The Presumed Prosumers

An observational study of the eSports experience

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Abstract

The contribution of this article concerns the fact that consumers of the eSports experience can be regarded as prosumers. This conclusion is based on an observational study carried out at Intel Extreme Masters in Katowice. Consumers of the eSports experience take on the role of prosumers as they contribute with resources such as time, money, skills and efforts, as well as engagement and creativity, which creates value not only for themselves, but adds to the entire experience. It was noticed during the observations that the contribution of resources varied between individuals, which stress the importance of allowing prosumers to participate on their own terms. We conclude that the motivations of prosumers are similar to the motivations of the consumers of the eSports experience. However, not all consumers of eSports are prosumers. Marketing actors within eSports cannot force the consumers to take on the role of prosumers, but they can however encourage them to collaborate by providing the consumers with opportunities to contribute with their resources in co-creational efforts such as collaborative marketing.

Keywords: Prosumers; eSports; Co-creation; Collaborative Marketing

Introduction

A name that may be heard more often in times to come is eSports, a name used to describe the scene of organised games played between professional computer gamers around the globe. ESports, or electronic sports, are described by Wagner (2007, p.182) as "an area of sport activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies". Essentially, eSports take place when professional computer gamers, or video game players, play against each other in organised tournaments. In Deloitte's report: *eSports bigger and smaller than you think,* they predict that eSports will generate revenues of $500 millions globally in 2016, which is an increase of 25 % compared to 2015. It could be argued that eSports is becoming "bigger than basketball", due to the fact that the industry reaches tens of millions of people on a global scale and that the biggest events attract audiences of 40 000 people and more than 150 million viewers online. However, eSports offer fewer major events than traditional sports, which means that in dollar terms, eSports are not playing in the major leagues yet, although there is a great interest from tech and media companies due to the growth potential of the industry. Amazon acquired Twitch for around $1 billion and the Swedish media company Modern Times Group, MTG acquired a majority stake in ESL, for $87 million in 2015, (Deloitte Global Report, 2015), which demonstrates the growth of the industry. Historically, games were not played competitively like they are today, but with the birth of the Internet, combined with gaming, the gaming community soon started organising official tournaments (Jin, 2010). As a result of this development, players who were engaged in the community started forming teams and leagues that looked like

other leagues, such as the NHL (National Hockey League) and Champions League. The difference is that eSports is built on online content, which then resulted in offline tournaments, whereas other sports are offline performances turned into online performances through online media and communities. Once teams and leagues were created, players started competing on a global level (Taylor, 2012; Jonasson and Thiborg, 2010) and the money involved with winning an eSports event has made the sport into a spectator sport with broadcasted events in different parts of the world (Jin, 2010), just like many other sports. According to Seo (2013, p. 1543), "eSports is a fast-growing consumer segment, involving multiple on and offline interactions among and between consumers, companies, and other stakeholders" and contends that eSports are not only about gaming, but rather are complex phenomena consisting of multiple interrelated experiential performances, such as online tournaments and offline events, and multiple actors involved in creating those experiential performances. The marketing actors of the eSports experience consist of players such as consumers, teams, companies, broadcasters, and sponsors of the eSports experience.

What is most striking about eSports from a marketing perspective is not the global character of the industry and the extraordinary growth, rather the nature of the value consumers seek when engaging in competitive computer gaming (Seo, 2013). Consumers of eSports appreciate the co-creational aspects of the eSports experience, which consists of almost no physical products and only a few services, such as computer-game subscriptions, TV airings, and computer-game events (Seo, 2013). The way in which consumers take part in experiences has changed dramatically in the last 10 years, with an increase in people not only watching professionals, but also creating, sharing,

and becoming a part of the experience. Increased sharing of video game content and an explosive growth of the eSports industry is an example of what is known as "prosumers", consumers who take on the role as co-creators of the experience (Newzoo Global Esports Report, 2015).

The concept of prosumers was formulated already in 1980 by the futurist Alvin Toffler, who defined prosumers as someone who brings into existence certain services, goods, or experiences for himself, or herself. Instead of selling or exchanging these goods, services, or experiences, the prosumer uses them for his, or her, own enjoyment (Toffler and Toffler, 2006). However, the concept has changed its meaning during the years and the idea of prosumers as self-creators of value has been challenged by a view of prosumers as creators of value on a bigger scale (Tapscott and Williams, 2006), meaning that the value created by prosumers is important for other actors (companies, suppliers etc.) as well. Seran, Izvecian and Buiciman (2013) have defined prosumers as consumers that create value by engaging in a process with companies for their own use or for the use of others (2013). They argue that the difference between the traditional consumers and the prosumers is the fact that the prosumers are engaging creatively in the interaction with companies (Izvercian and Seran, 2014). Cova and Cova (2012, p. 150) have named prosumers "agents of their own destiny", because of their roles as co-creators of value and their influence on other marketing actors.

The aim of this paper is to explore if prosumers is a useful concept to understand consumers of eSports.
Previous research on prosumers has focused on the production process (e.g. Toffler, 1980; Tapscott and Williams, 2006) and the service experience (Chandler and Chen, 2015), but the concept of prosumers have not yet been studied within

a specific context. Based on the claim of Newzoo Global eSports Report, that the consumer of eSports is an example of a prosumers, we will explore the concept of prosumers within eSports further. What makes eSports such an interesting industry is the active role of the audience, and, Crawford and Gosling (2009) emphasise the paradigm shift that has occurred, where audiences are no longer passive, but rather co-creators using consumer goods in the construction of social identities. Taylor (2012) argues that "fans do not simply consume but are crucial participants in the production of cultural products" (2012, pp. 188), which implies that eSports consumers play an important role in industry.

In the case of eSports, even though the consumers may not be professionals, they infuse energy into the events (Taylor, 2012), which emphasises the active role of eSports consumers. This shed light on whether the consumers could be argued to be prosumers or if they are only presumed prosumers, which will be further developed in this paper. The purpose of this paper is to explore the concept of prosumers through an observational study of the eSports experience. The growing number of eSports consumers have not only evoked interest from companies within the eSports industry, but from other industries as well (Taylor, 2012), which makes it highly relevant to observe this growing market segment from a marketing perspective. By looking at the concept of prosumers within a specific context, more insight can be gained about who the presumed prosumers might be and the implications of these findings on the eSports industry as well as other industries.

