kuzushi te shimau toyuu o nayami o ankēto de wa ōku ukagai mashi ta. Sonna koe o moto ni kairiyō o kasane, ondo chōsetsu o okonau kinō kei o shiyō shi te, itsu demo kaiteki na 'me kumori innā. yutaka chō shirīzu' ga deki mashi ta. Mata minasama kara no go yōbō ga takakatta, iro. e. katachi ga hōfu ni nari mashi ta.* Survey 「みんなのインナー」Minna no innā 2009, in *Mokozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consuled 2014.

<sup>47</sup> 「肌触り」にこだわった肌着 'hadazawari' ni kodawatta hadagi: マカロニのように穴のあいた繊維を使用することで、あたたかい空気をため込む、保温性のよい肌着『めくもりインナー・中空モダール混』ができました。また、肌触りがよい生地を使い、やわらかな着心地にこだわりました *Makaroni no yō ni ana no ai ta seni o shiyō suru koto de, atatakai kūki o tamekomu, hoon sei no yoi hadagi 'mekumori innā. nakazora modāru kon ga deki mashi ta. Mata, hadazawari ga yoi kiji o tsukai, yawaraka na kigokochi ni kodawari mashi ta.* Survey 「みんなのインナー」Minna no innā 2009, in *Mokozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/inner01.html), consuled 2014.

- 3) **Underwear that consider the “warmth”:** In this development, we combined fibres that are delicate on the skin and thinner than cashmere we created “Warmth inner – track tape recorder” undershirt for a man with a smooth texture that does not create furballs easily.<sup>48</sup>

About underpants for man Muji made some improvements:

- 1) Than boxer short in the past, it has been changed to a better position under the waist. It is not too shallow, not too deep, just right. In addition, because of the inside leg is extended, when you wear a slacks it become comfortable difficult to shift up.<sup>49</sup>
- 2) Previous boxer has a pattern of vertically woven clothing for all parts, so that the silhouette was slightly loose-fitted. Enclosed nicely and sharp. Better fitted and no more displacement, while walking.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> 「あたたかさ」にこだわった肌着 “Atataka sa” ni kodawatta hadagi: 今回の開発では、肌に優しい線と、カシミアより細い繊維を合わせて使用することで、毛玉もできにくく、肌触りもなめらかな男性防寒肌着『ぬくもりインナー・タックテレコ』ができました *Konkai no kaihatsu de wa, hada ni yasashii sen to, kashimiya yori hosoi seni o awase te shiyō suru koto de, mō tama mo deki nikuku, hadazawari mo nameraka na dansei bōkan hadagi 'nukumori innā. takku tereko' ga deki mashi ta. Survey みんなのかばん Min'na no kaban 2009 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014...*

<sup>49</sup> 従来のボクサーパンツより、ウエストをおへそ下にくるような位置に変更しました。浅すぎず、深すぎず、ちょうどいい履き心地になりました。また、股下の長さを少し伸ばしたことで、ズボンを履いたときに、ズレ上がりにくく、安定した心地になりました *Jūrai no bokusā pantsu yori, uesuto o o heso ka ni kuru yō na ichi ni henkō shi mashi ta. Asa sugi zu, fuka sugi zu, chōdo ii haki gokochi ni nari mashi ta. Mata, matashita no naga sa o sukoshi nobashi ta koto de, zubon o hai ta toki ni, zure agari nikuku, antei shi ta kokochi ni nari mashi ta, Survey Survey みんなのかばん Min'na no kaban 2009 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014..*

<sup>50</sup> 従来のボクサーパタンのパターンは、すべての部分に生地繊維を縦方向に使い、ややシルエットゆったりしたつくりになっていました。すっきりした印象に、ほどよく包みこみます、フィット感アップ、歩いてもズレにくい *Jūrai no bokusāpatan no patān wa, subete no bubun ni kiji no sen'i o tate hōkō ni tsukai, yaya shiruetto yuttari shita tsukuri ni natte imashita. Sukkiri shita inshō ni, hodo yoku tsutsumi komimasu, fitto-kan appu, aruite mo zure nikui, Survey みんなのかばん Min'na no kaban 2009 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014..*

## 5.2.2 CASE W: survey about carrier bag. 「みんなのかばん」 *Min'na no kaban* (Everyone's bag)

This study concerns the carrier bag for travel or for business travel. Muji asked for users to explain some problems, lacks about the carrier bag used until now in order to create novel and useful products. There are no meeting arranged by Muji in this Case.

### 1) Lead User

*“Lead users are users whose present strong needs will become general in a market-place months or years in the future. Since lead users are familiar with conditions which lie in the future for most others, they can serve as a need-forecasting laboratory for marketing research. Moreover, since lead users often attempt to fill the need their experience, they can provide new product concept and design data as well” (von Hippel 1986 p. 791).<sup>51</sup>*

This study cannot affirm that the users of this community are “lead users” because they do not face problems and need before the company asks them to do it. Muji ask to them through a survey what is good and if there are some lacks in the carrier bag used until now and users gave comments, ideas on the base of their experience. Muji searched those users that have the lead user's characteristics. By using consumers' knowledge and information, Muji could develop better products. The most of consumers affirmed:

1. The wheels do not rotate properly.<sup>52</sup>
2. When it is raining, the baggage becomes wet.<sup>53</sup>
3. During a business trip/during a travel, the organization of the storage is difficult.<sup>54</sup>

From these users' experiences, Muji can do marketing researches about future needs or needs that Muji could not notice yet. Users toward their experiences could face dissatisfactions about some products or what have to be adapted, revealing in advance needs that other consumers could not notice yet. These examples could demonstrate that user can

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<sup>51</sup> Eric VON HIPPEL, “Lead User: A Source of Novel Product Concepts”, Management Science, 1986, p. 791.

<sup>52</sup> 車輪が回りにくい *Sharin ga mawari nikui*, Survey みんなのかばん *Min'na no kaban* 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>53</sup> 雨天時に荷物が濡れる *Uten-ji ni nimotsu ga nureru*, Survey みんなのかばん *Min'na no kaban* 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>54</sup> 出張時/旅行時の収納整理がしづらい *Shutchō-ji/ryokō-ji no shūnō seiri ga shi dzurai*, Survey みんなのかばん *Min'na no kaban* 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.

notice problems that firm cannot notice, but this study cannot definitely say that they are “lead user”. In this case, users notice that the carrier bag's wheels do not rotate properly, the baggage becomes wet when it rains and the storage is difficult to do during a business trip or during a travel.

### 3) Product Develop Process

*Until the 1970 the product development process it has done by the manufacturers. (小川 2002). But in these last years there are also methods towards them lead users can participate in the product development system toward two kinds of methods: 1) user-driven method (UD) and 2) the lead user method (LU). 小川(2006)*

The case of carrier bag 20,667 users responded to the questionnaire submitted by the company by giving information about carrier bag's problems and how resolve and improve them. By using these dates, this study can affirm that in these last years also user participates in the product development process.

**FIGURE 2-2 Characteristics of LU and UD**

	LU-method	UD-method
1) The starting point	Maker	User
2) Research target unit	Individual user	User community
3) Timing of demand explicit	After development	Before development
4) Use of internet	Not indispensable	Indispensable
5) Ease of specific user	Not ease	Ease

小川(Ogawa 2006) p.5

The UD-method and the LD-method presented by Ogawa (2006) did not reflect fully this way to participate in the Muji's development process, since as can we see *Monozukuri komyuniti* is not a community like those analysed until now. In this case users didn't write what kind of product they desire but it was the company that prior asked to users what do they think about a product already in the market. Thus, the starting point was the maker and not the

user. The research target is the individual user. It is indispensable the use of the internet and it is not required specific knowledges.

*After some time that user share information and experiences to company toward the online community it will begin a relationship of mutual trust. According to Fuller's et. al. (2006) about the Audi Infotainment case the 80% of the participants expressed their willingness to participate in the future product development initiatives and an ongoing series of interaction and this can birth a virtual relationship of mutual trust between the firm and the users.*

There aren't dates that refer to the birth of a mutual trust relationship, but 20.667 users responded to Muji's questionnaire telling what is not good with the carrier bag and they asked to Muji the features that they would like to have, for example:

1. Now the characteristic that I want is that the wheels do not make loud.<sup>55</sup>
2. The function that I want is no permeability.<sup>56</sup>
3. I want a simple product that I can use for a long time.<sup>57</sup>

If there were so many users who asked to Muji they want some features that means the users trust in Muji, and they know that Muji can create the feature they wish. So this study affirm that users trust in Muji. On the other side, with all those kinds of information Muji could create the most wanted product for users and achieved valuable outcomes.

*Between company and users will be born a win-win relationship and it can be a valuable source of innovation. By using win-win relationship the company can collect valuable knowledge, information, competence and technology from partners to combine with its resources. (Wuggetzer 2010).*

In this Case (W) there are not meeting arranged by Muji, but there are many messages among user and Muji that can prove the existence of a win-win relationship. By using the survey Muji can collect many kinds of information, knowledge from users. In the Case W

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<sup>55</sup> 今一番ほしい機能は、音がしない車輪です *Ima ichiban hoshī kinō wa,-on ga shinai sharindes*, Survey みんなのかばん *Min'na no kaban* 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>56</sup> ほしい機能は撥水性 *Hoshī kinō wa hassuise*, Survey みんなのかばん *Min'na no kaban* 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>57</sup> シンプルで長く使えるデザインのものがほしいと思います *Shinpurude nagaku tsukaeru dezain no mono ga hoshī to omoimas*, Survey みんなのかばん *Min'na no kaban* 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.

