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The Social Brand

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Attestation of authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgments), nor material to which a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”



Samantha Weston
2013

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My friends, you are ambitious with your education, which encourages me to be ambitious with my own. Especially Bethany and Eve for being great study-buddies and sending encouraging text messages just when needed.

And Nerice, for making bunting with me, and lending me your insight and experience in social media.

For Bob, who always worked hard and loved us.

“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin”

Matthew 6:27

Abstract

Social Media is fast becoming an integral component of the marketing strategies for many brands as a means of direct communication with a consumer base. This project will explore how brand strategy can best incorporate and work within social media to develop and enhance a brand. As part of this, it presents the argument that the fundamental concept of what a brand is needs to change to incorporate a social media co-creative potential. A significant factor in the research is this redefining of the concept of branding—as something that is not only more inclusive of audiences, but is actually responsive to them in a direct and organic way. It suggests that brands need to be conceptualized as strategic yet fluid relationships with customers, rather than as ‘top down’ constructions.

The central focus of this investigation will be how community relates to branding. In particular, it explores how social media can be utilized to create better engagement with an audience/consumer base, and develop brand loyalty, and a positive brand perception. The initial argument for this project is that a surrounding community will strengthen a brand, and that the relational nature of social media platforms provides an effective forum for this to occur. Further still, it argues that social media has such a significant social influence that it is essential for organizations to consider social media in the planning stages of branding and marketing strategies in order to thrive in the current marketplace.

Key words

Brand, Brand Strategy, Social Media, Community, Relational Marketing, Conversation

Contents

Attestation of authorship	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Abstract	iii
Contents	iv
Introduction	1
Bunting and markets	1
The problem	3
The argument	4
Significance of study	4
Review of literature	5
Methodology	10
Methods	11
Gathering information	11
Documentation methods	13
Reflective Practice	15
Traditional branding	17
Defining traditional branding	17
Social media	19
Defining social media	19
The development of social media's capabilities	21
The traditional vs. the new	22
Consumer decision process	24
Relationship marketing	25
Social media marketing and the demands of consumers	27
Communities on social media	31
Brand communities	33
Conversational markets	38
Word-of-mouth marketing and brand advocacy	41
Brand equity as a measure of brand strength	44
Social branding	46
Failings of traditional branding approaches in a social media world	46
Relational approach to branding	47
Involving the consumer in branding	47
Co-creation as a philosophy for branding through social media	49
The advantages of remaining small	51
Case Studies	54
Miley Cyrus VMA performance	54
Seven Sharp	54
Jamie's World	56

Nike Britomart Running Club	59
Conclusion	60
Glossary of terms	63
List of figures	65
References	67

Introduction

Bunting and markets

This research was inspired by bunting; that celebratory decoration that gets hung up at weddings, baby showers and everywhere in Britain during the Queen's Jubilee.

The story began at work, while my friend Nerice and I were brainstorming ideas for a promotion to celebrate reaching 10,000 likes on the Facebook page for one of the brands we worked for. We got talking about bunting and the possibility of making printed paper bunting to include as part of a prize pack for the promotion. We joked around a little bit, saying "we should do this for a living", and "we should make bunting and sell it" before turning back to our computers to get on with our work. A couple minutes later my friend turned back to me saying, "Do you think we could make the bunting in a week? I'm going to the markets, we could sell it there."



Figure 1: Hunting Letter Flags (2012) Oh Crap! bunting

Within a week we had business cards and a Facebook page, and a few days after that she took our little paper bunting triangles to the Pokeno Farmers Market... and we sold nothing. The conclusion was that it just wasn't the right market, and our paper bunting was a little out of place amongst the fruits and vegetables and homemade jams.

Our next attempt was at a specialty craft fair in Grey Lynn called Kraftbomb. Being that we had a little more time to prepare for our second market, we set up our table with our paper bunting, as well as a small selection of fabric bunting printed with phrases like "Happy Birthday," "Far Out" and our favorite, "Oh Crap!" The market was four hours long, and for the first two we sat there nervously and again sold nothing. By the end of the market, although we had sold a few things, most were pity sales to people we knew who had come out to support us.

One of the first sales to a stranger that I do remember was from that first market though. We began chatting to a German tourist who was in New Zealand on a working holiday. We spoke for over half an hour to

this guy, mostly about how he was finding work, and his involvement as a DJ for a Roller Derby association, his flat mates and why he liked New Zealand. Then the topic of conversation moved to bunting, how we had just started, and particularly our cheekiest phrase, “Oh Crap!” Finally at the end of the market, as we began to pack up he decided he wanted to buy the ‘Oh Crap!’ bunting, to send to a friend back in Germany. Nerice and I later laughed about how long we had spoken to him, and that it was the only reason he had ended up buying anything.

Being a part of the markets and the craft community has revealed many practical lessons in marketing and social media, and served as a real world example of how many of the ideas in this research would play-out off the page. Concepts which will be discussed in this thesis that also have examples in my experiences selling bunting including,

Finding a community of like-minded people – We were fortunate to find an existing community of crafters and makers that shared our passion for hand-made goods. Members of this community included both customers and other stallholders.

Surrounding our brand with a community – Over time, we built a small following on Facebook, as well as a network of other small craft businesses, stores and market organizers. Through this community we have gained a reputation as the go-to bunting girls, which not only facilitates sales of our bunting but also opportunities for cross-promotion between businesses, exposure for our bunting at events and involvement in photo-shoots for magazines.

Participating in conversations with customers – The dialogue we share with customers is one of the most important elements to our small business. At markets the face-to-face conversation forms the foundation for possible relationships with customers and other businesses. These conversations often seemingly have very little to do with bunting or encouraging sales, but are still crucial to being able to achieve this. Often just a compliment on a shoppers cardigan, or a ‘how’s your day going?’ allows us, as stallholders, to engage with a passer-by and start a conversation which may or may not lead to a sale. This allows our stall to become memorable to the customer, and gives us the opportunity to pass on our business card, encouraging customers to like us on Facebook so we might continue a dialogue with them after the market day. Often it is after the markets, as customers connect with us through social media that we make many of our sales.

Building relationships with our community – The relationships we have built with our community is perhaps the most rewarding aspect to being in the crafting business. Having repeat customers come back again and again to chat and support our business is very satisfying. It often gives us the chance to hear where our product has ended up, whether that is an obscure international destination, the home of a celebrity or the Prime Minister’s electorate office. Apart from the personal satisfaction, having

a relationship with our customers also puts us in a position of preference and has given us opportunities to collaborate or create product for exciting projects. Besides this, we have also found loyal customers who are keen to brag about us and recommend us to their friends.

It is because of these reasons that making bunting and selling it at the markets, forms the foundation and inspiration for this research. It's not about the bunting itself, but the people it has brought me into contact with, and the experience of selling to them.

The problem

There was an expectation from marketers and advertisers that the Internet and the creation of social networks would provide a mass market of consumers that they could reach with their promotional messages, products and services (Godin, 2009; Neumeier, 2003). However, for the most part, this turns out not to be the case. New Zealand businesses too, struggle to grasp the capabilities and nuances of reaching consumers online.

While the Internet has provided social media forums such as Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest that boast hundreds of millions of users worldwide, only 40% of Auckland businesses are using these tools (Chapman-Smith, 2013). Only half of New Zealand's small and medium-sized enterprises even have their own website (Chapman-Smith, 2013).

There are two parties in this exchange, the organizations and the consumers. When it comes to social media, the consumers are well ahead, with organizations playing catch-up (Gillin, 2009; Qualman, 2013). A survey carried out by MYOB showed that 86% of New Zealanders are now online, and 80% use the Internet to make purchases (Chapman-Smith, 2012). 'Yellow' marketing director, Evan Lawry stated that 57% of New Zealanders search for businesses, products or services via the web monthly (Chapman-Smith, 2013). Demonstrating that an Internet presence is vital, 17% of those conduct their searches exclusively via the web (Chapman-Smith, 2013). These statistics are evidence of how consumers are gaining influence in online forums by embracing technological capabilities and in many cases rejecting traditional marketing formats (Kozinets, 1999).

This highlights a significant missed opportunity for many New Zealand businesses. The study conducted by MYOB indicated the reason was that small and medium-sized businesses were slow adopters of new technology, with surveyed business citing a lack of time and knowledge holding them back (Chapman-Smith, 2012). Over 60% of businesses surveyed said they saw no value in having an online presence (Chapman-Smith, 2012).

Small and medium-sized businesses are missing an opportunity when it comes to utilizing the Internet and specifically, social media platforms, to

grow their brand and customer base. Perhaps this is a result of a lack of knowledge on how to approach the hoard of social media users in a way that honors and enhances both the brand and the consumers.

The argument

The sheer force of the influence of social media provides a daunting space for brands to occupy, and presents both advantages and disadvantages for organizations seeking to market themselves. By applying a traditional marketing approach, social media becomes another tool in the marketer's arsenal, and presents opportunities for low-cost, direct-to-the-public messages that are hoped will go 'viral' and spread rapidly across a vast audience of potential customers. Unfortunately, although social media is accessible and low-cost in terms of physical resources (as opposed to, for example, traditional advertising through print or television media), it can also be time-consuming and difficult to predict. But by thoroughly investigating the nature and capabilities of social media, then reflecting this in the strategies and goals of an organization's brand, social media can be used successfully in the marketing process. The argument presented through my research is that designing brand strategies that are influenced by social media and, in particular, aim to build 'community' around a brand, significantly strengthens that brand.

A key conclusion of this investigation is that social media and its opportunities for brands need to be approached from a new perspective. Rather than seeing the users of social media in traditional branding strategy as a 'target audience', they need to be approached from an entirely different framework—in a sense they need to be approached as individuals. Brands need to be constructed 'relationally' in order to reflect and respond to the way people use social media. Put simply, brands need to become social. The goal of building brands needs to encompass the development of relationships, dialogical conversations, transparency, and the building of community with customers. This behavior is already a part of the culture of social media, and brands that can learn and adopt this behaviour as a fundamental framework in their strategies are far better positioned to capitalize on social media. Brands that continue holding onto traditional attitudes and approaches to customers within this rapidly changing market place do so at their peril.

Significance of study

The significance of this thesis is that it brings together and evaluates a number of important arguments around the impact of social media on branding with specific regard to the importance of re-defining the notion of branding as more of a relational concept rather than a top down construction. It has clear implications for New Zealand businesses and suggests directions for businesses to involve social media and importantly, build communities through this, as part of their branding strategies.

Note: A glossary of key terms can be found on page 64.

Review of literature

This thesis investigates the development of branding, from traditional organization-led approaches, towards a participatory approach involving and focusing on the consumer. It explores the shift brought about by the development of social media and the changing culture of how consumers and organizations interact. The scope of literature therefore extends from a basic exploration of traditional branding, but concentrates on where branding now sits in light of the influence of the Internet and social media. The literature review suggests the key notion behind this investigation is that branding now takes a relational approach, as the balance of power between organizations and consumers swings more to the side of the consumer. Areas being investigated here as contributing to this contemporary participatory notion of branding are social media marketing, word-of-mouth marketing, building community, participation in a dialogue with consumers, and the building of brand loyalty and advocacy. Although a considerable number of other texts are referred to throughout this document, the following literature review identifies and examines the key texts that contributed most significantly to the research area.

Yan: Social media in branding: Fulfilling a need

A key text that outlines the use of social media in branding is Yan (2011), which identifies social media platforms as the “next media for marketing”. The users of Facebook, and other similar sites, are treating social media as a “core” web application, spending time on these platforms as a default and linking to other content from there (Watkins & Lee, 2010; Yan, 2011, p. 690). Yan then emphasizes the need for companies to also participate in these platforms, suggesting that through social media, brands need to connect with consumers creating a sense of belonging and engagement; and that “the brand is strengthened through participation, allowing external audiences to identify with it, and become involved in it” (2011, p. 691). He proposes that companies collaborate with consumers, and by encouraging participation, those consumers will become “evangelists” for the brand (Yan, 2011). Yan (2011) explores the increasing consumer demand for brands to be ‘transparent’, and the requirement for branding to be genuine and open with its consumers. He emphasizes the notion that for consumers to be able to actively and accurately advocate the brand, they must have a deep understanding of the values of the brand. Interacting with the brand via social media allows individuals to understand those values and the behind-the-scenes personalities. A salient feature we can take from Yan is that this level of transparency becomes a consideration of the brand strategy and planning stages of branding. The suggestion then is that utilizing social media and the opportunities for engagement, benefit the brand equity of organizations, and Yan (2011) states, “organizations seeking to build their brands avoid social media at their peril: we may find that their presence in brand strategy is indicative of whether they have a true market orientation” (p. 696).

The value of Yan (2011) to this research is as an overview or summary of the application of social media to branding and relating concepts, such as consumer interaction, brand transparency and consumer advocacy/evangelism. Yan's work also comes from a New Zealand context, as he is an author, designer and businessman working in Wellington.

Gillin: The New Influencers

Paul Gillin's book *The New Influencers* serves as a guide to marketing through social media, and is a key text in this area. Gillin (2009) expands on the use of social media in the marketing mix, with a focus on engaging with "Influencers," such as bloggers, who are involved in online communities. In this sense Gillin raises the notion, which expands Yan's discussion of brand advocacy, that within online communities there is a specific segment of users that display higher levels of commitment, and influence than the general membership. His focus suggests there is benefit in specifically targeting influencers for the purposes of collaboration with the organization.

The notion of influencers had been discussed earlier by Malcolm Gladwell in his book *The Tipping Point* (2000). Gladwell termed these characters, "Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen," and discussed the influence these individuals have over word-of-mouth phenomena as a result of their charisma and ability to connect socially to other people. Gladwell was known to Gillin and is referred to in his book.

Gillin (2009) states that "marketers need to understand, accept and participate in this new world," including connecting with enthusiasts. His book presents this as an opportunity for marketers to tap into social and consumptive communities and take advantage of the word-of-mouth promotion that is already occurring on social media. In fact, he presents the viewpoint that this is essential, as consumer advocacy or opposition, as a result of the web and social media, now has far greater reach (Gillin, 2009).

Gillin essentially supports the notion that by connecting with enthusiasts—people who are willing and motivated to talk about their brand—organizations are able to influence the word-of-mouth dialogue that occurs. Gillin's work is useful, but its usefulness is limited somewhat as it notes that what motivates people to become influencers is difficult to define, as this is often not profit driven. The influencers themselves are often unaware of what contributes to their own appeal. Instead, motivations are attributed to being able to "connect with people with similar interests," "influence markets and discussions," because "it just feels good" (Gillin, 2009).

Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki and Wilner: Networked Narratives - Understanding word-of-mouth marketing in online communities

In the article, *Networked Narratives: Understanding Word-of-Mouth Marketing in Online Communities*, Kozinets et al. (2010) commenced a “seeding” campaign – that is, a campaign in which a product is placed among influential consumers so that they can communicate favorably about it to other consumers. The study identified 90 bloggers, whose online content of lifestyle-related posts were relevant to the product, and attracted traffic of at least 400 unique visitors daily, and gifted them the new mobile device. These bloggers were identified as “potential opinion leaders” (Kozinets et al., 2010, p. 72). Of the 90 bloggers, 83 posted content about the product. The responses, comments and further content were then documented.

As a key text in the area of word-of-mouth marketing, Kozinets et al (2010) describes word-of-mouth as the inter-consumer communications about products, services or brand messages. Kozinets et al. (2010) suggest that consumers are more willing to listen to and trust the recommendations of a friend than official marketing messages, and that word-of-mouth marketing is therefore defined as “the intentional influencing of consumer-to-consumer communications by professional marketing techniques” (p. 71). This allowed marketers to work through the trusted friend or influencer. The area of investigation for this article therefore overlaps Gillin’s (2009) discussion of influencers, but expands on the practicalities of implementing a campaign which pushes a corporate influence on word-of-mouth phenomena.

Further concepts discussed in this article develop from the results of the investigation, including identifying “commercial-communal tensions” that show a level of complexity in communal relationship that occur on social media. Kozinets et al. suggest that while word-of-mouth is typically “organic” because it occurs between consumers, without input or influence from marketers, in many cases this seeding campaign instigated negative responses from readers, highlighting consumer demand for transparency in social media. These observations move into an area concerning relational factors that contribute to word-of-mouth communications, particularly in the interest of consumer commitment and advocacy for a brand.

Fullerton: Creating Advocates: The roles of satisfaction, trust and commitment

This paper focuses on concepts related to relational marketing, particularly the creation of consumer advocates for brands, and how levels of consumer satisfaction and commitment contribute to this. Fullerton (2010, p. 93) defines advocacy as, “the willingness of the customer to give strong recommendations and praise to other consumers on behalf of a products or service provider.” This paper’s observations are not specific to online communities or applications. The value Fullerton’s work has to this thesis

is in its discussion of relational marketing approaches, and of consumer commitment.