Literature Review

Within the field of marketing, there has been a trend in consumer research towards a move from a value-in-exchange perspective, where the producers are the creators of value towards a value-in-use view of customers as co-creators of value in the interaction with suppliers (Grönroos, 2006). Value-in-use means that value is not obtained until it is determined by the consumer in the process of consumption (Xie et al., 2008). A paradigm shift has occurred, where consumers have gone from isolated to connected, from unaware to informed, and from passive to active (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2002), which has resulted in the concept of co-creation. Co-creation, which is a business strategy where the focus is on consumer experiences and interactive relationships, has gained extensive interest from researchers in areas such as economics, management, and marketing (e.g., Sharma, Sugumaran and Rajagopalan, 2002; Etgar, 2008; Evans and Wolf, 2005; von Hippel and Katz, 2002; Pitt et al., 2006; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The research on co-creation has changed the role of the consumers in the interaction with companies and consumers are argued to no longer be satisfied with interactions where they have passive roles. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) argue that consumers are looking for personalized interactions based on their individual needs in the consumer-company interaction, which is the focal point of value creation.

Numerous researchers such as Evans and Wolf (2005), Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), Seybold (2006), and von Hippel (2005) have acknowledged the significance of involving customers in the value creation. Consumers are increasingly seeking out the opportunity to take a more active role in the process of value creation (Handelman, 2006; Roberts, Baker, and Walker, 2005). Cova and Cova (2012) claim that during the last 30 years, a new type of consumer has appeared. Consumers have become extremely discrepant and volatile and what they desire changes from day to day, which makes consumer behaviour highly unpredictable (Firat

1991; Van Raaij 1993). The new consumers have been argued to be active, knowledgeable, demanding, channel-hopping and most of all, experience seeking (Stuart-Menteth, Wilson and Baker, 2006) and they have been said to favour consumption experiences rather than products and services (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). However, experiences demand that the consumers immerse themselves in the experience and that they commit to the interaction with the company (Cova and Cova, 2012). Co-creation has gained a great deal of attention from researchers within different fields due to several factors.

First, the co-creation of experiences is argued to have a vital effect when it comes to attracting consumers and could be used as a competitive advantage for companies (Shaw and Ivens, 2005). Co-creational experiences are according to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004, p. 7), "High-quality interactions that enable an individual customer to co-create unique experiences with the company...". Colbert (2007, p. 112) argues that "the hedonic and symbolic dimensions of consumer behaviours stress the active observers, they are the co-creators of the experience…". According to his research, not all consumers experience the experience in the same way, but rather that they are provided with symbols and tools to construct their own meaning. Thus, consumers are an essential part of creating the experience due to their active participation. The idea of consumers experiencing experiences differently is supported by Pine and Gilmore (1998, p. 101) and they argue that consumers have become active actors as they "play key roles in creating the performance or event that yields the experience", which emphasises the co-creational aspects of experiences and the shift from value-in-exchange to value-in-use. Hence, the value of an experience is based on how it is perceived by the consumers.

Secondly, companies are increasingly acknowledging that value does not come from a firm-centric approach, but rather is created when consumers are allowed to co-create their own experience through personalized interaction, which creates unique consumer values (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003). The move from a company-centric position to co-creation is more than just small changes from the value-in-exchange view. Likewise, co-creation is not about outsourcing activities to consumers, like in the case of self-services, and, nor is it about customization, which is an usual misconception in terms of co-creation (e.g., La Salle and Britton, 2002; Peppers and Rogers, 1994; Schmitt, 1999; Seybold, 2006). Co-creation is about allowing consumers to take on a more active role in the creation of value in collaboration with the company, rather than consumers taking over the role as producers from the firms. The more active role of consumers in the creation of value can be connected to the concept of prosumers, which is something we will explore further in this paper.

Marketing actors such as gaming companies, professional players, gaming communities, sponsors, and broadcasting stations are involved in eSports. Although companies provide the platforms for competitive gaming, it is first when the consumers co-create the experience, that value is created (Seo, 2013). Kim and Ross (2006) argue that social and psychological factors, such as excitement, social interaction, competition, achievement, and knowledge application have been important drivers in attracting more people to eSports. Kozinets (1999) further argues that eSports are in "an important space from which to examine the intersection of recreational and relational online modes in the creation and collective consumption of fantasy experience" (p. 262). The collective nature of eSports emphasises the social and collaborative aspects of the experience. Cova and Salle (2008) argue

that the experience of eSports is a result of the co-creation and collaborative efforts by various actors, both companies and consumers, rather than host and guests. In their opinion, the market should be seen as a constellation of marketing actors, including both companies and consumers, engaged in the co-creation of value.

Prosumers

A popular term when talking about co-creation is the concept of the prosumer, which is a way of describing consumers as "agents of their own destiny" (Cova and Cova, 2012 p. 150). The concept was formulated by futurist Alvin Toffler in 1980 who described prosumers as producers of their own value (Cova and Cova, 2012). However, the concept of prosumers has changed its meaning during the years and the idea of prosumers as self-creators of value as stated by Toffler has been challenged by the view of prosumers as creators of value on a bigger scale (Tapscott and Williams, 2006), meaning that the value created by prosumers is important for other actors (companies, suppliers etc.) as well. Also Seran et al. (2013) have developed a new definition of prosumers as they argue that talking about prosumers solely as a composition of producers and consumers would result in everyone being a prosumers, which undermines the concept. They define prosumers as consumers that create value by engaging in a process with companies for their own use or for the use of others.

Prosumers are not a merge between producers and consumers, but rather it requires a certain level of engagement and creativity for consumers to become prosumers (Seran et al, 2013). The difference between the traditional consumers and the prosumers is the fact that the prosumers are engaging creatively in the interaction with companies (Izvercian and Seran, 2014). They therefore suggest that companies should become more prosumer oriented, rather than just prioritizing their own objectives and resources. Further, prosumption is according to Xie et al. (2008), something more than merely a purchase act. Prosumption is rather seen as a process with a mixture of a consumer's socio-psychological experiences, and physical and mental endeavours (Xie et al., 2008). Consumers partake in the prosumption process by offering their money, time, effort, and skills (Xie et al. 2008, p.110). Marketing practices, new ways of producing, and technology advances have, according to Xie et al. (2008), aided consumers to move from consumption to presumption, and is seen as needed for the transition to take place.