Muji asked to users: “What kind of improvement or version upgrade do you expect it?” Through the survey, we asked you the most important point when you replace a bag carrier by buying a new one.<sup>58</sup>The answers of user were:

1. My desire moves easily also the heavy carrier bag and that wheel rotates without stuck.<sup>59</sup>
2. I would like you to create a carrier bag typical of *Mujirushi Ryōhin*, unisex, undecorated, efficient and with low price. My wish is a design with the important function of travel goods not influenced by fashion, but could use them for a long time.<sup>60</sup>
3. Since the carrier bag itself is not a product that you change frequently, if it is water resistant, furthermore, if it has a sober design that doesn't affect the house's interior I think I can use it for a long time.<sup>61</sup>
4. It happened that small products spilled over and fall down, when I open and shut the carrier bag from the gab. If it could be improved I'll be very happy.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> どのような改良やバージョンアップが期待されているのでしょうか。アンケートでは皆さまに、キャリーバッグの買い替え時に重視するポイントについても伺いました。] *Dono yōna kairiyō ya bājon'appu ga kitai sa rete iru nodeshou ka. Ankētode wa minasama ni, kyaribaggu no kaikae-ji ni jūshi suru pointo ni tsuite mo ukagaimashita. Survey みんなのかばん Min'na no kaban 2009 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.*

<sup>59</sup> 重たい荷物も軽く運べて、車輪がひっかからず回ることを希望。デザインがよく、丈夫で、車輪まわりのいいものであれば(安価だとお)、買い替えを考える *Omotai nimotsu mo karuku hakobete, sharin ga hikkakarazu mawaru koto o kibō. Dezain ga yoku, jōbude, sharin mawari no ī monodeareba (ankadato nao), kaikae o kangaeru. Survey みんなのかばん Min'na no kaban 2009 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.*

<sup>60</sup> キャリーバッグは、無印良品らしく、ユニセックスで無地・機能的・低価格なものをつくってほしい。旅行用品は流行に左右されず、長く使える機能重視のデザイン希望 *Kyaribaggu wa, muinryōhinrashiku, yunisekkusu de muji kinō-teki tei kakakuna mono o tsukutte hoshī. Ryokō yōhin wa ryūkō ni sayū sa rezu, nagaku tsukaeru kinō jūshi no dezain kibō. Survey みんなのかばん Min'na no kaban 2009 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.*

<sup>61</sup> キャリーバッグ自体はそれほど頻繁に買い替えるものでもないもので、雨にも強く、また、普段部屋にあるときにまわりのインテリアに影響しないような、落ち着いたデザインであれば長く使えると思います *Kyaribaggu jitai wa sorehodo hinpan ni kaikaeru monode mo nainode, ame ni mo tsuyoku, mata, fudan heya ni aru toki ni mawari no interia ni eikyō shinai yōna, ochitsuita dezaindeareba nagaku tsukaeru to omoimasu. Survey みんなのかばん Min'na no kaban 2009 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.*

<sup>62</sup> 開閉時に隙間から小物がこぼれ落ちることがあります。これを防げる工夫があると、とてもうれしいです *Kaihei-ji ni sukima kara komono ga koboreochiru koto ga arimasu. Kore o fusegeru kufū ga aru to, totemo ureshī desu. Survey みんなのかばん Min'na no kaban 2009 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.*

How we can see from these messages between maker and users has formed a win-win relationship, though that it can be a valuable source of innovation. The firm can collect a huge kind of information and use them to improve its product by just asking to users what kind of improvement they want to have. On the other hand, the users have the products that they are expecting to have.

### 3) Brand Community

*“Brand community is a place where firm and consumers can exchange information and interact each other. “A brand community is a specialized, non-geographically, bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand”<sup>63</sup> (Muzin and O’Guinn 2001 p.412).*

By using the data found until now in the preview analysis this study can affirm that *Monozukuri komyuniti* is a place where Muji and its users exchange information and interact each other. By using the survey Muji could understand that the 17.5% of the users' problems is the wheels that don't rotate properly and, the 46% of the user are interested in is the functionality of the products.

After have done the survey Muji wrote: “The development team will analyse the results of the survey you have responded and they decided to change the manufacturing method”.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, this kind of community is different from those analysed until now by Muzin and O’Guinn (2001) and other researches. In this community, users and Muji didn’t have a platform where they interact each other, exchanging opinions and ideas, but was a community where Muji post some surveys for users. They did not interact each other like in other community.

*Innovation communities can increase the effectiveness and the speed with users and manufactures can develop and diffuse new innovations (von Hippel 2005).*

In this case the questionnaire was opened the 8th May 2009 till 21rd May 2009. After that, the team analysed the dates achieved from the survey and presented the results informing

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<sup>63</sup> MUNIZ Albert M., O’GUINN Thomas C., “Brand community...”, 2001, p. 412.

<sup>64</sup> 開発チームでは皆さまにお寄せいただいたアンケート結果を検討し、モノづくりの方針を定め直しました  
*Kaihatsu chīmude wa minasama ni o yose itadaita ankēto kekka o kentō shi, mono-dzukuri no hōshin o sadame naoshimashita.*

the users that in the middle of November 2009 they will give the first prototype. In the March 2010 the products started to be sold. Less than 1 year Muji could develop novel products. Thus, the community can increase the effectiveness and the speed of the diffusion of innovations.

*Brand community's members not only share the same passion toward the brand, but also they feel to be like a family and they help each other to solve problems. (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001)*

There are no dates for confirming this affirmation. This kind of community is different to other communities analysed until now. Users didn't interact each others but they just responded to the questionnaire, leaving there some comments and ideas based on their experiences.

*The relationship between firm and user is not only one-way, but also user help firm to solve problems about products. Using online brand community, companies can interact with the member, asking them what they think about brand or a specific product relating a better connection with the users and benefit from the consumers' knowledge. They also can help companies to solve problems and create new product thanks to their experience and knowledge by writing their ideas in the company site's wall. If a firm gives to its consumers the possibility of creating brand community and give them the freedom of modifying the products, they will do it (Schau, Muniz and Arnould 2009).*

As Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009) affirmed Muji by using online brand community firm can interact with the users asking them needs, ideas, comments etc. Users helped the firm by revealing their needs and some problems resolution like:

1. A thing that makes me shocked, even if it is wet by rain, I think it will be good if there are water-resistant raw materials.<sup>65</sup>
2. The organize goods that put size, on the contrary, because of the capacity that can be put inside decrease, I don't use it. Rather than goods, it is better if the carrier bag's external and inside pocket's

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<sup>65</sup> 衝撃に強いものや、雨に濡れても大丈夫な素材のものもあればいいと思います *Shōgeki ni tsuyoi mono ya, ameninurete mo daijōbuna sozai no mono mo areba ī to omoimasu*. Survey みんなのかばん *Min'na no kaban* in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.

cover will be full. Rather than subdivision, it is better a big pocket, it is generally useful.<sup>66</sup>

By using the *Monozukuri komyuniti* firm gained precious information and changed the product development method thanks to the user participation.

*Between lead user there are users who reveal freely information about innovation by using communities. Allen (1983) was the first one who affirmed that the precondition of collective invention is the free exchange of information about new techniques and plant designs between firms. In that way it could be possible a technical advance. But between lead user there are some who share freely information to the company and thanks to their innovative ideas and their cooperation with a company they can be a new way to create value (Ogawa 2013).*

The users in these cases revealed free information to Muji by using the survey that Muji uploaded in the site. They are registered on the Muji.net and join the online community. They revealed problems in order to improve its features without asking money in return. The gain, they received is the new product realized by Muji after the improvement, thus, their can obtain higher satisfaction from this interaction.

#### 4) Value co-creation

*By collaborating with users, company can create novelty and original products. Ogawa (2006) analysed the case of Muji, and found out that the users co-creation with makers can be a way to create original and novelty products.*

After achieving precious information from users Muji could create novel and original products. Muji could create a carrier bag with five improvements:

1. **Inside fastener & water-resistant:** outside zippers are used inside, so the back gauge is shown outside. By using opposite zipper and

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<sup>66</sup> 大きさを揃えた整理グッズは、逆に入られる容量を減らしてしまうので、まず使わない。グッズよりは、キャリーバッグの表面と、蓋の裏面のポケットを充実させたほうがいい。小分けでなく、大きいポケットのほうが、概して便利 *Ōki-sa o soroeta seiri guzzu wa, gyaku ni haira reru yōryō o herashite shimaunode, mazu tsukawanai. Guzzu yori wa, kyarībaggu no hyōmen to, futa no rimen no poketto o jūjitsu sa seta hō ga i. Kowakedenaku, ōki poketto no hō ga, gaishite benri, Survey みんなのかばん 2009, Min'na no kaban in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.*

apply the water resistance make it possible to smoothed the surface nice and clean.<sup>67</sup>

2. **A cover that hides the fastener:** In order to make the flat fastener integral with the body, the pocket on the front side, we applied a cover that overlay the fastener. Of course, there are also benefit rain repellent.<sup>68</sup>
3. **Bellows pocket continues:** In the Muji's carrier bag bellows type is already adopted, regarding the bellows type that received lots of support, we will incorporate this time too.<sup>69</sup>
4. **Wheels that rotate quietly:** The ease of moving the wheels adopted in the existing carrier bag is the same, we have improved wheels that don't make a sound.<sup>70</sup>
5. **Interior is water repellent:** Not only the fastener, but we also used waterproof material for the body of the carrier bag. It can protect against rain the interior of the bag and also the possibility of some dirty like mud spatter is decreased.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> 裏返し&撥水加工のファスナー *Uragaeshi& hassui kakō no fasunā*: 外側2か所のファスナーを、通常の標線を裏側にし、裏側を表にして使っています。ファスナーを逆に使い、さらに撥水加工を施すことで、裏面の凸凹が消え、平らに、すっきりとみせることができます *Sotogawa 2-kasho no fasunā o, tsūjō no hyō-sen o uragawa ni shi, uragawa o hyō ni shite tsukatteimasu. Fasunā o gyaku ni tsukai, sarani hassui kakō o hodokosu koto de, rimen no outotsu ga kie, taira ni, sukkiri to miseru koto ga dekimasu.*, Survey みんなのかばん *Min'na no kaban in Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>68</sup> ファスナーが隠れるかぶせ *Fasunā ga kakureru kabuse*: 平らにしたファスナー一面をさらに本体と一体にするため、前側のポケットには、ファスナーをぴったりとおおうかぶせを付けました。もちろん、雨が染みにくいといったメリットもあります *Taira ni shita fasunā ichimen o sarani hontai to ittai ni suru tame, maegawa no pokettoni wa, fasunā o pittari to ōu kabuse o tsukemashita. Mochiron, ame ga shimi nikui to itta merito mo arimasu.* Survey みんなのかばん *Min'na no kaban in Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>69</sup> ジャバラポケットは継続 *Jabarapoketto wa keizoku*: 無印良品のキャリーバッグで既に採用され、アンケートでも多くの支持が寄せられたジャバラ型については、今回も取り入られます *Muinryōhin no kyaribaggu de sudeni saiyō sa re, ankēto demo ōku no shiji ga yose rareta jabara-gata ni tsuite wa, konkai mo toriira remasu.* Survey みんなのかばん *Min'na no kaban in Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>70</sup> より静かに回る車輪 *Yori shizuka ni mawaru sharing*: 従来のキャリーバッグで採用していた車輪の動かしやすさはそのままに、より音が静かになるよう、車輪の開発を進めました *Jūrai no kyaribaggu de saiyō shite ita sharin no ugokeashi yasu-sa wa sonomama ni, yori oto ga shizuka ni naru yō, sharin no kaiatsu o susumemashita,* Survey みんなのかばん *Min'na no kaban in Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>71</sup> 裏面は撥水加工に *Rimen wa bachi sui kakō ni*: ファスナーだけではなく、キャリーバッグの本体にも、撥水加工を施した素材を使いました。軽い雨から中の荷物を守るのはもちろん、泥ハネなどの汚れも落としやすくなっています *Fasunā dakede wa naku, kyaribaggu no hontai ni mo, hassui kakō o hodokoshita sozai o tsukaimashita. Karui ame kara Chū no nimotsu o mamoru no wa mochiron, doro hane nado no yogore mo*

Muji created an inside fastener with water repellent, a cover that hides the fastener, a bellows pocket, reduced the sound make by wheels and used waterproof materials also for the interior of the carrier bag. Moreover, by using those improvement Muji created five different sizes of carrier bag that can adapt to the different kind of travel or business travel.