Fullerton suggests that advocacy is thought to be better than repeat purchases as an indicator of consumer loyalty, as it is indicative of a deeper level of attachment to a brand and that consumers are more likely to make a recommendation if they feel they have a relationship with a brand, viewing that brand as a friend.

It is suggested that a customer's commitment to a brand is an important determining element in whether or not they will participate in spreading positive word-of-mouth messages (Fullerton, 2010, p. 98). Fullerton (2010, p. 98) states: "It can be concluded that both satisfaction with the service and trust in the service provider create the kind of identification and attachment based consumer attitudes that lead the customer to be a strong advocate." The findings of this study indicate that the type of commitment achieved through relational marketing techniques strongly influence the likelihood that a customer will become an advocate. Fullerton also makes the claim that trust and commitment are essential elements of successful relational marketing.

Searls and Weinberger: Markets are conversations (The Cluetrain Manifesto)

The call for the implementation of relational marketing techniques is a key theme in The Cluetrain Manifesto. The manifesto is presented as a set of ninety-five theses, published in 2001, just prior to the social media boom with sites such as Facebook. It examined the impact of the Internet on business; particularly changes in the ways people interact and send messages. The fourth chapter, Markets are Conversations by Doc Searls and David Weinberger discusses a shift in markets towards a two way dialogue between organizations and consumers.

Using a traditional marketplace as an analogy, Searls and Weinberger (2001) discuss the ways in which buyers and sellers now take part in a dialogue, stating that "by listening, marketing will re-learn how to talk" (Searls & Weinberger, 2001). This chapter suggests that developments in the capabilities of the Internet and social media have enabled a consumer culture that is suspicious of and unwilling to hear marketing messages. "As sophisticated as marketing became, it has never overcome the ability of people to smell the BS behind all the marketing perfume" (Searls & Weinberger, 2001).

Searls and Weinberger's chapter serves as a precursor to Kozinets et al. (2010) investigation of word-of-mouth in an online setting, in that it identifies a shift in how the Internet influences business communication and makes bold statements about the tone of those communications. The Cluetrain Manifesto states, "Conversations among human beings sound human. They are conducted in a human voice" (Searls & Weinberger, 2001). Searls and Weinberger indicate the need to change from a professional tone of voice, to something more relational.

The Cluetrain Manifesto often uses analogies to describe the evolution from “business-as-usual” to conversational markets. While many of the notions discussed have come to fruition in the development of the Internet and social media, many of the changes in attitudes towards business have still not developed over a decade later, as discussed. This widely cited manifesto has however, served to articulate a change in business communication at the beginning stages.

Methodology

This thesis is a qualitative study of social media and its applications to branding. As such, the establishment of a solid theoretical foundation for this area of inquiry is a priority. In order to examine both the practice of branding and the phenomenon of social media, an understanding of how and where these areas intersect and are applied to marketing strategies is key. The investigation was therefore based on significant secondary research and an examination of relevant case studies. Methodology is “centrally concerned with how we conceptualize, theorize and make abstractions as it is with the techniques of methods which we use to assemble and analyze information” (Miller & Brewer, 2003, p. 192). While this thesis involves no applied or practice-based components, a design perspective and the potential for design applications remains at the forefront of contextualizing this study.

Design thinking, as defined by Tim Brown of design consultancy IDEO, is “a methodology that imbues the full spectrum of innovation activities with a human-centered design ethos” (2008, p. 86). This means that design seeks to observe and understand the values of people, in order to drive innovation. For this reason, this thesis has sought to retain a grasp of this aim and ethos of design in order to build an understanding, through research, that serves as a firm foundation for future creative endeavours that are applicable to industry. As a search for a solution that aligns consumer demand and the capabilities of technology with business strategy, the research aims for this thesis are reflected in the “design thinking” methodology. Design thinking “is a discipline that uses the designer’s sensibility and methods to match people’s needs with what is technologically feasible and what a viable business strategy can convert into customer value and market opportunity” (Brown, 2008, p. 86). It is hoped that the positioning of this research, being from a design perspective, will offer more and varied opportunities to business strategy.

This project has therefore involved an interplay between tacit knowledge, as described by Polanyi (1983) and explicitly learned knowledge. This tacit knowledge has also been discussed by Schon (1992) as “knowing-in-action,” or the knowledge that is inherent in our everyday lives, instinctual and intuitive. As social media applications are widely used, I had a prior understanding of its capabilities and culture. I therefore had instinctual ideas about its applications in designing branding and marketing. This influenced the establishment of an argument early on in this project. This argument was then molded and refined by explicit knowledge gained through secondary research. As Schon (1992) states, “practical knowledge becomes professional when it is based on the results of scientific research” (p. 119). It is only through reflecting on a tacit understanding of social media, in light of explicitly learned secondary research, that this instinctual knowledge can be carefully considered and applied to practice.

Aspects of this work have a broadly phenomenological approach in its observations of social media's relationship to people and their "lived experiences" (Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenological methodology explores social phenomena through the perspectives of the people involved (Stappers, 2007). This reflects the purposes of this research as an investigation of the social phenomena occurring in social media, and examining both the perspectives of consumers and organizations. Methods in this respect involve the observation of the social media profiles of prominent or successful brands, and a resulting case study, analyzing contributing factors to that success. This is particularly important to understanding the interactions between brands and their consumers/audience. It is the value of understanding the perspectives of both parties that forms the basis of the argument for this thesis.

Methods

Gathering information

In the initial stages of this research, a working argument was established based on my own tacit knowledge and experience of social media. This was concerned with the link between brand strategy, community and social media—in particular, how social media as part of the marketing mix might impact brand strategy. Therefore a wide view of the subject area was considered, supported with the gathering of social media marketing books, such as *Social Media Marketing for Dummies* (Singh & Diamond, 2012) and Eric Qualman's *Socialnomics* (2013). It should be noted that, as with the introduction of any new technological phenomenon with a commercial application, most of the initial writings around these areas tend to be non-academic sources—entrepreneurs, tech savvy writers, business writers, journalists, and the like—with academic investigations following along later. This does not invalidate these sources, but makes it important that they are not taken as academic sources but are also scrutinized and cross referenced as one might scrutinize and evaluate primary data itself. These sources, along with other non-academic sources, blogs and articles gave an oversight of social media and its corporate uses. These sources were primarily targeted towards a business-orientated audience, often as sources for industry applicable concepts and techniques. However, this initial stage assisted in the mapping of an evolving research area, and the identification of key themes.

After the initial stage, the primary source of insight for this investigation was academic literature relevant to this subject matter. Online databases and journal articles specific to various areas of social media proved most fruitful, but again tended to be written for business and marketing fields. Considering the short history of social media, much of the relevant literature was published recently, with very few relevant sources from prior to the year 2000. The gathered literature was read and relevant information documented as either notes or screenshots. Reviewing and seeking out the bibliographic references of sources already gathered, widened the range of academic investigation. Non-academic writings

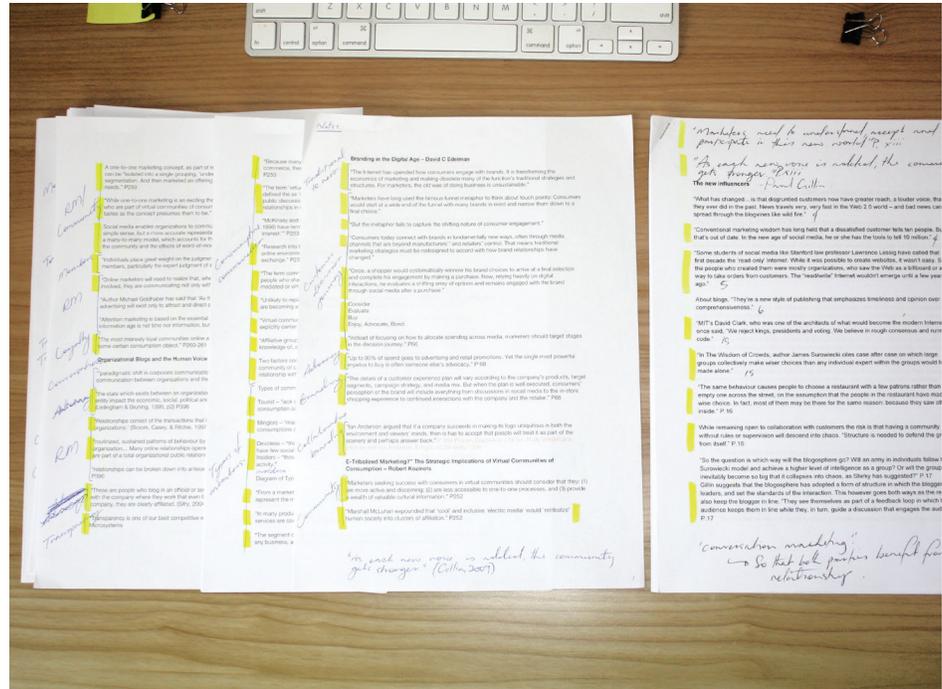


Figure 2: Samantha Weston (2013) Gathered Sources highlighted and annotated

continued to be pivotal to this research area, particularly when accounting for the fast paced development and topical interest of social media. Therefore sources such as newspaper articles, technology columns and webpages were also reviewed and documented.

The discovery of Searls and Weinberger's chapter Markets are which Conversations (2001) in The Cluetrain Manifesto provided a turning point in this investigation. The chapter, which seeks to redefine the way in which business relates to its audience, struck a cord with myself as researcher, as it shared many of the ideas that had developed up to this point. It also helped to connect many of the concepts I had documented up to that point. As one of the earliest gathered sources, being written in 2001 just prior to the creation of major social media applications like Facebook, it also gave insight into the development of social media and projections of what it was to become.

In these early stages the intention for this project was the incorporation of a practice-based element, with the involvement of an organization to act as case study. This organization would be responsive to this research, with the researcher appearing in a consultancy role. However over the course of this project, the establishment of a solid theoretical foundation became the priority. The relationship with the organization remains intact, and the opportunity to become involved in practically applying this research remains a goal for future investigations beyond the scope of this thesis.

Documentation methods

The documentation of key quotes and personal reflections on the research facilitated the critique and evaluation of the research, and its relation to this research area. Gathered sources were stored as either hard copies or digital files so this documentation took several unplanned forms. Hard copies were annotated, and important elements were highlighted. Reflections, quotes and observations were noted in a word document, including references to their sources.

Specific areas relating to social media’s application to business were noted early on, by brainstorming questions of interest, and categorizing these into groups. This initial structure of various areas of interest was fairly limited, but provided a starting point for secondary research. Notes from secondary research were similarly reviewed and categorized in relevant areas of enquiry. This was important to revealing the big picture for this research. As Preston and Thomassen (2010) state, “Context-mapping highlights a greater probability for true innovation as it registers a deeper ill-structured design inquiry” (p. 51).

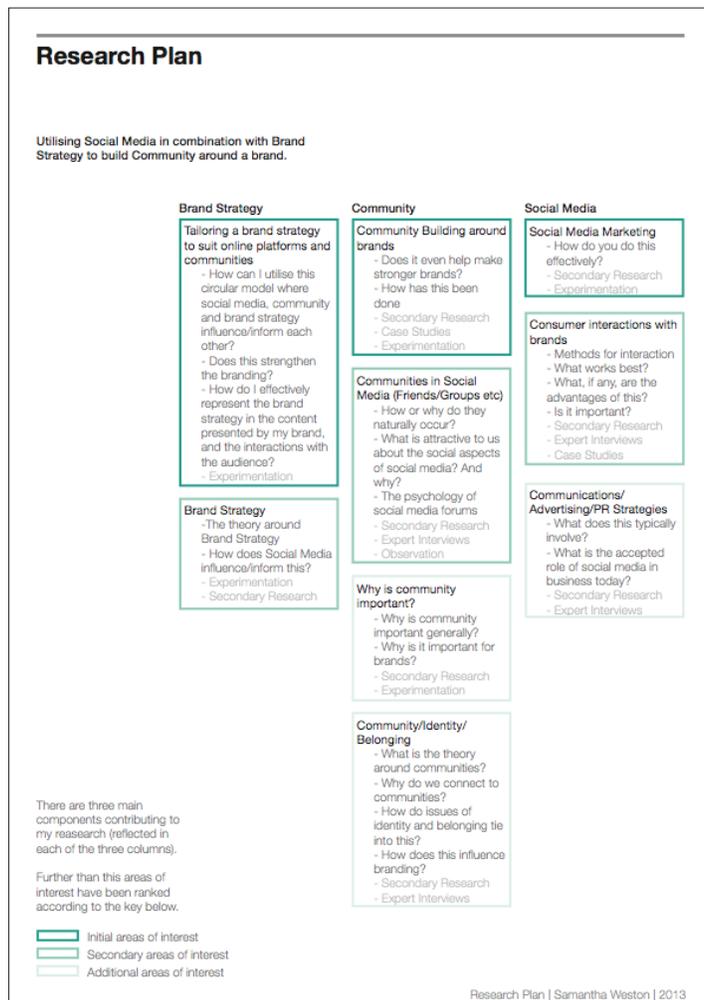


Figure 3: Samantha Weston (2013) Initial map of research area



Figure 4: Samantha Weston (2013) Revised map of research area

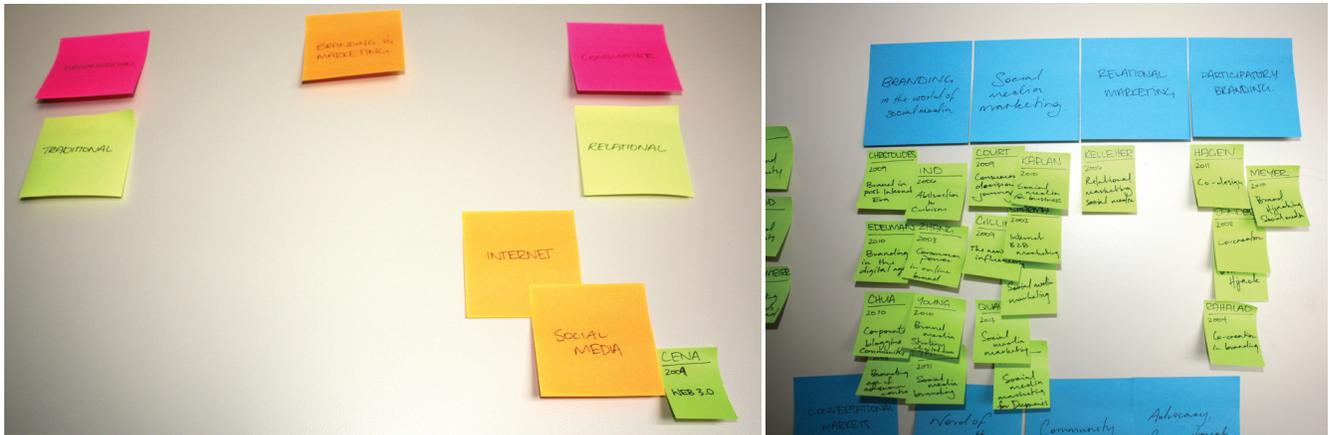


Figure 5 and 6: Samantha Weston (2013) Revised map of research area - detail

The scope of this research expanded significantly from the initial mapping of the research area. Therefore the process of mapping out the area was repeated, with this then informing a final structure for this thesis. Key areas, such as relational marketing, social media marketing and community were identified. Sources were categorized according to the key areas they related to. This second map is also structured loosely on a continuum between traditional branding to relational branding, as this became a central focus to my argument.

In the spirit of investigating the capabilities of social media, I utilized the social image-sharing site Pinterest to document and store links to relevant sources. Because Pinterest requires that linked sites have an image to display on the virtual “pin-board,” much of this collection of sources were non-academic and topical. I was able to include details of the sources, and observations or thoughts as captions on each pin. Pinterest also allows users to create “secret” boards, so I was able to keep my sources and observations unpublished through the duration of this research and thereby ensure any ethics considerations regarding source identities were not breached.