Some argue that the concept of prosumers will replace the notion of consumers and the role of companies as creators of value (Schembri, 2006), whereas other assert that prosumers are co-creators of value together with companies (Akaka and Chandler, 2011; Sampson and Spring, 2012). The notion of prosumers contradicts the traditional view, where consumers consume and producers produce (Etgar, 2008). It has been contested that consumers add value to companies through the creation of user-generated content in online spaces (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010), which has resulted in consumers gaining a great deal of academic attention due to their use of marketplace resources in the creation of value in product and service experiences (Mustak et al., 2013). Consumers are increasingly being seen as co-creators of value because of their high involvement in the production of products, services and experiences (Ritzer, 2014; Bitner et al., 1997), where consumers are increasingly taking the roles of prosumers.

In order to understand prosumers, it becomes essential to look at the motivation behind prosumption. When it comes to individual drivers, prosumers are motivated by the opportunity to create a unique and personal experience (Prügl and Schreier, 2006). It has been argued by

Gelber (1997) "consumers become prosumers in order creatively express and uncover their self-identities, whereas other research have found individual drivers such as autonomy and competence to be important for prosumers (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Dahl and Moreau, 2007). Autonomy involves the opportunity for an individual to be in charge of his or her own decisions (Dahl and Moreau, 2007), whereas competence is a way for consumers to demonstrate their skills (Watson and Shove, 2008) and prosumers are therefore likely to seek out experiences, where they can make their own decision and in which their skills are met. In addition to individual motivations, prosumers are also motivated by social drivers such as establishing social networks, finding new friends and creating communities (Chandler and Chen, 2015). It has been argued by Dahl and Moreau (2007) that some prosumers are driven by individual needs to be acknowledged for their achievements by others, as well driven by social motivations, in order to build relationships and being a part of a community.

Collaborative Marketing

The concept of prosumers developed by Toffler (1980) has resulted in the development of collaborative marketing (Cova and Cova, 2012). Collaborative marketing is, according to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a), about marketing with the consumers, rather than marketing to them. Firat and Dolakia (2006) claim that "marketing becomes everyone's activity, and the post-consumer is a marketer" (p.151). The blurred line between production and consumption is seen as a key factor in the development of collaborative marketing and consumers are looking for ways to become co-creators of their own lives (Cova and Cova, 2012). Co-creation is the central focus of collaborative marketing and collaborative marketing sees consumers as possessors of their own resources and with the capabilities of using them in the interaction with companies (Cova and Cova, 2012). As mentioned earlier, consumers integrate their own resources with the resources offered by the companies with their own in the consumption experience (Vargo and Lusch, 2008), in order to co-create and co-extract value from the experience (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

The co-creational aspects of collaborative marketing have enabled consumers to create a new and more equal relationship with firms. The new and more equal relationship is formed through the consumer's increased knowledge, created through discourse with other consumers about a firm and its products before the firm pushes for any collaboration (Li and Bernoff, 2008). This consumer led discourse has led to a universal belief amongst collaborative marketing discussions, where consumers now, with the use of internet, have more control and are seen as more creative (Muñiz and Schau, 2007). The increase in knowledge and creativity creates a domino-like effect, and consumers handle themselves differently in the market, going through the act of consumption whilst exercising their newly obtained creative skills and increased power (Berthon et al., 2007). Co-creation is a two-way street, where the risk is shared between the company and the consumers, since consumers invest time and resources in the relationship with the company. Collaborative marketing perceives consumers as equals to companies, where both parts are actors contributing with different resources in the consumption process and in the marketplace (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004), which emphasises the more active role of consumers in the creation of value. Collaborative marketing is a useful concept in order to make the notion of prosumers more substantial since it exemplifies how consumers take on the role of prosumers.

The consumers as co-creators of value could be linked to the concept of prosumers, due to the co-creational aspects of eSports highlighted by Taylor (2012) and Seo (2013), which is why we decided to look at if the concept of prosumers can be helpful in understanding the consumers of the eSports experience. In order to explore whether consumers of the eSports experience can be perceived as prosumers, we have developed a framework based on the theories of Tapscott and Williams (2006), Xie et al, (2008) and Seran et al. (2013). We argue that their definitions of prosumers are more relevant and up-to-date than the definition of prosumers developed by Toffler in 1980. To further develop the definition of Tapscott and Williams (2006), we have used to definitions of Xie et al. (2008) and Seran et al. (2013) in order to clarify the role of prosumers. We will look at if, and in that case how consumers contribute with their resources such as time, money, efforts and skills in the eSports experience. By using the definition of Seran et al. (2013), the line between the traditional consumer and the prosumer becomes clearer and is a necessity for us in order to explore whether consumers of the eSports experience can be perceived as prosumers.

Methodology

Observations were made during what is known to be the biggest global event in eSports, the Intel Extreme Masters (IEM) in Katowice, Poland, which was held between the 4th and 6th of March, in the Spodek Arena. IEM, which was started in 2006 by ESL, is the longest running global pro gaming tour in the world and includes eSports such as Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, StarCraft II, and League of Legends. This year's event was so far the biggest event in the history of ESL and it was held in the Spodek Arena, which is the second largest arena in Poland. The event attracted an audience of 113 000 at the Spodek Arena and the Intel Expo, 100 338

#IEM hashtags on social media and 34 million unique viewers watching online, which is an increase of 32 % compared to 2015 (Intel Extreme Masters, 2016). During the IEM, we got the opportunity to get a closer look at the interaction between consumers and a company operating in the eSports industry, by access through the company Fnatic, which is one of the leading companies within eSports. We were provided with visiting passes so we could access the same parts of the event as the visitors.