### 5.2.3 CASE X: a survey about apron 「エプロン」`Epuron' (apron)

In this study Muji asked to users what they think about the form of the apron and when they use it. Then Muji arranged two meetings to collaborate with users to know better users' needs and problems related to the apron used until now giving them some samples.

#### 1) Lead User

*“Lead users are users whose present strong needs will become general in a market-place months or years in the future. Since lead users are familiar with conditions which lie in the future for most others, they can serve as a need-forecasting laboratory for marketing research. Moreover, since lead users often attempt to fill the need their experience, they can provide new product concept and design data as well” (von Hippel 1986 p. 791).<sup>72</sup>*

Also in this case this study cannot affirm that users in this community are “lead users”. Muji just want to find some of them that have the lead user' features to join them in the product development process. Users just help Muji to improve some products by giving to it their ideas, comments and experiences. Thus, this study cannot confirm completely von Hippel's affirmation.

In this Case X Muji could understands what kind of design users expects from Muji. For example:

1. I am worried about creases, but I like natural materials like cotton and hemp;<sup>73</sup>

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*otoshi yasuku natte imasu, Survey みんなのかばん Min'na no kaban in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/bag02.html), consulted 2014.*

<sup>72</sup> Eric VON HIPPEL, “Lead User: A Source of Novel Product Concepts”, Management Science, 1986, p. 791.

<sup>73</sup> しわが気になるけれど、綿や麻などのナチュラル感のある素材を好きです *Shiwa ga ki ni narukeredo, wata ya asa nado no nachuraru-kan no aru sozai o sukidesu, Survey エプロン Epuron 2008 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.*

2. I think that natural materials are good, but it's also important that it dries quickly after laundered it;<sup>74</sup>
3. I would like an apron that can be easily put on and take off, and fashionable;<sup>75</sup>
4. Since also men like cooking, I think it will be good if there is also an apron for men.<sup>76</sup>

## 2) Product Development Process

*Until the 1970 the product development process it has done by the manufacturers. (小川 2002). But in these last years there are also methods towards them lead users can participate in the product development system toward two kinds of methods: 1) user-driven method (UD) and 2) the lead user method (LU). 小川(2006)*

Also in the Case X the method used in this study did not fit with those analysed by Ogawa (2006). In this study Muji asked to its consumers what kind of design they would like to have and what are their expectations from Muji. After collecting dates, Muji developed some samples to present them to consumers in the two meetings.

**FIGURE 2-2 Characteristics of LU and UD**

	LU-method	UD-method
1) The starting point	Maker	User
2) Research target unit	Individual user	User community
3) Timing of demand explicit	After development	Before development
4) Use of internet	Not indispensable	Indispensable
5) Ease of specific user	Not ease	Ease

小川( Ogawa 2006) p.5

<sup>74</sup> 自然素材がいいと思うが、選択して早く乾くということも重要になってくると思う *Shizen sozai ga ī to omou ga, sentaku shite hayaku kawaku to iu koto mo jūyō ni natte kuru to omo*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>75</sup> 着脱が簡単で、部屋着感覚のおしゃれなエプロンがあったらいいなと思います *Chakudatsu ga kantande, heya-gi kankaku no osharena epuron ga attara ī na to omoimasu*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>76</sup> 男性も料理するのが好きが多いと思うので、男性向けもあってもいいかと思います *Dansei mo ryōri suru no ga suki-kata ga ōi to omou node, dansei-muke moatte mo ī ka to omoimasu*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

Also in this case (W) the start point is the maker (i.e. Muji) that try to find users with a lead user's characteristics to involve him/her in the product development process. The researches target is users registered on the Muji Community site, Muji.net. The timing of demand is before development, because in this Case Muji did not ask what is wrong with a product, but asked what kind of design, when users use the apron, what they expect from Muji. The use of the Internet is indispensable because only who is registered on the Muji.net could join in the product development process. It did not need any special knowledge or ability, everyone can do it.

*After some time that user share information and experiences to company toward the online community it will begin a relationship of mutual trust. According to Fuller's et. al. (2006) about the Audi Infotainment case the 80% of the participants expressed their willingness to participate in the future product development initiatives and an ongoing series of interaction and this can birth a virtual relationship of mutual trust between the firm and the users.*

In this Case (W) there are no dates about how many users' responses to the survey and how many consumers jointed the two meetings. There are not certain dates about a mutual trust relationship, but if Muji submits some kind of survey to consumers, it means that trust in users' information, and collaboration. On the other side, consumers have the opportunity to cooperate with the firm and obtain the product that they expect to have.

*Between company and users will be born a win-win relationship and it can be a valuable source of innovation. By using win-win relationship the company can collect valuable knowledge, information, competence and technology from partners to combine with its resources. (Wuggetzer 2010).*

The beginning of a win-win relationship can be seen not only in the survey, but also in the two meeting holding by Muji the 4th July 2008, where Muji proposed some samples to consumers and heard their impressions and comments. At the beginning Muji tested the apron have sold until that time, because Muji wants to improve that products. While consumers were wearing those aprons, they could test the movements, and could give ideas and requests. Muji wants to develop two kinds of apron. One of the meetings has been held in one of the consumers' house.

Some comments about the two samples are:

About the apron with long sleeve:

1. Sleeve length is an exquisite that doesn't disturb;<sup>77</sup>
2. Since around the neck it is open, I feel cold;<sup>78</sup>
3. The position of the pockets is perfect. The size fits entirely in the hand, even if you put something a little heavy the pockets are tough and easy to use;<sup>79</sup>
4. The texture is thick and it is heavy to wear. The shoulders become stiff;<sup>80</sup>
5. Colour such black; I want a colour not only for cooking.<sup>81</sup>

About the second one:

1. Since it has two seams, it fits properly on the body;<sup>82</sup>
2. Since it will replace front and rear, it is good changing the V-neck and the round neck;<sup>83</sup>
3. Even if you do laundry, the string doesn't become wrinkled;<sup>84</sup>
4. At the beginning I had difficult to understand how wear it;<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> 袖が邪魔にならない絶妙な長さでした *Sode ga jama ni naranai zebbyōna naga-sadeshit*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>78</sup> 首まわり空いているので涼しく感じました *Kubi mawari suite irunode suzushiku kanjimashita*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>79</sup> ポケットの位置がちょうどよかった。手がすっぽり入る大きさで、少し重いものを入れても丈夫で使いやすかったです *Poketto no ichi ga chōdo yokatta. Te ga suppori hairu ōki-sa de, sukoshi omoi mono o irete mo jōbude tsukai yasukattadesu*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>80</sup> 生地が厚くて、着心地が重い。肩がこりますね... *Kiji ga atsukute, kigokochi ga omoi. Kata ga korimasu ne...* Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014

<sup>81</sup> 黒のような、かっぽう着らしくないカラーもほしいです *Kuro no yōna, kappō-girashikunai karā mo hoshīdesu* Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>82</sup> ひもを2か所で結ぶので、体にとってもフィットします *Himo o 2-kasho de musubunode,-tai ni totemo fitto shimasu*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>83</sup> 前後が入れ替えられるので、Vネックとラウンドネックを気分に変えられるのが良いです *Zengo ga irekae rarerunode, buinekku to raundonekku o kibun de kae rareru no ga yoidesu*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>84</sup> 洗濯しても、ひもがしわになりませんでした *Shite mo, himo ga shiwa ni narimasendeshita*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>85</sup> どうやって着るのか、最初は少し迷いました *Dō yatte kiru no ka, saisho wa sukoshi mayoimashita*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

5. I want also colour for autumn-winter;<sup>86</sup>
6. For person of short stature maybe it is a little bit long.<sup>87</sup>

In the two meetings, the users collaborated directly with Muji explaining good and bad points about the sample that they have worn. The win-win relationship is born not only in the surveys, but also in these two meetings.

#### 4) Brand Community

*Brand community is a place where firm and consumers can exchange information and interact each other. "A brand community is a specialized, non-geographically, bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand"*<sup>88</sup> (Muzin and O'Guinn 2001 p.412).

In the Case X this study can affirm that brand community is a place where firm and consumers exchange information as Muzin and O'Guinn (2001) affirmed, but they didn't interact each other because the nature of the community is different. By applying the survey Muji understand that the 92% of users use the apron for cooking and the 92% of users when buy an apron the first feature that they notice is the design. Then follow any comments and requests through those Muji can understand more about users' needs and expectations.

*Innovation communities can increase the effectiveness and the speed with users and manufactures can develop and diffuse new innovations (von Hippel 2005).*

By using *Monozukuri komyuniti* Muji could develop two new aprons in only five months. The survey was uploaded the 14th of March and the final products' sell started the 22th of August. This study could confirm the von Hippel's affirmation (2005) the use of innovation community increases the effectiveness and the speed of the development and the diffusion of innovation. Muji could developed in 5 five months two products that know they will be sell.

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<sup>86</sup> 秋冬っぽい展開の色も欲しいです *Akifuyu ppoi tenkai no iro mo hoshīdesu*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>87</sup> 小柄な人には少し長いかも... *Kogarana hito ni wa sukoshi nagai kamo...*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>88</sup> MUNIZ Albert M., O'GUINN Thomas C., "Brand community...", 2001, p. 412.

*Brand community's members not only share the same passion toward the brand, but also they feel to be like a family and they help each other to solve problems. (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001)*

There are no dates for confirming this affirmation. *Monozukuri komyuniti* is a different community rather others analysed until now by other researchers. Users didn't interact each other for a long time. The only one interaction between them is the meetings arranged by Muji, but the duration is very short. Most probably, users did not feel to be a family in such a short time.

*The relationship between firm and user is not only one-way, but also user help firm to solve problems about products. Using online brand community, companies can interact with the member, asking them what they think about brand or a specific product relating a better connection with the users and benefit from the consumers' knowledge. They also can help companies to solve problems and create new product thanks to their experience and knowledge by writing their ideas in the company site's wall. If a firm gives to its consumers the possibility of creating brand community and give them the freedom of modifying the products, they will do it (Schau, Muniz and Arnould 2009).*

As this study demonstrated in some posts before, the *Monozukuri komyuniti* isn't a community where users write on the company's site wall what they want and interact each other to develop a new product, but Muji submitted some surveys to users to understand their needs and expectations, solved problems by interacting directly with few users only by meeting. Anyway, this study can confirm what Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009) affirmed. If a firm gives to its consumers the freedom to join the product development process they do it.