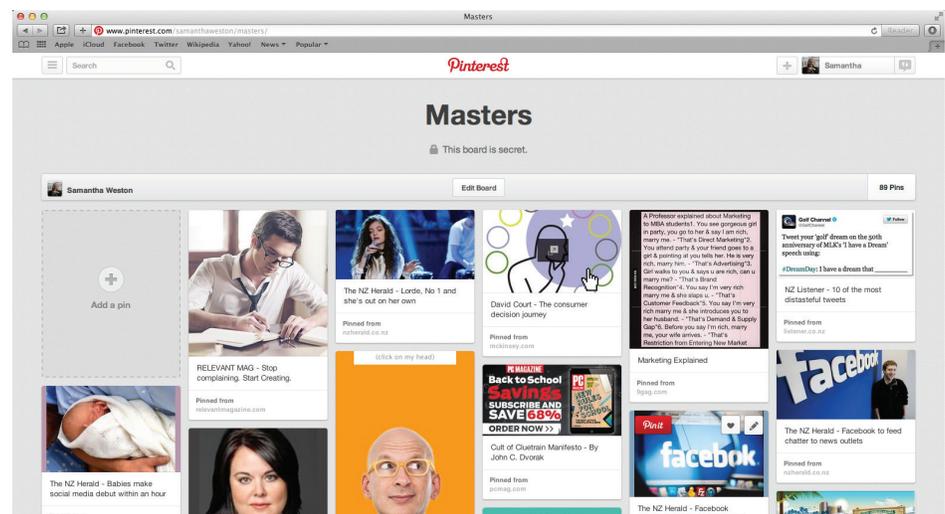


Figure 7: Samantha Weston (2013) Pinterest board for Masters research

Reflective practice

Methods for reflecting on the research were not rigidly planned, but occurred naturally over the course of the project. As Schon (1992) states, “Reflection on knowing and reflecting-in-action is a process of getting in touch with the understandings we form spontaneously in the midst of action” (p. 126). Despite this, reflective practice was an important element to this project, as this process validates and legitimizes the findings through critical thought. As Preston and Thomassen (2010) state, “even though we cannot set up the creative design process beforehand as a fully clinical experiment, we can, through reflection, analyze it” (p. 47).

Much of the active reflection on the material was documented through note taking, and annotations. The initial stages of writing the main body of this thesis also involved making colloquial or casual notes of observations throughout. These were musings on documented notes, often including my own opinions, or further areas to investigate. This reflective practice occurred in conjunction with my documentation of secondary research, and over time developed to be a critical aspect of this process. These musings were highlighted orange and re-worded, formalized or answered later.

This relates to what Jack Yan had stated about the growing customer demand for business transparency through social media. By taking part in a direct dialogue with the public in order to grow relationships with their customers, companies also open themselves up to closer scrutiny. They make a promise to be responsive to their customers. – Judging a brand based on how they interact with their customers. Do they answer customer’s queries online? How do they deal with online complaints? Do they participate in online forums regarding their products or services?

“Brands must be genuine.” (Yan, 2011, P692)

“By going to blogs and social networks, people can understand the personalities behind the scenes.” (Yan, 2011, P692) Talking to Mum – She receives several emails a day with people/businesses offering their services to improve her company website and social media profiles. What she wants to know is if her business gets facebook, what will they even have to say? When a business isn’t a customer-centered or retail business, who will they be talking to through social media? What social media platform would best suit them?

“...the growing consumer desire for transparent brands.” (Yan, 2011, P691) – *Find Beyond Branding (Itd, 2003) and Branding Governance (Itd, 2007)*

Word of mouth is useful tool for building a positive perception of a brand, and through the web and particularly social media sites this is able to happen on a large scale, and very quickly. On the other hand, the same can be said for the spread of a negative perception of a brand. What role can the brand take in online interactions to own how their brand is portrayed? Is that even possible, or does using social media imply that a brand has to give-up control over how their brand is portrayed. My feeling is that it doesn’t, there must be a way for companies to still retain some control over the perception of their brand, otherwise what is the point?

Examples of good and bad interactions and how it can go viral (online version of word-of-mouth)

Samsung Canada – Positive customer interactions going viral
<http://9gag.com/gag/6720322>

Figure 8: Samantha Weston (2013) Reflective practice note taking

The use of social media itself as a source for research and spending time on these applications was also an influential part of my reflective practice. This thesis claims that the consumers are ahead of organizations in terms of their understanding of the nuances of online communities. Prior to undertaking this research, I had only ever fulfilled the role of consumer in this equation, which required a shift in perspective, from consumer to organization. My role on social media developed, from being a consumer, to that of observer and critic. Therefore my experiences of social media served to evaluate the information I was reading, allowing me to discern whether the phenomenon discussed in the texts was occurring, or whether it could occur. Being in touch with social media, also allowed me to observe the concepts being discussed in the literature, which included those examples provided as case studies to this research.

Social media also played a role in the selection of texts. By searching out the social media profiles of the authors, to establish whether they utilized the applications personally or professionally, in my opinion provided further credibility to their work. I would argue, in line with the central contentions of this thesis, in fact, that if they were active in online communities, their work had more relevance.

Traditional branding

Defining traditional branding

Historically the convention of branding a company developed out of a need for manufacturers and farmers to identify the goods they produced, and as such branding was simply the name of the producer or store applied to the goods (Schutte, 1969). In the 1960's The American Marketing Association defined a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Wood, 2000, p. 664)

This definition centers on the product and concerns itself primarily with the visual elements that are representative of the brand. Later definitions include "any other feature" after the list of visual elements which differentiate one brand from another, allowing for the inclusion of intangible aspects such as consumer perception (Wood, 2000, p. 664). Always at the core however is the primary purpose of branding, as the differentiation of one brand from its competitors, and the competition to gain control of their respective marketplaces (Schutte, 1969; Wood, 2000).

Consumer-oriented definitions of branding focus on promises from the organization, of attributes that will provide satisfaction to the consumer. These attributes could be "real or illusory, rational or emotional, tangible or invisible," (Ambler & Styles, 1997) and seek to create a recognizable and memorable image of the brand in the minds of consumers (Wood, 2000, p. 664).

Therefore two approaches to defining branding come to the forefront. The first of these is a traditional approach where the brand is derived from the product itself and functions solely as an identifier. In this approach the branding is formed last. The second approach is more holistic, where the brand is not solely focused on the product, but instead includes all marketing elements such as price, promotion and distribution (Ambler & Styles, 1997). The holistic approach proves more relevant as it allows the flexibility to consider all product lines and brand extensions as one cohesive entity (Ambler & Styles, 1997). One might argue that brand management should be strategic and holistic, influencing people within the organization to become brand ambassadors, in order to create a brand that endures through the evolution and development of products and day-to-day business (Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Wood, 2000).

We can see from this that two philosophies exist in regard to branding—either product-centric or consumer-centric, and there has long been an acknowledgment that having a customer focus is important (Balmer & Greyser, 2006). In 1912, former President of the American Economic Association, Frank Taussig stated that, "We must accept the consumer as the final judge" (Balmer & Greyser, 2006, p. 731). As a result, a balance of power between consumer and marketer, and their relationship with each other, occurs in the marketplace (Balmer & Greyser, 2006). Three

types of relationships between consumer and marketer have been termed; manipulative; service; and transactional (Balmer & Greyser, 2006, p. 732). Each applies a different assumption about the “power/balance in the marketplace, the origin of consumer needs and desires, the type of consumer power exercised, the ‘warning’ to consumers or business that pervades the marketplace, and the role of the marketer” (Balmer & Greyser, 2006, p. 732).

In regard to the relationship between the consumer and the brand, the term “brand equity” was coined as a measure of the success of branding (Wood, 2000). Contributing to “brand strength” is the measurement of the consumers’ level of attachment to the brand, also termed “brand loyalty” (Wood, 2000). The three terms are somewhat synonymous, “when marketers use the term ‘brand equity’ they tend to mean brand description or brand strength” (Wood, 2000, p. 662). In a broad sense, brand equity is measured by the behavior and beliefs of customers and other stakeholders, which mean that the company earns greater returns with the brand elements, than without (Wood, 2000).

Social media

Defining social media

Social media is defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). These platforms and websites are used for social networking, some of the most recognizable of these being Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube and LinkedIn, among many more.

While all of these have a basis in being a facilitator of connections between people, each platform formats these connections differently. In doing so, each platform appeals to a different audience, fulfills a different purpose and includes a different set of communicational conventions. Essentially if the overall culture of social media were described as a language, each platform would have its own specific dialect. Following is a list of the most relevant platforms at the time of the writing of this thesis:

Facebook enables users to create personal profiles and connect with other users by becoming ‘friends’ with them. The site allows users to share messages, publically or privately, post photographs and videos and receive notifications of updates to their profiles and the profiles of their friends. The social media network began based on the colloquially known face-books, which were made available to college students so they could get to know each other, a notion which the online Facebook continues to encourage and facilitate.



Figure 9: Facebook Profile screenshot

Twitter users also create a personal profile to connect with others by ‘following’ them or being ‘followed’. Users are able to ‘tweet’ public messages, which are limited to 140 characters, and share links and images. Users are also able to create hashtags, which are phrases preceded by a pound sign (#). These are used to identify messages relating to specific topics, for example #allblacks. When

multiple users create the same hashtag, participating in collaborative tagging, this is known as folksonomy. Folksonomy is a user-generated system of classification, allowing multiple users to create metadata for content, which leads to trending.

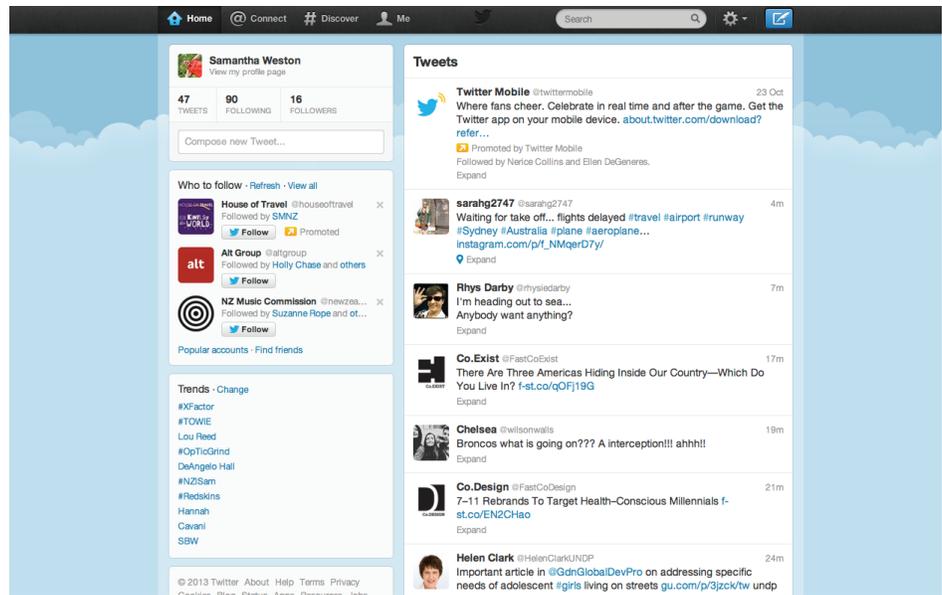


Figure 10: Twitter screenshot

Google+ is a social networking application that allows users to organize their connections into “circles” based on their relationship, for example friends, family, acquaintances or following (people users may not know personally). These circles can be named or renamed at the users discretion. Google+ facilitates messaging between users, the use of hashtags and the upload of photographs and videos, as well as “hangouts,” which are group video chats with up to ten people.

Pinterest offers users a platform on which users can upload and bookmark content, specifically images, by ‘pinning’ these hyperlinks to virtual pin boards. Users are also able to trawl through categorized archives of pins posted by other users, as well as following either users or specific boards.

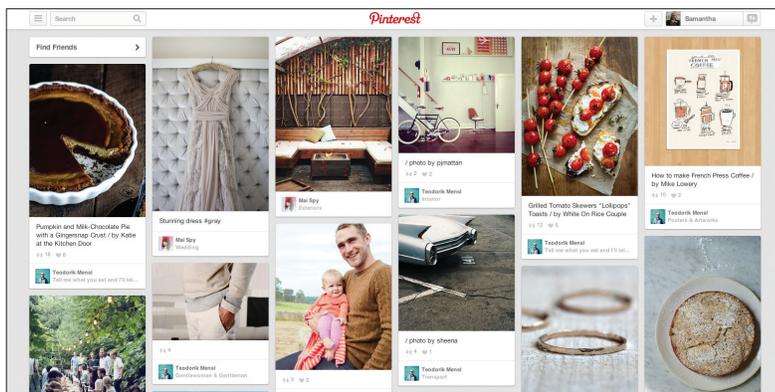


Figure 11: Pinterest screenshot

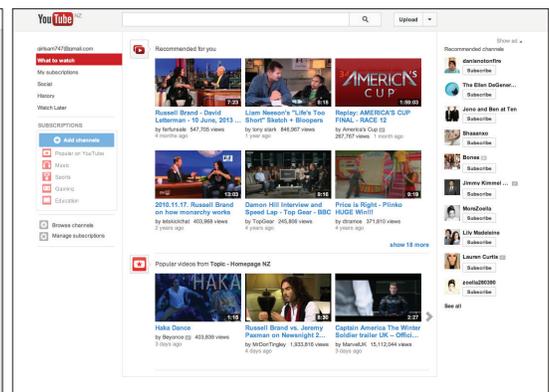


Figure 12: Youtube screenshot

YouTube is a video-sharing site, on which content can be uploaded and viewed. Viewers are then also able to comment on the content.

LinkedIn is mainly utilized as a professional networking site on which users can create profiles, much like a curriculum vitae. Users then make 'connections' with fellow users with whom they have a professional relationship. LinkedIn's features include allowing users to follow various companies, search for job vacancies, post photos, and engage with other users in their industry in discussions.

The challenge for businesses is to learn the language of each of these platforms and establish which suit the purposes of their brand and which audience they are best suited to. It becomes increasingly necessary for businesses to have a presence on these sites and understand how their customers utilize social media, and therefore how to communicate with them. Sites like Facebook become users 'core' website, meaning that people are primarily spending their time on social media sites and being linked to other websites and content from there (Watkins & Lee, 2010; Yan, 2011).

The development of social media's capabilities

Social media sites were made possible by advancements in technology beyond static webpages that allowed user-generated content and user interactions, known as Web 2.0. This term would describe social media platforms, blogs, wikis, video sharing sites, folksonomies etc. The term web 2.0 became popular in 2004 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Prior to this the Internet appears as a 'read-only' entity, and because creating websites was difficult it was embraced mainly by organizations and treated as a "billboard or a way to take orders from customers." (Gillin, 2009) It wasn't until the advent of web 2.0 that we saw the "read/write" Internet, allowing anyone to take the role of author (Gillin, 2009). Web 2.0, also known as Social Web, facilitates collaboration and interactions between users, and encourages the distribution of information (Cena, Farzan, & Lops, 2009).

Since 2009, the term web 3.0 has also been used to describe further developments in the capabilities of websites and applications towards more closely linked virtual and real worlds. Sometimes referred to as the Intelligent Web, Web 3.0 "refers to the provision of a more productive, personalized and intuitive environment through the integration of semantic web and in general Artificial Intelligence technologies emphasizing the information understanding" (Cena et al., 2009). This is evident through the development of technologies such as geosocial networking, geo-tagging and augmented reality where the physical location becomes a factor of the interaction with virtual communities. This can be seen as a natural progression as users increasingly access social media through mobile devices.

The development of technology and the link between Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 could be identified in projects like Baby X (TEDxAuckland, 2013).

In this project a virtual baby was created, with a virtual brain. The baby observes and reacts to people by simulating the increase or decrease of hormone levels in the brain that influence an emotional response. While the project is exploring what the effects of changes in brain stimulation are, the architects of the project are essentially creating an artificially intelligent machine that learns by observing and reacts in a humanistic manner. Web 3.0 also includes elements of the type of technology known as 'autonomous agents', which carry out tasks automatically on behalf of the user. Baby X's ability to observe and interact in a human-like manner, becomes relevant to this research as some of the interacting users observed that they felt it was difficult to leave her, indicating they had made some kind of personal connection. One may argue that the premise of this research—that the 'human' element of the interaction is essential to strong branding—may be simulated by an artificial being that can similarly observe, respond and connect to a customer.

While an analysis of Web 3.0 offers insight into the potential of social media, and possible future implications, for the purposes of this thesis the development of social media's capabilities described by Web 2.0 are sufficient. These are the development of social media to enable interaction of users with other users, and the fast sharing of information through virtual networks.

The traditional vs. the new

Traditional direct marketing approaches through traditional media platforms such as radio, television and print are being challenged. The internet has changed how consumers see and interact with brands, moving towards making traditional methods obsolete (Edelman, 2010). This results from several factors, the most significant of which is technological advancements, particularly in social media, which have allowed consumers to communicate with each other, and the fast spread of knowledge through the Internet. This can work both for and against the aims of a brand, as it means that consumers have become more knowledgeable and discerning when it comes to purchasing decisions.

In 2002, Gummesson, stated that there was no current general theory of marketing, but that there was a need for the development of 'good theory' past the remains of outdated microeconomics, and marketing models or concepts. The development of this 'good theory' required fresh foundations and relevance to industry trends. It could be argued that his claim that there was no general marketing theory is unfounded as there was other material that addressed these issues, available at the time. His observations that there was a changing landscape in marketing theory however, has been supported (Andersen, 2004; Edelman, 2010; Kozinets, 1999; Searls & Weinberger, 2001). This is particularly the case in regards to the development of relationship marketing which Gummesson uses to describe the new 'Value Economy' and 'Network Economy,' which form the basis of his approach to current marketing. "Everything today being a combination of goods, services, and information technology, I like to

propose . . . that we merge all these and zoom in on the total offering” (Gummesson, 2002a, p. 586).

