

BLANCHFLOWER, TIFFANY MACHADO, Ph.D. *Crafting Consumption through Community: An Exploration of the Etsy Experience*. (2016).
Directed by Dr. Nancy Hodges. 468 pp.

In a global market dominated by the mass production and consumption of branded goods, an interest in craft products has become a growing trend among consumers (Walker, 2007). Consumer demand for craft products includes a wide array of items, from those that are perishable, such as micro brews, to those that are nonperishable, such as jewelry (Clay, 2013). There are many reasons why consumers are embracing craft products, as they are often unique, one-of-a-kind, of higher quality, and provide a connection to the creator. Ultimately, craft goods provide a unique consumption experience within a marketplace dominated by carbon-copied products and consumption experiences (Walker, 2007).

While some retailers are trying to integrate the craft trend into their merchandise assortments, others have sought to build a business around craft products. Etsy is one such company that, through the craft community, has built a successful online business. Etsy, in turn, has helped promote the popularity of craft products. The convergence of craft products with community has turned Etsy into an innovative kind of online market. Since its introduction, Etsy has experienced tremendous growth. For instance, from 2005 to 2012 Etsy expanded into close to 200 international markets, attracted over 800,000 sellers, and sold roughly \$80 million in products (Mitroff, 2013). Etsy owes its quick success to the avid community of craft Sellers and Buyers. Yet despite the uniqueness of Etsy's growth and unique approach to retailing craft goods, no academic research exists on the topic.

Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is to understand how Etsy functions as both a community and an online, craft-oriented market. Three objectives guided this dissertation: (1) to explore what it means to be a member of the Etsy community, (2) to investigate the extent to which this community shapes Etsy's practices and functions as a market, and (3) to examine the implications of Etsy as a community-driven market for online retailing. The purpose and objectives were framed by a sociological perspective and understood within the context of consumer behavior research. Three overarching concepts—culture, community, and market—were used to weave together a conceptual framework for the study.

Ethnography and netnography serve as the interpretive approaches to explore Etsy's community and market. Three methods of data collection were employed, including participant observation, in-depth interviews, and visual documentation. Participant observation and pure observation occurred over a three-month time period resulting in a total of 312 hours of observation. Nine Buyers, eight Sellers and three Etsy Administrators were interviewed. Last, visual documentation was used to capture online and offline observations. Spiggle's (1994) suggestions of qualitative data analysis were employed to identify patterns in the data, which resulted in the development of three thematic areas: (1) *Uncovering Etsy's Culture*, (2) *Etsy as a Community*, and (3) *Etsy as a Market*.

The thematic interpretation revealed that Etsy's platform relies on an interdependent community/market relationship, as such, the community influences the market and the market influences the community. In turn, it was found that members'

roles, (e.g., Buyers, Sellers, and Etsy Administrators), were integral to fostering this relationship and ultimately shaping Etsy's platform.

Findings of this dissertation reveal the ways that Etsy has taken a unique approach to online retailing, as it diverges from the traditional online retailing model by seamlessly integrating community into its market. In so doing, this dissertation reveals how Etsy brings a new format to online retailing, the community-based electronic market. This particular retail format is unique in that it is dependent on market consumption communities to not only purchase goods and services, but to provide the merchandise to be sold within the market. Another distinct characteristic of Etsy is the market prosumer, a member that buys, sells, and works for Etsy. This market player is unique to the community-based electronic market, and like the concept of the community-based electronic market, it is new to the literature. Although future research on the topic is needed, findings from this dissertation point to the beginning of a new era in online retailing, as well as new avenues for consumer behavior research.

CRAFTING CONSUMPTION THROUGH COMMUNITY:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE ETSY EXPERIENCE

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
2016

Approved by

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I dedicate this dissertation to my family.

t.j., elouise, & sir walter raleigh

APPROVAL PAGE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Nancy Hodges for her infinite wisdom, patience, and for always keeping a watchful eye on me throughout this process. It was a long journey, but a fun one, and I was so grateful to have her as my fearless leader. Next, I would like to thank my committee members Dr. Steve Kroll-Smith, Dr. Kittichai Tu Watchravesringkan, and Dr. Jennifer Yurchisin for their support, time, and guidance.

I would have never even started this endeavor if it were not for the endless hours my mom poured into my education during my formative years. Mom, thank you for being so patient pushing me to reach for the academic stars. Next, I would like thank my step-father for supporting me through this process, and reminding my mom that coming home and working through the weekends on my dissertation was a “normal” thing. I would also like to thank my grandmother, Gail Klima, and late grandfather, Lew Klima for their support and instilling the confidence in me at a young age to achieve such a feat. Along the same lines, thank you to my in laws, JoAnne Blanchflower, Thomas Blanchflower, as well as my sister and brother-in-law Niki and Shane Dehaner. Thank you for your support, patience, and rides to and from the library during holidays, trips, and summer visits.

And to my friends, new and old thank you! I don't know how I would have made it through this process with out your wise cracking jokes and constant support. I especially want to thank my “besties,” Trish Kemerly, Lorraine Martínez-Novoa, and

Tom Turner. Trish, thank you for ALWAYS laughing at my jokes, and for watching Elouise when I really need the extra hand. Lorraine, thank you for providing off beat banter, constant love, and support. I especially loved our late night Skype dissertation sessions. And Tom, thank you for providing a listening ear, for the Saxapahaw meet ups, and adding a bit of tranquility to our crazy crew. To my newer friends, Amy and Elizabeth, thank you for always helping out, whether it was watching Elouise so I could write, letting me borrow your baby sitter, or a ladder. And to all my friends near and far, thank you for your love and support, it means the world to me.

Last, but not least to my little family tj, Elouise, and Sir Walter Raleigh, the biggest thank you goes to you all! There is absolutely no way in this universe I would have finished without your support and encouragement. Tj thank you for always providing me with a sounding board for dissertation discussions, and for understanding when I had to spend all day and night. And to Elouise, my sweet Elouise, you definitely inspired me to pick up the pace and get things done. And last, to Sir Walter Raleigh, thank you for always sitting by my side, no matter what (unless you were barking at the squirrels).

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In a global economy dominated by the mass production and consumption of branded goods, interest in craft products has become a growing trend among consumers (Walker, 2007). There are many reasons why consumers are embracing craft products over mass-produced ones. Craft products offer uniqueness, higher quality, and sometimes even tell a story. Craft products are perceived as socially and environmentally responsible, therefore symbolize the sustainable application of Capitalist ideas in a free market economy (Walker, 2007). Moreover, craft products reconnect the consumer with the creator, providing a unique consumption experience within a market dominated by the sameness afforded by mass-produced goods (Walker, 2007).

Consumer demand for craft products includes a wide array of items, from those that are perishable, such as micro brews, to those that are nonperishable, such as jewelry (Risen, 2013). Recently, big box retailers have even tried to integrate the trend toward craft products within their merchandising strategies (Townsend, 2012). For example, in 2012, Target introduced artisanal and craft products from a variety of American-based, small “mom and pop” shops known for their specialty products, including a line of handmade candies from San Francisco-based sweet shop, *The Candy Store* and dog treats from Boston’s *Polka Dog Baker* (Townsend, 2012). While some retailers are trying to integrate the craft trend into their merchandise assortments, others have sought to build a

business around craft products. Etsy is one such company that, through crafts, has built a successful online business that, in turn, has helped promote the popularity of craft products.

Etsy was launched in 2005 as an online platform for crafters to exchange ideas and sell their wares. This new site attracted the attention of many other individuals who shared a passion for the production and consumption of craft products, and this attention quickly turned Etsy into a craft-centered electronic market. Since its introduction, Etsy has experienced tremendous growth. From 2005 to 2012 it expanded into close to 200 international markets, attracted over 800,000 Sellers, and sold roughly \$80 million in products (Mitroff, 2013). Etsy experienced a 70% growth between 2011 and 2012 alone. Etsy has attracted attention not only from Sellers and consumers, but from investors, achieving a market valuation of \$600 million in less than eight years (Ante, 2012).

Although Etsy's success is connected to the growing consumer interest in handmade crafts, Etsy attributes the majority of its success to its members who share in its development as a market and craft community. In contrast to other kinds of electronic markets, such as eBay or Amazon, Etsy relies on its Sellers to not only provide products, but to shape its business functions and practices. As such, Etsy focuses on empowering its Sellers, allowing them to act as stakeholders while taking part in shaping the site as an electronic market. This has resulted in Etsy becoming an e-commerce site that is equal parts community and retailer, thereby making it somewhat of an anomaly among online retailers (Blanchflower & Hodges, 2013b).

The convergence of craft products with community has turned Etsy into an innovative kind of electronic market. Indeed, it is the community of avid craft Sellers and consumers that appears to have fostered Etsy's success. Yet despite the uniqueness of Etsy's approach to retailing and its enormous success, no academic research currently exists on the topic. Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is to understand how Etsy functions as both a community and an electronic, craft-oriented market.

Background

Etsy is best defined as an international ecommerce site that brings together artists, crafters, collectors, and consumers around handmade and vintage products as well as craft supplies (Etsy Inc., 2013b, 2013c). Etsy blends the nostalgia evoked by handmade goods of the past with the 21st century technologies of online retailing and social media to establish an electronic market that is driven by the growing consumer demand for unique, one of a kind products.

The Craft Concept

As a concept, craft has evolved to reflect changes in the production and consumption of goods over time. Today, the definition of craft is strongly debated, especially with the advent of digital technologies used to produce or assist in the creation of craft products (Greenhalgh, 2003). One definition of craft provided by Edmund de Waal, a well-recognized crafter and member of the British Crafts Council, illustrates the breadth of what craft is today: "Craft is a starting place, a set of possibilities. It avoids absolutes, certainties, over-robust definitions, solace. It offers places, interstices, where objects and people meet. It is unstable, contingent. It is about experience. It is about

desire. It can be beautiful” (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2013, para.12). This breadth can be seen in the way Etsy espouses the craft concept. That is, although some products are sold on Etsy that do not fully encompass the physical idea of craft (Etsy Inc., 2013b), all products sold through the site embody or support the more intangible ideals of craft. For instance, Etsy sells vintage products, which often provide uniqueness and a “story” that cannot be acquired through mass-produced goods. To Buyers and Sellers, goods available on Etsy represent something greater than the end product and like craft in its most genuine sense, embody uniqueness and a sense of “specialness.”

Etsy’s notion of a craft market is by no means new. The production of craft products by artisans or craftsmen was a pivotal component of advanced societies well into the mid-19th century (Donnellan, 2007; Tortora & Eubank, 2010). Indeed, until the advent of mass production, people relied on the production and trade of craft products, such as food, textiles, metalwork, and medicine to sustain a particular quality of life. In return, the consumption of these handmade products sustained the craftsman’s way of life (Laurie, 1997). However, this way of life was forever changed with the technological advancements that emerged from the Industrial Revolution (Tortora & Eubank, 2010).

The Industrial Revolution cultivated advancements in manufacturing technologies that resulted in a paradigm shift within the production and consumption of consumer goods (Sterlacci & Arbuckle, 2008). Ultimately, this shift led to the mass production of goods, and specifically of branded products, on a broad scale. Advancements in mass transit systems lead to the development of new retail formats, such as shopping centers

and malls, which also contributed to the widespread distribution of mass-produced consumer goods (Donnellan, 2007; Tortora & Eubank, 2010).

American consumers would eventually become obsessed with branded goods, shopping malls, and national retail chains, turning a blind eye to craft products and eventually abandoning the “mom and pop” retailers. America’s devotion to national branded goods reached its pinnacle in the 1990s with the widespread growth of “big box” discount retailers like Walmart and K-Mart (Neumark, Zhang, & Ciccarella, 2008; Sterlacci & Arbuckle, 2008). Indeed, Walmart would come to have a tremendous effect on local retail and labor markets, to the extent that for very every two jobs Walmart creates, three local jobs are destroyed (Neumark, Zhang, & Ciccarella, 2008). Etsy’s aim is to “go local” again by reintroducing craft and craft-related products back into retailing by returning to the “mom and pop” retail model, albeit in a 21st century electronic format.

Currently, the production and sale of products is experiencing another wave of change due to the Information Age. While the Industrial Revolution was known for the introduction of the manufacturing economy, the Information Age has introduced an information-based economy supported by advancements in digital technologies (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010). Specifically, the Information Age has provided advancements within computing technologies and digital communications that have altered how people communicate, form social bonds, and perform daily activities (Barabási, 2003; Granovetter, 1973; Ingram, 2012). Within the context of this dissertation, three advancements that have emerged from the Information Age are seen as pivotal to

production and commerce, and in turn the Etsy market: *online retailing, social media,* and *digital communities*. Each advancement is discussed in the following sections.

Online Retailing

As early as the 1960s, retail scholars and practitioners were speculating that the future of retailing may eventually exist within the digital space and that consumers would use computing technologies to order directly from the retailer's warehouse (Doddy & Davidson, 1967). Despite such speculation, online retailing was not introduced until the mid-1990s, when advancements in computing technologies and digital communications allowed for an infrastructure in support of an online retail channel (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010). Retailers were obviously drawn to this new channel due to its potential to capture new markets, increase earning potential, as well as expedite the dissemination of marketing collateral (Basu & Muylle, 2003). Since the late 1990s, online shopping has become the fastest growing sector of Internet usage (Smith, 2012). Consequently it is a topic that has captured the attention of a wide variety of academic and industry researchers (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010; Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2003).

Over the past two decades the online platform has evolved, resulting in the development of different formats, including content, commerce, context, and connection-based platforms (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). Content-based online business models include newspaper sites like *Women's Wear Daily* and the *Wall Street Journal*. These online businesses aggregate, distribute, and sell content to consumers, accruing revenue from online advertising and member subscriptions. Online commerce business models include retailers such as Amazon and eBay. These businesses sell and distribute goods

and services and accrue profits from sales and commissions. Etsy is a commerce-based online business. Context-based online businesses, such as Google, aggregate or disaggregate existing online content to simplify the online search for information, and accrue revenue from online advertising sales. Lastly, connection-based online business models such as Facebook, Twitter, and eHarmony.com provide online channels of communication for Internet users. Revenue is accrued by site advertising and member subscriptions. Etsy combines elements each of these retailing platforms, but it is commerce, also known as online retailing, that is the basic foundation of Etsy's market (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010).

Among the commerce-based online businesses, sites known as "pure play retailers" were the first to dominate the online channel. Called "pure play" because they only sold goods through the online channel, these retailers succeeded by eliminating the logistics and cost associated with the offline channel (Min & Wolfinbarger, 2005; Pfeifer & Zinnbauer, 2010). Early pure-play retailers that are still prevalent within online commerce are Amazon.com and eBay, while successful newer pure-play retailers include Overstock.com (Min & Wolfinbarger, 2005). By selling goods only through the online channel, these companies eliminate the overhead associated with brick-and-mortar stores and therefore are often able to offer products at lower prices. Such stores attracted the attention of consumers as well as investors from the beginning. Over time, competition amongst these pure-play retailers reached a tipping point, driving prices so low that many were unable to maintain viable profit margins. This competition eventually led to the

closure of many of the original pure-play retailers, while creating room for the second wave of online retailers (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010).

The second wave of online retailers was comprised of the well-established, offline branded retailers such as J.Crew, Nike and Lands End (Min & Wolfenbarger, 2005). These retailers used the online platform to diversify their channel offerings by creating online retail websites. The Internet allowed these established brands to quickly expand their current customer base, market share, and in turn, increase sales (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010). Today, the second wave continues to dominate online retailing, however some pure-play retailers, such as Amazon and eBay, remain key players. Other pure-play companies have emerged since the second wave, including Etsy and Zappos. Much like Amazon and eBay, without an offline presence these retailers offer competitive advantage through unique products, services, or lower prices (Hill, 2011; Pfeifer & Zinnbauer, 2010).

As a possible third wave of online retailers, research suggests that another change is on the horizon, specifically due to the influx of smartphone technologies that have increased the potential for mobile shopping and browsing (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010). Indeed, one study conducted over the 2012 holiday shopping season revealed that six of every ten cellular phone owners accessed the Internet via mobile devices while in stores to make purchase decisions (Smith, 2012). Fifty-five percent of these consumers accessed the Internet for product reviews and/or pricing information. Approximately 19% of these searches resulted in the online purchase of the same product for a better price or that of a less expensive, comparable product (Smith, 2012).

Aware of the value provided by mobile technology, many retailers offer sites formatted for mobile devices as well as “apps” specifically designed for mobile browsing and purchasing. Etsy has also started to embrace the mobile platform, dedicating a portion of its website to informing Sellers and Buyers about their mobile tools. Through mobile app technology, Etsy has retrofitted its shopping, searching and shop management functions for smartphone devices, facilitating a mobile experience that is the equivalent of its web-based offerings.

Social Media

Alongside the growth of online retailing, the Information Age has also facilitated the expansion of online communication, resulting in the introduction and growth of what is known as “social media.” Social media is comprised of technologically-driven online communication media beyond the traditional email format. Social media offers a platform for users to transmit and share information with one another online (Hartshorn, 2011). The most popular type of social media platform is the social networking website, with the three most frequently used being Facebook, Twitter, and Blogger (Bannon, 2012).

In 2013, 65% of all adults between the ages of 18-65 use social networking sites compared to just 8% in 2005 (Smith, 2012). Much like online retailing, increased use of smart phone technologies has led to an increase in consumers’ adoption and use of social media platforms (Smith, 2012). The sharp increase in social networking site adoption has attracted the attention of retailers to the point where social media sites now influence online retailing (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011; The Nielsen Company, 2010; Riegner, 2007). A few of the effects of social media use on online retailing include: an

increased rate at which marketing collateral is disseminated to consumers (Smith, 2012), greater ability to communicate with customers (Schlinke & Crain, 2013; Zeng, Haung, & Dou, 2010), another means of relationship building (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2011; Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010), and the ability to create a sense of community around a retail brand (Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013; Schlinke & Crain, 2013). For example, Etsy strategically uses social media tools to do all of this through its commerce-based site. Etsy provides its community with a variety of social media tools, such as blogs and forums, as well as the capacity to share and comment on photos and videos in support of Seller-to-Seller and Seller-to-Buyer relationships. These tools allow for consumers, as community members, to share personal profile pages within a semi-public bounded digital space, similar to a social networking site (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). In turn, consumers build relationships with the site and with others that use it, including Sellers as well as other Buyers.

Digital Communities

Given their enormous popularity, social networking sites are projected to continue to shape the future of online retailing beyond just creating more sales (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010; Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). Specifically, the rise of social media use among consumers has fostered the development of virtual, or digital communities, and over time these communities have become increasingly important to retailers. Digital communities use social media tools in place of face-to-face interactions to create, support, and sustain themselves (Rheingold, 1993). Digital communities can be

consumption-related, formed by loyal customers with a shared interest in specific products or a particular brand (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001).

According to Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001), brand communities can be defined as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412). Findings from Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001) study reveal that brand communities can exist offline, online, or a combination of both. They also discovered that all three types of communities use online social media tools to facilitate communication with and support for the community. Of interest to retailers, brand communities not only provide support for their members, but also for the brand (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). That is, academics and industry researchers have concluded that in the majority of cases, a brand community enhances and benefits the associated brand (Jang, Olfman, & Ko et al., 2008; Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012; O'Sullivan, Richardson, & Collins, 2011; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009). As will be discussed in detail within Chapter II, Etsy is a digital consumption community with a strong following, yet it is more than a brand community as currently defined in the literature.

Academics and practitioners have suggested that for online retailers to remain relevant they will need to blend online technology trends with consumer trends (Teece, 2010; Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). Etsy is an online retailer that does this successfully, as seen by its rapid growth. That is, Etsy blends the handmade craft consumer trend with trends in social media use, thereby fostering a digital community of

individuals united by a shared interest in the production, sale, and consumption of craft products.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Etsy functions as an electronic market driven by a craft-focused community. Three objectives were developed to address the study's purpose: (1) to explore what it means to be a member of the Etsy community, (2) to investigate the extent to which this community shapes Etsy's practices and functions as a market, and (3) to examine the implications of Etsy as a community-driven market for online retailing.

Because no academic and very little industry research has examined Etsy or the Etsy community, preliminary research was conducted in fall 2012 to guide the development of the purpose and objectives of this dissertation. The preliminary study was exploratory in nature and designed to investigate Etsy's business practices, specifically the role of Sellers on the site. Findings pointed to the way that Etsy is not only an electronic market for craft and craft-related products, but it is also a community. Data revealed a broad set of guiding principles designed to shape this community, such as the promotion of collaborative, rather than competitive selling strategies (Blanchflower & Hodges, 2013a). As community members, Etsy Sellers actually work together with Etsy's Administrators to shape its business practices and its functions as an electronic market. Findings of the preliminary research also provide a foundation for understanding how this collaboration helps Etsy to achieve a common goal: the success of the site as a whole. Building on the foundation provided by the preliminary study, this dissertation sheds

greater light on Etsy as an electronic market supported by a community through the production and sale of craft products.

Methodological Framework

As will be discussed in full in Chapter III, ethnography serves as the methodological framework for this dissertation. Ethnography allows researchers the opportunity to interact with and observe participants within their natural environment, permitting the collection of thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the “culture, history, and characteristics that shape a social phenomenon” (Robinson-Caskie, 2006, p. 853). As such, ethnography is often used to examine how attitudes and behaviors evolve over time to shape society and culture (Merriam, 1998; Sluka & Robben, 2007). As the purpose of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of Etsy as a community, an ethnographic approach provides the opportunity to explore the forces that shape this community.

Ethnography is rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, therefore the researcher is considered the primary instrument for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting meaning from observations (Kates, 2006; Sluka & Robben, 2007). Because the researchers’ participation in/with the phenomenon directly influences the research process, the role of the researcher must be clearly defined before entering the field (Kozinets, 2010).

Findings from the preliminary research revealed that Etsy’s market is not shaped solely by Etsy Administrators. Instead it is literally crafted by its Sellers and Buyers. To capture this process to the fullest extent possible, I assumed the role of participant observer during data collection. Specifically, I became a prosumer within the Etsy community. That is, I experienced the market as both producer and consumer (Kotler, 1986; Merriam,

1998). By engaging in the Etsy community as a prosumer, I was able to observe as well as experience life in the Etsy community.

Although Etsy has a strong online presence, there are offline settings that are also critical to understanding the Etsy community, such as Etsy MeetUps and Etsy Team meetings. Thus, two different observational methods were employed: (a) digital observation, also known as netnography, and (b) face-to-face ethnographic observation. Netnography was used because it provides a methodological framework for observing cultures and communities that exist solely or partially within digital environments (Kozinets, 2006). As will be discussed in Chapter III, netnography was used to guide online observations, while more traditional methods of ethnography were used to guide offline observations.

Three specific data collection methods were used to address the research objectives. First, netnographic observation data was collected from Etsy Blogs and Forums. This data provided insight into what it means to participate in the Etsy community as well as how Sellers help to shape Etsy as an online retail business. The second type of observation data included participation in two offline Etsy Teams. Data collected from these observations provided insight into how Seller-based groups engage in Etsy community building. Memberships in these Teams allowed me to develop relationships with other Team members, which facilitated the third data collection method: in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with a range of participants, which included Etsy Administrators, Sellers, and Buyers. This allowed me

to explore in-depth the experiences and perspectives of others who were involved in the Etsy community.

Researchers in a number of disciplines, including communication studies and consumer behavior have taken an interest in exploring online communities and have employed different methodological approaches in this exploration. Interestingly, while ethnographic, and specifically netnographic methods have been used in some online community research (Chalmers, Gessner, Venturoni, & Weiler, 2012; Park & Cho, 2012; Scaraboto, Rossi, & Costa, 2012) and brand community studies (Felix, 2012; Fuller, Lüedicke, & Jawecki, 2008; Moraes, Szmigin, & Carrigan, 2010; Muñiz & Schau, 2005; O’Sullivan, Richardson, & Collins, 2011) this approach is rather uncommon. Instead, the quantitative approach tends to be the dominant methodology in this area (cf., Ahn, Kwon, & Sung, 2010; Hassay & Pelozo, 2009; Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012; Madupu & Krishnan, 2008; Martin & Collier, 2007). There are also several examples that rely on the case study method (cf., Hickman & Ward, 2007; Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006; Kilambi, Laroche, & Richard, 2013; Sicilia & Palazón, 2008). Although such studies provide a great deal of information about brand communities, there remain major gaps in the literature that this dissertation addresses and therefore helps to both deepen and broaden the scope of knowledge relative to online retailing in general and specifically online community-driven sites like Etsy.

Conceptual Scope and Significance

As an electronic market, Etsy is a global platform that brings together artists, crafters, collectors, and consumers around handmade and vintage products as well as

craft supplies (Etsy Inc., 2013a, 2013b). As previously discussed, Etsy attributes its success to its members, many of whom go beyond just using it as place to sell things, and consider it a community in its own right. To better understand what this notion of Etsy community means for digital sales and consumption in general and craft products in particular, this dissertation focuses on four types of Etsy community members. The first are the employees of Etsy, known as Etsy Administrators. These individuals manage all retail, social media, and business-related elements of Etsy as a commercial website. Sellers, the second type, are members who create, collect, market, distribute, and sell handmade and vintage products as well as crafting supplies on Etsy. Composing the third type of community member, Buyers are consumers who purchase products from Sellers through the shops that comprise Etsy's market. At times, roles converge, such that Buyers can become Sellers or Sellers also become Buyers. The convergence of these roles creates the fourth type of member, known as the prosumer. Prosumers assume the dual role of Buyer and Seller (Kotler, 1986), in that they sell as well as purchase products on Etsy.

It is common for Etsy Administrators, Sellers, Buyers and Prosumers to interact with one another through socially-mediated communication and to engage in activities designed to build the "culture" of the site. For example, Etsy Administrators, Sellers, Buyers, and Prosumers work together to ensure that all products sold through Etsy fall into one of three categories: handmade products, vintage goods, or crafting supplies. The site clearly states that, "selling commercial or mass-produced...is not permitted" (Etsy Inc., 2013c, para 58). Etsy defines handmade goods as products produced by a Seller or a Seller's employees. Handmade products can include items that have been repurposed or

significantly altered. Vintage goods sold through Etsy must be 20 years or older, and can include collectibles. Lastly, crafting supplies include raw materials that may be commercial, but are not ready for direct use. For example, mass-produced doll clothing that is bought elsewhere and then put up for sale without significant alteration would not be permitted. Although not all goods sold on the site are “crafts,” they all must embody or reinforce the idea of craft (Etsy Inc., 2013b).

As mentioned previously, despite its growing popularity as a place to buy and sell crafts there is little research available on the topic of Etsy. Consequently, one goal of this dissertation is to develop a better understanding of Etsy, particularly how it functions as a community by and through its various members. Existing studies provide a limited perspective on consumption and community, and in fact most rely heavily on Muñiz and O’Guinn’s (2001) concept of brand community. As such, this area of consumption research has focused on enhancing what is known about brand communities (Hung, Li, & Tse, 2011; Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001; O’Sullivan, Richardson, & Collins, 2011), rather than expanding the scope of our understanding of consumption and community more broadly. This dissertation therefore addresses another major gap in knowledge regarding online retailing, specifically market communities, by expanding beyond the concept of the brand community.

According to the literature, the idea of community is not easy to define (Kozinets, 2010). Moreover, the term and what it encompasses is further complicated by differing views about what a community is in the context of the digital age (Keller, 2003). Most early studies espoused the notion that meaningful exchanges, social ties, and

relationships, the factors necessary to form a community, could only occur through face-to-face interaction (Gusfield, 1978; Hillery, 1955). This perspective resulted in the idea of community as being limited to certain geographic regions. Then, in the 1970s, Harvard researcher Harrison White and his graduate students expanded on the perspective of community via studies on social network analysis (Granovetter, 1973; Lorrain & White, 1971; White, 1970). Findings of these studies were used to support a new perspective, one that asserted that community could exist beyond small geographic regions, thereby establishing a foundation for the conceptual development of digital communities that would emerge three decades later (Bruhn, 2011; Rheingold, 2003; Wellman, 1999).

Most current definitions of community accept the notion that a community can exist either partially or fully online. For the purposes of this dissertation, a definition of community was developed from the works of seminal (Anderson, 1983; Hillery, 1955) as well as more recent scholars (Keller, 2003) and is a group of individuals that engage in social exchanges that occur online, offline or a combination of both to build social relationships based on a common interest. Furthermore, as will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter, a community also shares a consciousness of kind, possesses morality and caring, as well as exercises structure and governance to shape and manage its members and the community as a whole (Anderson 1983; Hillery, 1955; Keller, 2003). Finally, a community consists of various types of members that fulfill different roles to contribute to its overall success.

By exploring Etsy as a community, rather than simply as an online retailer, this study sheds light on the interplay between consumption and community in a particular

retail context wherein consumers are not bound together by a single branded product, such as Apple computers, Mini Cooper cars, or Harley Davidson motorcycles. Instead, this study focuses on a community that is bound by shared interest in creating a unique retail space for consuming craft and craft-related products. Moreover, Etsy's community members also influence its business functions and practices, making the Etsy community different from brand communities. As a result, this study builds on the current understanding of brand communities, while providing new insight into how online retailers can work as consumption communities to enhance their online presence.

Finally, most studies that examine communities formed around brands, whether online or offline, are quantitative in nature (Hickman & Ward, 2007; Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012; Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2011; Madupu & Cooley, 2010; Park & Cho, 2012). Although these studies offer a great deal of dimension within consumption community research, there remains a conceptual gap. Specifically, the literature does not capture the essence of community, or explore the convergence of community and consumption within online retailing. Thus, this dissertation employs a qualitative, ethnographic approach to capture the essence of community relative to online retailing and provide a deeper understanding of the role of community in the context of an electronic market.

Summary

This chapter provided an introduction to the proposed dissertation. I began with a description of Etsy, including the ways that it blends traditional notions of craft with 21st century technology. I then described the purpose and objectives of the study and the

ethnographic methodological framework that was employed to address them. Finally, I discussed the interplay of community and consumption as a rationale for the study and explained how this interplay is important to the study of Etsy. In the next chapter, the research objectives are framed by a review of the relevant literature.

CHAPTER II

THE LITERATURE THAT INFORMS THE RESEARCH

The goal of this study is to develop an in-depth understanding of Etsy. As discussed in Chapter I, three objectives are used to guide the dissertation: (1) to explore what it means to be a member of the Etsy community, (2) to investigate the extent to which this community shapes Etsy's practices and functions as a market, and (3) to examine the implications of Etsy as a community-driven market for online retailing.

As will be discussed in this chapter, the study's objectives are framed by a sociological perspective and understood within the context of consumer research. Three overarching concepts—culture, community, and market—are used to weave together a conceptual framework for the study. The aim of this chapter is to discuss each concept as part of the larger whole of the framework. Relevant literature is discussed as a means of informing the research as well as highlighting connections between the three concepts. A review of the literature reveals how these concepts are often interrelated, and, for the purposes of this study, illustrates how the convergence of the three help to make Etsy more than just an online craft store.

The first part of this chapter is divided into three main sections that are organized around an exploration of each of the three overarching concepts. The second part of the chapter presents the interrelationships of these concepts that, together, form the framework for the study. The study of Etsy as a community-driven market requires the

investigation of culture and community, in as much as culture is fundamental to community and community is a fundamental part of Etsy's market (Blanchflower & Hodges, 2013b; Heere, Walker, Yoshida, Ko, Jordan, & James, 2011; Kozinets 2010). As such, discussion of markets, as well as both culture and community, or what Kozinets (2010) considers to be "two of the most complex and contested terms in the English language" (p. 7), is presented from a sociological perspective. Each concept is defined in a manner that helps to structure the proposed investigation of Etsy specifically as a community-driven electronic market. To that end, the first section of this chapter begins with a brief introduction to the study of culture from a historical perspective. This is followed by a discussion of modern sociological perspectives on culture relative to the topic of this study.

The second section of this chapter introduces the role of community. This section begins with a discussion of thought on the topic of community within the context of modernity and technology. Next, the notion of community that is adopted for use in this dissertation is presented, specifically in terms of how it is employed to achieve the study's three main objectives. This is followed by discussion and explanation of the study of community within the context of consumer research, particularly the literature on consumption and community.

In the third section I introduce the role of markets by presenting the concept from a sociological perspective. This is followed by a discussion of the market literature particular to the Internet, specifically the areas of online retailing, social media, electronic markets and Web 2.0. Lastly, this section introduces the concept of moralized markets,

which is an emerging area of sociological thought on the Capitalist market that is influenced by and helps to explain current market conditions. An in-depth examination of the concept of a moralized market is provided, including its definition and characteristics. Throughout this section as well as the other two, pertinent studies are discussed as a means to highlight gaps in knowledge that exist that are addressed by this dissertation.

Finally, the last section of this chapter presents the integration of the concepts and how they are used to guide this study. Connections between the three concepts of culture, community and market that provide a framework for the study of Etsy are discussed. As part of this discussion, guiding questions that emerge from the literature and which help to address the study's objectives are presented.

Culture

As discussed in Chapter I, preliminary research on the topic of Etsy revealed that Etsy's community shapes its business practices and functions, and this community-driven model has contributed to its increasing success in terms of sales (Blanchflower & Hodges, 2013a, 2013b; Wolverson, 2013). Community is a fundamental element of Etsy, in that Etsy is united by a set of shared values and ideals that foster social bonds (Geertz, 1973) and generate consciousness of kind (Gusfield, 1978) through the production and consumption of craft-related products and services. Indeed, a community is a reflection of its culture, or a set of values and ideals generally accepted by members (Geertz, 1966; Heere, Walker, Yoshida, Ko, Jordan, & James, 2011; Kozinets, 2006). In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the Etsy community, the underlying values and ideals that unite its members must first be considered. By highlighting the role of culture in the

investigation of Etsy, a richer understanding of what unites its members and shapes its market practices and functions can surface. Thus, the following section begins with a brief discussion of culture from a sociological perspective. This is followed by an overview of the perspectives on and approaches to investigating culture that are considered to be most relevant to this dissertation.

Defining Culture as a Concept

Culture was introduced as a formalized concept and field of study in the late 19th century by anthropologists Edward Tylor (1871) and Lewis Henry Morgan (Hatch, 1996). Tylor and Morgan both posited culture as an evolutionary continuum, on which a society could progress from being less to becoming more civilized. This perspective was built on the assumption that some societies, particularly Western societies with European values, exhibited higher moral values and therefore higher culture. Within this perspective, the term “culture” soon became synonymous with civilization, and it came to be assumed that a civilization could achieve higher levels of evolution by adopting European morals, values, and ideals (Kendall & Wickham, 2001). Essentially, this initial perspective defined culture as a singular, status-driven concept (Hatch, 1996; Scott & Marshall, 2009).

In the twentieth century, diffusion anthropologists such as Boas (1940) and Pitt Rivers (1922) shifted the concept of culture from singular to plural (as cited in Kendall & Wickham, 2001). These scholars posited a perspective of culture as a product that is cultivated, learned, and shaped by collective group life. This perspective argued that cultures should not be described as high or low. Instead, cultures should be described as

they appear, and the role of context should be considered for shaping the values and ideals that unite collective group life. Within this perspective, culture was conceived of as a process in which individuals assimilated to a body of patterns that they learned through interaction with other members of a society.

Current perspectives of culture continue to embrace the notion of it as a process. Specifically, despite the myriad of definitions of culture employed by researchers, culture is often described as either being materialist-oriented or meaning-oriented (Hatch, 1996; Kendall & Wickham, 2001). Both are briefly examined next.

Perspectives of Culture

Within the sociology literature, the materialist-oriented approach espouses the perspective that material conditions, such as economic patterns and technological advancements, cultivate the market and sustain human life (Hatch, 1996). These material conditions are thought to influence and drive cultural systems (Hatch, 1996; Scott & Marshall, 2009). Within this perspective it is assumed that culture is influenced by society's adoption of different material conditions, which are the driving force behind defining the structure of a culture (Kendall & Wickham, 2001). Thus, materialist-oriented approaches examine how material conditions influence society in order to uncover the dynamics and structure of a given culture (Hatch, 1996; Kendall & Wickham, 2001).

In contrast to the materialist-oriented perspective, the meaning-oriented perspective positions culture as socially constructed by the meanings that individuals ascribe to their experiences (Hatch, 1996; Kuper, 1999; Scott & Marshall, 2009). As such, the study of culture focuses on the meanings individuals assign to human behavior

within a society (Hatch, 1996). This approach asserts that the world is socially constructed and organized, and that cultural frames give meaning to the everyday life experiences of individuals (Scott & Marshall, 2009). Clifford Geertz is considered a sociological scholar who employs the meaning-oriented approach, in as much as he viewed culture as something that was both social and public (1965; 1973). For Geertz, culture could be understood by investigating the meanings and symbols that individuals ascribe to the patterns of human behavior within a social setting (Geertz, 1973).

It is important to note that the context of culture is not just reserved for large scale societies. That is, culture can also exist among smaller groups of individuals, such as neighborhoods and families (Hebdige, 2002). Indeed, the study of culture can be scaled down further, to the level of the subculture (Kozinets, 2010). Subcultures are defined as groups of individuals who share values and practices that reject or are in opposition to mainstream culture (Hebdige, 2002). Subcultures are also commonly referred to as counter-cultures, as these groups of individuals knowingly accept values and ideals that go against the mainstream (Scott & Marshall, 2009). As a result of technology and the Internet, subcultures can be virtual (Kozinets, 2010) and can be participatory in nature (Jenkins, 2006).

A participatory culture is often a virtual one, in that in both cases members use formal and informal communication to share values and ideals, typically through social media (Jenkins, 2006; Kozinets, 2010). Jenkins (2006) describes participatory cultures as having "...relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creating, and some type of information whereby

experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices” (p. 6). Members use social media tools as a way to collaborate, work in teams, and solve problems related to the creation of new knowledge and ideas (Jenkins, 2006).

According to Jenkins (2006), members of participatory cultures share a set of values and ideals that foster social interaction, social bonds, and relationship-building based on an interest in artistic expression, civic engagement and the exchange of creative knowledge. Sometimes these social bonds and relationships intensify and grow, resulting in communities that are based on the values and ideals of a participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006; Kozinets, 2002). In particular, some online consumption communities are places in which members express themselves artistically (Maria & Finotto, 2008), engage in brand-related civic duties (Muñiz & Schau, 2005; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009), or exchange creative knowledge (Cova & Pace, 2006; Sicilia & Palazón, 2008). This is the case with Etsy, as members help to shape the culture through their participation within it and social interaction through it based on shared values and ideals, such as the importance of craft and craft production.

In summary, culture fosters socially-constructed values and ideals that are shared by members, which encourages interaction and relationship-building between these members (Scott & Marshall, 2009). The cultivation of these relationships can and often does lead to the development of a community, while in turn, community members bond over the values and ideals that are tied back to the culture. As a result, such values and ideals shape the identity of the community. To further explore the reflexivity of this relationship, the concept of community is explored in depth within the next section.

Community

Over the centuries, philosophers and researchers have speculated and debated about how large-scale population growth, technology, and the modernization of society would influence community (Bruhn, 2011). It appears that the question was first documented in 655 B.C. in the Book of Jeremiah. In his writings, Jeremiah posed the question of whether or not the growth of large societies would serve to weaken community bonds (Bruhn, 2011). Confucius and Plato continued the discussion, but despite such early speculations, the debate was not formalized within academia until the latter part of the nineteenth century (Bruhn, 2011). During this time, European philosophers, scholars, and theorists such as Friedrich Engels (1844/1958), Karl Marx (1848/1972), Ferdinand Tönnies (1887), Émile Durkheim (1893/1964), and Max Weber (1922/1978) began to contemplate how the technological advancements arising from the Industrial Revolution would influence social interaction, relationships, and ultimately, communities (Bruhn, 2011; Kendall & Wickham, 2001).

The Development of Thought Regarding Community

The Industrial Revolution generated a demand for large numbers of factory workers. Inadequate transportation to and from villages and towns required mill workers to live in close proximity to these facilities, which resulted in the rise of urban living (Donnellan, 2007; Tortora & Eubank, 2010). However, urban living conditions were drastically different from what the workers were used to. In contrast to living in a village or town, in an urban setting individuals had to develop relationships based on necessity, rather than kinship ties. In short, bonds among urban community members were formed

to fulfill such needs as emotional support or the acquisition of goods to sustain life in the urban environment (Bruhn, 2011).

Scholars of this period focused on how urban life altered social interactions, relationships, and culture as a means to theorize about how these changes would affect the development of community over time (Bruhn, 2011). Although some recognized the benefits of these changes for the individual, all agreed that in one way or another they would be detrimental to community life (Bernard, 1973; Bruhn, 2011; Marcelin, 2006). Specifically, some scholars believed that urbanization and the concomitant shifts in societal norms would have varying effects on society, and, in turn, community. For instance, Durkheim (1893/1964) believed that individuals could manage the complexities of urban life to develop communities, but was concerned with how urbanization would change their values. In contrast, George Simmel (1905/1964), and Tönnies (1887) viewed urbanization and cultural shifts as threats to human development that would ultimately harm the solidarity of the community. Marx (1848/1972) and Engels (1848/1972) agreed, and proposed a solution to alleviate the negative effects of urbanization on community life that involved replacing the Capitalist economy with a Socialist one (as cited in Almgren, 2001). Lastly, Weber (1922/1978, 1930/1989) examined several cities and countries to develop generalizable theories about urbanization, and in turn developed the ideal type of city as the “full urban community.” Similar to his contemporaries, Weber did not fully accept the idea that modern urbanization meant a healthy or vital community life that was beneficial to individuals.

The next wave in sociological thought on the topic of community emerged from American scholars associated with the Human Ecology movement in sociology (Bruhn, 2011). The human ecology paradigm of research was less theoretical than that of the early works of European sociologists (Bruhn, 2011; Marcelin, 2006). Scholars from the Chicago School, such as Park (1925) and Wirth (1938) examined how individuals interacted and formed bonds and social relationships within their natural social environments (as cited in Almgren, 2001). In contrast to the Europeans, American scholars studied communities by engaging with them, rather than theorizing about them from afar (Marcelin, 2006).

As the Human Ecology paradigm began to fade out, a focus on social class, structure, systems, and power began to emerge as a stream within the community literature (Drake & Clayton, 1945; Warner, 1941; Whyte, 1955). For instance, Hunter's (1953) seminal work discovered the extent to which different power structures existed within local communities. Yet it would not be until the social movements of the 1960s that ideas of what makes for a community would begin to change (Bruhn, 2011).

The Question of Boundaries

Within the early literature on the concept of community there was an underlying assumption that a community is defined only by geographic boundaries. Scholars such as Tönnies (1887), Durkheim (1893/1964), and Whyte (1955) adopted traditional notions of what makes for a community, asserting that communities are reliant on strong ties among members and bound by geographic territories (Almgren, 2001). These assumptions began to shift with the social revolution of the 1960s, and have since been further developed due

to advancements in social network analysis research. Rather than associating modernization and technology with a depleted community, scholars began to assert that community existed and even flourished beyond any set territorial constraints (Marcelin, 2006).

Against a backdrop of the Civil Rights movement and student-lead protests, scholars posited that assemblies of individuals constituted community formation. In as much as these individuals shared values, ideals, and goals that fostered social bonds and attachment, they formed communities that were driven by a passion for social change across a nation (Marcelin, 2006). This perspective shed light on how modernization and technology might actually facilitate, rather than constrain, the notion of community within large-scale societies. That is, the affordances of modern society fostered a social environment wherein people could easily connect with others through shared interests, forge social bonds, and ultimately create communities (Keller, 2003; Marcelin, 2006).

Shortly after scholars posited the “discovery” that community can exist without physical boundaries, advancements in computing technology in the field of social network analysis generated another kind of perspective on community (Wellman & Leighton, 1979). Researchers like Wellman and Craven (1973) began using social network analysis to investigate the social connections that take place within community involvement, resulting in the “networks as communities” perspective (Rheingold, 1993; Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Wellman & Craven, 1973). This new perspective freed the concept of community from the temporal and geographical boundaries set by the more traditional notion of community accepted by previous scholars (Bruhn, 2011). The

networks as community perspective also encouraged a more cross-disciplinary study of the topic of community, which lead to the development of models from disciplines other than sociology, such as communication studies and, as will be discussed later, consumer research.

Networks as communities. The networks as communities perspective asserts that network connections provide the actual foundation of a community; therefore a community is not always shaped by necessity or constrained to a particular place (Rheingold, 1993; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Networks are conceptualized as social connections or ties formed between individuals that make up “a specific set of linkages among persons or larger social units, like organizations, family, or a corporation” (Wellman, 1999, p. 8).

According to the literature, there are four tenets that guide the networks as communities perspective. The first tenet is that individuals are members of multiple communities at one time (Studdert, 2005; Wellman, 1999). Support for this can be found in the idea that in modern society, individuals adopt multiple social roles, prompting them to join different communities to satisfy the social needs of these roles. For instance, a doctoral student may also be a crafter of handmade jewelry. To satisfy these social roles the student might join a craft-based community, such as Etsy.

One outcome of membership in multiple communities is the formation of specialized relationships. This is the second tenet of the networks as communities perspective, known as personalized communities (Wellman, 1999). For example, a member of Etsy may also form specialized relationships and communicate with a small

circle of members, such as an Etsy Teams. Over time, an individual's specialized relationships create a web of relationships connecting various communities together and forming that individual's personalized community (Bruhn, 2011; Wellman, 1999).

Multiple community memberships, along with advancements in communication technologies, have resulted in loosely-knit communities, particularly those without geographic boundaries (Granovetter, 1973). As such, the third tenet asserts that communities can exist free of temporal and geographic constraints. This includes the advent of online communities (Marcelin, 2006; Rheingold, 1993). For example, an Etsy member can belong to an offline Etsy Team located in Raleigh, North Carolina, while being an active member of an Etsy Team that is exclusively online. Indeed, according to Wellman (1999), "analysts should be able to find community wherever it exists" (p. 18).

The last tenet supports the notion that community exists even when membership is not driven by a united sentiment. Instead, varying dimensions of shared values and ideals can unite members (Wellman, 1999). Within a community, there are often multiple reasons for an individual's membership and participation, and despite differences among members, a community can function as a supportive place that fosters social connections (Rheingold, 1993; Wellman, 1999). For instance, individuals join Etsy to sell a wide variety of products, from homemade muffins to screen-printing supplies. Despite the differences that prompt membership and participation, Etsy members form social bonds and build relationships, resulting in a community. It is interesting to note that some suggest that modern network communities are actually more sociable than those that are geographically bound (Bruhn, 2011).

The four tenets of the networks as communities perspective reflect the differences between this perspective and more traditional perspectives on community (Rheingold, 2003; Wellman, 1999). Specifically, the networks as community perspective proposes a broader notion of community and one that is illustrative of how technology and the modernization of society have positively impacted community development. As Wellman, a well-known scholar of community states,

I define community as networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging, and social identity. I do not limit my thinking about community to neighborhoods and villages. This is good advice for any epoch and especially pertinent for the twenty-first century (as cited in Rheingold, 2003, p. 129).

Moreover, the rediscovery of community that emerged from the social movements of the 1960s, along with research in social network analysis suggest that "...community continues to have a magical ring. Modernity, for all its technological wonders, has not managed to dispel the need for it" (Keller, 2003, p. 9).

The networks as communities perspective has been adopted in studies of communities that exist online as well as those that are offline. For instance, Gruzd, Wellman, and Takhteyev (2011) adopted the networks as communities perspective to examine whether a sense of community existed in the social media site Twitter. The authors employed social network analysis in the examination of Twitter feeds. Findings from this study revealed that despite Twitter's asynchronous relationship-building format, which does not allow users to engage in direct face-to-face contact, users can and do develop personal communities.

Capecea and Costa (2013) applied the concept of networks as communities to determine the relationship between a local community's use of social media to facilitate online interactions and the effect that these interactions had on the overall community. The researchers distributed a survey to examine members' face-to-face participation in community activities, involvement in community-developed social networking sites, and their overall sense of community. Findings revealed that when a social networking site is used to generate conversation between members, it enhances their overall sense of community. In contrast, a social networking site did not enhance members' overall sense of community when used only to disseminate information (Capecea & Costa, 2013).

Imagined communities. Granovetter (1973) and other scholars have asserted that community is not restricted to temporal boundaries, but instead is more about the strength of its ties, including loosely-formed relationships (Anderson, 1983; Wellman, 1999). For instance, in *Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Anderson (1983) argues against the traditional definition of community in favor of the idea that community can be imagined. He frames his argument within a discussion about Nationalism because, "...members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in their minds each lives the image of their communion" (p. 15). In other words, for Anderson, a community does not have to rest solely on face-to-face interactions that take place within set geographic boundaries.

The imagined communities perspective also supports the idea that community can exist within a digital space (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). In contrast to the networks as

community perspective, the idea of the community as imagined is not subject to specific principles (Wellman, 1999). Instead, this perspective holds that individuals do not necessarily have to interact with all members or engage in all facets of a community to know that the community exists (Anderson, 1983). For instance, a member of Etsy knows that Etsy exists as a community and recognizes his/her role as a member of that community, even though his/her social interaction may be limited to a few members.

In his discussion of community, Anderson states that a community should not be defined “by [its] falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which [it is] imagined” (p. 15). As such, the focus should be on values and ideals shared by members, as these elements represent how they envision their community. Moreover, Anderson (1983) posits that one should not use preexisting notions of community to define or investigate the presence of community. Instead an investigation of community should focus on how members define community for themselves.

In the field of consumer behavior, scholars have adopted this perspective to examine community relative to consumption. In particular, this perspective was adopted by Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001) in their article *Brand Community*, as a means to examine the prevalence and characteristics of communities that bond over branded products and services, whether online or offline. In subsequent research, Carlson, Suter, and Brown (2008) applied Anderson’s imagined community concept to extend that of Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001) by identifying the difference between a social brand community and a psychological one. In particular, the authors assert that as imagined communities,

psychological brand communities exist, wherein members share a psychological sense of community around a brand despite having limited or no social interaction.

Characteristics of Community

Scholars have investigated communities of various origins and contexts to identify the commonalities that exist among them. Three such studies in particular have had a great deal of impact in the development of certain characteristics, or “markers” that capture the idea of what makes for a community. In 1955, Hillery reviewed a myriad of community definitions to identify the commonalities they shared. From 1967 to 2001, Keller conducted an ethnographic study of the birth and maturity of a suburban community to identify the core characteristics of a community. In 2001, Muñiz and O’Guinn reviewed the sociological literature on community to identify the most commonly recognized characteristics defining community. Each of the three studies is discussed in turn within this section.

By conducting a meta-analysis of 94 community studies, Hillery (1955) sought to determine the various characteristics used to define what makes for a “community.” Hillery identified three characteristics shared among all definitions: (1) *social interaction*, (2) *common ties*, and (3) *area*. According to Hillery’s analysis, social interaction, or member-to-member contact, facilitates the exchange of ideas and builds member-to-member relationships. Thus social interaction is vital to community life. In addition, social interaction provides the opportunity for individuals to bond over commonalities and form common ties that create the community. Lastly, according to Hillery, social interaction and common ties occur within a specific geographic area or territory.

Obviously, Hillery's study was conducted before the digital age, therefore face-to-face interaction within a particular physical area was the norm.

Keller (2003) conducted an in-depth ethnographic study of a planned urban development called *Twin Rivers*, located in East Windsor, New Jersey, by observing it from its founding in 1967 to full maturity in 2001. Using a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods, Keller explored such questions as *What motivates people to join a community? What causes a community to develop, and How is community maintained?* By examining the birth and maturity of a single community, Keller synthesized major developments in its lifespan to establish an in-depth understanding of "...the process by which thousands of strangers become bound to one another and come to realize that their individual fates are joined, their lives intertwined" (p. 71).

A key contribution of Keller's ethnographic study is the development of ten "constant elements" of community. According to Keller, these elements are: (1) bound site of territory and turf; (2) criteria of membership; (3) an institutional framework of laws and rules; (4) a set of values emphasizing cooperation, mutual responsibility, and sharing; (5) a belief system; (6) a myth of community embodied in images, ideals, aspirations and goals; (7) shared rituals and celebrations; (8) leadership and structure; (9) social relationships that are personal, direct, responsive, and trusting; and (10) transcendent purposes and goals captured by "the spirit of community" (p. 32).

Similar to Hillery (1955), Keller's (2003) "ten constant elements" of community were premised on face-to-face community interaction. Yet Keller asserted that these elements could also encompass what was, at that time, the emerging study of virtual

communities. However, because both authors' characteristics and elements of community emerged from physical rather than virtual communities, neither fully take into account the notion that a community can be conceptualized as a network (Wellman, 1999) or be imagined (Anderson, 1983). As a result, the characteristics they provide fall short when applied within a digital setting. Moreover, while succinct, Hillery's characteristics are too broad to address the layers of complexity that exist beyond the fundamental elements of a community.

In contrast to Hillery (1955) and Keller (2003), Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) supported the premise that a community can exist online and offline or via a combination of both. Subsequently, many scholars have adopted the characteristics of community that were identified by the authors in their seminal article titled *Brand Community* (2001). In this study, the authors conducted an extensive review of the sociology literature to identify core community "commonalities" and found three that were most common: "consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility" (p. 412). Adapted from Gusfield (1978) and Weber (1922/1978, 1930/1989), consciousness of kind is a shared understanding that members possess which creates a sense of belonging and collectiveness uniting them and leading to community development. Rituals and traditions are shared practices and activities that embody and reinforce a community's culture, which includes members' shared values, ideals and consciousness of kind (Douglas & Isherwood 1979; Durkheim, 1912/1965). Lastly, community members must possess a sense of moral responsibility, that is, an intrinsic caring for other members and for the community as whole. The authors then couched these characteristics

within Anderson's (1983) perspective of imagined communities to encompass both online and offline communities. They then applied these characteristics to develop the concept of a "brand community" or, "[a] specialized, non-geographically bound community-driven on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412).

Many scholars have since used Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001) community characteristics to investigate the breadth and depth of different types of brand-related communities (c.f. Acosta & Devasagayam, 2010; Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008; Hassay & Pelosa, 2009; Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006). For example, Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2006) conducted a two-year, qualitative investigation of anti-consumption to explore the "darker side" of brand communities. Findings from their study revealed the existence of anti-brand communities, or groups of consumers that form social bonds over a strong dislike for a brand (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006). As another example, in 2007, Martin and Collier applied Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001) characteristics of community to investigate the concept of a brand collective. Findings from this study identified a brand collective as a group of consumers that share an interest in a brand without engaging in any form of social interaction or communication. Finally, in 2010, Acosta and Devasagayam applied the community characteristics outlined by Muñiz and O'Guinn to explore the concept of a brand cult. Findings from their study identified brand cults as groups of consumers who bond over a brand, but exhibit higher degrees of connectedness, brand following, and consumer conformity than a brand community.

Although findings of these studies are significant, research exploring consumption and community has been limited by the fact that most employ only one frame of reference, specifically that of Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001). Although these studies explain a great deal about brand communities, collectively they do not shed much light on community and consumption beyond the product-related, mass-marketed brand context. As a result, research that examines the interplay of consumption and community beyond Muñiz and O’Guinn’s (2001) sociological framework is needed.

In sum, researchers within the field of sociology and consumer behavior have identified the primary characteristics that define communities. A common point of difference between these perspectives is the importance placed on members’ engagement in face-to-face interaction. As discussed, a requirement of Hillery’s (1955) community characteristics is that members interact face-to-face, whereas Muñiz and O’Guinn’s (2001) characteristics allow for face-to-face as well as virtual interaction. In subsequent research, the characteristics offered by these three key studies have been applied to the development of models, or types of community. A discussion of the different types, or models, specific to online and consumption-based communities comprises the next section.

Community Models

Community models are used to classify and identify communities that share the above-mentioned defining community characteristics. In particular, four models will be explored here: (1) the online community model (Kozinets, 2010; Rheingold, 1993/2003), (2) the consumption community model (Boorstin, 1973; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998),

(3) the new consumption community model (Szmigin & Carrigan, 2003), as well as (4) the brand community model (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). As each consumption-related community model is introduced, pertinent studies are discussed and gaps in the research are identified.

Online communities. As with the term “community” in general, a myriad of definitions exist for Internet-based communities, including *online community*, *virtual community*, and *cyber community*. According to Rheingold (1993/2003) a seminal scholar of virtual communities, Internet-based communities are defined as “social aggregations that emerge from the [Internet] when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (p. 5). Based on this definition, two distinct characteristics of online communities are assumed: (1) they exist mainly in a virtual space, and (2) members connect via computer-mediated communications (Rheingold, 2003). Members use computer-mediated communication to facilitate conversation as well as construct and maintain group relationships within the network (Kozinets, 2010; Rheingold, 2003).

Online communities often rely on several different forms of computer-mediated communication, including electronic forums, e-mail, instant messaging, message boards, and virtual networks such as Facebook (Kozinets, 2002; Rheingold, 2003). The dynamic, fast, and convenient nature of computer-mediated communication allows individuals to quickly connect with one another, regardless of time or geographic distance. Consequently, individuals often belong to several online communities at one time because this offers a means of maintaining several connections and fulfilling various

social contact needs (Felix, 2012; Kozinets, 2010). As technology continues to advance, it is likely that this characteristic of virtual communities will be strengthened (Wellman, 1999).

According to Rheingold, “there is no such thing as a single, monolithic, online subculture; it’s more like an ecosystem of subcultures, some frivolous, others serious” (1993, p. 3). Similarly, there is no single “online community.” Instead, there are many different communities, each reflecting a different purpose and means for drawing community members together. Perhaps the most common type of online community at present is the online consumption community (Felix, 2012; Kozinets, 2010).

Consumption communities. Within consumer behavior research, the study of community relative to consumption has come to be known as “consumption community research,” a term coined by Boorstin in his 1973 publication *The Americans*. In this text, Boorstin draws the conclusion that the mobility of present-day life has caused citizens to turn toward their neighborhoods to find a sense of community. More importantly, Boorstin recognizes that citizens within these neighborhoods also engage in communal consumption behaviors, forming what he called “consumption communities.”

Although the concept of consumption community was introduced in 1973, the study of community and consumption within consumer behavior did not emerge until the early 1990s (Arnould & Price, 1993; Goodwin, 1994). Early studies on community and consumption within the field of consumer behavior argued the need for a sociological perspective, and for the use of ethnographic approaches in particular. This was achieved when Cova (1997) conducted an ethno-sociological study of community and

consumption to establish how postmodernity influenced social links, community, and consumption. The author posited that in a postmodern world “goods and services which are valued are mainly those which, through their linking value, permit and support social interaction of the communal type” (Cova, 1997, p. 305). As such, goods and services connect consumers based on their admiration for or value they place on particular goods and services. Cova builds on this thesis, stating that in the postmodern world, community and consumption are becoming intertwined, to the extent that this can be described as “tribal consumption,” wherein consumers satisfy their desires for community by seeking out products and services specifically for their linking value. Moreover, Cova (1997) established that modernization has forced an individual to fulfill several roles, each of which requires a different “consumption mask.” As a result, such individuals may belong to several different communities or consumption “tribes.” A key conclusion drawn from Cova’s (1997) analysis was that marketers should emphasize how products and services provide value by supporting such communities.

Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) further shaped the idea of consumption and community. The authors investigated consumer brand experiences, particularly the interpretation of brand messages through advertisements. A key conclusion drawn from this study was that “individuals form an interpretative community, not purely by demographic or psychographic factors but their shared interpretation of the meaning of the advertisement” (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998, p. 140).

According to the literature, most consumption communities share four key characteristics: (1) they are socially linked via consumption of goods and services, (2)

community members shape consumption experiences, (3) community members interpret and agree upon brand messages, philosophies or ideologies related to the production and consumption of goods and services, and (4) members may belong to several different consumption communities (Cova, 1997; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Thomas, Schau, & Price, 2011). It is also important to note that the term *consumption community* is used as an all-encompassing concept, including the consumption of both commercial as well as non-commercial goods, such as Nutella spread or Warhammer (a “strategic battle game”) as well as ideologies and philosophies related to the production and consumption of goods, such as the notion of Fair Trade (Cova & Pace, 2006; Cova, Pace, & Park, 2007; Thomas, Schau, & Price, 2011).

In 2011, Thomas, Schau, and Price (2011) built on the existing consumption community literature by defining the differences between various types of consumption communities, also referred to as “consumption collectives.” The authors define consumption collectives broadly as “...groups of consumers who self-select into a group that shares a commitment to a product class, brand, consumption activity, or consumer-based ideology” (Thomas, Schau, & Price, 2011, p. 271). The authors argue that all communities that bond over consumption, such as brand communities and brand cults, are not the same, but in fact are different types of consumption communities. The authors further argue that previous studies have not established well-defined parameters around the different types. Thus, the authors developed eight dimensions to classify and clarify the differences between types of consumption communities. For instance, brand

communities can be classified and differentiated by the “degree to which they center on a brand, activity, or ideology” (Thomas, Schau, & Price, 2011, p. 272).

Another stream of research on consumption communities has identified and established a conceptual extension of the concept, known as “new consumption communities.” New consumption communities are consumption collectives that exhibit consumption behaviors and habits counter to mainstream culture (Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2005, 2007; Szmigin & Carrigan, 2003). In the seminal article, *New Consumption Communities: Resisting the Hegemony of the Marketing Process*, Szmigin and Carrigan (2003) introduce and establish the idea of new consumption communities by conducting an exploratory investigation of two counter-culture consumption communities: *Ithaca Hours* and *Garstang Fair Trade Town*. The former is a trading community in the United States and the latter a town in the United Kingdom. The authors conclude that the consumption activities of these two communities are counter-cultural in nature yet reflect the concept of a new consumption community. For instance, in the *Ithaca Hours* community, members generate their own methods for the production and exchange of goods. Members work for *Ithaca Hours*, a currency system that places value on the hours worked, rather than the end product of the work. Members in this community create a catalogue of goods for exchange, which are sold only for *Ithaca Hours*. As a result, the value of an item is reflective of a tangible concept—the time required to produce the good—rather than an abstract concept, such as aesthetics or brand name. Ultimately, the authors drew the following conclusions about these two counter-culture consumption communities: (1) members question the current marketing and

business systems representative of large corporations, (2) members are concerned about others, the community, and/or environment, and are looking to better the world or some type of consumption system, and (3) the communities are typically confined to a physical location (rather than online). Moreover, the authors conclude that while new consumption communities are making small-scale localized changes, they are also having a trickle-up effect on the status quo in the consumption of goods. This effect has become apparent in, for example, increased transparency between producer and consumer reflected in the growing popularity of Fair Trade and organic products.

Although the literature on brand communities is quite extensive and covers a wide array of communities and consumption topics, to date, very few studies have examined service-based brand communities (Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008; Dholakia, & Vianello, 2010; Hede & Kellett, 2012; Yen, Hsu, & Haung, 2011). The overwhelming majority of consumption and community studies examine product-based brand communities, or those formed based on a shared admiration for a material good, such as the Mini Cooper or the Nutella brand (e.g., Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; de Almeida, Dholakia, & Vianello, 2007; Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006; Lüedicke, 2006; Matzler, Pichler, Füller, & Mooradian, 2011; McAlexander, Koenig, & Schouten, 2005; Muñoz & O'Guinn, 2001; O'Sullivan, Richardson, & Collins, 2011; Schau, Muñoz, & Arnould, 2009; Schouten, McAlexander, & Koenig, 2007). Furthermore, to date, no studies have specifically examined the relationship between community and consumption within electronic markets such as eBay or Etsy. That is, the literature has yet to address how consumers develop social bonds, and over time, communities, relative to electronic markets. This

dissertation addresses these gaps in the literature by exploring how social bonds are formed through the consumption of a service-based electronic market, and one that also provides material goods to end users.

In a similar vein, recent consumption community research has focused on the role of lifestyle, specifically alternative lifestyles that are associated with new consumption communities (Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2005, 2007; Moraes, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2012). For example, one study by Bekin, Carrigan, and Szmigin (2005) focused on consumers that partake in “voluntary simplicity” by engaging in alternative, eco-friendly consumption decisions (Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2005). Very little research has focused on the concept of new consumption communities in the digital space, and to date no research has investigated consumption and community relative to an electronic market. In as much as a key characteristic of new consumption communities is physical locality (Szmigin & Carrigan, 2003), it is important to explore how online communication and markets may influence or be employed by new consumption communities.

Brand communities. Over the last twelve years, brand community research has become a dominant stream within consumer research. As discussed earlier, the concept of brand community was originally developed by Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001) in their seminal article *Brand Community*. The authors conducted an ethnographic and netnographic study of three brand communities (Ford Bronco, Apple and Saab) to investigate and define the brand community concept. The authors describe a brand community as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a

structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. It is specialized because at its center is a branded good or service” (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412). Through the study, the authors argue that online and offline brand communities exhibit the same characteristics of community, which, as discussed earlier, consist of shared consciousness, a sense of moral responsibility, as well as rituals and traditions.

Since the introduction of the brand community, research has applied as well as further developed the concept (Madupu & Krishnan, 2008; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koeing, 2002). For example, in 2002, McAlexander, Schouten, and Koeing broadened the brand community concept with the introduction of a consumer-centric model of brand community. This model extended Muñiz and O’Guinn’s (2001) original notion that social relationships within brand communities were fostered by a common interest in the brand. Moving beyond the brand, McAlexander et al.’s (2002) study concluded that consumers can form social relationships within brand communities over an admiration for people as well as products. That is, consumers participate in brand communities for the relationships they form not only with the brand, but with other consumers as well as marketers. The authors went on to develop a scale to classify brand community members based on these relationships.

In 2005, Muñiz and Schau conducted a netnographic study of Apple’s Newton brand community, a community of consumers that continued to congregate despite the discontinuation of the Newton product. Findings revealed that this product had supernatural, religious, and magical undertones, which the authors suggest creates a transformative experience. The authors posit consumers’ motivations to join brand

communities may include, but extend beyond, admiration for the brand, a product, or people. That is, members may join brand communities for a “new” consumption experience that “remystifies community” (p. 476).

Madupu and Krishnan (2008) as well as Madupu and Cooley (2010) have developed and refined a scale to capture the dimensions inherent to a brand community and identify common brand community characteristics. The scale is based largely on Muñiz and O’Guinn’s (2001) description of these characteristics. For instance, *consciousness of kind* captures member’s attachment to and identification with the brand community, as well as degree of similarity members’ feel they have with the brand community. *Shared rituals and traditions* are captured by community members’ identification of words and symbols that represent the community as well as the recognition of community norms and conventions. Last, the *sense of moral responsibility* is captured by identifying members’ obligation to the community and its members.

As a whole, much brand community research has been dedicated to understanding the perceptions and motivations of members (c.f., Dholakia & Bagozzi, 2004; Dholakia & Vianello, 2011; Madupu & Cooley, 2010; Matzler, Pichler, Füller, & Mooradian, 2011; O’Donnell & Brown, 2012; Ouwersloot & Odekerken-Schröde, 2006; Schau & Muñiz, 2002). For instance, *Personality, Person–Brand Fit, and Brand Community: An Investigation of Individuals, Brands, and Brand Communities* by Matzler, Pichler, Füller, and Mooradian (2011) examined the relationships between personality traits, brand attachment, brand trust, brand loyalty, and identification among brand community members. Findings revealed that extroverted individuals were more likely to identify with

a brand community. Moreover, those who identified themselves as “members” exhibited more trust and loyalty to the brand as compared to those who did not see themselves as “members.”

Madupu and Cooley’s (2010) cross-cultural study examined the differences in motivations for joining brand communities among consumers in India and the United States. Findings revealed that both groups were motivated to join brand communities to satisfy desires for information sharing and enhancing their material status, as well as to meet social interaction and self-discovery needs.

Schau and Muñiz (2002) conducted a qualitative study to investigate how members of brand communities use membership and participation as a means to manage their online identities. The authors reviewed the personal webpages of 88 members within five different brand communities (Apple, Harley Davidson, Saab, Tom Petty, and Xena Warrior Princess). Findings from the study indicated that participants used brand community membership to manage their online personal identities in four ways: (1) to subsume identity, or hide their identity behind that of the brand and brand community, (2) as the super member, or members who identify themselves as true fans of the brand and brand community, (3) the community membership as identity component, or those members whose identities overpower their identification with the brand community, and (4) multiple memberships, or members who identify with multiple brand communities.

Consumers are the cornerstones of brand communities, generating content and engaging in activities that foster and maintain a sense of community around a brand (Dholakia & Vianello, 2011; Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). As a result, brand community

research has focused on discovering who these consumers are and what motivates them to participate in brand communities. Yet, despite extensive research in this area, very little attention has been paid to how some members have dual roles as both consumer and producer, also known as the Prosumer. This is an important consideration, as brand community research has shown that Prosumers are potentially a valuable resource for collaboration between a brand and its community (Füller, Matzler, & Hoppe, 2008; Kim, Bae, & Kang, 2008; Maria & Finotto, 2008; Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Wu & Fang, 2010). Moreover, collaboration between a brand and its community has been proven to be a lucrative and efficient way to innovate on existing products (de Almeida, Dholakia, & Vianello, 2007).

In a similar vein, even though the literature on brand community membership is quite extensive (Acosta & Devasagayam, 2010; Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008; Madupu & Cooley, 2010; O'Donnell & Brown, 2012), to date, only one study has examined the meaning of brand community through members' online interactions (Cova & Pace, 2006). In an online context, it is important to consider the extent to which the visual component of community interactions, such as websites and social networking site pages, may act as extensions of the community's ideals, values, aspirations, beliefs, and goals (Belk, 1998; Keller, 2003; Kozinets, 2010).

Academic and industry research has focused a great deal on the investigation of the marketing implications of engaging in consumer-generated and corporate sponsored brand communities (de Almeida, Dholakia, & Vianello, 2007; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Woisetschlager, Hartleb, & Blut, 2008). A customer-generated brand

community is created and maintained by brand enthusiasts (de Almeida, Dholakia, & Vianello, 2007; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Woisetschlager, Hartleb, & Blut, 2008). In contrast, a company-sponsored brand community is created and maintained by the brand's parent company, relying on consumers to interact with one another to generate a sense of community around the brand (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Thus, most studies have focused on identifying attributes that enhance brand community value such as customer loyalty (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinaliú, 2007, 2010; Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh, & Kim, 2008; Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012; Marzocchi, Morandin, & Bergami, 2013; Shang, Chen, & Liao, 2006), trust (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012; Marzocchi, Morandin, & Bergami, 2013), satisfaction (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinaliú, 2010; Royo-Vela & Casamassima, 2011), and word of mouth (Alagöz, Nezahat, & Samii, 2011; Royo-Vela & Casamassima, 2011; Shang, Chen, & Liao, 2006; Yeh & Choi, 2011).

For instance, in *How to Make Brand Communities Work: Antecedents and Consequences of Consumer Participation*, Woisetschlager, Hartleb, and Blut (2008) examined a corporate-sponsored Volkswagen brand community to determine how members' feelings towards the brand community influence their participation in it, and how this participation influences word of mouth, loyalty and dedication to the brand community. Structural equation modeling revealed that community members' identification, satisfaction, and perceived control over the brand community positively influenced their brand community participation. Further, participation positively influenced word-of-mouth and brand image, as well as reinforced loyalty to the brand

community. This study concluded that members with a strong desire to interact with the community engage in more word-of-mouth behaviors and have a stronger effect on brand image (Woisetschlager, Hartleb, & Blut, 2008).

Brand community research has also focused on the implications of marketing for engaging in consumer-generated and company-sponsored brand communities (c.f., Adjei, Noble, & Noble, 2009; Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013). For instance, in *Social Media Brand Community and Consumer Behavior: Quantifying the Relative Impact of User- and Marketer-Generated Content* (Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013), the authors conduct a two-part study to determine how consumer comments posted on a social media site versus those posted by a company effect purchase intentions. In the first part of the study, the authors conducted a content analysis, using text mining to differentiate between consumer- and company-generated comments and to classify the comments as informative, persuasive, direct, or indirect. Next, they used a model to determine participants' weekly spending. Using the extracted data, the authors ran a series mathematical models, from which they concluded that both company and consumer comments influence brand community members' purchase intentions. However, consumer-generated comments had more influence over purchase intentions as compared to company-generated comments. Moreover, consumer-generated comments were more influential in purchase decisions when comments were indirect, whereas company-generated comments were more influential when they were direct.

Recently, academics and practitioners have recognized that brand communities not only add value to a brand by generating positive word-of-mouth and revenue, but are

also an invaluable resource for product development and innovation (Füller, Matzler, & Hoppe, 2008; Kim, Bae, & Kang, 2008; Maria & Finotto, 2008; Muñoz & Schau, 2007; Pongsakornrunsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Wu & Fang, 2010). Füller, Matzler, and Hoppe (2008) approached the topic of brand communities as a source of information for product development and innovation. The authors sought to better understand what influences brand community members' willingness to engage in product innovation with a brand. The authors studied the Volkswagen Golf GTI brand community to determine how members' creativity, knowledge, trust, and identity influence their willingness to engage in product innovation. Findings indicated that creativity and brand trust most influenced members' willingness to engage in product innovation, whereas brand identity and knowledge did not.

Kim, Bae and Kang (2008) conducted a case study of Korean MP3 players and mobile handset brand communities to identify members who engaged with businesses during the development of new products and to determine the roles they played. The authors concluded that brand community members identified as "trendsetters," "innovators," or "early adopters" were used most often during the product development process. Moreover, trendsetters, innovators and early adopters were often called upon to provide information and insight during the various stages of product development, including idea generation, product development and testing, marketing and launching. The authors concluded that collaboration with brand community members provides marketers and product developers with valuable information, as these members offer insight into consumer likes, dislikes, needs, and desires, as well as emerging trends.

Several brand community studies have examined members' use of online communication tools, such as social media, to facilitate community interaction and carry out community-related activities (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Kim, Bae, & Kang, 2008; Woisetschlager, Hartleb, & Blut, 2008). At the same time, marketers have adopted various forms of social media to facilitate interaction between consumers and a particular brand (i.e., "liking" a brand on Facebook). Consequently, the focus tends to be on communities that exist solely online. Yet it is becoming more common for online communities to move into the offline area, interacting and meeting with members of the online community in offline settings (Kozinets, 2010; The Digital Research Report, 2008). Although Etsy is not a brand community *per se*, this dissertation addresses this gap in the literature by investigating both online and offline interactions among members, thereby providing an understanding of how community members engage in an online consumption community that extends into the offline environment.

As is clearly seen here, within the field of Consumer Behavior the majority of consumption and community research falls under the guise of brand communities as defined by Muñiz and O'Guinn (Thomas, Price, & Schau, 2013). Although there has been a lot of research done on the topic, findings remain fairly narrow in scope. Thus, this dissertation attempts to broaden the knowledge base by going beyond the notion of a brand community in its exploration of Etsy as an online consumption community. Moreover, this dissertation positions the concept of community and consumption within a markets context, which permits a conceptual broadening of the concept that will ultimately provide a better understanding of Etsy.

Markets

Although there are a myriad of perspectives on the function and structure of markets within the disciplines of Sociology as well as Marketing, one idea shared by all is that a market serves as a place for social interaction between *market actors* (Aspers, 2008; Beckert, 2009; Fourcade, 2007). That is, markets “[P]rovide a social structure and institutional order for the voluntary exchange of rights in goods and services, which allow actors to evaluate, purchase, and sell these rights” (Beckert, 2009, p. 248). Market actors are generally classified into two primary roles: producers, or those who create and sell goods, and consumers, or those who evaluate and purchase goods (Fourcade, 2007). However, in some markets the roles of producer and consumer converge, resulting in a third market actor known as the Prosumer (Kotler, 1986).

Although market actors are united by a common interest—the exchange of goods—multiple opportunities for exchange creates competition among them (Beckert, 2009). Consequently, markets exist whenever there is competition (Beckert, 2009). New technologies will typically increase market competition (Sterlacci & Arbuckle, 2008). Indeed, the technologies of the digital age, coupled with globalization, have created intense market competition, especially in the apparel industry (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010; Ruiz, 2012). In particular, online retailing, a relatively new location for market exchange, has become characterized by intense competition (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010). As with offline retailing, the online retail platform provides a place where market actors can exchange goods as well as engage in social interaction related to this exchange.

Online Retailing

Since the mid-1990s, online shopping has become the fastest growing sector of Internet usage and a topic that has engaged the attention of a wide variety of academic and industry researchers (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010; Smith, 2012; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003). Retailers have flocked to the online channel for the benefits and opportunities afforded by the quick and efficient nature of digital communications, such as access to a larger customer base, increased market reach (Pannuzio, 2008; Zhang, Zhang, & Hung, 2010), as well as the potential to enhance customer-, internal-, and business-related operations communications (Pannuzio, 2008).

As discussed in Chapter I, over the past twenty years three phases of change characterize the development of online retailing. The first phase was comprised of the introduction and demise of most pure-play retailers, or those that sold goods solely online (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010; Pfeifer & Zinnbauer, 2010). The pure-play retailers that survived were the pure-play electronic markets, such as eBay and Amazon, or those sites that did not rely solely on the purchase of end products, but instead accrued additional revenue by charging customers fees for selling their goods (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010; Pfeifer & Zinnbauer, 2010). The second phase involved the entry of well-established retail brand websites, such as JCrew.com. These retailers used the online platform to diversify their channel offerings, increase sales, and expand their customer base (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010). The third and most recent phase of change in online retailing is consumer's adoption of smartphone technologies, which has prompted

pure-play and branded retailers to adopt mobile online shopping platforms (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010).

Research indicates that the influx of smartphone technologies has significantly increased mobile shopping and browsing behavior (Crutchfield, 2013; Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010; Smith, 2012). Many online pure-play and retail brands have created mobile applications designed to increase the efficiency and convenience of online shopping (Crutchfield, 2013). This trend coincides with the rapid adoption and increased use of social media by retailers within their online shopping sites. The convergence of these trends has generated a more “social” online shopping experience, wherein retailers are better able to build relationships with their customers (Burrus, 2010; Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010).

The increasingly social nature of the online experience has prompted academia and industry to rethink the nature of online business. In *Strategic Development of Business Models: Implications of Web 2.0*, Wirtz, Schilke, and Ullrich (2010) conducted a review of the current state of online business to develop different classifications to describe online business models. The authors concluded that most online businesses possess characteristics of one or more of the following four online, Web 2.0 platforms: *content*, *context*, *connection*, and *commerce*. Content-based online businesses aggregate, distribute, and sell content to consumers, and accrue revenue from online advertising and/or member subscriptions. Examples of content-based businesses are online newspapers and magazines like *Women’s Wear Daily* and *TechCrunch.com*. Context-based online business models disaggregate and aggregate existing online content to ease

the online search for information, accruing revenue from online advertising sales. For instance, Google and Bing.com are examples of context-based online businesses that garner the majority of their revenue from advertising. The connection-based online business model provides online channels of communication for Internet users and generates revenue through online advertising and member subscriptions. Examples of connection-based online business models are Facebook, MeetUp, and eHarmony.com. Lastly, commerce-based online business models sell and distribute goods and services, generating revenue from sales and commissions. Examples of online commerce-based business models are eBay, Amazon, and UrbanOutfitters.

Online retailers often combine elements of the four online platforms to create a more dynamic and personalized online experience. For instance, UrbanOutfitters, an online and offline retailer, blends commerce and connection models within its website to create an online platform for shopping that connects shoppers and company members through a blog. Particular to the present study, Etsy's main practices fall under the commerce and connection-based online business platforms. That is, Etsy connects members interested in the production and consumption of craft goods through social media. Moreover, through its use of social media, Etsy's platform allows for multiple Sellers and Buyer to interact, thereby establishing it as an "electronic market."

Electronic Markets

One type of online commerce platform is the "electronic marketplace" also known as the "electronic market." Electronic markets are "places where buyers and sellers conduct transactions by electronic means" (Wang & Archer, 2007, p. 90).

Electronic markets are different from traditional online retailers, such as JCrew.com, in that they provide a service that allows for the exchange of goods between multiple sellers and buyers within one platform. As such, electronic markets provide goods to end-consumers, while also providing a means for anyone who wants to sell these goods (Dumas, Benatallah, Russell, & Spork, 2004). Electronic markets can include business-to-business or business-to-consumer products and services (Wang, Zheng, Xu, Li & Meng, 2008). Business-to-business electronic markets provide an online retail platform where businesses can exchange goods to be used in the production of end products. These electronic markets include such entities as such Elemica, a supply chain management company (Elemica, 2013; Wang, Zheng, Xu, Li, & Meng, 2008). Business-to-consumer electronic markets provide an online platform for individuals to sell goods to other individuals (Wang & Archer, 2007). As discussed earlier, contemporary examples of this type of electronic market include Amazon, eBay, and Etsy (Wang, Zheng, Xu, Li, & Meng, 2008).

Despite some clarity in terms of the difference between an online retailer and an electronic market provided by the literature, there is much debate concerning the precise definition of electronic markets. Many researchers have adopted the perspective that the definition of an electronic market is context dependent, therefore a singular definition is not possible (Wang & Archer, 2007). To remedy the problem, Wang and Archer (2007) conducted a review of the business-to-business electronic market literature and identified two classes of electronic markets: the governance structure and the business model. They then developed eight characteristics to describe and differentiate between the various

electronic markets that fall within these two classifications. Characteristics include number of participants, relationship dimension, participant behavior, ownership, industry scope, market mechanisms, products, power asymmetries, and fee structures (p. 97).

Researchers have also examined business-to-consumer electronic markets. Concepts explored include trust and purchase behaviors (Gefen & Pavlou, 2012; Masclet & Pénard, 2012; Sikora & Chauhan, 2012; You & Sikora, 2011). For instance, Masclet and Pénard (2012) employed an experimental design to measure how Amazon and eBay's rating and comments system influences level of trust between a seller and buyer, including whether the timing of reviews and different reviewing systems influence level of trust. The authors found that feedback systems that were based on both negative and positive ratings increased level of trust more than feedback systems in which users could not give negative ratings. Moreover, they found that this type of rating system generated more earnings for the seller as compared to other rating systems.

Research on business-to-consumer electronic markets has also spent much time addressing how auction conditions and pricing influences consumers (c.f., Chen & Weber 2008; Hickman, 2010; Highfill & O'Brien, 2009; Matros & Zapechelnjuk, 2008; Ning, Choi, Xie, Xie, & Dai, 2011, 2011; Vragov, 2010). For instance, Highfill and O'Brien (2009) address how lot sizes and alternative online book prices influence consumers, and, in turn, auction results. The authors reviewed sales, auction and pricing data from eBay along with pricing data from Amazon to determine how lot size and pricing influences the outcome of eBay book auctions. It was found that though lot size was important, pricing was the most influential factor relative to sales. Moreover, eBay sellers who set

their minimum auction prices closer to the alternative online prices (Amazon) experience lower overall sales. In contrast, sellers who set their prices further away from the alternative online price have higher sales (Highfill & O'Brien, 2009).

Although electronic markets are a heavily researched topic, major gaps in the literature remain. For instance, much of the research addresses business-to-business electronic markets (c.f., Alpár, 2010; Dumas, Benatallah, Russell, & Spork, 2004; Fassold & Koester, 2011; Kalvenes & Basu, 2006; Son & Benbasat, 2007; Wang & Archer, 2007). Consequently, literature on business-to-consumer markets like Amazon and eBay is scant. Moreover, no studies have examined business-to-consumer electronic markets like Etsy, wherein producers and consumers engage in social and monetary exchanges outside of an auction platform. More investigation of these electronic markets is needed, especially as the growth of social media reshapes the shopping experience provided by these markets. Indeed, despite the integration of social media into electronic market platforms, very little academic or industry literature has investigated how social media is used beyond the auction process (Gregg & Walczak, 2008; Geron, 2011) or shop reviews (Masclat & Pénard, 2012). This dissertation addresses these gaps by exploring how, as both a business-to-business and a business-to-consumer electronic market, Etsy integrates various forms of social media to facilitate market exchanges.

In a similar vein, the business-to-consumer electronic markets literature has not emphasized the role of product category. As such, there are few studies about the consumption of particular products within electronic markets (Adams, Hosken, & Newberry, 2011; Andrews & Benzing, 2007; Becherer, Halstead, & Taylor, 2008;

Highfill & O'Brien, 2009; Orkiszewski, 2005). Although the consumption of craft goods and handmade products is a growing consumer trend (Crutchfield, 2013; Datamonitor, 2011; Wolverson, 2013), to date, no studies have examined the consumption and production of craft products or supplies within an electronic market. Moreover, very few academic studies have examined the sale of vintage goods within online retailing in general (Zalot, 2013). This dissertation addresses this void in the literature by focusing on Etsy, an electronic market that offers both new and vintage craft products.

Lastly, business-to-consumer electronic markets foster the growth of the Prosumer, wherein the roles of producer and consumer merge (Kotler, 1986). The prosumer is a vital role within most business-to-consumer electronic markets, as these markets rely on the prosumer to buy into the service as well as sell products to generate sales (Denegri-Knott & Zwick, 2012). Despite the importance of the prosumer within electronic markets, a review of extant studies reveals that, to date, very few have examined the role of the prosumer (Denegri-Knott & Zwick, 2012; Kim & Wulf, 2010). Thus, this dissertation helps to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the importance of the prosumer within Etsy as an electronic market.

Social Media

Social media is a technologically-driven communication channel that encompasses several different methods to support online communication (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Culnan, McHugh, & Zubillaga, 2010). In contrast to traditional communication channels, social media relies on an engaged and participatory audience to provide user-generated content within an online bound system (Culnan, McHugh, &

Zubillaga, 2010). User-generated content is socially constructed information that is shared within an online social system (Hartshorn, 2011). In turn, social media provides an online platform where “people or groups can create, organize, edit, comment on, combine, and share content” (Godwin, 2011).

Some of the most widely studied forms of social media within consumer research include blogs (Akar & Topçu, 2011; Fisher, 2009), microblogs like Twitter (Akar & Topçu, 2011; Fisher, 2009; Harris & Dennis, 2011), video sharing through YouTube (Akar & Topçu, 2011; Fisher, 2009; Kunz & Hackworth, 2011), discussion forums (Dhar & Ghose, 2010), as well as industry networking and social networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook (Akar & Topçu, 2011; Fisher, 2009; Georgi & Mink, 2013; Rossa, 2012; Sands, Harper, & Ferraro, 2011). Although such types of social media can stand alone, they are often combined as a means of enhancing digital communications (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Moreover, the terms *social media* and *social networking* are often used interchangeably, however they encompass different aspects of user-generated mediated communications. “Social media” is an umbrella term that encompasses all user-generated mediated communications, whereas “social networking” is a specific type of social media. Social networking sites are a series of interconnected “public or semi-public profile[s] within a bounded system,” which serve as a platform for members to connect and interact with each other (Boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211). Members of social networking sites develop relationships with one another by creating, displaying, and sharing information through individualized profiles and other forms of social media provided by the social networking site (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). For instance, the most

popular social networking site Facebook combines instant messaging, e-mail, video sharing, photo sharing, and other social media formats with personal profile pages to facilitate communication and exchange between members (Bannon, 2012).

Thus far, social networking sites have proven to be the most popular form of social media. A Pew Research study (Smith, 2012) revealed that the adoption rate of social networking site users between the ages of 18-65 has increased 57% since 2005 and that 65% of all adults between the ages of 18-65 are members of a social networking site. The sharp increase in social networking site adoption among potential consumers has attracted retailers, resulting in the integration of social networking sites with online retailers and similar social media tools into online retail sites (Helf, 2011). Indeed, the use of social media, and in particular social networking sites, by retailers has continued to expand as they reap the benefits afforded by connecting directly with consumers (Griffiths & Howard, 2008; Harris & Dennis, 2011).

Online retailing and social media. Previous research has shown that social media benefits retailers and their brands in several ways (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010; McDonald, 2012). For instance, social media provides retailers with a direct line of communication with consumers, increasing the rate and efficiency of distributing marketing collateral (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). As such, much of the research in this area specifically investigates the financial benefits of social media use by retailers.

Customer-focused social media and online marketing literature has primarily investigated how a retailer's use of social media influences the customer's perceptions of a brand (Akar & Topçu, 2011; Cha, 2009; Taylor, Lewin, & Strutton, 2011). For

instance, Akar and Topçu's study (2011) titled *An Examination of the Factors Influencing Consumers' Attitudes Toward Social Media Marketing*, investigated the seven factors thought to influence consumers' attitudes toward a brand's use of social media. Specifically, the authors defined factors that influence consumers' attitudes towards a brand's use of social media as a marketing tool, including attitude toward marketing with social media, social media use, social media knowledge, Internet and social media interaction, and social media engagement (Akar & Topçu, 2011).

Online retailing and social media studies have also focused on determining how consumer-generated content and marketer-generated content influence word-of-mouth and referral behavior among consumers who engage with a brand via social media (Chatterjee, 2011; Okazaki, 2009; Riegner, 2007; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). For instance, Chatterjee (2011) investigated how content shared on social networking sites influences word-of-mouth recommendations and referral behaviors. Specifically, the author examined how consumer-generated and marketer-generated messages, influential member posts, influential member networks, member versus non-member referral visits, duration of social media membership, and product involvement all influenced word-of-mouth recommendations and referrals for new products. Findings indicate that marketer- and consumer-generated content influence recommendations and referral behaviors differently. That is, consumer-generated recommendations are more likely to prompt other consumer recommendations, but are less likely to result in product referrals as compared to marketer-generated content. Moreover, long-term social media site members are less likely to produce recommendations, but are more likely to produce referral visits.

When long-term social media site members endorse other customer-generated recommendations, the probability that these recommendations will turn into referrals increases (Chatterjee, 2011)

The online retailing and social media literature has also identified best practices for building relationships between consumers and a retail brand (c.f., Adjei, Noble, & Noble, 2009; Hung, Li, & Tse, 2011; Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012). Much of this research is folded into brand community research, wherein the focus is on fostering and sustaining brand communities via social media (Muñiz & Schau, 2005), identifying influential social media brand community members (Trusov, Bodapati, & Bucklin, 2010), or determining how social media influences brand communities' WOM (Zeng, Haung, & Dou, 2010). For instance, Laroche, Habibi, Richard, and Sankaranarayanan (2012) investigated how social media influenced brand community characteristics, and how these characteristics in turn influenced community practices and brand outcomes, such as brand use, trust, and loyalty. The authors surveyed brand communities that relied on social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, and a microblog (Twitter) as main platforms for community interaction. Findings from this study revealed that social media use strengthens a community's consciousness of kind, morality and caring, and obligations to society, which positively influence community engagement practices and brand use. Moreover, brand use influences brand trust, and brand trust influences brand loyalty (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012).

Social media and online retailing research has examined how a brand's social media use influences purchase behaviors and profitability (c.f., Hannah & Lybecker, 2010; Harris & Dennis, 2011; Matar & Gao, 2011; Riegner, 2007; Ruane & Wallace, 2013; Stephen & Galak, 2012). For instance, Hannah and Lybecker (2010) conducted an exploratory study to assess the determinants of online purchases and spending in relation to consumers' social media activity. Specifically, the authors employed regression analysis to determine how consumers' social media use, product perceptions, as well as demographic and socioeconomic profiles influenced purchase behavior. Results indicated that recent online purchases, gender (female), PayPal membership, and social media activities, such as listening to podcasts and involvement in online auction activity are determinants of recent online purchases. The authors ran a second regression analysis which revealed that gender (male), education level, social media activities such as involvement in online auctions, instant messaging and online dating are positive determinants of the proportion of a consumer's annual income that is spent online. A key contribution from this study is that social media use appears to increase online spending (Hannah & Lybecker, 2010).

Although there is much research about online retailers' use of social media, the majority of the studies examine the topic outside of the context of consumption communities (c.f., Adjei, Noble, & Noble, 2009; Hung, Li, & Tse, 2011; Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012). Moreover, most focus on use of social media by traditional online retailers rather than electronic markets. As a result, little attention has been paid to social media use outside of the traditional retailer context

(Burrus, 2010). There is much to be gained by investigating social media use in an online business setting in which buyers, sellers, and employees of the business all rely on social media to carry out business activities and market exchanges. An investigation of Etsy, a community that bonds over the production and consumption of craft goods, begins to address these gaps in the literature by investigating its social media use for business operations.

In a similar vein, the majority of studies focus on traditional retailers' and consumers' use of public social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter (c.f., Akar & Topçu, 2011; Kunz & Hackworth, 2011). Few studies have examined social media or social networking sites that are tailor-made and exclusive to a particular online retailer (Jones, Temperley, & Lima, 2009). For instance, little to no research exists on the blogs, forums, or video-sharing created for and embedded within a retailer's e-commerce site (Jones, Temperley, & Lima, 2009). Thus, there is a void in the literature, in as much as few studies have examined the full social media portfolios used by online retailers. Doing so is important because online retailers often employ several forms of social media to create connections with their customers and facilitate a community around a brand (Smith, 2012). Moreover, little is known about how different forms of public and tailor-made social media can work together to foster interaction between consumers. This dissertation addresses this gap by investigating Etsy's full social media portfolio, including its public and tailor-made social media tools.

Web 2.0. Since the introduction of the term "Web 2.0" in 2005 there has been much debate about what it encompasses, as some scholars view it as a catchall term,

while others have adapted the concept to specific online contexts. For instance, Boyles (2011) provides a broad and definitional perspective, stating that Web 2.0 is the “presence of increased interactivity in Web applications and an underlying open and collaborative platform” (Boyles, 2011, p. 81). In contrast, Wirtz, Schilke, and Ullrich (2010) present an in-depth and context-dependent perspective of Web 2.0, identifying a set of characteristics associated with Web 2.0 that have positively influenced online businesses. Based on an in-depth analysis of pure-play retailers, the authors identified social networking, interaction orientation, personalization/customization, and user-added value as the four characteristics of Web 2.0 that have most enhanced online businesses. Despite varying perspectives on Web 2.0, most scholars agree that the introduction of social media and user/consumer-generated content associated with this trend has resulted in a more connective online retailing business model and a more expedited diffusion of information (Lai, 2010).

The technologies associated with Web 2.0, in particular social media, have significantly altered the way people connect, communicate, and exchange ideas, values, and knowledge (Akar & Topçu, 2011; Burrus, 2010; Fuchs, 2011). Moreover, global use of these technologies has resulted in the development of new subcultures and communities (Kozinets, 2010), both of which have facilitated the rapid growth of the participatory culture and brand community (Kozinets, 2010; Plangger, 2012).

The affordances of Web 2.0 have also impacted the connectivity, communication and exchange of ideas, values, and knowledge between retailers and consumers. One outcome of Web 2.0 has been the introduction and growth of new online business

platforms that are increasingly social and create more community-driven shopping experiences (Burrus, 2010; Kuma, Lavassani, & Movahedi, 2012; McDonald, 2012; Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2013). As previously discussed, content- and connection-based online businesses are direct outcomes of Web 2.0, and other online businesses are also embracing this trend. Daniel Burrus, a prominent business and economic forecaster, sees Web 2.0 as a long-term trend that will continue to influence and change the landscape of retailing. In a forecasting summary of the risk and benefits associated with Web 2.0, Burrus (2010) developed the concept of “Business 2.0” to describe its current and future influence on business and industry:

Business 2.0 involves using the new web-based social networking applications (many of which were originally created for personal use) in a way that fosters innovative teamwork, customer co-creation of value, collaboration with external partners, and interactive communication between leaders and employees in an efficient way. (p. 52)

A review of studies in the areas of brand community (Muñiz & Schau, 2007; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009), electronic markets (Alpár, 2010), and social media (Jones, Temperley, & Lima, 2009) reveals that some retailers have already integrated social media in these innovative ways to foster teamwork, collaboration between brands and customers, and online communication between employees. Moreover, some online retailers have innovated beyond what Burrus forecasted, using social media to actually foster online consumption communities (Füller, Lüedicke, & Jaweck, 2008; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009). As previously discussed, members of online consumption communities bond over shared interest in and commitment to a “product class, brand,

consumption activity, or consumer-based ideology” (Thomas, Price, & Schau, 2013, p. 271). To this end, social media serves as the platform used by consumers to seek out and connect with other like-minded consumers to discuss and actively form communities around shared consumption preferences and practices (Jenkins, 2006).

Social media acts as a conduit that not only allows consumers to easily exchange ideas and information among themselves, but for consumers to exchange ideas with producers (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). As discussed earlier, within the context of online retailing, the affordances of Web 2.0 have influenced the way consumers interact and exchange information, which has led to social changes that are reflected in certain consumer trends on a broader scale (Lai, 2010; Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). For instance, social media allows consumers in Capitalist economies to be more aware of market practices, and, in turn, to demand more transparency regarding the production and distribution of consumer goods (Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Knippenberg & de Jong, 2010; Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). On the flip side, the interaction orientation afforded by Web 2.0 has allowed for producers to meet consumers’ demands for “more intense and authentic dialogue with a firm” (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010, p. 277). Industries have also identified this trend, in that, “From farm to truck to fork, consumers are demanding greater accountability and transparency.... It’s not just food, but all product materials, country of origin, labor conditions, philanthropy and leadership that’s forcing the trend” (Crutchfield, 2013, para. 3). Particular to apparel and textile goods, consumers have turned toward handcraft and handmade goods as one way to satisfy the need for accountability (Wolverson, 2013) and as an electronic market, Etsy in particular has

created an online platform to facilitate the exchange of handcraft and handmade goods within a transparent market setting. Ultimately, such changes point to a much larger trend that is emerging within Capitalist markets known as “moralized” markets, wherein connectivity between individual consumers and between consumers and producers has fostered a demand for products and services that meet higher moral and ethical standards (Fourcade & Healy, 2007).

Moralized Markets

The concept of “moralized markets” was initially introduced in Fourcade and Healy’s (2007) *Moral View of Market Societies*, a conceptual article that discussed three key sociological perspectives on morality and society within Capitalist markets. In this article, the authors introduced the next stage in the evolution of the idea by proposing the concept of moralized markets. According to Stehr and Adolf (2010), who would go on to extend the conceptual meaning of the term, “A moralization of markets means, simply put, that market behavior in modern societies is no longer determined primarily by the self-interest of market participants, and that this process of change ultimately becomes a self-realizing and self-reinforcing process” (p. 225).

Although some economic sociologists have cited this perspective within research related to market morality and ethics (Anteby, 2010), limited conceptual attention has been paid to the idea in general (Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Stehr & Adolf, 2010). Stehr and Adolf’s (2010) article, *Consumption between Market and Morals: A Socio-cultural Consideration of Moralized Markets* is one of the few to substantially build upon the moralized markets concept. This article provides depth and breadth by describing the

emergence, reach, and characteristics of moralized markets. Obviously, the conceptual literature on moralized markets is scant due to the recent emergence of the concept. As such, the perspectives provided by Fourcade and Healy (2007) and Stehr and Adolf (2010) are adopted for this dissertation and are further supplemented by the few articles that exist which investigate morality in the market (in particular Anteby, 2010 and Fourcade, 2007)

The moralization of markets thesis can be described as the reciprocal interplay between consumers and producers, in which both actors have a mutual effect on supply and demand (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). Economic sociologists, consumer behavior researchers, and retailers have recognized increasing consumer demand for products that meet higher moral and ethical standards (Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009). Industries, including retail, have responded by integrating these demands into their operations and offerings. As a result, new business practices and products, such as LEED certifications, corporate social responsibility, and organic goods have emerged (Kanji & Chopra, 2010; USGBC, 2013). From an economic sociological perspective, these new practices and products have marked a significant shift in the power relationship between consumers and producers. For example, producers have become more concerned with ethical and moral standards within the early stages of product development. Scholars in economic sociology assert that this not a fad, but instead is a long-term trend that indicates a new wave within the Capitalist system (Beckert, 2009; Fourcade, 2007; Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Stehr & Adolf, 2010). Moreover, scholars in consumer behavior have echoed this sentiment in part, stating that power is increasingly shifting

from producers to consumers (Cova & Dalli, 2009; Lusch & Vargo, 2006; Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009), as reflected by increased collaboration and the aforementioned new consumption communities (Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2007; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould; 2009).

Socio-cultural drivers of moralized markets. Stehr and Adolf (2010) cite three major socio-cultural related changes that have influenced the emergence of the moralized market phenomenon. First, there has been increased concern among consumers about the ethical consumption of goods, which has shifted attention to the environmental impact of consumption. For instance, there is a growing awareness of the detrimental effects of society on the environment and public health, as well as growing concern over “civilization-threatening catastrophes and dangers,” such as the aftermath of tsunamis and earthquakes (Stehr & Adolf, 2010, p. 219). These growing concerns have spurred new consumer lifestyles and culture driven by a focus on health and preserving the environment. Governments have addressed these concerns by integrating environmentally-driven philosophies into legislative policies. These policies, in turn, have fostered the development of national and international institutions that work towards creating, addressing, and safeguarding environmental concerns, such as the Federal Ecolabeling and Certification programs and The EU Ecolabel program. In turn, rules and regulations have been developed and enforced by these new institutions to drive change within the market. An example of this change is the development of the LEEDs certification, which has led to a focus on manufacturing buildings that have a low environmental impact (Stehr & Adolf, 2010; USGBC, 2013).

Along with greater attention to environmental impact, the second socio-cultural change stems from the socio-structural shifts over the past sixty years that have shaped society and which allow moralized markets to emerge. Since the 1950s, disposable income has steadily increased in prosperous countries such as the United States. This increase has generated a growing sense of material security and personal prosperity among consumers, which has, in turn, increased the generally accepted standard of living (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). At the same time, the average age of consumers has steadily increased. Moreover, many countries have transitioned from industrial-based to knowledge-based economies. As a result, individuals have increased access to information and multiple means of communicating with one another. In turn, individuals have formed social relationships with others across nations and the world (Kozinets, 2010). These individuals share interests, needs, and ideas about self-interest and value, which has created socially constructed knowledge that transcends small, self-interested groups reaching international populations. Consumers are, as a result, more aware and informed about the goods and services they consume, specifically where these goods are made and by whom (Long & Murray, 2012). This awareness has led to an increasing demand for transparency in the production process of material goods. Moreover, when coupled with technological advancements, these socio-cultural shifts have influenced the expansion of production and consumption into new global territories, product categories, and even into social issues such as health care (Fourcade & Healy, 2007).

Lastly, Stehr and Adolf (2010) suggest that the previously mentioned socio-cultural conditions have influenced a shift in the importance placed on economic goals

within markets. As consumers have become more prosperous and product selection has become endless, consumers are less driven by hedonic needs or economic goals (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). For instance, in the field of Consumer Behavior, research has shown that some consumers purchase goods based on their low environmental impact and are willing to spend more on these products (Long & Murray, 2012; Smed, Andersen, Kargard, & Daugbjerg, 2013). As such, producers are paying closer attention to the ethical and moral concerns that shape consumption behaviors. In addition, consumers have become more critical of unethical and amoral production practices (Long & Murray, 2012). The digital age has made it increasingly difficult for producers to conceal these practices and deter consumers' negative reactions toward their businesses (Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2007). This transparency has ultimately forced some producers to take consumers' moral and ethical demands into consideration at earlier stages of the product development process (Crutchfield, 2013).

Theoretical foundation of moralized markets. The theoretical foundation of moralized markets revisits and reorganizes traditional sociological perspectives on the dynamics of markets and morality, relationships between producers and consumers, as well as the interplay between market, society, economy, and culture. According to Fourcade and Healy (2007), the premise of moralized markets rejects traditional notions of the relationship between markets and morality, specifically that markets are either civilizing or destructive to society. Ultimately, the theoretical foundation of moralized markets points to how markets, culture, economy and society can no longer be treated as separate elements. Instead each is interdependent on the other within a social system or

society (Fourcade & Healy, 2007). For instance, growing awareness about climate change has influenced the market, culture, and society at the same rate and time. Within certain societies, awareness of climate change has become woven into the values and ideals ascribed to ethical environmental practices. At the same time, these cultural values and ideals are satisfied and reinforced by market producers, who are being driven by consumers' demands, demands that are influenced by consumers' cultural values and ideals.

For instance, one concern associated with climate change particular to consumers' values and ideals involves reducing the carbon footprint of goods consumed. Local markets both satisfy and reinforce this value by hosting seasonal and weekly farmer's markets that feature locally-grown produce and artisanal food products. Consumers' values in terms of environmental impact are satisfied, as it takes fewer resources to get locally grown foods to a farmer's market as compared to a grocery store. Indeed, the popularity of farmer's markets is increasing, as their numbers have grown by approximately 25% over the last three years and larger grocery chains have adopted the trend (Kurtzleben, 2013).

While morality can be expressed as the values or principles that shape what is adopted as good, bad, or ethical within a society, defining what behaviors or actions are moral within a society is context-dependent and often reflects multiple interpretations (Anteby, 2010; Beckert, 2009; Fourcade, 2007). For instance, in markets where consumer values are environmentally-driven, consumer demands may involve the eco-friendly production and consumption of goods. Producers that exchange within these markets

consider these demands and seek to satisfy them. Morality is then established in the market by values shared by consumers and producers, which vary among different markets, producers, and consumers (Knippenberg & de Jong, 2010; Stehr & Adolf, 2010). As a result, several iterations of morality are typically practiced within a market (Anteby, 2010; Knippenberg & de Jong, 2010). In other words, what is considered moral is defined by how the consumers and producers implement the concept through the production and consumption of goods (Anteby, 2010). It is important to note that not all markets fully embrace the idea of morality or share the same understanding of what it means (Fourcade, 2007; Fourcade & Healy, 2007). However, this does not mean that consumer demand for moralized products has not altered that market in some way (Fourcade & Healy, 2007).

Characteristics of moralized markets. In previous decades, consumers had minimal influence or power over the production process. Typically, the only power they had was expressed by a purchase decision. Now consumers can influence the production process from the early stages of product development, signaling a shift in power that provides consumers with a degree of authority over the organization (Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Stehr & Adolf, 2010). Likewise, as pointed out earlier, consumers have become more knowledgeable about products, including production and distribution practices. The rise of the middle class has increased disposable income, spending power, and demand for goods to satisfy various desires rather than needs. As a result, the market has become saturated with a myriad of products and producers fighting for market share. This saturation has led to producers engaging with consumers to produce products that

directly satisfy the wants of the latter (Cova & Dallı, 2009; Pongsakornrunsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Zwick, Bonsu, & Darmody, 2008). Stehr and Adolf (2010) have labeled this phenomenon the “democratization of the market,” which recognizes that consumers are no longer passive. Instead, consumers are engaged participants, actively influencing the production process as a whole.

Markets are integrated into all aspects of society and everyday life, to the extent that despite their instrumental and rational nature, markets are shaped by cultural values (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). As such, the moralization of markets is also considered to be the culturalization of markets. Consumers are still driven by self-interest, but this self-interest is tied back to the well-being of society as a whole (Fourcade & Healy, 2007). That is, instead of being driven by the cheap acquisition of goods on a mass scale, consumers in moralized markets are driven by the self-interest of responsible consumption (Stehr & Adolf, 2010).

According to Stehr and Adolf (2010) the moralization of markets requires three market conditions that rely on the interplay between consumer and producer: (1) moralization of consumption, (2) moralization of consumer goods, and (3) moralization of consumer goods production. First, goods and services must be produced according to consumers’ moral demands. Market participants’ orientation and behaviors (in this case producers) must shift to meet these demands. Second, consumers’ moral demands must be integrated into the initial rather than the later stages of the production process, in as much as the fundamental principles and physical composition of the goods must align with consumers’ moral demands. Third, integration of consumers’ moral standards into

the initial stages of the production process shapes the supply chain of the producer, that is, its partners and eventually the market in which they all operate. Specifically, producers seek out supply chain partners that meet these standards to ensure all elements of the production process, including the finished product, align with consumers' moral standards (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). For example, Raleigh Denim, a North Carolina denim manufacturer satisfies the moral demand for "Made in America" fashion apparel among some consumers. Adjusting to the particular standards these consumers expect, the company seeks out raw goods, such as denim, from North Carolina suppliers. It then employs local people to cut, sew, and finish the jeans (Raleigh Denim, 2013).

Boundaries of moralized markets. Although the concept of moralized markets has been identified as a new phase in Capitalism, not all markets are moralized. Moreover, not all moralized markets meet consumers' moral demands to the same degree. In other words,

The moralization of markets is an emergent phenomenon, a process that is presently running its course; indicating that we live in a time when more market actors are very likely to be concerned about the ethical conditions and consequences for their actions. (Stehr & Adolf, 2010, p. 225)

A market's context influences the producers' adoption of consumers' morally-driven demands. As such, moralized markets are currently present in small sectors of society and as a part of larger markets. However, Stehr and Adolf (2010) propose that the increased moralization of smaller markets will create a snowball effect, eventually influencing larger groups of consumers and producers, resulting in a shift in consumption and production more broadly.

In summary, the moralization of markets is poised to be a long-term trend within Capitalist contexts (Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Stehr & Adolf, 2010). Although this trend has not influenced all markets to the same degree, it has emerged quite strongly relative to the consumption and production of some goods, including apparel. To this end, this dissertation explores the ways that Etsy may serve as a micro-level exemplar of a moralized market wherein members' moral demands relative to the production and exchange of craft products shape its community-driven practices and functions as an electronic market.

Integration of Concepts

The conceptual framework used for this dissertation integrates the three main areas of literature and thought discussed in the previous sections: (1) culture, (2) community, and (3) market. In this section I begin with a discussion of how the integration of concepts form the framework that facilitates the study of Etsy proposed here. This is followed by a discussion of how specific guiding questions that arise from the framework are used to address the purpose and objectives of this study.

Linking Culture, Community, and Market

Culture is a set of socially-constructed values and ideals that are shared by members within a society. Values and ideals unite members, creating a myriad of groups, such as subcultures and communities, within a given society (Scott & Marshall, 2009). The values and ideals that shape these groups also guide the market in which members of the society interact to exchange goods (Fourcade & Healy, 2007).

The values and ideals that guide a community and a market are in a constant state of flux, shifting alongside perspectives on human behavior and interaction (Hatch, 1996). For instance, cultural values and ideals shape individual perspectives on socially acceptable behavior and relationships, as well as the ethical consumption and exchange of goods (Kendall & Wickham, 2001). Consequently, culture can be described as a pervasive force that guides communities and markets, while at the same time, individuals, communities, and societies work to shape culture (Kuper, 1999). Thus, the development and refinement of culture is an iterative process, in which cultural frames are developed to explain community life as well as the market in which community members exchange goods (Stehr & Adolf, 2010).

Previous consumption and community literature supports the idea that within a culture, an overlap between a community and a market may occur (Füller, Lüedicke, & Jawecki, 2008). This overlap signals collaboration between members of a community (consumers) and a market (producers). Within this shared space, the culture of a community and the culture of the market converge, resulting in the development of products that meet the demands specific to the culture of the community and the market. For instance, Füller, Lüedicke, and Jawecki (2008) studied how a community of outdoor enthusiasts transformed into a business that produced and sold outdoor recreation gear, and ultimately formed a consumption community. Specifically, this community blended the demands of their own outdoor community with those of the outdoor retailing market to create a new brand of outdoor recreational gear (Füller, Lüedicke, & Jawecki, 2008).

This example illustrates how synergy between the values and ideals shared by a community and market can result in products that meet the demands of both.

Brand community research also supports the notion that communities and markets can, and often do, converge. In particular, the Internet and social media facilitate the convergence of communities with markets, resulting in virtual meeting points in which collaboration between consumers and producers occurs (Kim, Bae, & Kang, 2008; Muñiz & Schau, 2007; Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011). This type of collaboration is beneficial to consumers, as their needs and demands are recognized and satisfied by the market/brand (Muñiz & Schau, 2007). This collaboration is also beneficial to the brand, in that brand community members provide valuable market insight into emerging consumer trends, as well as consumers' likes, dislikes, needs, and desires (de Almeida, Dholakia, & Vianello, 2007; Kim, Bae, & Kang, 2008).

Similarly, it is possible that Etsy's members (Sellers, Buyers, and Administrators) collaborate as both community and market, and that one shapes the other by the iterative process of culture. Thus, culture is an overarching concept that guides the examination of Etsy, in particular the social construction of Etsy as a community-driven market. By applying a cultural lens to the study of Etsy's community and market, the values and ideals that shape it are considered. To this end, I employ the meaning-oriented perspective of culture described earlier in this chapter, as this perspective emphasizes culture, rather than structure (Hatch, 1996). In other words, culture is defined as shared values and ideals that are socially constructed and represent a "...way of life of a people, including patterns of both thought and behavior" (Hatch, 1996, p. 105). Specifically in

the case of Etsy, these shared values and ideals are reflected in how Etsy functions as an electronic market as well as the ways that members help to shape it as a community.

To understand how Etsy is a community-driven market, the aforementioned perspectives of “network as communities” and “imagined communities” will be employed. As discussed, within the consumption community (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001) and online community (Capecea & Costa, 2013) literature, both perspectives have been applied to investigate consumption within online and offline contexts, and both reflect the characteristics that are most often used to define community. In particular, Hillery (1955), Keller (2003), and Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001) provide the four characteristics of community that guide this study of Etsy: (1) social interaction, (2) consciousness of kind, (3) morality and caring, and (4) structure and governance. Social interaction is the heartbeat of community, in that it fosters social bonds and social attachments which are the community’s foundation (Hillery, 1955). Consciousness of kind is the intrinsic understanding shared by community members through common viewpoints, beliefs, goals, and aspirations (Keller, 2003; Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). This understanding is enacted during community rituals and traditions, through which the “spirit of community” is celebrated and reinforced (Gusfield, 1978; Keller, 2003, p. 267). Morality and caring captures members’ sense of moral responsibility and caring toward other members as well as the overall community. This is a key component of community, as it perpetuates trust, cooperation, and a sense of responsibility throughout the whole (Keller, 2003). Structure and governance refer to the use of leadership and membership roles as well as laws and rules to guide a community and its members (Keller, 2003). As previous

research in sociology and consumer behavior has adopted these characteristics to investigate the culture of a community (Keller, 2003) as well as the convergence of community with market (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006; Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001) they are particularly appropriate for the present study.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Etsy is an outcome of Web 2.0, in as much as it is an electronic market that relies on social media to facilitate exchanges between members (Anteby, 2010; Knippenberg & de Jong, 2010; Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). To investigate Etsy as an electronic market, Wirtz, Schilke, and Ullrich’s (2010) four classifications of online business (content, context, connection, and commerce) are employed. Similar to other electronic markets, such as eBay and Amazon, preliminary research conducted on the topic suggests that Etsy combines several online business platforms to facilitate market exchanges between members. For instance, commerce and connection appear to be the foundation of Etsy’s electronic market, in that both occur through social media use, as it facilitates online communication and market exchange between members (Blanchflower & Hodges, 2013a). By applying these classifications to an investigation of Etsy, the significance of and integration between each platform will be investigated, which will facilitate a better understanding of Etsy as both an electronic market and a community.

As depicted in Figure 1, the relationships between the three concepts of culture, community, and market are not linear in nature. Rather, they are integrated into a larger whole, as each concept helps to shape the other and all work to shape Etsy. Indeed, the moralized market literature suggests that concepts of market, culture, economy, and

society can no longer be treated as separate entities (Fourcade, 2007; Fourcade & Healy, 2007). Instead they are interrelated concepts that reflexively exist within a social system (Fourcade & Healy, 2007). This perspective helps to explain the emergence of small, community-driven markets that have formed over shared values, beliefs, and ideals that run counter to those of the wider Capitalist market (Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2005, 2007; Moraes, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2012; Szmigin & Carrigan, 2003). Likewise, I posit that this perspective helps to explain Etsy. That is, when a community ultimately forms a market, as in the case of Etsy, the underlying values and ideals associated with the culture of that community also shape the resulting market. Conversely, when examining a market that is shaped by a community, as in the case of Etsy, the culture of the market reflects the values and ideals of the community.

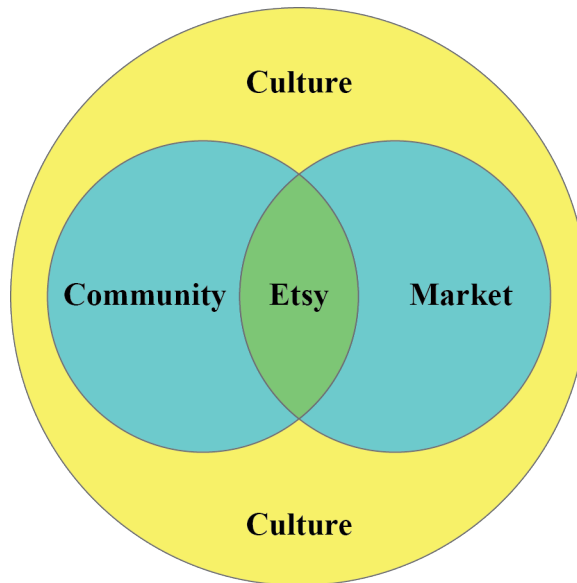


Figure 1. Integration of the Three Key Concepts

Guiding Research Questions

As introduced in the beginning of this chapter, the three objectives of this study are: (1) to explore what it means to be a member of the Etsy community, (2) to investigate the extent to which this community shapes Etsy's practices and functions as a market, and (3) to examine the implications of Etsy as a community-driven market for online retailing. In this section, I explore how these objectives will be addressed by the framework, specifically through questions emerging from the literature that are used to help guide the research.

Objective one: Etsy membership and community. The first objective of this dissertation is to explore what it means to be a member of the Etsy community. To this end, I consider the experiences of different members, such as Etsy Administrators, Sellers, and Buyer within the context of Etsy. The literature indicates that markets are

places in which an exchange of goods occurs between market actors, including producers and consumers (Beckert, 2009). Given that Etsy is a community formed around the exchange of craft goods, exchanges between market actors shape their different roles relative to the community. Thus, the first guiding research question is: *How does participation in the exchange of goods within Etsy shape members' various roles?* To this end, data collection focused on how members experience Etsy relative to the exchange of craft-related goods and how these experiences help to shape their particular roles in the community (e.g., Seller, Buyer, Prosumer, Administrator).