An ethnographic study was carried out, in order to explore whether consumers of the eSports experience could be perceived as prosumers. Ethnographic studies have been the choice of method for a number of consumer culture theorist such as Schouten's and McAlexander's (1995) study of the biker community, Kozinets's (2002) observations during Burning Man, and Belk's and Costa's (1998) research about the Mountain Man myth. Our aim in terms of methodology was to observe the consumers of the eSports experience, when they were in action, rather than have them talk about the experience, which is why an ethnographic study is a suitable choice of method. The main purpose of doing an ethnographic study is to observe the interaction between people and their environment in a natural setting, in order to more clearly understand their culture (Creswell, 1998; van Maanen, 2011). Realist ethnography, by van Maanen (1988), is characterised by an approach by the researcher to study an individual, which is done by looking at data from the perspective of a third person and gathering information from people in the environment studied. Further, the strength of carrying out an ethnographic study is the relationship formed between the researcher and the participants. Stake (1974) describes the researcher as someone who becomes a subject involved in the actions, who also learns behaviour that can be analysed, and van Maanen (1988, s. 2)

states that the "fieldwork usually means living with and living like those who are studied".

Observation is a commonly used method within consumer research (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002). Observations enable the researcher to gain profound evidence of what is occurring within a specific environment at a specific time (Nippert-Eng, 2015), which is why we argue it to be a good choice of method. Observational skills are helpful in order to describe and comprehend what is happening and to better understand patterns of behaviour. Instead of people describing what they do, observations allow the researcher to be in the front row (Nippert-Eng, 2015). There are different observational strategies in terms of the participation of an ethnographer; from being an outside observer to taking the role as a full participant, according to Wolcott (1995).

The theme of our observations was whether the consumers present during the eSport experience could be perceived as prosumers. The use of a framework provides an orientating focus of how to carry out the observations in a more structured manner (Wolcott, 1900, 1994, 1995; Fetterman, 1998; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). When elaborating on a strategy of how to carry out the observations, we had to ask ourselves how closely we wanted to observe the subjects and what our level of participation was going to be. We decided that we wanted to come as close as possible by participating in some of the parts, such as sitting in the stands during the tournament. We did this to be able to watch interactions between the people observed and their environment, while also keeping a certain distance that enabled us to maintain a level of objectivity during other parts of the experience. We had the opportunity to join Fnatic in their booth as much as we wanted to, but our observations were not merely connected to Fnatic, and in order to

maintain objectivity, we decided to not take an active participant role in the ongoing activities in the booth, in line with the argument's of Wolcott (1995), stating that it is a challenge to be able to participate and observe in a way that makes it comprehensible and comprehensive for outsiders. Due to the fact that the eSports event took place in Poland, there was a language barrier. It was not possible for us to communicate with all the visitors at IEM. Thus, we had to put more effort into observing the visitors and their behaviour, rather than relying on their words.

When observing the people and their social activities at the event, we were taking field notes in order to collect our empirical data (Wolcott, 1994, 1995; Coffey, 1999). We were focused on capturing as much information as possible, in its natural setting, and to not forget any important details, as suggested by Emerson et al. (2011). Apart from the field notes, we also took a lot of pictures and videos during the three days of the event. The aim was, with a centre of attention on a holistic view, to observe different consumer behaviour from different angles. Since ethnography should take place within natural settings, we spent a great deal of time in the Fnatic booth, where relevant events and behaviour occurred. We were also paying attention to how things in the environment may have had an impact on different behaviours when people moved through the different spaces. After collecting the data from IEM, we started the process of analysing the raw material. We used open coding when evaluating the data to extract keywords from our observed notes. The open coding was unrestricted and our intentions were to sort out other meaningful pieces from the raw material, in order to develop a grounded theory. The grounded theory is linked to the real world and helps us to understand people's behavioural patterns that are meaningful and applicable (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). When sorting, priorities

often appear in an unstructured way, because of the subconscious not yet being able to see patterns within the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). When presenting the data below, we chose to present the observations chronologically, in order to deliver the experience to the reader from the same viewpoint as we explored it.

Attending an eSports event was very different from any other sports event we have previously attended. For those who have not been to an eSports event, it might be difficult to fully grasp the setup, size, and special feeling of the experience, which is why our findings start off with a vivid description of the eSports experience.

A Vivid Description of the eSport Experience

Arriving at the Spodek Arena in Katowice, on the first day of the Intel Extreme Masters (IEM), we were met by thousands of people outside the entrance. When we entered the Spodek arena, it was crowded with youths who were going to watch the elite of eSports compete over the biggest prize pool ever in the ten-year long history of the tournament (Intel Extreme Masters, 2016). IEM involved a number of different actors, such as consumers, players, broadcasting companies, sponsors and commercial companies, which are similar to other sports. There were mostly technology companies, such as Intel, HP, ASUS, and Acer present at IEM, but also companies like RedBull and Sprite. The people who visited the IEM could be described as a mixture of fans and people working within, or in industries connected to the eSports industry. The overall majority of the consumers of the eSports experience were younger men, mostly teenagers, dressed in hoodies and sneakers, and only a small part of the crowd were women. Some people were dressed in the shirt of their favourite team, and some others, mostly women, were dressed up as their favourite characters from a game. The event started off with an opening ceremony in the big arena hall, where the biggest games took place. As the inauguration got closer, the crowd joined together in the countdown for the event opening. When the countdown ended, all the teams of the tournament entered the stage in front of the standing crowd and the applause never seemed to fade. With that, IEM 2016 in Katowice had kicked off and the games started.

Apart from the games taking place in the arena, there was also the Intel Expo, an exhibition hall, where visitors could visit different brands inside their booths. In the Expo hall, visitors had the opportunity to try, and purchase, products from different brands, but the focus was on creating experiences. Music was playing loudly in the hall from the different booths, and there were a lot of ongoing activities, such as competitions, autograph signing sessions, and games being played between visitors. The expo hall was very crowded and at times it was almost impossible to make your way through the aisles because of all the people. Some consumers were sitting down playing games on computers, which were placed on a small and elevated stage inside the booth, while others were standing on the side, watching and cheering on those who were playing, creating a very engaging atmosphere and a sense of community. We noticed a higher level of activity in the booths offering the visitors an opportunity to interact through games, competitions, and entertainment, than in the booths only offering merchandise.

On the second day of the event, Fnatic launched a brand new game for consumers in the booth. The game, called Fnatic Challenge, was designed to show how good a player's click reaction is. Since the game was easy to play, there was a high

level of commitment from the participants, all while displaying a player's mouse-skills. The visitors were able to participate and try the game, and the winners got to play a game of CS:GO against the pros from team Tempo Storm, a CS:GO team sponsored by Fnatic. It was a high level of participation, as a lot of visitors wanted to demonstrate their skills and compete against each other. Many consumers were very skilled gamers and it was clear that they knew what they were doing when watching them play. Others were more unfamiliar with gaming, but also wanted to test their skills in the Fnatic Challenge.