The new economy is defined by services and interactions, whether between the supplier and the consumer, or business to business. This is in contrast to a traditional approach defined by sales and profits. We see this playing out through social media, as there is a free exchange of information between brands and their audiences. The consumer’s feelings of connection to a brand and their experiences interacting with the organization become crucial measures of a brand’s success.

It could be argued that defining these exchanges by service, and leaving them free from the pressures created by pushing the sale of goods, is essential to the brands ability to build relationship with the customers. This appears counter-intuitive by old marketing approaches, especially for businesses that are providers of goods. Further removing the focus from selling, the new currency of this economy is human attention, and advertising now seeks to “attract and direct attention” (Kozinets, 1999).

In the new economy these relational marketing approaches reflect the combination of service and information technology needed in order to sell goods. Many customers are motivated to purchase goods because they have a connection to the brand, and a desire to belong (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). The building of a brand relationship responsive to new modes of communication and perception needs to be recognized as a key foundation for the success of any business. With developments in the capabilities of the Internet to connect people, we see how these early calls for revolution in marketing approaches are being applied. The need for relational marketing approaches becomes more apparent in the climate of social media.

Heller’s (1995) article, ‘Commercial Modern: American Design Style 1925-1933,’ centers around design and advertising developments in the 1920’s. In it, Heller (1995) discusses how the strategies for advertising developed to address the mass market, then changed again at the end of the 20’s because of the recession in the economy leading into the Great Depression. Businesses returned to ‘hard-sell’ methods rather than the glitz of the mass-market approach of commercial modernism (Heller, 1995). One might regard the trends of marketing now—shifting away from a mass-market approach and towards a relational model—as the current generation turning towards its own digital version of the ‘hard-sell’ methods. It could be suggested that mass-market advertising, through traditional media platforms, works during economic up-turns because consumers are more prepared to spend money, and are thus more easily swayed. During times of economic hardship, as Heller notes, we return to person-to-person sales techniques. Social media could be seen, to some degree, as the current generation’s version of the door-to-door salesman, or word-of-mouth marketing. Here we can see the privileging of personal relationships and interaction as a direct result of difficult market conditions. We might also suggest that in times of economic hardship,

companies have less money themselves to spend on marketing, and in periods such as the late 1920s, the meager wages for door to door salespeople would have been considerably less than investment in mass marketing techniques. Similarly, the cost of social media, given its reach and potential influence, is one of its most significant advantages.

Consumer decision process

The process consumers go through to make decisions about which brands to purchase was traditionally represented by the funnel metaphor. Consumers would begin the process with a wide range of brands to choose from, and like a funnel, would narrow down the number of choices until one final brand was left (Court, Elzinga, Mulder, & Vetvik, 2009; Edelman, 2010). Traditional marketing strategies sought to reach consumers at particular “touch points,” or moments that were the most influential, along this decision journey (Court et al., 2009). These touch points include advertising, conversations with friends and experiences with the product. Hogan, Almquist and Glynn (2005) discuss touch points as all instances of involvement with a brand, which may influence the overall perception of a brand. However, unless consumers are actively looking to make a purchase, many of these occasions appear wasted (Court et al., 2009). Repeated exposure to brands through these touch points, influences whether or not a brand is considered at the initial stages of this decision journey (Court et al., 2009).

FUNNEL METAPHOR



Figure 13: Funnel metaphor, based on diagram by Edelman (2010)

The funnel metaphor fails to account for the active engagement of the consumer, which occurs today as the consumer interacts with the brand through social media channels (Edelman, 2010), and the ways that consumers make decisions has changed (Court et al., 2009). Previously engagement with a brand would cease following the purchase; however now this becomes a pivotal touch point in building a relationship with the consumer and gaining consumer loyalty (Court et al., 2009; Edelman, 2010). Consumer-driven touch points, such as social media and the resulting word-of-mouth opportunities have become more important foci for marketers (Court et al., 2009).

Now the consumer decision journey is better illustrated as circular, with four main touch points: “initial consideration; active evaluation, or the process of researching potential purchases; closure, when consumers buy brands; and post-purchase, when consumers experience them” (Court et al., 2009). Hogan, Almquist and Glynn (2005) identify this process as a “customer relationship continuum,” which recognizes the impact of customer service and consumer interactions at “before, during and after”

LOYALTY LOOP



Figure 14: Loyalty loop, based on diagram from Court et al. (2009)

phases of making purchases (p. 13). The increase in interactivity and online engagement makes both the initial-consideration touch points and the post-purchase phases more important targets of marketing efforts. Court et al. (2009) stated: “In our qualitative research, consumers told us that the fragmenting of media and the proliferation of products have actually made them reduce the number of brands they consider at the outset.” Indicating the importance of initial brand awareness, brands that are known in these initial stages are “up to three times more likely to be purchased eventually than brands that aren’t.” (Court et al., 2009). Similarly, in post-purchase phases, consumers continue to engage with brands, and these positive experiences encourage consumer loyalty and advocacy. This increases the brand awareness and the possibility of the brand making it into the initial consideration set of either repeat purchases or new consumers (Court et al., 2009).

Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing is a guiding approach to marketing. Kozinets (1999) states: “In its broadest sense, relationship marketing uses the metaphor of an organization-customer ‘relationship,’ and prescribes that the organization must foster and nurture a mutually beneficial continuing relationship with customers” (p. 256). These relationships comprise of the transactions and exchanges between the organization and the consumer, with Kelleher and Miller (2006) defining relationship as “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity” (p. 396).

It is becoming apparent that communication and the use of open dialogue to build positive relationships with consumers is key to

relationship marketing (Andersen, 2004). A two-way dialogue is important to establishing consumer involvement and brand loyalty, with online communities and social media emerging as a useful platform for organizations to foster these interactions (Andersen, 2004). There has been a shift in the way branding targets markets, moving to a conversational approach that builds “collaborative relationships with publics rather than targeting them” (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 398). This approach can be seen to mirror public relations theory, engaging with consumers in a way that benefits both parties.

An aspect of relationship marketing is the notion of the one-to-one marketing concept. Traditional marketing perceived consumers as a mass market, either a large general mass or smaller mass segments. Therefore organizations target consumers accordingly through mass production and mass distribution, as it was thought that approaching consumers as individuals would not be cost effective (Gummesson, 2002b). Relationship

RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

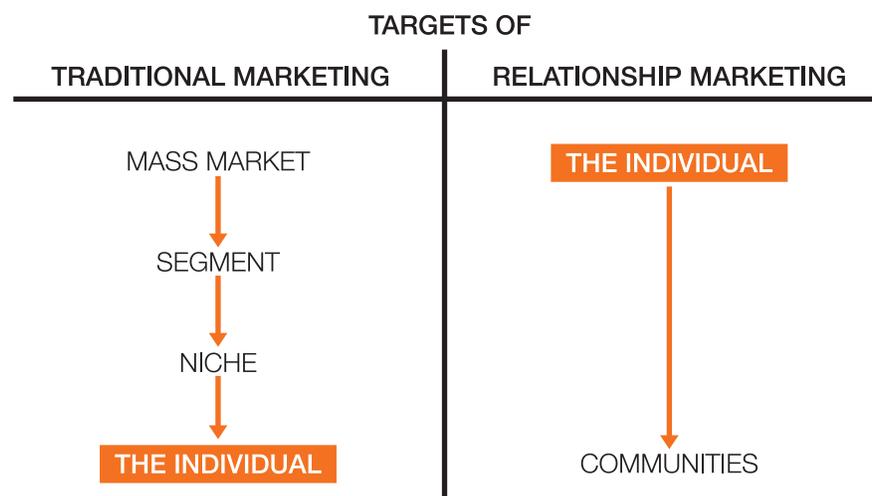


Figure 15: Targets of traditional and relationship marketing, based on diagram from Gummesson (2002b)

marketing however, privileges an approach to consumers as individuals (Gummesson, 2002b). The one-to-one marketing concept asserts that a consumer can be isolated and understood, and then targeted in a way specific to them and their individual needs (Kozinets, 1999, p. 259). While social media enables organizations to communicate one-to-one with their consumers in a simple sense, a more accurate representation of social media would be a one-to-many or a many-to-many model. This accounts for the impact of individuals who are influencers within online communities and the effects of word-of-mouth marketing. “Online marketers will need to realize that, where virtual communities of consumption are involved, they are communicating not only with many ‘ones,’ but also many ‘manys’” (Kozinets, 1999, p. 260). Building community could prove an effective tactic in applying relational marketing, as brand communities are a collection of active enthusiasts. Muniz Jr. and O’Guinn (2001) state

that “a strong brand community can lead to a socially embedded and entrenched loyalty, brand commitment, and even hyper loyalty” (p. 427).

Gummesson (2002b) identifies “network organizations” as organizations that embrace relational marketing approaches. These organizations may be small, but engage with a wide network of stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, alliances and anyone who chooses to participate online. Network organizations are inclusive, blurring the boundaries between the organization and the market (Gummesson, 2002b). Relationship marketing focuses on outsourcing and collaborating through these networks in order to create value (Gummesson, 2002b). To some extent this has already been occurring in traditional development, production and marketing phases, although it could be argued that the growth of online and brand communities provides opportunities for this approach to be more influential.

Social media marketing and the demands of consumers

Social media changes marketing approaches because it not only provides a forum for organizations to talk to consumers, but also enables those consumers to talk directly to one another as well as to the organization itself (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004). As noted, these conversations and interactions taking place through social media are out of the organization’s control, contrasting with traditional marketing where a high level of control is required (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). Consumers now dictate the circulation of information, much of which comes from the market and is based on consumer’s experiences. Word-of-mouth is a main element in social media marketing, as the reach of consumer recommendations or criticisms is amplified because social media enables users to communicate quickly and easily to hundreds or even thousands of people (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The challenge for brands, therefore is how to influence those conversations (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Marketing that uses social media as a platform requires content and communications to be shaped in such a way that not only honors the goals of the organization, but also adheres to the conventions of social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The methods of achieving this include, “providing consumers with networking platforms, and using blogs, social media tools and promotional tools to engage customers” (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 357). More and more consumers are rejecting traditional promotional elements and trusting advertising less as a reliable guide for purchase decisions (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This declining trust in advertising is an interesting and significant point for the advertising industries, and the repercussions of which are worthy of deeper investigation—unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis.

The users of social media are ahead of the brands (Wipperfurth, 2005), in terms of their understanding of the culture, etiquette and capabilities of social media, and because of this, these users are becoming more

informed and discerning. Internet users are becoming more aware of the capabilities and reach of social media, increasing the occasions of dissent and questioning of organizations and authority (Kozinets, 1999). Research suggests that consumers are growing wary of marketers and as community of consumption members converse with each other they are empowered to challenge the traditional marketing messages. Kozinets (1999) states: “the more active they become as consumers, the more activist their activity” (p. 258).

One could suggest that issues like climate change and the global financial crises, along with the rapid and often uncensored spread of information (through channels like Wikileaks for example) have led to an increasing distrust of traditional authoritative figures and an increased cynicism towards traditional organizations. As a result mass marketing and the traditional media have less appeal, with audiences becoming more demanding that organizations be transparent and authentic. As Neumeier (2003) notes: “Brands that don’t project depth and humanity tend to create suspicion among customers.” With increasing revelations about morally dubious multinational corporations, branding can become viewed as false personas applied to an otherwise faceless and manipulative industry. Branding, particularly in a world embracing social media, is required to be more than the façade of a company. It needs to encompass the internal, as well the external culture of a company, both of which need to reflect the other in order for the brand to be seen as authentic. “If a brand looks like a duck, quakes like a duck, walks like a duck and swims like a duck, then it must be a duck. If it swims like a dog, however, people start to wonder.” (Neumeier, 2003)

It could be argued however, that organizations can rebuild consumer trust through online communities, by developing relationships with consumers and acting in their best interests (Chua, 2010b). Trust requires “mutual liking” between both the organization and the consumer, with organizations particularly showing goodwill towards their consumers. Chua (2010b) states: “In order to gain trust, strong company-customer engagement levels must first exist as proof of mutual emotional connections and understanding of each other’s motives” (p. 75). The strong bond between consumer and organization is therefore a key element to gaining trust. Whether or not an organization is transparent with its audience affects its ability to gain the trust and respect of that audience (Chua, 2010b). When organizations reveal otherwise private information to consumers they are more likely to be trusted, therefore by being open and sharing inside information that is of interest, with consumers via social media, organizations can build trust and strong bonds with consumers (Chua, 2010b). Trust is built through the facilitation of conversation and two-way interactions between both parties, which promote credibility and transparency in the role of the organization (Chua, 2010b, p. 245). Kollock notes that repeated transactions and interactions over time enable trust to develop, as either party experiences occasions of dependence or vulnerability to the other, as control is shared between both the organization and the consumer (Kollock, 1994). Kollock (1994)

further argues that the development of trust in corporate environments is reliant on social relationships and ongoing experiences influencing the perception of the organization.

Transparency in the way an organization engages with the consumers is also essential, as perceptions of the organization's conduct influences whether consumers find them trustworthy. The organization can preserve the appearance of transparency by being responsive to consumers, being authentic in their interactions, being encouraging and respectful even in the face of disagreements and by also acknowledging the competition (Chua, 2010b). Gummesson notes that these attitudes must be reflected throughout the organization as a whole, as the relationships within an organization will be reflected in the relationships with external customers and collaborators (Gummesson, 2002b).

A study conducted by Kozinets et al. (2010) commenced a "seeding campaign" in which influential bloggers were gifted a mobile phone in the hopes that they would talk about the phone on their blogs. The campaign was aimed at encouraging positive word-of-mouth messages in online communities. The transparency of the bloggers became an issue to their ability to promote the phone, as some readers felt they were selling out by including commercial content in their blogs. In one example of representative blogs' lack of success with the word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) campaign, Kozinets et al. (2010) explains:

Although Alicia's character type stresses humility, transparency, and egalitarianism, her sudden status change to that of influencer – signaled by her selection for the WOMM campaign – grants her implicitly superior social standing and appears to change her role from empathetic community member to valorized outsider" (p. 79).

Because Alicia's blog had previously not been a vehicle for promoting products, and was characterized by values that contradicted this, her readers felt negatively towards her reviews of the mobile phone. This illustrates consumers' demand for transparent brands (Yan, 2011) and is evident in blogs that had positive feedback to the bloggers consumer-turned-marketer style posts. Blogs that were open about promoting products for profit, or diffused the moral conflict of the promotion with humour were more successful. In an online pod-cast referring to the mobile phone, another blogger, Brain "uses the word 'bribe' (twice) as well as the phrase 'I can be bought.' In addition to highlighting and thus, in some sense, discharging moral conflict, the term confirms the significance of his awareness that he is simultaneously a target and a marketer" (Kozinets et al., 2010, p. 76)

The use of social media as a marketing tool does demand more of organizations in terms of transparency. Gillin (2009) states:

Transparency may be the most disruptive and far-reaching innovation to come out of social media. In the blogosphere,

transparency is about a lot more than just not lying. It's about opening yourself to inspection, analysis, judgment, praise and ridicule. It's remarkable that a community of people with so little formal organization should embrace it as a core value. (Gillin, 2009)

Despite this, as Jonathan Schwarts of Sun Microsystems states, "transparency is one of our best competitive weapons" (Kelleher & Miller, 2006).

Social media, also known as consumer generated media, has significantly changed the way in which organizations reach consumers and increased the effects of consumer dialogue and word-of-mouth (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Mangold and Faulds (2009, p. 358) state "methods for shaping those conversations have not yet been articulated," highlighting that many in branding and marketing have not yet fully realized or been able to strategize for the impact of social media on promotional efforts.

An approach to gaining influence in social media forums is the provision of "networking platforms" or communities (to be discussed in further detail on page 31), where consumers can join with others who share their interests and values and participate as members of those communities (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

There are many options of social media applications for organizations wanting to utilize social media as part of their promotional mix. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) discuss important points for organizations, in the selection of these applications. These include carefully selecting which platforms are most suited. While social media is a relatively low cost option, an important consideration may be that it does demand a commitment of time. The literature suggests that organizations may wish to consider whether making this choice involves selecting an existing social media applications and taking advantage of the existing user base, or building their own (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The latter was the case in the Obama campaign for presidency where an application called MyBarackObama.com was designed specifically to facilitate and connect campaign events and volunteers (McGirt, 2009). In selecting social media applications, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) note that organizations must "ensure activity alignment," (p. 65) making sure that social media activities on different platforms align with each other and other promotional efforts. Social media and traditional media must be integrated, as for consumers; they are part of the same entity and together work to form consumer's perceptions of the brand. Kaplan and Haelein's (2010) final guideline in the selection of social media applications involves ensuring that employees can access these platforms. Employees will form an important core to a brand community, and in many cases will unofficially become spokespeople and advocates for an organization. It will be clear that these people "are affiliated with the company where they work, that even though they are not officially spokespeople for the company, they are clearly affiliated" (Kelleher & Miller, 2006).