Brand community studies that examine how members interact and engage with one another tend to focus on collaboration between marketers and consumers (Kim, Bae, & Kang, 2008; Maria & Finotto, 2008) or how member interactions influence a brand (Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh, & Kim, 2008; Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012). In contrast, the present study seeks to explore how interactions between Etsy's members give meaning to their experiences as part of the community and how these experiences reflect the characteristics that define it as a community. Thus, the second guiding research question allows me to explore how the different members contribute to creating the Etsy community as a whole: *How does interaction between members and their various roles shape Etsy as a community?* Because social interaction is an essential component of community (Hillery, 1995; Keller, 2003; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001), even in instances where not all community members interact or engage in all facets of community life (Anderson, 1983; Bruhn, 2011; Wellman, 1999), to address this guiding research question, data were collected to reflect the different types of member

interactions that occur and to highlight the ways that Etsy functions as a community through these interactions.

Preliminary research revealed that members of Etsy interact with one another in three different ways: within, between, and among different member roles (Blanchflower & Hodges, 2013a). Social interaction often occurs between one or more members that share the same roles, such as Buyer to Buyer, Seller to Seller, or Administrator to Administrator. Conversely, social interaction also occurs between members of different roles. For instance, a Seller will often interact with a Buyer as well as Administrators. Lastly, social interaction can also occur among all Etsy members at the same time. For example, within an online forum, social interaction can occur between a Seller, Buyer, and Administrators simultaneously. As such, data from these different member interactions are used to understand how they shape the Etsy community by reflecting the characteristics that define communities outlined in the literature (i.e., consciousness of kind, morality and caring, and structure and governance).

According to the literature on community, shared values and ideals create a common point of interest through which relationships are formed and communities are developed (Hatch, 1996; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Moreover, consumer research indicates that when consumers interact via shared values and ideals related to the consumption of branded goods, these interactions foster relationships, and, over time, can form brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Thus, the third guiding research question designed to address objective one is: *How are the values and ideals of Etsy members reflected in their various interactions?*

Brand community and consumption community studies reveal how members often blend online and offline social interaction to shape the community (Dholakia & Vianello, 2011; Muñiz & O' Guinn, 2001; Sicilia & Palazón, 2008). Similarly, Etsy's members engage in social interaction in both online and offline formats. Particular to Etsy's community, social interaction starts online for all members. For instance, Buyers and Sellers must first become online members to buy or sell goods. After an online presence has been established, some members interact with one another offline. In both cases, social media tools are used to mediate and/or support the interaction. Indeed, the literature suggests that within the online setting, members of brand communities often use social media to foster and maintain social interaction (Muñiz & Schau, 2007; Trusov, Bodapati, & Bucklin, 2010). Moreover, members use social media to fulfill their roles within a consumption community (Muñiz & Schau, 2005), as well as shape the characteristics of that community (de Almeida, Dholakia, & Vianello, 2007). Thus, it is important that I explore how, through shared values and ideals, members use social media to fulfill different roles that, when combined, serve to create and maintain the Etsy community.

Objective two: Etsy as a community-driven market. The second objective of this study is to explore the extent to which the Etsy community shapes Etsy as an electronic market. As discussed earlier, studies in the areas of both community and markets indicate the ways that values and ideals held by members can shape communities as well as markets (Fourcade, 2007; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001) and that this occurs through an iterative and emergent kind of process (Fourcade & Healy, 2007). Thus, to understand

how Etsy's community shapes it as an electronic market, specifically its business practices and functions, the first guiding research question is: *How do the products and services exchanged embody the values and ideals of the Etsy community?*

When members of a community form the community through the consumption of particular goods, the values and ideals of the community become associated with these goods. That is, the goods that are exchanged are reflective of the values and ideals that unite community members (Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2007). For example, according to McAlexander, Shouten, and Koenig (2002), the foundation of a brand community is shared admiration for the brand's products offerings and for relationships that form between like-minded consumers. In turn, the shared values and ideals reflected in the brand are also reflected in the community that forms around the brand. Similarly, the goods exchanged between members within a consumption community often reflect the values and ideals of that community (Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2007; Szmigin & Carrigan, 2003). Thus, in the present study I explore Etsy's business practices and functions from a cultural perspective to understand how the shared values and ideals of its members are reflected in its goods and services as well as in the ways that these goods and services are exchanged.

Collaboration between community members is what ultimately creates and sustains a consumption community. More specifically, studies on electronic markets have revealed how market actors can play a role in shaping the market's functions and practices (Gefen & Pavlou, 2012; You & Sikora, 2011), while new consumption community research has shown how collaboration between members achieves similar

results (Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2007; Szmigin & Carrigan, 2003). Thus, the second guiding research question relative to objective two is: *How does collaboration between community members in the exchange of goods shape Etsy as a market?*

Studies on electronic markets (Geron, 2011; Gregg & Walczak, 2008), brand communities (Muñiz & Schau, 2005), as well as moralized markets (Stehr & Adolf, 2010) suggest that social media platforms can and do facilitate collaboration between communities and markets. Moreover, these online platforms function as a location where communities of consumers and markets of producers exchange and blend values and ideals to achieve symmetry between the needs of both parties (Füller, Matzler, & Hoppe, 2008; Geron, 2011; Masclet & Pénard, 2012; Muñiz & Schau, 2007). Likewise, studies examining social media use by online retailers and consumption communities suggests that these parties use social media as a way to collaborate, shifting more of the power over market practices and functions to the consumer (Füller, Matzler, & Hoppe, 2008; Muñiz & Schau, 2007). As discussed, Etsy is a community-driven electronic market and social media is its cornerstone, in that social media is used to facilitate member-to-member community collaboration as well as market exchanges. Thus, through the data collected for this study, I specifically explore the role of social media in collaboration between and among different members of the Etsy community (Sellers, Buyers, and Administrators) and how this collaboration facilitates Etsy's practices and functions as a market.

By addressing the second objective, the two guiding research questions discussed here permit an investigation of the extent to which Etsy's community shapes how Etsy

functions as an electronic market. As a result, this dissertation fills gaps within the electronic market and consumption community literature. Specifically, studies on electronic markets have only looked at online auction or business-to-business sites (Gefen & Pavlou, 2012; Masclet & Pénard, 2012; Wang & Archer, 2004). Etsy is unique, in that it is a site where the exchange of goods occurs in a variety of ways, including through business-to-consumer and business-to-business exchanges, and where interaction occurs among and across all members, whether consumers, producers, or Prosumers. Moreover, unlike auction sites, Etsy is an electronic market defined by collaboration rather than competition, driven by members who share an interest in crafts and craft-making. As a result, it is more than just a place for the exchange of goods; rather, it is a community where those who are interested in crafts can go to interact and exchange with others who share a similar interest. Thus far, no studies have examined the craft community as a basis for an electronic market or considered the role of this type of electronic market within the online retail context.

Objective three: What Etsy means for online retailing. The third objective of this study is to examine the implications of Etsy as a community-driven market for online retailing. Etsy is one of the few, if not the only electronic market to allow all market actors, whether Buyers or Sellers, to exercise some degree of control over the business functions and practices of the site. Hence, it is possible that, as an electronic market, Etsy is a micro-level example of a larger phenomenon occurring in the Capitalist market—the moralization of markets—that was discussed earlier in this chapter (Beckert, 2009; Fourcade & Healy, 2007). Thus, the first guiding question addressing objective three is:

Does Etsy, as a community-driven electronic market reflect the principles of a moralized market?

To address this guiding research question I will explore how the principles of the moralized market concept may be reflected in Etsy as a community-driven, craft-focused electronic market. To this end, through the data collected for the study, I explore how interaction and collaboration between Etsy's members reflect certain moral and ethical standards, and how these standards, in turn, help to shape the way Etsy functions as a market. Likewise, I examine the extent to which these standards are reflected in the type of goods exchanged on Etsy (crafts). Thus far, the idea of moralized markets has not been employed in consumer research to understand how an electronic market such as Etsy might signal a shift in electronic markets in general. Conversely, the moralized market literature has paid very little attention to how interactions between market actors (aside from producers and consumers) shape a moralized market (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). Hence, using Etsy's focus on crafts as a point of departure, this dissertation addresses both research gaps.

Integration of consumers' moral and ethical demands within the early stages of the production process signals a move toward reconnecting producers with consumers (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). This reconnection offers an alternative consumption experience wherein consumers are able to buy goods that align with their moral and ethical standards (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). Etsy's approach to exchange allows for this type of experience, while its focus on crafts reveals an inherent connection between producer and consumer. Thus, the following guiding research question is used to further address objective three:

As a community-driven market that connects producers with consumers through crafts, how does Etsy offer a new or alternative online consumption community experience?

Studies on consumption and community as well as moralized markets suggest that consumers seek out specific communities and markets for the alternative consumption experiences they provide (Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2005, 2007; Muñiz & Schau, 2005). Further, Muñiz and Schau (2005) posit that brand communities have “remystified” community by integrating it back into the consumption experience. Likewise, studies on new consumption communities have shown how alternative lifestyle consumption needs are fulfilled through particular goods and market exchange practices (Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2005, 2007). Based on these ideas, I explore the ways that Etsy offers a new or alternative consumption community, and thus consumption experience, within the online environment.

More than just an online craft store, Etsy is an electronic market driven by a craft-focused community. By addressing objective three—along with objectives one and two—this study sheds light on what Etsy means for online retailing in general while offering a point of departure for understanding how the concepts of culture, community, and market converge to form the Etsy experience.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a review of the literature pertinent to the three concepts of culture, community and market that are used to frame this dissertation. Relevant studies were discussed and gaps were identified relative to the goals and objectives of this dissertation. The conceptual framework for the study was explained and several guiding

research questions emerging from the literature were outlined. In the next chapter, the research design is explained.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Etsy functions as an electronic market driven by a craft-focused community. As discussed in Chapter I, an interpretive methodological framework, in particular ethnography and netnography are used to accomplish the three objectives of the study, which are: (1) to explore what it means to be a member of the Etsy community, (2) to investigate the extent to which this community shapes Etsy's practices and functions as a market, and (3) to examine the implications of Etsy as a community-driven market for online retailing.

As discussed in Chapter II, this study addresses three major gaps within the consumer behavior literature. First, this study offers an understanding of Etsy as a selling-focused consumption community, including how members shape the marketplace in which the selling occurs. Second, this study examines the ways that Etsy, as a community-based online marketplace, offers a different kind of retail environment than other online retailers. Third, this dissertation expands the existing knowledge base regarding consumption communities by specifically investigating how members of such communities can form social bonds not only through the consumption experience, but through the selling experience.

In this chapter, I discuss the research design employed in the dissertation. I begin by providing a discussion of ethnography and netnography as the interpretive approaches

that were used, followed by an explanation of the methods employed for data collection. Next, I describe the sampling process that was followed and provide details about the participants. I conclude with a discussion of the approach to data analysis and interpretation that was employed.

Ethnography and Netnography as Interpretive Inquiry

According to Merriam (1998), a primary goal of interpretive research is to develop a deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. As a methodological approach, interpretive inquiry allows for multiple truths or realities to be used to explain the nature of being, and these realities are seen as socially constructed (Merriam, 1998). As such, within the interpretive approach, to understand the reality of a phenomenon one must investigate it within its context and from the perspective of those who experience it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998). As a result, this approach requires the researcher embrace an emic perspective, or an insider's point of view, and enter into the research process as the primary instrument for data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998). Likewise, as part of the interpretive approach, data analysis is inductive and emerges from the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon through the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The ontological and epistemological underpinnings of interpretive methodology align with aims of this study, as the goal is to develop a deeper understanding of Etsy as an online marketplace and community. To achieve this goal, I entered into the Etsy context—online and offline—and explored members' experiences related to participating, selling, and buying within this context. As one particular type of

interpretive inquiry, ethnography is often used when the researcher seeks to enter into a social setting to gather information about what goes on within that setting (Kozinets, 2010; Mariampolski, 2006; Sluka & Robben, 2007). Moreover, ethnography is an interpretive approach used to investigate human life from a cultural perspective (Hultgren, 1989). Ethnographies investigate shared beliefs, practices, artifacts, history, folk knowledge, and behaviors and seek to explain how these factors shape life among members of a group (Hultgren, 1989). Kozinets (2010) states that ethnography

[e]nables the researcher to gain a detailed and nuanced understanding of a social phenomenon, and then to capture and convey its cultural qualities. It provides a sense of the lived experience of a culture's members, as well as grounded analysis of structures of their group, how it functions, and how it compares to other groups. (p. 55)

Ethnographic research is open-ended and flexible. As such, it has been used to investigate and explain a myriad of cultural perspectives on human life (Kozinets, 2006). Within Consumer Behavior research, ethnography has been employed to explore a wide variety of consumption communities, including Yamaha R1, by Felix (2012), Primark, by Jones Temperley and Lima (2009), Coca-Cola, by Sicilia and Palazón (2008), Apple, Nike, and Harley-Davidson, by Kilambi, Laroche, and Richard (2013) and Ford Bronco, Macintosh, and Saab, by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001). For the purposes of this dissertation, ethnography was employed to gain an understanding of the Etsy community and marketplace, particularly through exploration of the shared behaviors and experiences that give structure and meaning to it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hultgren, 1989).

Although no two ethnographic studies are conducted the same way, there are certain key characteristics that shape all ethnographic research (Hultgren, 1989; Mariampolski, 2006). First, ethnographic studies are subject-oriented (Mariampolski, 2006). Through certain data collection strategies, such as participant-observation and in-depth interviews, the data collected reflects the participants' point of view (Mariampolski, 2006; Sluka & Robben, 2007). Second, ethnographic strategies are empirical and naturalistic, in that they require the researcher's participation and/or observation of life within a natural setting (Mariampolski, 2006; Sluka & Robben, 2007). Third, ethnography is holistic, in as much as the interconnection of the parts of individual experiences helps to explain the whole that is group life (Mariampolski, 2006). Lastly, ethnography produces knowledge that is context-dependent, comprehensive, and inclusive (Mariampolski, 2006; Van Maanen, 1982). To this end, several data collection methods are often employed, particularly to gather information about lived experiences and to capture the essence of social life within a particular community (Hultgren, 1989; Mariampolski, 2006). In turn, an ethnographic approach facilitates the collection of rich and thick descriptive data that provide multiple perspectives on the "culture, history, and characteristics that shape a social phenomenon" (McCarthy & Robinson-Caskie, 2006, p. 853).

As previously stated, ethnography requires the research to enter into the social setting in which group life occurs. Given the dual nature of Etsy's social context (online and offline), traditional ethnographic strategies were used alongside netnography. Netnography is a digital approach to ethnography and is used when observational data are

collected within digital environments (Kozinets, 2006). Netnography adopts ethnographic research techniques and strategies to observe cultures and communities that use computer mediated communications (CMC) and information and communication technologies (ICT) to maintain group life (Kozinets, 2002). Kozinets (2010) defines netnography as,

A type of online, or Internet, ethnography; ... it provides guidelines for the adaptation of participant-observation procedures - planning for fieldwork, making cultural entrée, gathering cultural data, ensuring a high-quality ethnographic interpretation, and ensuring strict adherence to ethnical standards - to the contingencies of online community and culture that manifest through computer-mediated communications. (p. 191)

In the online environment, social interaction between group members is achieved by communication technologies, thereby making online fieldwork distinct from face-to-face fieldwork in at least three ways. First, online social interactions must be mediated via CMC or ICT, which creates a communication experience that resembles, but is different from, face-to-face communication. Second, participants can exercise full anonymity, which is not possible offline. Last, social interactions are archived because they occur through CMC and ICT. As a result of the difference between online and offline social interaction, the researcher must employ strategies and techniques specifically adopted for online observation and fieldwork (Kozinets, 2010). As the focus of this study is an online community, Kozinets's (2010) netnographic approach was used to guide the collection process of digital data, including observations of text-based interactions, images, and video.

The increased use of the Internet by consumers has led to more use of netnography to guide research on online consumer behavior (Felix, 2012; Kozinets, 2002;

Noble, Noble & Adjei, 2012; O'Sullivan, Richardson, & Collins, 2011). Moreover, in studies where online communities meet in different social worlds it is common practice to blend traditional ethnography with netnography (Kozinets, 2010). Because Etsy's online and offline social worlds are distinct, both require investigation to create a more holistic understanding of Etsy as a community-driven market. For example, in the offline context, members congregate in subgroups, and social interaction tends to be more inclusive to the group. Different kinds of subgroups include Etsy Teams and Etsy Craft Parties. In the online context, social interaction tends to be more all-inclusive, in that all Etsy members communicate and interact with one another through asynchronous modes of communication, such as Etsy Forums and Blogs (Kozinets, 2010). Given the difference in these social worlds, online observations provide vital information that could not be captured in the offline context (Kozinets, 2010). Likewise, offline observations are important to understand behaviors and experiences that occur within member subgroups that meet face-to-face.

Ethnography and netnography are often blended because together they provide a complete picture of group life within communities whose members interact both offline and online. However, when blending ethnography and netnography in one study, Kozinets (2010) recommends selecting one as the dominant approach to guide data collection. According to Kozinets (2010), there are two types of netnographic studies: studies of communities online and studies of online communities. The former examine "social phenomena whose social existence extend well beyond the Internet" (Kozinets, 2010, p. 64). Although online interactions play an important role in these communities,

offline interactions are more dominant and therefore significant to data collection. Thus, such studies typically use ethnography as the dominant research methodology (Kozinets, 2010). In contrast, studies of online communities examine a social phenomenon whose social existence has been created through online social interactions and online culture. In these studies, because the offline context is less dominant than the online context, netnography serves as the dominant research approach (Kozinets, 2010).

In the case of Etsy, online interactions are more dominant, and online community social interaction among members occur less often. Thus for the purposes of this study, Etsy is considered an online community. As such, netnography served as the primary approach that guided data collection.

As discussed, the differences between online and offline social interaction requires a distinct methodological approach to a study such as this. By blending ethnographic and netnographic strategies, I was able to engage with and observe online and offline Etsy community life, thereby providing a more comprehensive means of data collection. That is, the data provide a thorough sense of the phenomenon of Etsy and, in turn, facilitate the development of a more holistic understanding of the Etsy community.

Data Collection Methods

One goal of interpretive research is to capture lived experience as it gives meaning to a particular social phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, the aim of data collection in this study was to develop an understanding of Etsy as a community-driven marketplace through the experiences of those who are part of it. As discussed above, a combination of netnographic and ethnographic strategies guided this investigation,

requiring that, as the researcher I embrace an emic location from which I could observe and participate in the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). To achieve this location, I employed several methods common to ethnography and its online counterpart netnography, such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and visual documentation. These data collection methods are discussed the following sections.

Participant Observation

Participant observation facilitates the collection of data within a natural setting and therefore is used to capture firsthand accounts of the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam, 1998). I employed participant observation in both the online and offline setting (Sluka & Robben, 2007) by becoming an active Etsy member, and specifically as a Prosumer (Merriam, 1998). As described in Chapter I, a Prosumer assumes the dual role of Buyer and Seller (Kotler, 1986), purchasing, producing, as well as selling goods within the Etsy marketplace. As such, the focus was on the observation of member interactions both on and offline as well as my experiences as Buyer and Seller within the Etsy community.

Observations were documented in the form of field notes, which consisted of written and photo documented accounts during and after entry into the field (Burgess, 1982). Field notes are the primary data collection instrument used in participant observation and are therefore essential to ethnographic data collection and analysis (Burgess, 1982; Kozinets, 2010). According to Kozinets (2010), it is important to determine the organization, structure, and flow of field notes before entering into the field. For the purposes of this study, three types of field notes were used to document

online and offline observations: *substantive field notes*, *methodological field notes*, and *analytical field notes* (Burgess, 1982).

Substantive field notes were used to document observations and interactions with participants, focusing on the particulars of events and documenting details related to who, what, where, and when (Burgess, 1982). Substantive field notes provide a chronological order of observations, interviews, and interactions with participants by recording people, places, and events along with more detailed descriptions of what was observed and experienced. In contrast, methodological field notes are more reflective in nature, capturing my process and role as a researcher, providing a place for thoughts on the research process as it unfolded. There is much debate over whether this kind of field notes should remain private or be used in the analysis of data (Burgess, 1982; Gans, 1999; Goffman, 1992). Given my role as an Etsy member, reflexive field notes were critical to capturing data related to my personal experiences as a Prosumer. Thus, the content of my methodological field notes are considered data and integrated into data analysis. The final type of field notes, analytical field notes, served as a place for preliminary analysis, and where I documented thoughts about analysis concurrent with data collection. Analytic field notes are brief initial interpretations of data that occur during data collection that begin to capture the meanings within the data which help to form preliminary ideas as to emergent themes (Burgess, 1982). Field notes were written by hand in a journal and also typed into the note-taking system Evernote.

As discussed previously, I became a member of Etsy's community as a Prosumer, collecting data in both the online and offline "field." Specifically, my fieldwork took

place in three ways and over a three-month period. First, I collected purely observational netnographic data from Etsy Blogs, Forums, online member-to-member interactions, recordings of town hall meetings, and member comments posted to blogs and forums (Kozinets, 2006). As discussed above, field notes were used to record observation data. All field notes were chronologically catalogued, providing details about blogs, forums, member-to-member observations and comments. Particular to blogs, these field notes captured details about posting dates and locations, as well as topics discussed, member comments, and member-to-member interactions within the blog. The second type of field notes, methodological notes, captured my experiences with, reactions to, as well as reflections on the research process in connection to the observation data from blogs, forums, member-to-member interactions, and comments. Lastly, analytical field notes provided a place for initial analysis of the observation data collected. These notes contained preliminary identification, coding, and classification of topics and themes that emerged during the observations. This type of data collection was important to my study as it permitted me to collect observational data on Etsy's community and culture, and provided a means of staying current on Etsy's marketplace business functions and practices.

Along with pure observation of the Etsy community, during this time I also engaged in participant observation as a Prosumer, by both buying and selling goods. Data were collected from online interactions with Etsy Administration, other Sellers as well as other Buyers. That is, as a "Seller" I interacted with Etsy Administration, other Sellers and Buyers relative to the selling process through Etsy's social media tools, including

blogs, Etsy Convos, Forums, and Treasuries. As a “Buyer” I interacted with Sellers searching for and purchasing goods. Interactions between myself, as a Buyer, with other Sellers took place via Etsy Convos and the shopping cart page. Field notes were used to collect participant observation data during my time spent as a Prosumer. Substantive field notes were used to systematically document details about my interactions with others in the Etsy community. For example, documenting what, who, where, when, and how interactions with others in the community occurred. Methodological field notes captured my experiences and thoughts as a Seller and Buyer as well as provided a place for reflexivity. Analytical field notes were used to identify initial themes and topics related to the roles of Buyer and Seller. By participating as a member who is both a Seller and Buyer, I gained a deeper understanding of the different roles at work within the Etsy community.

The third type of fieldwork consisted of participation on a digital Etsy Team. Etsy Teams are groups developed by Etsy members based on a common interest. They are self-regulated and are led by a Team captain and Team leaders. Teams can be developed online, offline or through a combination of both. I planned to select an online Team that met weekly, and participate in their online activities or events over a three-month time period. However, the Team that I chose decided to close their offline meetings, and there were no other Teams within a 4-hour radius that also met offline. Since I was therefore unable to attend face-to-face Team events, I attended two Etsy Craft Parties, hosted by Etsy in Brooklyn, NY. Participation in Etsy Craft Parties provided an intimate and direct

face-to-face fieldwork setting, where I was able to interact with other Sellers, Buyers, as well as Etsy Administration.

Field notes were used to collect data about my participation in online Etsy Teams as well as attendance at the Etsy Craft Parties. The first type of field notes, substantive field notes, chronologically recorded details pertaining to interactions and observations with Etsy Teams and Craft Parties. For instance, these field notes systematically catalogued details regarding the times, meeting places, members in attendance, what was discussed, and meeting duration. Methodological field notes were used to record experiences with Etsy Team and Craft Party participation. Analytical field notes were used to record my thoughts on potential themes that emerged during data collection. The data collected during my Etsy Team and Craft Party participation provided an alternative perspective on the dynamics between Etsy and its members, and how these dynamics shape Etsy as a community. This type of data collection also provided an opportunity to develop stronger connections with members, thereby facilitating the second data collection method used, which was the in-depth interview.

Over a three-month period, I spent approximately 15 hours a week as a “Seller” and 3 hours a week as a “Buyer.” In addition, I dedicated approximately 8 hours a day to observation. Participant observation and pure observation occurred over a three-month time period, resulting in a total of 312 hours of observation.

In-depth Interviews

Within ethnographic as well as netnographic studies it is common to combine in-depth interviews with participant observation as a mean to provide an additional

perspective on the topic (Cotte & Kistruck, 2006). Kozinets (2010) notes that within online community research, in-depth interviews facilitate a deeper “...understanding of the relationship between a person’s own unique socio-cultural situation and their online culture or community activities or behaviors” (p. 47). In-depth interviews also provide the opportunity for researchers to capture member’s recollections of events and experiences, as well interpretations of what it means to be a member of the community (Kozinets, 2010).

In this dissertation, I used in-depth interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the different roles within the Etsy community and what these roles mean to community membership. Data collected from in-depth interviews provided the opportunity for members to share their personal experiences and opinions about the Etsy community and its culture as a market as well as a business. By blending member's personal experiences with the observation data, a comprehensive and holistic understanding of Etsy emerged.

In-depth interviews were conducted during the three month period discussed for fieldwork, and were conducted in both face-to-face and online formats depending on the participant’s role in the Etsy community (i.e., Administrators, Sellers, and Buyers). Interviews were semi-structured with questions tailored to the participant’s particular role (see Appendix A: Interview Schedules). Questions were developed based on findings from the preliminary study and considering the objectives of this dissertation. Although most questions differed depending on the participant’s role, the progression of questioning was the same. That is, initial questions were the least difficult and probing; they were used to create an environment that encouraged open conversation and

conveyed the researcher's interest in the participant's perspective (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). This was followed by questions that were more thought-provoking, and these questions were used to gather personal perspectives on topics. By doing so, participants became more comfortable with sharing information that was perspectival in nature, offering a level of personal insight needed to address the research objectives (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The final few questions steadily worked downward in difficulty in terms of personal or emotional responses, moving toward interview closure.

As discussed, specific interview questions were tailored to tap into the participants' experiences in a particular membership role (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). For example, interviews with Etsy Administrators began with simple descriptive questions such as, *When did you join Etsy? How long have you been in your current role? Have you fulfilled any other roles in Etsy?* This was followed by more probing questions, such as *What public social media tools do you use to fulfill your role and duties?*, gradually building to questions that ask participants to draw on personal experiences and opinions, such as *Describe some experiences that illustrate your relationship with other members of Etsy's community? What are the challenges you personally face as an administrative member of Etsy? Does Etsy administration influence Etsy's community and marketplace?* Participant responses shed light on how members who are Administrators perceive their role within the community and market.

Interviews with participants who are Sellers began with simple, descriptive questions, such as *Describe your product assortment? What do you sell? How many items do you sell on a monthly basis?* Responses provided a basis of comparison between

Sellers that sheds light on the role of product within the Seller's experiences. This was followed by questions about the participant's experiences as community member, such as *Describe your interactions with Team members. How often do you meet? Do Teams support you as a Seller? Do they support Etsy as a community?* I also asked Sellers questions regarding their perceptions of their role within the marketplace, such as, *As a Seller do you influence the functions of Etsy as a marketplace? The practices?*

The interviews with Etsy Buyers also began with simple descriptive questions. For instance, *Describe your last purchase on Etsy? What did you buy? Why did you buy it? How much did it cost?* These questions were meant to ease participants into the increasingly experience-oriented questions, such as *Have you ever purchased something customized from Etsy? If so, can you describe this experience?* These questions were important to the study, as they provide insight into the dimensions of the purchasing experience and what makes Etsy different from other online marketplaces and retailers. I also asked participants to talk about their perceptions of Etsy as a community, such as, *Do you interact with a Seller when you purchase something from Etsy? Why or why not? Do you communicate with other Etsy members online about the products for sale?* Participants' responses to these questions sheds light on what draws consumers to Etsy's market instead of other online retailers and markets.

Interviews were conducted in locations that were convenient to the participants, such as their homes, local coffee shops, and other public venues. Since Etsy is an online retail site, many interviews took place online through video chat software, such as Google Hangout and Skype. Participants who were uncomfortable with this online

software were interviewed over the phone. All of the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants (see Appendix B: Consent Form).

Visual Documentation

Visual methods like photography and video are commonly used as methods of data collection in both traditional ethnographic and netnographic studies (Kozinets, 2010; Kozinets, 2006; Peñaloza & Cayla, 2006). Peñaloza and Cayla (2006) note that visual documentation provides a record of observations and experiences that document more detailed accounts of events as compared to written field notes. Conversely, written field notes better document the researcher's thoughts, feelings, and reflections about these events. As both forms of data collection capture different aspects of an observation, Peñaloza and Cayla (2006) posit that a combination of visual and written documentation serves to strengthen data collected in the field. Visual documentation also adds breadth and depth to ethnographic/netnographic studies, because it allows the researcher to move beyond text-based records during data analysis (Peñaloza & Cayla, 2006).

For the purposes of this dissertation, I used visual methods in both online and offline contexts. Specifically, offline visual documentation occurred via photography, while online documentation occurred through screen captures (Kozinets, 2010). Collection of visual data took place throughout the three-month period of fieldwork. Because its community interactions largely occur online, the visual component of the Etsy site was critical to understanding the communication process. Screen captures were used to document this process within specific areas of the Etsy site, such as Etsy's Forums, Blog, Seller Shops, Buyer to Seller Transactions, and Treasuries. Offline visual

documentation enhanced the understanding of the product, which is a critical part of understanding Etsy as a craft-oriented community. Offline visual documentation was used to document the artifacts of the Etsy community during Etsy Craft Parties. Through photography, images of products, member-to-member interactions, Etsy spaces, as well as products purchased by Buyers were captured and used to supplement data analysis. The visual data collected enhanced the textual data to better shape the understanding of the role of craft products within the Etsy community, and in particular, how Etsy's market signals a revival in craft products that has reconnected the consumer with the producer.

Participant Sample and Selection

As discussed above, interviews were conducted with three types of participants: Etsy Administrators, Sellers, and Buyers. A total of 20 interviews were conducted, and includes each particular type. In this section, I provide more detail about the participant sample and describe how I recruited participants for the interviews.

It was important to select a diverse range of Sellers to capture the different perspectives that exist relative to the Seller side of the Etsy community. I specifically looked for novice (newbie), average, and well-seasoned Sellers. For example, veteran Sellers have different perspectives on and experiences with doing business within the Etsy community as compared to novice Sellers. As such, I interviewed eight Sellers, each of whom varied based on sales volume, type of goods sold, and selling time on Etsy. This provided a mix of participants representing the different types of Etsy Sellers featured on Etsy Blogs, such as the up-and-coming Sellers interviewed for the "Featured Shops" and

well-seasoned Sellers featured on the “Quit Your Day Job” blog. Criteria for selecting “novice” Sellers included having joined Etsy within the last year and sales ranging from 30 to 60 items. “Average” Sellers are members that have been selling on Etsy for two years and have average sales between 200 and 500 items. “Well-seasoned” Sellers are members that have sold goods on Etsy for over two years with sales ranging from 1,000 to 5,000 items. Table 1 provides details about these participants.

Table 1

Participant Information: Sellers

	Seller Typology	Main Goods Sold	Total Transactions (Approx.)	Duration of Selling
Margaret	Newbie	Rare and Exotic Plant Seeds	5,000 +	6 months
Laura	Newbie	Retro Vintage	500+	7 months
Sabrina	Newbie /Average	Shop 1: Jewelry Shop 2: Tuning Forks Shop 3: Cosmetics	2	1 year
Fiona	Average	Customized Phillies Terrible Towels	40+ does not include sales over PayPal via Etsy	1 year
Josie	Average	Shop 1: Handmade Type Prints Shop 2: Vintage Home Goods	100+	8 months

Erin	Well-Seasoned	Shop 1: Dog and Cat Collars & Wears Shop 2: Children's Wear	2,000+	6 years
Madison	Well-Seasoned	Dog Toys & Custom Toys	3,000 +	3 years

Participants were recruited in several ways. I reached out to Sellers via Etsy Forums, wherein I posted several calls for participants. I also used the snowball method, using word of mouth to reach out to my personal network. I provided my contacts with information about the study and asked them to pass along the information to anyone they knew who might be interested. Last, I used my social media network to contact people involved in social groups, asking them to pass along information about my study to anyone who might be interested.

It was equally important to capture the diversity of consumer, or Buyer, perspectives, given the wide range of products and price points available on Etsy. As such, I interviewed nine consumers that vary in the type of goods purchased and total dollar amount spent. Types of goods include mainly handmade and vintage, however some Sellers interviewed are also Buyers and purchase crafting supplies as well as finished goods. Participants that are Buyers varied based on the how often they purchase goods (rarely, moderate, or heavy), which also tended to correspond to the total dollar amount spent at Etsy. Interviews with Buyers were conducted either online or offline, depending on the participant's preference and location. Interviews lasted between one and one and a half hours. Additional details about these participants are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Information: Buyers

	Goods Purchased	Time Spent on Etsy	Spending
Kaitlin	Purchases everything from deodorant to children's birthday gifts.	Browses 3 to 4 times a week	Approximately 1 to 2 purchases a week.
Samantha	Purchases items for herself, as well as gifts, like chocolates and one-of-a-kind items.	Browses almost every day via Etsy e-mails	At least 1 purchase a week.
Amber	Purchases items for herself. Seeks out very unique custom items. For example, legs for an Ikea Chair and a Watercolor Painting.	Browses once a week or less	Two purchases.
Lilly	Purchases items for herself and quirky gifts.	Browses once a week.	Approximately 1 to 2 purchases a month.
Anne	Purchases items for herself as well as gifts for friends. She searches for unique items.	Browses twice a month, often when an item or shop is mentioned by a friend.	Around 1 to 2 purchases every couple of months.
Catherine	Makes purchases mostly for friends, seeks out unique and customizable items.	Browses for specific purchases.	Makes purchases for birthdays and holidays.
Amy	The bulk of her purchases have been for her wedding.	Browses almost every day for wedding items.	Joined in 2008, but most recently became active because of her wedding. Made well over 20 purchases.

Chrissy	Main purchases were made for her wedding.	Browsed almost every day, until items were purchased for her wedding, less of a browser now.	Purchases were clustered close together for the purposes of her wedding. Rarely shops now.
Bridget	Personalized gifts for friends.	Browses at least once a week.	In her 5 years as a member she has made about 10 purchases.

As with Seller recruitment, I used the snowball method to recruit Buyers. I relied on my personal network as well as my social media network to see if anyone I already knew was a Buyer. I then provided these contacts with information about my study, and asked them to pass along the information to anyone they knew who might be interested.

Last, I interviewed three members of Etsy Administration. I originally proposed to interview participants in one or more of the following roles as identified by Etsy’s career categories: (1) maintaining Etsy social media, such as Blogs and Forums, (2) community management, (3) marketplace trust and integrity, (4) member operations, and (5) online retail operations. However, I came across a gatekeeper who limited my access to Etsy Administration and the number of members I was allowed to interview. I had made contact with other Etsy Administrators, but was told by the gatekeeper to discontinue my contact with these participants, and only interview the people that she lined up. I did not want to lose the Administrators that the gatekeeper put me in contact with, so I went ahead with them. When I reached out to other Etsy Administrators, I either did not get a response, or they declined to participate. As such, I was unable to schedule any other interviews with Administration. Fortunately, the interviews that I did

conduct were with long-time Etsy employees. Each interview lasted from one to two hours. Two of the interviews occurred over Skype, while one interview was face-to-face. Additional information about the three Etsy Administrators is provided below.

Randy

The first participant interviewed was Randy. He described himself as the first of the few that were initially hired to work for Etsy. He says, “I was employee [laughter] somewhere between number 15 and number 30, ‘cause all of us came aboard about the same time.” Randy officially started working part-time at Etsy in June 2007 and became a full-time employee in August that same year. Since that time he has worked mainly in Etsy Forums, and currently holds the position of a Senior Forums Moderator. As a Forums Moderator, Randy manages other moderators, overseeing how they engage with the community and resolving conflicts among community members. In talking about his role in relation to how he is perceived in the community, Randy explained, “I want [Etsy members] to think of me as a liaison between the community and the employees of the company.” In addition to managing forums and other forum moderators, Randy provides vital information to members within Etsy. For example, Randy will share information with other Teams, such as Etsy’s product Team, relaying community feedback about the development or integration of a new Seller tool. Randy provided insight into the ethos of Etsy, and well detailed some of the ways that Etsy has evolved over the past nine years. Moreover, Randy was able to describe Etsy’s growing pains and provide insight into the mission that moves Etsy forward as a business.

Mary

Mary began working for Etsy in the summer of 2008 as an intern, and became a full-time employee in June of 2009. Similar to Randy, she described herself as one of the first employees of Etsy. Mary has held several roles while at Etsy, as she started as a member of the Blog Team and moved into copywriting and editing. Eventually she became a Story Specialist, which is her current position. In the following passage, Mary describes her role in relation to Etsy as a business and marketplace community.

M: We will often get contacted by press outlets looking for specific kinds of member stories. Whether they are looking for someone in the New York area who works on a traditional craft to speak on a panel, or looking for someone who's using a new technology to make their items, or someone who lost their job in the recession and is now supporting their family with their Etsy shop. Umm... So I do a mix of reaching out to members of the community, interviewing them, cataloguing the story, kinda identify themes that can be brought out... Then, also using some of them as a reactive thing. So when the press reaches out to us, or Chad our CEO is speaking at a conference and is looking for a specific kind of anecdote. I think it's a way for us to keep the focus of the Etsy story on the community, on the person, not the company.

As a Story Specialist, Mary searches for Etsy Sellers that are doing something different, whether it be the product they are making, their process, or a story behind the goods. She catalogues and shares these unique Seller stories with Etsy's community and the press. Other Etsy Administrators, as well as the CEO, Chad Dickerson, use these stories for conferences and other Etsy-related public relations activities. Mary's journey from intern to full-time employee and different career experiences at Etsy provided insight into some different aspects of Etsy as a business that Randy could not speak to. In

addition, Mary's long tenure with Etsy provided another perspective on how Etsy has transformed from its humble beginnings.

Nicole

Nicole has a unique Etsy history, as her initial introduction to Etsy was as a Seller, opening her shop in 2007. Similar to other Sellers, Nicole quickly found out that she needed help with her shop, and she turned to Etsy's Blog and Forum to gain assistance from the available resources and other Sellers. Eventually Nicole became so connected to other Sellers, especially local Sellers, that she started a New York non-profit Etsy Team. As the Team Captain, she created selling events for New York based Etsy Sellers, eventually partnering with the local government. During this time she applied for and was hired as an Event Manager, which was her first role at Etsy headquarters. As an Event Manager she organized craft shows for Etsy Sellers and cultivated sponsorships. Over time this role was folded into Etsy's Community Teams. Currently, Nicole manages Community Teams, which includes Etsy Teams, Seller Education, and the Seller Education Blog. Nicole was an interesting Administrative member to interview. Given her background as an active and successful Seller, she provided perspective on two sides of the Etsy experience, that of a Seller and that of an Administrator.

Reflexivity

As a member of Etsy, as well as both Buyer and Seller, I acknowledge that my previous experience with and knowledge of Etsy influenced the research process. Although a researcher does not enter any field without preconceived notions of what he or she expects to find, the goal is to enter into it open to all of the possibilities (Peñaloza,

2006). As a researcher, one must engage in reflexivity to establish where one's own perspective ends and the research begins, in order to recognize and assume responsibility for one's role within the research process (Peñaloza, 2006). Indeed, according to Kozinets (2010), reflexivity is important "for netnographic quality ...[such that] netnography acknowledges the role of the researcher and is open to alternative interpretations" (p. 67). Reflexivity is an important part of the ethnographic research process because the researcher's activity in the field, whether it be online or offline, influences the process of data collection and analysis. As Kozinets (2010) notes,

Some of the most interesting occurrences in the world of netnography are occurring in the tension between the researcher and culture members, as online communities and cultures actively resist being studied. As the netnographic text is reflexive about these moments, its insights and ability to speak with authority about cultural membership are affirmed. (p. 169)

Indeed, the act of reflexivity often illuminates new or key findings not apparent in the data alone.

Sociologist Clifford Geertz speaks to the importance of reflexivity, but from a slightly different vantage point than Kozinets, by positing the "signature dilemma." Ethnography requires the researcher to participate and observe the community as a complete investigator. In addition to requiring reflexivity about the impact that this role may have on the data collected, it also creates tensions and difficulties in the writing process, as the researcher must determine how much to invade the text (i.e., the signature), while still representing the multi-vocality of participants. For Geertz, balance is achieved by being reflexive during the writing process, convincing the reader that she

or he has truly “been there,” and that had the reader been there too, the reader should have seen “what they saw, felt what they felt, concluded what they concluded” (1988, p. 16). Geertz (1988) notes that this can be achieved by writing empathetically, rather than scientifically, as well as by adopting a writerly signature that reveals that the researcher was there alongside participants, in the thick of it. The process of reflexivity, or “being there,” not only enriches the interpretation, but enhances its credibility:

The ability of an anthropologist to get us to take what they say seriously has less to do with either a factual look or an air of conceptual elegance than it has with their capacity to convince us that what they say is a result of having actually penetrated another form of life, of having one way or another, truly “been there.” And, that persuading us that this offstage miracle has occurred, is where the writing comes in. (Geertz, 1988, p. 4)

Given the fact that I assumed the role of participant observer, and that the nature of this role influenced the research process, the extent of this influence was reflected upon throughout data collection and analysis. As previously discussed, I dedicated time to maintaining reflexive field notes in the form of a journal to capture my personal experiences, perceptions, and feelings related to the Etsy. I documented my participation, noting how my membership influenced the research process. These reflexive field notes are folded into the interpretation to create a richer narrative and one that includes my presence as having “been there” in the field.

Data Analysis

After data collection was complete, I applied Spiggle’s (1994) recommendations for data analysis and interpretation. The process of developing thematic interpretations is iterative, in that it requires the researcher to go back and forth between the various types

of data to develop a conceptually rich interpretation. Initial data analysis started with identifying and labeling patterns within the data, as well as determining conceptual links shared between these patterns. Next, patterns were reviewed against one another to identify points of similarity and difference (Spiggle, 1994). Through this process an initial set of thematic categories emerged. These thematic categories were further developed by identifying shared relationships in categories, establishing the characteristics and dimensions of each theme. Themes were further refined by considering the influence of conditions, contexts, and data collection strategies. The thematic interpretation is presented in three parts and consists of Chapters IV-VI. Last, thematic content was tied back to the substantive areas of study, in this case the content themes of community, culture, and market, thereby situating the interpretation of data relative to the literature as well as the purpose and objectives of the study. Thus, Chapters VII and VIII include discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the data.

Summary

In this chapter, the methodological framework of this study was discussed. This framework blends an ethnographic and netnographic approach to investigate Etsy. Specific methods that were used to collect data were then outlined, followed by a discussion of participant selection, as well as consideration of the issue of reflexivity during data collection and analysis. Lastly, the approach to data analysis and interpretation was described. The next chapter is the first of three dedicated to the thematic interpretation of the data.

CHAPTER IV
THEMATIC INTERPRETATION PART I:
UNCOVERING ETSY'S CULTURE

As discussed in Chapter II, preliminary research revealed that community is a concept that is fundamental to Etsy (Blanchflower & Hodges, 2013). The two cornerstones of community are shared values and ideals, as both foster social interaction, bonding among members (Geertz, 1973), and generate consciousness of kind (Gusfield, 1978). At the same time, a community's shared values and ideals are reflective of its culture (Geertz, 1966; Kozinets, 2006). Throughout the interviews conducted for this dissertation, participants from Etsy's community shared stories and experiences that revealed how Etsy's cultural values and ideals are closely associated with the production and consumption of handmade and vintage products.

As will be discussed in this chapter, interpretation of the data revealed that participants share similar cultural values and ideals related to the production and consumption of goods sold on Etsy. These values and ideals appear to unite Etsy's members and foster a sense of community among them. Four thematic areas shed light on the specifics of these cultural values and ideals: (1) *The Mixed Meaning of Craft*, (2) *Unity in Diversity*, (3) *Roles and Responsibilities*, and (4) *Forging Relationships*.

The Mixed Meaning of Craft

It goes without saying that Etsy is rooted in the tradition and notion of craft. However, participants expressed mixed views about what craft encompasses, as well as

what craft means for Etsy. Although not necessarily of great debate between the members of Etsy, it is clear that participants who are involved in Etsy Administration view craft differently from those who are Buyers and Sellers. To better understand these differences, several issues are explored within this theme, including (a) *What Craft Means*, (b) *Reinstating the Human Touch*, and (c) *The Craft vs. Vintage Disconnect*.

What Craft Means

When asked to describe craft in relation to Etsy, different ideas surfaced. Overall, participants involved in Etsy Administration initially referenced a historical notion of craft, in particular the divide that is perceived to exist between Craft and Fine Arts. The following statement from Nicole, a member of Etsy's Administration, described it as: "I think it was really a reflection of the tradition of craft, um... often getting relegated to this second tier when it comes to Fine Arts. And that's not something that is new to Etsy, Right?" Likewise, Randy also recognizes this divide stating, "I know that some people. Um... define and divide between art and craft, and I don't think about that too much honestly." In contrast to mainstream thought regarding the art/craft divide, these participants recognize that within Etsy's corporate setting this divide does not exist. Nicole further elaborates on this when describing the blurred distinctions of Craft and Fine Arts within Etsy's marketplace,

N: So um... I think that it's really great to see Fine Artist and um... Craftsmanship on Etsy, all sort of just muddying that creative spectrum in a really beautiful way, right? Where um... it can be, I, you know, there are real fine art sculptures on there, for thousands of dollars, and there are folk artists on there... I think it's really great to have that all in one space.

In sum, the participants sought to break down the divide, and instead to convey the message that within Etsy's culture Fine Art can co-exist with Craft and that both can be of value. Indeed, I discovered the different ways that Etsy reinforces this idea during my observations as a Seller. For instance, when using search filters on Etsy, searching or listing items as Craft or Fine Arts does not exist as an option. Likewise, it appears that products defined as either "Craft" or "Fine Art" receive equal attention on Etsy's Blog and Front Page.

Participants who are Etsy Administrators also noted that the idea of handmade is typically folded into the notion of craft. Although these participants hold different opinions on the meaning of the two concepts, as a culture, members share the perspective that craft and handmade are tied to the notion of how goods are produced. This is illustrated very well in Randy's explanation of craft versus handmade:

R: I referred to ahh, the word "manufacturing" earlier in a literal sense, because you know when you manufacture something you are creating it. It's, it does not mean it came off an assembly line, it doesn't mean you used a machine. It means that you made it. I see craft in a similar way.

Likewise, Randy associates the notion of handmade with a level of quality or attention to detail. As he explained, "Yeah um... for... for me, um... I think it's [handmade] an implication of sort of the level of care that went into the creation of something." He continued to emphasize that handmade is, "...a literal attention to detail. Sometimes you screw it up! That too is handmade... you know precision is precision, but handmade is wanting to, you know, is wanting to pay that level of attention to detail."

Interestingly, among participants who are Etsy Administrators, craft represents the process of producing goods, as well as the way Etsy as functions as a business. For instance, Etsy's CEO created a Blog called *Code as Craft*, which was constructed to foster a place where members could share the "craft" of creating web code with the larger community. Within this Blog, the CEO further discussed how craft is a concept that represents quality, attention to detail, and pride. In the following excerpt, Nicole provides an interpretation of the current CEO's perspective on craft in relation to how Etsy Administration, and Etsy as a whole, carry out business:

N: And then in terms of how the company thinks about craft, I know... our CEO has often talked about um... code as craft, right? So taking pride in work that you do, um... and really wanting to pay attention to the details, umm... wanting it to represent yourself, being personally vested in your work. I think there, you know, oh also authorship, right? Like signing your work, we have experimented with, if a new product comes out on Etsy, uhhh like a site product, having some of the Etsy admin that worked on that product having their photos right there on the landing page. So, I think that we look to our community and the ideals that they have shared with us based on their craft and definitely think about how we can apply that in our office work as well.

In this excerpt, Nicole introduces the idea that craft is something that is carried out by Administrators within their daily roles by paying attention to detail, being invested in their work, and taking ownership and responsibility for what they produce. As such, craft is also a value that is integrated into Etsy's corporate culture. That is, Etsy Administrators practice craft by simply fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. Likewise, Nicole mentions that Administrators look outward to the Etsy community, integrating the community's work ethic and attitude into their work at the company's headquarters. Her

ideas reveal the extent to which craft is a value that shapes how business is conducted and ultimately shapes Etsy's culture.

In contrast to participants who represent Etsy Administration, the majority of participants who are Buyers and Sellers separated the idea of craft from that of handmade, assigning handmade a higher status than that of craft. For example, Erin, a seasoned Seller explains,

E: I don't really like the word craft... You usually think of hot glue guns... I don't know, I think there's like negative connotations with like "I make crafts," you know, that's something you do. I don't know that I like the word craft, but I understand that, that's what people do, make crafty stuff.

Likewise, most participants who are Buyers and Sellers view the products they purchase or sell as "handmade goods," instead of "craft goods." Although all Sellers and most Buyers share this perspective, a small group of Buyers did acknowledge that craft goods are sold on Etsy. Samantha, a long time Etsy Buyer, stated:

S: Etsy's like the protective veil, where you don't have to see the weirdness, you don't have to be exposed to like the high school cafeteria, like weekend craft shows of... like it takes away the awfulness for me of craft. And it makes it more personal, less weird.

According to Samantha, Etsy provides a filter that eliminates the lower quality goods usually associated with craft products. In turn, she feels that this relieves the negative connotations that others might associate with craft products. Catherine, another seasoned Buyer, shared a similar opinion, "I think outside of Etsy, craft... is not like quality, usually I think craft, like a little kid is making a craft project in the home, but I know that

is not the case [on Etsy].” For Catherine, craft means lower quality and amateurish products.

Others like Samantha, a baking enthusiast, think that the difference between handmade and craft comes down to quality.

S: “Handmade” to me has a much better connotation than “crafting,” “crafters,” “craft.” Like handmade, I don’t know. Like I love to bake, so for me handmade feels like, you know I have taken these very raw ingredients and created something nice, or potentially nice, depending on how it goes.

For Samantha, handmade products are the result of a more rigorous process that combines raw ingredients or materials. The resulting product is of a high level of quality. Amber, a relatively new Buyer, describes the rigor and authenticity of handmade goods on Etsy by comparing the process to making “handmade” milkshakes at Chick-fil-A.

A: Okay so, “handmade.” I am using it in comparison to other things, so I always get frustrated. I don’t eat at Chick-Fil-A anymore but when I did, they would always say “handspun milkshakes,” which really annoyed me. Because the hand spun part was really just like they put the milkshake in some little like, you know whirly gig thing. That’s not hand spun! I don’t know what hand spun even means but I’m pretty sure that is not what it means. So I feel like handmade in the Etsy sense is the truest, it is just like honest, just like an honest claim. I guess, using a hand spun in the Chick-Fil-A sense wasn’t very helpful, but I feel like I couldn’t come up with anything else, but I feel like for Etsy, they are not, like yes it’s become a selling point, but I think in the beginning maybe it was not so much as a selling point, as much as it was the truth, and then it became the selling point because it was the truth.

Fiona, another Seller, similarly describes the difference between craft and handmade and reinforces this notion among Sellers:

F: I think of handmade as being like, there's like a greater attention to detail. Um... that it was well thought out and well planned, and it was not necessarily made for the art... I think of crafts as just being... like, "I want to go make a... wreath... so I am going to make it and just sell it." That would be a craft. But when I think of handmade, as not necessarily being made for me, I am making it, but I could be making it for somebody else.

Fiona brings up an interesting point echoed by a small number of participants who are Buyers. For some, craft is associated with a hobby, something that an individual does just for pleasure. In contrast, handmade is associated with more of a trade or career, and, as such, is something that the maker enjoys doing with the intent to sell to an end user. Thus, the Buyer, rather than the Seller, is the main consideration when producing something "handmade."

Indeed, the terms "craft" and "handmade" invoke different meanings among participants, depending on their roles as Etsy Administrators, Buyers or Sellers. Buyers and Sellers created a divide between crafts and handmade goods, similar to the way Etsy Administration described the division between fine art and craft that exists outside of Etsy. Buyers and Sellers perceive the goods sold and purchased on Etsy as handmade, rather than crafts. The majority of these participants expressed that more rigor goes into producing handmade goods compared to craft goods, which results in a higher quality end product. Despite this difference of opinion, all seem to recognize that whether something is handmade or a craft, it is the result of the process of "making something." In sum, the act of "making something," whether interpreted as craft or handmade, is an ideal common throughout Etsy, and as such, is an integral part of Etsy's culture.

Reinstating the Human Touch

Despite varying perspectives on “craft” versus “handmade,” the allure of shopping and selling on Etsy seems to be linked to the production process associated with the goods sold. When describing handmade goods, Fiona, a Seller, reinforced this notion when describing the difference between handmade and craft goods, “[handmade goods have] greater attention to detail... they are well thought out and well planned.” Similar to other participants, Fiona recognizes and values the hand- versus machine-driven process espoused by Etsy.

In a similar vein, Bridget, a long time Buyer who often browses Etsy but makes few purchases, discussed this process as part of the handmade goods sold on Etsy:

B: I mean that’s what I exactly think of when I, when I think of Etsy I think of handmade. So, I think of artists that have put, materials together themselves um... to make a product. So they’ve, they’ve developed a different, a process of... it’s not something that’s mass-produced. They made it themselves...

Other participants who are Buyers and Sellers, ranging from the well-seasoned to newbies, shared Bridget’s sentiment. For instance, Sabrina, a Buyer new to Etsy, shares a response that coincides with this sentiment, as she stated that goods sold on Etsy are “not mass production [goods],” and that this is “...a value of the product that a consumer can get from Etsy.” Fiona, Bridget, and Sabrina touch upon the idea that the handmade nature of the goods sold on Etsy adds value and uniqueness, which is also a reason why participants who are Buyers like to shop on Etsy.

Participants, in particular Sellers and Buyers, also tend to idealize the handmade aspects of the goods. For example, when Erin, a long time Seller, shares what she does for a living with others, she tends to emphasize that aspect:

E: When people ask me what I do, and I'm like oh, "I sell on Etsy, I hand make pet supplies, and I hand make children's clothing." You know a lot of people, you know if I'm given a gift I let people know that, "Oh, this is handmade." And then they are like, "Oh wow, that is something really special. It was handmade." Or people will ask at craft shows 'cause, um... you know some craft shows require stuff to be handmade and some don't, and they'll ask, "Oh, did you hand make this?" And I'm like "Yeah." And they're like, "Wow this is amazing!"

Lilly, a Buyer, explains why handmade products tend to be sought after from a consumer's perspective,

L: I'm thinking like sewing embroidery, metal work, like when you do something with rings, and that kind of thing. Um... stuff that not necessarily everybody can do, painting, um... or people who like find a um... the little, the vintage pictures and them put them in the jewelry, that kind of stuff. Like, I can't do that, and even if I could, I wouldn't really have the time, so it's somebody who's put time and effort into making a product.

Lilly admires the time and effort that goes into making something by hand. She, like many other Buyers, recognizes that the ability to create (or acquire in the case of vintage) is a talent and something that cannot be done by just anyone. Many also expressed that they "wished" they could make what Sellers do.

Although all members value the hand-produced element of goods on Etsy, it also surfaced that, as a business, Etsy embodies a deeper and more complex interpretation of the handmade concept. An excerpt from a conversation about goods sold on Etsy with Randy, a long-time Etsy Administrator, illustrates the company's perspective on the

relationship between manufacturing and handmade relative to what can be sold on the site.

R: So on Etsy, um... handmade fits, things that you, things that you constructed yourself from scratch, from just like raw materials... On Etsy [it] can also be things that, involve some part of manufacturing assistance. Provided it follows our policy, provided you applied and got accepted...

Randy further explained the complexity of the idea of made by hand by describing the production process of Gibson Guitars. He continues,

R: I think there is like a guitar company, I don't know if it's Gibson or who it is that makes acoustic guitars. Umm... And, and it's like a manufacturing plant somewhere, I think they have, I think they have like 40 people on staff, you know there are machines that are involved and there are people with like hammers, um... so... you know it's a good, it's sort of a good example of how manufacturing and handmade can sort of fit together.

Clearly the idea of “made by hand” or “handmade” is a slightly more complex notion for those in Etsy Administration than for Sellers and Buyers. Unlike those who are Buyers and Sellers, participants who are Etsy Administrators recognize that in order for some successful shops to grow, they must allow for the integration of machine equipment during the production process. In turn, they have created rigid guidelines and introduced a manufacturing assistance application and approval process to ensure that the integrity of the “handmade” claim is upheld. Members idealize the unique and creative approaches used by Sellers to create, acquire and curate goods, including unique and creative processes used by Etsy Administration. As such, from this interpretation it can be

surmised that a value of Etsy's culture is the appreciation for uniqueness and creativity related to products as well as market practices and functions.

The Craft vs. Vintage Disconnect

Although participants recognize that vintage goods are an important part of Etsy's marketplace, most do not associate vintage goods with either craft or handmade. For instance, when asked about her thoughts on the vintage shops that are part of Etsy, Catherine, a well-seasoned Buyer responded, "I have seen some really cool things, but they are more expensive, because people are probably taking more effort to find them, and [especially the] ones that are worth reselling." Catherine, like other Sellers, views vintage goods as a separate entity of Etsy's market, distinct from its handmade goods. As such, the majority of Buyers and Sellers often described vintage goods as a particular product category sold on Etsy. Josie's description of Etsy's product assortment aligns with this idea, "Um... I guess I probably define vintage by the 20 year rule that I learned from Etsy." Like Catherine, Josie recognizes vintage as a product category, and in particular she sees vintage according to Etsy's interpretation of this product category, which it defines as "items that must be at least 20 years old" (Etsy, 2014).

While some participants, like Josie, recognize vintage as a product category defined by tangible attributes, other participants value vintage goods for their more intangible attributes. During a conversation about interesting selling experiences, Laura, a newer vintage Seller, talked about an exchange she had with a woman in Moscow, Russia.

L: I hadn't been selling for very long... and I got a Convo from a woman, and the item I was selling was ridiculous. They were these cups. They looked clearly like they were from the fifties, brand new in the boxes with the tags still on them. The bottom had a well up in it with a squeaker, then they had what I learned from doing the research, lenticular eyes.... They had dog faces with lenticular eyes and squeakers on the bottom...

Laura continued to explain the story behind the glasses:

L: [They are based off of] Russia's version of Dr. Seuss, a guy named, it's like Chernofsky or something. [The Buyer said that her] children loves his books and he has [a] museum... well a child gave that writer one of those cups as a gift. And she said, and 'I guess they let the kids handle it [the cup] and it has been glued together a million times, and I told them if I could ever find one [the cup] I would replace it for them.'

This experience reinforces how certain members value vintage goods for their intangible attributes. Laura's experience illustrates that for some members, vintage items can reconnect Buyers to the past, and provide a product or experience that can no longer be acquired new. In the case of Laura's vintage glasses, the Buyer was able to share the story of a famous children's book writer with her children, as well as with visitors to Chernofsky's museum.