There was full activity in the Fnatic booth during the entire day. A couple of fans spent several hours in the Fnatic booth playing, making posters, and waiting for their favourite players to appear. Two guys and two girls were sitting in front of the computers playing League of Legends. Some people were standing beside to watch what was going on in the game. Later that afternoon, Fnatic had a signing session with their League of Legends team in its booth. It was crowded with people both inside and outside the booth, as people were trying to get a glimpse of the young Fnatic players. When Sam Mathews, the founder of Fnatic, introduced the players in front of the cheering crowd, everything was being livestreamed on Fnatic's Facebook page, which has almost 2,5 million followers. It was the first time Fnatic did this type of livestreaming and we heard from Fnatic that it was a great success, as it evoked a huge amount of response from the followers in terms of likes, comments, and shares. The players were asked some questions by the crowd before they started signing posters and t-shirts, and talked to their fans. There was a captivating feeling in the air that turned familiar when the players chatted with the fans when signing their posters. Some fans had even made gifts, such as self-made posters, to the players, which seemed to make the players very happy.

One of the major happenings of IEM was the CS:GO final on Saturday night. The fight over the title and the silver coated, 15 kg, iconic trophy, was between Luminosity and Fnatic. The big arena hall was once again crowded to its limit, and people in the aisles stood like packed sardines. Before the game started, there were commercials and eSports videos running on the two big screens on each side of the stage. Intel, the title sponsor of IEM, was the most prominent actor during the event. They have started a crowdfunding initiative, where the sale of a limited edition IEM PC contributes with money to the prize pool, and Intel marketed it as a way to support the teams and players. Apart from the commercials and the eSports videos, there were eSports quizzes between the rounds of the game. Questions popped up on the screens and the crowd was discussing the alternative answers intensely as they eagerly waited for the answer to pop up. When the answers were revealed after a couple of minutes, there were both shouts of delight and disappointment among the crowd. Once the game started, the focus was once again on the action on the screens and on the stage. Fnatic won over Luminosity with a score of 3-0, and the sparkling confetti fell like snow from the ceiling over the entire arena, as Fnatic walked down the stage to lift the trophy to the tones of the IEM anthem, in front of thousands of cheering people.

On the last day of the event, when we were standing in the booth, a girl in a spectacular costume with Fnatic's colours, entered the booth. She immediately caught the attention of everyone in, and around the booth. Her hair was long and dyed in an ocean blue colour, she was wearing a short crop top in black and orange with matching shorts. She was also wearing orange headphones and orange sunglasses, and she had a long magical staff. The long magical staff looked like a high walking stick, similar to a lamppost, with the Fnatic

logo on top. When we complimented her on her spectacular costume, she proudly told that she had made it herself and then she turned around to continue taking pictures with several different people from the crowd around the booth.

The visitors at IEM also had an opportunity to create and interact with the brand, when creating their own posters in the Fnatic booth. Many visitors also took the opportunity to participate in playing a game, or watching their friends gaming while cheering them on. The hosts of the booth also invited volunteers in the audience to stand up on the stage as a commentator during the ongoing game, and those who participated, played or functioned as a commentator, received some small branded gifts. There was a high level of engagement among the visitors in the booth, and the hosts were frequently asking questions and interacting with the customers. The booth had very few closed spaces, and the visitors were allowed to move around quite freely in the booths.

The visitors also had the opportunity to take pictures with, or just hold, last year's CS:GO trophy, something, which was extremely popular. Fnatic encouraged the visitors to share the pictures on social media channels, such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, which allowed the visitors an opportunity to share their experience with others while marketing the event together with the other marketing actors at IEM. It also allowed people not attending IEM to be a part of the offline event through the online experience of social media. Even though the event only took place from Friday to Sunday, it was three days full of action. It was clear after our weekend in Katowice, that the eSports industry is continuing to attract a great deal of interest from different actors. There were cameras everywhere at the event, and journalists from different parts of the world were at the event to report. Not only was there interest from eSports journalist, but

also from media channels such as BBC, CNN and Sky TV, where CNN followed the Fnatic CS:GO team during the weekend. The team, however, seemed used to the media attention, and based on the growing interest in the eSports industry, we will probably be used to hearing more about eSports in times to come.

Consumers Contributing with Their Resources

The role of the consumers at IEM as co-creators of value through their contribution of money, skills, time and effort, could clarify them as prosumers, in line the theory of Xie et al. (2008). The idea that the eSports industry is built upon the co-creational efforts of consumers (Taylor, 2012; Seo, 2013) goes in line with the concept of prosumers as creators of value, not only for themselves, but for companies as well (Tapscott and Williams, 2006). The concept of prosumers was noticed in our observations of IEM during several occasions, such as the dressed up characters in homemade costumes, the fans making posters, and the visitors taking on the role as commentators in the Fnatic booth. When these consumers contributed with their resources such as time, efforts and skills, they added value to the eSports experience and thereby took on the role as prosumers.

During our observations at IEM, we noticed a number of example in which the consumers contributed with their resources such as money, time, skills and efforts. The contribution of time and efforts was noticed when some fans created their own posters for the Fnatic players. Some of the fans did even spend several hours in the Fnatic booth to create something to show appreciation for their favourite team. The girl who visited the booth in a spectacular costume, showed similar dedication, as she had spent a great deal of time and effort making her Fnatic costume with all matching accessories. These types of costumes are often created by the person

wearing it, and the people who were dressed up were frequently being stopped to take a picture with other visitors. This could be argued to add value to experience, not only for the people dressed up, but also for the other visitor at IEM.

Another example of how consumes contributed with their resources and shaped the experience, was in the development of the new launched game, Fnatic Challenge. Fnatic created the foundation of the experience through the game, then it was the consumers who took part in the game who were shaping the experience, through their input of time, effort, and skills. Regarding consumers' willingness to contribute in terms of money, the Intel's crowdfunding initiative was a clear example of how the consumers took an active role, in contributing with their own resources to the prize pool money. Consequently, the consumers help the industry to grow and create value, not only for themselves, but for the industry as a whole, which would make them prosumers in line with the research of Tapscott and Williams (2006). The value created in this case was the money from the Intel's crowdfunding initiative. During the event, the eSports consumers contributed with $37,500 to the prize pool (IEM Katowice, 2016).