In this Case (W) Muji through survey didn't ask to users to solve some problems, or to find some lacks, but asked to give to it information about the design users desire and their expectations. For example:

1. A material that don't make wrinkles when you do laundry will be good;<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> 洗濯してもしわにならない素材がいい。紐が細いのに洗濯でよれてしまっくせになること、結構あります  
*Sentaku shite mo shiwa ni naranai sozai ga ī. Himo ga hosoi no ni sentaku de yorete shimatte kuse ni naru koto, kekkō arimasu*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

2. Cotton is good after all. I think that hemp is good for summer but, I want to try to use a product that doesn't stiff and supple;<sup>90</sup>
3. It will be good a pattern with soft pink or green that parents and child could use for enjoying cooking together;<sup>91</sup>
4. I want you to produce an apron that has the form of tunic dress easy to put on and take off and also looks fashionable when I go to throw out the garbage and when suddenly come to home some guest or home delivery.<sup>92</sup>

The problem solving have been done at the meeting:

1. The texture is thick, it is heavy to wear. The shoulders become stiff;<sup>93</sup>
2. At the beginning I had difficult to understand how wear it;<sup>94</sup>
3. I want also colour for autumn-winter;<sup>95</sup>
4. For person of short stature maybe it is a little bit long.<sup>96</sup>

*Between lead user there are users who reveal freely information about innovation by using communities. Allen (1983) was the first one who affirmed that the precondition of collective invention is the free exchange of information about new techniques and plant designs between firms. In that way it could be possible a technical advance. But between lead user there are some who share freely information to the company and thanks to their*

<sup>90</sup> やっぱり綿がいいです。夏は麻もいいと思いますが、ごわごわしない、しなやかなものなら使ってみたいです *Yappari sen ga īdesu. Natsu wa asa mo ī to omoimasuga, gowagowa shinai, shinayakana mononara tsukatte mitaidesu*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>91</sup> 薄いピンクやグリーンなど、親子で調理を楽しみたいのでおそろいの柄がいいです *Usui pinku ya gurīn nado, oyako de chōri o tanoshimitainode osoroi no gara ga īdesu* Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>92</sup> 外にゴミ出しに行ったり、急なお客さまや宅配の方への対応の時に、着脱が簡単でおしゃれにも見えるチュニックワンピース型のエプロンもつくってほしいです *Soto ni gomi-dashi ni ittari, kyūna okyaku-sama ya takuhai no kata e no taiō no toki ni, chakudatsu ga kantande oshare ni mo mieru chunikkuwanpīshisu-gata no epuron mo tsukutte hoshīdesu*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>93</sup> 生地が厚くて、着心地が重い。肩がこりますね... *Kiji ga atsukute, kigokochi ga omoi. Kata ga korimasu ne...* Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>94</sup> どうやって着るのか、最初は少し迷いました *Dō yatte kiru no ka, saisho wa sukoshi mayoimashita* Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>95</sup> 秋冬っぽい展開の色も欲しいです *Akifuyu ppoi tenkai no iro mo hoshīdesu*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>96</sup> 小柄な人には少し長いかも... *Kogarana hito ni wa sukoshi nagai kamo...*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

*innovative ideas and their cooperation with a company they can be a new way to create value (Ogawa 2013).*

For write a comment in the *Monozukuri komyuniti* all users have to be registered on the community site Muji.net and join the various communities. In this community, users give freely their information to Muji. The profit's users are the developed products.

#### **4) Value co-creation**

*By collaborating with users, company can create novelty and original products. Ogawa (2006) analysed the case of Muji, and found out that the users co-creation with makers can be a way to create original and novelty products.*

After collecting all the information from the survey and the two meetings, Muji was able to develop new and original products. Muji developed two types of apron and one of them have 2 kinds of version. I can confirm the affirmation of Ogawa.

##### **1. Water-repellent polyester cooking coat:**

The functions of the coat that cover entirely the arms and body have been intact as before, we complete the design with a thin figure of the smock and tunic. By using the ideas created during the meeting, rather than the first trial sample, we put both the cuteness of appearance and comfortable and spacious.<sup>97</sup>

About fabric, we chose the water-repelling polyester that was favoured at the meeting. It has been also used in the previous apron but, the penetration of dirt into the fabric was difficult, and even if you wash it fall easily to dirty again. Difficult to wrinkles, dries easily also lend itself to the apron.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> 撥水ポリエステル綿かつぼう着 *Hassui poriesuteru wata kappō chaku*: 袖や胴体側面をすっぽりカバーするかつぼう着の機能はそのままに、少し細身のスマックやチュニックのようなデザインに仕上げました。また、モニターの方のご意見を参考にして、最初の試作サンプルより、身頃のギャザーを多くとり、ゆったりとした着心地と見た目のかわいらしさの両方を取り入れています *Sode ya dōtai sokumen o suppori kabā suru kappō-gi no kinō wa sonomama ni, sukoshi hosomi no sumokku ya chunikku no yōna dezain ni shiagemashita. Mata, monitā no kata no go iken o sankō ni shite, saisho no shisaku sanpuru yori, migoro no gyazā o ōku tori, yuttari to shita kigokochi to mitame no kawaiirashi-sa no ryōhō o toriirete imasu*, Survey エプロン *Epuron* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

## 2. Taburie:

Muji created two versions of Taburie. The first one is polyester water repelling and cotton taburie, the second one is 100% hemp texture.

### a. Water-repellent polyester cotton Taburie:<sup>99</sup>

The design that connects both in front and behind the normal apron, cover entirely not only the side and front body, but also the back. It takes an active part, of course, in the kitchen, or the like housecleaning and gardening.

### b. Taburie made with plain linen fabric.<sup>100</sup>

By referring to the opinions of meeting, we changed in a long string, now the consumers can enjoy the 8 sizes. We changed the design around the neck, the knot of the string, and the position of the pockets, a single Taburie change the various arrangements of expressions.

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<sup>98</sup> 布地には、モニター会でも好評だった撥水ポリエステル綿を選びました。既存のエプロンでも使用している素材ですが、あらかじめ撥水加工がされているため、汚れが生地にしみ込みにくく、また、洗ってもすぐに落ちやすくなっています。しわになりにくく、乾きやすい性質も、エプロンに向いています *Nunoji ni wa, monitā-kai demo kōhyōdatta hassui poriesuteru wata o erabimashita. Kizon no epuron demo shiyō shite iru sozaidesuga, arakajime hassui kakō ga sa rete iru tame, yogore ga kiji ni shimikomi nikuku, mata, aratte mo sugu ni ochi yasaku natte imasu. Shiwa ni nari nikuku, kawaki yasui seishitsu mo, epuron ni muite imasu*, Survey エプロン Epuron 2008 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>99</sup> 撥水ポリエステル綿ダブリエ *Hassui poriesuteru wata taburie*: 通常のエプロンを前後両方で結ぶようなデザインで、前身ごろや側面だけでなく、後ろ姿もすっぽりとカバーしてくれます。キッチンではもちろん、ガーデニングや大掃除などでも活躍します *Tsūjō no epuron o zengo ryōhō de musubu yōna dezain de, zen migoro ya sokumen dakedenaku, ushirosugata mo supporto to kabā shite kuremasu. Kitchinde wa mochiron, gādeningu ya daisōji nado demo katsuyaku shimasu*, Survey エプロン Epuron 2008 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.

<sup>100</sup> 麻平識ダブリエ *Asa heshiki Taburie*: モニタリング時のご意見を参考に、ひもを長めに変更したことで、8通りの着こなしを楽しんでいただけるようになりました。首まわりのデザインやひもの結び目、ポケットの位置を変えることで、一枚のタブリエがさまざまな表情のアレンジに変化します *Monitarangu-ji no go iken o sankō ni, himo o nagame ni henkō shita koto de, 8-tōri no kikonashi o tanoshinde itadakeru yō ni narimashita. Kubi mawari no dezain ya himo no musubime, poketto no ichiwokaerukoto de, ichi-mai no taburie ga samazamana hyōjō no arenji ni henka shimasu. Epuron 2008 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/apron01.html), consulted 2014.*

#### 5.2.4. CASE Y: survey about Valentine's Day Kit 「手づくりバレンタインの思い出話」 *Tedzukuri Barentain no omoide-banashi* (Reminiscences of handmade Valentine chocolate).

This survey submitted by *Mujirushi Ryōhin* to its user concerns the Valentine's Day handmade chocolate made by women for their boyfriends or men who are attracted to. Muji asked to Muji.net's users who used the *Mujirushi Ryōhin* Valentine's kit or who received chocolate created by that to tell some episodes and ideas based on their experiences. The submit has done the 11rt July 2008 until 24th July 2008. Moreover, the 21rd of July 2008 it has arranged a meeting with 6 usersm in which users used the Valentine's Kit developed by Muji, 自分でつくるガトーショコラ *Jibun de tsukuru gatōshokora* (Gatou Chocolat produce by myself).

##### 1) Lead User

*“Lead users are users whose present strong needs will become general in a marketplace months or years in the future. Since lead users are familiar with conditions which lie in the future for most others, they can serve as a need-forecasting laboratory for marketing research. Moreover, since lead users often attempt to fill the need their experience, they can provide new product concept and design data as well” (von Hippel 1986 p. 791).<sup>101</sup>*

Also this case cannot affirm that users who responded to the survey are “lead users” because they did not face the problems before maker by themselves, but Muji ask to them some experiences about the Muji Valentine's Day Kit in order to create a novelt kit for the next Valentine's Day. Anyway Muji find those users that have the lead user' characteristics and join them in the product development process. For example:

1. I tried to make fresh cream with soy milk, but husband really did not like it, so I make it as usual. I made it easily without permission and at a moderate price, but when I heard “Handmade”, he was very happy. Even now I still don't know how use soy milk to make;<sup>102</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Eric VON HIPPEL, “Lead User: A Source of Novel Product Concepts”, Management Science, 1986, p. 791.

<sup>102</sup> 生クリームを入れてつくる場所を、豆乳でヘルシーにつくってみたかったのですが...夫がすごく嫌がったので、結局、普通に生クリームを入れてつくりました。お手頃値段で無断も出さず簡単につくりましたが、「手作り！」と、すごく、喜んでもらえました。豆乳でつくってみたら、どうだったのか、それは、今でも、不明です *Nama kurīmu o irete tsukuru tokoro o, tōnyū de herushī ni tsukutte mitakatta nodesuga... otto ga sugoku iyagattanode, kekkyoku, futsū ni nama kurīmu o irete tsukurimashita. O tegoro nedan de mudan mo dezu kantan ni tsukuremashitaga, `tedzukuri!' To, sugoku, yorokonde moraemashita. Tōnyū de tsukutte mitara, dōdatta no ka,*

2. Last year I made the truffle for my boyfriend (now my husband) while we have a long distance relationship but it was a flop because it remains some lumps. Since this year we live together, I hide the wrapping and I enjoy doing it secretly;<sup>103</sup>
3. By using the Mujirushi Ryōhin Handmade Kit I cooked cookies and muffin, I iced them and I put them in a basket. When I give it to my boyfriend he was very touched.<sup>104</sup>

By using their experiences, users could notice some problems and lacks about the prior Muji's Kit and explain to the firm some experiences. They have some lead user's characteristics, but I cannot affirm that they are certainly lead users.

## 2) Product Develop Process

*Until the 1970 the product development process it has done by the manufacturers. (小川 2002). But in these last years there are also methods towards them lead users can participate in the product development system toward two kinds of methods: 1) user-driven method (UD) and 2) the lead user method (LU). 小川(2006)*

Users by using brand community could participate in the product development process. There aren't dates about how many users responded to the survey, but there are many comments posted by Muji. This study can affirm that users expressed their ideas, comments, experiences as Ogawa (2006) affirmed, but this method used by Muji didn't fit with those explained by Ogawa (2006).