Katlin, who is a long time Buyer with a passion for vintage dinnerware, describes the value of vintage for her:

K: Vintage um... I mean that's just something that was maybe neglected in the past or just lost and, has, like resurfaced, I don't know, I think there is a lot of cool vintage stuff out there... I keep seeing all this cool vintage Pyrex stuff... for some reason vintage dinnerware, I don't know what it is about it, but I feel like I would just throw away all of my stuff I have, just to have vintage... To me it's just old stuff that like, people used to not even think about. But now it's just special I guess. I don't know why vintage stuff is so neat to some people.

Kaitlin's excerpt reveals that she values vintage goods for their historical qualities and connections to the past. In particular, she appreciates the history as well as the story behind these goods. These particular vintage goods are so valued by Kaitlin that she is willing to put aside all of her new ware for vintage pieces. Moreover, she recognizes that while the vintage appeal is not always important to others, it is important to her. She continues to explain this notion through her love for her parents' vintage Buffalo pottery:

K: We have my old, it's like my parents old Buffalo pottery, and my sister is like "Why do you have mom and dad's old bowls and plates?" And I'm like, "They're so cool." She's like "They are ugly, they are old and they have brown rings on them." But then I'm like "Look they are so cool!" I like them better than all of the new stuff we got when we got married, like. I don't know why, it's just neat that someone else way in the past was using them, and it's like "I wonder what they were doing when they used them..." I don't know, I think it's only certain people that get that.

As Kaitlin shares her passion for vintage, she points out that not everyone or even all Etsy shoppers admire vintage for these reasons. She notes that it is a particular type of person that values vintage, and appreciates it for its rich historical significance or stories. In addition, she points out how some people will often dismiss these products as "junk," pointing to the idea that for some Buyers as well as Sellers, the saying "one man's trash is another man's treasure" holds true.

To this end, some participants believe that vintage goods are a way to repurpose things that are no longer considered useful to others. In the following excerpt, Lilly explains this point of view:

L: I guess in correlation with Etsy, vintage is, a lot of found items... and a lot of people who are really creative have no problem repurposing stuff that's older,

seemingly outdated, or even just presenting it to the community and letting them use it the way they want to. Like old hats, and things like that, that you haven't necessarily done anything to. But there's a market for it, because people either collect them or might even wear them, that kind of thing.

It is important to note that a small group of participants equate the process of acquiring vintage goods with the process used to make handmade goods. During a conversation with Amber, a Buyer on Etsy, the similarities between the two were clear:

A: ...So okay, I think in the Etsy sense there is old and there's making things to be old, or to reminisce like a certain part of culture, you know? ... So I think in and of itself just creating things with your hands is vintage, because there is something that is so human about that...

Amber considers the process of making handmade goods to be vintage, in as much as she equates both the act of making handmade goods and that of acquiring vintage goods as integrating the human touch. That is, some participants see the effort involved in finding vintage goods akin to making something by hand, as Buyers have to go out and find vintage pieces of value, which, like making pottery or jewelry, is a skill that not everyone has.

Etsy's culture is rooted in the tradition, process, and production of handmade goods. All participants were initially drawn to Etsy by the desire to consume, produce, or facilitate the sale of things either made by hand or considered vintage. Despite craft being a cornerstone of Etsy's culture, participants in various roles, whether Administrators, Sellers, or Buyers, hold a range of different perspectives on the meaning of craft relative to Etsy, including differences between Fine Art and Craft, craft and handmade, and

handmade and vintage. These mixed meanings point to the individualized, free-spirited notion of commerce espoused by Etsy.

Unity in Diversity

Regardless of participants' reasons for joining Etsy, whether shopping, selling, or working, they often share a common core of values and ideals that attracted them to the site in the first place. Yet, despite this common core, not all participants ascribe to or abide by it. As such, two issues surfaced as important to understanding how participants often both embrace and reject Etsy's cultural values: (a) *Etsy's Core*, and (b) *Going Against the Grain*.

Etsy's Core

Participants pointed to a myriad of values and ideals that they personally feel serves to unite Etsy's market members as a community. Among these values and ideals, three appear to cut across different categories of participants, creating bonds among them: (a) *Loving handmade*, (b) *Admiring the unique and creative*, and (c) *Promoting honesty*. These core cultural values and ideals were found to be important to the majority of members despite differences in their roles or reasons for being a part of Etsy.

Loving handmade. A key cultural value that drew all participants to Etsy is the appreciation for handmade and/or vintage goods. For instance Nicole, a long time Etsy Administrator, shared that Sellers are often drawn to Etsy as a way to leave "an artistic mark, in a really positive way, being able to use their gifts." She further explained that this is reflected in members' commitment to doing something "good" relative to the making or selling of goods, or to creating. As such, participants often cited the desire to

consume, sell, and or aid in the retailing of handmade as well as vintage goods as what initially attracted them to Etsy.

Similar to Nicole, Madison, a well-seasoned and high volume Seller, shared her opinions about why people sell on Etsy from the Seller perspective: “I think it is kind of like, to create a quality handmade product. And it kind of seems like everybody stands behind their product and wants to present it in the best light.” According to Madison, this is often why Sellers are attracted to Etsy as a venue to sell their quality handmade goods.

Similarly Bridget, a moderate Buyer, explains that members are attracted to Etsy for “just the appreciation of handmade art.” Bridget notes that not only Sellers, but Buyers and Administrators value handmade products. Amber, a newer Buyer, explains that Buyers are drawn to Etsy as a way to gain access to the “good stuff,” in particular, handmade products reminiscent of the William Morris Arts and Craft movement.

A: I think just, the arts and crafts movement, you know? I think Etsy in a lot of ways has kind of repeated like the William Morris era, you know? That [of the] Arts and Craft movement, wallpaper and letter pressing and all that good stuff... I think Etsy is a sort of modern day Arts and Craft, or it's a part of the modern day Arts and Crafts movement.

Amber went on to explain that members are attracted to Etsy as a way to obtain goods that are special and not always accessible at mass-merchant retailers. Indeed, many participants expressed an appreciation for the handmade process and quality associated with handmade goods, rather than the low-quality and mass production process associated with mass-produced goods. Amber points to the importance and value of the handmade production process for her:

A: Yeah. I feel like there is a very um... not like... it's like almost a homegrown mentality... It's like the anti-industrialism mentality. Um... So yeah, this idea that, that, humans are all we need to make things, to create things. And we don't need, any other... There really shouldn't ever be middlemen in what you do. Because you are the one who's suppose to do it. I think that is the main idea, the main idea there.

Amber points to the fact that members not only value handmade goods, but also what these goods stand for. Bridget described this shared cultural sentiment as “the appreciation of being able to get something that's, that's not mass produced, that's not, um... you know, just that's unique.” For Amber and Bridget, the value in these goods lies in the human element of the production process. Randy, a long time Etsy Administrator elaborated on this shared value when discussing community goals.

R: [Etsy Buyers] don't want you to go to Bath & Body Works, they don't want you to go to Target. They want you to come to them, come to other soap sellers, and buy your soap from somebody who hand-makes it.

Randy's statement illustrates the idea that members are drawn to Etsy not just for the tangible product, but also for how goods are produced.

In a similar vein, Bridget explains that there is value in the transparency that occurs between Sellers and Buyers as a result of handmade production.

B: You know, being able to have people appreciate something that you made by hand. And I mean that, that work really goes into those type of things, you know, and it's not that it's something that can always be done in a hour or two but, that, it's going to be done especially for you. When you go and you say [to a Seller], “This is what I want. This is how I want it.”

The ability for Bridget to communicate directly with Sellers highlights her appreciation for the transparency in the production and transaction process of goods exchanged on Etsy. Like many other participants, she values this transparency. Likewise, Amber shared her appreciation for the transparency in the making of handmade goods by expressing frustration with the lack of transparency in the making of most of the goods she consumes.

A: Like the construction of my apartment. I know that I pay a certain amount for rent. But I don't know who made this apartment. I have no idea what kind of pains they went through to get that door straight or like put that knob on right. You know what I mean? Like all these little things that I have, like when you live in a world that is constantly like that. Where you are constantly using things that where you don't know, what human touched it ever, or in its creation. It is really refreshing to find something that a human has like, you know, [made], like the watercolors.

She continues to explain that she will always return to Etsy because there is comfort in knowing who is making the goods that are sold, “‘cause you never know who it is that made anything!” As Randy, Bridget, and Amber point out, there is intrinsic value in goods created by a person, and in the transparency of the hand-made production process as compared to mass-produced goods.

I observed this notion of transparency in interactions between Etsy Administration and Sellers. That is, Etsy Administration create and use various social media tools to facilitate an open platform and dialogue with Sellers. For example, Etsy Administration facilitates face-to-face, live streaming Town Hall meetings. These meetings serve as a tool to exercise transparency between the community and Etsy Administration, as they allow for open, uncensored discussion to occur between the two parties. Mary, an Etsy

Administrator, described the ways that they use social media to further achieve this transparency.

M: One [value] that I'd say that we very much try to bring the whole community into is this idea of transparency... [W]e've been posting weather reports, which is like site-wide stats for the community for years, which is really quite rare to see a company sharing that much information. And then I think that we try to be incredibly open with the community, hosting Q&A's in the Forums, things like that, having... Town Hall [meetings]... where sellers are able to ask their questions directly in a live environment, you know no editing... [A]t the same time we are trying to encourage sellers to have that same kind of transparency with their Buyers.

Essentially, Mary's excerpt illustrates how Etsy practices transparency between and among members. She also notes how the idea of transparency is further encouraged with Sellers when interacting with Buyers.

Based on participants' responses and my observations, it is apparent that regardless of their particular roles, participants value handmade goods not only for the end products, but also for the processes by which these goods are made. As Erin, a seasoned Seller stated, among Etsy members there is "a high value placed on handmade goods." Producing something by hand naturally means fewer entities involved in the production process, thereby fostering transparency relative to the production as well as distribution of these goods. Moreover, the idea of transparency is emphasized through communications between Etsy Administration and Sellers. As such, a love for the product as well as the process of making something by hand is a core Etsy value.

Admiring the unique and creative. Similar to participants' appreciation for the handmade characteristics of goods sold on Etsy, many view Etsy as a unique online

platform that provides them with a place to buy and/or sell high quality handmade products. In general, participants expressed an appreciation for Etsy's creative and unique approach to selling these products. Moreover, they value the fact that Etsy facilitates the buying and selling of high quality, unique, and innovative goods, and this is something that brought them to Etsy in the first place.

Participants who are Buyers often seek out goods on Etsy because they see these goods as creative and/or unique. Lilly, a Buyer shared this perspective when describing why people are drawn to Etsy, "You just get this huge sampling of creativity, literally from all over the world, and you find stuff... it's neat that they just share stuff that you wouldn't find down the street." Similarly, Bridget thinks that Etsy's endless assortment of merchandise makes it a market where items are truly unique, providing further details by contrasting Etsy to "Things Remembered," a retail chain that specializes in the personalization of assorted products.

B: At Things Remembered... you're kind of, you're limited, you know, like to a certain type of font, or certain type of products, I mean you're going to find metal this, or plated things. But on Etsy, you really can search for so many things, and you can kind of take their creativity, and meld it with maybe what you are trying to do for somebody or for your own self. So it can kind of be a shared creativity process.

In this excerpt, Bridget touches upon the notion that one facet of uniqueness is personalization. She goes on to further explain the idea of uniqueness and personalization:

B: Obviously if you're getting a gift you can go anywhere... I've gone to "Things Remembered" before, they do really nice custom things. But you're kind of

pigeon-holed to what they do. Whereas on Etsy you can kind of, you can branch out and do so many really unique things... just because of people's creativity.

Bridget continued to discuss this topic, saying, "creativity and uniqueness [must be] shared values between Buyers and Sellers." This comment suggests that she recognizes the extent to which creativity and uniqueness are valued among members and embodied in the products, whether custom or ready-made, that are sold on Etsy. Moreover, in the following passage, Catherine, a Buyer, explains how an appreciation for uniqueness and creativity often extends beyond the end product:

C: ...[sometimes] if I order something they send something that is of a lower value and throw it in as an added benefit. Or the packaging is really cute.... [A]nd so I think that it's really neat that the sellers do, [and] are unique in that aspect, like in their packaging or in how they position themselves, or [how] they write little notes. I always feel special when the seller writes "Thank you for your purchase Katie." Like they will put your name, or they will put like a unique message, and they will hand write it, instead of putting a card... And I like that they are putting so much into [it].

Catherine recognizes, as do many other participants, that creativity and uniqueness extend beyond the products to become part of the entire exchange process. She appreciates and recognizes that the ways Sellers package items and communicate with Buyers fosters a unique approach to customer service.

Nicole, an Etsy Administrator, explained how creativity and uniqueness are also values recognized and encouraged by Etsy Administration: "You know, it's all with this common thread of sort of creative community, that's probably the shallow end, but it is a creative community." As a shop owner, Nicole explained the role of creativity from the Seller's perspective: "I mean as a Seller myself, this is, you're really, it's part of who you

are. This is your, your creativity on the line, and maybe how you are following your dreams and maybe doing something for yourself.” Similarly, Mary, also an Etsy Administrator, noted that Etsy provides “a creative outlet. It can be so many different things to so many different people.” Both Nicole and Mary believe that Etsy Administration aims to create a space where Sellers can be creative and unique not only with the goods they sell, but with the way they conduct shop business. As such, Etsy Administration strives to foster a platform where Sellers can exercise their creativity throughout the entire selling process.

As both a Seller and Buyer, I also observed appreciation for creativity and uniqueness in the goods sold, as well as in shop practices. As a Seller, I found that Etsy’s Administration fosters a platform where I can be unique and creative with the merchandise that I sell. For instance, though I experimented with several different media when making jewelry, I found that the pieces that are most often “favorited” by others are what I think are my most unique and creative pieces. These pieces are part of a four-part series of necklaces that feature real acorns. I sold several of them and even shipped one priority express to Australia for a Buyer’s birthday.

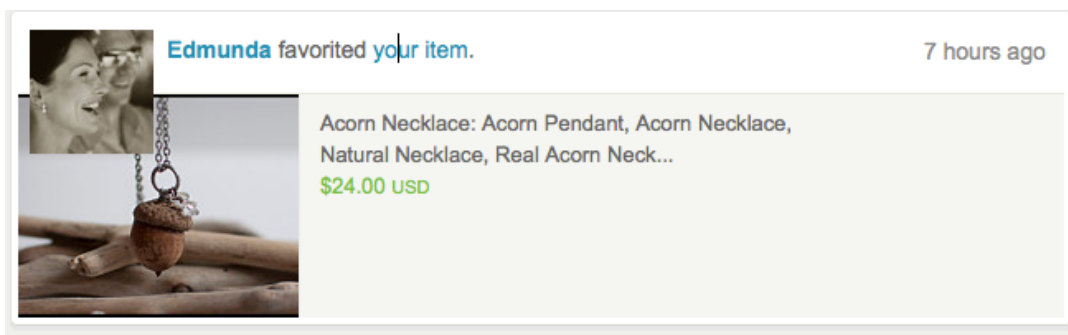


Figure 2. Acorn Necklace

As a Seller, I want to provide a unique and creative overall customer experience to my Buyers, and that includes my product packaging. All packages are shipped in a craft paper jewelry box, however each package has different cardstock and packaging to meet the aesthetic needs of individual items while keeping them secure during shipping. I also use a typewriter to create product labels and thank you cards. With all packages, I include an individualized, handwritten message to the Buyer and a coupon code for the next purchase. I also employ creativity and personalization with my shop policies, as I tailor my policies to my own particular business goals as a part-time Seller.

As a Buyer, I find that Etsy offers an endless assortment of unique and unusual items. For instance, when shopping for my friend's birthday, I was looking for a unique gift related to photography. I found a wide variety of goods, but during my search I stumbled upon an item that I did not even know existed: a slide show notebook. The Seller used vintage Kodak photography slides to create miniature notebooks using the slides as the front and back. Not only was this product a creative use of old slides, it was unique and perfect for my friend's eclectic taste. When I received the package it was wrapped in graph paper and tied with yellow twine. The Seller repurposed an old card from a card catalogue as a thank you card and wrote a personalized message. In addition, when I placed the order, I was contacted directly by the Seller to let me know that each notebook was made by hand and to order, therefore it would take a week to make and ship the notebook. This was an experience I was not used to having when buying something online from mass merchant retailers. All in all, the product and purchase reflected the Seller's own creativity and uniqueness. As a Buyer, I felt that I had received

not just a unique, creative and high quality product, but a unique, creative, and high quality customer service experience. Essentially, uniqueness, creativity, and quality are values that are at the core of Etsy's culture. As such, members seek to either create or obtain products and experiences that embody these values.

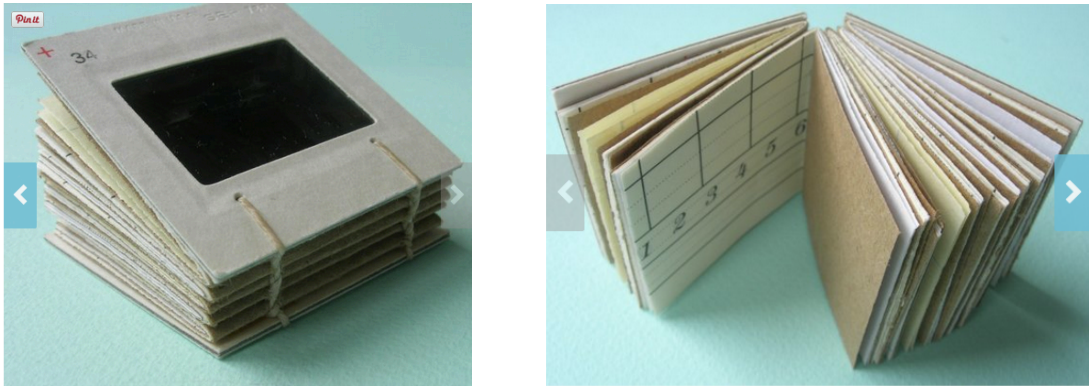


Figure 3. Slide Show Notebook

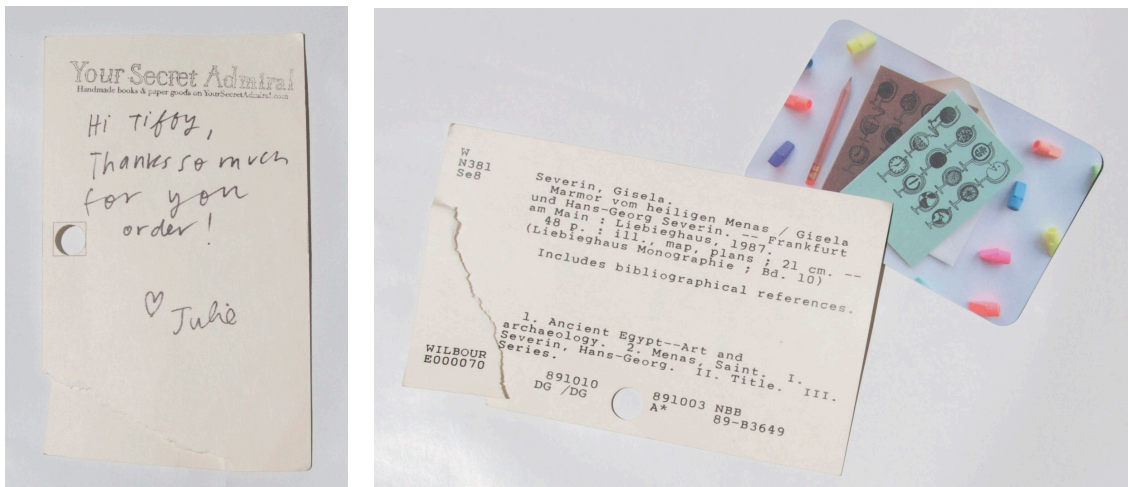


Figure 4. Slide Show Thank You Card Front, Back, and Business Card

Many participants who are both Sellers and Buyers also noted that quality is an aspect they value and either try to integrate into their shops or look for when purchasing

goods. For instance, Josie, a Seller stated, "...quality and uniqueness... are the two things I pay the most attention to." Whether buying goods for her vintage shop or for herself, uniqueness and quality are two characteristics she values the most. She continued to explain what she means by quality and uniqueness by showing me her brass animal collection.

J: Like the craft of the actual thing. I guess one example I look at, I have a tiny little collection I started of brass animal things... Yeah, one is a mouse, one is an elephant that is actually a bottle opener. There's a lot of things like them, but the actual design of the animals is not [always] so great. So I wait and don't get one unless it seems like more unique or a better design than the other ones.

For Josie, as with many other participants, quality is valued and plays an important role alongside uniqueness when searching for products to buy for personal use or for a shop. As mentioned earlier, participants often cited that, for the most part, they know that they are getting a quality item on Etsy. However, some participants did note that not all Sellers sell quality products. As Fiona, a Buyer turned Seller explained, not everything that is creative is of high quality or even nice to look at.

F: Yeah, and just because I love Etsy, and had shopped on it so long I knew that so much of what's on there is really beautiful and nice and creative, um... [but] you're kind of torn. 'Cause part of you realizes that the whole point is for it to be a forum for artists and anybody that creates can be an artist, so you want to, you want to appreciate the fact that somebody made something and is selling it. And I think on the other side is "It's really ugly, please take it down."

Fiona's explanation highlights the "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" conundrum. Because Etsy allows individuals to exercise their own creativity and uniqueness, a myriad of products as well as perspectives on what is unique, creative, and of good quality exist.

Like Fiona, many other Buyers and Sellers noted that although most items on Etsy are of good quality, not everything is. However, all participants believe that the items they personally sell or purchase are quality items. None of the participants in this study cited instances where they felt they were fooled or were disappointed by lack-luster products. This idea points to the next issue of importance to understanding the core values that shape Etsy: Honesty.

Promoting honesty. As previously discussed, participants recognized that while most products sold on Etsy are of high quality and value, some are sub-par. However, participants went to great lengths to point out that the products they purchase and the service they experience typically exceeds their expectations. Furthermore, participants conveyed an appreciation for the honesty seen among Sellers and the overall Etsy community. When describing the Etsy community, Nicole, an Administrator, pointed to this particular value. She explained that Sellers “...really are, such, like honestly, genuinely kind people who are trying to find success as artist and as makers. And that’s kinda, itself, is inspiring, it’s inspiring when people reach that point that they really want to give something a try.” Nicole conveys the notion that Sellers are genuine and trustworthy, and use Etsy as a way to make an honest living by harnessing their passion for handmade and/or vintage goods.

Buyers are similarly receptive to this value, often almost idealizing it when discussing the Sellers they encounter. As Bridget, a moderate Buyer explained:

B: Well, what I’ve noticed, about a lot of Sellers, um... is that they’re really upfront and honest about their process, um... So I think that there’s a belief system of honesty between the two. So if you have any questions, they’re going to be

honest with you. But they're usually up front and honest with you, about their process and about their product, um... So I really think there's an honesty factor.

In this excerpt, Bridget reveals that honesty is reciprocal, as it involves Buyers' expectations and Sellers' practices equally. She also reveals how honesty is practiced in the production process for products sold on Etsy. As Bridget sees it, honesty is also important to the exchange process on Etsy.

B: I've never had to return anything, but I'm sure that, you know, a lot of people have the policy of, "If this isn't what you wanted, or if this doesn't hold up to your expectation, my guarantee is that there's an exchange, or there's a remake," or something like that. So I think that it's just a really open and honest process, [and] that has always seemed to be what I've come across.

Similar to many other participants, Bridget thinks that honesty even enters into the exchange process.

Participants believe that the majority of Sellers are honest by being transparent about their business operations. Sabrina, a newer Seller on Etsy, put it simply:

"Everybody wants to make a living and be honest with their work." In a similar vein,

Fiona described in detail the idea of exercising honesty from the Seller's perspective:

F: You wanted to please your customer, like everyone wanted to um... like everyone seemed to have um... return policies and tried to be very clear about what they were offering um... it seemed like people even went overboard to me on describing their products, good or bad things, which leads me to believe that they were trying to be honest... with what they were offering.

Fiona's statement reveals that Sellers maintain honesty by practicing transparency. To Fiona, it does not matter if the products sold are "good or bad things," signaling that

despite the perceived quality of products sold on Etsy, most, if not all Sellers aim to be transparent with Buyers. As such, it appears that honesty is an end result of the desire to please customers.

There were many stories shared by participants about Sellers going above and beyond to please their customers and to maintain transparency with them. The following exchange with Laura illustrates the great lengths Sellers will go to make some Buyers happy.

L: I sold something I said was in mint condition, 'cause I thought it was, to a man in Texas. Oh my gosh, he reamed me. Oh my gosh, it was terrible.

Me: Was he just really rude?

L: Yeah. And I said, "I'm so sorry, I thought based on all the items I run across this was mint condition." Well it did, it had a tear. I didn't see it, I didn't see it! He said it was dirty, it was not dirty! Well anyway. I gave him a full refund including his shipping and I said, "If you would like to send it back to me that would be great, if you decide to keep it fine." He kept it. Umm... but he gave me a good review, it was a very carefully worded review.... "Very honest Seller," you know what I mean? It was good, but I knew, we knew, what happened... [and] I lost, you know some money on that transaction. But, I wanted to do the right thing...

Laura's experience captures the efforts that Sellers on Etsy will make to not only please their Buyers, but to maintain shop integrity. Laura did not have to give this Buyer a full refund with shipping, or let him keep the bag. However, she felt that she made the mistake and therefore the "honest" thing to do was to provide a full refund, including shipping, and allow the customer to keep the bag. She did not care that she lost money. Instead, like many other Sellers, Laura was more concerned about maintaining honest relationships with her customers. Honesty, as a value, seems very important to

participants, and is what initially attracted many to Etsy as a place to sell as well as purchase goods. Indeed, Buyers, Sellers, and Etsy Administrators all emphasize practicing honesty in their roles and view it as a core value of the Etsy community.

Participants embraced a particular set of core values that Etsy reflects and which foster bonding among members of its community. As a result, Etsy is perceived as a community-based market by many Sellers and Etsy Administration. All participants appreciated and valued the tangible and intangible attributes of the handmade goods available on the site. The majority of participants also expressed that they value the uniqueness and creativity exercised by Sellers, as well as by Etsy as a market. These values provide flexibility for Sellers to exercise creative freedom with their businesses, which results in a unique assortment of goods, and ultimately attracts many Buyers and Sellers to this creative community. The handmade production process, coupled with a unique and creative approach to selling goods, foster an online space wherein Sellers and Buyers develop relationships through honesty. Etsy “...just seems like a more honest community” as Kaitlin, a long time Etsy Buyer, shared. In sum, honesty is another cultural value important among Etsy members, which is supported by the other values of uniqueness, creativity, and transparency that shape its market.

Going Against the Grain

As discussed in the previous section, Sellers, Buyers, and Etsy Administrators share values that unite the community. However, not all members wholeheartedly adopt or abide by these values. The majority of these “value violators” are Sellers, and for Buyers, it seems to happen most often during the exchange process with a shop owner.

Most attributed these infractions to poor customer service. For example, Catherine shared one of her bad Etsy experiences:

C: Yeah, Tom [Catherine's husband] ordered something for me for Christmas, and it did not come until like, Christmas Eve or the day before. He was a little frustrated because they were not as responsive as he would have liked and because it came so late and he ordered it the first week of December. Um... I feel like I rarely have that problem. The vast majority of sellers are responsive and considerate. There are always a couple...

Catherine attributes this negative experience to the item not being shipped in a timely manner, in addition to a lack of communication on the part of the Seller. These two issues break with the values of superior customer service and open communication between Buyers and Sellers and therefore were the chief complaints expressed among both groups. For example, Erin, a Seller, shared her frustration over a lack of communication with another Seller:

E: And I've even had, like e-mailing people about custom stuff and they never [email] me back. Like why would you not e-mail somebody back? Like I wanna custom item from you. That's a sale you just missed out on. And then I'll tell other people, "I e-mailed her, and she never e-mailed me back." That's going to hurt your sales! I don't, it surprises me how many people don't answer.

Like many other participants, Erin expressed not only frustration with this lack of communication, but disbelief about why Sellers would ignore potential customers. Sometimes Sellers come off as rude to Buyers, as in the case provided by Catherine.

C: My worst order is a little embarrassing, but it is a little funny. So as joke, I ordered a pair of Zelda underwear... but when I got them they were too small. The person, was kinda rude about it, [but] she ended up giving me a refund, and stuff.

Catherine continued to explain that she wrote a review that reflected her experience, and in it mentioned that she did not care for the way the refund was handled. She continued to explain,

C: So I wrote a review, and it was not terrible... but she [shop owner] was like, "They're one size, or I have never had a problem before," or something like that. If you have to give a refund, you don't have to be like that, come on be real about it. And she was a just a little snippy about it, and asked me to take down the review. And if I took it down she would give me refund.

Catherine shared that she decided to take down the review and she received her money back but it was a bit "unsettling." She described this experience as not necessarily horrible, but it was the only bad or semi-bad experience that she has had on Etsy. Other participants who shared negative experiences are similar to Catherine, in that while the experience was not ideal, it was not the worst purchase experience they have ever had. Some participants even mentioned that they have never had an experience that would completely deter them from buying from Etsy as a whole, just from a particular shop.

In the previous section, honesty and transparency were discussed as values that Sellers, Buyers, as well as Etsy Administration see as important to Etsy's culture. Indeed, during data collection only one participant shared experiences where a Seller was being dishonest. She talked about how it is common practice to report such violations on Etsy's Forum. It is important to note that such violations are generally the exception, not the rule. Below, Madison shares the story about the shop that was perceived as dishonest.

M: So, like a specific shop I can think of um... she no longer has a shop, she sells dog collars. She would sell them to people, take their money, and either never

ship the product or ship it two months later. And she would also create, um... the shipping stickers for people but never actually ship it.

This story illustrates one of the ways Sellers can violate a Buyer's trust by being dishonest. In this particular case, the Seller was dishonest about when items were shipped or not shipping anything at all.

Another type of dishonest behavior mentioned by participants was the act of reselling. Etsy defines reselling as "...creatively repackaging commercial items (for example, a gift basket consisting of non-handmade items) as well as curating a collection of others' handmade goods that were neither designed nor made by members of the shop." Samantha shared her thoughts on reselling when discussing her perspective on vintage merchandise:

S: I don't know, I feel like [vintage] it's a very subjective term on Etsy. Where you see stuff, even handmade, you know what I mean? It's, I think that the "Regretsy" site handled that really well [Regretsy was a website that poked fun at Etsy products and/or pointed out some product inauthenticity]. They really pin pointed how people, "Well okay, you are just repackaging something that's mass produced and calling it handmade," ... That's really not vintage.

The topic was also discussed by the community on Etsy's Forums. The following passage was posted by a Seller to the community:

FP: I have noticed lots of shops selling mass produced items from China that you can buy on sites like Aliexpress and Dhgate. Not crafting supplies or foreign patterns either, things like clothing and lingerie. Are other people finding these items too? It seems to [be] becoming a worse problem.

A myriad of Sellers shared thoughts on this issue, responding to this original post with similar sentiments. For instance, Kaitlin, a Seller on Etsy said, “You’re right... lately I’ve been buying from shops I’ve previously bought from, and know they are legitimate. Also shops I find on the Forums and Teams who I know are real and make their items.” Some Buyers expressed concerns for the future. For example, Patrick posted that “Resellers are not good for Etsy! It is a shame that this once great venue for buyers is headed in this very negative direction.” Resellers appear to violate Buyers’ trust by selling goods that do not fit into the categories of handmade, vintage, or craft supplies. These actions also violate the trust in the idea that Sellers are adhering to the goal of promoting handmade and vintage goods.

When interacting with others, some Sellers do not always follow Etsy’s expectations for etiquette, going against Etsy’s cultural norms. Randy, who works as a Forum moderator, shared his perspective on these individuals:

R: On the Forums you know, ahhh, and I think, you know, you get folks certainly who are more determined to, uh, to provide more passionate language right from the outset. It’s sort of a battle between what you perceive as the integrity of your message versus consideration for your readers. And the people, who, who are more dedicated to the integrity of their message because they feel very strongly about something, are more subject to, kinda rubbing folks the wrong way, not being as respectful as we would like them to be. But for the most part, um.... I think I see a lot, I do see a lot of people who are dedicated to keeping their message as intact as possible while following our policies, which is great!

Randy continued to explain that sometimes Sellers are more worried about getting their point across and lose sight of Etsy’s “Be respectful to others” policy. These infractions can result in being banned from Etsy’s Forums and Blogs for a brief period of time. Etsy

Administration seeks to respond quickly to correct behaviors that violate expectations for proper etiquette.

Interestingly, two participants shared their experiences with violating Etsy's Forums policies, and their subsequent "ban" from participating. Margaret, a newer Etsy Seller was banned from Etsy's Forums for telling a Seller, who was venting frustrations with selling on Etsy to "Stop having a tantrum. You're acting like a baby, listen to what people are saying to you and run your business like a man." A week later, Etsy contacted Margaret saying, "We only say nice things to each other on Etsy's Forums, and you're banned for a week." She continued sharing her frustration with this experience and in general with Etsy's Forums policies. On the topic of Forum rules and infractions she said, "...We are in this weird place and Etsy put the rules down, and it's like, supposed to be involved but you don't have to. And then you're supposed to be really gooey gooey sickly sweet to each other. I mean not just decent." She expressed overall frustration with Etsy's be nice and respectful policy, and thinks that people are too nice to one another. For Margaret, this suggests a lack of honesty, and avoidance of constructive criticism, even when it comes to providing Sellers with advice about their shops.

In contrast, Sabrina was banned from the Forums for starting a thread that actually promoted shops. She started this thread because she felt like there were too many people providing constructive criticism, and not enough providing support. She explained her point of view on this type of feedback,

S: ...shop critiques [on Etsy Forums]... [are] always more business [focused], "Oh, you can do this better, and you can do this better, and that is bad, and dah dah dah..." You know, that is not, not how I see Etsy. I see it as, you know


everybody... on Etsy does the best they can or they wouldn't be on Etsy. They put money into what they do. And I think you can build more on positive feedback, than negative feedback.

Sabrina believes that Sellers benefit more from positive feedback, and that critical or “business-like” feedback brings Sellers down. As such, she decided to create a post on Etsy Forums that asked Sellers to promote other Sellers’ shops, and provide positive feedback about these shops. Despite Sabrina’s good intentions, she was banned from the Forums because Etsy Administration interpreted her post as a use of the platform for promotion, which is a direct violation of Forum etiquette. Sabrina expressed her frustration with the ban because creating a promotional thread was not the reasoning behind her post. She just wanted to create a thread where people talked about what they like about other shops, rather than what they do not like.

Margaret’s and Sabrina’s experiences highlight two different types of violations that commonly occur on Etsy’s Forums. Some of the violations are intentional, as in the case of Margaret, who knew that being disrespectful violated Etsy’s values. In the case of Sabrina, she was unaware that her actions were violating Etsy’s Forums polices, and actually thought she was reinforcing Etsy’s value of helping one another.


It seems that Sellers, more than Buyers, are quick to tell Administration about behaviors that violate Etsy’s values and polices regarding customer service, products sold, and Forums etiquette. Sellers on Etsy’s Forum, like the participants interviewed for this study, shared experiences with calling out these policy violators. For example, one Seller briefly posted about how she reacted when finding a reseller: “I reported one of these shops yesterday that popped up repeatedly during my searches. Ironically, the only

category I search within is vintage.” Forum posts that related to violations of Etsy’s values and policies often include instances where Sellers tell other Sellers about how they report these violators. A selection from a Forum post entitled “Noticed LOTS of shops selling mass merchandise, is it just me?” (see Figure 5) illustrates this particular type of behavior.




from 8:51 am Jan 9, 2014 EST


What I can't believe is when the owners of these shops come to the forums asking for advice on getting sales. If they're doing something obviously against Etsy's rules (reselling, not using manufacturers), then why are they drawing so much attention to themselves in the forums?



from 8:58 am Jan 9, 2014 EST


Same here! And I'm from an Asian country but truly handmade seller. Hate to be lump with the mass resellers just because I'm born and stay here...

Reply to 



from 9:08 am Jan 9, 2014 EST

Haha maybe we should come up with a tag everyone can use to tell the handmade stuff from the made in chine crap #notmadeinchina



from 9:12 am Jan 9, 2014 EST

there are lots of sellers from china who are not mass producers and do not make crap


Reply to 

Figure 5. Identifying Etsy Violators in Forums

This excerpt demonstrates how Sellers use Etsy's Forums to air their grievances about violations, and in particular, Sellers who are resellers. In the excerpt, Seller 2 responds to Seller 1's frustrations, sharing that as an Asian Seller, she feels even more frustrated with these Sellers, as she is often accused of being a reseller. Seller 3 comments, illustrating that like many other Sellers, Seller 3 assumes that Chinese Sellers are the key violators of this policy. Within this thread, Seller 4 directly posts to Seller 3's comment, pointing out that not all Chinese Sellers are resellers. This excerpt reveals how Sellers communicate back and forth with one another via Etsy Forums about those who seek to violate Etsy's policies.

Participants who are Buyers did not share any experiences in which they directly contacted Etsy Administration to blow the whistle on violators. However, they indicated that they bring attention to some of these issues through their shop reviews. For instance, Anne shared her perspective on the importance of shop reviews and the role they play:

A: I don't leave reviews a lot when I purchase things like, just online. Um... but for them [Etsy Sellers] I do, because I feel like it is really important, because they're not selling the volume that like Nordstrom or somebody is. So I think that like every review [on Etsy] is important... Definitely leave them reviews because the people that come in after you are going to want to read those reviews and hear what you have to say.

Anne brings attention to the notion that leaving reviews is a way to support good Sellers, and that posting reviews for Sellers is more important on Etsy than doing so at other online retailers. To Anne, Buyer reviews are important because Etsy Sellers must maintain their integrity and reputation within the community to support their shops. Consequently, a bad review on Etsy carries more weight than a bad review for a

corporate retailer like Nordstrom. As Anne notes, Buyers look at these reviews as indication of product and customer service quality. Catherine also shares her perspective on how leaving shop reviews impacts her and the greater community of Etsy,

C: So I like to know that people have had a good experience. I want to support Sellers that are good people. And if people have had a bad experience then I will go somewhere else. Because there are a lot of options, and I feel like the Buyers have also created that community.

Like the majority of participants, Catherine almost always reads shop reviews, and mentioned that she reads shop reviews to find Sellers that will provide the particular Etsy experience she is seeking. More importantly, she mentions that Buyers have created a community of a particular type of Sellers by leaving reviews. This portion of the passage brings to light the notion that Buyers are seeking out Sellers that share their values and ideals, and by leaving accurate reviews, Sellers that do not meet these cultural ideals will be exposed to the larger Etsy community.

Participants who are Buyers, Sellers, and Etsy Administrators all shared experiences in which members did not always respect, value or abide by the cultural ideals and values held by the greater community. In particular, it seems that Sellers most often violate community-wide values and ideals and the violations are often related to customer service and Forums etiquette. Etsy Administration is always on the look-out for these violations and will contact and reprimand these Sellers in the hopes of curbing future violations. Sellers often share stories with other Sellers about how they “blow the whistle” on violators by reporting them to Etsy Administration. Buyers interviewed for this study did not mention reporting violations directly to Etsy Administration. However,

they felt that by leaving shop reviews, they made other community members aware of Sellers that violate these values and ideals. As will be discussed in the next section, although Buyers, Sellers and Etsy Administrators share a core set of cultural values as a community, the data also revealed a set of values unique to each member's particular role.

Roles and Responsibilities

As discussed in the previous theme, participants talked about certain values that they think are strongly shared by members of Etsy. Based on the interpretation of data, it is clear that some of these cultural values are shared among members of the same role. That is, it appears that members of each membership role, whether Etsy Administrators, Buyers, or Sellers, share values that are shaped by the activities related to fulfilling the roles. The following sections examine the values revealed to be important relative to each role and to Etsy's culture as a whole.

Administration

A specific set of values surfaced that are particular to those who hold Administrative roles within Etsy's community. For one, Etsy Administration appears to share the common goal of community success. In particular, all participants involved in Administration expressed the desire to satisfy Sellers by crafting site tools and cultivating a platform that allows Sellers to achieve success as part of Etsy's market. Randy discussed how Etsy Administration seeks to solve problems, especially those that Sellers believe will make them more successful.

R: ...what members do as well as what they say is really important to the work that we do. Um... you know let's say that, um... our data is showing that something is really successful, but there are people in the Forums posting that they are having some sort of issue with it. Those are two important signals and they might not jive sort of at first glance, but because of how Etsy operates we'll investigate it. We'll get to the bottom of it, we'll do everything we can to try to satisfy the concerns of members that are speaking about it.

From this passage, it is clear that Etsy Administration values Seller feedback about market tools and practices. Randy reveals that they listen to Sellers and rely on their feedback, sometimes more so than data or metrics. Mary, who is also an Etsy Administrator, shares a similar sentiment but discusses success from the community-wide perspective.

M: Um... and I think that is what's so exciting to me, is this idea of, Etsy leading to, you know literally a million businesses all over the world. That's, that our success is really actually representing the successes of so many more people.

Randy and Mary both reveal how the notion of success extends beyond fostering individual Seller success to that of community-wide success. That is, as Nicole another Administrator explained, Etsy's Administration seeks to foster success not just among individual Sellers, but throughout the community as a whole. Etsy aims to empower Sellers with knowledge as well as tools to help Sellers.

N: We are constantly trying to figure out the best information for Sellers to succeed as businesses. You know on Etsy, I think we are a bit of a different platform because really we're all about empowerment.

Nicole continues to describe the extent to which Etsy's Administration values Seller success.

N: We are there to help you [achieve] your goals. Whatever that may be. For some people that means, you just starting a business might be a life long dream. For other people that is quitting your day job. For some people that's supplemental income. So there is a huge range of ways, that our Sellers and our community defines success. So it makes our job pretty complicated. While we want everyone to succeed, we are not going to package one story of success and say, "You've got to fit this model." No way! You know, figure out what it actually means for you to succeed and what does it mean for your neighbor to succeed? And how can we [Etsy admin] best help both of you.

Etsy Administration acknowledges that a Seller's success is context-dependent and different for each person. They note that there is no right or wrong definition of success, rather, success is defined by the Seller and often shaped by that individual's personal circumstances and goals. As such, this definition presents a challenge for Etsy Administration when developing tools to foster Seller success. Nicole continues to explain, "So... trying to balance all of those things and develop programs to help... those Sellers succeed, you know, on the platform." Mary shares similar sentiments on this issue, specifically related to her role at Etsy, which is to write and publish Sellers' stories:

M: I take that very seriously, trying to reach out to Sellers that I think are really passionate and committed, and have a really beautiful well-made original product, um... I do, you know I take that responsibility very seriously because there are so many sellers on the site. Um... and I wish I could help all of them to get more exposure, but um... I think, you know definitely trying to focus on all of those traits, and also making sure to spread that exposure around, right?

Although Etsy's community is united, pockets of community members with disparate goals make for an interesting challenge for Etsy Administration. Yet despite the difficulties this presents, Etsy Administration still strives to create a platform that meets the needs of the entire community. In fact, the desire to create a platform that fosters

Seller as well as community success as a shared value appears to unite participants who are Etsy Administrators. This desire is a natural result of their role as an employee of Etsy, however it also appears that this is a value that extends from their own personal values and reasons for associating with the site. Indeed, all participants who are Etsy Administrators express pride in and value helping small businesses reach their full potential. As a result, fostering a community of successful Sellers surfaced as a common value held among Etsy Administrators.

During the course of interviews with Etsy Administrators as well as during observation of the Forums and Blogs posts, another common value surfaced: Sustainability. It appears that Etsy Administration, moreso than any other type of member roles, values the idea of sustainability within Etsy's market and community. Mary provides an explanation of this particular value.

M: So I think that is [sustainability] something that we believe in as our own community, but very much so because we feel like it reflects our greater community. That [it] is part of this economic model, and also we think it makes for a more sustainable world generally.

For Mary, sustainability is a value shared not only by Etsy's community of Administrative members, but is perceived as important to Etsy as a whole. As a member of Etsy's Administration, Mary revealed that the idea of sustainability relates to the way its' members, as well as Etsy as a site, carry out market exchanges. To that end, Nicole discussed the relationship between sustainability and market exchanges.

N: Yeah I really do feel that there is this focus, again, on sort of, sort of sustainable entrepreneurship. Thoughtful entrepreneurship. Ummm... You know,

how, how to make these decisions in a way that um... puts, you know, people first. You know, that is good on the environment. Is a way that is, is a better way to be, in some way. A more sustainable way to be.

Interviews, as well as observation data, reveal that a component of sustainability within Etsy's market is related to the practices that are unique to it. Specifically, Nicole's idea of sustainable entrepreneurship influences the way goods are sold, as well as the way Etsy functions as a business. That is, the notion of sustainability appears to have a direct impact on Etsy's practices and policies as a business. Randy describes some of the more obvious examples of these practices:

R: ... It's [sustainability] important to us as a company period. Gosh the Brooklyn office they compost, recycle cans, try to reduce our, our fossil fuel footprint to the extent that we can, umm... There's a "Values and Impact Report" that just came out not too long ago, that goes into great detail about that, um... but, Etsy cares about individuals, Etsy cares about its employees, Etsy cares about the Earth.

As this excerpt reveals, the notion of sustainability is reflected in Etsy as a company. In particular, the value of sustainability is integrated into everyday business operations, such as recycling, but also is incorporated into more complex business practices, such as the ethical treatment of company employees. As a business, it is important for Etsy to communicate this value to the entire community. As Randy discussed, they do so by publishing their sustainable practices in the "Values and Impact Reports" that are made available to the community online.

Participants that hold Administrative positions share values that are shaped by this particular membership role. As such, Etsy Administrators strive to create a platform that fosters success for individual Sellers, as well as the community as a whole. They

recognize and value that Sellers have different definitions of success, and seek to create a marketplace that facilitates community-wide success. Particular to the value of success, the desire to help small business attain success is also a personal value that surfaced, not just one driven by their responsibilities as Administrative members of Etsy. These participants also value sustainable business practices, including the ways that Etsy fosters a different, and, in general, more sustainable kind of business.

Buyers

As discussed, participants who are Etsy Administrators share certain values. Similarly, Buyers share a set of values specific to the consumption of goods on Etsy. The main role of Buyers is to engage in the exchange process, and ultimately consume the goods and services provided by Sellers on the site. In turn, one of the values that Buyers hold in common is that of good customer service. Catherine, a long time Buyer, describes one of these experiences.

C: I have had so many great Etsy transactions... [In] 2010 I... was commissioning [a Seller] to make a really large flower for my wedding dress... So I was having her recreate this flower um.... but we could not get the fabric right to match the dress, so I think she did two or three. I paid for one and it was not right, and she did the next two for free, because she felt bad. And in the end we still couldn't get the coloring right.

Catherine, like many other Buyers, values the level of customer service she received. On the flip side, her experience highlights the great lengths Sellers will go to in order to ensure the Buyer's satisfaction. Particular to this experience, the Seller recreated two additional flowers for free to satisfy Catherine. Although Catherine did not end up with a

final product that met her needs, she was still so satisfied with the experience that she sees it as one of the best customer service experiences she has had on Etsy.

Indeed, Sellers going above and beyond is a common experience that Buyers shared when discussing how much they value the customer service element of Etsy.

Lilly's explanation of her best and worst Etsy experiences further highlights the level of customer service participants value.

L: Hmm let's see, my worst experience was, I bought a little, umm... apron, and it was like one of those cutesy 50's looking aprons... [What happened] it wasn't anybody's, it was like my fault, just the way the store was set up I ended up purchasing the wrong... color or the wrong style. I couldn't... figure it out the way I should have [ordered the apron], but the vendor was super nice and contacted me. And was like, "Hey I noticed that you, like selected, [that] but it looks like you [instead] maybe wanted that?" You know they were, they were really good at getting back in contact with me. So it could've also, I guess qualify as the best, because someone actually gave a crap.

Lilly's experience captures how Sellers will go out of their way to correspond with Buyers, and illustrates how some Sellers even personalize the exchange process by reaching out to their customers, rather than waiting for customers to reach out to them. In another example, Anne's description of why she likes to shop on Etsy highlights how the customer service experience is reflected in the care taken by Sellers to package the goods. She says that receiving a package from Etsy is "always fun 'cause it's like you bought yourself a present... plus you just feel special when you get the little package and it's done up really nice. It's got the color and the bow and things like that." Several other participants who are Buyers expressed that they value the unique and quirky product packaging and that it is something they look forward to when receiving an item.

In general, the experiences shared by Chrissy, Lilly, and Anne illuminate another component of the value of a good customer service experience: that of a personal touch. When talking about why people are drawn to Etsy, Fiona put it simply, “I think it is just people wanting that personal connection.” As mentioned, Sellers often go above and beyond by providing refunds, expediting orders, and working one-on-one with Buyers to ensure an optimal buying experience. As a result, the buying process on Etsy is more personalized than that at other online retail sites.

Alongside the importance of a personal touch, participants who are Buyers often talked about how important it is to them to support small business. Buyers recognize that people shop on Etsy because they value the opportunity it provides to support entrepreneurs. Chrissy, a Buyer who frequents Etsy to purchase items for her wedding, explains this value from a broader, community-wide perspective:

C: Um... yeah definitely, I think that they want to support the little man, the people that buy... it's, I just feel like, it makes you feel better, just feel good about yourself, when you buy from straight up a person, rather than, Target or, you know, Wal-Mart!

As Chrissy reveals, Buyers feel that by purchasing on Etsy, they are doing something “good,” and that they are giving back, as well as making a connection with the maker, in contrast to buying a mass-produced item. Lilly, a long time Buyer on Etsy, came to a similar conclusion when discussing why people are drawn to Etsy to shop.

L: Yeah I think it's just the, first of all just loving beautiful things, like art. And supporting small artists... and it's jewelry makers, or um... people who do things with clothing... I think people just kind of like the identity of supporting people on

a smaller, on a smaller frame, rather than giving all their money to like, just kind of faceless organizations.

Buyers recognize that the ability to support small business through Etsy is something that cannot be readily achieved in the current market. Buyers gravitate toward making purchases on Etsy to satisfy the need for a personal connection during the market exchange process. Moreover, they seek out Etsy because they value small business and feel good about making purchases from them.

Sellers

In contrast to Etsy Administrators and Buyers, Sellers expressed only one shared value that is related to their role within the Etsy community: a shared passion for making and/or selling their creations and collections. Erin, a long time Seller, shares her perspective on what she has in common with other Sellers: “I guess overall, I would say just about every Etsy Seller loves what they do,” which means either producing or acquiring handmade and vintage products, as well as related supplies. Indeed, participants who are Sellers seem to share an interest in making or acquiring goods to sell in their shops. They share this value despite the fact that their product offerings, as well as their end goals, vary. As Erin continued to discuss what she had in common with other Sellers, she unveiled another dimension to this shared value:

E: I think that most people want to, you know, hand make and put their heart and soul into items. Have an appreciation, you know that they can make the best thing they can make. I think that everybody kind of works from that ideal, you know, love what you do, and hope the person buying it loves it too.

Erin reveals how she not only loves making something, but like other Sellers, does so with passion and with the shared vision of creating a high quality product that others will love. Often participants stressed that a great amount of time, effort, love, and/or care goes into making their goods, or in the case of vintage Sellers, selecting goods for their shops.

Interestingly, this value is not just important to participants' experiences with making the products, but with Buyers' appreciation of them. Laura, a vintage Seller, shared this sentiment when talking about her experiences with selling mid-century vintage homeware.

L: I just wanted them to love it. So yeah, so the rewarding part... I really, it's just I thought it was fun to kind of be a small part of people's events. And we always got such positive feedback, we never... [got negative feedback] out of the 100's we made.

As both Erin and Laura reveal, Sellers on Etsy not only love the making process but often enjoy the selling process too. Sellers share the desire to please their customers. They not only want Buyers to be happy and satisfied with their product offerings, but to love having the products as much as they love making them. Some Sellers, like Laura, even like to connect with Buyers via their feedback.

In sum, the data reveal that functions particular to each type of role held by participants serves to foster a shared set of values among them. Those in Etsy Administration share the values of doing what they can to help Sellers achieve individualized success as well as overall community success. Administrator members also value sustainability and discussed several ways this shared value is integrated into their role as part of Etsy. Similar to Etsy Administration, shared values among Buyers

appear to be cultivated by the roles they carry out within Etsy's market. As such, Buyers expressed a shared interest in the customer service experience provided by Sellers as well as the desire to support small businesses. In contrast, Sellers appear to share a single value, which is a passion for making and selling handmade goods. Although Sellers are united in this value, the data suggest that it has several dimensions. For instance, Sellers seek enjoyment from the exchange process that accompanies the making process. Moreover, some of these participants expressed an interest in creating connections with Buyers through this process. The next section examines these roles within the bigger picture of the relationships that shape Etsy's community, and ultimately its culture.

Forging Relationships

The values shared among and across members provide a core set of goals and guide behaviors that shape Etsy's culture as a whole. One commonality that surfaced strongly within the data is that of relationships. That is, the desire to build and maintain relationships provides a strong foundation for Etsy as a business, market, and community. This is the case whether it is relationships between Administrators and Sellers, or between Sellers and Buyers. Relationship-building is essential to negotiating, developing, and adopting cultural values and ideals that ultimately shape community development. Two subthemes emerged to illuminate the cultural dimensions inherent to forging relationships on Etsy: (1) *Storytelling* and (2) *Making Connections*.

Storytelling

When talking to participants about why people are drawn to Etsy and what they love about it, several participants mentioned an appreciation for the story behind the

creation and/or acquisition of products on the site. As such, there are several different ways members identify how and why stories are an important value, which sheds light on the role of storytelling within the context of Etsy's culture. For instance, Etsy Administrator Mary shared her perspective on this appeal when discussing Etsy's founder, Rob Kalin's vision for the site.

M: The founder Rob Kalin used to talk about if we go back centuries, marketplaces were at the crossroads of culture, and so objects were not just the only thing being shared, but languages and stories. And, I think, you know, seeing that in an Etsy context, that is really illuminating in what are people getting out of this besides just a transaction of an object, there is a tradition of exchanging stories, and perspectives and culture. That comes along with those physical packages.

Aligning with Rob Kalin's original vision, some of the participants recognize and value the story behind the products on Etsy. Mary also touched upon what Buyers and Sellers share during a transaction, including the exchange of a story, idea, or perspective. During a discussion about vintage merchandise sold on Etsy, Madison, a Seller and Buyer described her interest in the story behind the goods.

Me: But do you know what I mean? With vintage when you look at it, and you just feel like it has some story with it?

R: Like who had this before you?

Me: Yeah.

R: Whenever I look at fur coats and hats I think of that, because now it is sort of a taboo to have real fur in our society. But back then it had a story. I remember my Grandmother talking about it, she still has [her fur coats], it and it was such a big deal and it had such a story behind it. So now whenever I see other ones, I think of that... When I am like in vintage stores, I'm like, I wonder who wore this, and like...

Me: And what parties they went to?

Mary and I both recognized that in the case of vintage goods, items have past lives and stories. In the case of vintage clothing, these items often capture a cultural moment that no longer exists within present society. As such, they not only carry a story but also preserve a moment in time.

Likewise, handmade goods are recognized and cherished for their ability to tell a story, as Kaitlin describes:

K: So many things are just like everyone has, I don't know, everybody has the same stuff nowadays I feel like, and like everyone has their Coach bag or their, I don't even know what shoes people wear... but um... people all have the same stuff and I think there is a growing segment of the population that wants unique stuff that has a story behind it. And, you know, something a little more special.

Kaitlin points out an interesting observation that only a particular “segment of the population” within society values and seeks out products that have stories. This is an interesting point, because within Etsy, it also appears that only a particular segment of the Buying population is interested in the story behind the products. Lilly's experience with such exchanges point to the importance she places on this idea of shared “uniqueness:”

L: Like, I have a pair of gloves, they're these fingerless gloves and they say “Hold Fast” on them... they're neat... You know I'm not going to walk down the street and see somebody with my same gloves on that I got on Etsy. Um... and if you do, it's kind of a cool commonality you would have with that person, like “Oh, you got those on Etsy,” and it sort of strikes up a conversation. And people have stories, which I find is really good for conversation, and I think it has become sort of a bonding tool with people.

Lilly's example reveals that the story and uniqueness behind the goods purchased on Etsy can lead to exchanges between people. Sometimes these exchanges occur between members of the Etsy community, and other times they occur between an Etsy member and non-member. In addition, Lilly notes that such exchanges can sometimes even lead to forging deeper connections.

The data further reveal that not only do the products on Etsy carry a story, but Sellers often have a stories behind why they are selling on Etsy. Almost all of the Sellers interviewed expressed great interest and value in knowing that there is a face behind the products they sell. However, only a few of the Buyers expressed interest in learning more about a Seller's personal story. For example, Anne is one of the few who indicated that she looks for this kind of information while shopping on Etsy:

A: I usually just read the page [the shop "about" page], and read the reviews. If they have other external sites or something like that I will usually go off into there, or if there's something on Facebook, because I do like to learn about the people, so you like to learn their story.

Anne noted that she not only accesses Etsy to learn more, but goes to other social media sites to learn more about the Seller's personal story. Samantha, a long time Buyer on Etsy discusses how she, too, enjoys learning about Sellers.

S: I might be on there once a day. Not necessarily with intent to buy, just out of interest and um... I mean even sellers I have purchased from in the past. I think it can be interesting to see how their shops have evolved. Or I will go back, another one of X, Y, Z and note they have completely changed their outlook and now they don't make.... jewelry anymore or they don't make something anymore...

Samantha revealed that sometimes Buyers like to follow Sellers and their Etsy journeys. However, at the same time, Sellers often underestimate the value of their personal stories. As Mary, an Etsy Administrator explains, “I would say the main challenge... in terms of community members is not realizing what power their story has. So not, really delving into it on their shop.” As a whole, Etsy Administration enjoys learning about Sellers’ stories. Mary continued to explain that the value of these stories is an opportunity that is missed by many Sellers:

M: Sometimes you will find this great story and it’s not even anywhere presented in their profile or their shop. And they don’t even realize that, that’s something that people would connect to and respond positively too. I feel like some of my job is just education about, you know, that is what press is looking for, that is what Buyers are looking for, uhhh, Get personal!

Mary brings attention to the fact that Etsy Administration recognizes that these stories add value to the shops, and they are something that many Buyers look for when shopping on Etsy.

As a business, it appears that sharing stories is one of Etsy’s values, too, as it dedicates a group of administrative staff to finding these stories and sharing them with the broader community. Mary is part of this team, and describes her experiences with finding and sharing these stories in the following passage:

M: The idea behind the role is that... we’ll often get contacted by press outlets looking for specific kinds of member stories. Whether they are looking for someone in the New York area who works on a traditional craft to speak on a panel, or looking for someone who’s using a new technology to make their items, or someone who lost their job in the recession and are now supporting their family with their Etsy shop. So I do a mix of reaching out to members of the community, interviewing them, cataloguing the story, kinda identify themes that can be

brought out... Then also using some of them as reactive thing, so when press reaches out to us, or Chad our CEO is speaking at a conference and is looking for a specific kind of anecdote... I think it's a way for us to keep the focus of the Etsy story on the community, on the person, not the company.