Consumers are increasingly being seen as more knowledgeable and creative (Muñiz and Schau, 2007), which we believe adds value to the entire experience, and increases the level of involvement from an eSports consumer. Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) have argued that consumers add value to companies by creating user-generated content in online spaces, which further connects the eSports industry to prosumers. The fact that consumers are consuming experiences, rather than products and services (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), also helps to explain the increased attentiveness of the eSports industry. When the customers were sitting and playing in

the booth, it highlights, the customers' willingness of seeking out an opportunity to take a more active role in the process of value creation and their role in adding value to the experience, in which they become prosumers.

The Social Aspects of Prosumption

The eSports industry stands out from other industries in the active role of the consumers and the fact that the industry is built upon user generated online-content (Taylor, 2012; Seo, 2013). When a game was being played in the big arena, it was as if the audience knew more about the gameplay and the moves in the game, compared to other sport audiences. We believe that the level of recognition and involvement is much higher at an eSports event, simply because it is possible for the audience to fully recreate and experience the same digital environment, and make use of the same digital physical abilities that the professional gamers have. Even though the audience are all physically and mentally different in real life, in the eSports game they are all the same code, made up of 1's and 0's, who are digitally and theoretically able to do the same things.

The social aspects of eSports, such as visitors who were gaming against each other in the booths, can help explain the strong connection between prosumers and eSports. The consumers of the eSport experience had the opportunity to integrate with different actors such as companies, sponsors, team and broadcasters, of the eSports experience through games, competitions, and other activities. As soon as the games in the big arena ended, they left for the Intel Expo to try their skills in different games, something that has been highlighted in the research of Dahl and Moreau (2007) and Watson and Shove (2008), concluding that prosumers are driven by a desire to demonstrate their skills. The fact that we got to spend a great

deal of time in the Fnatic booth resulted in insights into how consumers of the eSports experience interacted with eSports actors, such as Fnatic, as well as with each other. In accordance with Dahl and Moreau (2007) and Chandler and Chen (2015), prosumers are driven by a desire to be a part of a community and to build relationships as well as a desire to create a unique and personal experience (Prügl and Schreier, 2006). Further, Kim and Ross (2006) claim that drivers of eSports involve factors such as excitement and social interaction, and Kozinets (1999) description of eSports as a collective consumption of fantasy experiences. Consequently, the drivers of eSports and the drivers of prosumers are arguable to be similar as prosumers are likely to seek out experiences, where they can demonstrate their skills, be a part of a community, and create a personal experience.

The consumers' involvement in the creation of Fnatic Challenge and Intel's crowdfunding initiative, correspond well to the notion that companies have increasingly acknowledged the role of consumers as co-creators in the value creation as argued by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003). Fnatic Challenge and Intel's crowdfunding initiative could be seen as ways for actors within eSports to respond, to the consumers seeking out the opportunity to take a more active role in the creation of the products, services, and experiences they consume. This exemplifies the fact that the line between production and consumption has been blurred to an extent where the roles of the producer and the consumers have merged, hence the concept of prosumers. However, in order for consumers to take on the role of the prosumers, they must be provided with opportunities to contribute with their resources. Those opportunities also require that other marketing actors contribute with their resources. Those resources could consist of games, competitions, and materials to make posters or a Trophy for

the visitors to take a photo of. In our observations, we noticed a higher degree of activity in the booths where the visitors could engage in activities and interact with different actors, compared to booths only offering merchandise and no actual experience. Shaw and Ivens (2005) claim that a co-creation of experience has a potential of attracting consumers and therefore serves as a competitive advantage for companies and that co-creation is necessary to meet the demands of the consumers demanding an active role in the interaction with companies in line with the research of Roberts et al. (2005) and Handelman (2006). The booths where the visitors could play, compete, create content, and interact with the actors of the eSports experience, were more popular among the visitors, compared to the merchandise booths. This highlights the fact that consumers are looking for a more active role in the interaction with actors within the eSports experience and in the co-creation of value, and emphasises the merge between the concepts of consumers and prosumers.

When the visitors of IEM created posters or acted as commentators it serves as examples of when consumers become prosumers when they engage creatively in the interaction with companies in accordance with Izvercian and Seran (2014). They have suggested that companies should become more prosumer oriented, rather than prioritizing their own objectives and resources. When the eSports actors made some of their resources available, such as games, posters and stickers, the trophy in the Fnatic booth, it allowed the visitors to contribute with engagement and creativity, which allowed them to take on the role of prosumers in line with Seran et al. (2013).

Not All Consumers are Prosumers

Many visitors took the opportunity to do some gaming in the Expo Hall between the

games taking place in the big arena, but some were only there to watch the games. Schembri (2006) argues that the concept of prosumers will replace the notion of consumers and the role of companies as creators of value, whereas Akaka and Chandler (2011) and, Sampson and Spring (2012) state that prosumers co-create value in collaboration with companies. We argue, based on the observations during IEM, that consumers and prosumers are still two different concepts, since it was observed that not all consumers at the event demonstrated engagement and creativity. Not all visitors were taking part in activities offered by the eSports actors at IEM.

When observing the IEM, it was noticed that some visitors were more eager to interact with the different actors, whereas others were more passive and mostly strolled around and watched what was going on. Hence, not all consumers engage in the in the eSports experience, which do not make them prosumers in the definition of Seran et al. (2013). Furthermore, consumers consume the experience differently, which is in line with the research of Colbert (2007), and Pine and Gilmore (1998). Consumers engage in the experience on different levels and their input in the co-creation of value vary. The disparity in resource investment could be argued to depend on the individual factors driving prosumption (Xie et al., 2008), such as personal motivation and level of skills. The opportunity to express their self-identities and make their own decisions is something prosumers value to a high degree (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Gelber, 1997; Dahl and Moreau, 2007). It could therefore be argued that consumers should be able to interact on their own terms, and that the experience should be personalized, in line with the arguments of Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003), in order for value to be created. It was observed at

IEM, the consumers cannot be forced to take on the role of prosumers, not all consumers were willing to actively interact with the different actors present at IEM. However, they can be encouraged if they are allowed to participate on their own conditions.