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soreha, imademo, fumeidesu, Survey: 手づくりバレンタインの思い出話 Tedzukuri Barentain no omoide-banashi 2008 in Monozukuri komyuniti, <http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/oishii01.html>, consulted 2014.

<sup>103</sup> 去年はトリュフを遠距離恋愛中の彼(今の夫)につくりましたが、なんだかつぶつぶ感が残って失敗だったかな…。今年と同じ家にいるので、ラッピングとか隠しておいて、こっそりつくるのが楽しみです Kyonen wa toryufu o enkyori ren'ai-chū no kare (ima no otto) ni tsukurimashitaga, nandaka tsubutsu-kan ga nokotte shippaidatta ka na.... Kotoshi wa onaji-ka ni iru node, rappingu toka kakushite oite, kossori tsukuru no ga tanoshimidesu, Survey: 手づくりバレンタインの思い出話 Tedzukuri Barentain no omoide-banashi 2008 in Monozukuri komyuniti, <http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/oishii01.html>, consulted 2014.

<sup>104</sup> 無印良品手づくりキットでクッキーとマフィンを焼いて、アイシングして、かごに入れて贈ったら、彼はすごく感動してくれました Muinryōhin tedzukuri kitto de kukkī to mafon o yaite, aishingu shite, kago ni irete okuttara, kanari gōka ni nari, kare wa sugoku kandō shite kuremashita, Survey: 手づくりバレンタインの思い出話 Tedzukuri Barentain no omoide-banashi 2008 in Monozukuri komyuniti, <http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/oishii01.html>, consulted 2014.

The nature of the community is different from those analysed until now. *Monozukuri komyuniti* is a community where Muji asked to its consumers if they are satisfied about products or if there are some lacks, not good points about those products through some surveys.

**FIGURE 2-2 Characteristics of LU and UD**

	LU-method	UD-method
1) The starting point	Maker	User
2) Research target unit	Individual user	User community
3) Timing of demand explicit	After development	Before development
4) Use of internet	Not indispensable	Indispensable
5) Ease of specific user	Not ease	Ease

小川( Ogawa 2006) p.5

In this case the start point is the maker (i.e. Muji) that try to find users with a lead users' characteristics to involve them in the product development process. The research target is users registered on the Muji Community site, Muji.net. The timing of demand is before development, because Muji wants to know if there are some lacks in the Valentine's Day Kit used until now in order to improve it. The use of internet is indispensable because only who is registered on the Muji.net could join in the product development process. The lack's recognition is not difficult everyone could do it.

*After some time that user share information and experiences to company toward the online community it will begin a relationship of mutual trust. According to Fuller's et. al. (2006) about the Audi Infotainment case the 80% of the participants expressed their willingness to participate in the future product development initiatives and an ongoing series of interaction and this can birth a virtual relationship of mutual trust between the firm and the users.*

In this Case (Y) there no dates about how many users responded to the survey, but Muji uploaded many comments concerning requests or experiences. In this Case, this study cannot affirm that is born a mutual trust relationship. Many consumers gave their information to Muji and the firm used this information for creating a new Valentine's Day Kit.

*Between company and users will be born a win-win relationship and it can be a valuable source of innovation. By using win-win relationship the company can collect valuable knowledge, information, competence and technology from partners to combine with its resources. (Wuggetzer 2010).*

The win-win relationship can be seen not only in the many comments that users sent to Muji, but also in the meeting arranged by the firm with six users, in which users try the sample created by Muji and together found lacks and thought improvement for it.

The comments about the Muji's sample are:

1. It is easy to make;<sup>105</sup>
2. Since it just opens the bag and make it, it is easy;<sup>106</sup>
3. The simplicity as, for example, managing the hot cake mix;<sup>107</sup>
4. I could do it without hesitation.<sup>108</sup>

About some problems:

1. It would be better if the single step-by-step instructions are not too long;<sup>109</sup>
2. The handle of the turntable at the beginning is difficult to understand;<sup>110</sup>
3. The quantity of the icing sugar for the complementation is too much;<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> つくりやすい *Tsukuri yasui*, Survey: 手づくりバレンタインの思い出話 *Tedzukuri Barentain no omoide-banashi* in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, <http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/oishii01.html>, consulted 2014.

<sup>106</sup> 袋を開けてつくるだけなので簡単 *Fukuro o akete tsukuru dakenanode kantan*, Survey: 手づくりバレンタインの思い出話 *Tedzukuri Barentain no omoide-banashi* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, <http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/oishii01.html>, consulted 2014.

<sup>107</sup> ホットケーキミックスを扱うような簡単さ *Hottokēkimikkusu o atsukau yōna kantan-sa*, Survey: 手づくりバレンタインの思い出話 *Tedzukuri Barentain no omoide-banashi* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, <http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/oishii01.html>, consulted 2014.

<sup>108</sup> 迷わずつくれた *Mayowazu tsukureta*, Survey: 手づくりバレンタインの思い出話 *Tedzukuri Barentain no omoide-banashi* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, <http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/oishii01.html>, consulted 2014.

<sup>109</sup> ひとつひとつの手順説明は、あまり長すぎない方がいい *Hitotsuhitotsu no tejun setsumei wa, amari naga suginai kata ga I*, Survey: 手づくりバレンタインの思い出話 *Tedzukuri Barentain no omoide-banashi* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, <http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/oishii01.html>, consulted 2014.

<sup>110</sup> 冒頭のダーンプレートの取り扱いが分かりにくい *Bōtō no tānpurēto no toriatsukai ga wakari nikui*

<sup>111</sup> 仕上げかける粉糖の量が多い。あと、どのぐらいの量を振っていいのかわからない *Shiage kakeru funtō no ryō ga ōi. Ato, dono gurai no ryō o futte ī no ka wakaranai*, Survey: 手づくりバレンタインの思い出話 *Tedzukuri Barentain no omoide-banashi* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, <http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/oishii01.html>, consulted 2014.

4. Difficult to find a dotting line of a pastry pan. I am not used to understand the word "dotted line";<sup>112</sup>
5. It would be better if the photo of the finished product will be integrated in the package.<sup>113</sup>

### 3) Brand Community

*Brand community is a place where firm and consumers can exchange information and interact each other. "A brand community is a specialized, non-geographically, bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand"*<sup>114</sup> (Muzin and O'Guinn 2001 p.412).

In this study brand community is different rather others analysed until now. Users respond to some surveys submitted by Muji that collects ideas, comments, experiences and through those information improves products. In this Case (Y) Muji asked to users some experiences with Valentine's Day Kit used until now and they respond with many comments. I can affirm that the *Monozukuri komyuniti* is a place in which there is an exchange of information, but not that there is an interaction between users and Muji.

*Innovation communities can increase the effectiveness and the speed with users and manufactures can develop and diffuse new innovations (von Hippel 2005).*

The survey was submitted by Muji to users the 11rd July 2008 and the 8th August 2008 is being arranged the meeting with six consumers. The final products were completed the 23rd January 2009. In six months Muji could develop a new product on the base of the users' collaboration. Thus, this study can affirm that the communities can increase the effectiveness and the speed the development of new innovations.

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<sup>112</sup> 型についているミシン目の場所が分かりにくかった。そもそもミシン目という言葉にも馴染がない *Kata ni tsuite iru mishin-me no basho ga wakari nikukatta. Somosomo mishin-me to iu kotoba ni mo najimi ga nai*, Survey: 手づくりバレンタインの思い出話 *Tedzukuri Barentain no omoide-banashi* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, <http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/oishii01.html>, consulted 2014.

<sup>113</sup> パッケージ写真は、でき上がりの全体像を入れたほうがいい *Bakkēji shashin wa, dekiagari no zentai-zō o ireta hō ga ī*, Survey: 手づくりバレンタインの思い出話 *Tedzukuri Barentain no omoide-banashi* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, <http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/oishii01.html>, consulted 2014.

<sup>114</sup> MUNIZ Albert M., O'GUINN Thomas C., "Brand community...", 2001, p. 412.

*Brand community's members not only share the same passion toward the brand, but also they feel to be like a family and they help each other to solve problems. (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001)*

There are no dates for proving this affirmation. *Monozukuri komyuniti* is a different community rather those analysed until now by other researchers. Muji submitted some surveys to users in order to understand user's needs, expectations, problems or lacks about products.

*The relationship between firm and user is not only one-way, but also user help firm to solve problems about products. Using online brand community, companies can interact with the member, asking them what they think about brand or a specific product relating a better connection with the users and benefit from the consumers' knowledge. They also can help companies to solve problems and create new product thanks to their experience and knowledge by writing their ideas in the company site's wall. If a firm gives to its consumers the possibility of creating brand community and give them the freedom of modifying the products, they will do it (Schau, Muniz and Arnould 2009).*

In this case (Y) users dates about the users who helped the firm to find some solution to some problem can be seen only in the meeting arranged by Muji. In the survey users told about their experiences.

*Between lead user there are users who reveal freely information about innovation by using communities. Allen (1983) was the first one who affirmed that the precondition of collective invention is the free exchange of information about new techniques and plant designs between firms. In that way it could be possible a technical advance. But between lead user there are some who share freely information to the company and thanks to their innovative ideas and their cooperation with a company they can be a new way to create value (Ogawa 2013).*

All the users in this community share information freely. They have to register on Muji.net and then participate in the various communities. The profit that users receive is the expected product. In this Case (Y) is the Valentine's Day Kit for making chocolate cake.

#### 4) Value co-creation

*By collaborating with users, company can create novelty and original products. Ogawa (2006) analysed the case of Muji, and found out that the users co-creation with makers can be a way to create original and novelty products*

Also in this case (Y) the affirmation of Ogawa can be confirmed. After gathering all the comments, ideas, experiences from survey and meeting Muji could create novelty and originally product.

Muji has explained the improvements in these comments:

1) **We made it more clearly by taking out the description of the pattern:**<sup>115</sup>

About phrases of recipe and illustration, on the base of the voices that we have received at the meeting, we promoted details expressions. For example, concerning the description “Take out the cake carefully from the mold along the perforated line” which gathered the opinion to be difficult to understand, it was supplemented in addition to beginning a sentence "Take of the splice of the cake mold". Moreover, we addicted an illustration and we treated a separate procedure.

2) **The sugar that has sprinkled at the end, we made the proper quantity:**<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> 型から取り出す説明などを、よりわかりやすくしました。 *Kata kara toridasu setsumeï nado o, yori kawari yasuku shi mashi ta:* レシピの文章やイラストについて、モニター会でいただいた声を元に、細かい表現の見直しを進めました。例えば、わかりにくいと意見の集まった「ミシン目にそって型から丁寧にケーキを取り出します」という説明については、「焼き型のつぎ目をはがし」という文章を冒頭に加えて補足しました。さらにイラストを添え、手順を独立した項目として扱いました。 *Reshipi no bunshō ya irasuto nitsuite, monitā kai de itadai ta koe o moto ni, komakai hyōgen no minaoshi o susume mashi ta. Tatoeba, wakari nikui to iken no atsumatta 'mishin me ni sotte kata kara teinei ni kēki o toridashi masu' toyuu setsumeï nitsuite wa, 'yaki gata no tsugi me o wa hagashi' toyuu bunshō o bōtō ni kuwae te hosoku shi mashi ta. Sarani irasuto o soe, tejun o dokuritsu shi ta kōmoku toshite atsukai mashi ta.* Survey: 手づくりバレンタインの思い出話 *Tedzukuri Barentain no omoide-banashi* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, <http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/oishii01.html>, consulted 2014.