Kaplan and Haelein (2010) also present five points about being social, once the selection of which social media applications to appear on have been made. These are concerned with the actions of organizations on social media, much like a code of conduct:

Be active – Developing relationships with consumers requires organizations to take the lead in instigating interaction, ensuring that they post relevant content often, to engage in discussions with consumers.

Be interesting – Ensuring that content is interesting gives consumers incentive to engage with organizations. Generating interesting content also extends beyond typical sales incentives, such as price or quality.

Be humble – Realizing that the consumer is knowledgeable and influential, and that the consumer may be more competent in the use of social media.

Be unprofessional – There is value in interacting in a casual manner, as it endears an organization to its consumer. “Firms would be wise to avoid overly professional content offerings” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

Be honest – This involves acting honorably in social media forums, abiding by the conventions and culture of online communities and social media applications. (p. 66-67)

Communities on social media

The term community describes a group of people brought together by obligation to one-another or shared purpose, beliefs or values (Zhang, 2008, p. 3). Muniz Jr, and O’Guinn (2001, p. 412) state that “community is a core construct in social thought,” which provides members with a sense of belonging. This belonging comes out of a shared consciousness, which is more than just a perceived similarity with other members, but a sense of connection with those in the community and differentiation from those not in the community (Muniz Jr. & O’Guinn, 2001). Community is thus a “common understanding of a shared identity” (Muniz Jr. & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 413).

Rituals and traditions are indicators of community, and contribute to the creation of publicly defined and understood culture. Rituals enhance the sense of a shared history and culture within members of the community (Muniz Jr. & O’Guinn, 2001). Similarly a sense of moral responsibility is an indicator of community, where individual members feel an obligation to one-another and the community as a collective. It is this sense of responsibility which spurs the collective into action when necessary (Muniz Jr. & O’Guinn, 2001).

It could be argued that the notion of community has been challenged in recent times, and that society has developed in opposition to traditional forms of community. Natural community constructs have been replaced by “a more depersonalized, mass produced, and less grounded type of human experience (modern society)” (Muniz Jr. & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 413). In this sense there has been a disconnect between modern branding and consumption, and the concept of community. However, evident in the development of the Internet and social media, society has been re-tribalized in online communities based on shared interests and values (Godin, 2009; Zhang, 2008). Author and online marketing entrepreneur, Seth Godin (2009) presents a useful perspective through his TED talk titled ‘The tribes we lead,’ which premises that the Internet has brought about a resurgence of the formation of tribes, not in the historic sense, but of people brought together based on shared interests and values. These ‘tribes’ are formed through sociality, and as Muniz Jr. and O’Guinn (2001) states: “they form, they disperse, they re-form as something else, reflecting that constantly shifting identities of postmodern consumers” (p. 414). One way of considering branding through social media is to recognize that organizations need to tap into these existing tribes, and appeal to them. We might go one step further however, and suggest that rather than merely appealing to them, perhaps brands need to become ‘members’ of the tribes.

In contrast to the notion of ‘Globalism,’ —the idea that there would one day be a ‘global village,’ connected by technology, and that had no divisions; the web and social media have given us pockets of people, connected through shared interests and values (Neumeier, 2003). People can be seen as tribes working within, contributing to, or forming environments they can understand and in which they can feel a sense of belonging. As Kelleher and Miller (2006, p. 398) state: “There is a deep yearning for human contact and a resentment of bombast,” highlighting that there is a natural inclination towards human connection and the formation of communities, even within branding. In point of fact, it could be argued that branding through social media acts in some ways as a replacement for the sense of human contact that has been lost in modern culture.

The term virtual community was established in 1993 and is defined as “social aggregations that emerge from the net when enough people carry on public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (Kozinets, 1999, p. 253). Preece et al (2003) describe online community as “a group of people who interact in a virtual environment. They have a purpose, are supported by technology, and are guided by norms and policies.” Rheingold (2008) defines virtual communities similarly, adding only that members may or may not meet face to face, and that “like any other community, it is also a collection of people who adhere to a certain (loose) social contract, and who share certain (eclectic) interests.”

Online environments, in many cases, have proven to be effective forums for meaningful social engagement, and the term community is appropriate

for this as it describes a group of people, their social interactions and a shared space (virtual in this case) (Kozinets, 1999). Kozinets made the case in 1999 that social media and virtual communities were becoming an important support for real-world encounters and a forum for continuing engagement and relationship past initial meetings, but were unlikely to replace physical encounters and information from traditional media outlets. However, by 2010 Watkins and Lee (2010) were able to state that “there is sufficient evidence that social media afford opportunities for new expressions of friendship, intimacy and community,” reinforcing the notion that, as social media facilitates human interaction, it is capable of creating a sense of belonging and community.

Despite occurring without physical encounters, online communities continue to be hugely interactive, as consumers are able to gather, sharing common interests without the limitations of geographic proximity (Zhang, 2008). Related to this is the emergence of the concept of neo-tribalism which argues that, contrary to popular assertions, there is a decrease in individualism evident in the “reaggregation of hyper-individualist society” (Muniz Jr. & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 414). Individuals are seeking out and joining with others with shared interests and values, forming communities or “pockets of people” online (Godin, 2009).

Brand communities

Often online communities form around particular consumptive activities or brands, making it essential for marketers to be informed and involved. As a sub-category of virtual communities, these groups are termed “virtual communities of consumption” and are defined as “affiliative groups whose online interaction are based upon shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity or related group of activities” (Kozinets, 1999, p. 254). Despite earlier views that community and consumer behavior were separate, there is now an argument that acknowledges the social nature of brands. Muniz Jr. and O’Guinn (2001, p. 427) argue that “brands are social objects and socially constructed,” and that consumers are active participants in the creation of brands, and furthermore, that brand community is a contributing factor in building brand equity (to be discussed further on page 44).

The evidence suggests then that through online communities, the consumer is gaining influence, embracing the developments in the capabilities of technology, and in many case rejecting traditional forms of marketing that they may find invasive or immoral. There is a developing sense that consumers are not willing listeners to messages from business (Searls & Weinberger, 2001). One could argue that this cynicism, combined with an economic recession, discussed previously, has left consumers responding to business by asking: ‘What’s in it for them, other than being manipulated into buying something else they don’t really need or want?’ This suggests that encouraging anything more than passive listening, such as actual interaction or engagement, is increasingly difficult. However, in communities of consumption, members are often much more

active in interacting and engaging with their consumptive activity, as well as their interactions with other members. There is thus significant evidence to suggest that marketers need to be participating online in order to gain an understanding of the complex culture of these communities and the balance between member's personal identities, social identities and even the brand's identity, itself.

It appears that whether or not a person identifies with a community of consumption is reliant on that person's relationship with the consumption activity itself as well as their relationship with other members of that community (Kozinets, 1999). Neumeier (2003) suggests that a brand can form a tribe around itself of people who identify with it. This can be seen in social media, as people proceed to 'like' and 'follow' brands, on sites like Facebook and Twitter, essentially identifying themselves as members of various brand communities. Customers make the conscious decision to engage with certain brands, and open themselves up to hearing their brand messages or participating in a dialogue. In this way, through social media, the consumer is able to tailor the advertising messages they wish to hear. To a certain extent, this is a 'win-win' situation, as consumers are able to filter which brand messages they are exposed to. Muniz Jr. and O'Guinn (2001) also identify "oppositional brand loyalty" as a contributing factor to a sense of communal consciousness, stating:

Through opposition to competing brands, brand community members derive an important aspect of their community experience, as well as an important component of the meaning of the brand. This serves to delineate what the brand is not, and who the brand community members are not. (p. 420)

Therefore consumer groups themselves identify not only with those with similar interests, but also identify with others based on dislikes, making statements by the exclusion as well as inclusion of particular brands in their lifestyles (Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001).

Brand communities are similar to communities of consumption, although the distinguishing feature that differentiates them from communities of consumption, is an intentional focus on marketing aims (Andersen, 2004, p. 286; Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001). The commercialism of brand communities is explicit, and "exists in full view," acknowledged by members in a "communal self-awareness" (Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 415). These groups may be formed by the organization itself, or by enthusiasts for the brand (Zhang, 2008, p. 3). A brand community is identified as a "specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Kozinets, 1999; Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001).

Although brand communities have specific marketing aims, they still share the markers of a traditional community: "shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility," although these markers now take on a commercial ethos (Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001, p.

412). Brand communities are also relatively stable, and can foster strong levels of commitment amongst its members (Muniz Jr. & O’Guinn, 2001).

Member commitment of individuals is demonstrated by the varying levels of engagement and connection to the community as a whole. Kozinets (1999, pp. 254-255) identifies four membership profiles representative of the different levels of interaction and commitment to a community of consumption:

Tourists – these participants have weak social ties to the community as well as weak personal ties to the consumption activity.

Minglers – members who maintain strong social ties to the community, but superficial interest in the consumption activity.

Devotees – members who enthusiastically interested in the consumption activity, but weak social ties to the community.

Insiders – those who have both strong ties to the consumption activity and those within the community.

These four profiles suggest a scale of consumer commitment, with Tourists and Minglers demonstrating limited commitment, and Devotees

COMMUNITY OF CONSUMPTION MEMBER TYPES



Figure 16: Community of consumption member types, based on diagram from Kozinets (1999)

and Insiders demonstrating stronger levels of commitment to the brand and community. Therefore the most important focus for marketing tends to be Devotees and Insiders, as loyal users are identified as “the core of any industry and any business, and are usually the heart of any successful marketing effort” (Kozinets, 1999, p. 255). This is because in many industries, twenty percent of customer base (loyal or heavy-users) accounts for eighty percent of the consumption of products or services (Kozinets, 1999). Kozinets suggests that members of communities of consumption will progress from being Tourists to Insiders over time, indicating that the time spent engaging with the community is critical. Over time, members gain online experience and understanding and are able to identify with a particular consumption activity and build relationships

with other community members (Kozinets, 1999). It is worth noting that relationships with other community members are valuable, particularly as the opinions of Devotees and Insiders are influential for the rest of the community (Kozinets, 1999). These two membership roles are more involved in shaping the culture of the community, redefining group opinions towards consumption and evaluating the brands itself (Kozinets, 1999).

In addition to these four membership types, Chua (2010b) and Zhang (2008) identify two more profiles which describe membership engagement; the Monitor and the Leader. Both roles exercise influence and control over the community as a whole and develop from the role of the Insider, based on the argument that the Insider has a natural desire to gain control over other members (Chua, 2010b). The Leader develops to be influential in the community, whereas the Monitor takes control authoritatively (Chua, 2010b).

In an alternative system of identifying membership types, five roles in online communities were introduced using “participation, responsibilities and power levels of members” as a foundation (Chua, 2010b, p. 20). According to Chua (2010b) these are:

1. Visitors, who browse without a clear role in the community
2. Novices, who are new members with much to learn
3. Regulars, who have been ‘around for a while’ and comfortably participate in discussion and community activities
4. Leaders, who act as volunteers, contractors or staff to keep the community active
5. Elders, the long-time regulars who share knowledge with the community

Like Kozinets, this system argues that members who have spent more time in the community (elders) are more committed to maintaining it, whereas those like ‘visitors’ lack attachment to the community (Chua, 2010b).

As well as time spend interacting with a brand Fullerton (2010) suggests that commitment results from whether a consumer identifies with the brand or holds the same values. In this sense a brand can mean much more to a consumer than simply an association with their products. As Yan (2011) notes: “It is . . . necessary for brands to build a connection with users and [be] fostering a sense of belonging through the engagement itself.” The people behind the brands that appear on social media platforms “satisfy a need: the desire of engagement with a brand [consumers] wish to be associated with” (Yan, 2011). This sense of belonging can be seen as having much more significant meaning for consumers than a relationship with a product or a company: “The Net invites your customers in to talk, to laugh with each other, and to learn from each other. Connected they reclaim their voice in the market, but this time with more reach and wider influence than ever” (Searls & Weinberger,

2001). The 'business-as-usual' model is not able to access this sense of connection. Instead, it abstracts the data, distancing itself from being useful, reliable or relevant information on which to base decisions (Ind, 2006; Searls & Weinberger, 2001)

From the notion of tribes, and the existence of online and consumption communities, it becomes clear that community can be regarded as a tool for branding. There are considerations to be made when targeting virtual communities, including the more active and discerning nature of consumers, that the ability to reach consumers one-to-one is limited by the vast reach of word-of-mouth, and that consumers are a source of relevant cultural information (Kozinets, 1999, p. 252). It would seem prudent then that marketers recognize that one-to-one marketing may be problematic as consumers in consumptive communities are not isolated (Kozinets, 1999).

Successful targeting of online communities also relies on building content that seeks to fulfill and benefit its members, whether they are members of the organization itself or brand enthusiasts (Zhang, 2008). Building and maintaining a virtual community requires time spent in absorbing the culture and customs of the community, (Rheingold, 2008) because as Kozinets (1999, p. 257) states: "These interactions are not merely passive, but highly active, full of nuance and multidimensionality." Mangold and Faulds (2009) provide guidelines for organizations using social media within these communities. These guidelines include a call to: provide information to consumers, as "consumers are more likely to talk about companies and products when they feel they know a lot about them" (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 363); be outrageous in order to provoke conversation and consider talking points in the design of products and services; provide a feeling of exclusivity that encourages community members to feel special; and tell stories, particularly stories which are memorable, as "the more memorable they are, the more likely they are to be repeated" (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 364)

Like traditional communities, storytelling is an important element for brand communities, as "stories based on common experiences with the brand serve to invest the brand with meaning and meaningfully link community member to community member"(Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 423). Storytelling plays a role in word-of-mouth marketing to build meaningful consumer perceptions of a brand and grow a sense of community. However, through brand communities the identity of the organization, or its branding are socially negotiated, as corporate messages move through various contexts, from consumer to consumer (Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001).

The social negotiation of the brand poses difficulty when considering the nature of online communities, as they consist of a group of people without a formal structure or code of conduct. While acknowledging the growing influence of consumers, remaining open to collaboration with customers risks having both the community, which is without rules or

supervision, and the brand, descend into chaos. While Paul Gillin's book *The New Influencers* (2009) revolves mainly around blogging as a form of social media, his observations can be applied to other social media applications and the way they function. Gillin (2009) makes the salient point that "structure is needed to defend the group from itself," although this may not always hold true as it becomes evident in many cases that "large groups collectively make wiser choices than any individual expert within the groups would have made on their own" (Gillin, 2009). The culture of online communities is developing towards a system which rejects formal leadership and authority, in favour of "rough consensus" (Gillin, 2009). Gillin suggests that the blogosphere, a term which refers to all blogs and their connections and communities, has adopted a form of structure in which the blogger is the leader, and sets the standards of the interaction. This however goes both ways, as the readers also keep the blogger in line. "They [the blogger] see themselves as part of a feedback loop in which their audience keeps them in line while they, in turn, guide a discussion that engages the audience." (Gillin, 2009)

Creating brand communities has advantages past its use as a direct sales tool, such as being able to foster the commitment of community members. The Internet also proves a vital tool in being able to grow these communities, making it possible to recruit new community members by viral marketing techniques (Andersen, 2004). As a means to foster relationships with consumers and between consumers themselves, the role of the community is influential in growing brand loyalty and market share (Andersen, 2004, p. 287). The relationship between the consumer and the organization becomes an integral aspect of the branding of that organization, and the consumer's perception of the brand. Participating in brand community then becomes a way to reach consumers at touch points along their decision journey that are most influential in either encouraging purchases or brand loyalty (Andersen, 2004; Court et al., 2009). However this requires marketers to consider how consumers use social media. Watkins and Lee (2010) conducted a survey of university students and recent graduates on their use of the social media application, Facebook. Their questioning centered around user's habits and motivations related to the use of the site. The survey found that communication with friends was most often why these participants used Facebook; posting status updates, comments and likes, indicating the validity of utilizing word-of-mouth as a marketing tactic. "More than half ranked 'Posting messages, links, or some other content to friends' profiles' as one of their top three activities" (Watkins & Lee, 2010).

Conversational markets

The most defining difference between traditional "business-as-usual" marketing and the relational marketing approach, brought about by the development of social media, is the conversations between consumers and organizations (Searls & Weinberger, 2001). This requires that consumers and organizations be no longer seen as separate, but rather that both parties participate together in a dialogue. Searls and

Weinberger's (2001) chapter, *Markets as Conversations*, in *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, presents an analogy of a traditional marketplace of stallholders and customers as a representation of how other buyers and sellers partake in conversation. This same marketplace now appears online through sites like Facebook and Twitter. This requires organizations to recognize the need for both give and take in consumer relationships, as for brands, listening becomes just as important as speaking (Chua, 2010a). As Searls and Weinberger (2001) states, "by listening, marketing will re-learn how to talk."