Collaborative Marketing

As previously mentioned, the concept of prosumers developed by Toffler (1980) has resulted in the development of collaborative marketing (Cova and Cova, 2012), in which marketing is done in collaboration with the consumers (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). The visitors at the Fnatic booth had the opportunity to take a picture with the IEM Trophy the Fnatic CS:GO team won last year, and share it on social media. For Fnatic it was a way for them to market themselves together with the consumers, whereas the visitors could experience the feeling of lifting the same trophy as the professional eSports players. The creation of posters can be seen as another example of collaborative marketing, in which Fnatic provided the resources necessary for the creation. When the visitors contributed with their time, skills, and efforts, it supports Cova and Cova's (2012) theory of consumers as possessors of their own resources. Many of the different actors present at IEM, demonstrated a high level of willingness to allow the visitors to shape the experience, through the visitors participation in the experience, which was exemplified when they were gaming, creating posters and acting as commentators. The setting mostly consisted of open spaces and the visitors could move around freely, which emphasises the changed and more equal relationship between consumers and companies (Li and Bernoff, 2008; Berthon et al., 2007).

The event in Katowice resulted in 101 338 #IEM hashtags (Intel Extreme Master, 2016), of which the main part came from the visitors, making them collaborative marketers of the event and prosumers, as they became marketers and contributed with both time and effort. Cova and Salle (2008), argue that it is more accurate to talk about marketing actors, instead of hosts and guests of the eSports experience, which supports the idea of "marketing becoming everyone's activity" (Firat and Dolakia, 2006, p. 151). The relationship between consumers and companies are no longer on the condition of companies, but rather an equal relationship based on collaborative efforts from both parties. We argue, based on our observations at IEM, that consumers of the eSport experience could be perceived as prosumers in line with the definition of Tapscott and Williams (2006) stating that prosumers do not only create value for themselves, but adds value to other actors as well. They are also prosumers in accordance with Xie et al. (2008) since they contribute with money, time, efforts and skills. Further, what separates the prosumer of the eSports experience with the consumer is the input of engagement and creativity as stated by Seran et al. (2013). I was almost impossible for us to not get carried away by the strong engagement of the visitors at IEM, as they embodied the concept of prosumers with their engagement and creativity.

We have developed **The Prosumer Map (**see figure 1), based on our findings at IEM. The Prosumer Map is based on the definitions of prosumers by Tapscott and Williams (2006), Xie et al. (2008) and Seran et al. (2013), but the role of other marketing actors have been added.

The Prosumer map shows the process in which consumers become prosumers and the role of marketing actors. If the marketing actors do not provide the consumers with opportunities to contribute with their resources, they will not take on the role of prosumers. The strongest example of this was seen at the Expo Hall, where the booths of companies only providing merchandise attracted significantly less interest from the visitors, whereas booths were the visitors could
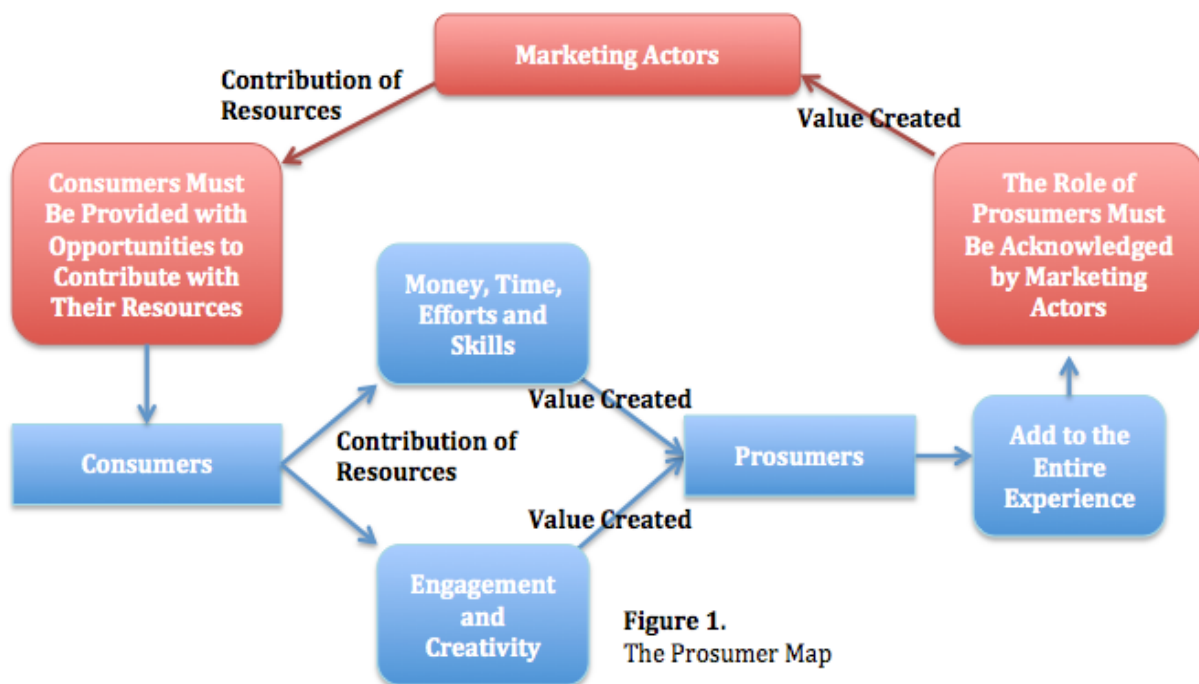