As Mary explains, by telling Sellers' stories, the focus is put back on the community and the individual Seller, rather than the business. Etsy works to spread awareness of these stories both within and outside of the community. It strives to connect not only the community, but, little by little, the world, with the notion of purchasing from an individual maker and supporting small businesses.

Not only does Etsy Administration value, promote, and disseminate Seller stories, they also work to help Sellers craft these stories. Mary explains this process.

M: What I love about my current role, it is actually about helping other people tell their stories. So equipping them with perhaps an editing lens, in terms of what really could be a good hook to catch the press on their end. Um.. or giving them just the confidence to be sharing more personal details. I feel like I am kinda just more about, more behind the scenes and getting to help such a diversity of stories be told out in the world, instead of focusing inward on my own.

Mary will often work with a Seller to help her or him craft and present the full story.

These stories are then shared with the Etsy community. While at times it can be difficult to find these great stories, Mary mentioned the most difficult stories to find are Buyer stories, "It's harder to find those Buyer stories, umm, but when I do, you really find some very engaged shoppers that care so much..."

Although Buyers' stories are more difficult to find, some Sellers stumble upon them, and in fact expressed an interest in getting to know their Buyers. In particular, these Sellers expressed an interest in knowing why Buyers are going to their particular shops,

and uncovering the stories behind their purchases. For instance, when sharing selling experiences, Laura expressed a deep interest in her Buyers and their stories, exclaiming: “Oh I love my stories!... Well I just love these little stories, when they tell me why they are getting it.” She continued to share one of these cherished stories with me, about when she sold a salmon-colored Melamine tea set to a grandmother, who was purchasing it for her grandson for Christmas.

Sellers also shared how their stories are sometimes integrated into their handmade products. In the following passage, Madison provides an example:

M: One girl had been a Furry customer for 2 years, she contacted me about 6 months ago and her husband just passed away. And before he passed, which he was super young, like 29, his request was that he wanted one of his shirts made into a Furry... it was an owl, and it was [the shirt] part of the owl wings.

This story highlights another side to Sellers’ appreciation of Buyers’ stories. Madison’s example illustrates how some Buyers use Sellers as a source of inspiration, blending the purchase story with the product story. When discussing similar experiences, Fiona, a shop owner of hand embroidered Steeler *Terrible Towels*, felt that by engaging in these experiences, she and her husband “made every special moment just a little bit better or something” for her customers. In turn, these blended storylines appeared to create deeper connections between Buyers and Sellers.

In a similar vein, Sellers often expressed a desire to create a more intimate and personal selling environment. Madison shares her perspective, saying:

M: Maybe it’s just me, but I hold myself to a standard, where... I think of them [Buyers] as family and friends, where if I have a conversation with somebody I

always want it to be on that level, where it's not super dry business like, where it's more friendly, but also have the business aspect, where you get a timely response...

Madison seeks to foster a selling environment that is not just professional and efficient, but casual and friendly. She continues to explain how she creates this environment.

M: ...when I see somebody's name I know, like they've come here before. And I will also see the name and picture they have, and "Like oh, their dog's name is Raleigh." So I don't know why I remember these things, but I always make sure like, "Hugs to Raleigh," or something; 'cause I guess I want almost a friendship.

Madison fosters a professional but friendly selling environment by recognizing Buyers and remembering little bits of information about them. She uses Seller's stories about their animals to reconnect with them when they visit her store for repeat purchases. By acknowledging the stories of her Buyers, and thereby making connections with them, Madison is able to foster stronger bonds with her customers. In short, storytelling is a cultural value shaped by different member's roles, which, at the same time, unites them. The cultural value of storytelling plays a unique role in Etsy's culture, as it appears to be a conversation starter that also leads to the development of professional and personal friendships.

Making Connections

Storytelling is a value embraced by a particular segment of members. Specific to Etsy's business practices, this value is embraced and promoted within Etsy's culture by Administrative members as well as some Sellers and Buyers. As discussed in the previous subtheme, the cultural value of storytelling can often act as a gateway to

creating closer connections between members. Members that value storytelling often value the relationship-building opportunities they provide. As such, the concept of relationship-building emerged as another value shared by a particular segment of Etsy members. In the following passage, Nicole shared her thoughts on how Etsy, more so than other online markets like Amazon, fosters this value by encouraging Sellers to form these relationships.

N: So you can, yes you can sell things on, Amazon, but you sort of participate in it just for one task. “Oh I’m going to get my sale and just get my money and leave.” And on Etsy I think because, you know, there’s a real idea of growth there. You start something, and you know, we try to give you educational content. We try to work with you, you can talk to the community, you can create these relationships. That there’s just something more there, it’s not just about going in checking your, checking your shop. It’s like “Oh, let me go read an article. Let me go see what my Team is saying... and see what else is going on. Let me go visit the Forums and check in.” You know, like check in with your folks, check in with your people. You know, and I think that’s the way that a lot of our community talks about Etsy. They don’t talk about it like, “I just use that thing.” It’s so, so emotional. It’s a relationship. It really is a relationship.

Nicole points out the extent to which Etsy encourages Sellers to not just sell merchandise, but to foster relationships. To that end, it provides different tools, such as educational content, Forums, and articles that help to foster interactions between members, and in turn, build relationships. Another Etsy Administrative participant, Mary, shares how using these tools can connect Sellers with Buyers:

M: It’s often not a marketplace that you are going looking for one specific thing, but rather start to follow someone who’s taste you really love. Maybe you follow his or her Blog, and then when you have an opportunity to buy a piece of art or buy from someone, you’ve already cultivated that relationship.

Mary reveals how the different social media tools on Etsy provide a means for connecting Buyers with Sellers beyond just making a sale.

When asked about developing relationships with other members, Samantha, a long time Buyer, shares an example from her experience:

S: There was one [shop] that my mom still asks me about... It was a husband and wife in California and they create high end organic caramels. And they had, like a Bourbon pecan turtle, and I would get them for my mom, for Mother's Day, birthdays... It would get to the point I was ordering them so often for gifts, I felt like I was having a personal relationship with this woman.

Samantha continued to explain that both she and the Seller had lived in England at one time. Over time, Samantha found out her what her favorite chocolates were from England, and she would send her packages of these chocolates. She said, "It got to the point where it felt like it wasn't weird for me to send a box of her favorite candy bars from England."

In a similar vein, some of the Sellers spoke about forming relationships with other Sellers in the process of selling goods on Etsy. Laura, a vintage Seller, shared a couple of stories about how she got to know, and eventually formed relationships or strong acquaintances with, other vintage Sellers. The following excerpt highlights one of these stories:

L: There's a women in Kentucky, my home state...who's a Seller of ... fabric stuff, like old clothes, and old quilts, and this and that. And if I have a textile question, like how to clean something for example... I go to her, and she's super nice, very helpful. I have written her a couple of times with some questions. Um... "How do I describe this," because I'm not a textile person. And she'll say "It's counted crossed," if it's this, or if it's this and that.

As Laura points out, it is typical for such relationships to begin with seeking advice or help with the shop. In some cases, Sellers talked about how these initial business-related relationships ultimately blossomed into friendships. Madison even shared how she met another Seller through Etsy and felt comfortable enough with this individual to stay at her house when attending a conference in the Seller's town.

Similar to participants who are Buyers and Sellers, Etsy Administrators shared stories about cultivating acquaintances, friendships, and relationships with Sellers. Nicole met a Seller at an Etsy event and stayed in touch with her. They sent Christmas cards to one another and eventually the Seller came to New York to visit Nicole at Etsy's headquarters. During this time, Nicole was able to meet with the Seller and the Seller's husband. Nicole explained that they "maintained this nice relationship," but unfortunately, some time after the visit the Seller's husband passed away unexpectedly. Nicole described the effect this had on her and what she did as a friend, as well as an Etsy Administrator, to help this Seller.

N: I was so... upset, I was like so upset, and this was, I mean honestly this was someone that I met three time in my life. This was somebody I just met three times in my life, but what, I was so inspired by her and what she had built with her husband, and they thought they were following their dreams. And they, they had grown their business to have an employee, and... I could, I kept thinking "Oh my God, I'm this upset by this one incident, I've met thousands of sellers. I don't know what is going to happen in the future because I have such a connection to a community." And you know, you form very, very, very deep bonds, and I think because of the inspirational nature of what people are doing, it's so, so meaningful to them and to us.

Nicole continued to explain that she found other Etsy Administrators willing to help and oversee the temporary closing of the Seller's shop. She did this to make sure that, at the

very least, the Seller would not have to worry about keeping up with the Etsy bills and shop duties. Nicole continued to explain that on Etsy, “I have so many relationships with the community, but this was definitely one that I really thought that, my gosh, this is how Etsy works, you care so deeply about people.”

Nicole’s story illustrates the deep ties that Administration can forge with Sellers through the process of sharing stories and experiences related to selling on Etsy. These stories show how even brief interactions between Etsy members can turn a casual acquaintance into a deep friendship. However, it is important to note that not all participants who are Etsy Administrators view their relationships with other members in this way. For instance, Randy described his approach as being about “keeping loose ties with Sellers.” He explained the reasoning behind this approach:

R: ...it is a little bit by design, just to, to keep sort of a professional level of distance, you know they’re all, good folks, everybody is subject to their own sort of biases, whatever they are doing, you know. [I] try to keep on the objective path...

The perspectives of Nicole and Randy highlight the two sides of the relationship-building coin. That is, some Administrative members talked of developing deep relationships, while others talked of developing acquaintances. Buyers and Sellers expressed similar sentiments when discussing relationships with other members.

When it comes to creating relationships on Etsy, some Sellers do not necessarily seek them out, but will work with other Sellers toward a common goal. For instance, Erin stated that she does not seek relationships with others on Etsy. However, when talking

about her early years of selling on Etsy, she indicated that she worked closely with other Sellers to identify and expose resellers.

E: Yeah, I'd say just about everybody, you know, this was a huge problem before Etsy was bigger than this, but Admin would go on vacation on the weekends so there would be no Admin people there on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, and like you'd get these resellers like from China and stuff would show up on you know, like, Thursday night and start selling crap you sell at the dollar store and like, pawning it off as handmade. And the Sellers would just like get together on the Forums, and be like, "I found the shop, flag it. It needs to get like 20 flags, and then it would notify Admin." ...you know, I think everybody has a really strong idea that it's got to be vintage or handmade feeling.

This passage reveals how Sellers may not always realize the ways that they build relationships with other Sellers on Etsy.

What participants value about Etsy includes an emphasis on forging relationships through storytelling and making connections. Although this value is not shared among all participants—including Buyers, Sellers, and Administrative staff—it is important to understanding the importance of the community building aspect of Etsy. Although not all participants expressed the same desire to build relationships with other members, in most cases, it appears that the exchange process creates initial touch points between participants which can help foster relationships between them.

In conclusion, in this chapter, the notion of culture was explained through four emergent themes that give shape to understanding Etsy's particular culture. The first theme revealed that at the center of Etsy's culture is an admiration for the concept of craft and/or handmade. However, participants had varying perspectives on what craft is, revealing the extent to which the idea of craft is a very complex, yet important value

within Etsy's culture. Despite varying perspectives on craft, the second theme revealed a core set of values that unite Etsy's community, including a love for handmade, admiration for uniqueness and the creative, and advocating honesty in the production and retailing of handmade goods and related products. The third theme illustrated how each membership role, whether Etsy Administrator, Buyer or Seller, share values that are shaped by fulfilling these roles. The last theme explored participants' appreciation for the stories behind products and/or shops, which, in some cases act as a gateway to relationship-building among community members. As a whole, these themes shape an understanding of Etsy's cultural values and ideals, revealing that the production and consumption of handmade and vintage products is at the core of Etsy culture.

As described in this chapter, a certain core set of values seems to attract participants to Etsy as a platform, whether as a place to sell or purchase handmade and vintage goods, or simply to work. As with the concept of culture in general, the two cornerstones of Etsy's culture are shared values and ideals. Both work jointly to foster social interaction and bonding among members, resulting in a consciousness of kind that helps to define the Etsy community. Conversely, a community's consciousness of kind is reflective of its culture (Geertz, 1966; Kozinets, 2006). Particular to Etsy's culture is an appreciation for handmade and vintage products, as well as transparency, creativity, uniqueness and honesty in the business of retailing these goods. These are the values and ideals that help to create a consciousness of kind among Etsy members, which ultimately shapes Etsy as a community. In the next chapter, the ways that Etsy's culture is shaped by its community are discussed.

Summary

In this chapter I presented the first of three conceptual areas used to structure the interpretation of the data: Culture. Four themes, *The Mixed Meaning of Craft*, *Unity in Diversity*, *Roles and Responsibilities*, and *Forging Relationships* highlight the key values and ideals that shape Etsy's culture. In the next chapter, I examine the second conceptual area, that of community.

CHAPTER V
THEMATIC INTERPRETATION PART II:
ETSY AS A COMMUNITY

As discussed in Chapter II, there are a myriad of perspectives regarding what a community is and the characteristics it embodies (Anderson, 1983; Granovetter, 1973; Hillery, 1955; Keller, 2003; Rheingold, 1993; Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Wellman, 1999). During preliminary research that I conducted prior to this dissertation, I found that while Etsy is indeed a community, more research is needed to understand its depth and breadth. To this end, this chapter examines the data to further explore the characteristics of Etsy's community, specifically addressing what it means to be a member of this community and how this community shapes Etsy's culture. This discussion is presented via four thematic areas: (a) *Sellers in the Driver's Seat*, (b) *Destination Etsy*, (c) *Crafting Tightly Knit Connections*, and (d) *Community (Ex)Change*. Within each theme, the data are examined for the characteristics that define Etsy as a community and what it means to be a member of this community.

Sellers in the Driver's Seat

Data reveal that Etsy is a Seller-focused community. This notion is reflected across all participants' views, including Buyers, Sellers, and Administrators. To this end, this particular theme helps to identify the characteristics that define Etsy as a community, and illustrates how those who are not Sellers influence the Seller-driven nature of the

community. Although brief, this theme sets the stage for the subsequent themes, as it is vital to understanding participants' perceptions of Etsy and its community members.

As described in Chapter IV, participants expressed a set of shared values and ideals that help to cultivate a sense of belonging among members of Etsy. For this reason, Buyers, Sellers, and Administrators often describe Etsy as a community, yet upon closer examination, they are often describing it as a community centered on the Seller. For instance, a longtime Buyer, Kaitlin, described Etsy's community as comprised of "people that are artists and stuff, that kind of make their living doing that, they just share a special community, I guess, and sell." This quote captures the sentiments of participants who are Buyers when asked to describe Etsy's community. Overall, participants who are Buyers described Etsy's community as an online platform where people unite in creating and selling craft goods as well as vintage products.

As a result, participants who are Buyers do not necessarily feel like they are a direct part of Etsy's community. Some Buyers attribute this feeling to either an inability to make crafts or lack of interest in creating craft goods and/or selling goods on Etsy. The following excerpt from Samantha, a well-seasoned Buyer, sheds light on this perspective.

S: I know for some people, I know that if I was a crafter, an artisan of some sort, you know, if I sold something, maybe if I had that creative gene, I would probably feel more, connected in the community... I feel like if I were on the Seller end I would see it more that way... for me... I don't know, it sounds really shallow, but I see it just as, you know a business of ... as a marketplace, that is what it is to me.

Overall, Samantha thinks that her lack of creativity and/or artistic abilities prevents her from being as connected to the community as someone who is a Seller might. Thus, she views her involvement with Etsy purely from a market perspective.

Like Samantha, all of the Buyers interviewed recognize Etsy as a Seller-centered community. Interestingly, these participants often acknowledge that they could be more involved, but are not interested. As such, participants who are Buyers were often unaware of Etsy Forums, Blog, Teams, and Meetup opportunities. Furthermore, when asked whether they would like to be more involved in Etsy as a Buyer-driven community, these participants responded strongly against the idea.

Data collected from my online observations further support this idea, as Sellers seem to be the majority of members engaging in interactions on Etsy's Forums and Blogs. For instance, Etsy Teams are created and managed by Sellers, not Buyers. In turn, it is extremely rare to find Buyers interacting with Sellers on Etsy's social media tools and platforms. However, the same finding did not hold true during my offline observations.

Offline observations included participation in two of Etsy's monthly *Craft Parties* in Brooklyn, NY. During these events I experienced a stronger community of Buyers compared to my online observations and interviews. A group of Buyers attending the event shared that they liked to meet their friends at these events to craft and to catch up with one another. Other Buyers shared that they attend these events out of a general interest in Etsy, crafts, and meeting new people. For example, one Buyer mentioned that she was interested in starting a shop, and decided to attend the workshop to get a better

feel for Etsy, and, at the same time, meet new people. These particular offline events appear to bring all members together regardless of role and based on the love for craft and working with their hands. Overall, it appears that Buyers that attend these events do so as a way connect and socialize through craft.

Aside from the offline activities of some Buyers, like most of the participants in this study who are Buyers, Sellers also recognize that Etsy's community is primarily Seller-centered. Fiona, a shop owner, shared, "You just feel like you are part of like the artist community... You felt like you have something in common with these really cool people." For Fiona, by being a Seller she feels connected to this community, which, for her and many other Sellers, is comprised of artists. During this exchange she also expressed a sense of pride in being connected to this "artist" community. Many other Sellers expressed similar sentiments, feeling pride in being a part of this community, while identifying Sellers as the cornerstone of Etsy's community.

Participants who are involved in Etsy Administration hold views similar to those of the Buyers and Sellers. For instance, when asked if Etsy's community highlights one role over another, Nicole, an Etsy Administrator responded by saying, "That is a very interesting question... Yeah, 'cause I would say when people talk about the Etsy community, they are often thinking of the Sellers." Nicole clearly recognizes that Etsy's community is often thought about from the Seller perspective, and talked about how Sellers are the cornerstone of this community. Yet, Etsy recognizes that Buyers also play an important role in shaping the market aspects of the community. The following passage

by Randy, an Etsy Administrator, explores the dynamic between Buyers and Sellers within Etsy's community:

R: Etsy's community is a... group of individuals from all over the world. Who see value in doing business with other people from all over the world. Um.... You know, whether it's gifts that you can't find anywhere else, as cliché as it is, it's absolutely true.

Randy explains that Etsy's community is comprised of an international audience that appreciates engaging in the exchange of, or "doing business" in, international handmade or craft goods. As such, Randy's idea of Etsy's community involves the Buyer as much as the Seller, recognizing that both members are required to conduct business, as well as to create the community as a whole. Based on Randy's comments, as well as other participants who are Administrators, it can be surmised that Sellers provide the goods to be consumed but the Buyer is necessary to consume them.

Overall, participants interviewed for this study shared similar sentiments regarding who makes up Etsy's community. Buyers, Sellers, as well as Etsy Administrators immediately identified Etsy's community as Seller-centered. In turn, Buyers talked about feeling disconnected from the community, which stemmed from their role as consumers rather than producers. Despite minimal community engagement, some Buyers, as well as Etsy Administrators, recognize that as members, Buyers shape the market aspects of Etsy's Seller-centered community. This point will be discussed in more detail within the upcoming sections.

Destination Etsy

As discussed in the previous theme, the majority of participants see themselves as playing a role in Etsy's community, and as contributing to and shaping it. However, not all Buyers and Sellers feel that they are *directly* a part of the Etsy community. For instance, participants who are Etsy Administrators feel that they guide the community. In turn, Sellers' experiences and opinions provide them insight into what this community is actually comprised of. From this data emerged a set of unique characteristics that help Sellers navigate the "roads" of Etsy. As such, this section is arranged via five subthemes: (a) *It's a Handmade Business*, (b) *Exercising Creativity*, (c) *Going Against the Mainstream*, (d) *Debbie Downers*, and (e) *Navigators*.

It's A Handmade Business

As discussed, participants who are Sellers share a unique set of characteristics that motivate them to sell on Etsy. Sellers often decided to set up their retail stores on Etsy as a way to fulfill a passion for selling whatever it is they create or curate (in the case of vintage products). As Erin, a long time Seller shares, "I guess overall, I would say just about every Etsy Seller loves what they do. Um...I think the reason, the end game, is a little bit different for everybody." Erin shares that regardless of a Seller's products or sales goals, most share a love for conducting business on Etsy. Folded into this passion is a love for making and/or collecting goods for their shops. Fiona, another Seller, further explains this community-wide shared interest in making and collecting handmade goods, "Yeah, I think this is kind of like, to create a quality handmade product. And it kind of seems like everybody stands behind their product and wants to present it in the best

light...” Like other handmade and vintage Sellers, Fiona’s passion extends to not only selling on Etsy, but to the process of creating or acquiring goods, i.e., the handmade process.

Madison’s story about why she started selling on Etsy further illustrates this point. Madison originally made her handmade dog toys as gifts for dogs that were going through chemotherapy treatment (see Figure 6). She explained that she did it for fun and as a “little pick me up for her [friend],” because,

M: She absolutely loved them, and she was like “you need to keep making these.” And so I think that is when I opened the Etsy shop, and I was like, “Err I will just try this and see.” And it sort of picked up from there and just kept going, and I feel like I have been trying to keep up with it since.

For Madison, what began as a fun, part-time project turned into a profitable, full-time business. As she explained, she entered into Etsy not with the end goal of making a profit, but rather to share her passion with others. As such, her fun and quirky dog toys quickly captured the eye of Buyers in Etsy’s market and beyond, turning this part-time activity into a means of earning a living.



Figure 6. Madison's Handmade Dog Toy

During my online observation of Etsy's Blogs, I ran across other Sellers with similar stories. Like Madison, it seems that many Sellers enter into selling on Etsy as passion projects, which, for some, have turned into profitable businesses. While all participants who are Sellers expressed a moderate desire to make money, or at least break even, they all expressed that they were initially inspired or driven by a passion to make handmade or collect vintage products.

Exercising Creativity

As discussed in the previous chapter, participants, including Sellers, value the creativity and artistry integrated into the products as well as the exchange process on Etsy. Within the greater theme of Destination Etsy, this particular finding emerged as a subtheme, as it was discovered that Sellers view Etsy as a retail destination that allows them to express and exercise their creativity, as well as admire the artistic creativity of

others. In turn, Sellers often discussed their passion for Etsy as fueled by its creative and artistic community. As Fiona, a Seller of customized “Phillies Terrible Towels” explains:

F: You just feel like you are part of like the artist community, hahaha. I don’t know, it sounds kind of cheesy and I’m not an artist, ‘cause all I did is type a name on a machine and hit go. So it’s not like I’m being creative, it was just fun being part of that... And um... I was always just so happy to be part of a website that was creative, and artistic... You felt like you had something in common with these really cool people.

Fiona describes the Etsy community as artist-driven, and as a Seller she sees this as a common characteristic shared by all Sellers. Although Fiona does not necessarily make the most creative item available on Etsy, she still feels like a member of this creative, artist community. Laura, a Seller of mid-century vintage housewares, shared a similar point of view:

L: You know, I admire people who are more artistic, I guess, um... I love to look at it. I definitely tell people, friends that know about Etsy. I’ll just hear people saying... “If I could find this for a gift or that.” And I’m always like, “Go to Etsy it’s handmade stuff. It’s beautiful!” I see a lot of it and I think it’s gorgeous, but again I just can’t [make] it.

Like Fiona, Laura perceives Sellers as creative and artistic, particularly the Sellers of handmade goods. Also like Fiona, Laura does not think she exercises the same degree of creativity as other Sellers. Creativity and artistry are recognized as characteristics that the community shares, even in instances where Sellers see themselves as being less creative or artistic given the particular goods they sell.

Going Against the Mainstream

Along with Fiona and Laura, the data revealed that Sellers are often motivated to participate in Etsy's selling community because of its unique and rather laid back approach to selling. Moreover, Sellers often describe Etsy as a "non-traditional" approach to selling handmade and vintage goods. Notably, the way Sellers run their businesses is somewhat unorthodox, as they go against mainstream approaches to online retailing by interacting with and helping out competing Sellers. When contrasting Etsy with eBay, Josie illustrates the key difference:

J: Um... compared to eBay it's much less mainstream. Um... so I feel like there's a lot more personality um.... compared to eBay... eBay to me really seems like, like, like a money-maker for people who don't want to like, who like aren't creative. I don't know if that makes any sense, but you know? Like with Etsy I feel like there's people selling things that they are interested in or passionate about... there's a little more soul in Etsy.

Josie describes Etsy as an alternative online retail site, primarily because Sellers are driven by a passion for creativity rather than the bottom line. As a result, for Josie it is Sellers who give Etsy its "soul."

On a similar note, Josie talked about the competitive nature of eBay, stating "I feel like eBay's like, like there's like a competition aspect to it that I really don't like... We're putting our stuff out here to see how we can make the most money." Similar to other Buyers, Josie expresses that while there is a lot of competition within Etsy's market, it is a less competitive environment overall when compared to more mainstream online retailers like eBay or Amazon.

Similar to Josie, other Sellers mentioned that they enjoy the relaxed and supportive nature of the Etsy community as a place to sell their products. The following passage provided by Erin sheds light on Etsy's positive selling environment:

E: You know, there is so much advice out there that's positive. So if you have questions or [are] just starting out, there are so many tips from seasoned Sellers... When you're starting out it's a nice way to reach out.... You know if you're feeling like you're not doing the right thing or you just need some encouragement, it's nice to be able to reach out in the Forums or to a Team or something like that and kind of get advice on what to do right.

Based on her own experiences with selling on Etsy, Erin describes the community of Sellers as a positive, knowledgeable, helpful, and uplifting resource for new as well as seasoned Sellers. From her perspective, the community is always there for Sellers, whether it be to provide shop advice, critiques, or emotional support, and by lifting Sellers up when they are down. The result is a nurturing selling environment and a relaxed retailing atmosphere, which many participants see as very different from other online retailers.

Laura's sentiments regarding Etsy's community showcases how Sellers often engage with the Etsy community at large for help:

L: The easiest part is, that it is really a community. It's personal. It feels like, kind of like a family, the community, and there is support when I expect, when I need it, I get support. Um... and... it feels like home, it's my, my base.

Like many other Sellers, Laura reaches out to the community for help with her shop. She describes the responses she receives as similar to what one might get from a family, and therefore she often turns to the community when she cannot figure out a selling problem,

or if she has general problems with her shop. Indeed, it seems that sharing advice and tips about selling on Etsy among competing Sellers is a common Etsy practice. For instance, Laura reached out to several Sellers when researching product information for her vintage goods. Interestingly, it is in fact common practice for competing Sellers on Etsy to work together to help one another.

In contrast to mainstream online retailers, Etsy's Sellers help one another with their shops as well as provide emotional support. Even participants who are Sellers and do not directly engage with Etsy's community note the presence of this support system. For example, when asked about her interaction with Etsy's community, Josie said she never really engages other community members. Instead she mostly uses the resources created by Etsy Administration. Josie describes this feeling, "Generally I feel like the community is really receptive, even though I don't... [I] use more like of the admin created stuff and Blog." Despite limited interactions, she still recognizes and feels a sense of community, and consequently describes Etsy as a platform that is receptive to Sellers' needs.

In summary, participants who are Sellers often describe selling on Etsy as a "new" or "less traditional" approach to online retailing, as well as to the retailing of craft goods. When discussing selling on Etsy, they often invoked online retail sites like eBay and Amazon, or craft shows, to compare and contrast the differences between selling on Etsy and more traditional retail platforms. Unlike these traditional platforms, and in particular the online versions, Etsy's Sellers are cognizant and appreciative of the community support and often reach out to other Sellers when in need. In turn, Etsy's

selling environment is seen as more relaxed and positive. However, as will be discussed in the next subtheme, as with any rule, there are exceptions.

Debbie Downers

As discussed in the previous subthemes, the majority of participants had positive experiences, as well as reasons why they chose to “park” their retail store in Etsy’s parking lot. However, not all participants’ perceptions of selling-related behaviors on Etsy align with the aforementioned positive motivations. Consequently, this subtheme explores participants’ experiences with behaviors that run counter to the Etsy norm.

The majority of participants who are Sellers shared at least one or more instance wherein they witnessed or personally experienced Sellers straying from the community norms. Erin, a long time Seller, shared her experiences with this type of Seller in the following passage:

E: In the Forums, you could, you know, reach out and ask questions or if you’re having trouble you know, bring something up and somebody would always be willing to help you. And now if you go into the Forums and somebody brings up a question or has an issue there’s so many people that just jump all over them, and tell them what they are doing wrong, or you’re not allowed to do this, you shouldn’t talk about this here. And it’s just like, there’s always at least one person that’s going to jump in and not say anything helpful. Like, why are you commenting on the issue if you’re going to be rude about it!

Erin describes how, over time, some of the comments have changed in tone, and while the majority of Sellers continue to be helpful, she has witnessed instances where Sellers are rude, inconsiderate, or just downright unhelpful to other Sellers. As our conversation continued, Erin shared that she calls these people “Debbie Downers,” or those with a

“glass half empty” perspective. To Erin, these individuals focus on the negative rather than the positive aspects of selling on Etsy.

In a similar vein, some participants who are Sellers shared examples of “Debbie Downers” using Forums or similar spaces to rant and rave about their personal selling problems or problems that they had with Etsy. Erin referred to this as the “complaint department,” as she shares in the following passage:

E: Stuff I don't like about Etsy, the complaint department... Like new stuff that comes about is you know good for the whole, but it rubs a lot of people wrong. You know, they just started saying that you can... source your stuff to like a factory, as long as it was your original idea... So, I think that's... rubbed a lot of people kinda raw.

Erin describes how some Sellers use the Forums to complain about changes to the site and its practices. For participants like Erin, these Sellers are seen as a nuisance and viewed as not contributing to conversations that help move Etsy forward. It is important to note, however, that the topic Erin brought up (allowing outside manufacturing) was a major point of debate among the Etsy community occurring during data collection, especially in the “complaint department.” However, for Erin, the issue is the ranting and raving rather than providing constructive feedback or possible solutions to those seeking help with their shops.

The identification and description of “Debbie Downers” is important to understanding the whole that makes for Etsy's community. As members identify Seller behaviors that do not fit with the Etsy community, the behaviors that do fit become much

clearer. Thus, Debbie Downers make it even more obvious the extent to which the Etsy community strives to be a positive place for selling handmade goods.

Navigators

As revealed in the previous sections, the majority of participants recognize Etsy's community as Seller-centered. Yet, participants often discussed ways in which Buyers can be an influential and integral part of Etsy's community. For instance, Chrissy, a Buyer, talked about the ways that Buyers guide this community.

C: I see it [Etsy] as a huge community. I may not be super in the community if that makes sense. I just buy or whatever, but I can imagine that as Sellers, it's a huge community. I mean, it's kinda like any, any relationship in nature, you know it's like mutualistic in a lot of ways, Buyers and Sellers help each other. And, you know, a lot of Sellers help each other.

Buyers like Chrissy recognize that though they are not *directly* involved with the community, they know that they are influential to it. In particular, Chrissy recognizes that while Etsy's community is Seller-focused, Buyers cannot help but impact the community via their purchases. The following exchange with Lilly, another Buyer, further reveals the influence some Buyers believe they have on the market aspects of Etsy's community:

L: ...there are so many Sellers and users [Buyers] on Etsy, I might be a drop in the bucket. Um... but, I think if there's enough feedback on something from users, stuff would change

Me: Kind of like a democracy?

L: Yeah, sort of. I think that, that Etsy's integrity... I think that's really important to the entire... definitely to the merchant community, but to the users as well...

Me: I see what you are saying. I gotcha, not necessarily like, I don't like this and you should change it. But if you don't like it and everybody else doesn't like it they are going to listen.

L: I think they would [listen]. I think they would.

Lilly does not see herself as part of the “merchant community,” but, she thinks that, as a collective group, Buyers can influence Sellers to change a part of the process, whether it be a product or a policy. Overall, she believes that if there is something that the majority of Buyers do not like, it could change. In turn, she calls attention to the fact that Sellers listen to Buyers, and therefore, through the exchange process, Buyers help to guide the community as a whole. Many participants who are Buyers shared Lilly's viewpoint, in that they think that they are outsiders looking in on Etsy's community, yet influencing it by purchasing goods as well as by providing feedback about their purchases.

The data revealed a second “guiding force” in Etsy's Seller-driven community: Etsy Administration. In the following passage, Madison, a Seller, shares her perspective on how Etsy's Administration influences the community:

M: ...I guess, I think of it more as the Buyers and Sellers are kids, and the Admin are like the parents. So they are there, kind of watching over. And so if one of the “kids” has questions they can go to the Admin and they'll answer... Or even if, you know, there are changes made to Etsy, they will go in and tell you this changed...

Madison positions Etsy Administration as overseeing the interactions that take place between Sellers and Buyers. She feels that they play a similar role in Etsy's Seller community, helping out Sellers as well as disseminating important market and community information to them.

Participants who are Etsy Administrators believe that they are there to help the community, including Buyers. As Mary, an Etsy Administrator explains,

M: I think that we are always, um... looking at both [Buyer and Seller] of those behaviors to try and make it better. Umm... So I just think the nature of them just sort of being on the platform and using the platform gives us information about how they're using it, so that they can influence it. And then I think we are also always sort of reaching out and trying to set up these communication loops so that we can understand more about their needs. So I think that both the community being, Buyers and Sellers will always have a huge impact in terms of how we develop and what tools we develop.

Mary's role is to ultimately make Etsy a better experience for both Buyers and Sellers. To this end, interviews with Administrators, as well as observation data, point to the ways that Etsy frequently seeks out and integrates input from both when shaping Etsy's platform.

Turning the attention back to the Seller, participants who are Etsy Administrators emphasized the importance of listening to Sellers. Participants like Nicole shared the different ways that they reach out to Sellers:

N: So, you know, within the company we try to share as much as possible with different Teams. Whether it's projects that are getting worked on or umm... data that we gleaned from different surveys, and we do that with the different communities itself so, but, you know we've been posting Weather Reports, which is like site-wide stats for the community for years, which is really quite rare to see a company sharing that much information. And then I think that we try to be incredibly open with community, hosting Q&A's in the Forums, things like that, having Town Halls... um... or where Sellers are able to ask their questions directly in a live environment, you know, no editing.

While discussing the information that Etsy shares with its Teams as well as the community as a whole, Nicole pointed to the online communication tools Etsy uses to

create an open dialogue with its Sellers, including surveys, Town Hall Meetings, Q&A sessions, Etsy Forums, as well as *Weather Reports*. These tools are mainly used to foster interaction between Sellers and Etsy Administration in order to obtain Seller feedback as well as to disseminate market information to the community at large.

During my online observations as a Seller, I participated in some of these activities and experienced this “feedback loop.” For instance, I joined a couple of Etsy’s Prototype Teams, which is an online program used by Etsy Administration to get feedback from Sellers about tool prototypes. Etsy describes these Teams as places “for people who want to test and provide feedback on new Shop Stats Features before they’re available to everyone...” In particular, as a member of the “Shop Stats Improvement Team,” I used the tool in my shop and provided feedback to an Etsy Administrator about bugs as well as the tool’s overall usefulness.

Etsy Administration also carries out activities to help guide interaction among members and foster community development. For instance, as a Seller I often engaged with other Sellers through online Forums, adding threads and responding to posts. These Forums are overseen by Administration. Randy, an Etsy Administrator, describes how this oversight is accomplished:

R: Well, I mean one of the things I tried to do from the very beginning is to say, “I’m not here to play police, that’s not my goal. I am not here to police you.” Umm you know, there is policy enforcement involved, for sure. But, umm... you know, “I want you to think of me as a liaison between community and the employees of the company,” not as someone who knows, sees you busting a window and is like, [in an old man voice] “Quit it you darn kids!”

Randy sees himself as a liaison between Sellers and the company. Later in our discussion, he shares another aspect of his role that further suggests the extent to which Etsy guides the community:

R: Moving threads to the appropriate section, um... checking out reports that are sent to us by the community, saying “I think this post is in violation of Forums policy.” Reviewing that, making the determination, taking appropriate action. Maybe it’s hiding the post, maybe it’s closing the thread. Maybe it’s referring it for uhhhh for, for review for further disciplinary action. Also, um... engaging with the community, which sounds a little bit buzz wordy, but, um... You know, people post threads about what they are having for dinner tonight, and you know I post, I post what I am having for dinner tonight, talk about favorite movie and tv shows, and I post on that stuff too.

Randy sees his role as helping to facilitate communication among Sellers as well as between Etsy and its Sellers. He guides the community conversation, ensuring that Sellers are not violating Forum policies, and taking action with Sellers that are infringing on them. In addition to guiding the conversation and creating the overall Forum atmosphere, he engages with the community in a friendly way, leaving comments himself. Clearly, even though it is a Seller-driven community, both Etsy Administration and Buyers have a role to play in navigating how the community shapes Etsy as a retail destination for all.

Crafting Tightly Knit Connections

As discussed, Etsy’s approach to online sales affords members the opportunity to individualize levels of engagement with the community. The notion of individualization surfaced frequently, and it was discovered that not only do Sellers individualize the selling experience, but they also individualize the community experience. They do this by

crafting smaller communities and networks of Sellers to support their Etsy shops. Along the same lines, Etsy acts as a conduit, connecting Sellers to like-minded business communities and networks as well as business opportunities outside of Etsy. Over time, some Sellers experienced instances wherein connections made via business communities and networks turned into more personal relationships, and even friendships. In this theme, *Crafting Tightly Knit Connections*, these findings are examined in depth through four subthemes: (a) *Fabricating Business Connections and Networks*, (b) *Etsy as a Gateway*, (c) *Crafting Personal Connections and Relationships*, and (d) *Etsy Teams: Building a Foundation of Support*.

Fabricating Business Connections and Networks

Although the majority of participants who are Sellers associate themselves with Etsy's "community," many reach out to smaller groups of Sellers within the community when seeking business help/advice. One popular way to do this is to join an Etsy Team. For example, Laura is a member of Epstien, an Etsy Team. She explains her reason for joining this particular type of Seller community:

L: ...[a Team] does give you a lot of exposure, and I have contacts now when you have questions about an item, I go to people on those Teams. Or on that Team and um... ask them questions, 'cause they have been selling for a lot longer. It's nice to have a virtual friend to ask questions.

This excerpt reveals that Laura uses Teams to help her address questions about selling items in her vintage shop, and has forged bonds with other members over a shared interest in vintage goods. She finds that reaching out to specific members, rather than the entire community through Forums or Blogs, is the most helpful. Based on the interview

and observation data, it appears that this is a common practice among Sellers, as they often join Etsy Teams to seek out and interact with other Sellers in similar product categories.

It also seems that Sellers join and/or engage with Etsy Teams for marketing purposes. While describing how she engages with members of the Team called Etsy Pickers, Laura reveals this additional benefit:

L: I think it's, Etsy Pickers and Sellers, it's a pretty big Team. And they will do this contest, you know, make a Treasury using this item, and their [the store with the best Treasury] store gets featured [the] next week... and they are big enough I think, it just gives you exposure, I don't think you get a lot of sales from it. But it does give you a lot of exposure...

This passage reveals how Sellers can engage with Etsy Teams to increase shop traffic. Laura had the opportunity to engage in Team games that ultimately increased her shop traffic. Other participants who are Sellers participated in similar games, including visiting other Team members' shops to "heart" items, thereby helping to increase others' shop traffic. Consequently, Etsy Teams serve as a communal space where members can engage with other like-minded Sellers to promote one another and increase their own shop's visibility.

Sellers also use the connections they made via Etsy Teams, as well as other acquaintances (i.e. Buyers), to create business networks. Specifically, it appears that moderate to high volume Sellers in particular create connections that ultimately lead to the development of business networks. In talking about building relationships with other

Etsy members, Laura discusses how a one-time Buyer has now become a part of her network:

L: And I've kind of made sort of virtual friends with a women in um... Scandinavia, and it's an ongoing thing, we communicate a lot. Her name is Ruby, and she e-mailed me one day and she had a question about a particular piece [Scandinavian dish].

Laura formed a relationship with Ruby over a series of exchanges related to the purchase of the dish, which Ruby eventually made. Laura felt that they had forged a virtual friendship over these business-related exchanges and decided to include another item with Ruby's purchase for free. When Laura told Ruby about the additional item, Ruby responded, "Well if you ever have any questions about Scandinavian items, you can ask me 'cause I know quite a bit." Laura thinks that Ruby works for a company that collects and possibly sells vintage Scandinavian items.

The exchange between Laura and Ruby reveals two key points about Sellers' use of Buyers as part of their business networks. First, Ruby was one person out of a handful that Laura referred to when talking about using Etsy for business advice. These connections are linked to a separate network, rather than community-wide. That is, the interactions are just with Laura. Second, this excerpt reveals how a business-based connection can evolve into a "virtual friendship," based on a shared interest in a product, and in this case, Scandinavian design. Creating relationships that serve the business but are mutually beneficial appears to be a common practice among participants who are Sellers.

Etsy as a Gateway

Building on the idea of business networks, some Sellers see Etsy as a gateway to related industries, or those industries which exist outside of Etsy. This notion is particularly important to participants who are extremely high volume Sellers. For example, Madison described how being a member of Etsy connects her to the broader pet retail industry, and ultimately helped to greatly expand her business network:

M: [Etsy] It's like this web...

Me: Hm... you have a lot of like outside communities that help grow your business inside of Etsy.

M: Hmm Hmmm.

Me: And some are connected to Etsy and some aren't?

M: Yes. And what happens, even this woman I met in Texas, she does pet photography. She has a huge group of people she knows 'cause she started out in design, she knows people in New York and whatever, but she found me 'cause she made a purchase through Etsy. So she didn't have a shop at all, she made a purchase, and from there pulled me into her little community.

Over the course of the interview, Madison and I discussed additional ways that Etsy acts as a conduit to expand her business network in ways that contribute to the growth and success of her shop that sells one-of-a-kind pet toys, called FurryFriends.

M: And then magazines, so... this last Fall I think it's been in 7 different publications. This last fall was Caesar Milan's, you know the dog whisperer... They contacted me through Etsy, um... and this summer I'll be in a project where, it's really cool. They are going to build a family of 4 and 2 dogs a house from the ground up. And where everything in the house is dog friendly and they will blog about it and do photos everyday. But they build stuff, so it will be from the wood floors, the paint they choose on the wall, everything, and it's... Yeah, so everything is being donated, and it will be...

Me: So you are donating some FurryFriends?

M: Hmmm.hmmm.

Me: Okay, that's really cool. And so Caesar Milan, those are some really big deals. I am sure it made your shop super busy.

M: It's kind of over Etsy though too, 'cause I think a lot of big name other companies know of Etsy. So they come in there and they search to find what they are looking for, and then they come and contact shops through there to get what they want.

Me: Like Caesar Milan's PR people probably did that. Is that what you are thinking?

M: Yeah...

For Madison, expansion of her business has gone beyond the digital walls of Etsy. Indeed, she has found that Etsy can act as a form of marketing in itself, as larger companies and organizations know it is a place to find unique and interesting crafters, collectors, as well as products. Through her network, Madison connected to dog communities, charity communities, as well as industry communities, mainly by initial interactions that occurred via Etsy. In particular, Madison's involvement with Ceaser Milan highlights how Etsy can serve as a place that aggregates unique business owners and products in one place. Although not necessarily the case with the majority of Sellers interviewed for this study, during online observation I noticed that other high volume Sellers featured on Etsy's Blog appeared to have similar stories and experiences. In sum, for those who want it, Etsy can serve as a platform to grow business networks and connections by fostering business opportunities.

Crafting Personal Connections and Relationships

As touched on in the previous section, some business-related interactions between members have resulted in personal connections. The following passage shared by Madison provides insight into how initial business connections between Sellers can morph into a personal acquaintance or even friendship.

M: ...[when] I was still in Minnesota... I actually met some people there, so when I go back to Minnesota I will see a lot of people, um... For instance, I met a women that does pet photography that is in Texas, and I went there last year with um... Daniel [husband] for a conference... and then I ended up meeting her. So it's kind of cool. I will meet other people that I would never know otherwise. So, face-to-face is a little harder because people are all over the world.

Prior to moving to North Carolina, Madison lived in Minnesota, where she was friends with Etsy Sellers as well as industry members connected to pet-related businesses. Madison explains that when she goes home, she visits with some of these people. As she continues to share, Madison explains that she has similar relationships with people outside of Minnesota, in particular a friendship with a Texan Dog photographer came to mind. She shares that she became acquainted with the photographer via a business transaction. Madison paid her to take photographs for her shop. Madison became so close to this Seller that she stayed at her house, instead of a hotel, during a trip to Texas. Madison's experience provides an example of how initial business relationships can blossom into personal connections, resulting in friendships. Moreover, it reveals that a shared interest in selling on Etsy, or selling a particular category of goods, can act as a common point of interest that unites Sellers on a more personal level.

In a similar vein, some participants shared instances wherein Etsy transactions led to the development of personal relationships between Sellers and Buyers. For example, in the following passage, Erin shares how her relationships with Buyers might develop:

E: A couple, you know people that have, that come back [to the shop]. I have this one woman that buys, um... you know all different, every year she'll e-mail me and she'll want like new Christmas collars for her dogs. Or last year she bought three matching collars and then she got a fourth dog, so she got another collar. But you know, I know about her dogs, and all that, because she has been ordering from me so long. And then, the same thing with the kids clothes, they'll come back, you know they want the birthday outfit for one kid and a birthday outfit for another kid, they want, you know, Christmas pajamas every year. I've kind of made, you know, friends with people, through that aspect of it. Just coming back and telling me about their kid, you know, their kid is turning whatever age, sending me pictures, that helps, too.

As a long-time Seller, Erin often creates personal relationships with repeat customers. Particular to Erin's circumstance, the items she makes are usually custom or one-of-a-kind, which requires an open dialogue between herself and the Buyer. During these exchanges, she often learns of personal details about the Buyer's life. For instance, her Buyers will share how many dogs or children they have, as well as their ages, or breed, in the case of dogs. This passage also reinforces that the act of selling, as well as the products sold, can be a common point of interest serving to unite Buyers and Sellers, and sometimes prompt relationships between them on a personal level.

Although not all Sellers formed personal relationships with their Buyers, the majority of Sellers interviewed for this study seem to enjoy being able to connect with Buyers on a personal level. The following exchange with Madison captures this sentiment:

Me: So you really want to get to know the person?

M: Yeah, I do, almost like a pen pal... I feel like if someone just wrote me an e-mail, like had a website and wrote me from there, I would not feel the same comfort, in like asking, "How was your day? What did you do?" But Etsy does create that Pen Pal feeling, where, people will send me pictures from their vacations, and things that don't even have to do with FurryFriends. We've created friendships I guess.

Me: Could you think of one of those friendships and describe it?

M: ...I know I guess a lot of it is, people will tell me when they are abroad or go on vacation, or the woman in United Arab Emeritus... she'll just randomly write a message saying, "Oh, I'm on the beach enjoying a drink of coffee, and I hope you have a great day."

Madison refers to these relationships as "pen pals," as she enjoys keeping in touch with Buyers every now and again. To Madison, such relationships with Buyers are fostered by the sense of community provided by Etsy.

In a similar vein, the majority of Sellers interviewed said one benefit, or at least a fun part of selling on Etsy, is having the ability to directly engage with and connect to their customers. Again it is high volume Sellers, as well as some Buyers, that are more likely to engage in these types of behaviors and form these relationships. These participants think that the ability to form such relationships makes selling, or in fewer cases buying, on Etsy a more personal and fulfilling experience.

Participants who are Etsy Administrators also shared instances in which they engage in more personal kinds of communication with Etsy Sellers. As discussed in Chapter IV, Mary shared one particular relationship in depth, by recounting how close she felt to a Seller despite their physical distance and limited conversation. She was devastated by the Seller's husband's passing, and detailed what she and other Etsy

Administration did to help the grieving Seller. At the end of this conversation, she concluded the following about her personal experience with Etsy Administration/Seller relationships, “Yeah and it is one of many [relationships], you know. I have so many relationships with the community, but this was definitely one that I really thought that, ‘My gosh, this is how Etsy works, you care so deeply about people.’”

Like Mary, another Etsy Administrator I interviewed, Nicole, noted that she formed relationships with Sellers. In these instances, the relationships shared between Sellers and Administrators can often be tied back to the business aspects of Etsy. In turn, Administrator-to-Seller relationships were more business professional in nature, compared to Seller-to-Seller and Buyer-to-Seller relationships. For some Etsy Administrators, like Mary and Nicole, work-related relationships with Sellers can sometimes transform into something more personal and intense. In contrast, Randy keeps his relationships with Sellers strictly business, believing it is important to keep a distance between himself and the Sellers. By doing so, he is able to maintain objectivity with Sellers, which he sees as vital to fulfilling his administrative role at Etsy.

Etsy Teams: Building a Foundation of Support

The data revealed that Etsy Administration wants to see its Sellers form and join Teams, business networks and build relationships with one another. As such, Administration goes to great lengths to maintain an online environment that cultivates and supports interactions and exchanges for making such connections. One of the chief ways Etsy Administration achieves this goal is through the development and cultivation of Etsy Teams. While discussing her role at Etsy, Mary explains it as:

M: ...[finding] where the magic is happening, and really help them [Teams] do what they need to be doing, and what they want to be doing. And [Etsy] Teams is a great way to do that.

From the Administrator's perspective, Teams are a valuable resource, as they provide a place for Administrators to easily connect with a large population of Etsy Sellers.

Connecting with Sellers is imperative for Administration to fulfill its responsibilities with Etsy. Mary describes the "magic" of Etsy Teams from the Seller perspective,

M: So we'll see these local networks [Teams] forming and we will try to support them in anyway that we can. So that, so that, they can network and actually solve these problems for themselves. Because most often, there's a lot of really niche solutions that they can come up with. So it's really just about us finding these pockets and really empowering them and helping them.

Etsy Teams emerge from within the community, usually based on Sellers' desires to connect with one another as a means to solve shop-related problems. Moreover, Etsy has found that localized networks, which will often eventually form into Teams, are the best option for providing solutions and support for Sellers, as they are more adept at catering to shop-specific needs. It is clear that Etsy recognizes this invaluable contribution to Sellers, as the success of Teams can lead to the success of individual Sellers, thereby making a positive contribution to Etsy's overall community. These networks are vital to Etsy and its community, as they provide opportunities for Sellers to help one another, fostering a business network through community spirit.

Data collected through online observation further supports this notion and provides more insight into how Etsy strives to specifically support Teams, and relationship-building in general, among its members. For instance, successful Teams are

often featured on Etsy's Blog, as well as ways that Teams can seek Etsy funding to help them grow and prosper. Some of the features include, but are not limited to, Etsy Craft Parties, Etsy Grants, and Etsy Fellowship Programs. In summary, Teams are an approach used by Etsy to foster bonding among members as well as community development. As such, Etsy Teams support the notion of a community-based rather than a competition-based selling environment, further reinforcing the ways that community shapes Etsy's culture.

Community (Ex)Changes

Communication is essential to the health of a community, in that without communication a community will falter and eventually dissolve. Thus, the final theme of this chapter focuses on how members communicate to foster and maintain a healthy selling community. For the most part, participants use social media tools provided by Etsy to engage with one another in the community. Participants' involvement levels with Etsy's community vary, and it seems that they develop relationships within Etsy's community that met their individual needs, particularly those participants who are Sellers. Thus, the following two subthemes explore the depth and breadth of community exchanges from the Sellers' perspective, highlighting points at which Buyers and Administrators play a role in these exchanges: (a) *Creating Digital Connections* and (b) *Creating Face-to-Face Connections*.

Creating Digital Connections

The fact that Etsy is online greatly influences the ways by which Sellers communicate and engage with each other in Etsy's community. In particular, the data

suggest that participants who are Sellers rely heavily on Etsy's social media tools to facilitate conversations and interactions. Moreover, it was discovered that three Etsy-created social media tools are the most popular among these participants: *Etsy Convos*, *Etsy Forums*, and *the Etsy Blog*. In turn, these Etsy-specific social media tools are used to structure discussion of how Sellers communicate and engage within Etsy's community.

Etsy Convos. Although participants who are Sellers rely on Etsy's social media tools to interact with others, Etsy Convos appear to be used the most often by Sellers when conducting business-related activities. Etsy Convos is a closed network e-mail system available to all members of the Etsy community. The following passage from Laura, a vintage product Seller, highlights the use of Etsy Convos,

L: ...every now and then I might write... If someone buys something from me and I list something that reminds me of what they bought, and I think they might like it, I might go back to a Seller or Buyer and say, "You know, no pressure at all, I just thought of you when I listed this because you bought something similar." And sometimes they respond and sometimes they don't. But I might do that.

Laura uses Etsy Convos to communicate with Buyers to follow up on previous sales as well as make contact with Buyers in regards to future sales. Laura indicates that Etsy Convos also help her maintain and foster business relationships with other Sellers.

L: ...there's a women in Kentucky, my home state, not actually where I lived, who is a Seller. I go to her, and she's super nice, very helpful. I have written her a couple of times with some questions. Um... "How do I describe this?" Because I'm not a textile person.

For Laura, Etsy Convos are helpful when she needs to "talk shop" with other Sellers. In sum, Etsy Convos are used by Sellers to follow up with Buyers regarding the progress of

purchases. Between Sellers, Etsy Convos are used in a similar fashion, but to create business connections. Among a small segment of participants who are Sellers, Etsy Convos are also used to forge personal connections with other Sellers as well as Buyers.

Etsy Forums. Etsy's Forums are a social media platform used by a wide variety of Sellers. Forums are divided into three parts: questions, discussion, and bugs (site errors and problems). The majority of Sellers use the questions and discussion sections to communicate with other Sellers. During a conversation about Forums, Erin, a long time Etsy Seller, revealed several different uses for Forums. For one thing, Erin mentions, "...in the Forums, you could, you know reach out and ask questions or if you're having trouble you know bring something up and somebody would always be willing to help you." She continues to explain,

E: ...you know there is so much advice out there that's positive. So if you have questions or are just starting out, there are so many tips from seasoned Sellers, that you can find. And a lot of them say the same thing so, when you're starting out it's a nice way to reach out. You know, if you're feeling like you're not doing the right thing or you just need some encouragement it's nice to be able to reach out in the Forums or to a Team or something like that and kind of get advice on what to do right.

According to Erin, Forums are a place to get shop advice as well as constructive feedback. Observation data support this idea of Etsy Forums as a positive place. Sellers seem to engage in these spaces as a way to reach out to a large group of members quickly for business related advice and feedback, support, and encouragement. Interestingly, most Sellers, whether new or old, said that they find the advice on Etsy Forums informative and helpful.

However, observation data as well as data from interviews revealed that some Sellers do not always use Etsy Forums to spread positive messages or support one another. As discussed in Chapter IV, while many perceive Etsy Forums to be a positive space, they are also a space where Sellers complain, airing their grievances about other Sellers, Buyers, as well as Etsy in general.

In contrast to Etsy Convos, Forums are also used by Sellers to discuss community matters. Sellers often engage in dialogue about policies and regulations that impact Etsy as a market and, ultimately, as a community. Erin, a long time Seller shares how in the early days of Etsy she and other Sellers used Forums to address the community matter of resellers. As Erin explains, "...so I know if you look on the Forums, there are people that hate the changes and they're not doing as well as they used to. And there's people that love the changes and welcome [them]." Particular to the business side of Etsy, community Forums provide a place for Sellers to engage in enforcing as well as debating Etsy's policies and regulations.

Data from online observations and interviews revealed that Sellers also engage in and enjoy "chit chat" through Etsy Forums. When engaging with other Sellers on Etsy's site, I often came across off-topic conversations that appeared to take the form of chit chat among Sellers. Figure 7 highlights a series of comments that capture these "side bar" conversations.

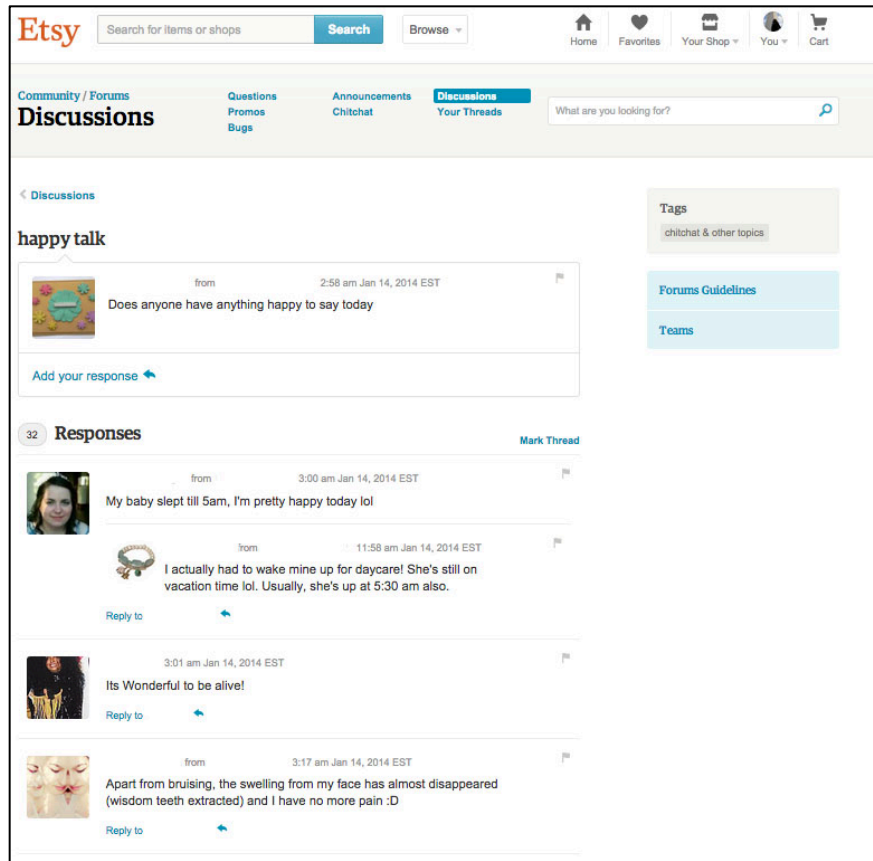


Figure 7. Etsy Forums, Example

In Figure 7, the *Happy Talk* post is an example of Sellers engaging in off-topic threads related to everyday life, rather than Etsy. In this particular post, Sellers are sharing happy things that have occurred in their personal lives. Indeed, the post includes little to no conversation about shop-related issues. I found this to be pretty commonplace in Etsy's Forums, and many of the Sellers interviewed for this study seem to enjoy these off-topic conversations.

On the other hand, a small group of Sellers interviewed for this study found this kind of conversation distracting. For instance, Erin, a previously avid Forums user states, "I don't really use the Forums, I think it used to be different, and rather than seeing a lot

more helping out, it's just kind of chatty in there.” This particular group of Sellers find that these chit chat or side bar conversations deter from the usefulness of Etsy Forums.

However, conversation on the lighter side allows Sellers to share more personal information about their everyday lives, including personal struggles and triumphs. As such, these “chit chat” conversations are one of the ways that Etsy connects its community members on a more personal level and contributes to its open, collaborative, and laid back selling environment. Used by Sellers to talk about business matters, to seek out business advice, as well as to chat with other Sellers, overall, Etsy Forums seem to be an important communication tool.