For organizations especially, it is essential to embrace the two-way concept of conversations in this new market. As Searls and Weinberger (2001) state, "ironically, many of us spend our days wielding axes ourselves. In our private lives we defend ourselves from the marketing messages out to get us, our defenses made stronger for having spent the day at work trying to drive axes into our customers' heads." The "axes" Searls and Weinberger describe represent traditional marketing messages. Consumers and those within organizations are not so different from one another, and they will have more influence by identifying common ground and relating to each other on equal terms.

Gummesson (2002a) also uses a Saturday flea market as a metaphor, although his comparison uses the market to demonstrate outdated marketing techniques and theory. However Searls and Weinberger's (Searls & Weinberger, 2001) use of the same metaphor focuses on the notion of conversation as a new marketing technique, which can be applied through social media and the web. A market consists of stallholders (sellers) and customers engaging in an interaction and transaction, whether or not the sale of goods occurs. Although the seller is there to sell their product, the hard-push to encourage the consumer to buy is not always the most effective. The traditional monologue of marketing messages now falls on deaf ears, in terms of consumer responses (Searls & Weinberger, 2001). Conversational markets value the relationship between consumer and organization built through dialogue between customer and supplier, as that connection often leads to follow up sales, repeat business and better brand recognition. Searls and Weinberger (2001) state: "conversations among human beings sound human. They are conducted in a human voice," suggesting that in order to engage with consumers and community members there is a "requirement to be candid and forthright" (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 398). The tone of this conversation differs from typical marketing messages, and organizations are urged to communicate "with a sense of humour, admitting mistakes, treating others as human, and providing links to competitors" (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 399). The evidence suggests that communicating with consumers via social media requires positivity and openness. Consumers need to feel assured that their relationship with the organization is valued, and that they have common ground with the brand (Kelleher & Miller, 2006).

Social media becomes a forum to continue the conversation with the consumer, once the initial face-to-face interaction has ended. Whether

a consumer makes a purchase with the brand or not, by directing them to “follow” or “like” the brand on social media applications gives the brand further opportunities to continue a relationship with the consumer. However this depends on several factors; the consumer must feel that the brand shares their interests or values, and the branding needs to be memorable and recognizable. This is because the brand is relying on the customer to leave the initial interaction and later decide to engage through social media. It could be argued however that with the development of mobile devices that link to social media sites remotely this is becoming less important, as people are able to instantly engage through social media while still face-to-face with the brand. Practically however, there is no guarantee of this occurring, so measures to ensure memorability are still necessary, such as free giveaways, fliers and business cards with the social media addresses included. This demonstrates the link between online and offline interactions, with all aspects of a consumer’s interaction with an organization collectively forming the perception that person has of the brand (Wood, 2000). Both online and offline promotional elements must work together to encourage customers to engage in a forum where they will be open to hearing other messages and participate further in a dialogue with the brand.

Neumeier (2003) presents contrasting new and old communication models which reinforce the premise of conversations in the market place. His traditional model only shows a message sent from a sender to a receiver, the sender being the brand and the receiver being the customers. In the new communication model we see that the receiver also replies to the sender. The advantage to brands of this new communication model is that they can receive feedback directly from their customers and are able to tailor either their message or product. An example that demonstrates

OLD COMMUNICATION MODEL



Figure 17: Old communication model, based on diagram from Neumeier (2003)

NEW COMMUNICATION MODEL

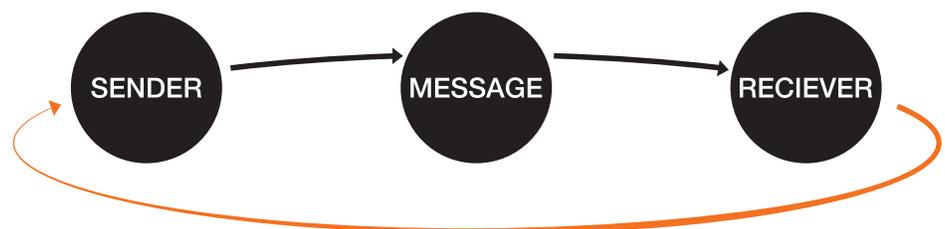


Figure 18: New communication model, based on diagram from Neumeier (2003)

how this works is TVNZ's current affairs programme, *Seven Sharp*. The show's journalists engage with viewers via Facebook and Twitter, posing questions to the public in order to gain feedback. The viewer's feedback, opinions and comments are then integrated as a feature of the live show, in a sense giving the viewer the opportunity to influence the show itself.

The research presented in this thesis is clearly in favour of new marketing approaches as a result of the development of social media. This leads to the question of whether this research has only tapped into one specific ideology, held by a group of enthusiasts for these notions of social media marketing. Critics such as technology columnist John Dvorak question the validity of community based marketing. In his article for PCMag.com, *The Cult of the Cluetrain Manifesto* (2002), Dvorak claims not to understand the conversational or relational approach to online communities and branding, viewing its enthusiasts as hippie types who petition for marijuana legalization. This highlights the significant contrast between this contemporary proposed attitude to marketing and traditional views of marketing. The new approach defines itself by a sociability and a certain 'casualness' often found in 'cutting edge' technologies and their advocates, and which is quite foreign to the polish of commercialism.

It could be argued that in 2002, when Dvorak wrote this article, the full extent of social media's impact on commerce was unrealised. There was no Facebook or Twitter, and social media applications largely only included weblogs, or blogs, as we know them now. It could be argued that this type of opposition comes from a lack of understanding of social media's capabilities. This does not invalidate Dvorak's perspective but the evidence suggests that social media is a growing powerful force and a clear shift can be seen as marketers in all fields move to understand and utilize this new opportunity. As Gillin (2009) states, "marketers need to understand, accept and participate in this new world."

Word-of-mouth marketing and brand advocacy

Word of mouth has always been an important tool for branding, as one satisfied customer shares their experience with a brand or its products with friends, then those friends tell more people and so on and so on. While traditionally slow to spread (Qualman, 2013), word of mouth marketing is effective because the messages come through trusted sources, being that they are between one consumer and another and occur 'organically' with the involvement of marketers (Kozinets et al., 2010). However, through social media the reach and speed at which word-of-mouth marketing is amplified exponentially, as instead of telling one or two friends, customers are able to reach hundreds of Facebook friends or Twitter followers with a single post or tweet. This is true for both positive and negative reviews of a brand or product. "Conventional marketing wisdom has long held that a dissatisfied customer tells ten people. But that's out of date. In the new age of social media, he or she has the tools to tell 10 million." (Gillin, 2009). Individuals in social media

communities are in near constant dialogue with each other, and are only becoming more so as mobile devices enable access to social media anywhere, at any time (Watkins & Lee, 2010). Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2004) state that “over 60 percent of consumers trust other consumers’ online postings” (p. 7). Online consumers are a valuable resource for marketers, because they are active and influential, having no hesitations in sharing their consumption experiences (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004). The “seeding campaign” instigated by Kozinets et al. (2010) aimed to gain understanding of how organizations could influence word-of-mouth between consumers for commercial gain. As one of the main findings of the study was the consumer’s growing demand for transparent brands this poses difficulty for brands wishing to influence word-of-mouth marketing. The messages appeared not to be ‘organic,’ because the influence of the marketer was evident. Here Kozinets et al. (2010) observes how to elicit a positive response:

Our analysis of reader comments and responses suggests that a positive communal attitude towards a WOMM [word-of-mouth marketing] message will be a function of the way that it (1) is consistent with the goals, context, and history of the communicator’s character narrative and the communications forum, or media; (2) acknowledges and successfully discharges commercial-communal tensions or offers a strong reason an individualistic orientation is suitable; and (3) fits with the community’s norms and is relevant to its objectives.

Utilizing the marketing technique of word-of-mouth intentionally to influence consumer to consumer conversations therefore demonstrates a need to balance the commercial aims and the communal culture of those communications (Kozinets et al., 2010). One might therefore argue that community building becomes an aim, so that the brand is a part of the communal culture, and therefore has the right to participate in, instigate or influence word-of-mouth marketing. As Kozinets et al. (2010) states: “despite awareness of the complexity of these communal relationships, marketers are just beginning to understand the formation, reaction and effects of communally based marketing campaigns.”

Word-of-mouth and the recommendations and advocacy of brands by friends and family is a key component of marketing through social media (Kozinets et al., 2010; Qualman, 2013). Consumers level of connection and commitment to a brand or consumption community is a determinant of whether consumers will develop “positive word-of-mouth intentions” (Kozinets et al., 2010).

The most powerful incentive to purchase is often the recommendation of others (Edelman, 2010), making consumer advocacy an important asset to promotional efforts. Advocacy is defined as “the willingness of the customer to give strong recommendations and praise to other consumers on behalf of a products or service provider” (Fullerton, 2010).

Achieving consumer advocacy or evangelism (Yan, 2011) is the goal when encouraging customers to participate in word-of-mouth marketing, as it could be argued that this is a better measure of consumer loyalty than repeat business because it is an indicator that the consumer is enthusiastic about the product or service and is willing to express strong positive feelings to others (Fullerton, 2010). Now, as many consumers use social media to communicate with friends, family and acquaintances instantly online, customer advocacy is even more important, especially as some of what they share may be reflective of their experiences as a customer (Fullerton, 2010). The Internet has become the hub of consumer driven marketing, as it is a forum from which consumers seek information and recommendations about brands. It is therefore a key touch point for marketers to be able to reach consumers as they make purchase decisions, encouraging positive word-of-mouth advocacy and engaging with people (Court et al., 2009).

Customers are more likely to recommend a brand, if they see that goods or service provider as a friend (Fullerton, 2010), which could be achieved by employing relational marketing approaches. This would be particularly evident, or fitting to an environment like social media where the construct of communities and networks is relational or friendship based. The brand has the opportunity to “occupy the position of trust previously only occupied by friends and family” (Walls, 2011). As Fullerton (2010) states: “people want to help organizations when they identify with and are affectively attached to those organizations.” Organizations have sought to facilitate this by ensuring their brands are relatable, and by giving them a “human face,” based on the premise that while it may be easy to feel negatively towards a large organization, it is difficult to feel negatively towards an individual (Walls, 2011).

Tapping into enthusiasts also becomes an important tactic to encouraging brand advocacy. Enthusiasts are people who are willing and motivated to talk about a brand or product they feel positively towards. These advocates would be categorised as the devotees and insiders in online communities (Kozinets, 1999), and have considerable influence over other members of the community. Gillin (2009) suggests that currently, 10 per cent of American consumers make the buying decisions for the other ninety per cent. Utilizing these “influencers” for commercial gain is difficult to do, as it is hard to identify what their motivations are. These community members are often not driven by profit, but instead a desire to “‘connect with people with similar interests,’ and ‘influence markets or discussions,’ or because ‘It just feels good” (Gillin, 2009). Many of these influencers are unaware or have little understanding of their own appeal (Gillin, 2009), which we are able to see with the likes of Jamie’s World. The sixteen year old Jamie Curry hosts the Facebook page Jamie’s World (Curry, 2013), and states in her ‘about’ comments on her profile, “My name is Jamie and if you’re wondering why I have so many likes, don’t ask me, I have no idea” (Curry, 2013). She continues with the self-deprecating tone stating that she is “Just another stupid girl with another stupid page,” despite the fact that she is most definitely an influencer with an avid audience of over five million.

Brand equity as a measure of brand strength

Brand Equity is value created by the consumer's brand knowledge and the response to the brand. Brand knowledge includes two aspects, the first being brand awareness which relates to the consumer's ability to recognize and remember the brand. The second is brand image, which describes the consumer's perception and the associations they link with the brand (Ye, 2004). Zhang (2008) defines brand equity as "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand's name and symbols, which add to or subtract from the value provided by the product to a firm and/or to customers" (p. 38). "A strong brand is a very valuable asset of a firm" (Ye, 2004, p. 95)

Brand equity is measured in three areas: "the customer mindset, product market outcomes and financial market outcomes" (Ye, 2004; Zhang, 2008, p. 38). The consumer's feelings of attachment and loyalty to a brand contribute to the measure of customer mindset in brand equity (Zhang, 2008).

The research suggests that, as a contributing factor of building brand equity, growing a community of "active loyalists" should be a goal of marketers. This requires reaching consumers at relevant touch points along their decision journey, particularly in post purchases phases, (Court et al., 2009) in order to build relationships, consumer commitment to the brand and drive word-of-mouth advocacy. It could be argued that brand loyalty can be measured in terms of culture, experience and emotional devotion, when considering brand communities (Kozinets, 1999). "Researchers of consumption meaning over the last decade have offered persuasive evidence that brand loyalty is based on social needs: the desire to believe and to belong" (Kozinets, 1999, p. 258) In online communities loyalty is evidenced by members who show connection and enthusiasm for a brand or consumption activity (Kozinets, 1999).

Court (2009) identifies that there are different levels of brand loyalty; either active loyalty where consumers are enthusiasts who actively recommend the brand, or passive loyalty where consumers remain with a brand without any commitment to it. Passive loyalty may be caused by laziness or confusion about how to switch to competitors, where customers are still open to other brands (Court et al., 2009). As Kozinets (1999) states: "Loyalty is retention with attitude" (p. 258)

Gummesson contends that investing in long term relationships with consumers pays in terms of creating active loyalty in brand communities (Gummesson, 2002b). The economic advantages that come with this type of loyalty include lower marketing costs to bring on new customers, and a greater customer share (an increased proportion of a consumers spending goes to one organization) (Gummesson, 2002b). Along with these economic incentives, investing in long-term relationships also allows community members to develop higher levels of commitment and enthusiasm for a brand. The long-term relationship approach also applies

to those within the organization as retaining employees assists in fostering relationships with external community members and retaining “human intellectual capital” (Gummesson, 2002b, pp. 52-53).

Whether a brand is likable and memorable is also a contributing factor to brand equity (Ye, 2004; Zhang, 2008). The likability of a brand is linked to consumer familiarity to that brand (Monin, 2003; Ye, 2004). Ye (2004) states that: “presented brands should be more likely to be liked than non presented brands because of the mere-exposure effect” (p. 100). Familiarity leads to likability; a consumer is more likely to prefer a brand they have seen before, to a brand they have not seen before. In online communities familiarity occurs through the recognition of names and writing styles of other members. Members establish bonds with one another as they build relationships and gain trust. The experiences with other community members transfers to brands as, “people experience feelings of intimacy and comfort when they gain a sense of familiarity which enhances their liking of the brand” (Court et al., 2009). This is based on the notion of the “warm glow heuristic” which argues that “good-is-familiar,” and is evident as people often find attractive faces more familiar than unattractive face, or positive words more familiar than negative words (Monin, 2003). Therefore exposure or time spent becoming familiar with a brand links to the likability of that brand.

Brand communities directly address each of these areas contributing to brand equity (Muniz Jr. & O’Guinn, 2001); encouraging brand knowledge and likability through familiarity, attachment and engagement with a brand and brand loyalty.

Social branding

Failings of traditional branding approaches in a social media world

The internet and the development of social media has changed the way business interacts with its customers (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004; Christodoulides, 2009; Chua, 2010a; Edelman, 2010; Gillin, 2009; Godin, 2009; Gummesson, 2002a; Ind, 2006; Kozinets, 1999; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Meyer, 2010; Searls & Weinberger, 2001; Wipperfurth, 2005; Yan, 2011). Previously branding and marketing related only to outbound messages by organizations to communicate to their target markets (Balmer & Greyser, 2006). Organizations defined their branding as “what we say we are” (Balmer & Greyser, 2006, p. 735). This continued into the early stages of the Internet, as brand managers replicated offline marketing techniques online, resulting in static ‘brochureware’ style websites (Christodoulides, 2009, p. 141). However the one-way flow of information between consumers and organizations, which had worked in favour of the organizations, was reversed and now alternated equally between consumer and marketer (Christodoulides, 2009, p. 142).

Traditional branding has been criticized as “the exercise of a narcissist” (Christodoulides, 2009, p. 142), led by a brand manager who retained control of creating a specific brand image which focused only on the positive and communicating that message to the consumers, suppressing any alternative perceptions (Christodoulides, 2009). However this approach makes the assumption that the consumers are passive recipients of brand messages, and fails to account for the capabilities for interactions that the Internet and social media offer (Christodoulides, 2009). The monologue that brands traditionally participated in no longer functions in light of the capabilities of social media, where consumers have the power to interact with both the organization itself and other consumers (Christodoulides, 2009; Gillin, 2009; Gummesson, 2002a; Kozinets et al., 2010; Searls & Weinberger, 2001). The Internet has changed the focus of brand strategies towards the relationship with the consumer and the notion of interactivity, and has seen offerings tailored accordingly (Christodoulides, 2009).