<sup>116</sup> 最後に振りかける砂糖を、ぴったりの量にしました *Saigo ni furikakeru satō o, pittari no ryō ni shi mashi ta:* モニター会で「全部ふりかけると真っ白になってしまう」「ちょうど量を用意の方が見栄えの失敗がなくていい」などのご意見をいただいた粉糖について、サンプル時の 10g から適量の 5g に変更しました。 *Monitā kai de 'zenbu furikakeru to masshiro ni natte shimau' 'chōdo no ryō o yōi shi ta hō ga mibae no shippai ga naku te ii' nado no go iken o itadai ta kona tō nitsuite, sanpuru ji no 10 g kara tekiryō no 5 g ni henkō shi mashi ta.* Survey: 手づくりバレンタインの思い出話 *Tedzukuri Barentain no omoide-banashi* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, <http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/oishii01.html>, consulted 2014.

At the meeting we have received comments about “If you sprinkle all the sugar it becomes completely white”, “If you prepare the proper quantity there aren't the appearance of fail”, and when we proposed the sample we changed the proper quantity from 10 gr to 5 gr.

**3) It was put in the package the whole picture of the completed work:<sup>117</sup>**

Refers to the voice about “Hand it as a whole without cutting it into pieces.” We changed the picture in the package for let understand the flower form of the finished product.

**5.2.5. CASE Z: survey about children's baggage. 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ Kodomo no mochimonon o tsukuro u! (Let's create baggage for children)**

In this case (Z) Muji asked to users (mothers) about a bag in which they can put the children's wallet, handkerchief, mask. Then there are questions about what kind of things children put in their pocket. Moreover, there are another survey about 3 items, lesson bag, shoulder bag and slippers case, bags that children use to go to kindergarten or school.

**1) Lead User**

*“Lead users are users whose present strong needs will become general in a marketplace months or years in the future. Since lead users are familiar with conditions which lie in the future for most others, they can serve as a need-forecasting laboratory for marketing research. Moreover, since lead users often attempt to fill the need their experience, they can provide new product concept and design data as well” (von Hippel 1986 p. 791).<sup>118</sup>*

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<sup>117</sup> でき上がりの全体像をパッケージに入れました *Dekiagari no zentai zō o bakkēji ni ire mashi t*: 「切り分けずに、ホールのままで渡すこともある」という声を参考にし、でき上がりの全体像が花型であることがわかるように、パッケージ写真を変更しました。'Kiriwake zu ni, hōru no mama de watasu koto mo aru' toyuu koe o sankō ni shi, dekiagari no zentai zō ga hana gata de aru koto ga wakaru yō ni, bakkēji shashin o henkō shi mashi ta. Survey: 手づくりバレンタインの思い出話 *Tedzukuri Barentain no omoide-banashi* 2008 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, <http://www.muji.net/community/mono/new/oishii01.html>, consulted 2014.

<sup>118</sup> Eric VON HIPPEL, “Lead User: A Source of Novel Product Concepts”, *Management Science*, 1986, p. 791.

In this case, like others, it could not confirm if the users (in this case mother) are really “lead users”. This kind of users didn't create by themselves new products, but explain problems and lacks only after Muji asked them to do it. Muji chose those users that have the lead user's characteristics to join them in the product development process. Users helped Muji to improve some products explaining their ideas, comments and experiences.

About lesson bag and slippers case some problems and lacks that users noticed and requests are:

1. I want a good handbag in which I put things that I carry;<sup>119</sup>
2. I want a device of the pocket inside and outside;<sup>120</sup>
3. It will be good if there is a zipper that don't allow the contents to jump out;<sup>121</sup>
4. I want a slipper case that I can use for a long time;<sup>122</sup>
5. It will be good if it is easy to wash;<sup>123</sup>
6. I want a product that does not reveal the inside dirty.<sup>124</sup>

About the wallet:

1. Since it is dangerous carry the wallet in the hand, I want an item with strap or pochette-shaped that are lowered;<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> 持ち運ぶものが入る十分なマチがほしい *Mochihakobu mono ga hairu jūbun na machi ga hoshii*, Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimono” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>120</sup> 内ポケット、外ポケットなど、ポケット収納の工夫を *Uchi poketto, soto poketto nado, poketto shūnō no kufū o*. Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimono” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>121</sup> 中身が飛び出ないファスナーがあるといい *Nakami ga tobide nai fasunā ga aru to ii*. Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimono” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>122</sup> 大きくなっても使える上履き入れがほしい *Ōkiku natte mo tsukaeru uwabaki ire ga hoshii*. Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimono” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>123</sup> 洗濯がしやすいといい *Sentaku ga shi yasui to ii*. Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimono” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>124</sup> 内側の汚れが目立たないものを *Uchigawa no yogore ga medata nai mono*, Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimono” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>125</sup> おさいふを手を持たせるのは危ないので、ストラップ付きやポシェット型などの“下げられる”ものがほしい *Bōhan jō o sa ifu o te ni motaseru no wa abunai node, suto rappu tsuki ya poshetto gata nado no "sagerareru" mono ga hoshii*, Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimono” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

2. For when children lose the wallet, it will be good if there is a space where writes the name.<sup>126</sup>

About handkerchief the most of the users are interested in 乾きやすさ *Kawaki yasusa* (ease to wash it).

In this Case consumers understand before Muji what is wrong with those products and what would be better to improve.

## 2) Product Develop Process

*Until the 1970 the product development process it has done by the manufacturers. (小川 2002). But in these last years there are also methods towards them lead users can participate in the product development system toward two kinds of methods: 1) user-driven method (UD) and 2) the lead user method (LU). 小川(2006)*

By using the *Monozukuri komyuniti* 7.388 users gave their ideas, comments, experiences to Muji so this study could confirm that users can participate in the product development process. Also in this Case (Z) the methods didn't fit with those by other researchers. This brand community is not the same of those analysed until now, but Muji submitted some survey to users to understand products' lacks, problems and better improvements for the future.

**FIGURE 2-2 Characteristics of LU and UD**

	LU-method	UD-method
1) The starting point	Maker	User
2) Research target unit	Individual user	User community
3) Timing of demand explicit	After development	Before development
4) Use of internet	Not indispensable	Indispensable
5) Ease of specific user	Not ease	Ease

小川( Ogawa 2006) p.5

<sup>126</sup> なくした時のために、名前が書けるスペースがあると良い *Nakushi ta toki no tame ni, namae ga kakeru supēsu ga aru to yoi*, Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimono” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

The starting point is the maker (i.e. Muji), the research target is individual users where Muji try to find the lead users' characteristics. The timing of demand is after development because Muji ask about products used until that time if there are some changes to do to improve them, but the use of internet is indispensable because only who are registered into Muji.net could respond to the survey and it is not difficult everyone can do it.

*After some time that user share information and experiences to company toward the online community it will begin a relationship of mutual trust. According to Fuller's et. al. (2006) about the Audi Infotainment case the 80% of the participants expressed their willingness to participate in the future product development initiatives and an ongoing series of interaction and this can birth a virtual relationship of mutual trust between the firm and the users.*

There are not specific dates that could confirm the birth of a mutual trust relationship, but in this Case (Z) 7.388 users responded to the surveys giving their ideas, comments, problem resolutions. Thus, even if there are not specific dates about a mutual trust relationship, this study could affirm that users trust Muji, because more than 7000 of them responded to survey and give their ideas about it. It means that they believe in Muji and think that the firm will develop those products by using their information. On the other side, Muji submitted surveys to understand users' needs, therefore also Muji trust in users' information.

*Between company and users will be born a win-win relationship and it can be a valuable source of innovation. By using win-win relationship the company can collect valuable knowledge, information, competence and technology from partners to combine with its resources. (Wuggetzer 2010)*

The win-win relationship can be seen not only in the survey with the responses, but also it the two meetings arranged by Muji in which 5 users (of those who responded the surveys) meet and share ideas, comments and think about some improvements. In the first meeting Muji staff and users talks about problems and improvements giving some ideas, and in the second meeting Muji gave to users the sample created by using the information gained in the first meeting.

In the meeting Muji could understand good point and lacks in the samples.

About lesson bag:

1. The polyester material was good and light;<sup>127</sup>
2. Large arithmetic set fits perfectly; <sup>128</sup>
3. The lid is very useful, but when you have many big things, the lid is not long enough...;<sup>129</sup>
4. I feel that the sewing of the handle is feeble and I am preoccupied. If it could be reinforce it....<sup>130</sup>

About slipper case:

1. Lesson bag similarly, it was good and light;<sup>131</sup>
2. Until now I used the zipper that open and shut, but I like the ease of the D-ring;<sup>132</sup>
3. I want a space in which write the name;<sup>133</sup>
4. Since the open is not the type that can be closed, the small slippers seems to run out from the gap.<sup>134</sup>

About handkerchief:

1. Even if you put it in the pocket, without becoming lumpy, it was neat and settled;<sup>135</sup>

<sup>127</sup> ポリエステル素材が、軽くてよかったです *Poriesuteru sozai ga, karuku te yokatta desu*, Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimonon” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>128</sup> 大きな算数セットが、ぴったり収まりました *Ōkina sansū setto ga, pittari osamari mashi ta*, Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimonon” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>129</sup> ふたがとても便利なのですが、大きい荷物の時は、ふたの長さがちょっと足りなくて..... *Futa ga totemo benri na no desu ga, ōkii nimotsu no toki wa, futa no naga sa ga chotto tari naku te.....*, Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimonon” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>130</sup> 持ち手部分の縫製が弱いように感じて、気になりました。補強してもらえたら..... *Mochi te bubun no hōsei ga yowai yō ni kanji te, ki ni nari mashi ta. Hokyō shi te morae tara*, Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimonon” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>131</sup> レッスンバッグ同様、軽くてよかったです *Ressun baggu dōyō, karuku te yokatta desu*

<sup>132</sup> 今まではファスナーで開け閉めするタイプを使っていたのですが、Dカンの使いやすさが気に入りました *Ima made wa fasunā de ake shimesuru taipu o tsukatte i ta no desu ga, D kan no tsukai yasu sa ga kiniiri mashi ta*

<sup>133</sup> 名前を書くところがほしいです *Namae o kaku tokoro ga hoshii desu*, , Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimonon” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>134</sup> 口をすべて閉めるタイプではないので小さい上履きは、入れ口の隙間から飛び出してしまうそう *Kuchi o subete shimeru taipu de wa nai node chīsai uwabaki wa, ire guchi no sukima kara tobidashi te shimai sō*, , Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimonon” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>135</sup> ポケットに入れても、もこもこせず、すっきりと収まっていた *Poketto ni ire te mo, mo ko mo kose zu, sukkiri to osamatte i mashi ta*, Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimonon” o tsukuro u!