Figure 1.
The Prosumer Map

interact with the eSports actors were full of people. We argue that consumers should not be seen as being prosumers, but rather in terms of becoming prosumers as they contribute with their resources. In order for consumers to become prosumers, marketing actors must provide them with opportunities and resources to do so and once the consumers contribute with their resources, they become prosumers, which adds to the entire experience. Value is created, but in order for marketing actors to leverage on the value created, these marketing actors must acknowledge the role of prosumers. In this view, marketing actors can take an active role in encouraging consumers to take on the role of prosumers by providing them with opportunities and resources.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that the consumers of the eSports experience can be regarded as prosumers. The consumers of eSports can be seen as prosumers, due to the fact that they co-create value together with actors within eSports through the integration of consumer resources. First, consumers of the eSports experience do not only produce value for themselves, but also contribute with their resources, such as money, time, skills, and efforts, adding value for the different actors, and to the experience in its whole, which might be the most evident example that consumers of eSports are prosumers to a high degree. They also contribute with their engagement and creativity in the experience and the contribution of resources adds to the entire experience. Second, the motivations of prosumers and the drivers of eSports were observed to be the same during IEM, which further links prosumers to eSports, and helps to explain why consumers take on the role of prosumers in creating the eSports experience. However, the level of engagement varies, which stresses the importance of allowing prosumers to participate on their own terms. The

observations at IEM showed that prosumers are seeking out opportunities to co-create the eSports experience, but consumers cannot be forced to take on the role of a prosumer. They can, however, be encouraged to do if provided with opportunities and resources to do so. Collaborative marketing allows companies within eSports to market together with the consumers, which enables the companies to draw upon the resources of the consumers in the co-creation of value, which encourages the consumer to take on the role of a prosumer. Marketing actors must however acknowledge the role of prosumers in order to leverage on the value created by these prosumers.

Discussion

Based on the conclusion that consumers of the eSports experience can be perceived as prosumers, we argue that the prosumer have gotten a face. Previous research on prosumers has laid the foundations to what defines prosumers (e.g. Toffler, 1980; Tapscott and Williams, 2006; Xie et al, 2008) and what their motivations are (e.g. Dahl and Moreau, 2007; Chandler and Chen, 2015). The co-creational efforts of eSports consumers have been highlighted by Taylor (2012) and Seo (2013) and the concept of prosumers was linked to the eSports industry in the Newzoo Global Esports Report (2015). That statement made us curious whether the consumers of eSports can be perceived as prosumers, resulting in the title, *The Presumed Prosumers.* By observing the visitors at IEM, we have gained more insight about the behaviour of consumers taking on the on the role of prosumers, which has been little explored.

Based on our findings at IEM, we developed the Prosumer map. The model shows the process in which consumers take on the role of prosumers and the role of marketing actors. The implications of our findings show that consumers can be

encouraged to become prosumers by being provided with opportunities and resources to do so by other marketing actors. Marketing actors can therefore act in a why that enables consumers to take on the role of prosumers, which emphasises the fact that marketing actors can actively make consumers become prosumers, by contributing with opportunities and resources, which are important finding, not only for the eSports industry, but for other industries as well. The eSports experience should a number of great examples of how eSports actors encouraged consumers to become prosumers by means such as collaborative marketing, gaming, competitions and visitors acting as commentators. We therefore argue that other industries can learn from the eSports industry in terms of actively encouraging consumers to take on the role of prosumers. The eSports experience demonstrated an equal relationship between consumers and marketing actors, where both parts mutually invested resources in the relationship and thereby co-created value. There were not always huge investments in resources, but many drops make a river.

Not only did this observational study provide insight about prosumers, it also showed what prosumption can look like. By combining different definitions of prosumers and observing it from in specific setting, it becomes more comprehensible how consumers become prosumers, not only what prosumers are. Consumers of the eSports experience embody the prosumers in many ways. They are prosumers in the way that they contribute with their resources and thereby add to the entire experience. Our findings suggest that consumers can be encouraged to take on the role of prosumers if they are provided with the opportunity to contribute with their resources in the interaction with eSports actors. This was exemplified in the Fnatic booth, when the consumers became prosumers as they created poster, acted as

commentators and played the game, Fnatic Challenge. In many of the examples from IEM, value was created in collaboration between the eSports actors and the visitors. The act of prosumption can therefore be seen as a process, which starts in the interaction between companies and consumers, with places emphasis on the interaction between companies and consumers to a greater extent, rather than seeing value-creation as created by either producers or consumers. Companies should therefore focus more on the interaction with consumers and look at ways in which the can contribute with opportunities and resources to encourage consumers to contribute with as much of their resources as possible. The more companies invest, the more they can gain from the value created by prosumers, which can be seen as a mutual exchange of value creation.

The different actors at IEM enabled the consumers to take an active role through open settings, the provision of resources, and activities where the visitors could co-create the experience. We noticed a higher degree of activity in the boots offering the visitors an opportunity to interact and partake in the creation of experience, e.g. gaming, competitions and other activities. This implies that consumers are actively seeking out the possibility to become prosumers, which could be traced to the drivers motivating prosumers such as being a part of a community, demonstrate their skills (Dahl and Moreau, 2007) and create a unique and personal experience (Prügl and Schreier, 2006). Consequently, the relationship must be equal and based on the individual and social motivations of prosumers. It could therefore be suggested that actors of the eSports experience should acknowledge the individual and social motivations of prosumers and allow consumers to take on an active role in creating the experience. This highlights the fact that companies should emphasis personalisation to a greater extent and

create equal relationships built on collaboration with their consumers. Since prosumers seek unique and personalised experiences, they should be allowed to contribute on their own conditions, in order for companies to be able to draw upon the value created. It was observed during IEM that companies that did not offer the visitors personal experiences, but rather standardized products, were unable to meet the needs of the consumers, which resulted in significant lower activities and participants within their booth.

Even though we have concluded that consumers of the eSports experience were willing to contribute with their resources when interacting with different eSports actors, it should be emphasised that not all visitors at IEM were prosumers. This conclusion was based on the fact that some visitors at IEM were more passive during the event, as they were there to solely watch the games taking place, rather than taking an active role in the experience in the way that they were engaging with the eSports actors or adding creativity.

Implications for future research suggest that prosumers within other industries are studied in order to see if there are any major differences between eSports and other industries. Does eSports consumer engagement increase because of the consumers' ability to fully replicate the professionals' actions in a game, even though they are all different physically and mentally in real life?

It would also be highly relevant to study prosumer from a business perspective in order to understand the full value of the contribution of prosumers in co-creating the experience. During the event, the eSports consumers contributed with $37,500 to the prize pool (IEM Katowice, 2016), which shows that prosumers create value, not only for themselves, but also add to the entire experience. Future research should look deeper into strategies on how companies can maximise the value created by prosumers and go more into detail regarding what companies should do to make consumer become prosumers.

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