The temptation of marketers to retain control of their brand, as they have traditionally done, no longer functions as social media empowers the consumer. “The loss of control is so extensive that through these applications consumers may even interfere with the brand’s values” (Christodoulides, 2009). This was evident when Mattel, the makers of the Barbie doll, launched a campaign against copyright and trademark infringements. In doing so Mattel targeted many of its most loyal customers and enthusiasts as it sought to control the use and perception of its branding, stopping fan clubs and leading collectors from using the Barbie name for charity events or publications. In attempting to retain control of their brand, Mattel attracted negative press, internet rebellion and lost thousands of collectors as it alienated its fan base (Wipperfurth, 2005, p. 33). Mattel failed to recognize the changing culture of consumers as a result of social media and potential value of allowing the consumers

to collaborate in developing the brand (Wipperfurth, 2005, p. 34). “Command and control branding simply cannot be tolerated online” (Christodoulides, 2009, p. 142).

The role of the marketer has shifted away from being a custodian of a brand. They are now facilitators of the development of the brand, which they may influence, but no longer have control over (Christodoulides, 2009). We can see that in the large part, their role is now to participate in dialogue with the consumers and build relationships between consumers and the brand (Kozinets et al., 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Searls & Weinberger, 2001).

Relational approach to branding

Ind (2006) also addresses a shift in marketing approaches, from the abstraction created by traditional market research to a “cubist” approach that accounts for multiple perspectives, identifying flaws and limitations of using quantitative data to make decisions about branding. He claims that when market research is solely relied on, this can be problematic as “that research must abstract, group and categorize customers. If we accept the specific individuality of people, this categorization will inevitably be flawed.” (Ind, 2006, p. 148) Instead, Ind (Ind, 2006; Ind & Bjerke, 2007) proposes that brands recognize the relationship between consumer and organization, and acknowledges that the consumer has power in that relationship. Ind (2006) continues with the statement, “this is much easier if we concentrate on a direct dialogue rather than using information mediated through statistical abstraction” (p. 149).

Organizations, such as sportswear supplier Quicksilver, also encourage strong ties between the company and its target audience, employing professional and amateur surfers. This ensures that the brand is in-touch with and gaining the approval of the community of consumer supporting their brand. By being closely connected to their target audience Quicksilver receives direct feedback, maintains brand authenticity and remains ahead of relevant trends (Ind, 2006). “Quicksilver needs to be an active listener... This ensures the continued relevance of the brand to its core customer base.” (Ind, 2006)

By applying Ind’s (2006) ideas with the capabilities of social media, it becomes evident that there is both a need and opportunity for human-focused branding, where relationship is a main feature and the distinction of roles of stakeholders inside and outside the organization are blurred.

Involving the consumer in branding

Further illustrating the shift of power from the corporations to the consumers is the notion of ‘brand hijacking,’ which describes circumstances where the consumers take hold of the role of defining or redefining a brand’s image (Meyer, 2010; Wipperfurth, 2005). The brand does not belong to the marketing department, instead it is the property

of the consumers who identify with it and form a community around the brand. We see this with examples such as the Greenpeace anti-whaling campaign, in which an online poll was promoted to select a name for a tracked whale. Internet and social media users hijacked the campaign and control was taken away from the professional marketers for Greenpeace. The winning name, 'Mr. Splashy-Pants' and the subsequent popularity as the campaign was hijacked and 'went viral', ultimately achieving better results for Greenpeace than if the campaign had gone as planned (Ohanian, 2009).

The hijacking of a brand by the public may not always be a positive thing, but in many cases it is, as it signifies that consumers are identifying with a brand, showing interest and taking ownership of it (Wipperfurth, 2005). Brands can take advantage of this and encourage brand loyalty by embracing their audience and direction they are leading the brand. This all comes back to being in a relationship with the consumers and partaking in a dialogue with them. If a brand is getting direct feedback, or allowing a community of consumers to shape their brand and products, they are able to supply something that better suits those consumers, and will ultimately sell better.

In his book *The Brand Gap*, Marty Neumeier (2003) presents ideas aimed at industry to help move from brand strategy to the implementation of branding. In doing so he makes some observations about how branding is developing which are applicable in the context of social media, particularly around the role of the consumer in the branding process. He says that brands are developed over time, as a result of the interactions between all stakeholders or contributors, including customers, employees, and suppliers, calling this "an entire branding community. It takes a village to build a brand" (Neumeier, 2003). This redefines the perception of what a brand is, as more than simply the trademark and the messages and collateral produced by an organization. A brand is defined by the perceptions and feelings it evokes in individuals, and so has its foundations in the organizations interactions and relationships with those individuals (Neumeier, 2003). Therefore brand management becomes about facilitating the conversations and interactions that build the perception of a brand.

That a brand is ultimately what the customer says the brand is, rather than what the marketing department defines (Neumeier, 2003; Wood, 2000), presents a dilemma to launching new brands. While an existing brand can utilize the interactions with the audience it already has to adjust and redefine how customers perceive it, how a new brand begins the process of introducing itself to an audience, while still allowing that audience to mold it presents a difficulty. Certain aspects are essential to the launch of a brand and building it as an identifiable entity.

Certainly it can be argued that a brand needs an identifier, logo, look and feel and a tone of voice (at least one that can be developed over time), and promotional collateral. Yet to build all of this requires telling

an audience who the brand is, which opposes the idea of developing a brand based on relationship with the consumers. I would suggest that perhaps the answer is a system of defined elements, combined with flexible elements that are developed, allowing the brand to evolve over time. This concept of allowing a brand to evolve over time is evident in the many individuals or organizations that have become popular through social media. Examples such as Jamie's World have involved a community of fans and over time developed into clearly defined brands. This would constitute a purposeful strategy aimed at brand hijacking by an audience. For this to work the aim of the brand must be to build community, and to involve others in the brand, not to give up full control, but to gain collaborators and ambassadors. As Wipperfurth (2005) states, "in order for a brand to stick, for it to have real impact on our culture, it better collaborate with its users."

The issue here is not about de-valuing traditional branding, or seeing it as out of date, but instead about utilizing the traditional method with a new aim. Directing this towards goals other than selling may be better for creating strong positive brand perception, and consequently lead to better returns. Identity systems that seek to control the look of the brand could be seen as two-dimensional on their own, requiring, as Neumeier suggests an injection of life, and need to become "living brands" (Neumeier, 2003). Neumeier (2003) further explains this notion by stating "a living brand is a collaborative performance" (p. 147). Elements of the brand are evident in every aspect and interaction that takes place on behalf of the organization, and they communicate the brand strategy as strongly as advertising or websites. "People 'read' the script in their experiences with the company and its communications, then retell their version of it to others. When people's experiences match their expectations, their loyalty increases" (Neumeier, 2003).

Co-creation as a philosophy for branding through social media

Co-creation and co-design are emerging philosophical approaches to design (Hagen & Rowland, 2011; Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Often confused, the two terms describe processes of collective creativity, not only between collaborating designers, but also between designers and those not trained in creative disciplines (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). The term co-creation refers, in a broad sense, to any occurrence of collective creativity, whereas the term co-design refers more specifically to the design process as a collaborative act. Therefore, "co-design is a specific instance of co-creation" (Sanders & Stappers, 2008, p. 2).

The method of co-design makes the assumption that the end users are experts in their field, and therefore should participate in the design process (Hagen & Rowland, 2011). Blurring the lines between client and designer, the end users are not only a source of information, but active in directing and influencing the design process (Hagen & Rowland, 2011). The role of the designer also changes, as Hagen and Rowland state (2011) "when taking a co-design approach it is our role as designers to facilitate that participation."

In light of the changing nature of branding, brought about by the development of the internet and social media (Christodoulides, 2009; Gummesson, 2002a; Kozinets, 1999; Searls & Weinberger, 2001), one may argue that co-creation should become an overriding philosophy of the formation of brands, where through social media the consumers become participants in the creation of a brand. The co-creation of the brand will develop as a result of the interactions and conversations that take place between the organization and the consumer over time, and therefore grow to reflect not only the organization, but also what the consumer perceives or desires the organization to be.

This approach will require flexibility on the part of the organization. Neumeier (2003) defines a brand as “a person’s gut feeling about a product, service or company,” defined by individuals, and not limited to the logotype or other visual elements. As branding is an overall impression of an organization, the involvement of the consumer therefore becomes the basis for the evolution of a brand. The intention is to facilitate opportunities for a brand-hijack by the intended audience.

Just as a co-creation philosophy changes the role of the designer (Sanders & Stappers, 2008), so too does the role of the marketer. The marketer will become the facilitator of the development of the brand and the creator of relevant and well conceived content. The marketer will be more closely connected to the consumer, forming relationships on behalf of the organization, understanding and guiding the perceptions of the consumer.

The role of the consumer in this process, like that of an end user, is as expert of their area and active participant (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Users of social media will be well suited to this, as they are often more attuned than the professionals to the culture and capabilities of social media (Wipperfurth, 2005), as well as having a better understanding of their own wants and needs. The participatory nature of this approach also encourages interactivity with consumers that are no longer passive and is “expected to lead to stronger and deeper relationships between brands and consumers and more effective brand communities” (Christodoulides, 2009).

Co-creation defines different levels at which users participate or create, as not all users can become co-designers, dependent on expertise, passion or creativity. These levels are defined as: “doing, adapting, making and creating” (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). This is reflective of Kozinets’ (1999) classifications of community members as either tourists, minglers, devotees or insiders. Each set of classifications indicates a level of involvement and commitment, where returns grow as members/users progress to the next level (Kozinets, 1999; Sanders & Stappers, 2008), making it advantageous for brands to encourage the interaction and involvement of consumers.

The precursor to co-creation theory, participatory-design actually finds its basis in business and marketing techniques, rather than design practice (Sanders & Stappers, 2008), however co-creation has been slow to impact the competitive marketplace. This is because participatory-design had been seen as purely academic with no relevance to industry, and that “participatory thinking is antithetical to consumerism, in which personal happiness is equated with purchasing and consuming material goods.” (Sanders & Stappers, 2008, p. 6)

As evidenced by the one-way flow of information from organization to consumers, traditionally the interactions of the consumer and the organizations were not seen as sources of value creation in branding (Rahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). However it is now evident that “high-quality interactions that enable an individual customer to co-create unique experiences with the company are the key to unlocking new sources of competitive advantage. Value will have to be jointly created by both the firm and the consumer” (Rahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 7). Organizations are now beginning to embrace the consumer, recognizing the value of interacting and involving them in the development of the brand, and moving away from a “firm-centric” view towards the relational branding techniques (Rahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

The advantages of remaining small

A possible solution to developing a brand through social media, which allows the brand to remain flexible, approachable and connected, is to remain small. This does not refer to limiting potential for large returns or big opportunities, rather concentrating efforts to build relationships between consumers and the individuals within the organization. Paul Gillin (2009) states, “to understand influence in social media, you need to buy in to the power of small markets” (p. 63). Social media has led to an increased demand for transparency and depth of information from a more discerning audience, and a shift away from the traditional “big” forms of media (Gillin, 2009). As Gillin (2009) states:

This mile-wide-inch-deep mentality dominated media for the last 150 years, but small markets have always had value of a different kind. The audience is highly engaged and often passionately interested. Often, it’s because the topic relates to their work or a cause that concerns them” (p. 63).

Gillin suggests that social media has shifted attitudes away from ideas of big business and globalisation, now “small is cool” (Gillin, 2009, p. 64). In this new economy of social media, ‘small’ is preferred because while it is easy to dislike ‘big’ business, ‘small’ allows the audience to identify and connect with a brand (Walls, 2011).

Author and social media marketer, Seth Godin posted favorably of ‘small’ on his blog; pointing out the advantages of remaining small, with the conclusive statement “Don’t wait. Get small. Think big” (Godin, 2005b).

Here remaining small is not in reference to doing small business or having small returns, but about allowing the brand to be flexible, approachable and connected. As Gillin (2009) states, “focused markets are more efficient than large ones” (p. 66).

Forming a brand that embraces being small offers an answer to the dilemma of implementing some of the key ideas presented in this research. By remaining small, a brand is able to manage its relationships with its consumers, making it possible for consumers to meet, speak with and form relationships with the staff that are the representatives for that brand. The people working in a company are as much an indication of the brand as the signage and logo are. “Small means the founder makes a far greater percentage of the customer interactions... Small means you can answer emails from your customers... A small restaurant has an owner who greets you by name... A small church has a minister with the time to visit you in the hospital when you’re sick” (Godin, 2005b). Small also allows greater opportunity for transparency, which is evident to be increasingly important to branding through social media, “Small means you can tell the truth on your blog.” (Godin, 2005b).

In social media, it is evident that many of the most successful brands or ventures are those that started small, often with little expectation and grew organically over time. While there are definite factors that contribute to their success that can be planned and applied to other brands, being small limits the risk and offers flexibility for brands to be able to grow in appeal and be adopted by an audience. Godin (2005b) states:

One of the implications of the Long Tail is that you don’t know what’s going to work. That it’s easy to launch stuff, hard to figure out where it’s going to land. If you don’t have to bet the farm on every launch, you’re way more likely to launch more, and more randomly, which vastly increases your odds.

This statement from Godin would indicate that success on social media cannot be predicted, but this is not the case, as evidenced by the identification of methods and approaches in this research. However, what this statement does reinforce of social media, is the flexibility it offers organizations to be able to launch promotional material and still continue to adjust and develop their brands.

It is suggested that remaining small saves brands from a need to conform to the ‘business-as-usual’ measures of what will or won’t work. A social media strategy for a “small” brand “doesn’t have to be strategic or scalable or profitable enough to feed an entire division. It just has to be interesting or fun or good for [the] audience” (Godin, 2005a). The risk of a campaign’s failure is therefore limited as costs are limited (Godin, 2005a). Remaining small therefore seems to offer much in terms of potential for branding, design and thinking. Focus can be placed on creating fun, unpredictable and out of box ideas because limited risk offers a lot of freedom. The fear of failure that could stifle a lot of ideas is eliminated,

which is important when dealing with social media. Ideas can be fully embraced and hijacked by an audience that is enthusiastic and willing to advocate organizations that take risks without taking themselves too seriously. This is evident in the audience response to Jamie Curry of Jamie's World, who 'doesn't take herself too seriously' and therefore achieves a level of approachability, which is clearly essential to building relationships with consumers, especially when the goal is to build community around your brand.

Case Studies

Miley Cyrus VMA performance

A top news story across social media sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, immediately following the MTV Video Music Awards (VMAs), was the performance by Miley Cyrus. The 20-year-old performed provocatively with 36-year-old singer Robin Thicke. The performance has encouraged many to talk about the shock that the young singer has resorted to this overtly sexual display with headline such as “Miley Cyrus Did What???” and “Miley’s Shocking Moves.”

This addresses a couple of interesting points to branding through social media. From the point of view of Miley Cyrus and those promoting her, the performance has had the effect that people are again talking about her and therefore boosting her profile (even if possibly in a negative way).

Also of interest is how much coverage this received by news outlets and the mainstream media, overshadowing many other important world events, such as the Syrian chemical attacks and the conflict in Egypt. This was addressed in a satirical faux article appearing to have been written by managing editor of CNN.com Meredith Artley on the website theonion.com (TheOnion, 2013). The article addressed the fact that Miley Cyrus won the top news spot on CNN’s website, and attributed it not to its merit as a significant world event, but instead as a ploy to gain more page views for CNN in order to sell more advertising. The article claims “All you are to us, and all you will ever be to us, are eyeballs. The more eyeballs on our content, the more cash we can ask for. Period.”

While this article is tongue-in-cheek, it demonstrates some interesting points about the relationship between organizations and consumers. Viewer attention can be seen to be the new currency of the marketplace (Kozinets, 1999). We can see the cyclical relationship of brand growth through media: the Miley Cyrus article takes the top news spot because that is what the audience want to read about, and the audience reads it because it is in the top spot.

Seven Sharp

Seven Sharp is a half hour current affairs show that airs daily during the workweek, straight after the news on TVNZ’s TV One. The New Zealand show has presented a new format for current affairs, aimed at gaining a wider audience by being light-hearted, often humorous and involved in social media. The show itself as well as individual presenters and journalists are encouraged to have their own twitter accounts, tweeting during the day as they prepare and research their stories for the show. In this way the presenters are promoting the evenings show, encouraging viewers to watch. They also encourage the involvement of the viewer in the form of questions and polls posted to their Facebook and Twitter profiles, and then speak about this during the live shows. By encouraging dialogue in this way, they are involving the viewer and giving them the



Figure 19: Seven Sharp promote their social media profiles during show

ability to influence the show and tailor it to themselves. Doing this ensures the show is relevant.