Etsy Blog. Online observation revealed that Etsy's Blog is another popular social media online platform among Sellers. As shown in Figure 8, excerpts from an Etsy Blog post, *Craft Entrepreneurship: Year in Review*, provide examples of the typical exchanges that take place. This particular Blog post informs the community about the progress of Etsy's pilot program called *Craft Entrepreneurship*. The aim of this program is to support the economic development of craftspeople in Rockford, Illinois and New York. As seen in the posts, Sellers praised Etsy for giving back to these communities and seemed focused on the positive aspects of Etsy. These posts also reflect members' adoption of Etsy's values and ideals related to maintaining a community-driven selling environment.

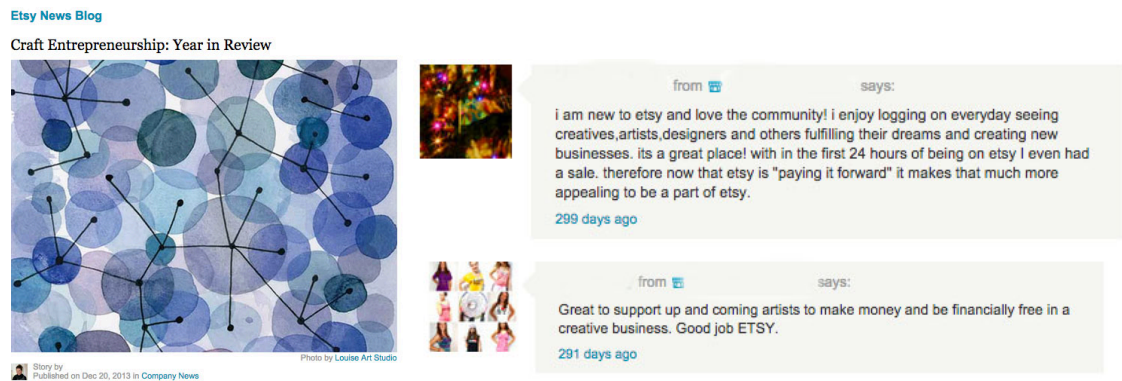


Figure 8. Etsy News Blog and Member Excerpts, Year in Review

Content of a Blog post will often set the tone and topic of discussion among Sellers within Etsy’s Blogs. For example, as seen in Figure 9, *5 Etsy Sellers Partnering With Manufacturers* sets a more negative tone. Sellers posted their opinions about Etsy’s manufacturing policy changes, which allows Sellers to use mass manufacturers as long as the selected manufacturers abide by Etsy’s manufacturing polices. Prior to this change, Sellers were prohibited from using mass manufacturers to produce their goods. The excerpt captures the three common types of responses seen. In the first post, the Seller supports these changes, as long as Sellers abide by Etsy’s manufacturing protocol. In the second post, a Seller expresses disappointment about these changes, and concerns about Etsy maintaining its handmade ethos. The last post, by an Etsy Administrator, highlights the role of Administration in providing facts.

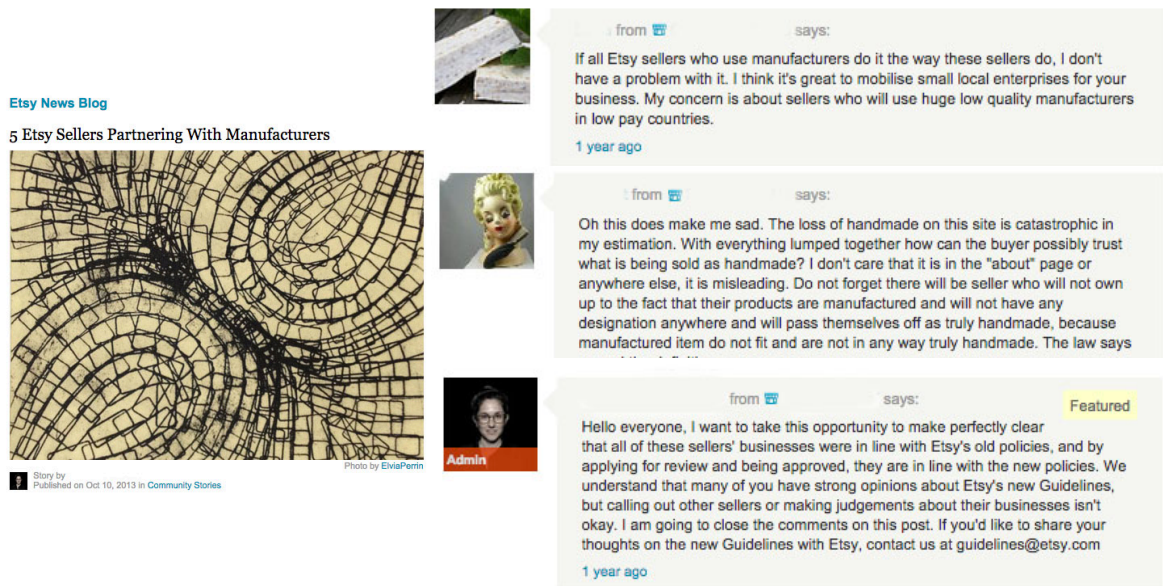


Figure 9. Etsy News Blog and Member Excerpts, Partnering with Manufacturers

The behaviors and conversations highlighted in the selected Blog posts exemplify what often takes place within Etsy's Blog. It is common for Sellers to share their personal opinions about Etsy's policies, as well as engage in dialogue that supports or opposes Etsy's as well as other Sellers' opinions about these policies. For instance, I observed that when a Blog post discusses new policies or regulations, Sellers will often give their opinions and thoughts about such topics, typically sharing their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the policy or regulation. Similar to Etsy Convos and Forums, there is some overlap in conversational topics. As such, Sellers also use Blogs to engage in business discussions.

All of the Sellers interviewed engage in some form of social interaction with others, whether it be via Etsy Convos, Etsy Forums, Etsy Blogs, or Etsy Teams. However the degree of interaction varies. For instance, as Sellers became more successful, they

tended to become less engaged with Etsy Forums, Blogs, and Teams. Many shared that they do not reach out to the community or engage in group discussions, as they are too busy trying to manage the success of their shops. Overall, these Sellers are so busy with their shops they have little to no time to focus on engaging with Etsy's community. Instead, they tend to have smaller business or personal communities that they formed either early on or even before joining Etsy.

Creating Face-to-Face Connections

Although participants did not often meet other Etsy members face-to-face, some of the observation data, including my participation in face-to-face Etsy events, helps to shed light on how Etsy members interact offline. As previously discussed, Etsy advocates for and supports the growth of Etsy Teams, using them as a tool to foster community interaction. Thus, the next section explores the role of Etsy Teams in fostering face-to-face interactions as well as other Etsy-sponsored face-to-face events.

Coordinating face-to-face connections. All Etsy Teams are provided with a Blog on the Etsy site, which affords them the opportunity to disseminate information about the Teams, such as background information, members, activities, as well as a space to organize activities. As shown in Figure 10, the Acorn to Oak Team uses an Etsy Blog to provide information about the Team, including updates and dates for offline Team activities (see green boxes in Figure 10). For instance, the Acorn to Oak Team provides a brief snippet about the purpose of its Team, information about when and where the Team meets offline, as well as updates about yearly dues required for members that attend offline meetings. On the Team Blog, Etsy also provides an “Elsewhere” link that allows

Teams to link the Blog to its other platforms, such as websites, Blogs, and/or other social media pages, like Facebook. “Elsewhere” social media sites often include additional information about Teams and their offline activities (see the orange box in Figure 10).

The screenshot shows the Etsy interface for the 'Acorn to Oak Handmade' team page. At the top, there is the Etsy logo, a search bar, and navigation icons for Home, Favorites, Your Shop, You, and Cart. The page title is 'Acorn to Oak Handmade'. On the left, there is a sidebar with a photo of people at a table, a 'Home' button, and a menu with 'Members', 'Discussions', and 'Founded Jun 9, 2011'. Below this is an 'Elsewhere' section with links for 'Group Website', 'Blog', and 'Facebook Page', which is highlighted with an orange box. To the right of the sidebar is the 'About this team' section with a photo and text: 'We believe in great art. We are a local team created to help artist's make a living online from etsy in the Triangle, NC.' Below this is the team's address: 'Acorn to Oak Handmade Etsy Team Studio, 5825 Triangle Drive, Raleigh, NC 27617'. To the right of the address is the 'Who can join?' section with text: 'Anyone can join who supports local arts and crafts. Either as a maker or a lover of artisan goods.' Below this is a 'Read more' link. Below the 'About this team' section is the 'Discussions' section with a table of threads. At the bottom, there are 'Tags' and 'Members' sections.

Figure 10. Acorn to Oak Team Page and Related Social Media Pages

In addition to Team Pages, Etsy has integrated “Meetups,” a third party online social media tool to facilitate and support members seeking to meet face-to-face, including offline meetings among Team members as well as attendance at Etsy events. For instance, an excerpt from a Blog post about the February Craft and Charity event sheds light on this particular use of MeetUps site by members, Teams, as well as Etsy:

We think that crafting is way more fun with friends, so we invite you to throw your own Craft Party in your corner of the world. All you need to do is visit Etsy's Meetups Everywhere page, join a Special Delivery Meetup where you live, invite your friends and neighbors, make some heartfelt cards and mail them our way. Don't forget to share photos of your gathering in action!

Etsy often uses Meetups as a way for its members to find offline Etsy-related events and activities. Meetups are also used by Etsy Teams as a way to organize their own offline events and activities.

As an organization, Etsy uses Meetups as a way to organize and coordinate its own events. For instance, when I attended an Etsy Craft Party, I signed up and registered for a free ticket using Meetups. Without registering and acquiring a ticket via Meetups, participants are not guaranteed entry to the event, as the space for these events is often limited. Although Etsy Team pages and Meetups seem to be the way that Etsy facilitates and organizes face-to-face meetings, it should be noted that the Blog and Forums are also used to disseminate information about company-wide as well as large Team face-to-face events and activities.

Face-to-face conversations. Face-to-face and online conversation was very similar, as the majority of offline events, whether hosted by an Etsy Team or Etsy's headquarters, are focused on promoting Etsy's handmade mission. As such, offline events typically include activities and workshops related to topics like craft, craft and community, the business side of craft, or making the world a better place through craft. For instance, both of the events I attended at Etsy's headquarters were tied to Etsy's craft based community focus. At the first event I attended, we learned how to make handmade cards. For this particular workshop, Etsy coordinated with City-Meals-on-Wheels, a New

York based organization that delivers meals to seniors who are unable to leave their homes. The goal was to create handmade Valentine's Day cards to accompany the meals that were delivered on Valentine's Day. This particular event reinforced Etsy's mission as a craft-based, community-focused business, by teaching a new craft while advocating for community building within and outside of Etsy. Etsy Team events echo similar sentiments, providing activities and workshops related to Etsy's craft and community, the business side of craft, as well as improving the local community via craft.

While conducting offline observation at these workshops, I found that members engage in conversations similar to those on online Forums, the Blog, and Etsy Convos. For instance, during these events, members will share tips and advice about selling on Etsy, as well as more personal information that led to forging relationships. During one of the Etsy craft events I even observed a large group of friends that appeared to frequent Etsy Craft Nights as a way to reconnect. At the same event, I witnessed several instances where Sellers would engage with one another, discussing their shops and sharing personal stories. It should be noted that it appeared to take less time to foster deeper connections among members offline as compared to online. For instance, even I experienced a more instant kind of connection with others when engaging through offline Etsy events. The following excerpt from my field notes captures this finding:

While at an Etsy Craft Night, I met Farah, a long time Buyer and new Etsy Seller. At Etsy Craft Nights it is common for members to meet up with other members or come alone and meet new other fellow craft enthusiasts. This particular night Farah and I both went to the event alone, and we were the first in line. While we were waiting for the event to start, we began talking, initially about our shops, and quickly we started sharing stories about our personal lives. As we entered the room we sat at a table where we met four other Etsy members; three Sellers and a

Buyer. We were all strangers, had never met before, and instantly started talking about our shops or interest in Etsy, this conversation quickly transitioned to discussing our lives and sharing personal stories. By the end of the night I had made acquaintances with Farah and another long time Etsy Seller, Mara. As a non New Yorker, they offered to walk me to the subway and help me find my way back. Farah and I discovered we were both heading back on the same train line and traveled back to our final destinations together.

After the event, Farah and I stayed in touch for a brief period of time, and she told me to contact her when I was back in New York, which I did. Unfortunately, she was too busy to meet up and I was only in New York for the day, for an Etsy Craft Night. Although our friendship was brief, I felt and still feel like I could reach out to Farah. The ability to meet face-to-face over the course of two hours created a stronger bond than I had experienced during the entire three-month period I spent observing online. This particular finding helps explain why members who form close acquaintances or friendships with other members tend to be long-time Etsy members. This points to the idea that, regardless of Etsy's vast social media tools, it takes more time and effort to foster personal relationships online as compared to meeting members face-to-face.

As described in this chapter, Etsy is an online and offline community shaped mainly by Sellers. There appears to be a core set of values that drive Sellers to Etsy's site, such as its handmade focus, creative and artistic members, and avant-garde approach to retail. Digging deeper, these values create a picture of what it is like to be part of Etsy's community. However, it is important to note that there are multiple forces that sometimes shape the characteristics and direction of a community, as is the case with Etsy. For instance, the data revealed that Sellers, and in turn, the community, are influenced by the guidelines set forth by Etsy Administration as well as the demands made by Buyers.

Etsy is a rather large community; at the time of data collection there was well over 500,000 Sellers. As such, it was found that Sellers often form smaller communities or networks, creating closer ties with members to help with business-related matters. However, not all of these connections are strictly business, as over time some of these connections transformed into “close ties” and even became friendships. It was also found that Etsy acts as a conduit, allowing for Sellers to connect with like-minded Sellers, as well as the wider industry. As discussed, engagement and communication are lifelines of the Etsy community. When examining how Sellers engage one another, it is clear that they rely heavily on the social media tools provided by Etsy. These tools not only provide Sellers with opportunities to engage one another online, but to set up face-to-face interactions, further strengthening the ties that bind the community.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the second conceptual area used to structure the interpretation of the data, Etsy’s community. I introduced four themes to illustrate the depth, breadth, and scope of this community: *Sellers in the Driver’s Seat*, *Destination Etsy*, *Crafting Tightly Knit Connections*, and *Community (Ex)Change*. In the next chapter, I discuss the third and final conceptual area, that of Etsy as a market.

CHAPTER VI

THEMATIC INTERPRETATION PART III: ETSY AS A MARKET

As discussed in Chapter II, all markets have two key players—makers and users—and the actions of both shape their roles within a market. As discussed, “makers” can be thought of as retailers and “users” as consumers. Like television or radio and magazines of the past, within the current market, retailers have begun using social media as a way to promote products, but also as a way to communicate with consumers to gain insight on their product offerings and the customer service experience. In this chapter, the data are interpreted for how they define Etsy’s different market players, and how the site and its players create a unique and successful market through this two-way form of communication.

Buyers, Sellers, and Etsy Administration all play a role in shaping Etsy’s market functions and practices. The data reveal that the exchange process largely shapes the different members’ roles and influences the level of engagement participants have with social media. It is clear that Etsy’s Administration uses social media as well as offline interactions to help shape the market. Although most participants find Etsy to be a helpful and generally positive place to sell goods, there are points of market tension. To delve more deeply into these points and shed light on Etsy as a market, this chapter is divided into five themes: (1) *Creating Member Roles*, (2) *Crafting Etsy’s Market*, (3) *Filling a*

Niche: The Handmade Movement, (4) Differing Views, and (5) Growing Pains: The Double-Edged Sword of Success.

Creating Member Roles

Interactions among Buyers, Sellers, and Etsy Administration appear to shape different types of member roles within Etsy's market. Observational and interview data revealed that different activities combine to create four roles that are integral to understanding Etsy's market: (a) *Overseeing The Market*, (b) *The Cornerstone of Etsy*, (c) *Market Consumers*, and (d) *Multiple Identities*.

Overseeing The Market

According to participants, Etsy Administration governs Etsy's market by listening to Sellers and Buyers and integrating their needs within its decisions. Indeed, Etsy Administration uses a wide variety of online and offline methods to gather members' opinions about its market, to shape it into the successful online, community-based retail platform it has become. To achieve this, Etsy Administration had to embrace different approaches to address different facets of the community. In turn, five issues are examined to give shape to the discussion: (a) *Working with Sellers*, (b) *Building a Community-Based Market*, (c) *Educating the Market*, (d) *Listening to Buyers*, and (e) *Achieving Market Goals*.

Working with Sellers. Participants who are Administrative members of Etsy's market talked about relying on engaging with Sellers to understand how best to fulfill their duties and responsibilities as Etsy employees. To do this, Etsy Administration developed a myriad of online and offline events and activities that are now part of Etsy's

market. By way of these activities, Etsy Administration engages and collaborates with Sellers and Buyers as well as other Administrative members to fulfill their daily job functions and responsibilities. Some of these events and activities include the Etsy Blog, Etsy Teams, Prototype Teams, Craft Parties, and craft conferences.


As discussed in Chapter V, Etsy Administration cultivates Etsy Teams, which are groups of members that form a smaller community group within Etsy. Goals of these Teams vary, ranging from strictly business to strictly socializing. Etsy's Administration provides the platform, Teams Community Pages, for Team members to communicate with one another. As an example, Figure 11 includes a screen capture of the Acorn to Oak Teams Page. Within this space, Sellers can post and respond to one another. The Teams page also provides a starting point for Sellers to learn more about the Team, its members, as well as its online presence beyond the Teams page. In the case of the Acorn to Oak Team, the Team's Page features a link to its Blog, Group Website, and Facebook page. Within this page users can also contact the Team Captain and report any Teams violations to Etsy Administration. The infrastructure created by Etsy Administration has made it easy for Sellers to find Teams and engage with other members, but it is also a space wherein Etsy Administration can seek out advice from Teams and Team Captains.

Sell Registry Community Blogs Mobile Gift Cards Hi, tiffy. Your Shop: TiffanyBlanchflower Your Account Help

2 Cart

Home > Community > Teams > Acorn to Oak Handmade > Discussions > Cary Wine & Art Festival?

Acorn to Oak Handmade Cary Wine & Art Festival?



Home

Members

Discussions

Founded Jun 9, 2011

Elsewhere

[Group Website](#)

[Blog](#)

[Facebook Page](#)

Tags

cary durham artists

triangle diy team

guild releigh

handmade

north carolina

Teams

Forums

Your Threads


Subscribe to email digest

Report this team to Etsy

Contact the Captain

Leave this team

Original Post




Amanda Cousins from AmandaCousinsStudio says

Anyone have experience vending at the Cary wine show in April? The booth fee is \$275 for one day. Is that insanely high or would it be worth it? I'm new to NC and don't know anything about this one. 60 vendors, attendance 5000.

Posted at 3:38 pm Jan 27, 2014 EST - Report this post

Responses




Jill M. Davis from orangecatart says

Is it at Booth Amphitheater? If so, I did it twice a long time ago, and it was meh. You might do better with jewelry than I did with photography, though. Still, the only vendors I saw doing really well had fancy food and/or wine related items. (Also, be prepared to protect your stuff from drunk people.)

Posted at 6:05 pm Jan 28, 2014 EST - Report this post

Post a reply



tiffany blanchflower from TiffanyBlanchflower says:

All Etsy members will be able to see your reply, not just members of this team!

This discussion is public.

[Post a reply](#)

[Mark](#)

Figure 11. Acorn to Oak Handmade Convo

Mary, an Etsy Administrator shared how she and others like her engage with the community to fulfill their duties.

M: Another thing that we do, we have a couple of admin-run Teams on the platforms. One for Captains, [one for] Team Captains, and one for, just general business advice. And we try and keep an eye on that to, to really understand what the community is needing. And sometimes we will just ask, “Hey we’re thinking about doing a tax article. What do you guys think?” And we will listen to those comments and are really able to develop some education tool to deliver on that. I think that it is a really important relationship. And um... and as we get bigger it becomes even more important.

Mary shares how Etsy Administration deliberately seeks to engage Etsy Sellers and Team Captains to gather information about their needs. This excerpt reveals that the decisions of Etsy Administrators, though in an authoritative role, are largely driven by Sellers' needs. In addition, the Administration group understands the importance of fostering these interactions and relationships in order to fulfill its role within Etsy's market.

Building a community-based market. Interview data as well as online observation also revealed that some within Etsy's Administration work toward building a communal spirit within the market. They do this through social media and by fostering community interaction by way of Etsy Teams, Forums, and Blog as well as online and offline activities like Etsy Craft Parties. For instance, Laura, a newer but successful vintage Seller, shares how Teams have helped her as a Seller and community member.

L: [Being a member of an Etsy Team]...it does give you a lot of exposure, and I have contacts now when you have questions about an item, I go to people on those Teams [and] ask them questions, 'cause they have been selling for a lot longer.

For Laura, as with other Sellers who are active on an Etsy Team, being able to connect to a smaller group of Etsy members with similar interests fosters the development of a virtual network. In the case of Laura, Team members assist with her shop problems and address her questions. Similar to what other Sellers experience, these interactions promote a sense of belonging for Laura and ultimately, she feels like a community member.

The Etsy Team is just one example of the many ways Etsy Administration fosters market engagement among community members. Through activities like featuring

specific Teams on Etsy's Blog, as well as providing funding opportunities for Team activities, Administration provides further support for community building within Etsy's market. Developing and overseeing various online and offline activities shapes these Administrators' roles as initiators and facilitators of Seller interactions, and consequently, the market's communal spirit.

Educating the market. Not all Etsy Administrators deal directly with community-based market development. Some focus on Seller education. For instance, some Administrative members' duties involve developing and implementing Seller tools and education, as well as providing technical support for the overall site. These functions serve to support Seller success, and facilitate exchanges that take place between Buyers, Sellers, and Etsy. Particular to Seller success, Etsy Administration has created blogs, online workshops, and a Seller Handbook on how to be a successful Seller on Etsy. The Seller Handbook is a series of blog posts aggregated from Etsy's website into a single space. For example, *Top Ten Marketing Tips from Full Time Etsy Sellers*, is one post that illustrates the type of educational information Etsy Administration provides to Sellers. In this post, Etsy Administration collaborated with and interviewed full-time Sellers about Etsy's marketing best practices. Etsy Administration used the advice and tips to shape the blog post and ultimately share ways to achieve marketing success with the community.

Etsy Administration also serves as a mediator between Sellers as well as between Sellers and Buyers. Randy, a long time Etsy Administrator, shares how this is a challenging part of his job at Etsy,

R: But, just umm making sure that you are, ah... just that you're keeping the right perspective...I think we all, do that pretty well, nobody gets cynical or anything, which is, which is good.... I wouldn't even say, you know, that I don't like the people that violate the rules in our Forums, because that dramatically oversimplifies it. Everyone has a reason, and I think that's, sort of one of the things I came into this role with was compassion. Um... understanding... What they are saying and why they are saying it. If, you can't accept it professionally, it's not acceptable for the Forums. You can at least understand why they are coming from that position. Um... you know, is there something that you need to be investigating, this person said, well, they were calling me every name in the book. Because if there is you should go and look at it, even if you're upset in that moment.

Randy's excerpt provides an example of how Etsy Administration sometimes has to step in and act as a mediator between Sellers, as well as between Sellers and Buyers. He mentions that within Etsy's Forums, moderators do not fight fire with fire when members violate policies. Instead they are encouraged to be open-minded and address violations from an objective perspective, resolving the issue at hand and restoring order within the Forums. At times this particular part of the job can be a bit discouraging, as when Sellers or Buyers violate Etsy's Forums policy and it sometimes feels personal to Etsy Administration. As Randy's experience reveals, Etsy Administration takes these policies very seriously, and seeks to reflect its role in the community while representing Etsy's corporate structure. Because they mediate and enforce policies, members perceive Etsy Administration as the authority figure that governs Etsy's market.

Listening to Buyers. Other members of Etsy Administration might engage with Buyers as part of fulfilling their daily activities and responsibilities. While I was unable to recruit any of these individuals, data from my interviews with other Etsy Administrators along with observational data, shed some light on this role, as well as how

it shapes the market. For instance, the following excerpt from Mary, an Etsy Administrator who interacts mostly with Sellers, touches on this topic.

M: I think that we are always, um... looking at both of those behaviors to try and make it better. So I just think the nature of them [Buyers] just sort of being on the platform and using the platform gives us information about how they're using it, so that they can influence it. And then I think we are also always sort of reaching out and trying to setup these communications loops so that we can understand more about their needs. So I think that both the community being Buyers and Sellers will always have a huge impact in terms of how we develop and what tools we develop.

Similar to the other Administrative members interviewed, Mary alludes to fact that Etsy listens to Buyers. Both Buyers and Sellers are integral to the success of Etsy's market. As such, some Administrative members interact with Buyers simply to better understand their overall needs, buying behaviors, habits, as well as expectations. In turn, Etsy Administration can better provide Sellers with information that will improve their shops and ultimately the entire market.

Achieving market goals. Administrative members often collaborate with one another to fulfill Etsy's market goals. In the following excerpt, Randy provides an example of this type of collaboration.

R: You know, let's say that, um... Our data is showing that something is really successful, but there are people in the Forums posting that they are having some sort of issue with it. Those are two important signals and they might not jive sort of at first glance, but because of how Etsy operates we'll investigate it. We'll get to the bottom of it! We'll do everything we can to try to satisfy the concerns of members that are speaking about it. While keeping what's working so well.

Here Randy shares Administrator-to-Administrator collaboration. Randy has had experiences where data points about Seller tools contradict Seller opinions about these tools as expressed on Etsy Forums. In these instances, Randy contacts the appropriate Administrative people to bring these concerns to light. This satisfies his responsibility of meeting members' needs, as well as Etsy's responsibilities of providing helpful Seller tools. This particular instance reveals that Etsy Administration actually works as a Team to provide overall market support.

In sum, Etsy Administration can be thought of as a governing body, and the Sellers and Buyers as citizens. Similar to a governing body, Etsy Administration creates and enforces policies that are influenced by Seller and Buyer behaviors and needs within Etsy's market. As such, Etsy Administration is perceived as an authoritative but friendly force within Etsy's market. Etsy Administration also provides support to citizens of the market, listening to the needs and demands of Buyers as well as Sellers. By enforcing policies and providing support, Etsy Administration does its part to foster a community-driven market.

The Cornerstone of Etsy

Exchanges between and interactions among Sellers, Buyers, and Etsy Administration give shape to and ultimately define the role of Sellers within Etsy's market. Based on the interpretation of the data, it appears that exchanges between Sellers and Buyers contribute the most to defining the Seller role, and do so in several ways that are discussed in this section: (a) *Sellers and Buyers*, (b) *Supporting one another*, (c) *Market critiques*, (d) *Working with Etsy Administration*, and (e) *A spectrum of Sellers*.

Sellers and Buyers. Seller and Buyer interactions are typically focused around products or services for sale on Etsy. As such, these interactions deal with the exchange of products or services. Erin, a successful owner of two shops, shares her experience with interacting with a particular Buyer:

E: I had a women get, what did she want? Oh, she wanted a waterproof dog bed, and then she needed like a blanket sewn on top of the bed because her dog liked to sleep under blankets. So it was like kind of cool doing the little blanket, like sewn on to the bed so the dog could sleep like a person.

Participants who are Sellers and Buyers had similar stories, sharing instances in which they used Etsy Convos to discuss the purchase, or in this case, the potential purchase of a product. In Erin's case, the Seller contacted her directly to create a customized dog bed. Participants often shared that these experiences make them feel a little closer to one another. These particular exchanges are important to understanding the role of a Seller within Etsy, as they situate Sellers as retailers within the market. On the whole, participants in this study described Etsy Sellers as extremely personal, friendly, and going above and beyond to meet needs of Buyers. In turn, participants did not view Sellers on Etsy like other retailers, such as Nordstrom, Target, or an Amazon shop. Instead, they view Sellers as part of a large market space comprised of creative and supportive individuals.

Supporting one another. Although Sellers compete for market share on Etsy, they often help one another, exchanging tips and advice about selling on Etsy's market. For instance, Margaret, a new but extremely successful Seller, shares her thoughts on these exchanges.

M: I mean, I like to give advice there [on Forums] and then go to bed. And they're a few people that give really good advice... You know that person is very generous. Speaking the truth in what they are saying, 'cause they don't really need to be there.

Like many other Sellers, Margaret recognizes that Etsy's community of Sellers often generously shares valuable information regarding how to sell products on Etsy with each other. She points out that participating in this exchange is not a requirement of selling on Etsy. Rather, it is something that Sellers do just because they enjoy it. Sometimes Sellers also share personal information, and seek out emotional support as well as general advice about life, as seen in the following screen capture (see Figure 12).

< Questions >

What if someone puts you down???????

[Forums Guidelines](#)

[Teams](#)



Matthew Pelkey from [ColorWheelArtistry](#) 11:27 am Jan 12, 2014 EST

This morning I was getting the house cleaned when my partner asked me to go somewhere with him. I said no because after I was done cleaning I was going to work on my business. He then said "What? working on your business that isn't making you any money?" So my 4 months work and 8 sales mean nothing? All my efforts and networking means nothing? He made me feel like a piece of shit. Now, I can't even work on my designs because of this. Totally killed me joy. Has anyone encountered this while trying to build their businesses?

[Add your response](#) ↔

114

Responses

[Mark Thread](#)



Mona Lisa from [beachartz](#) 11:29 am Jan 12, 2014 EST

Oh yes. I am single now, and very successful.



Teresa from [CreativeTreasuresUK](#) 11:41 am Jan 12, 2014 EST

I've given a serious reply to the OP on page 2, but I did have to giggle at this reply. :)



VivaLeChat from [VivaLeChat](#) 1:21 pm Jan 12, 2014 EST

Fantastic answer, good for you!

[Reply to Mona Lisa](#) ↔



Ulla Seckler from [germandolls](#) 11:29 am Jan 12, 2014 EST

All the time! Just ignore and keep going! I still get this "when are you going to get a real job" from my husband once in a while. Hey I am still here. 2013 was by best year so far. I am glad I didn't give up.



Tana from [PrairiePrimitives](#) 1:13 pm Jan 12, 2014 EST *edited*

Hi Ulla, same here! You've been here almost as long as I have. When I see posts in the forums (and various teams) from newbies who are ready to give up after a month or two of no or very few sales, I can't believe I've stuck with this for as long as I have! The first 3 or 4 years nobody knew what an "Etsy" was and sales were few and far between. Business started to pick up late in 2012 ...



Tana from [PrairiePrimitives](#) 1:13 pm Jan 12, 2014 EST *edited*

and 2013 was MUCH better for me here on Etsy! I think my "social networking" has finally started to pay off!

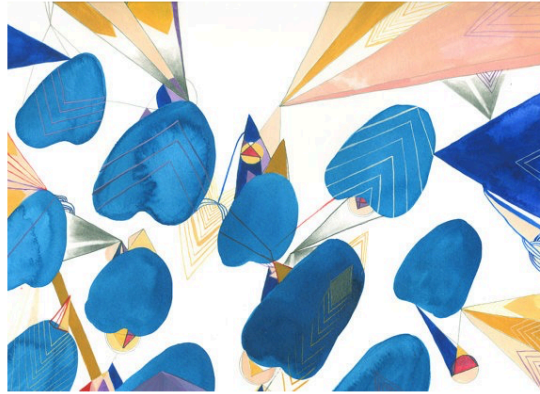
[Reply to Ulla Seckler](#) ↔

Figure 12. Etsy Community Forums Thread

This series of posts is one of many examples of how Sellers reach out to one another for more than just business advice, and how many seek to lend a helping hand in return. In this case, this particular Seller shares that he is being ridiculed over his lack of success. The responses of others illustrate the support given to those who are looking for positive feedback, solutions, or advice. This exchange of personal information beyond business advice is markedly differently from other online retail platforms. These exchanges reveal how many Sellers are business-focused, yet passionate and kind to their fellow Sellers. In turn, this creates a market infused with compassion, as opposed to competition.

Market critiques. As discussed in the previous theme, Sellers interact with Etsy Administration, often sharing points of joy and pain regarding being a Seller on Etsy. For instance, some Sellers use Etsy's Blog and Forums to praise Etsy as well as to air their grievances. This happens even in response to the company's CEO. As seen in the post, *Notes From Chad: 30 Million Members Strong*, both of these behaviors are exhibited. In this post, Chad, the CEO of Etsy, shares his point of view on Etsy's current state and its future.

Notes From Chad: 30 Million Members Strong



Story by Chad Dickerson
Published on Aug 07, 2013 in Company News

Photo by CallieHelen

It's been some time since I last wrote. We've had a busy spring and summer at Etsy HQ, as I know many of you have, too. On a personal note, my wife and I recently adopted a son from South Korea — our first child. Such a significant life change and set of new responsibilities as a father have given me a chance to pause and reflect on Etsy's place in the world from a new perspective. The stories I hear regularly of how running a business on Etsy gives people the flexibility to spend more time with their friends and families are even more meaningful now.



Chad

Inside the company, we have been planning for the next couple of years and beyond at Etsy and I want to share that thinking with you. Our vision for Etsy is to reimagine commerce in ways that build a more fulfilling and lasting world. We do this by enabling people anywhere to build and buy from independent, creative businesses run by real people like you.

What makes Etsy special

Before talking about where we're headed, I want to first take a moment to reflect on what makes Etsy special: the community and the direct, personal connections between buyers and sellers. Wired wrote about Etsy in its 20th anniversary edition under the headline "[Etsy Restores Our Faith in People](#)":

Figure 13. Notes From Chad: 30 Million Members Strong

At the end of Chad's post, there are hundreds of Seller comments. In Figure 14, two have been selected which highlight the different types of interactions that Sellers attempt to have with Administration. In the first post, the Seller "Alice" highlights the problem of resellers, and praises Etsy, as she has had great success with her shop. Like many other Sellers, she takes the time to thank Etsy and other Sellers for their support. The second post captures the negative side of Seller comments that can be seen in Forums and Blogs. In this post, Janice complains about Etsy's focus on social issues, as she feels this deters Etsy from helping Sellers with the retailing aspect of Etsy. Janice brings attention to the changes Etsy made to its activity feed (e.g., the place people visit to see what has happened since their last visit to Etsy) and how this has negatively impacted her shop.



Alice from  LandAndSee says:

Chad, allow me to add my voice of those attempting to draw Etsy's attention to the resellers. Etsy's recent collaboration with Kiva speaks to true entrepreneurship. The "handmade" items from resellers speak of something entirely different. My suspicion is that it's a sort of entrepreneurship that doesn't envision the world as etsy does. In addition please let me add my voice to those who speak in gratitude. When I became a seller late last year my last thought was that I'd actually have sales. Now I'm looking forward to opening my second etsy shop next summer. Thank you and all of the etsy team -- for the idea in the first place, the support, the encouragement, the inspiration, and most of all the incredible vibes. I may be one in 900, 000 but you've made many of us feel special. Alice



Janice Cordeiro from  WoolSculptures says:

I thought Etsy was a venue to sell handmade items. Social sites abound on the Internet. I wish Etsy would help on the selling end more and the social end less. Since the changes to the new activity my views and sales have plummeted. I work harder and get less. Time I need to invest on the creative end is now spent on the marketing end with very little results. Easy to keep track of sales. They are zero most months since the new feed.

1 year ago

Figure 14. Notes From Chad: 30 Million Members Strong, Member Comments

Sellers' posts to Etsy Administration are often one-way interactions. However, in instances where Sellers have exemplary comments, or post something that violates Etsy's policies, then actual interaction between Sellers and Administration will generally occur. Etsy's social media platforms can therefore serve as a soapbox for Sellers to say what they want to the community at large, including Etsy Administration.

Working with Etsy Administration. Although participants that are Sellers have minimal, if any, interaction with Etsy Administration observational data as well as interviews with Etsy Administrators revealed that these exchanges do occur, usually when Etsy Administration reaches out to a Seller for information regarding a shop or for the improvement of Etsy tools. For example, Nicole, an Etsy Administrator in charge of Seller stories, often contacts Sellers for interviews, commenting that

N: Sometimes you will find this great story and it's not even anywhere presented in their profile or their shop. And they don't even realize, it's something that people would connect to and respond positively to. I feel like some of my job is just education, about you know, what the press is looking for, that is what Buyers are looking for. Uhhh, it really, can get personal.

Like other Etsy Administrators who engage with the community, a large component of Nicole's daily responsibilities involves interacting with Sellers.

Similar interactions take place between Sellers and Etsy Administration, in that some Sellers engage with Etsy Administrators to share information regarding Seller tools, shop stories, or provide information regarding best practices for selling on Etsy. Other times, Sellers and Etsy Administration interact regarding violation of policies, such as reselling or breaking Forum guidelines. These interactions with Etsy Administration give Sellers a feeling that they are part of Etsy's market, rather than just a customer of Etsy. Moreover, these interactions influence market behaviors, such as Sellers praising other Sellers who are successful on the Blog. The reverse is also true when Sellers reprimand other Sellers who violate Etsy's practices, putting an end to undesirable practices by temporarily or permanently banning them from participating in the market.

A spectrum of Sellers. When discussing the role of Sellers in Etsy's market, it is important to draw attention to the fact that not all Sellers set up their shops with the same goals in mind. As such, Sellers display varying levels of involvement in and interaction with Etsy's market. The ability to do this aligns with the fact that Etsy encourages Sellers to help it "reimagine commerce," as they craft their own "selling stories."

Based on the data, it appears that Sellers' involvement levels can be plotted on a spectrum. On one end, being a Seller is a full-time job. These individuals literally "quit

their day jobs” and are entrepreneurs through Etsy. Etsy Administration often interviews these Sellers and features them on the blog, under the blog post “Quit Your Day Job.” Two Sellers interviewed for this study, Erin and Madison, are full time Etsy Sellers. For both, as selling on Etsy became a full-time commitment, it became their day job, so to speak.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are the Sellers who sell for fun, or as a way to supplement their incomes. For instance, Josie owns two shops on Etsy but falls on this end of the spectrum.

J: Um... the second shop was selling, vintage decor and smaller furniture pieces, that I found while I was out. I got really in to going to auctions and estate sales. Um... so as I was kind of redecorating my house, I would go out there and I would just starting buying stuff I like and see if I can sell it because I had also really gotten into um... refinishing furniture. So, I was considering [having] a longer term side business...

For Josie, her shops are side businesses; she works a full-time job and plans on keeping it. She sells on Etsy for fun, in particular her vintage shop supports her habit of shopping at Estate sales, as it is a way to sell items she does not need. Sellers like Josie do not place a focus or emphasis on growing the business. Instead they seem pleased with it remaining a “side project.”

In the middle of the spectrum are those Sellers who sell on Etsy part-time, in the hopes that it becomes a full-time, day job at some point. Of the participants, Sabrina is a very determined Seller, and has dreams of turning one of her three shops into a full-time job. Unfortunately, as of yet she has not been able to reach her goal.

According to the data, it is clear that Sellers engage in the market to varying degrees. As such, some Sellers have more experience with interacting with other Sellers, Buyers, and Etsy Administration. This difference reflects the free nature of Etsy's market, and supports the notion of how Etsy is reimagining commerce, allowing for a wide range of Sellers, including those who are fully engaged to those who just dabble, to use Etsy as a platform and to participate in its market.

Market exchanges that occur between Sellers and Buyers seem to have the biggest impact on the role of Sellers as retailers within Etsy's market. However, interactions with other Sellers and Etsy Administration make this role rather unique when compared to other retailers. For instance, Etsy Sellers reach out to one another for business advice as well as emotional support. They also engage Etsy Administration through Forums, or more direct means like Etsy Convos, to provide feedback and opinions regarding Seller tools, market policies, and market structure. Finally, Sellers craft their own "selling stories," varying in the type and degree of involvement they want to have with Etsy's market.

Market Consumers

The key interaction that shapes the role of the Buyer within Etsy's market is seen in the act of consuming the goods that are provided by Sellers. Interviews with participants who are Buyers revealed that many join Etsy to purchase products or services directly from Sellers. For instance, when asked why Catherine joined Etsy, she replied,

C: Yeah, well I hate going shopping in the store. I don't go. I don't go shopping very often, unless it's something that is specific, and I kind of like to get gifts that are thoughtful. And I feel like Etsy is a really good medium for that... I feel like I

am getting a good value in both price range and special[ness]. I always feel that things that I buy on Etsy are special and I um... really like that. You don't have to spend a lot.

Like many other Buyers, Catherine joined Etsy to find unique and personalized gifts, as well as occasional products for herself. In her case, she likes shopping on Etsy because it is online, as she does not like shopping in stores. Similar to other Buyers, she enjoys the fact that custom gifts can be found on Etsy at reasonable prices. Although, Sellers' roles are ultimately shaped by the act of purchasing goods, other interactions that occur within Etsy's market result in some Sellers adopting specified roles. These roles are further discussed in the following two subthemes: (a) *Engaging Sellers*, and (b) *Conscious consumers*.

Engaging Sellers. Since a Buyer's main goal for joining Etsy is generally to shop, it is not surprising that these individuals have limited social interaction or engagement with Etsy's market and its other market players (other Buyers, Sellers or Etsy Administration). For instance, Chrissy, a Buyer, has the following to say about her awareness of Etsy's social presence.

Me: Have you ever used any of the Etsy Convos, Treasuries, Forums or Blogs? Or have gone into those spaces?

C: I haven't, and I didn't even know that existed. I guess I should look into it.

When asked a similar question, another Buyer, Lilly has the following to say.

L: I think I follow a couple people [on Etsy], but it's pretty rare that I go on there and care enough to see what people have favored.

Me: So do you use Etsy Convos, we talked about that. Have you ever used the treasuries or Forums or like the Blogs?

L: No.

Chrissy and Lilly, like the majority of Buyers interviewed for this dissertation, are not interested in engaging on Etsy in a social way. Indeed, Chrissy was unaware of almost all social media tools Etsy provided, even though she bought a large majority of her wedding decorations and supplies on Etsy.

None of the Buyers interviewed for this study interact with Etsy Administration. In addition, online observation further revealed that online interaction between Buyers and Administration seems very limited. For instance, Nicole, an Etsy Administrator, has the following to say about Buyers in her role as a Member Story Specialist at Etsy: “It’s harder to find those Buyer stories, umm, but when I do, you really find some very engaged shoppers that care so much.” Observational data support this idea, revealing that interactions between Etsy Administration and Buyers are typically minimal. As previously discussed, when these interactions do occur, they often involve mediating a problem with a Seller, or involve Etsy Administration reaching out to get Buyer feedback about the site. Overall, data suggest that from the Administrative perspective, Buyers play a secondary role to Sellers within Etsy’s market.

Among some of the high-volume Buyers, there does seem to be an interest in learning more about Sellers, and/or the stories behind their shops. Some of these Buyers read Etsy’s Blog, but do not engage in posting to it. Observational data revealed similar findings, as it is extremely rare to see Buyers commenting on Etsy’s Blogs and Forums.

Similarly, offline, at Etsy Craft Parties, Buyers are not as prominent as Sellers. In turn, the focus on purchasing products and lack of involvement in socializing via Etsy seen among Buyers shapes their role as players who are less active than Sellers within Etsy's market.

Despite lack of involvement in the market, Buyers sometimes interact with Sellers regarding purchases made, or if they have ideas about products. When Samantha, a long time Etsy Buyer, was asked how she interacts with others on Etsy, she replied, "typically, through Etsy Convos," and specifically:

S: Umm... Like going back to the confectionary company in California, I found them on Facebook, and I would communicate with them and comment, things like that [Facebook]. I always enjoyed interacting with them through social media [thinking out loud "I can't remember their first names" (referring to the shop owners)]. Um... There have been a few, other shops, where I follow them on Facebook, and I use Twitter, and there are a few that I follow on Pinterest.

Similar to many of the other Buyers interviewed for this study, Etsy Convos are used by Samantha to engage with others. In addition, within this excerpt, Samantha shares how she uses asynchronous social media tools to keep up with Sellers. Some of the other Buyers exhibited similar behaviors, following Sellers not on Etsy, but rather, through public social media sites like Facebook or Pinterest. This is an interesting finding, as Buyers seem to want to follow Sellers, but not engage with them directly. This approach is similar to the way consumers engage large retail brands or chains. Buyers that follow Sellers via social media enjoy learning more about them and their products, but tend to only engage with them when making a specific purchase. In instances where Sellers and Buyers are more social, these interactions typically began with a purchase of a product.

As such, it appears that Buyers embrace the more typical consumer role, in that though there are instances wherein Sellers and Buyers engage in communication, and even relationship building, this appears to have been prompted by the purchase of a product in the Seller's shop. Moreover, these behaviors are not commonplace in online shopping in general, but are unique to Etsy due to the social media elements of the market.

Conscious consumers. Some Buyers post shop reviews. These reviews serve two important purposes relative to the role of Buyers within the market. First, this information provides Sellers with feedback about their products and customer service. Second, this information provides other Buyers with information that can be used to make more informed purchase decisions. Catherine, a long-time Buyer shares, "I like the reviews, reviews are important to me when I am buying something on Etsy, because I want to know the quality, and know the experience is good." Similar to shopping on other online retail sites, many Buyers read customer reviews to acquire information about product quality. Particular to Etsy, many Buyers also want to learn about the overall customer service experience, and this is particularly important when it comes to custom orders. Providing feedback to Sellers about products and customer service helps to position the Buyer within the market.

Although Etsy Buyers are mostly interested in shopping, the site's platform provides them with the opportunity to engage with other market players. The data reveal that in some instances, this leads to Buyers exchanging information with Sellers about their purchases, which, while rare, sometimes leads to social exchanges and even friendships between Buyers and Sellers. Moreover, it was found that interaction between

Buyers and Etsy's Administration is minimal, as such, Buyers do not necessarily feel like stakeholders in Etsy's market to the same extent that Sellers do.

Multiple Identities

Participants who have multiple roles —whether, Buyers, Sellers, or Etsy Administrators— shared instances in which they assume more than one role in Etsy's market. This usually means that they both produced and consumed products. As such, the role of “prosumers” emerged as a fourth type of member within Etsy's market. For instance, many Sellers interviewed for this study began their journeys on Etsy as Buyers. Erin, the longest running Seller interviewed, shared, “I did not start out with the intent of selling, so I started buying first. And then I started selling.” She continues, “I started with dog beds, because I have two big dogs that are also filthy, and when you like try and find a big dog bed they are super expensive, or so thick that you couldn't wash them. So I started making my own.” Similar to other Sellers, Erin started as a Buyer but eventually decided to start selling. Indeed, the majority of Sellers interviewed engaged in both buying and selling, representing the role of prosumer.

In a similar vein, some Seller/Buyer Prosumers purchase items that they use in making products for their own shops. The following excerpt from Sabrina highlights this kind of behavior.

S: I buy as much as I can on Etsy all together, the vintage Rhinestones, the clips and stuff like that. I buy crochet and my lace stuff. I buy all of this on Etsy to, you know, support the Etsy Sellers and the community.

A major category of products sold on Etsy is crafting supplies. Sabrina purchases as much as she can from Sellers who sell crafting supplies. By doing so, she is able to purchase the supplies she needs to make products for sale in her shop, as well as to support the market. As a Seller, I also purchase crafting supplies that I use to make jewelry for sale on my shop. Ultimately, the Buyer/Seller Prosumer role is shaped by the dual role played when purchasing and selling goods on Etsy.

Another category of prosumers consists of Etsy Administrators who also purchase or sell merchandise on Etsy. Etsy Administrators are encouraged to open shops and participate in Etsy's market as Sellers. Although only one of the Administrators in this study engages in the prosumer role, in a review of the profiles of other Administrators, it is clear that this is a trend among some of Etsy's staff. Figure 15 is an example of the work of one Etsy employee, Janice, who is also a Seller. As an employee of Etsy, Janice is in charge of the Seller Handbook. This work features another responsibility she has, which is to manage Etsy's "How-Tuesday DIY" editorials. Janice is also the founder of Etsy's Craft Night program held regularly in Brooklyn, NY. Janice's shop is featured in the screen capture in Figure 16.



Figure 15. Example of Janice's Work for Sale on Etsy

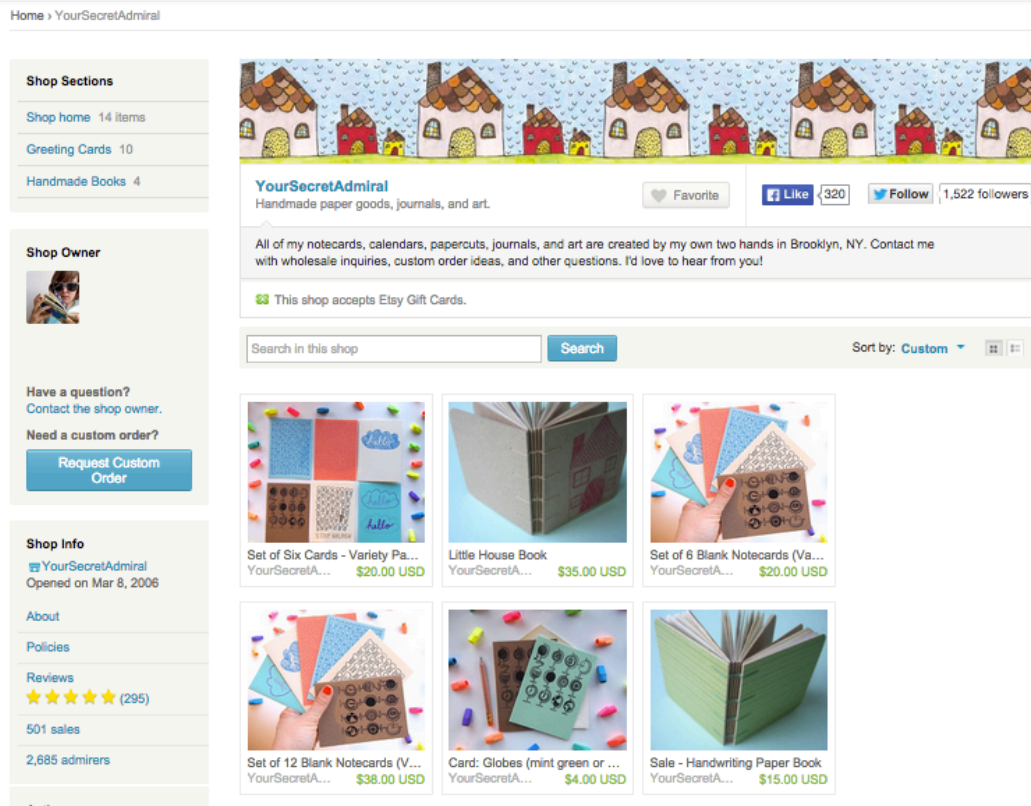


Figure 16. Screen Capture of Janice's Shop

As with other Etsy employees, Janice operates her own Etsy shop. She specializes in handcrafted, paper-based products, such as cards, journals, and notebooks. Her shop has been open since March 8, 2006, before she started working for Etsy, which, from the website, appears to have been in 2007. As a shop owner, Janice has had moderate success, with over 500 sales and over 2,000 Etsy admirers. These figures illustrate the different roles that some Administrators play within Etsy's market. In addition to owning a shop and working for Etsy, some of these Prosumers also purchase goods from other Sellers, engaging in a three-fold market role, as Seller, Buyer, and Etsy Administrator.

Prosumer market activities blur the lines between the different roles participants hold within Etsy's market. Prosumers are often Buyers that decide to open an Etsy shop, engaging in the acts of buying as well as selling. Some Prosumers purchase goods within Etsy that they then use in order to create products for their own shops. Some Etsy Administrators also embrace the role of Prosumer, purchasing and/or selling goods on Etsy's market. In some instances, Administrative members engaged in all three roles within Etsy's market: working, selling and buying.

In conclusion, the acts of buying, selling, and working for Etsy shape the different roles seen within Etsy's market. These acts can best be described as interrelated, as one act shapes at least one or more of the roles within the market. For instance, the act of purchasing goods between Buyers and Sellers shapes their respective roles. Moreover, this act also shapes the Administrator role, as sometimes Administrators act as mediators between Buyers and Sellers to resolve market issues and reinforce Etsy policies. Finally, the lines between the roles can become blurred, as prosumers can engage in buying, selling and administering Etsy's market.

Crafting Etsy's Market

Etsy facilitates the use of tools and activities that are designed to foster online and offline interactions between market members. Online and face-to-face interactions result in members working together to craft Etsy's market. These interactions occur in different ways, each of which are discussed as subthemes in this section of the chapter: (1) *Etsy's Tailor-Made Social Media*, (2) *Public Social Media*, and (3) *Offline Engagement*.

Etsy's Tailor-Made Social Media

Initial findings from this study point to the ways that Etsy generates its own social media tools to support and foster market functions among Sellers, Buyers, and Etsy Administration. Moreover, the data suggest that performing member roles often requires the use of these tools. Based on the data, exchanges that occur through Etsy's tailor-made social media generally pertain to four market areas: (1) *Market exchange: Buying* (2) *Market exchange: Selling*, (3) *Preserving Etsy's market mission*, and (4) *Maintaining Etsy's market*. The following sections are organized around these four areas and provide insight into how Etsy's social media tools are used by participants within the market.

Market exchange: Buying. As previously discussed, Buyers often mentioned how important shop reviews are to their purchase decisions. By providing a platform for shop reviews, Etsy fosters social media use to help Buyers make purchase decisions. For instance, Samantha, a well-seasoned shopper explains,

S: I just always read reviews and get an idea for... [hypothetical reviews left by other Buyers] "Oh, I had an issue with shipping or they lost my order, or it wasn't all that I asked for, or it was amazing! And they did extra for me and they FedEx or overnighted it!" Or whatever, I say probably presentation and reviews are the biggest.

According to participants, shop reviews provide Buyers with insight about the quality and value of a Seller's products as well as the quality of a Seller's customer service. The following screen capture in Figure 17 highlights the type of information Buyers often post in shop reviews. In this example, the Buyer provides information about

the product, saying she loved it as well as the customer experience, noting that shipping took no time, and the customer service was excellent.

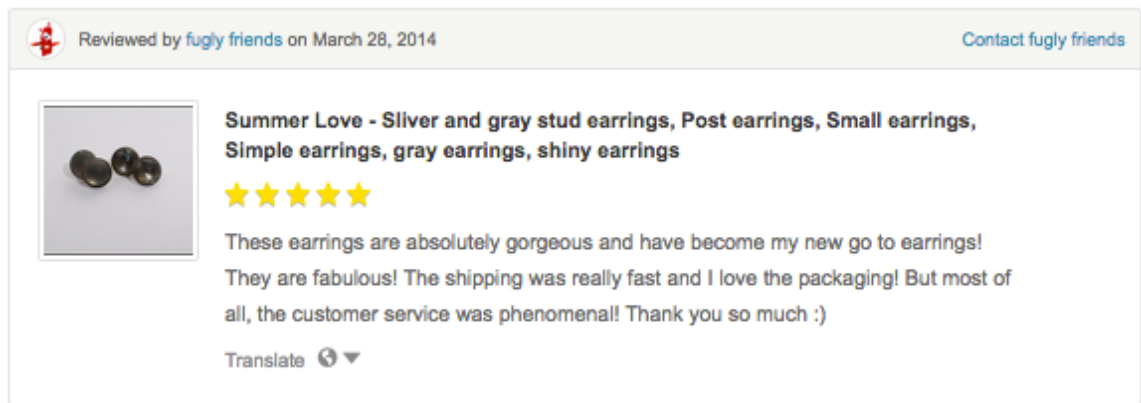


Figure 17. Etsy Shop Reviews

As seen in Figure 17, all shop reviews require two pieces of information: a star rating (1 to 5 stars) and a typed comment. Etsy’s system requires that Buyers leave a comment in order to rate a Seller. In turn, this provides Buyers as well as Sellers with some information about the purchase experience and/or product. When leaving a review, an interesting finding emerged: Etsy’s review system provides the reviewer with feedback about his or her comments before it is posted. For example, if it is too short, blue text will appear saying, “Keep going, almost there,” or “Add a little detail.” This is an interesting feature, as it encourages Buyers to leave more information about their purchases. While not all participants who are Buyers leave customer reviews, many of them find reviews to be a helpful guide when making purchases, especially with customized products.

Market exchange: Selling. Overall, Sellers are the most active and involved participants in Etsy's market. As such, they appear to use a myriad of Etsy's social media tools to carry out functions related to selling. The most commonly cited Etsy social media tools used by Sellers are Etsy's Forums, the Seller Handbook, Blogs, Treasuries, and Shop Reviews. These tools seem to play an important role in a Seller's success. Thus, the different types of Etsy social media tools are discussed in terms of how they support Sellers within Etsy's market.

Forums. Forums are commonly used as a sounding board. To that end, they serve as a place where Sellers can exchange ideas about their products as well as the process of selling on Etsy. The following screen capture illustrates how, as a Seller, I used Forums as a sounding board, (see Figure 18).

I need some help with my shop... tags & titles

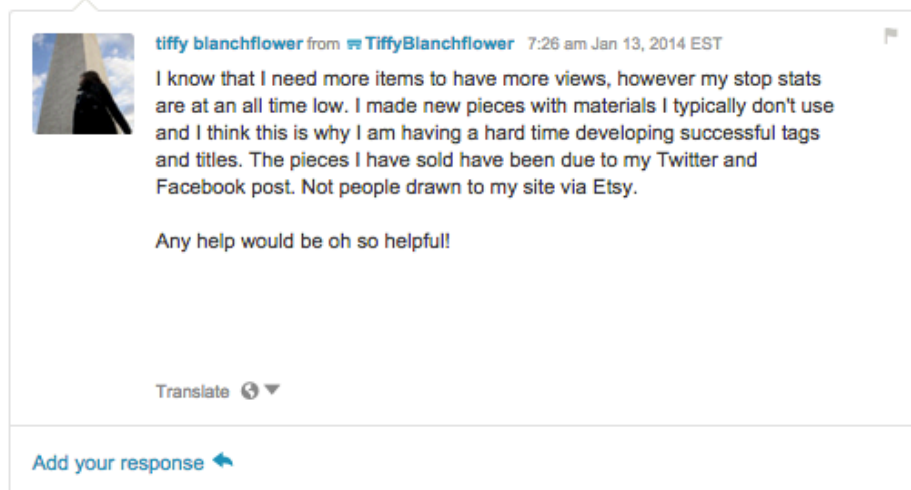


Figure 18. Post to Etsy Forums, Tags & Titles

As I wrote in the post above, a review of Etsy's stats revealed that I had very little traffic in my shop, and this was reflected in my sales, which were suffering. I thought that it had to do with my tags and titles, as these are the words used to find items on Etsy's site as well as in a Google Search. Similar to other Sellers, I decided to reach out to the Etsy community via Etsy Forums for advice and help with this topic. This is a common practice among Etsy Sellers, as observation data revealed that Sellers use this space to ask a wide variety of questions related to selling on Etsy. Topics include, but are not limited to: customer service, shipping, pricing, tags, titles, product development, product photography, and product packaging. The next series of screen captures in Figure 19 are replies to my post and illustrate the type of advice Sellers often provide to one another on Etsy's Forums.

8 Responses

[Mark Thread](#)



Therese and Bill from [RelativePics](#) 9:51 am Jan 13, 2014 EST *edited*

Hi Tiffy,

I was just viewing one of you items and noticed a typo in the listing, tag, and description.