2. I think that colour and design together are good. About self-colored, I think it is boring for children;<sup>136</sup>
3. The space where children write the name, maybe it is small;<sup>137</sup>
4. I want that you make the texture gently and smoothly.<sup>138</sup>

### 3) Brand Community

*Brand community is a place where firm and consumers can exchange information and interact each other. "A brand community is a specialized, non-geographically, bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand"*<sup>139</sup> (Muzin and O'Guinn 2001 p.412).

This study can affirm also in the Case (Z) that *Monozukuri komyuniti* is a place where users and Muji exchange information but didn't interact each other. By using the survey Muji could obtain important information for use them in the product development process. In this Case Z Muji submitted one survey concerning four different products: lesson bag, slipper case, wallet and handkerchief. Besides, many comments and suggestions Muji understand that the 70,3% of users use Lesson bag, 75% use the slipper case. About the wallet less than 45% of users said that their children don't use a wallet, indeed at the end Muji don't develop any wallet. Finally, 46% of the users have 6-10 handkerchiefs.

*Innovation communities can increase the effectiveness and the speed with users and manufactures can develop and diffuse new innovations (von Hippel 2005).*

The survey has been submitted the 27rd March 2009 and the two meetings with users have been arranged in May and in October in the same year. The final products have been

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2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>136</sup> 色、デザインともに良いと思います。無地だと、子どもにはつまらないと思うんですね *Iro, dezain tomo ni yoi to omoi masu. Muji da to, kodomo ni wa tsumaranai to omou n desu yo ne*, Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimonon” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>137</sup> 子どもが自分で名前を書くには、ちょっとお名前欄が小さいかな *Kodomo ga jibun de namae o kaku ni wa, chotto o namae ran ga chīsai ka na*, Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimonon” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>138</sup> 少し肌触りをなめらかに、優しくしてほしいです *Sukoshi hadazawari o nameraka ni, yasashiku shi te hoshii desu*, Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimonon” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>139</sup> MUNIZ Albert M., O'GUINN Thomas C., “Brand community...”, 2001, p. 412.

developed the January 2010. Less than a year Muji could develop 2 items that know they will be sell because Muji could understand the real users' needs.

*Brand community's members not only share the same passion toward the brand, but also they feel to be like a family and they help each other to solve problems. (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001)*

This study can not confirm this affirmation because the brand community is different, in which the users don't interact each other but only individually with Muji. The only interaction among users is during the two brief meetings. With only few days users cannot create a so deep relationship.

*The relationship between firm and user is not only one-way, but also user help firm to solve problems about products. Using online brand community, companies can interact with the member, asking them what they think about brand or a specific product relating a better connection with the users and benefit from the consumers' knowledge. They also can help companies to solve problems and create new product thanks to their experience and knowledge by writing their ideas in the company site's wall. If a firm gives to its consumers the possibility of creating brand community and give them the freedom of modifying the products, they will do it (Schau, Muniz and Arnould 2009).*

The relationship between firm and users is not only one-way can be seen in these sentences:

**1. About lesson bag:**

- a. Before the opening ceremony and the closing ceremony of the elementary school there are many things to carry, for example the toolbox the younger children have many things that they cannot now put inside by themselves. I would be better if the lesson bag is a little bit leeway.<sup>140</sup>
- b. I want a material easy to wash and difficult to get dirty.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> 小学校の始業式明けと終業式前は荷物が多く、お道具箱とか低学年の子どもでは、自分でうまく入れられないことが多い。レッスンバッグは、もう少しゆとりがあるほうがいい。Shōgakkō no shigyō shiki ake to shūgyō shiki mae wa nimotsu ga ōku, o dōgu bako toka tei gakunen no kodomo de wa, jibun de umaku ire rare nai koto ga ōi. Resson baggu wa, mōsukoshi yutori ga aru hō ga ii. Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimonono” o tsukuro u! 2009 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>141</sup> 洗濯がしやすく、汚れが付きにくい素材がほしい Sentaku ga shi yasuku, yogore ga tsuki nikui sozai ga hoshii. Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimonono” o tsukuro u! 2009 in Monozukuri

## 2. About slipper case:

- a. I think it is better a slipper case similar to a cute bag rather than a usual slipper case.<sup>142</sup>
- b. If the slipper's size will become bigger, because of the type of zipper you cannot close the case. I think that the old-fashioned D-ring is more flexible and clever.<sup>143</sup>

## 3. Handkerchief:

I think it would be better if he/she take handkerchief and tissues, but don't want to hear it. The pocket become so full and she/he doesn't like it.<sup>144</sup>

*Between lead user there are users who reveal freely information about innovation by using communities. Allen (1983) was the first one who affirmed that the precondition of collective invention is the free exchange of information about new techniques and plant designs between firms. In that way it could be possible a technical advance. But between lead user there are some who share freely information to the company and thanks to their innovative ideas and their cooperation with a company they can be a new way to create value (Ogawa 2013).*

Also in this Case (Z) all the users give freely their information to Muji. Everyone who is already registered on the Muji.net site can join the community and respond to the survey. The users' profit is the final product.

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komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>142</sup> いかにも上履き入れという感じではなく、バッグのような可愛いかたちだったらいいと思う。Ikanimo uwabaki ire toyuu kanji de wa naku, baggu no yō na kawaii katachi dattara ii to omou. Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimonon” o tsukuro u! 2009 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>143</sup> ファスナータイプのは、上履きのサイズが大きくなってきたら、閉まらなくなってきた。昔ながらの D カン利用タイプの方が、融通が利いて便利 Fasunā taipu no mono wa, uwabaki no saizu ga ōkiku natte ki tara, shimara naku natte ki ta. Mukashinagara no D kan riyō taipu no hō ga, yūzū ga kii te benri Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimonon” o tsukuro u! 2009 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>144</sup> ハンカチやティッシュも持っておけばいいのに、とは思いますが、言っても聞きません。ポケットがいっぱいになるから、嫌だと言います Hankachi ya tisshu mo motte oke ba ii noni, to wa omoi masu ga, itte mo kiki mase n. Poketto ga ippai ni naru kara, iya da to ii masu. Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimonon” o tsukuro u! 2009 in Monozukuri komyuniti, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

#### 4) Value co-creation

*By collaborating with users, company can create novelty and original products. Ogawa (2006) analysed the case of Muji, and found out that the users co-creation with makers can be a way to create original and novelty products*

By collaborating with the users during the meeting and then by using the information gathered from the survey, Muji was able to create new and original products.

**Lesson bag:** This bag has a large gusset and you can put B4-sized objects freely.

We made it with lightweight and durable polyester fabric. Plus, we strengthened the corners of the bottom, which tends to wear thin. Therefore the bag became easy to carry around.<sup>145</sup>

**Slipper case:** Together with the lesson bag, we created a shoes bag with polyester material. The important thing is the usefulness, we created a simple handle with D-ring closure and a big entry to put in and take off the shoes.<sup>146</sup>

Considering that we put dirty slippers/room shoes, a sac is made of 2 layers of clothes so that you can easily clean the dust inside. Moreover, even if it is dirty you can immediately put it in the net and wash it in the washing machine.<sup>147</sup>

**Handkerchief:** it takes more time to be developed.

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<sup>145</sup> B4 サイズがゆつたりと入る、広めのマチをとったレッスンバッグです。軽くて丈夫なポリエステル素材を使い、擦れやすい底の角を補強したことで、持ち歩きしやすいバッグに仕上げました。Saizu ga yuttari to hairu, hirome no machi o totta ressun baggu desu. Karuku te jōbu na poriesuteru sozai o tsukai, sure yasui soko no kaku o hokyō shi ta koto de, mochiarukishi yasui baggu ni shiage mashi ta. Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimono” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>146</sup> レッスンバッグとおそろいの、軽くて持ち歩きしやすい、ポリエステル素材でできたシューズバッグです。使いやすさを重視し、靴の出し入れがしやすい大きな入れ口と、シンプルなDカン留めの持ち手でつくりました。Ressun baggu to osoroi no, karuku te mochiarukishi yasui, poriesuteru sozai de deki ta shūzu baggu desu. Tsukai yasui sa o jūshi shi, kutsu no dashiire ga shi yasui ōkina ire guchi to, shinpuru na D kan tome no mochi shu de tsukuri mashi ta. Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimono” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

<sup>147</sup> 汚れやすい上履きを入れることを考え、ふくろ自体が中のほこりが取り出しやすい、二重仕立てになっています。また、汚れてもすぐに、ネットに入れてそのまま洗濯機で洗えるように仕上げました。Yogore yasui uwabaki o ireru koto o kangae, fuku ro jitai ga naka no hokori ga toridashi yasui, ni jū shitate ni natte i masu. Mata, yogore te mo sugu ni, netto ni ire te sonomama sentaku ki de araeru yō ni shiage mashi ta. Survey: 「こどもの持ち物」をつくろう！ “Kodomo no mochimono” o tsukuro u! 2009 in *Monozukuri komyuniti*, [www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/](http://www.muji.net/community/mono/mama/goods03/) consulted 2014.

## **CHAPTER 6 Conclusions**

### **6.1 Findings**

Through the online survey and the analysis of the five researches in the *Monozukuri komyuniti*, that methodology and results have been explained in the Chapter 4 and 5 permitted to confirm the hypotheses about how users can give their contribute in the company's product development process.

It has been observed some differences between results and hypotshes, but does not influence them substantially.

Here there is a brief summary of the survey and researches' results.

#### **6.1.1 Online survey consumers**

The online survey gained 516 responses, but even though the big number reached only 22 (around the 5%) responders affirmed that they have revealed their ideas, information, experiences to Muji. Among these 22 responders, only one person explained her idea and she affirmed that Muji accepted it and created a new product. This consumer (denominated Case A) have the lead user features, as explained by von Hippel (1986; 1988): 1) lead user faces need that will show in the marketplace months or years before the maker; 2) she is positioned to earn a benefit by obtaining a solution by those needs. Case A participated in the product development process, but in a different way as explained Ogawa (2006), she didn't participate in any brand community. Nevertheless, Case A began a relationship with Muji of mutual trust, she trusts in Muji's products and Muji trusts in her information, and a win-win relationship, in which both gain a profit from their collaboration and interaction. At the end, Case A there was a value co-creation and a new and original product have been created.

By analysing the dates gained through posting the survey in some Muji'fan blogs, this study cannot strongly affirm that Muji's consumers join the firm's product development process by participating in the brand community. These have been affirmed the second research.

### 6.1.2 Case researches

The second study, analysis of 5 cases of the *Mujirushi komyuniti*, a community in the *Mujirushi Ryōhin's* site Muji.net, could affirm with more vigour the hypotheses defined. In this community Muji submit some surveys in order to know lacks, unsatisfactory points of the current products and improve them with the consumers' collaboration. Moreover, after have been created a sample by using the consumers' information gained through the survey, the company has arranged some meetings モニター会 *Monitā kai* in which consumers, chose among the responders of the surveys, directly analysed the samples and judge them with comments and suggestions.