It has become apparent through this research that to be relevant, relatable and authentic a personal tone of voice is important. Seven Sharp has achieved this by encouraging reporters to have their own social media profiles rather than filtering all content through one central ‘official’ profile. This has drawbacks that were highlights in an article in The New Zealand Herald outlining the new set of ‘rules’ that have been enforced as a code of conduct for presenters on social media. This was in response to series of tweets from several reporters, which were deemed inappropriate or offensive. This highlights the need for balance between being personable



Figure 20: Seven Sharp’s Facebook profile

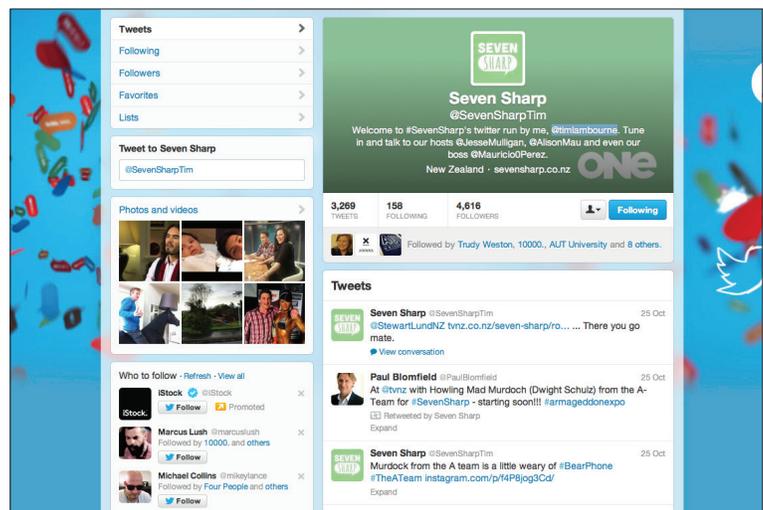


Figure 21: Seven Sharp’s Twitter account

and also representing a brand. In this case it was a balance between “expressing personal opinions” and “News and Currents Affairs objectivity and independence.” (Glucina, 2013) Glucina (2013) notes TVNZ’s Megan Richards statement: “Like all news organizations we’re learning as we

go with social media and it's maybe not surprising that there's some confusion about where to draw the line."

Seven Sharp's approach in utilizing social media demonstrates many of the concepts presented by this thesis, particularly in their aims to engage with viewers, embrace informality and recruit the journalist to advocate and connect personally with viewers. They have recognized the value of being inclusive with their audience, involving them in the development of the show.

Jamie's World

Jamie's World is a Facebook page and YouTube channel run by sixteen-year-old New Zealander Jamie Curry. She has over 5.2 million likes on Facebook in just over a year (at the time of completion of this thesis). Curry posts daily videos of herself that are humorous, and aimed at teenagers. Her success lies in her content being directed towards a very specific target audience, being relatable and reflecting common interests of that target audience by including anecdotes about things that teenagers deal with.

Curry has significant audience interaction, with many of her videos showing hundreds of thousands of likes, thousands of comments and shares. She appeared on current affairs show Seven Sharp in July, when her number of Facebook likes reached only 2.6 million, she stated her current weekly reach was 26 million people (du Plessis-Allan, 2013). Growing a profile such as this comes through people sharing, liking and interacting with the page. When one person interacts, that interaction appears on the news feeds of their friends, creating opportunity for others to also see and interact with it. Interaction is key to getting people to see what a brand is doing online.



Figure 23: Jamie's World Facebook page on 27/07/2013



Figure 24: Jamie’s World video featuring song by Jason Derulo on 12/08/2013

Jason Derulo released a music video for his song ‘Talk dirty to me’ on YouTube on the 7th of August 2013, which now has over 5 million views. On the 12th of August Jamie Curry of Jamie’s World posted a video on Facebook that featured herself dancing and cleaning the bathroom to Jason Derulo’s new song. While Facebook doesn’t show the number of views, the video does have over 400,000 likes, over 24,000 shares and over 27,000 comments. On the 13th of August, Australian Internet comedy group, The Janoskians, posted a video of themselves dancing in public spaces to the same song, which now has over 1 million views.

The original music video on YouTube shows how people were led to this from one or both of the Jamie’s World or The Janoskians videos. Many viewers left comments claiming “Jamie’s World sent me here,” “I’m here because of Janoskians” or similar. It could be argued that much of the success of Jason Derulo’s music video attracting viewers was due to Jamie’s World and the Janoskians using his song in their own clips, because their audiences were then directed to the original song. It is interesting to note however that neither Jamie’s World or the Janoskians made any direct link or indication to the origins of the song, but that it was because of them that many viewers sought it out themselves. This was how I came across the song as well.



Figure 25: A selection of comments from “Talk Dirty” video on Youtube

Jamie Curry has collaborated with New Zealand musicians, creating clips and music videos, demonstrating a more purposeful attempt to achieve the type of cross-promotion that was seen with the Jason Derulo music video. She featured with musician Jamie McDell on a video for her song 'Nemo Song.' Most notably she also featured as the main female lead in a music video for New Zealand musician, Massad's song 'Girl Next Door.' The collaboration involved Jamie's presence in the music video, as well as posts relating to music video, including 'sneak-peeks' into the making of the music video in anticipation of its launch. Massad's own Facebook profile reflected similar posts in anticipation of the video launch.



Figure 26: Massad's music video on Facebook on 5/09/2013

It is interesting to note that the collaboration was advantageous for both parties for different reasons. Jamie Curry continues to gain acting and media experience, moving into more traditional media outlets through this video. However it could be argued that Jamie Curry's presence in the video was more advantageous for Massad, in terms of the success of promoting his new single. While the music video for 'Girl Next Door,' has reached over 1.6 million views, his previous music videos were not so successful, the highest of these being just over 150,000 views. This would indicate that many of the views on this newest video were first fans of Jamie's World.

Of the concepts presented in this thesis, two notions are clearly demonstrated by Jamie's World. Curry has targeted a specific tribe (teenagers) and formed a community of fans who share the values of her brand. This illustrates the notion of tribalism and its re-emergence through

social media and online forums. Jamie's World also serves as an example of the way word-of-mouth marketing occurs through social media. Curry's use of the Jason Derulo song in her video and her collaboration with Massad demonstrate a form of cross-promotion in which Curry herself, acts as an advocate or influencer. Her recommendations hold credibility to her audience.

Nike Britomart Running Club

An example of the concept of building a community around a brand is the Nike Britomart running club in Auckland. They boast that they are the largest running club in the world, as individuals meet at Britomart regularly to run through pre-planned courses. They are an example of how community is formed around a brand, which encompasses both online, and offline interactions. The Nike Britomart running club has appealed to people based on their interests, but brought them together to form a community based around the brand. The members of the community then become advocates for the brand, physically running through the streets under the brand name Nike. Bringing runners together also creates a sense of belonging or support as they are motivated towards fitness goals, and the positive experience of this encourages them to share this with others. The face-to-face interaction of community members is supported by a presence on social media applications, as they use their Facebook page to keep community members up to date with times, courses, updates and incentives. This highlights an important factor of consideration in building community around brands, being that there must be a balance of online and offline contact that supports each other. The conversations initiated offline are continued online and vice versa. Again, like Jamie's World, this demonstrates how community can be built based on shared values with a brand, and that this is an influence on brand loyalty and advocacy.

Conclusion

The development of social media is redefining the concept of branding. Branding is now becoming an inclusive notion, which aims to build relationship with consumers and participate in dialogue and collaboration. Building community can be seen as an essential goal of brands, needed in order to engage more effectively with consumers and develop better brand loyalty and positive brand perception, and strengthening a brand by way of increasing brand equity. As they are relational in nature, social media platforms provide a powerful forum for facilitating relationships with consumers,

Two approaches to defining branding have become evident; a traditional product-driven brand functioning solely as an identifier; and a holistic approach, which encompasses all elements of the promotional mix. The holistic, consumer-centric approach to branding proves more relevant in today's market as it allows for more flexibility and gives deeper consideration to the perceptions of the consumer. At the same time, the consumer is experiencing a wider access to information and greater ability to interact with other consumers through social media. It therefore becomes more and more evident that a brand is in large part, defined by the consumer, who is ultimately the final judge of a brand's worth.

The notion of consumer-centric, consumer-defined brands contrasts with the control held traditionally by brand managers. The change towards consumer-centric brands signals a shift in power from the organization to the consumer. Traditional approaches fail to account for the interactivity of consumers enabled by social media, and are thus in danger of missing the potential offered by encouraging consumers to collaborate in developing the brand. However, in the attempt to maintain control or through simply not recognizing the dangers of the shifting social media driven market, organizations run the risk of losing control of their brands entirely: "The loss of control is so extensive that through these applications consumers may even interfere with the brand's values" (Christodoulides, 2009). There is significant evidence that brand strategies should now focus on the relationships with consumers in facilitating the development of the brand. The evidence suggests that to a large degree the marketer is no longer the custodian of a brand, rather their role is to participate in conversation and build relationships between the brand and the consumer.

One of the key reasons for this loss of control is that social media has encouraged consumers to be more demanding of corporations, the consumer desire for transparency being a central component of that demand. Transparency in the conduct and communications of an organization is essential to their brand's ability to gain the trust and respect of an audience. Consumers have an increased skepticism of corporate marketing messages, with numerous cases of social media enabling the free and fast spread of information that contradict or call out marketing claims. However, transparent branding offers the potential to foster meaningful consumer commitment and brand loyalty, as

organizations connect with consumers and build relationships. In this regard, greater transparency can be seen as an essential tool in branding, and one brought on directly by the growth of social media.

Tribalism as a phenomenon in social media has impacted how brands approach consumers. The Internet and social media has influenced a resurgence of the formations of tribes—people brought together based on shared interests and values. While it could be argued that society has moved away from traditional forms of community, and that commercialism has been disconnected from the concept of community, it is clear that social media has facilitated its resurgence. Individuals have a desire for human contact and relational connection, and even within branding there is a natural inclination towards the formation of communities. The argument in this thesis is that it is in the best interests of brands that they acknowledge and embrace the sociality of those communities, and themselves become social entities within those communities.

The most defining contrast of traditional branding from a notion of social branding is its dialogical nature. Organizations are now called to participate in a dialogue with consumers, where traditionally marketing concerned itself with a monologue of marketing messages. The consumer now has the ability to respond both directly to the organization itself, as well as to other consumers. This requires organizations to recognize the ‘give and take’ of consumer relationships, and that listening to the market is as important as speaking. Conversational markets recognize and value the relationship between the organization and the consumer, which is built through dialogue and interaction.

An aspect of conversational markets is word-of-mouth. This has long been acknowledged as valuable to the promotion process, however with social media the impact and reach of word-of-mouth messages is amplified exponentially. A defining feature of word-of-mouth messages are that it occurs organically, without the direct influence of marketers and comes through trusted sources (friends or family). This thesis argues that for organizations to successfully influence word-of-mouth messages, it is important to recognize the balance between commercial-communal tensions. By participating in conversation with consumers and integrating as fellow members of online communities, organizations have the opportunity to influence word-of-mouth messages.

Also key to being able to influence word-of-mouth messages is the role of enthusiasts as members of brand communities. The recommendations of others are possibly the most powerful incentive to purchase, therefore achieving consumer advocacy is a sensible goal when encouraging word-of-mouth marketing. Brand advocacy requires a level of commitment and enthusiasm on the part of the consumers. By engaging with consumers through online communities, over time, brands are able to encourage higher levels of consumer commitment and therefore influence word-of-mouth marketing. Organizations can also influence consumer conversations by participating as members of online communities and

building relationships with consumers, giving the brand the opportunity to appear in the role of trusted friend.

This thesis proposes a co-creation approach to branding. As a design philosophy that encourages collaboration with the end user, this offers potential for organizations to embrace the active participation of the consumer in shaping their brand. This is particularly viable in light of the increasing influence and power held by the consumer in the current market. The co-creation of a brand can develop from the interactions and conversations that occur between the organization and the consumer. Brands will therefore develop to, not only represent the organization itself, but also its community of consumers and their perceptions.

Brand equity as a measure of brand strength, encompasses aspects such as consumers feelings of attachment and loyalty to a brand. These are influenced by a brand's participation in online communities with their consumers. There is a strong case that by applying the ideas stated above, such as relational marketing, dialogue with consumers and active participation in communities, that organizations can increase brand equity, resulting in stronger brands.

This thesis outlines a theoretical basis for a re-framing of branding through a social media context. This has involved a redefining of the concept of branding towards an approach that is both inclusive and responsive to consumers. Building brand communities has emerged as a tool to create better engagement with consumers, developing brand loyalty and a positive brand perception. An area of possible further study, which would enhance this investigation, would be the practicalities of implementing these attitudes and strategies, and a closer examination of specific social media applications and their capabilities.

Glossary of terms

Advocacy

“The willingness of the customer to give strong recommendations and praise to other consumers on behalf of a product or service provider” (Fullerton, 2010).

Brand

“Brand refers to a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller’s goods or services as distinct from those of other sellers. From a consumer’s point of view, brand is a perception resulting from experiences with, and information about, a company or a line of products. Brand is not only a symbol or perceptions; it also adds value to people’s lives. [Brand is defined as] the promise of the bundles of attributes that someone buys that provide satisfaction. The attributes that make up a brand may be real or illusory, rational or emotional, tangible or invisible. By measuring people’s brand attitude, brand behavior or brand liking, a company can understand the condition of a brand” (Zhang, 2008, p. 3).

Brand equity

“A set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand’s name and symbols, which add to or subtract from the value provided by the product to a firm and/or to customers” (Zhang, 2008).

Community

“Community refers to a group in which individuals come together based on an obligation to one another or as a group in which individuals come together to be one in purpose” (Zhang, 2008)

Customer/Consumer

“The actual or prospective purchaser of products or services” (Koontz, 2001).

Online/virtual community

“Social aggregations that emerge from the net when enough people carry on public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (Kozinets, 1999, p. 253).

“A group of people who interact in a virtual environment. They have a purpose, are supported by technology, and are guided by norms and policies” (Preece et al., 2003).

Relational marketing

“In its broadest sense, relationship marketing uses the metaphor of an organization-customer ‘relationship,’ and prescribes that the organization must foster and nurture a mutually beneficial continuing relationship with customers” (Kozinets, 1999).

Social media

“Agencies, such as websites and applications, that facilitate social networking” (Collins Dictionary, 2013).

“Social network sites [are] web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site” (Boyd & Ellison, 2008)

Word-of-mouth marketing

“Word-of-mouth marketing is the intentional influencing of consumer-to-consumer communications by professional marketing techniques” (Kozinets et al., 2010)

List of figures

Figure 1: Hunting Letter Flags (2012) Oh Crap! bunting. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=264800353624448&set=pb.223190907785393.-2207520000.1395135703.&type=3&theater>

Figure 2: Samantha Weston (2013) Gathered Sources highlighted and annotated

Figure 3: Samantha Weston (2013) Initial map of research area

Figure 4: Samantha Weston (2013) Revised map of research area

Figure 5 and 6: Samantha Weston (2013) Revised map of research area - detail

Figure 7: Samantha Weston (2013) Pinterest board for Masters research

Figure 8: Samantha Weston (2013) Reflective practice note taking

Figure 9: Facebook Profile screenshot, www.facebook.com

Figure 10: Twitter screenshot, www.twitter.com

Figure 11: Pinterest screenshot, www.pinterest.com

Figure 12: Youtube screenshot, www.youtube.com

Figure 13: Funnel metaphor, based on diagram by Edelman, D. C. (2010). Branding in The Digital Age; You're spending your money in all the wrong places. Harvard Business Review(December 2010), 62-69.

Figure 14: Loyalty loop, based on diagram from Court, D., Elzinga, D., Mulder, S., & Vetvik, O. J. (June 2009). The consumer decision journey. McKinsey Quarterly. Retrieved from http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/marketing_sales/the_consumer_decision_journey

Figure 15: Targets of traditional and relationship marketing, based on diagram from Gummesson, E. (2002). Relationship Marketing in the New Economy. Journal of Relationship Marketing, 1(1), 37-57.

Figure 16: Community of consumption member types, based on diagram from Kozinets, R. V. (1999). E-Tribalized Marketing?: The Strategic Implications of Virtual Communities of Consumption. European Management Journal, 17(3), 252-264.

Figure 17: Old communication model, based on diagram from Neumeier, M. (2003). The Brand Gap. Berkeley, California: New Riders Publishing.

Figure 18: New communication model, based on diagram from Neumeier, M. (2003). *The Brand Gap*. Berkeley, California: New Riders Publishing.

Figure 19: Seven Sharp promote social media profiles during show. Screenshot retrieved from <http://tvnz.co.nz/seven-sharp>

Figure 20: Seven Sharp's Facebook profile. Screenshot retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/sevensharp?fref=ts>

Figure 21: Seven Sharp's Twitter account. Screenshot retrieved from <https://twitter.com/SevenSharpTim>

Figure 23: Jamie's World Facebook page on 27/07/2013. Screenshot retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/itsjamiesworld?fref=ts>

Figure 24: Jamie's World video featuring song by Jason Derulo on 12/08/2013. Screenshot retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo>.

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