It's the "Shiny and Sliver Waterfalls: Cut glass charm and silver chain" Sliver vs. Silver.

B

[Translate](#)



tiffy blanchflower from [TiffyBlanchflower](#) 9:59 pm Jan 13, 2014 EST

Thank you so much, you would think after being in school what feels like a million years that I would be able to spell :) I will make the change, and love the suggestion about the ":" and the spacing. I will be making theses changes for sure.

[Translate](#)

[Reply to Therese and Bill](#)



Therese and Bill from [RelativePics](#) 10:03 am Jan 13, 2014 EST

I'm not 100% sure on the use of ":" in your listings. It may be a punctuation that "could" be prohibiting your items from showing in Google and/or Searches.

I would suggest using a - instead and be sure there's a blank space on Both sides like Shiny and Silver Waterfalls - Cut Glass.....

Hope this helps,

B

[Translate](#)

Figure 19. Replies to Etsy Forum, Posts, Tags & Titles

As can be seen in Figure 19, within a matter of hours I received advice from several Sellers regarding titles and tags for items in my shop. For instance, the first reply to my post was about a spelling error. The second comment was advice regarding the use of punctuation in my titles. It was suggested that I remove the quotation marks in the titles, and instead use a dash, as the quotes could be the reason my products were not appearing in Google Searches. On the whole, advice provided by Etsy Sellers is delivered in the spirit of constructive criticism, and by those who want to help other Sellers

strengthen the weak areas of their shops. In turn, many Sellers, in particular the ones interviewed for this study, use Etsy's Forums for advice and help with their own shops.

Seller handbook and blog. Some Sellers do not always use Etsy Forums for shop advice or help. For instance, sometimes Sellers have questions that require deeper explanation or professional insight, or they do not feel like opening their problems up to the whole Etsy community. In such cases, Sellers often turn to Etsy's Seller Handbook. The Seller Handbook is a series of blog posts with advice and information about selling. As seen in Figure 20, the Seller Handbook is arranged into ten content areas related to selling on Etsy (e.g., photography, shipping, community, etc.) and included within each content area are links to various related articles from Etsy's Blog.

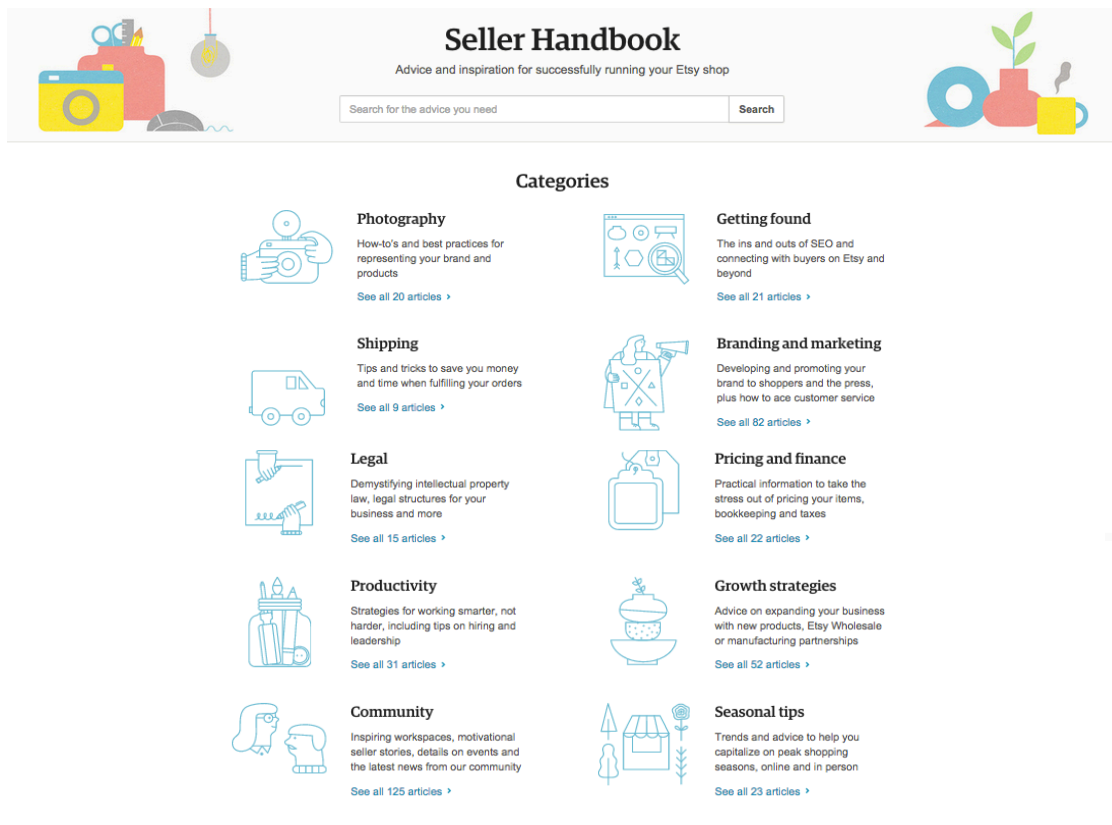


Figure 20. Etsy’s Seller Handbook

At the same time, some articles on Etsy’s Blog double as part of Etsy’s Seller Handbook. Laura, a newer but well-established vintage Seller, shares her experience with Etsy’s Seller Handbook, “[I use the Seller Handbook] if I have a question about something, like every now and then.” Like Laura, other Sellers also used Etsy’s Seller Handbook when they first opened their shops and then stopped using it when they became more comfortable with selling on Etsy.

Treasuries. For Sellers, Treasuries are creative outlets that function as promotional tools. Etsy describes a Treasury as a “member-curated shopping gallery comprised of list items.” Treasuries are curated by Sellers and feature 16 items that are

crafted around a theme or a topic selected by the curator. An example of a Treasury from my Etsy page has been provided in Figure 21. This particular Treasury featured 16 items from different Etsy shops, and did not include any products from my own shop. Over a short period of time this Treasury had over 180 views, 45 clicks, and 5 admirers. I found, as did many participants who are Sellers, that activity related to a Treasury can increase shop traffic. For instance, a review of shop statistics showed that by posting this Treasury, I increased my shop traffic from 1 view (the day prior) to 27 views.

Darker Blossoms by tiffany blanchflower on Etsy

















Sell Registry Community Blogs Mobile Gift Cards Hi, tiffy. Your Shop: TiffanyBlanchflower Your Account

Etsy Shopping Cart

Home > Treasury > Darker Blossoms by tiffany blanchflower

Sort by: Home

Darker Blossoms

 Dark green Floral Print dress ... originalstyle... \$59.50 USD	 BLACK Rose Floral Boho Knit... AnytimeScarf \$28.00 USD	 GRACE Frame Bag, Black a... MissVincent... \$41.40 USD	 Dark blue studs earrings, flor... Lepun \$14.00 USD
 Dark Garden - Black Pink Flo... TheWhirlwind \$28.00 USD	 Deep blue floral print dress w... FallforDesigns \$22.00 USD	 black floral coin shells earring... skylofve \$12.00 USD	 Leather FoldOver Clutch Bag... jurgabespoke \$65.00 USD
 FREE SHIPPING 60's vintag... SunnyCsc \$13.68 USD	 Women Gray 3D Knit Dress... UniqueDesig... \$68.00 USD	 Caramel Roses Earrings - El... ZoeRiver \$13.80 USD	 Red Gold Floral Foldover Clu... JuneberrySli... \$32.00 USD
 Rose Earrings in Apricot Sha... LimonYellid \$24.00 USD	 Vintage 1970s California Loa... BoroughVint... \$48.00 USD	 Handcrafted Black Reverse ... BleckerGirl \$73.00 USD	 Cameo Ring, Vintage Style A... apockettopo... \$21.00 USD

Previous

Next

Stats

186 views
45 clicks
5 admins

Tags

90s floral dress
black flowers dark dr
floral accessories
floral button earrings
floral clutch floral dre
floral earrings
floral handbag
floral headband
floral looks
floral necklacc
flower accessories
vintage floral
winter trends


Curator Tools

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Your Treasury Lists

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Curator

 **tiffany blanchflower** from [TiffanyBlanchflower](#) Just now


This treasury is an arrangement of floral dresses and accessories that have taken a darker turn as they bunker down for winter. Enjoy!

[View tiffany blanchflower's other Treasury lists](#)


Add Your Comment

 **QuietUnrestVintage** from [QuietUnrest](#) says: Jan 8, 2014


perfect to fend of the polar vortex :) thank you!

 **East Workshop** says: Jan 8, 2014

lovely collection! thank you very much!

 **Agnieszka** from [PureKnitting](#) says: Jan 9, 2014

Lovely! Thank you so much!

 **Inge** from [madeforfun](#) says: Jan 9, 2014 [Delete](#)

Br, baby it's cold outside...)
Thank you so much for including my gloves.

Figure 21. Example of an Etsy Treasury, Darker Blossoms

Laura, a new but successful vintage Seller discusses her perspective on Treasuries.

L: I love the Treasuries. I wish I had more time to do some more of my own. I have just a few, but I do like to look at them. And I am featured in a lot of them. I always heart or like the ones that I'm featured in and thank the people that, you know, for featuring my item. Um... but I, it's really a time thing. I post things about every night, and it's about all the time I got.

Laura loves Treasuries, and enjoys both creating and reviewing them, as do many other Sellers. This excerpt also captures that her own products are often featured in Treasuries, which helps to increase shop traffic as well as sales. Moreover, Etsy Administration often selects Treasuries to feature on the Etsy home page, increasing a shop's visibility exponentially. The data reveal that Treasuries serve as a tool that other Sellers use to promote one another and thereby promote themselves. Promoting other Sellers is reinforced by Etsy's Treasuries policies, as one of the rules is that a Seller must feature other Sellers' products rather than her/his own.

Shop reviews. Although the Sellers interviewed for this dissertation did not specifically say that Etsy's Shop Reviews aided them with selling on Etsy, observational data and interviews with Buyers suggest otherwise. As highlighted in Chapter IV, Catherine, a dedicated Etsy Buyer, shared a story about a shop review experience she had with a Seller. As a joke, Catherine purchased a pair of Zelda underwear for herself, she explained that her husband Josh, was a really big Zelda fan and she thought it would be a funny thing. She explains,

C: And like it was a total joke, but hysterical, but when I got them they were too small. The person, was kind of rude about it. She ended up giving me a refund, and stuff. So I wrote a review, and it was not terrible... I can't remember it was a while ago...

She looked for the reply from the Seller about her review, and continued.

C: I can't find it [the Seller reply] in my email messages, or Convos. But she was like, "They are one size, or I have never had a problem before," or something like that.

Me: Ohhh, yeah it was the wrong tone to take with the customer.

C: If you have to give a refund, you don't have to be like that, come on be real about. And she was a just a little snippy about it, and asked me to take down her review. And if I took it down she would give me refund.

Me: So did you take down the negative review?

C: I did, I don't want to screw another person, but like come on. So that was, you know, it was like that big deal or anything, she gave me my money back and whatever. Umm... but it was just a little unsettling...

Catherine was unsatisfied with the product she received, and therefore wanted to return the item. She left an honest review about the product as well as the customer service experience. The Seller reached out to Catherine about issuing a refund, on the condition that Catherine would take down the review, as she felt it was unfair. As Catherine explains, she did not think her review was that bad, and did not think it was necessary for the Seller to contact her. However, she wanted the refund and so she took down the review. Catherine's experience illustrates the importance of reviews to Sellers. Online and offline observational data revealed similar findings, as many Sellers noted that they need shop reviews, as they provide a unbiased way to reflect the quality of the shop and its product offerings to other Buyers. Unfortunately, Buyers do not often leave reviews. For instance, out of 39 sales in my shop, I received only 7 reviews. Fortunately, they

were all very positive. In sum, it seems that Shop Reviews are useful for Sellers, as they provide insight about their product offerings and exchange practices. In addition, Shop Reviews can act as a marketing tool, communicating to potential Buyers the quality of a shop's products and customer service.

Keeping the Etsy mission alive. Etsy's Blog serves several purposes. It appears that one of these purposes is to support and nurture a unique market, one that cultivates creativity, positivity, and a free-spirited attitude toward entrepreneurship. Participants who are Etsy Administrators explained that an underlying goal of Etsy's approach to its market is to allow Sellers to reimagine commerce. Randy, one of the first employees hired by Etsy, talks about this idea,

R: You know, our goal I think has always been to, to reimagine commerce [at] some level. Um... generally speaking, I think a lot of Etsy Sellers, see... a benefit of other people shopping with other Etsy Sellers. I don't know if it's um... it's umm... a moral matter for them. There are some people who certainly view it as a matter of supporting businesses and um... tiny industries.

The notion of *reimagining commerce* is carried out by allowing Sellers to craft a personalized selling experience and create a communal market. In turn, these behaviors promote a "humanizing" of the purchasing experience for Buyers. At the same time, such behaviors allow Etsy to conduct business in a socially and environmentally responsible way.

Etsy Administration often uses the Etsy Blog to spread the notion of reimaging commerce by featuring Sellers and Etsy-related activities that embody this concept. For instance, the following blog post, *Next Chapters*, is a review of Etsy Sellers that have

entered into retirement by starting a new chapter in their lives as Etsy entrepreneurs. This article provides stories about Sellers who have retired and are now selling on Etsy. The underlying thesis of this article is that Etsy is for all crafters, old or young, the new or well-seasoned. As such, this blog post highlights a variety of retirees, ranging from Sellers who are entering into the vintage space to sell a lifetime vintage collection, to professional artists who have entered into Etsy to sell a new type of handmade good. This article is just one example of how Etsy uses its blog as a place to communicate the idea of reimagining commerce, and in this case, a reimagining through the perspective of individual Sellers who have the experience of retirement in common.

The Etsy Blog

Next Chapters



Story by Karen Brown
Published on Feb 10, 2014 in Read

Photo by Inky Creative

Christine Daly of Daly Studios



A snapshot of Christine.

Daly Studios

Toni Cartisano of Kensington Fused Glass



ToniCartisano

Figure 22. The Etsy Blog, Next Chapters



Other articles on Etsy's Blog support Etsy's idea of reimagining commerce by showcasing up-and-coming Etsy Sellers as well as full-time Sellers. Other topics examine the reimagining of commerce from the community perspective, reporting on Etsy's

community outreach activities, such as Etsy’s Entrepreneurship program, Team events, and Grants.

Another component of Etsy’s reimagining of commerce is supporting its handmade roots, which embody a crafty, DIY attitude. For example, Etsy runs a blog post series named *How-Tuesday*. One such post is shown in Figure 23. This figure highlights the structure of the How-Tuesday post. This post typically features an at-home craft activity with step-by-step instructions and images. These posts reinforce the creative and handmade spirit of Etsy’s market. For instance, a Seller leaves the following comment on this blog post, “What a wonderful playful idea! This project would be such a great way to let loose with a free-flowing imagination that comes from creating with spontaneity!!!” This particular post captures the essence of Seller comments in general, best described as positive, appreciative, and supportive of Etsy’s handmade mission.



The Etsy Blog • Featured S

How-Tuesday: Hand-Painted Tights



Step 1: Put the tights on. You’ll need to wear your tights while you paint them, so you can gauge the design placement and take the stretch factor into account. Note: You may get some paint on your skin, but it will easily wash off with soap and water.

To make the evil eye pattern, paint as many ellipses onto the front of your tights as you’d like with a light shade of paint. Wait for the paint to dry and add another coat. You can use a blow dryer (on a low temperature setting) to speed up the process. Carefully peel off the tights (the paint might make them stick to your legs). If you want your design to be on both sides (front and back), put them on backwards and repeat the process above.



Story by [Clare McGibbon](#)
Published on Sept 17, 2013 in [Make](#) Like 108
Photo by [Romain Laurent](#)

Figure 23. *The Etsy Blog, How-Tuesday: Hand-Painted Tights*

In addition to these hands-on DIY blog posts, Etsy Administration also covers quirky topics related to selling on Etsy. The following post, *The Mystery of the Christmas Pickle*, is an example. This post is about the Christmas Pickle, which is a Christmas tradition for many that involves hiding a pickle ornament in the Christmas tree on Christmas Eve. On Christmas morning, everyone searches for the pickle. The story goes that the first person to find the Christmas pickle receives good fortune or, in some cases, an extra present.

The Etsy Blog

The Mystery of the Christmas Pickle



Story by [Jeni Sandberg](#)
Published on Dec 24, 2013 in [Read](#)

It's a strange juxtaposition: an ornament in the shape of a pickle hanging in your festively decorated Christmas tree. [The Christmas pickle](#) is a beloved holiday tradition for some, but one with very murky origins.

Though the details can vary, the basic premise is this: the Christmas tree is decorated and, while the children sleep on Christmas Eve, a parent hangs a pickle ornament somewhere within the branches of the tree. Because the green pickle is hidden amongst the green boughs, it is difficult to see, and the first to find the special ornament on Christmas morning would get an extra present, or be blessed with good luck all year.



Jeni

Jeni Sandberg is a dealer, appraiser and consultant in 20th century design. She has worked in museums, was a Senior Specialist at Christie's, and also appears on WGBH's Antiques Roadshow. She writes about fun objects on [her blog](#). In this series, she will explore the history of decorative objects.

Related Items



Personalized Family Nam...
peachwik



Polymer Clay Christmas...
handmademom

Figure 24. *The Etsy Blog, The Mystery of the Christmas Pickle*

Interesting and unusual topics related to the market aspect of Etsy are often covered on Etsy's Blog, typically designed to reinforce an aspect of Etsy's market functions, but from a creative, fun, and lighthearted perspective. Such posts help to

convey the message that reimagining commerce means fostering a fun, creative, and nurturing market, rather than a competitive and strictly professional one.

Managing Etsy's market. Etsy uses several different social media tools within its overall platform to manage the market. Data suggest that the most commonly used social media tools for doing so are the Etsy Blog and Etsy Forums. The following screen capture is an example of a post that concerns changes to the Etsy market (see Figures 25 and 26). The purpose of the post is to clear up confusion within the market concerning Etsy's new mass manufacturing policies. It is important to point out the blue text within the paragraph. In all of Etsy's Blog posts additional information about the topic at hand can be found by clicking on the blue text. In this case, more information about Etsy's policy changes can be found by clicking *changes to our policies* in Figure 25, which directs the reader to the following page, shown in Figure 26.

Clarifying Our Guidelines on Outside Manufacturing



Story by Sarah Abramson
Published on Jan 27, 2014 in Company News

Photo by JaneLKakaley

Sarah Abramson leads Etsy's Marketplace Integrity team, working with sellers to make sure the items on Etsy comply with our guidelines.

In October, we announced some [changes to our policies](#) on selling handmade goods. Specifically, we clarified that sellers can hire help or work with individual collaborators to produce their goods, so long as they list everyone involved in their shop. We also gave the greenlight to shipping or fulfillment services, so long as sellers take responsibility for their customer's experience personally.

And we introduced an [application process](#) if you want to partner with manufacturers to produce your designs. A manufacturer is any outside business that helps make your items.



Sarah

Figure 25. Clarifying our Guidelines on Outside Manufacturing

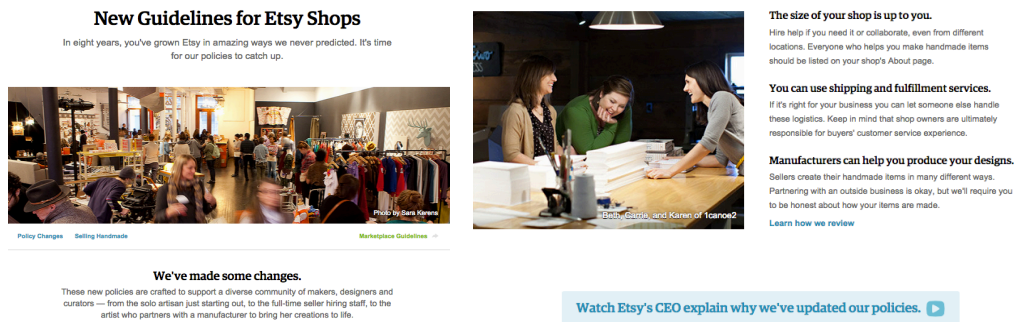


Figure 26. New Guidelines for Etsy Shops

This example highlights how Etsy uses its blog to help Sellers find information about market rules and policies. For instance, this page provides a more detailed summary of changes and additional resources. Additional blue text in the Blog post in Figure 26, *an application process*, redirects readers to available information about the application process and the actual application.

Etsy’s Blog also serves as an asynchronous form of communication between Sellers and the broader Etsy market. Sellers often express their questions and opinions about Etsy’s market in this platform. Posts from Sellers provide Etsy Administration with feedback that is often used in refining and managing Etsy’s market. Etsy’s Forums are used in a similar way. Randy, an Etsy Administrator, describes this use of Forums.

R: So, among other things, I work with our Product Teams and try to offer up, umm... you know anticipating questions, [Questions the Product Teams might ask Randy] “We’re going to release this product, okay. We have this documentation.” [Randy’s response to Product Teams] “Okay well the community is also going to ask this...” And you know, we want to have, we want to have an answer for them. We would like to be able to, if we see that question, to get an answer right away, and not have to, wait some period of time.

As Randy's quote reveals, Forums serve as places where Etsy Administration can gather community insight on new products, as well as topics concerning Etsy's market. Within this space, similar to the reply feature on Etsy's blog, members can share their perspectives on the topics presented to the market. As a result, these social media tools provide Sellers with a platform to air their grievances and opinions, as well as space for Etsy Administration to pose questions to the market. Solicited or unsolicited, the information provided by Sellers is then used by Administration to inform decisions regarding Etsy's market tools and practices.

In sum, social media tools crafted by Etsy, or its tailor-made social media, are used to help members conduct a variety of market activities. For Buyers, shop reviews aid in the decision to purchase a product. In contrast to Buyers, Sellers rely on a myriad of Etsy's social media tools to carry out selling activities, primarily its Forums, Seller Handbook, Treasuries, and Shop Reviews. Similar to Sellers, Etsy Administrators rely heavily on Etsy's Blogs/the Seller Handbook and Forums. In sum, Etsy's social media tools are tailor-made to provide Sellers, Buyers, and Administrators with the opportunity to work independently and together as part of a larger group to shape the market.

Public Social Media

Along with Etsy-specific social media, several public social media tools are also integrated into Etsy's platform. According to participants, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and Meetups are used the most often. Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest seem to serve similar purposes, primarily as promotional tools used by Sellers, Buyers, and Etsy Administration. However, the role the participant holds seems to influence how she

or he engages and interacts with these social media sites. In light of this factor, the following two sections examine public social media uses: (1) *Window Shopping*, and (2) *Enticing Buyers*.

Window shopping. In conversation with participants, Buyers often shared that they find themselves on Etsy's site by way of public social media. For instance, when asked if there is a particular type of social media that influences her purchase experience on Etsy, Chrissy, a Buyer responded:

C: Pinterest. That's a big, that is actually where I have seen almost everything I have bought from Etsy... That's a definite. But I would say Facebook too, only because I have a few friends on Facebook who advertise their Etsy shops. They use Facebook as a way to advertise, so yeah.

When asked about any other sites she replied, "Oh my gosh. Um... pretty much everything from Instagram takes you to Etsy somehow..." Similar to other participants who are Buyers, Chrissy thinks that Pinterest is a social media site that influences her purchases on Etsy. She also mentioned Facebook and Instagram as other social media sites that have a similar influence.

Pinterest, followed by Facebook and Instagram, seem to be the most influential social media sites used by Buyers and by Etsy as a business. Based on interview and observational data, it appears that these public social media sites act as kind of digital store front, allowing shoppers, in this case Buyers, to window shop online. Catherine's description of how she used Pinterest and Etsy for wedding shopping illustrates this use of social media among some Buyers.

C: Pinterest. I used that a lot for my wedding, and I know that there are a lot of Etsy items on there that are linked to Etsy or others tag them to [Etsy shops]... but I am not an avid social media user, I just used it for the wedding.

Catherine used Pinterest to window shop for wedding products. By doing so, she discovered that, more often than not, the items that she liked were on Etsy. For instance, she mentions that most images are linked directly to the item's page on Etsy or to an Etsy shop. Interestingly, these excerpts reveal how Sellers use Pinterest, Facebook, and Instagram as promotional tools, which will be discussed further in the next section.

Enticing Buyers. Participants who are Sellers often use some form of public social media as a way to promote their shops. Erin, a long time Etsy Seller with two shops, discusses her use of social media for promotion.

E: I have a Facebook page for both of my businesses. I've recently gotten better about it, I'm terrible about checking into, and updating them. Um... those seem to help. When I make a sale, you can send out a standard message whenever it ships. I put like a thank you and then, "If you want to keep up with what I am doing, and get coupon codes, then follow me on Facebook." Then I will send them a link to my Facebook page. And I've gotten quite a few people *liking* my page through that.

Erin shares that she has a Facebook page for both of her shops, but given the volume of her shops it is hard to keep the page current. She uses Etsy's outgoing messaging system to make Buyers aware of her Facebook page. Erin has seen some people *liking* her page, and explains,

E: When I hand them [customers at craft shows] my business card they will then *like* my Facebook page or they'll look at stuff on my site. And at least I have the Etsy Facebook connection with them, you know, like, months down the line,

they'll use my business card to *like* me on Facebook, and then when Christmas rolls around they see me posting on Facebook and then they'll order a dog collar.

Erin points to how she also sells her dog products at local craft shows. At these events she hands out business cards that feature her Etsy shop site and her Facebook page. She has found that providing a business card with this information leads to an increase in shop views. She further concludes that it increases her *likes* on Facebook, which ultimately leads to sales around high-volume seasons, such as Christmas. Indeed, Facebook emerged among participants who are Sellers as the most widely used social media site to promote their shops and the items within them.

Analysis of the observational and interview data further revealed that Sellers use social media to share shop information and run shop promotions. For instance, in talking with Madison, a well-seasoned Seller of dog toys, she reveals several different ways she uses social media for such purposes.

Me: So I saw on your Facebook page, you donate FurryFriends to shelters and things like that?

M: Yeah... I do. I do both. So I'll donate um... products themselves and so then whatever the rescue is can use them in a silent auction and raise money. I think the average per FurryFriend is about 30 dollars that they get from that.

In a later conversation, we continued to talk about Madison's social media use related to other promotional activities.

Me: Do you ever do any of your contests through your social media outlets?

M: Hmm... I haven't done them as much lately I would have to say, because, I don't, I don't really like to do what everybody else is doing... So I think probably

3 years ago or 2 years ago I did a lot more all the time to help build stuff up, but now... I think because you see it all over the place that everybody's doing contests, I try, I don't want to overload people and do too much, so I try to be mindful of other people's time and stuff.

Madison uses public forms of social media for several purposes, such as updating her customers about community outreach activities, and in the past, for promotional contests. Other participants who are Sellers use external social media sites for similar purposes, such as updating customers about business happenings, shop promotions, and new products. Although not designed specifically with Sellers in mind, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, etc. are useful means of connecting with consumers.

Offline Engagement

Participants interviewed for this study do not typically engage with other members in the offline environment. However, my online and offline observations as well as my participation in the Etsy community revealed several ways that Etsy actually uses offline interactions to help shape its market, and does so in at least four strategic ways: (a) *Keeping Sellers in the loop*, (b) *Etsy cares*, (c) *Going rogue, crafting offline*, and (d) *Team building*.

Keeping Sellers in the loop. Etsy develops and implements monthly *Town Hall Meetings*, which take place at Etsy's Headquarters in Brooklyn, NY and are streamed online. At these meetings Etsy Administrators share and discuss current and potential market policies as well as general issues brought up by Etsy Sellers. Town Halls invite the opportunity for Sellers to meet with Etsy Administration face-to-face or online (streaming) to discuss these topics in real time. Overall, Etsy's *Town Hall Meetings* are

one of the ways that Etsy Administration updates Sellers and maintains its market via face-to-face interaction.

Etsy cares. Etsy creates and participates in pre-existing offline activities and events as a means to promote current Etsy Sellers. For instance, Etsy hosts *Home for the Holidays*, a yearly event that occurs around Christmas, in which a select group of Etsy Administrators arrange informal, face-to-face meetings with Sellers from their hometowns. This provides Administration with the opportunity to meet and greet its Sellers within Etsy's market, building camaraderie between the two types of members and thereby promoting Etsy's market as a community-based selling platform.

Etsy also hosts Seller visits, which are usually reserved for high volume Sellers. These visits to Etsy's headquarters typically involve a tour of the facilities and sometimes lunch with Etsy staff. During these visits, Sellers are able to meet Etsy Administrators. Participants who have done these visits described the experience as a very positive one, and one that made them feel like very special members of Etsy's community. In addition, the visit gives Administration one-on-one time with Sellers to understand their perspectives on selling through Etsy, and in turn, foster a stronger connection with them.

Going rogue, crafting offline. Crafting is clearly a gateway used by Etsy to engage current as well as potential Sellers. For instance, Etsy hosts and participates in offline events and activities to promote itself as an online venue for selling handmade and vintage goods. As Mary points out, "So my first role at Etsy was organizing events at craft shows for us, as well as sponsorships, um... and, and that sort of stuff." Later in the conversation, Mary provided more details about what Etsy does at these events.

M: While we do a lot of online communication with our community, it is really important to also connect in person. You build a different relationship and people just communicate, just so differently. So you know we do a couple of different things there. We go to Seller conferences quite a bit, to ahh answer questions directly to Sellers. um... We host education events throughout the country. Not as much, because it is actually easier for us to host them here [at Etsy's headquarters], than it is to go to conferences and work there.

Etsy Administration also seeks out small business conferences and craft shows to promote and educate the different "handmade communities" about Etsy. These events are used to promote Etsy's market to potential and current Sellers, as well as to educate existing Sellers about new tools in Etsy's market. As Mary explains, these events are designed to communicate with Sellers and crafters in general about Etsy's platform.

M: We will host an event, or we will go to a local Team event to answer any questions people may have about Etsy. And for a conference we usually have a set Meetup or something for our community, you know, just to sort of ask questions of us and really speak to them.

Etsy also uses its headquarters in Brooklyn, New York to host bi-monthly Etsy Craft Parties. These events are open to Buyers and Sellers, and the main focus is to promote Etsy's handmade market philosophy, as Buyers and Sellers gather to learn a new craft and chat. As a Seller, I participated in two Etsy Craft Parties. Observation at these events revealed that Etsy's Craft Parties serve to reinforce its handmade ethos within its market, as Buyers and Sellers often bonded by sharing personal- and selling-related stories over the art of craft. In addition, these parties provide Buyers and Sellers with the opportunity to engage with Etsy Administrators.

Sometimes Craft Parties are more Seller-focused. Etsy provides Sellers with open space and time to meet up with other Sellers to work on personal projects and activities related to selling in Etsy's market. Similarly, Etsy also hosts workshops for Sellers.

Mary, a long time Etsy employee, talks about these workshops.

M: Sometimes we will develop a workshop and we'll host it in the space and nobody will come. So we did this, this mobile workshop, because we think that mobile is, is you know ahh, really ahhh, an important tool in today's business, so we did a workshop on how to optimize your shop for mobile and like 4 people showed up.

Mary explains that Administration hosts workshops to educate Sellers about its sales tools and how to sell on Etsy. As Mary shared, not all of the workshops are a success, however they do help to foster interaction between Etsy Administration and Sellers. This interaction further reinforces Sellers' use of Etsy's tools, as well as the "Etsy way" of selling. Activities hosted at its headquarters help to shape Etsy's market offline, by fostering interaction between Sellers and Etsy Administration through activities that support Etsy's mission.

On the flipside, participants who are Sellers revealed that they also participate in craft shows and fairs to sell their products as well as promote their shops. For instance, Erin, a longtime Etsy Seller, shares her experiences with selling at these venues.

E: ...the craft sales are good too, just getting to a different market. So the Farmer's Markets here are huge. And I thought, well you know, moving to Birmingham, I had a very stereotypical [view]. "You know it's going to be a southern city," but they are actually super trendy, up and coming. They have tons of Farmer's markets. And my business is doing better here than it did in San Diego.

In this passage, Erin shares that she sells at Farmer's Markets in Birmingham and her products sell better there than they did at the Farmer's Markets in San Diego. Erin has been able to sell a high volume of products in a short period of time, as well as promote her shop by connecting with potential Buyers.

Although Erin is the only Seller interviewed for this study that regularly participates in craft shows, many of the participants who are Buyers talked about meeting Sellers at these types of events. For instance, Anne discussed the different Etsy vendors she has seen at art festivals.

A: The lady with the shirts, I've seen her at the festivals. Well actually, there's another. I haven't bought from this lady but she's on my favorites and I'm waiting. She does wire jewelry, and her online shop has a ton of stuff in it, but I came across her at one of the craft shows too, and I REALLY loved her stuff. And I took one of her cards, and I realized she was on Etsy, so I was like, "Oh my god I've got to add her on there." So I can keep track.

Similar to other Buyers, Anne shares that she often comes across Etsy Sellers at craft fairs and art festivals. Other Buyers mentioned meeting Etsy Sellers at similar offline, craft-focused events. They like the idea of getting to meet the Seller as well as seeing the physical product. As with Anne, for some Buyers this interaction has led to purchases they have made on Etsy.

Team building. As previously discussed, Etsy-developed Teams, or groups of Sellers united by shared values and ideals, will sometimes interact offline. Teams, whether online or off, are designed to provide support for Sellers in Etsy's market. As Laura shares,

L: I don't think you get a lot of sales from it [being a member of an Etsy Team]. But it does give you a lot of exposure, and I have contacts now, when you have questions about an item, I go to people on those Teams.

Sellers use Etsy's Teams to support their activities as shop owners. In this excerpt, Laura points to how she views Sellers on her Teams as resources for questions about the vintage items she sells. Other Sellers cite a similar use of Etsy Teams. Moreover, some Teams meet face-to-face, which provides Sellers with the opportunity to meet one another, possibly take part in workshops hosted by these Teams, as well as other activities related to Team building and Etsy's craft-centered mission.

In addition to Etsy's Seller-driven Teams, Etsy Administration developed another type of Team, the Prototype Team. Mary explains the role of Prototype Teams in Etsy's market.

M: ...Teams are really such a great way to talk to such a larger group of people at one time, you know... For example, like last year I think we did um..., I'm not sure if we did this for the, were working on the listing page, we might actually start a Team, called a Prototype Team. Where Sellers can opt in to get a preview of the product, and give us feedback. So, that we not only do this [engaging with members for feedback] for education, but for the product as well. And you know, it's a way for us to ask a question, and tons of Sellers to participate in that. Um... it's something that we only, want to continue growing this sort of dialogue. Like, "How do we create these discussions, around concerns that are really, that are really valid for our community?" Um... learn from them and then deliver solutions for them.

None of the Sellers interviewed for this study were part of a Prototype Team, however, as a Seller I joined a Prototype Team and learned that this type of Team is used to gather Seller feedback about potential tools. As Mary shares, Prototype Teams are an effective way to get Seller feedback. In general, Teams, including Prototype Teams provide

Administration with a deeper understanding of the market's concerns and possible solutions to address them. In contrast to Etsy Teams, which can be on or offline, Prototype Teams only communicate online.

In summary, Etsy uses a myriad of social media tools and offline events and activities to craft its market. Particular to online, Etsy's tailor-made and public social media tools combine to facilitate online communication among Sellers, Buyers, and Etsy Administrators. Moreover, these digital tools support many aspects of Etsy's market activities. For instance, Shop Reviews aid Buyers in making purchase decisions and provide Sellers with feedback about Buyer perceptions. In contrast, public social media tools like Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest, serve as promotional tools for Sellers and Etsy Administration as they lead Buyers to specific shops or items for purchase on Etsy. Etsy Administration hosts face-to-face events and activities to serve similar purposes, fostering market activities among participants as well as acting as a form of promotion for Etsy as a company. Finally, Etsy also uses its unique Teams and Prototype Teams as a means to solicit feedback from Sellers about market tools as well as policies. Overall, Etsy creates new and integrates preexisting social media tools with a variety of offline events and activities to craft its market in ways that foster creativity, collaboration, and an entrepreneurial spirit.

Filling a Niche: The Handmade Movement

Analysis of data from Buyers, Sellers, and Etsy Administrators indicates that members join Etsy to satisfy a desire to engage in the exchange of alternative market goods (e.g. handmade and vintage). Participants who are Buyers and Sellers mentioned

that they are unaware of anywhere else to exchange such goods. However, Buyers and Sellers have differing motives for joining Etsy, and these motives are tied to their respective roles within Etsy's market. These motives are explained in the three issues that emerged which are used to structure this particular theme: (1) *An Alternative Shopping Experience*, (2) *Providing a Commerce Alternative*, and (3) *Consuming Conversation Starters*.

An Alternative Shopping Experience

The data revealed that Buyers join and shop on Etsy to satisfy desires for an alternative shopping experience as well as to purchase goods that are different from "mass" market product offerings. Relative to this issue, four key topics capture what is meant by the "alternative" shopping experience that Etsy's market provides.

Alternative products. Items sold on Etsy include vintage and handmade products, as well as crafting supplies. Participants consider vintage and handmade products to be specialty items. Bridget, a long time Buyer who frequently browses Etsy captures this sentiment in the following passage.

B: Yeah, it's [purchases on Etsy] not meant to be an everyday [thing]. To me, it's not meant to be an everyday product. Um... To me it's a birthday present or it's an occasional type of thing. It's not something that I would go on and buy. You know? I don't go on and buy socks everyday from Etsy.

Bridget describes these purchases as different from everyday items, or the things that can be purchased just about anywhere. Bridget continues "You know getting a paper rose bouquet, it's just kind of different! You know, I can't get something like that at Target. You can get almost everything from Target, but you can't get that!" It seems that this is a

common value shared among Buyers as well as Sellers, or what Bridget calls “appreciation of being able to get something that’s, that’s not mass produced, that’s not, um... you know, just that’s unique.”

Like Bridget, other participants who are Buyers describe Etsy’s product assortment as unique, original, special, and one-of-a-kind. They appreciate the quirky, artistic, and unique nature of the Sellers and their product assortments. Along these lines, Buyers often shared that they turn to Etsy to find items that carry a message or a store that makes something intensely personal and sentimental for the recipient. Kaitlin, a long time Etsy Buyer, further elaborates on this idea:

K: I think it is just people wanting that personal connection, and they want something unique and different. So many things are just like everyone has, I don’t know, everybody has the same stuff nowadays I feel like, and like everyone has their Coach bag or their, I don’t even know what shoes people wear... but um... people all have the same stuff and I think there is a growing segment of the population that wants unique stuff that has a story behind it. And you know something a little more special.

Like Bridget’s response, Kaitlin draws attention to a growing group of consumers that are turning away from mass-produced products. Instead of being label- or brand-conscious they are more conscious about being different, and finding items that have greater personal value. Moreover, these Buyers seek a personal connection with the maker via the product or service, unlike when they shop big box retailers and mass merchants.

In a similar vein, Buyers and Sellers all mentioned that they enjoy the variety of products sold on Etsy. When discussing her favorite things about Etsy, Kaitlin speaks more about product variety.

K: Um... I like, I like the unique variety of stuff, and how you can customize things. Like if there is something... like, I know a lot of times if you don't find exactly what you want you can just contact them [the Seller] and they can create a custom order or something...

As with many of the participants in this study, Kaitlin mentioned the variety of products available on Etsy as something unique to its market. Even in the rare instance when a Buyer cannot find what he or she is looking for, one can “Convo” a Seller to get a product altered or custom made. Lilly, a long time Buyer, recounts a conversation she had with her boyfriend about Etsy which illustrates the breadth and depth of its product offerings.

L: Um... I like that there's just a ton of stuff to choose from. You can type in pretty much anything and something will come up. The other day, I was showing it to my boyfriend, um... 'cause he had never heard of it. And I was like, “Check this out!” And like, he's like “This is a girls site [in a funny man voice].” And I'm like, “No, no, no look at this,” and I type in “Wu-Tang,” it's got like all these shirts, buttons and posters and all this stuff pops up. And I like, I think I searched for Biggie, like Biggie-Small, and all that stuff popped up.

The majority of the Buyers who are participants cited at least one or more instances in which they found a unique, unusual, or rare item on Etsy. They often talked about how they would never be able to find it anywhere else. For instance, a Treasury of Will Ferrell items that I curated illustrates the unique nature of Etsy's product assortment.

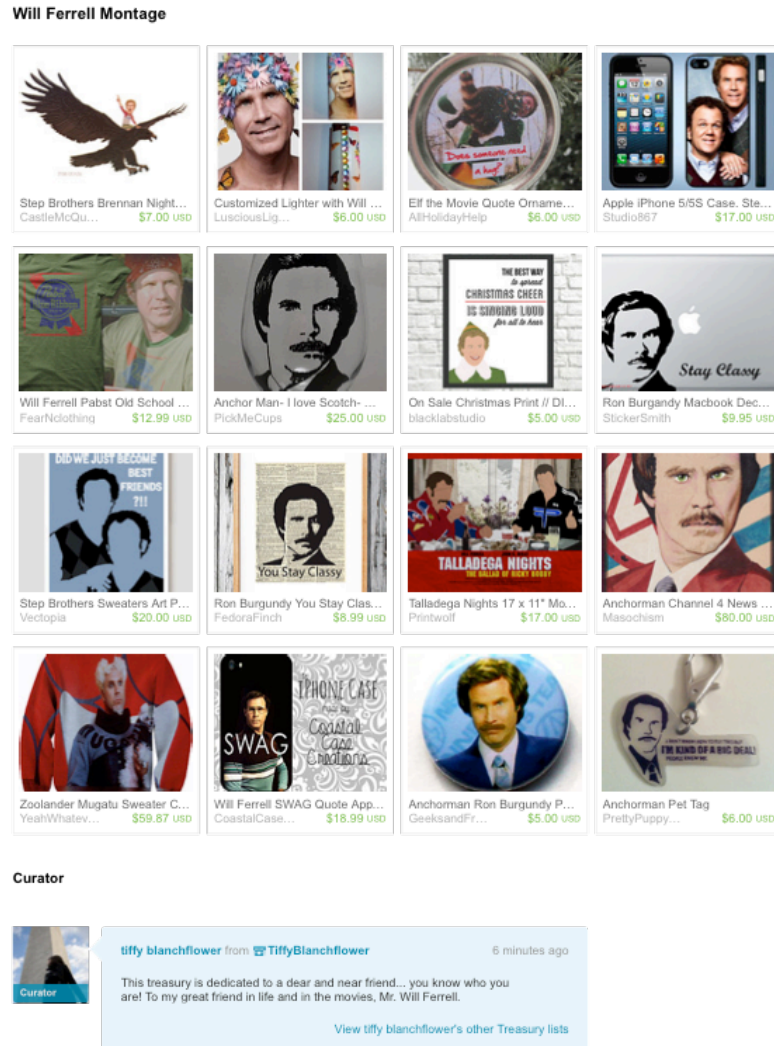


Figure 27. Will Ferrell Treasury

When selecting items for this Treasury, I was able to find a myriad of products that featured different Will Ferrell characters. These products ranged from the typical, such as t-shirts and posters, to the obscure, such as laptop decals, lighters, and wine glasses. Buyers often mentioned that the endless variety of items, coupled with the ability to work with Sellers to make or customize merchandise, is a big reason why they love

shopping on Etsy more than traditional retailers. Clearly, Sellers are filling gaps within the current marketplace that big box retailers and mass merchants are unable to satisfy due to the nature of their mass-produced products and mass-market retailing.

Personalizing the shopping experience. According to participants, the shopping experience on Etsy is nontraditional, as Sellers have the ability to connect directly with Buyers, thereby creating a personalized experience. For instance, Bridget shares, “... I know [shopping on Etsy] it’s meant to be a very unique experience...” Bridget draws attention to the act of shopping and the idea that exchange on Etsy is different than other online retail options. The following excerpt from Kaitlin provides further insight into this idea.

K: I think Etsy really caught on, it’s because it’s unique in what it does. It brings tons and tons of artists together in one Forum, to be able to sell their products. So, when you want handmade soap you don't have to go to necessarily *Whole Foods* to get your soap. You can go online and you can have a conversation about what goes into their product or if you want a special scent. There are so many different things that you can talk about in one place, where that has never really been available before.

Kaitlin brings to light the extent to which the products on Etsy as well as the purchase experience is unique. In this excerpt, Kaitlin mentions Whole Foods, a specialty retailer known for organic and health-related products. She recognizes that while Whole Foods may offer products with similar attributes, it is unable to provide the same customer service experience that Etsy does.

In a similar vein, based on the data, it seems that Etsy actually encourages communication between Sellers and Buyers. As such, Buyers that are extremely vested in

their purchases are able to directly contact makers to custom-make goods or just to learn more about the product or Seller. This creates a unique and very personalized shopping experience, which is something missing within the larger online marketplace. Later in the interview, Kaitlin goes into depth about creating these “personal connections” with Sellers when shopping on Etsy.

K: I don't know, I feel like a little connected to something. I know that I gave my friend a scarf today, that I got on Etsy, it was made by a girl that was from her home town, and it's just neat, making that connection and like knowing you can look at the picture of the person that made it. And if there is a question you go straight to them, you're not going to have to call a 1-800 number.

Similar to other participants that are Buyers, Kaitlin appreciates knowing the creator on a more personal level. She appreciates that there is something special about being able to see a picture of the person and contact him or her directly. It makes the product as well as the experience special and more intimate when compared to purchasing something from mass-market online retailers like Amazon.

Encouraging open communication and personal interaction between Sellers and Buyers also allows for the co-creation or customization of products. Again, this enhances the uniqueness of the purchasing and overall customer service experience. Catherine describes one of her best experiences with working with Sellers.

C: I ordered it [a fabric flower] and um.... it was like giant. Like I wanted something big, but I did not want it to be something that took up half of my head.

Me: So it looked like... more of a hat?

C: Yeah, so it was huge, and so um... I was like “Can you help me with this?” And so, I sent it and she made the adjustments. And she did not mind working on

it until I was satisfied. And I had plenty of time, so it was not like I was in a hurry. And it was not originally a custom order, but I guess it ended up being one.

Etsy's platform allowed Catherine to work directly with a Seller to reduce the size of the flower for her hair. This example illustrates how Etsy's platform permits Sellers and Buyers to collaborate, before and even after items are purchased.

In a similar vein, Buyers expressed a deep appreciation for the customer service experience. In the following passage, Catherine goes into depth about her appreciation for the customer service experience provided on Etsy.

C: Etsy Sellers typically go really far and beyond to make sure that you are satisfied. I also really like, haha, a lot of time Sellers will, send samples or a card. Or if I order something they send something that is of a lower value and throw it in as an added benefit. Or the packaging is really cute. Umm... And so, I think that it is really neat that the Sellers do [this]. And are unique in that aspect, like in their packaging or how they position themselves, or how they write little notes. I always feel special when the Seller writes, "Thank you for your purchase Catherine!" Like, they will put your name or they will put like a unique message, and they will hand write it, instead of putting [just] a card... And I like that they are putting so much into it...

Catherine enjoys the extremely personalized nature of the transaction process on Etsy, such as hand-written notes addressed to her and unique product packaging.

Other participants who are Buyers mentioned being made to feel special and appreciated by the Sellers. Likewise, receiving and opening a package from Etsy is often considered part of the Etsy experience, and therefore receiving and opening the item is something many Buyers talked about looking forward to. Margaret, a new but very successful Seller of exotic and rare plant seeds, found this out via a review posted by a customer:

M: Somebody, gave me like, 3 stars and said, “lack luster packaging.” I was like, “Really, the seeds are in plastic bags, but that’s because they are seeds, they can take moisture on. If you wanted them gift-wrapped you could have told me.” But the point is that she wanted that same Etsy you know, organza bow, rice paper...

The functional nature of Margaret’s products requires utilitarian packaging to preserve the seeds. However, this failed to meet some Buyers’ expectations, as they look forward to the special touch, such as an “organza bow and rice paper.”

Products with soul. The manner in which participants who are Buyers talked about Etsy products, Shops, and Sellers suggests that products as well as the customer experience embody intangible attributes that cannot be satisfied by mass merchants. One way to describe this attribute is “soul.” Chrissy’s discussion about how she felt when purchasing an original watercolor illustrates this particular attribute of shopping on Etsy.

C: ...I don’t know, it’s always nice getting something customized. It makes you feel kinda special. You know? But the watercolor, like it’s almost like I was buying a piece of the artist herself as opposed to like it was, a piece of herself, like I was buying a part of the artist.

Chrissy explains that she feels special when she purchases customized or original products on Etsy. In this instance, she felt as if she was buying a piece of the artist or investing in the artist, rather than just buying a piece of art. To Chrissy, the art embodied the artist.

Many other Buyers shared similar stories. As such, the concept of uniqueness or specialness in regards to Etsy is often tied back to the notion that behind each shop and product is a person: the Seller. Moreover, this is a person that Buyers can learn more about through Seller’s Profile pages or contact directly. There is something about the idea

of knowing the *hands* that crafted the goods that reinforces and embodies the human element of goods purchased. In turn, many Buyers often purchase goods on Etsy because they can find gifts that have a story, or create a story that is personal or intensely meaningful.

Providing a Commerce Alternative

Participants who are Sellers view Etsy's platform as a place of opportunity, and often as the only place they would even consider selling their products. Fiona, a Seller that customizes Phillies Terrible Towels, shares the thought process behind her decision to sell on Etsy.

F: We had a few friends suggest going to um... bridal shows up in Pittsburg and setting up a little booth and doing them in the booth... But, I'm getting a freaking PhD in Marketing and I still don't know where I would sell them!

She continues to share,

F: We thought about um... listing them on Craigslist and in the Pittsburg area, but it just didn't seem like the right Forum for them. And I had used Etsy enough that I knew that it would be the perfect place to list them. Um... actually 'til this day I still don't know where else I would have sold them....

Like many other Sellers interviewed for this dissertation, Fiona did not know of another place where she could successfully sell her particular product. Many participants that are Sellers mentioned that they knew that their products would sell well on Etsy due to their previous experiences as Buyers on Etsy. That is, they knew that their own products would sell there because, as Buyers, they sought out similarly unique, special, quirky, and unusual merchandise from Etsy.

eBay, Amazon, and ArtFire. Oh my. Participants recognized that similar markets exist, such as eBay, Amazon, and ArtFire, however they view them to be inferior retail alternatives to Etsy. When discussing the similarities and differences between these platforms and Etsy, the most commonly mentioned point of difference is aesthetics. For instance, Fiona says,

F: It [eBay] seemed damaged. It's sad because I think eBay wanted to be kind of the source for kind of rare things, but it just turns out to be like everybody's garage sale. Like yeah, with Etsy it has this, it has that fresh feeling to it, where eBay has kind of a stale [feeling].

To Fiona, and many other participants, the aesthetics of these mass retail sites are less than desirable. As such, many participants in this study who are Sellers decided to open a shop on Etsy because they found it more aesthetically appealing, often describing it as “clean,” “fresh,” “professional,” and “pretty.” Moreover, it seems that these participants want to sell their products on a site that takes as much pride in presentation as they do with their own shops and products. Indeed, Laura, a new but very successful vintage Seller, speaks to this perspective.

L: Yeah. And eBay, I've been buying from for years. I have no interest in eBay, that's just intimidating to me. I don't know why, but it just is. It just doesn't appeal to me. And it's so unprofessional to me. Etsy, it's pretty. You know, people, mostly, take pride in the way their sites look. And eBay can look tacky.

Laura shares her dislike for how eBay looks from a Seller's perspective. She thinks that, unlike Sellers on eBay, most Sellers on Etsy take pride in the presentation of their shops

and products. In turn, she believes that the eBay site as a whole looks unprofessional and tacky, and is not suitable for her vintage goods.

Laura also touches on another reason so many Sellers decide to sell on Etsy instead of sites like Amazon and eBay, which is that it is easy and not intimidating.

Madison, a long time successful Seller of dog toys, shares how easy she finds it to sell something on Etsy. “Yeah, and it’s also because, it is a really easy platform to figure out, to just upload your photos, put the price, and then it’s all laid out. It’s like boom, boom, boom.” Laura expressed similar sentiments, saying “...it’s so easy, ‘cause not being a computer person, if I can do it, anyone can.” Erin, a long time Seller with two shops, reflects on her experience with creating her own website in comparison to setting up her Etsy shops.

E: [Selling on Etsy] is fool proof. It’s like [Etsy saying] “I’ll set it up for you.” Because, I had my own website at one point, because everybody was like, “Start your own website!” And, oh my goodness! Like programming, and the behind the scenes stuff is like so insane... You know [on Etsy] you just, pull up a page and it has all these categories. And you just put your pictures in and your price. It’s so easy compared to doing a website on your own.

Me: Yeah, so you had experience with a website, what was your biggest headache with the website?

E: Oh my god. It was like 10 times more work than the Etsy site and it was expensive... You had to do it all on your own... You know, there’s like tutorials and stuff, but I spent so much time reading and trying to figure it out. And then to hire somebody to do it for you is so expensive!

As with many other participants in this study, Erin described how easy it is to sell on Etsy. Compared to creating her own website, Erin found that creating a shop on Etsy took less time, was easier to manage, and required less money. After all of Erin’s hard work to

set up her own site, she discussed that it still did not always work efficiently and was in need of professional help, which was very expensive. In contrast, creating a shop on Etsy can be done in a matter of minutes, especially if the person already has a shop name, images, and item descriptions. Even the most technology-challenged participants find Etsy very easy to use, and cited minimal or no technical difficulties associated with their shops.

To summarize, members are drawn to Etsy because of its unique and “human first” approach to retailing, resulting in products and Seller practices that are perceived as more soulful or ethical compared with traditional online retailers. Within the discussion about alternatives, two subthemes surfaced particular to Sellers, they are *Aggregating the unique consumer* and *Helping hands*. These subthemes provide more insight into why Sellers gravitate to Etsy’s market instead of to its competitors. In particular, these subthemes explore how Etsy as a business embodies a soul-like presence, and how this attracts Sellers to Etsy’s platform over its competitors.

Aggregating the unique consumer. As mentioned above, participants who are Sellers often turn to Etsy to sell their goods because they are familiar with the site from being Buyers. Moreover, Sellers often commented on how everyone they speak to knows of Etsy. For instance, when talking to Erin, a very successful Seller with two shops, about why she sells on Etsy, she responded, “There is rarely anyone that I talk to that hasn’t heard of Etsy. So it’s the website people have heard of.” She continued to explain,

E: I like that it’s well known... I am thankful that I got started early, because it is just bogged down now. When I started, you know, 5-6 years ago nobody knew what Etsy was. Nobody selling, it’s like nothing now. It’s nice that it’s huge,

‘cause you know, more people know about it and there are more people shopping there....

Many participants noted that Etsy is a great resource, because it aggregates a myriad of unique Sellers offering handmade and vintage goods. As such, Etsy attracts a large number of unique consumers, as it generates a market of international customers looking for unique products. Thus, many participants who are Sellers like the immediate access they have to a growing group of consumers, which takes them very little effort, time, and cost to access, especially compared to maintaining their own websites.

Helping hands. As discussed in the previous section, Sellers like Etsy because a shop is easy to set up and manage. Moreover, Etsy provides tools and resources that Sellers find helpful. Erin, a long time Seller says,

E: I still subscribe to the Etsy newsletter, and the Etsy success letter and all of that. And in the beginning they really helped, but I found lately that they are just kind of regurgitating the same information that they have been saying for years. So, when you're first starting out they're really helpful.

Similar to Erin, many of the Sellers in this study used Etsy tools and resources in the beginning to trouble-shoot technical as well as sales problems. As they became more successful with selling and got the basics of selling on Etsy down, they relied less on these resources. However, Forums and other community-based interactions are used by most Sellers, new and old, with the exception of Sellers that are too busy to even keep up with their own shops. The following excerpt from Etsy's Community and Forums page illustrates one of the ways Sellers use the community to help with their shops.

The screenshot shows the Etsy forum interface. At the top, there's the Etsy logo, a search bar, and navigation icons for Home, Favorites, Your Shop, You, and Cart. Below that, the 'Community / Forums' section is active, with 'Discussions' highlighted. A search bar asks 'What are you looking for?'. The main thread is titled 'Got a little time for shop critique if anyone needs'. The first post is by 'Andie' from 'LaurelCreekDecor' at 1:14 am Dec 7, 2013 EST, stating 'I'm no expert, but if you want a little shop advice, I'm available for a bit.' Below this is a 'Responses' section with 320 replies. The first reply is from 'Susie' from 'SimpleLivingJewelry' at 1:16 am Dec 7, 2013 EST, saying 'I would love it! Thank you!'. The second reply is from 'Andie' from 'LaurelCreekDecor' at 1:23 am Dec 7, 2013 EST, providing detailed feedback: 'Cute shop:)', 'Use all your keyword tags. It's the only way you'll be found in search. Make your descriptions and policies page sound a little more professional and flesh them out more.', 'Picture backgrounds could be more consistent and brighter.', and '2 sales in such a short time from opening isn't bad; you're on your way!'. The third reply is from 'Susie' from 'SimpleLivingJewelry' at 1:26 am Dec 7, 2013 EST, saying 'A die! Thank you so much!!'. The fourth reply is from 'Red Death' from 'ReddrumDesigns' at 1:16 am Dec 7, 2013 EST, saying 'Oh PLEASE and thank you. :]'. The final reply is from 'Andie' from 'LaurelCreekDecor' at 1:30 am Dec 7, 2013 EST, saying 'Love your rings!'. On the right side, there are sections for 'Tags' (critique), 'Related Links' (Marketing Your Shop), 'Forums Guidelines', and 'Teams'.

Figure 28. Etsy Forums, Shop Critique

In Figure 28, a Seller reaches out to the Etsy community as a whole to provide a shop critique to shop owners. The first post and reply highlight how these types of interactions can be helpful to a shop owner. Seller One (Andrew), who posted the initial

thread provides feedback about Seller Two's (Lindsay) shop, commenting that she should work on key words, product descriptions, and pictures. Lastly, Seller One (Andrew) provides some encouraging words about Seller Two's (Lindsay) current sales. This particular post reflects the sentiment felt by Sellers within the community. Sellers are often reaching out to one another to help problem solve, increase sales, make photos look more professional, increase shop traffic, or resolve customer service issues. Even Josie, a Seller that does not engage in the community, recognizes the benefits of Etsy's community, saying, "I feel like I've seen a lot of other Sellers who kind of become friends and help each other out."

Etsy provides Sellers with a platform that is vastly different from those offered by market alternatives. Although Etsy takes pride in allowing Sellers to craft their own experiences, they do encourage Sellers to take pride in their work and create a selling experience that reflects the clean and pleasing aesthetics of the site. To this end, Etsy makes the process easy compared to the market alternatives, providing a plethora of education for as well as spaces in which Sellers can reach out to one another for help with their shops. Moreover, Etsy aggregates a large group of like-minded consumers who feel comfortable with the site, and, in turn, have more trust in shops of individual Sellers. In sum, Sellers are drawn to Etsy because it is aesthetically pleasing, easy to navigate, well-known, affordable, and reputable.