First, an unexpected great number of consumers responded to the survey with good or bad comments, giving suggestions and explaining their experiences (6000-20000 users responded to the surveys). Also in these cases (X, V, W, Y, Z) the consumers have the lead users' features, even if it have not affirm completely that they are “lead user”. They participate in the firm's product development process through the brand community and the meeting arranged by Muji. But the method is different as Ogawa (2006) explained in his studies. In this brand community Muji asked to users, by a survey, what is wrong or what is good in a product, and also asked some experiences and suggestion in order to improve those products. The users comments one o more products that already exist, the use of the Internet is indispensable and the process of recolonization of the product's lacks is not difficult, everyone can does it.

Second, it could be affirmed that the relationship between firm and consumers is of mutual trust and win-win, even if this study could not affirm that the mutual trust relationship was born in the community. However a great number (6000-20000) of users responded to the surveys in which Muji asked users' ideas and opinions. It means that Muji trusts in the consumer voice, and consumers trust in Muji and in the realization of their expected product. The win-win relationship is the mutual profit that they gain in the collaboration: Muji could gain important and precious information by which it could develop a novel product that certainly will be sold, and consumers could have the expected product.

Third, by using the consumers' voices in the survey and in the meetings Muji could create novel and original products. Thus, this study can affirm the predetermined hypotheses: users toward online brand community participate in the firm's product development process

giving their ideas and experiences and they can create new and innovative products. This relationship is advantageous for both, firms that can increase their sales and profits without using useless costs and resources, and users that can have higher satisfaction by using the products they really want.

Finally, even if in the first research, online survey, it could not be affirmed the participation of the consumers in the firm's product developing process, in the second research, case study, consumers by using the *Monozukuri komyuniti* arranged by *Mujirushi Ryōhin*, collaborated indirectly and directly with the firm and developed better products.

## **6.2 Implications**

### **(a) Theoretical Implications**

Among the existing studies, have been chosen those that support the hypothesis predetermined for this study. In particularly von Hippel's studies are used to understand the “lead user”'s features, their relation with the firm. Ogawa and Piller's studies and Muniz and O'Guinn (2001)'s study have been chosen to understand and support the hypothesis about brand community as vehicle through that consumers interact with firms in the product development process. Fuller's et al. (2006) have been used to support the mutual trust relational, and Wuggetzer et al. (2010) for the win-win relationship between firm and consumers. Phahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) and Ogawa (2006) have been chosen to support the hypothesis about value co-creation.

Finally, others researchers' studies have been used to remark the hypotheses in details.

### **(b) Practical Implications**

Most of the previous researches focused on why consumers want to interact with the firm in the product development process and what arise their willingness to participate in the online brand communities. Only few researches focused how consumers interact with firms and if effectively the collaboration between the firm and consumers could get precious profit for both. Thanks to the survey, partially, and the cases study it help to know that the interaction is possible also in a different kind of online community and it reconfirms that not only firm could create good products but also users can be a valuable source of innovation.

### 6.3 Limitations and Future Research

Even if the survey has been sent to many Muji's fan blogs only one posted it on her blogs inciting her followers to respond. Due to the small field in which survey has been posted, it was not able to get much information. The reason that the admins of the Muji's blog did not post the survey on their blogs could be the diffidence toward an unknown person request.

Due to the number of Muji's fan blogs in which survey have been posted (only one) and the dates about the case study in the *Monozukuri komyuniti* that are not a primary source, but dates have already analysed and posted by Muji, this study cannot be considered in absolute terms. This can be a source of new study in order to focus deeply on the user innovation.

Future research could focus on the research of new kind of vehicles, not only online brand communities, by which consumers participate in the product development process, why consumers are willing to join the firm's product development process and what kinds of basis firm choose consumers to collaborate.

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## APPENDIX 1      オンラインのアンケート質問リスト

1) あなたの年齢を教えてください。

- 20代
- 20歳未満
- 30代
- 40代
- 50代
- 60代以上
- その他

2) あなたの性別は？

- 女性
- 男性

3) あなたがお住まいの都道府県は？

4) 既婚ですか？未婚ですか？

5) お子さんはいますか？

- いない
- 一人
- 二人
- 三人以上

6) あなたの職業は？

7) いつから無印良品のファンになりましたか。

- 1年以内
- 2～4年前
- 4～6年前

- 6～8 年前
  - 8 年以上前
- 8) あなたがほかの企業より無印良品の製品を選択するのはどうしてですか？
- 9) 無印良品という企業が新製品を開発するにあたり、あなたのアイデア/意見を伝えたことがありますか？
- はい
  - いいえ
- 10) 無印良品はあなたの/意見を活用して新製品を製作したことがありますか？
- はい
  - いいえ
  - わからない
- 11) それはどういうアイデア/意見でしたか？
- 12) それはどういう製品でしたか？
- 13) あなたのアイデア/意見が新製品に反映されたとき、どういう気持ちになりましたか？
- 14) 無印良品にあなたのアイデア/意見をメールで出しましたか？ ネット上のアンケートでしたか？
- メール
  - アンケート
  - わからない
- 15) どうして無印良品にあなたのアイデア/意見を伝えようと思ったのですか？
- 16) 自分のアイデア/意見を無印良品に出した後、企業から連絡がありましたか。
- はい
  - いいえ
  - わからない

17) あなたは無印良品の製品に満足していますか？無印良品の製品開発に貢献した後、無印良品をもっと好きになりましたか？それはなぜですか？

18) 無印良品が開設しているブランド・コミュニティ(例えば、Facebook、ムジファン)に参加することがありますか？

- はい
- いいえ
- わからない

19) 無印良品のブランド・コミュニティに参加している知り合いがいますか？

- はい
- いいえ
- わからない

20) 他の無印ファンと連絡をとったりしていますか？それはどのように連絡していますか？(例 メール・LINE・Facebook など)

21) 他の無印ファンとどのような話題の話をしていますか？

22) ブランド・コミュニティに参加した後、他のメンバーとの関係を深めてきましたか？問題解決に参加する機会を増やすことができましたか？

23) 今後、新たにお尋ねしたいことができたときには、追加で質問させていただいてもよろしいでしょうか？

## APPENDIX 2 ONLINE CONSUMERS SURVEY QUESTIONS LIST

1) How old are you?

- Younger than 20 ages
- 20 ages
- 30 ages
- 40 ages
- 50 ages
- More than 60 years old
- Other

2) What is your gender ?

- Woman
- Man

3) Where do you live in Japan ?

4) Are you married ? Or not?

5) Do you have children ?

- No one
- 1 child
- 2 children
- More than 3 children

6) What is your job?

7) When did you become a Mujirushi's fan?

- 1 year ago
- 2~4 years ago
- 4~6 years ago

- 6~8 years ago
- More than 8 years ago

8) Why do you chose Mujirushi's products than others company?

9) When Mujirushi develop new products, have you ever expressed your idea/opinion to the company?

- Yes
- No

10) Did Mujirushi used your idea/opinion for creating new products?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

11) What kind of idea/opinion was it?

12) What kind of products was it?

13) When your idea/opinion has used to create new product how you feel it?

14) How did you reveal your idea/opinion to Mujirushi? E-mail or questionnaires on Internet?

- E-mail
- Questionnaire
- I don't know

15) Why did you think to reveal your idea/opinion to Mujirushi?

16) After revealing your idea/opinion to Mujirushi, have you contacted from the company?

- Yes
- No

- I don't know

17) Are you satisfied from Mujirushi's products? After you have supported Mujirushi in the product development process, do you like this company more than before? Why do you feel it?

18) Have you ever participated the brand community created by Mujirushi? (For example, Facebook, Mujifan)

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

19) Do you know someone who participate in the Mujirushi's brand community?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

20) Are you in contact with other Mujirushi's fan? How do you contact she/he? (For example, E-mail, LINE, Facebook)

21) What do you talk about with the other Mujirushi's fan?

22) After participating in the brand community, does the relationship with others member become deeper? The chance to participate in the problem resolution is increased?

23) After this, can I ask you some question for integrating the data of this questionnaire?

## RINGRAZIAMENTI

Innanzitutto vorrei ringraziare la professoressa Kimura Junko che mi ha aiutata durante tutto il percorso nella stesura dell'elaborato finale. Il rapporto che ho instaurato con Lei è andato ben oltre quello del classico rapporto professore-studente. Oltre ad essere una valida insegnante è stata anche un'amica e una confidente. 木村先生、いつもお世話になっております。修士論文のご指導をいただき、誠にありがとうございました。先生と過ごした日々は、幸せな時も大変な時もありましたが、おかげさまでようやく修論を完成することができました。また、先生とは論文以外でも、色々なことを話しては一緒に笑ったり、日本のお菓子をもらったりと、教師と生徒の間を超えて関係を築かせていただき、心から感謝しております。先生に出会えて本当に良かったです。またお会いできる日を楽しみにしております。

Un ringraziamento va anche alla Prof.ssa Marcella Maria Mariotti per il suo sostegno e incoraggiamento durante la parte finale della stesura della tesi.

Ringrazio mia mamma e mia zia Luigina e lo zio Silvano (anche se non è più tra noi), i quali hanno sempre contato su di me e mi hanno incoraggiata. Vorrei ringraziare anche la famiglia Melato, Alcide, Anna, Marta e Michela, coloro che posso considerare la mia seconda famiglia. Mi avete cresciuta da quando avevo solo quattro anni e mi avete sempre considerato parte della famiglia. Grazie di cuore.

Grazie a Giulia, mia amica d'infanzia. Ci siamo conosciute all'asilo e anche se all'inizio non è cominciata bene, siamo diventate delle amici inseparabili. Abbiamo condiviso momenti belli e brutti, sostenendoci e ascoltandoci a vicenda.

Ringrazio anche Romina, fedele compagna di risate. Abbiamo passato 5 anni bellissimi alle superiori e tra una risata e l'altra ci siamo diplomate. Quelli erano bei tempi, spensierate e affini come non mai, bastava un solo sguardo per capire cosa stavamo pensando.

Un sincero grazie anche alle mie ex-coinquiline Anna e Federica, con le quali ho convissuto per 2 anni a Venezia.

Ringrazio anche le cameriere della pizzeria "Il Palio", Valentina, Silvia, Alice, Silvia, Alida. Anche se ormai non lavoriamo più insieme e ognuna di noi ha intrapreso il proprio cammino, con voi ho passato 8 anni bellissimi, durante i quali ci siamo aiutate e sostenute, sia

nel lavoro sia nei problemi dalla vista. Ringrazio anche il proprietario della pizzeria Ferrarato Flavio, anche se molto severo, mi ha sempre voluto molto bene.

Ringrazio anche i miei amici, Giorgia, Alice, Gus, Matteo, Zuleika, Senada, Pagni.

Infine ringrazio tutti gli amici conosciuti in questi 5 anni all'università e soprattutto Jacopo, Alice, Rita, Lara (Ravarotto), Lara (Marinozzi), Elena.

Per sempre nel cuore.