Consuming Conversation Starters

Participants who are Buyers, Sellers, and Administrators noted that the type of goods sold on Etsy often spur conversation among strangers, friends, and family. Lilly, a

long-time Buyer, and short-term Seller discusses how Etsy purchases often become a conversation piece.

L: You find stuff that you would... You know, I'm not going to walk down the street and see somebody with my same gloves on that I got on Etsy. Um... and if you do, it's kind of a cool commonality you would have with that person. Like "Oh, you got those on Etsy!" and it sort of strikes up a conversation. And people have stories, which I find is really good for conversation, and I think it has become sort of a bonding tool with people.

In Lilly's experience, buying products on Etsy or owning a shop can be a conversation starter. She thinks that there is something about being a member of Etsy, whether Buyer or Seller, which fosters interaction and bonding, and ultimately unites people. Other participants that are Buyers also noted that the uniqueness and/or handmade nature of the goods sold on Etsy often start conversations with friends, family, or complete strangers. Buyers therefore admire Etsy's ability to tell a past story, but also create a new one.

Participants, whether Buyers, Sellers, or Etsy Administrators, joined Etsy because it provides a market alternative. Among Sellers and Buyers this concept has different meanings. Buyers joined Etsy's market because it provides a friendly and personalized customer service experience with product offerings that are different from mass merchants. Particular to participants who are Sellers, it was discovered that they joined Etsy's market because it is simple to use, well known and adored by consumers interested in their products. In relation to competing markets, Sellers noted that they selected Etsy over the competition because the site is more aesthetically pleasing, economical, and reflected the quality and value of the goods they sell. In the case of both parties, Buyers and Sellers, they are unable to cite a comparable online market in which they can engage

in the exchange of these goods. In sum, Etsy is perceived as the preferred alternative in the market space of online retailers, and this is what appears to be the most attractive to Buyers and Sellers.

Differing Views

Although the consensus among participants is that Etsy is a Seller-focused community, opinions were mixed regarding members' influence over the market aspects of Etsy. Participants interviewed for this dissertation often expressed one of two perspectives: (1) that Etsy is a market driven by "consumers," including both Buyers and Sellers, or (2) that Etsy is a market driven by Administrators. This theme is therefore divided into two sections to reflect the two perspectives.

Who's Guiding Etsy's Market: The Buyer's Perspective

The majority of participants that are Buyers feel that they influence Etsy's market in terms of what is sold. For instance, Catherine, a long time Etsy Buyer, discusses how reviews influence her purchase decisions, "I like the reviews, reviews are important to me when I am buying something on Etsy, because I want to know the quality, and the experience is good, when trying to buy it." For Catherine, like many other Buyers, reviews are used when choosing a Seller's shop as well as a certain product.

Catherine highlights how Buyers use reviews to evaluate two elements of the purchasing process. First, Buyers often check reviews to make sure that the product being sold is what they are expecting, such as its value and quality, etc. Second, reviews are used to determine the quality of the customer service experience. For instance, when waiting to hear back from a Seller, Chrissy found the following review: "She's not going

to get back to you in time. She might not get your flowers to you on time. So just don't use her and her stuff." After reading this review and others like it, Chrissy realized why it was taking so long to hear back from the Seller. After reading these reviews, she quickly came to the conclusion that the Buyer was not trustworthy, and decided to go a different route.

The data reveal that reviews are an integral way that Buyers shape Etsy's market, as they inform other Buyers about the overall product and customer service quality of Etsy Sellers. For instance, Anne says,

A: ...at the same time, you just kind of have to trust that individual. I read a lot of the reviews though too. So, if I see that they don't have a lot of reviews, I am really, really, really hesitant to buy something.

For Anne, as with other Buyers, the information shared in reviews communicates the integrity and trustworthiness of a Seller. In turn, shop reviews influence the popularity as well as success or failure of a shop, shaping what is expected by and from Sellers, and ultimately the market that is Etsy.

Some Buyers picked up on the notion that their reviews not only help other Buyers, but aid Sellers. Anne mentions, "Um... you're always dealing with independent Sellers... um... as a Buyer I think the reviews are crucial for both of them [Buyers and Sellers]." She continues to add,

A: I'm sure to leave a review, especially on Etsy. I don't leave reviews a lot when I purchase things like, just online. But for them [Etsy Sellers] I do, because I feel that it is really important, because they're not selling the volume that like Nordstrom or somebody is. So I think that like every review [for a Seller] is important.

Anne does not often leave reviews for online non-Etsy purchases, but like many other Buyers, she understands the importance of leaving reviews of Etsy purchases. Buyers view Etsy shops as small, independent businesses, and realize that these small business owners rely on word-of-mouth as well as Buyer feedback to improve their products, customer service, and to support the growth of their shops.

Who's Guiding Etsy's Market: The Seller's Perspective

When Sellers were asked about their influence over the market, they clearly had mixed emotions about the ability of Sellers to impact the practices and functions of Etsy's marketplace. Many Sellers expressed that they can or do impact Etsy's market, while others were doubtful. Similar to Buyers, on this topic Sellers shared one of two perspectives, which are used to frame the following discussion.

Tentative listeners. In an exchange between Madison, a very successful and long time Seller, and myself, it is clear that she holds the view that Sellers can impact the Etsy market.

Me: As a Seller, do you feel that you have an impact on Etsy's businesses or functions in the market?

M: Yeah, I think so!

Me: Could you elaborate on that a little bit if you don't mind?

M: Yep. I think part of it is that anybody that provides income or money from them, kind of has hold on owning part of the business almost....

Me: Oh...

M: Yeah 'cause I know each month they take in whatever I make them.

Me: So you almost feel like you are a stakeholder?

M: Yeah!

Madison shares that as a Seller, she feels that she contributes to the overall success of Etsy. In a sense, she feels like she *owns* part of the company by contributing to its financial success, similar to that of a stakeholder. She continues to add, “And they seem very open... wanting to know shop owners’ opinions to always make it better.” Online observation data reveal similar findings, as Sellers like Madison behave in ways that suggest they have an influence over Etsy’s market. Moreover, many believe that Etsy Administration listens to their needs, concerns, and opinions regarding business practices within Etsy’s market.

Selective listening. In contrast to the perspective held by Sellers like Madison, others feel they have little to no power over Etsy’s market practices. In turn, these participants think that Etsy Administration has the ultimate power when it comes to the way Etsy conducts business.

This particular sentiment surfaces often within Etsy’s Forums, in particular, postings regarding Etsy’s manufacturing policy changes. Just prior to the start of data collection, Etsy changed its policies, allowing Sellers to use mass manufacturers. Before this change, Sellers had to go through a rigorous application and review process conducted by Etsy Administration. The point of this review process was to ensure that the manufacturers aligned with market values and ideals particular to the product component of the handmade process. Despite the rigorous process and these contingencies, the overwhelming majority of Sellers that commented on Etsy’s Forums and Blogs were

strongly opposed to the idea of allowing Sellers to use mass manufacturers. The following comments from a blog post, *5 Etsy Sellers partnering with Manufacturers* (Figure 29), illustrates this particular sentiment.

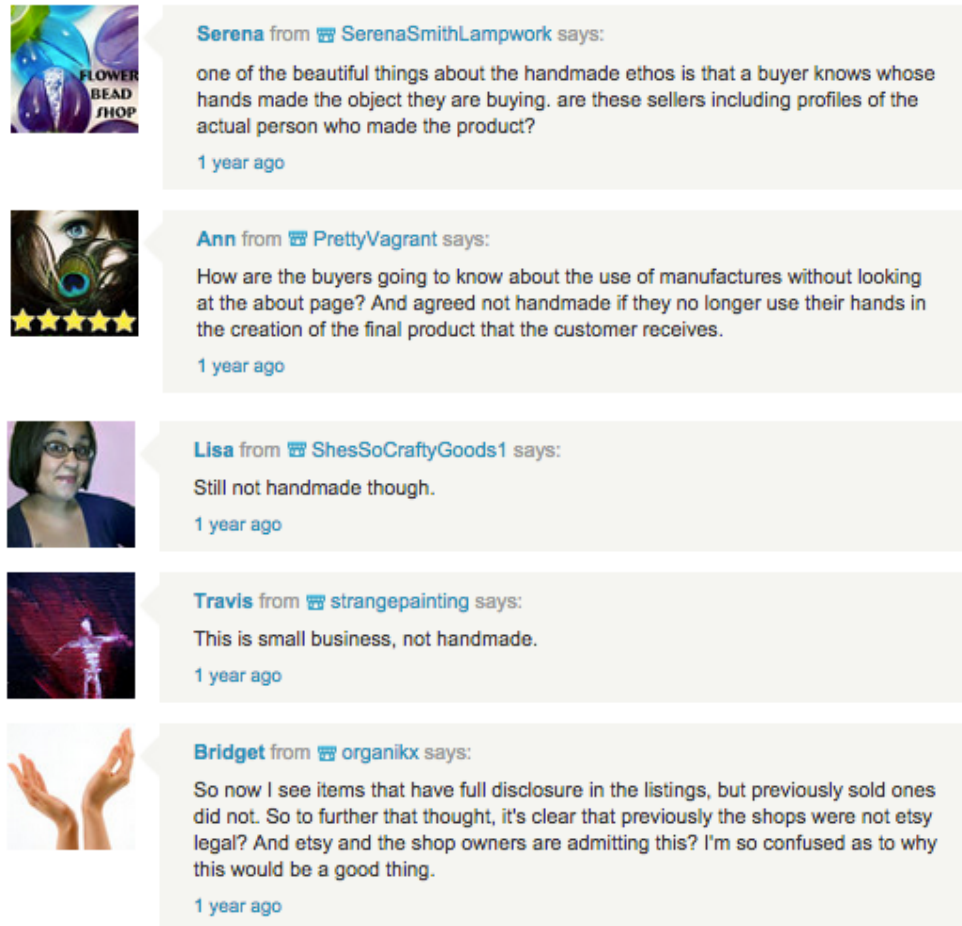


Figure 29. *Etsy's Blog: Etsy Sellers Partnering with Manufacturers*

The selection of posts in Figure 29 reflects the majority of perspectives Sellers have on this particular policy change. Moreover, this particular policy change has these Sellers questioning the purpose of Etsy and its future. Many of these Sellers feel that Etsy is moving away from its original mission of handmade goods, and moving in the direction

of small/corporate business. In turn, they voiced concerns about how these goods clearly violate the handmade ethos of Etsy, and the transparency of its goods in the marketplace. Moreover, this example reveals the distrust beginning to emerge between Sellers and Etsy Administration, which became a fairly prominent theme during data collection. The controversy surrounding this particular post escalated to the point that Etsy Administration decided to close the post due to the overwhelming negativity in Seller responses and as a means to preserve the positive, upbeat, and supportive nature of Etsy's Forums and Blogs. However, Etsy Administration remained open to hearing what Sellers had to say, and taking these concerns into consideration, provided Sellers with the *guidelines* e-mail address as a point of contact where they could continue to voice their concerns about manufacturing policy changes.



Figure 30. Etsy Blog: Featured Post Regarding Etsy's New Manufacturing Policies

Some Sellers, like Margaret, who is a new but extremely successful Seller, thinks that Etsy does not care about the individual Seller.

M: They are very select and they think it's really cool. And they have complete contempt for the people that are selling on Etsy for the most part. I mean.... they

don't hate us. They just don't care. I mean they are like, "How big can we get this so our bottom line is really big so we can go public or somebody will buy us out."

From Margaret's perspective, Etsy does not care about the individual Seller, and in the end, Etsy is just another business. As such, she thinks that Etsy cares more about growing the financial aspects of its business. Indeed, its manufacturing policies seem to intensify this sentiment, particularly among this group of community members.

Interpretation of the data indicates that there was very little gray area in how Sellers feel about their impact on Etsy's market practices. Similar to Buyers, Sellers feel that Etsy Administration either listens to or ignores what they have to say. However, participants who are Etsy Administrators were adamant that they listen to Sellers, citing different tools and strategies they use to gather their opinions and address their needs.

Growing Pains: The Double-Edged Sword of Success

Since its introduction, Etsy has experienced significant growth, success, and shifts in its corporate structure. Moreover, Etsy has experienced a seismic market, following the same growth pattern of a similar type of market alternative, eBay. Most recently, Rob Kalin, CEO and founder stepped down and a new CEO, Chad Dickerson, took his place, taking a more business-savvy approach to the running of Etsy. Indeed, over time, growth in membership coupled with changes in the corporate structure appear to have caused growing pains within the Etsy community and market. Thus, several issues related to its growth are discussed in the following subthemes: (a) *To Manufacturer or Not Manufacturer, That is the Question*, (b) *One Seller's Trash is Another Seller's Treasure*, and (c) *Drowning in Competition*.

To Manufacture or Not Manufacture, That is the Question

Sellers that experienced significant growth found that in order to maintain their shops they needed to expand their production practices to keep up with increases in orders. During data collection, I came across a Seller that actually had to stop selling on Etsy because she was growing in popularity faster than she could produce goods. This particular Seller was also a leader of an Etsy Team at one time. When I contacted her about the Seller's offline events, she had the following to say.

S: Hey Tiffy, we haven't since Techshop closed, as my husband hosts a Thursday night "Maker Cave" get together in our design studio, which is geared more towards the craftsmanship side of being an artisan than online sales on Etsy. We'd be interested in hosting monthly meetings again...but there's an uncomfortable fact for us that you are unlikely to make more than six figures a year unless you want to either become a production artist, join a guild, or avail yourself of a licensing partnership with one of the thousands of factories. NC has over 5,000 textile factories alone, plus countless small shops that make all sorts of clothes. I'm not sure if that's something people want to hear or discuss and neither of us want to break people's dreams. Most of what we would want to have meetings about now would be production management stuff...how to build your design brand, contracting labor, how to be profitable, make tech packs for production, etc. Where to and not to spend money... How to deal with factories, employees, assistants... hiring help etc. Doing wholesale so the public doesn't [take] away your personal life.

This excerpt illuminates one of the major growing pains of Etsy's market, which ironically, is rooted in the handmade ethos that made Etsy so successful. As this Seller points out, it became nearly impossible to survive financially and achieve a healthy work/life balance with handmade-only production. This particular Seller explains that to survive the growth in sales, she needed to branch out to alternative selling and production methods. She came to this conclusion months before Etsy changed its policies on mass

manufacturing. As a result, a very successful shop that was run by Captains of a successful online/offline Etsy Team closed its doors. This example illustrates how the success of Etsy can threaten the overall success of individual Sellers, and in turn, change Etsy's market.

Randy, an Etsy Administrator, discusses this challenge, and why Etsy had a change of heart regarding production practices.

R: People... have all manners of perspectives. So, beliefs differ pretty radically I would say, even to the extent that... We have our mission... we are doing what we can to reimagine commerce. We want to let people who started weaving hats in their apartments just by themselves, to be able to grow their business to the point where... they can get manufacturing assistance in a responsible way. They're ahhh, some Sellers that feel more strongly about that positively/negatively than others.

As Randy points out, Etsy's handmade approach quickly became a double-edged sword, in that, to retain these successful and high volume Sellers, something in the production process needed to change. However, Etsy is based on a "handmade" ethos. The solution to this problem ultimately became allowing Sellers to use manufacturers, provided these manufacturers align with Etsy's ethos and mission.

One Seller's Trash is Another Seller's Treasure

Among Buyers and Sellers, participants interviewed for this study expressed that not all Sellers exercise the same degree of quality control. Chrissy, a newer Buyer, shares her feelings about this growing issue.

C: Yeah. So um... something that I don't like as much, is the quality control. I feel like a lot of the things that are being sold on Etsy... I don't know it's like and I guess it is all a scavenger hunt, and I guess that is also the beauty of it. Is that

anybody can sell. But I feel like a lot of times there are things that, like I wouldn't buy...I think that the one time that I was looking for artwork it was like some hand done sketch, that someone, of an apple or something that was literally just an outline of an apple and they just scanned it in. And like were going to ask \$30 for this apple sketch, and I was like "okay, how'd you, how'd you make it into the mix [of Etsy]."

According to Chrissy, shopping on Etsy can at times be like a scavenger hunt, since there are no quality-control rules. More importantly, she points out that this aspect is part of what makes Etsy so unique. In a similar vein, some Buyers indicated not liking the sorting features and options, as they do not sort out the products they are not interested in very well, making it harder to find what they are looking for.

The guidelines for selling on Etsy are fairly loose, which allows for individuals to create their own selling experiences. For instance, the definition of vintage is "20 years or older," and handmade is anything "not mass-produced or resold." There are no strict rules about what is defined as "quality" handmade goods or vintage products, and in a market with a wide product variety, this creates a quality control issue. In turn, what is and is not defined as "quality" is in the eye of the beholder, whether that of Sellers or Buyers. As a result, several Buyers and Sellers noted that the one thing they dislike about Etsy is the "lack of quality control." Moreover, the overwhelming growth of Etsy's market prompts a market saturation issue, which is discussed further in the next section.

Drowning in Competition

Rapid growth has generated another growing pain for Etsy's market: too much product variety. Lilly, a long time Buyer and one-time Seller describes this problem.

L: Sometimes, it can be challenging because there is so much merchandise. I mean that's the great thing about it. Is that you have a ton of choice! But sometimes when you have too much choice, it's like, "I don't even want to go through all this. It's too much, like, this is too much for me to go over."

Participants that are both Buyers and Sellers often mentioned that Etsy's growth is great, but the market is flooded, thereby making it equally challenging for Buyers and Sellers. As Lilly comments, it can be too much for Buyers, as there is an endless array to search through, and the lack of standards within Etsy can compound this problem further, making it even more difficult to find a particular item.

For Sellers, the increasing market space can make it difficult and sometimes impossible to be found in a product search. Erin, a long time Seller speaks to this problem, "And then there's SO MUCH competition now! You really have to be on top of listing stuff. [Making sure that] you're on peak times of the day or listing stuff all day long, and making stuff. It's hard to get seen." Erin brings to light that while the growth experienced by Etsy is beneficial to its market by attracting consumers, at the same time, this makes it difficult for Sellers to stand out. To do so, a Seller really has to be active on Etsy and in the shop. Erin also brings an interesting point to light: that there is strategy involved particular to selling on Etsy. As a Seller, I had a similar experience, in that I was the most successful when I was online in my shop posting items or even just poking around, posting to Forums and Blogs. It got overwhelming at times, as I constantly needed to make, photograph, and post products as well as engage with the community in order to be successful.

The growth of Etsy's market signals that it is a healthy, successful, and popular platform for makers and Sellers of handmade and vintage goods, as well as consumers of these products. Yet, the data indicate that this growth prompts new challenges to this market for Etsy Administrators, Buyers, as well as Sellers. Etsy Administration had to introduce mass manufacturing to allow successful Sellers to grow, causing mixed reactions among Sellers as well as some Buyers. Sellers and Buyers recognize that the growth of Etsy's market has also created quality control issues, and particular to Sellers, this makes it increasingly difficult to gain a share of Etsy's market.

The exchanges that take place within Etsy's market shape four key member roles: Etsy Administrators, Sellers, Buyers, and Prosumers. Etsy Administration acts as a governing body of Etsy's market by enforcing rules, mediating problems, as well as providing online communication channels and social media to facilitate communication among market members. Offline activities and events as well as social media are used by Etsy Administration to capture Seller's opinions and feedback about Etsy's market and facilitate networking among Sellers. Despite Etsy Administration's efforts to capture Seller as well as Buyer opinions, both have mixed views on the true impact they have on Etsy's market practices. Last, Etsy fills a particular niche that is not satisfied in the current marketplace, which has led to its rapid growth and success. Unfortunately, this success prompts issues that Etsy Administration has sought to resolve, such as mass manufacturing and quality control. As will be discussed in the next chapter, such issues reflect one of the most unique aspects of Etsy's market, which is its introduction of a moral compass into online retailing.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the last of three conceptual areas used to structure the interpretation of the data, that of Etsy as a market. I introduced four themes— *Creating Member Roles*, *Crafting Etsy's Market*, *Filling the Niche*, *Mixed Emotions*, and *Growing Pains*— which described the roles of market players, the structure of Etsy's market, as well as the overall market environment. In the next chapter, I discuss how the findings presented in the three thematic interpretation chapters, *Uncovering Etsy's Culture*, *Etsy as a Community*, and *Etsy as a Market*, align with the literature introduced in Chapter II as well as the conceptual framework used to guide this dissertation.

CHAPTER VII

THEORIZING THE INTERPRETATION

Netnographic and ethnographic data collection within Etsy's community provided findings that give shape to the purpose of this dissertation, which is to understand how Etsy functions as both a community and an online, craft-oriented marketplace. These findings shed light on Etsy from a cultural, community, and market perspective, and are the basis of the thematic interpretation chapters of this dissertation. In order to fully address the purpose of this study, in this chapter, the theoretical implications of these findings are tied back to substantive issues in the culture, community, and market literature that were discussed in Chapter II.

The substantive areas of culture, community, and market do not always stand alone, instead they often intersect and overlap, influencing and shaping one another. As such, a conceptual framework was developed and presented in Chapter II to diagram these relationships and provide structure to the pursuit of the purpose and objectives of this dissertation (see Figure 31). The conceptual framework was situated in a sociological perspective within the context of consumer behavior research. Thus, in this chapter I offer insights into Etsy as a craft-oriented marketplace relative to consumer behavior as well as sociological research. To structure this chapter, the discussion of theoretical implications is organized into three sections: (1) *Community and Culture*, (2) *Blurred*

Lines: Etsy's Community and Markets, and (3) Etsy's Market and Beyond. Each is discussed in turn.

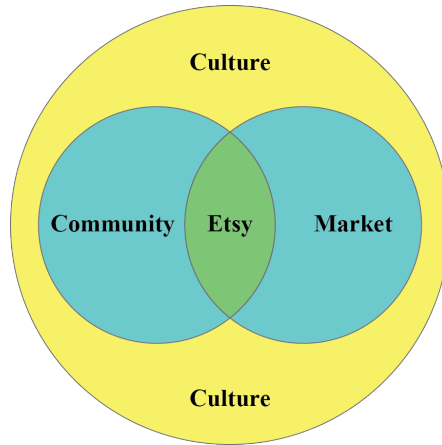


Figure 31. Conceptual Framework: Exploring Etsy's Culture, Community, and Market

Community and Culture

The first objective of this study is to explore what it means to be a member of Etsy's community. To this end, three guiding research questions were developed: (1) *How does participation in the exchange of goods within Etsy shape members' various roles?* (2) *How does interaction between members and their various roles shape Etsy as a community?* and, (3) *How are the values and ideals of Etsy members reflected in their various interactions?* These questions were used to frame the discussion of how the data relate to the substantive areas of literature presented in Chapter II and the conceptual model used in this study. The following discussion explores how the thematic interpretation points to issues of importance in the literature on community and culture, as well as the convergence of these two concepts within the context of Etsy. Dimensions of this discussion are presented in the following four sections: (a) *Sellers At The Center,*

(b) *Individualizing the Experience*, (c) *Constructing a Craft Culture*, and (d) *Molding Etsy as a Community*.

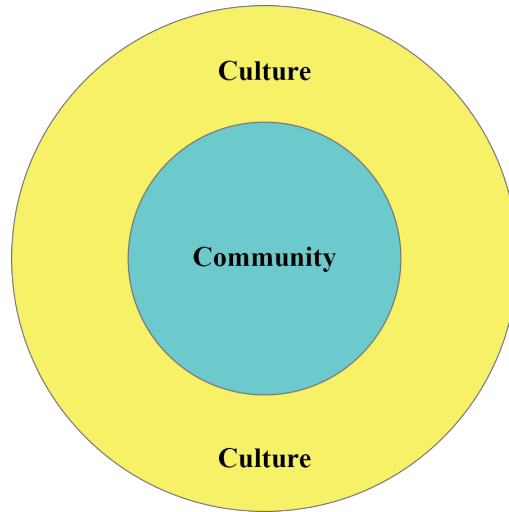


Figure 32. Conceptual Framework: Focus on Etsy's Culture and Community

Sellers at the Center

As discussed in Chapters V and VI, Sellers are the nucleus of Etsy's community-based market. The act of exchanging goods is the cornerstone of Etsy's community and market, and without Sellers, Etsy would not exist. At the same time, without Buyers to purchase the merchandise, Sellers would not have a market. The literature on markets asserts that all markets rely on two key parties: producers and consumers. Etsy is no exception. Producers are those who create and sell goods, and consumers are those who purchase and/or consume goods (Fourcade, 2007). In the case of Etsy, Sellers are the producers and Buyers are the consumers. However, in contrast to the traditional market concept (Fourcade, 2007), Etsy's market relies on an additional market player —Etsy

Administrators— who assume a producer role. Nicole’s discussion of Etsy

Administration’s overall goals for Sellers provides insight into this unique role.

N: We are there to help you [achieve] your goals. Whatever that may be. For some people that means you just starting a business, might be a life long dream. For other people that is quitting your day job. For some people that’s a supplemental income. So, there is a huge range of ways that our Sellers and our community define success. So it makes our job pretty complicated.

As discussed throughout the interpretation chapters, Etsy Administration oversees the exchange process, providing structure and governance to Etsy’s market. Similar to other electronic markets, such as Amazon and eBay, Etsy relies on key market players, in this case, Buyers, Sellers, and Administrators (employees). Different from traditional markets, though, findings of this dissertation indicate that Etsy has its own culture, and this culture is shaped by and through the market roles of Seller, Buyer, and Administrator.

The exchange of goods and services between Buyers and Sellers creates, fosters, and supports Etsy’s market. In turn, the unique nature of Etsy’s market requires guidance from the additional market player of Administrator. Again, this makes Etsy similar to other electronic markets like Amazon and eBay (Blanchflower & Hodges, 2013a, 2013b). For instance, eBay, like Etsy, relies on customers to join their selling service and set up a shop (Sellers) to sell goods to eBay members (Buyers). eBay employs people (Administration) to regulate these market exchanges. In addition, as with Etsy, the majority of eBay’s revenue is from shop owner sales and shop fees. Similar to Etsy, eBay relies on the exchange of goods and services, as well as eBay employees to regulate,

craft, and maintain its electronic market platform. This interpretation of Etsy points to the ways that Etsy is a product of a reciprocal relationship between culture, community, and market as each influences the other to create Etsy. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the culture of Etsy's community and market are similarly shaped through this reciprocal process.

Although each role is vital to Etsy's market, it was found that the Seller has the most influence over its structure. Buyers, Etsy Administrators, and even Sellers recognize that the community aspect of Etsy's market is focused on and driven by the Seller. As such, in discussions, participants often referred to the Seller when discussing how Etsy's culture, market, and community are shaped. As shared in Chapter IV, Nicole, an Etsy Administrator stated, "...I would say when people talk about the Etsy community, they are often are thinking of the Sellers..." Traditional consumption community research has shown that the end consumer (e.g., the Buyer) is often in the driver's seat in the shaping of these communities (i.e., brand communities and new consumption communities) (Adjei, Noble, & Noble, 2009; Akar & Topçu, 2011; Hung, Li, & Tse, 2011; Kunz & Hackworth, 2010; Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012). With Etsy, however, as end consumer, the Buyer is not necessarily doing the shaping. Rather, it is the Seller, a middleman in the market, that largely shapes Etsy's community. This finding therefore expands on current consumption community research by adding a new type of consumer, the producer, as a member of communities that bond over consumption. In the case of Etsy, the producer is not operating as distinct from the market and others within it. Instead the producer is the maker of goods (crafts) that ultimately give shape to the

market (Etsy) in which their community exists. The idea that Etsy's community is Seller-focused is important to note and to keep in mind moving forward, as it shapes the direction of subsequent discussions of the interpretation relative to the literature introduced in Chapter II.

As discussed in Chapter VI, Buyers, Sellers, and Etsy Administration often assume an additional role within Etsy's market—the Prosumer—which occurs when the roles of producer and consumer converge (Kotler, 1986). Erin, the longest-running Seller interviewed, shared how she entered into this additional role.

E: I did not start out with the intent of selling, so I started buying first. And then I started selling. I started with dog beds, because I have two big dogs that are also filthy... a big dog bed, they are super expensive or so thick that you can't wash them. So I started making my own.

In this passage Erin shares that she started as a Buyer on Etsy, but over time became a Seller to fulfill a need in the pet market. Yet, as a Seller she still purchases products and therefore maintains an identity as a Buyer. Many of the participants interviewed for this study share a very similar story. Overlap between the roles of producer and consumer in a given market is common practice according to the electronic market literature, in that the roles of market actors within electronic markets often converge, as members assume the role of the prosumer (Denegri-Knott & Zwick, 2012; Kim & Wulf, 2009; Kotler, 1986). This dissertation highlights how Etsy's market includes the Prosumer as an additional market member.

Etsy's market also includes instances wherein Etsy Administration assume all of the roles in the market through buying, selling and working to regulate Etsy's market. As

discussed in Chapter VI, many of Etsy's Administrators are encouraged to sell on Etsy and have an Etsy shop. For instance, Janice, an Etsy Administrator, is in charge of the Seller Handbook, and often writes the Etsy's *How-Tuesday DIY*: She is also the shop owner of YourSecretAdmiral, where she sells handcrafted paper goods (see Figure 33 and Figure 34).

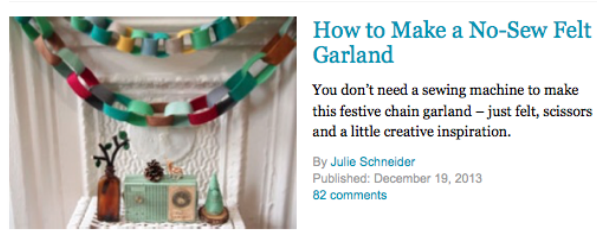


Figure 33. Example of Janice's Work for Sale on Etsy

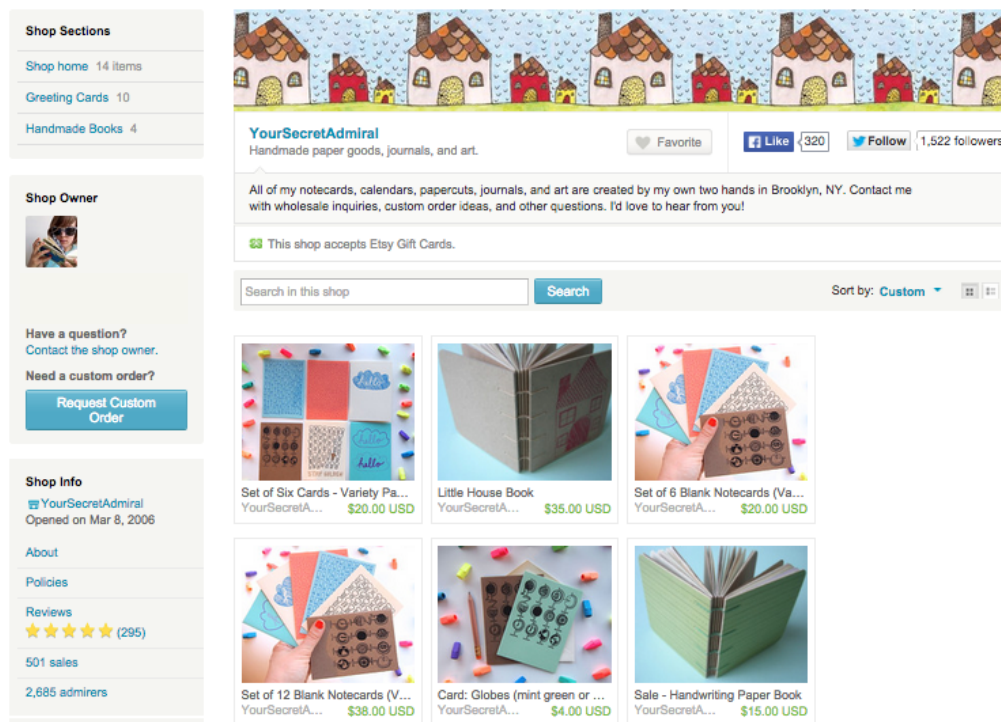


Figure 34. Screen Capture of Janice's Shop

Janice's experience helps to illustrate the different roles that Administrators often assume within Etsy. Moreover, Etsy Administration can also be Buyers, and as a result they take on a threefold market role as Seller, Buyer, and Administrator. These additional roles make the market appreciably more complex than other electronic markets discussed in the existing literature. At the same time, findings of this study indicate that Etsy benefits when Administrators take on additional roles because then they are better in-tune with Sellers' needs and market problems.

Consumer Behavior research has shown that prosumers are actually a valuable brand asset (Füller, Matzler, & Hoppe, 2008; Kim, Bae, & Kang, 2008; Maria & Finotto, 2008; Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Wu & Fang, 2010). For instance, de Almeida, Dholakia, and Vianello's (2007) study revealed that collaboration between a brand and its community is a lucrative and efficient way to innovate on existing products. Particular to Etsy, Administrative Prosumers benefit Etsy's business, market, and community. When an employee of a community-based market becomes a consumer and producer within that market, everyone benefits, including the overall market. Past prosumer literature has not explored in-depth the role of prosumers in communities, such as Etsy, that bond over consumption. Thus, findings of this dissertation help to add new dimensions to existing research on the topic.

Individualizing the Experience

A finding that emerged frequently within the interpretation is that the free-flow nature of Etsy's platform allows Sellers to shape their own community- and market-related experiences. Accordingly, the interpretation revealed that Sellers share varying

perspectives on what it means to be part of Etsy's community. Indeed, these participants referred to the number of interactions they had with other Sellers, Buyers, and Etsy Administration as a way to describe their engagement and role within Etsy's community and market.

Imagined Etsy. Some Sellers, like Josie, an owner of two shops, have virtually no interaction with other members beyond filling a few special orders. Despite this limited interaction, Josie knows that Etsy's community exists, and therefore feels like she can reach out to it whenever she needs help. Josie shared,

J: In general I feel like the community is really receptive, and even though I don't use it more.... I do sense that they do have standards to uphold, and you know I think it's evident that they really care about Etsy itself.

This excerpt illustrates that despite Josie's limited interactions within Etsy's market, she knows Etsy's community exists and that its members share common goals. Josie's perspective of Etsy's community can be best explained by Anderson's (1983) imagined community perspective. Anderson's perspective supports the idea that community can exist without temporal boundaries and strong ties. Most importantly, Anderson asserts that not all members of a community have to engage with one another to know that community exists, which is indeed the case with Josie and other like-minded participants. Thus, it can be said that Etsy's community falls under the guise of Anderson's (1983) imagined community perspective, as members who have limited interaction with other members feel that they belong to a community. Like other studies within the community and consumption literature, this finding illustrates how Anderson's (1983) imagined

community perspective can be adopted and used in the field of consumer behavior (Akar & Topçu, 2011; de Almeida, Dholakia, & Vianello, 2007; Hung, Li, & Tse, 2011; Kunz & Hackworth, 2010; Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). In particular, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) use Anderson's imagined community concept to build the case for brand communities.

Etsy as a networked community. As shared in Chapter VI, some Sellers engage with Etsy's community by posting to Blogs and Forums, creating Treasuries, as well as interacting with other Buyers via Etsy Convos, whereas other Sellers have minimal to no interaction with Etsy's community. In the following quote, Madison, a well-seasoned Seller, shares her experience, "Etsy does create that Pen Pal feeling, where, people will send me pictures from their vacations, and things that don't even have to do with FurryFriends. We've created friendships I guess." For Madison, and many other Sellers, experiences with Etsy's community are shaped by frequent and in-depth interaction between Buyers, Sellers, and sometimes Etsy Administrators. For these Sellers, being part of Etsy's community is associated with being an involved and active member, a perspective that, as will be discussed next, corresponds with each of the four tenets of the network as communities perspective (Granovetter, 1973; Rheingold, 1993; Studdert, 2005; Wellman, 1999).

The first tenet of the network as communities perspective asserts that an individual can be a member of multiple communities at one time (Studdert, 2005; Wellman, 1999). Indeed, throughout the interpretation chapters, particularly Chapters V and VI, it was revealed that many members in this study are members of multiple smaller

communities within Etsy. For instance, Laura, a vintage Seller, is a member of the Etsy Team Epstein, which is a smaller community within Etsy.

Second, the network as communities perspective asserts that members form specialized relationships with one another. This is the case with many participants. In the excerpt below, Laura, the owner of a vintage shop, shares this experience.

L: ...I've kind of made sort of virtual friends with a woman in um... Scandinavia, and it's an ongoing thing, we communicate a lot. Her name is Ruby, and she e-mailed me one day and she had a question about a particular piece [Scandinavian dish].

Similar to other Sellers on Etsy, Laura formed a relationship with Ruby over a series of exchanges related to the purchase of this dish. Over the course of these exchanges, Laura found out that Ruby was an expert in Scandinavian pottery, and every now and then Laura reaches out to Ruby to get additional information about other Scandinavian items in her shop.

Third, the networks as communities perspective posits that interactions among members are mediated online. Interpretation revealed that the majority of participants communicated exclusively via social media. For instance, when asked about engaging with other members, the majority of Buyers and Sellers interviewed for this study had limited to no engagement with other members outside of Etsy's platform.

The last tenet of the networks as communities perspective states that communities can exist even if members do not share the same reason for joining (Studdert, 2005). Particular to Etsy, the interpretation of data revealed that community members have multiple reasons for joining Etsy. For example, some Sellers sell for fun, as is the case for

Josie. She described her second shop as a way to fund and justify her auction and estate sale habit. For others, like Margaret, selling on Etsy is a career. As discussed in Chapter VI, Etsy Administration often features these Sellers on its Blog, usually under the heading “Quit Your Day Job.”

Review of the pertinent literature on community in Chapter II revealed that there are myriad definitions and perspectives on community (Hillery, 1955; Keller, 2001; Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). Indeed, as discussed, a singular definition of community does not exist. Rather, the concept of community is contextual and one that mirrors members’ perspectives (Anderson, 1983; Rheingold, 2003). This would explain why each Seller paints a slightly different picture when describing her ideas of Etsy’s community. Likewise, members’ experiences can best be described as unique to their own particular goods, in as much as Sellers determine their own levels of engagement within Etsy’s community and market. For these reasons, Etsy’s community can be described as both an imagined community (Anderson, 1983) and a networked community (Rheingold, 2003). As highlighted in the literature on community (Anderson, 1983), although members may have varying ideas about the particular community, they share a core set of values and ideals. This sharing is what ultimately makes Etsy’s market a community of Sellers. That is, although Etsy’s members have varying ideas about its community, they share a core set of values and ideals, which are what makes Etsy’s market a community of Sellers, rather than a market of competition.

Constructing a Craft Culture

Members of Etsy's community—Sellers, Buyers or Administrators— share a core set of values that initially attracted them to sell, buy, or work for Etsy. To fully understand Etsy's community and market, the values and ideals that unite these individuals were explored in the thematic interpretation chapters. For instance, in Chapter V, Lilly, a Buyer, shares one of these values when describing why people are drawn to Etsy: "You just get this huge sampling of creativity, literally from all over the world, and you find stuff... it's neat that they just share stuff that you wouldn't find down the street." Like many other members, Lilly expressed an appreciation for the creativity of Etsy's markets and its Sellers. Additional values and ideals that members share include a love for handmade craft and the process of making it, admiring uniqueness, and expecting honesty and transparency in the production and exchange processes.

Social media is the tool that members use most often to communicate these values and ideals. For example, Anne, a Buyer, discusses her use of Etsy's social media and general public social media to learn about these values:

A: I usually just read the page [the shop's 'about' page], and read the reviews. If they have other external sites or something like that I will usually go off into there, or if there's something on Facebook, because I do like to learn about the people, so you like to learn their story.

Anne, like some other Buyers, uses these tools to learn more about the values and ideals that shape that particular Etsy Seller. Along these same lines, both Sellers and Etsy Administration use these tools to communicate their values to one another. In the

following passage, Mary, an Etsy Administrator, reveals the role of social media tools when discussing transparency.

M: One [value] that I'd say that we very much try to bring the whole community into is this idea of transparency... [W]e've been posting weather reports, which is like site-wide stats for the community for years, which is really quite rare to see a company sharing that much information. And then I think that we try to be incredibly open with the community, hosting Q&A's in the Forums, things like that, having... Town Hall [meetings]... where Sellers are able to ask their questions directly in a live environment, you know no editing... [A]t the same time we are trying to encourage Sellers to have that same kind of transparency with their Buyers.

This passage is an example of how Etsy Administration and Sellers use social media to share and shape these values. Such perspectives support the idea that Etsy's values and ideals are socially constructed, which is similar to the meaning-oriented perspective of culture discussed in the review of literature (Hatch, 1996; Kuper, 1999; Scott & Marshall, 2009). According to the meaning-oriented perspective, cultural frames are crafted through values and ideals, and these frames are then used to give meaning to everyday experiences (Scott & Marshall, 2009). In the case of Etsy, these frames are used to make sense of individual experiences within Etsy's community and market.

Particular to Etsy, the roles of Buyer, Seller, and Administrator require that members carry out different sets of activities. Consequently, members have varying community and market-related experiences. For instance, some of the activities an Administrator carries out include providing educational materials to Sellers and overseeing the exchange process between Sellers and Buyers. Whereas a typical Buyer's activities include searching and purchasing goods from Sellers, Buyers rarely engage

with Etsy Administration or the materials they provide to Etsy's community. As a result, the data reveal that Etsy Administration have different experiences and depths of understanding regarding Etsy's community and market when compared to Buyers. Although Buyers and Etsy Administration described Etsy's community as Seller-focused, Etsy Administration recognized that Sellers made business as well as personal connections within the community. In contrast, Buyers are not as aware of these exchanges. Lilly, a long-time Buyer, shares "...as a consumer I can kind of see where it's maybe more of a merchant's community, but I could definitely see where people would use it to connect with other Sellers..." This excerpt reflects the extent to which it was found that Buyers have a limited understanding of the depth and complexity of Etsy's community, especially when compared to Etsy Administration.

Juxtaposing the perspectives of Etsy Administration and Buyers highlights how the activities carried out in these roles serve as cultural frames, and how members use these frames to make meaning out of their experiences within Etsy. At the same time, values and ideals are socially constructed and organized (Scott & Marshall, 2009), therefore members make sense of their experiences through their roles within Etsy's community and market. In a similar vein, findings point to how these roles influence the development of subcultures within the larger culture of Etsy.

Market subcultures. Smaller segments of Etsy's community seem to unite over iterations of their shared values and ideals, thereby creating market subcultures within Etsy's larger culture. Again, the process of exchange influences Etsy's culture to the extent that these subcultures are crafted by the roles of buying, selling, and working for

Etsy. As shared in Chapter IV, Buyers expressed a core set of values. For example, Anne explains why she buys things on Etsy, “[it’s] always fun ‘cause it’s like you bought yourself a present... plus you just feel special when you get the little package and it’s done up really nice. It’s got the color and the bow and things like that.” In addition to unique product packaging, Buyers value good customer service, the personal touch of the exchange process, and the fact that they are supporting small business. Because these values are specifically shared among Buyers, this group of members emerged as a market subculture within Etsy’s larger culture (Hedbidge, 2002; Kozinets, 2010).

Sellers are another subculture within the Etsy community, but unlike Buyers, these participants seem to share a single overarching value: passion for making products. Erin, a Seller on Etsy, provides further context.

E: I think that most people [Sellers] want to, you know, hand-make and put their heart and soul into items. Have an appreciation, you know, that they can make the best thing they can make. I think that everybody kind of works from that ideal, you know, love what you do, and hope the person buying it loves it too.

As Erin describes, Sellers share a passion for making and selling their creations and collections, and this is the one value that all Sellers have in common, regardless of their interactions with other members. The passion for making, creating, collecting and selling within Etsy’s market binds these members, and creates a subculture within Etsy’s community that again, is shaped by a particular role in Etsy’s market.

Like Buyers and Sellers, Etsy Administration surfaced as another subcultural group within Etsy’s greater culture. Particular to Etsy Administration, the interpretation of the interview and observational data reveal that Etsy Administration shares values tied

back to Etsy's broader business mission. An excerpt from a conversation with Mary, an Etsy Administrator, reveals one of these values:

M: Um... and I think that is what's so exciting to me, is this idea of, Etsy leading to, you know literally a million businesses all over the world. That's, that our success is really actually representing the successes of so many more people.

Mary actually articulates a community-wide value, that of achieving success through helping others. The interpretation unveiled values, such as fostering market and Seller success, as well as giving back to local, national, and international communities. It is important to note that while only some Buyers expressed similar values, all Etsy Administrators interviewed and observed seemed to share them.

As seen throughout the interpretation chapters, a myriad of craft and vintage goods are sold on Etsy. Likewise, members have myriad perspectives on the notion of craft. The differences in the notion of craft, coupled with the endless array of goods sold on Etsy, fosters subcultures particular to the craft and vintage categories sold on Etsy. For instance, as shared in Chapter IV, Laura sells on Etsy because she admires vintage products, and in particular, mid-century design. On the other hand, Sabrina sells on Etsy because she enjoys making jewelry out of handcrafted materials. As a vintage Seller, Laura is just one of the many Sellers that belong to a market subculture within Etsy that is shaped by an interest in selling a particular category of goods. In Laura's case, it is a subculture formed around mid-century aesthetic. She relies on other members of this group when seeking information, as she explained,

L: Last night... I had a question about an item, and I went to someone on... Epstein Team. And I said, "I don't really know what this is? Is there a way to ask [a question]?" And she [a Team member] said, "Here you go!" And she sent me a link to a Forum... to ask people on that Team, what this [a piece of mid-century pottery] is. So it can be real helpful.

Laura's anecdote reveals the presence of subcultures within Etsy's larger culture. Like many other members, Laura engages in subcultures related to her shop. Thus, Etsy's subcultures are sometimes shaped by a trade or craft category (i.e., pottery, metal-smithing, and knitting) and/or business philosophy (vintage, sustainability, and organic consumption). Particular to Laura's example, the shared appreciation of mid-century modern design is not necessarily in opposition to Etsy's larger culture; rather it is a value that aligns individuals as a smaller segment of Etsy's community. That is, Etsy Sellers that share a specific set of values shaped by a trade interest or business philosophy, function as a subculture that supports the broader cultural norms.

According to Hebdige (2002), subcultures are typically defined as groups of individuals that share values and practices that are in opposition to mainstream culture. Contrary to this notion of subculture, Etsy's subcultures seem to align with the overall values and ideals of Etsy's larger culture and community. This particular finding is interesting, as it contradicts consumer behavior research that defines a subculture by the ways it goes against the mainstream. In contrast, Etsy's subcultures work toward mainstream Etsy cultural and community goals. Furthermore, community and consumption literature has not examined how market subcultures may exist within communities that bond over consumption. This dissertation sheds light on the role of subcultures within a community tied together through consumption.

Etsy as a participatory culture. Members of Etsy's community value artistic expression and civic engagement, which in turn fosters social interaction, social bonding, and relationship building. These aspects mirror Jenkins' (2006) notion of a participatory culture, which he describes as having "...relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing some type of information whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices" (p. 6). For instance, a participatory culture uses online resources to create and share information between experts and novices. The majority of the interactions and information shared between members occurs online via Etsy's social media: Etsy Convos, Blogs, and Forums. Laura, a newer but successful vintage Seller, shares her experience with Etsy Teams:

L: [Being a member of an Etsy Team]... it does give you a lot of exposure, and I have contacts now. When I have questions about an item, I go to people on those Teams [and] ask them questions. 'Cause they have been selling for a lot longer.

Laura's experience reflects other Sellers' experience with Etsy Teams. For the most part, Sellers find that these Teams allow them to connect to smaller groups of members within the larger whole of Etsy.

Etsy Administrators also use social media tools to share information with one another, as well as with Buyers and Sellers. For instance, when asked how Administration engages with Sellers, Mary, an Etsy Administrator, had the following to say, "I would probably say our Teams program and our Forums... those communication tools. Then we direct Convo. But Teams are really just such a great way to talk to such a larger group of people at one time." This excerpt reflects how some social media tools are

also used by Etsy Administration to provide materials to support the growth of Seller shops, and in turn, the growth of Etsy's market. This sentiment reflects the value shared by Administration of fostering success for Sellers and the overall market. To this end, Etsy Administration often takes on the expert role, sharing educational materials, such as Blog post and videos, to help Sellers be successful. Likewise, as seen throughout the thematic interpretation, there are many instances in which experts (seasoned Sellers) share information with novices (new Sellers) about their products or shops, often described by Sellers as "helping" each other out. For example, Erin, a seasoned Seller shares information with newer Sellers through her participation on an Etsy Team.

E: ...they were always there [Team members]... I think I was one of the more advanced Sellers, I was a little more seasoned than the rest of them. You know, I think I did a little more helping then they did for me. But, you know, definitely with getting your items seen in [the] Treasuries. And just a word of advice, they [Team members] were helpful in that aspect.

As this excerpt and other data reveal, seasoned Sellers often "help" novice Sellers by exchanging information designed to improve their shops and overall selling practices.

The act of information exchange between expert and novice is characteristic of a participatory culture. Moreover, the information exchanged in a participatory culture is often artistic or civic-natured (Jenkins, 2006; Kozinets, 2010). Particular to Etsy, the information exchanged between experts and novices is artistic in nature, as it fosters the creative processes of creating, merchandising, and selling products. With respect to the idea of civic engagement, as discussed in Chapter VI, Etsy Administration often shares

an interest in engagement activities hosted by Etsy, such as the Etsy Entrepreneurship program.

Finally, similar to other participatory cultures, Etsy is inviting and easy to join. As described in Chapter VI, Sellers feel that Etsy is a welcoming and supportive place to sell when compared to similar online markets. Fiona, an Etsy Seller, describes this sentiment when discussing why Etsy has become such a popular venue for selling handmade and craft goods.

F: [As a] Seller I think it's gotten to be so popular because it is such an easy-to-use format. I think people like to have control over their own shop, and the way that things are done. And Etsy, has a way of really making you feel empowered.

As reflected in the excerpt above and discussed in the interpretation chapters, Etsy is characterized as having a low social barrier to entry for a couple of reasons. For one thing, the data point to how Etsy Administration seeks to eliminate a cultural divide between craft and art, striving to make a platform wherein all levels of artisans, crafters, and collectors feel welcomed. For another, Etsy is inexpensive to join and shops are easy to maintain, and therefore are a low financial risk for Sellers.

Despite these similarities, the interpretation also revealed some differences in Etsy's culture that actually make it distinct from Jenkins' (2006) concept of participatory culture. First, Jenkins' (2006) idea of participatory culture often lives in an educational space related to artistic expression and civic engagement. In contrast, Etsy's culture is rooted in a market space, wherein exchanges occur between several different types of market players, specifically Buyers, Sellers, and Etsy Administrators. Another important

point of difference is that the driver of Etsy's culture is as much about the exchange of information about artistic expression as it is the exchange of goods for money, in that it is an electronic market.

In sum, Etsy's culture exhibits characteristics of a participatory culture, as it possesses the characteristics as outlined by Jenkins (2006): strong support for creating and sharing, exchange of knowledge from experts to novices, and relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement. However, Etsy's culture does not appear to be solely a participatory culture, rather, the values and ideals of a participatory culture are present within Etsy's culture. As discussed, Sellers share rather than harbor information to make the community as a whole successful. Likewise, Sellers often extend a helping hand, and are welcoming to all members, from novice Sellers to well-seasoned crafts people, artisans, and vintage collectors.

The values and ideals of a participatory culture support sharing knowledge and helping one another, which are values that make Etsy a community of Sellers, rather than a market of competing Sellers. This finding is important to the participatory culture, community, as well as market literatures, because it builds on what is currently known about consumption communities and participatory cultures. In particular, the identification of participatory cultural values and ideals are new to the consumption community as well as participatory culture literature. For this reason, this finding sheds light on how a participatory culture's values and ideals may exist with these kinds of communities. Furthermore, this finding provides insight into how sharing knowledge and building relationships among individuals in a market can actually cultivate and sustain a

community-based, non-competitive culture within an electronic market. Thus, in the following section, the values and ideals that make up Etsy's culture will be used to further discuss how Etsy is as much a community as it is a market.

Molding Etsy as a Community

Data interpretation revealed that members of Etsy's platform act as a community. Members engage with one another, form social bonds, and build relationships. As discussed in the previous section, a core set of values is what drives members together to forge bonds, and this, ultimately, is what creates Etsy's community. In this section, I examine the structure of Etsy's community further. To this end, findings are discussed relative to the community models that were introduced in Chapter II, including online communities, consumption communities, new consumption communities, and brand communities.

Etsy as an online community. As touched upon in the previous section, Etsy's members negotiate cultural values as a community, and this process occurs mostly via social media. These behaviors are similar to the behaviors of online communities (Rheingold, 2003). As shared in Chapter II, an online community can be defined as "social aggregations that emerge from the [Internet] when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 1993, p. 5). Based on this definition, there are two distinct characteristics of online communities: (1) members connect via computer-mediated communications and (2) they exist mainly in a virtual space (Rheingold, 2003).

The thematic interpretation chapters reveal that Sellers, Buyers, and Etsy Administration connect through computer-mediated communications using various social media tools. An example of this is provided in the following screen captures of Etsy Blog posts about new mass manufacturing policies (see Figures 35 and 36). These examples highlight just one of the many ways Etsy’s members use social media tools to communicate with one another. The thematic interpretation also revealed that there are multiple forms of social media used by Sellers, Buyers, and Etsy Administration, including: Etsy Forums, Blogs, Etsy Convos, and other public social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Clarifying Our Guidelines on Outside Manufacturing



Story by Sarah Abramson
Published on Jan 27, 2014 in Company News

Photo by JaneLKakaley

Sarah Abramson leads Etsy's Marketplace Integrity team, working with sellers to make sure the items on Etsy comply with our guidelines.

In October, we announced some [changes to our policies](#) on selling handmade goods. Specifically, we clarified that sellers can hire help or work with individual collaborators to produce their goods, so long as they list everyone involved in their shop. We also gave the greenlight to shipping or fulfillment services, so long as sellers take responsibility for their customer's experience personally.

And we introduced an [application process](#) if you want to partner with manufacturers to produce your designs. A manufacturer is any outside business that helps make your items.



Sarah

Figure 35. Clarifying Our Guidelines on Outside Manufacturing

New Guidelines for Etsy Shops
 In eight years, you've grown Etsy in amazing ways we never predicted. It's time for our policies to catch up.

The size of your shop is up to you.
 Hire help if you need it or collaborate, even from different locations. Everyone who helps you make handmade items should be listed on your shop's About page.

You can use shipping and fulfillment services.
 If it's right for your business you can let someone else handle these logistics. Keep in mind that shop owners are ultimately responsible for buyers' customer service experience.

Manufacturers can help you produce your designs.
 Sellers create their handmade items in many different ways. Partnering with an outside business is okay, but we'll require you to be honest about how your items are made.

We've made some changes.
 These new policies are crafted to support a diverse community of makers, designers and curators — from the solo artisan just starting out, to the full-time seller hiring staff, to the artist who partners with a manufacturer to bring her creations to life.

[Watch Etsy's CEO explain why we've updated our policies.](#)

Figure 36. New Guidelines for Etsy Shops

Etsy's use of social media satisfies the first characteristic of an online community, which is that members connect via computer-mediated communications. The second characteristic of an online community is that it exists mainly online. As mentioned several times in the thematic interpretation chapters of this dissertation, Etsy's community exists mainly online. While there are opportunities to connect offline, the majority of members do so online via social media. In sum, Etsy's community satisfies the two requirements of an online community and therefore fits within the concept of an online community.

Etsy as a consumption community. By that same token, Etsy is also a consumption community, and is so in several ways. As described in Chapter II, a consumption community shares four key characteristics: (1) community members are socially linked via consumption of goods and services, (2) community members shape consumption experiences, (3) community members interpret and agree upon brand messages, philosophies or ideologies related to the production and consumption of goods and services, and (4) members may belong to several different consumption communities

(Cova, 1997; Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1988; Thomas, Schau, & Price, 2011). The thematic interpretation revealed that Etsy indeed possesses characteristics of a consumption community.

Within Chapter V, the data revealed that, like consumption communities, members are socially linked via the exchange process and the consumption of Etsy's services. For instance, Laura, a Seller shared that Etsy "...feels like, kind of like a family, the community, and the support [is there] when I expect, when I need it, I get support...it's my, my [home] base." This is consistent with the first characteristic required of a consumption community, which is that members are socially linked via the consumption of a particular good or service (Cova, 1997; Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Thomas, Schau, & Price, 2011). In the case of Etsy, Sellers create and share social relationships over the consumption of the site's selling service.

Etsy's community also exhibits the second characteristic of a consumption community, as Sellers shape their own consumption experiences (Cova & Pace, 2006; Cova, Pace, & Park, 2007; Thomas, Schau, & Price, 2011). For instance, as discussed in the thematic interpretation, Etsy encourages Sellers to craft their own selling experiences. When explaining her role at Etsy, Nicole, an Etsy Administrator says, "We are there to help you [the Sellers achieve] your goals. Whatever that may be." This quote captures Etsy's perspective on the Seller experience. As with other consumption communities, Etsy wants Sellers to be fully in charge of their selling experiences. In turn, Sellers are required to create their own shop policies, practices, and merchandise. Thus, like

consumption communities, Sellers craft their own experiences, but in this case it is through the consumption of Etsy's selling service, rather than a specific brand or product.

The third characteristic of a consumption community is that members interpret and agree on brand philosophies and ideologies related to the production of goods (Cova & Pace, 2006; Cova, Pace, & Park, 2007; Thomas, Schau, & Price, 2011). Indeed, some of Etsy's Sellers participate in activities related to the interpretation and negotiation of philosophies and ideologies that shape Etsy's market. For instance, Figure 35, *Clarifying Our Guidelines on Outside Manufacturing*, and Figure 36, *New Guidelines for Etsy shops*, above capture a community discussion about mass manufacturing on Etsy. These conversations show how Sellers use Forums and Blogs to engage one another and discuss the philosophies and ideologies that shape the products sold on Etsy as well as the nature of production and exchange processes. This reveals that, similar to the discussion of consumption communities in the literature, Etsy's members interpret and agree on Etsy's philosophies and ideologies related to it.

The last characteristic of a consumption community is that members often belong to other consumption communities (Cova & Pace, 2006; Cova, Pace, & Park, 2007; Thomas, Schau, & Price, 2011). As discussed at length in this chapter and the interpretation chapters of this dissertation, Sellers often create smaller networks within Etsy, known as Etsy Teams. These Teams are smaller communities embedded within Etsy, and their members often unite over a shared interest in particular type of craft or vintage category. For instance, Laura, a vintage Seller, is also a member of the Epstein

Team. As discussed earlier, members in this particular Team bond over a shared appreciation for the collection, curation, and retailing of mid-century designs.

This dissertation expands on consumption community research by investigating a community that bonds over the consumption services provided by a market. Previous consumption community research has a narrower focus, examining consumption communities that bond over the consumption of products, services, or ideas. As such, findings of this dissertation reveal how consumption communities can exist within a closed market, such as an electronic retail market. Second, as is the case with Etsy, these communities can exist online, and, as such, they rely heavily on social media tools to shape and manage them. Third, smaller communities within these communities often shape the larger community, as is the case with Etsy. Last, these smaller communities often bond over their roles (e.g., Seller) and/or the product categories they sell (e.g., mid-century) in Etsy's market.

New consumption communities. Many of the values and ideals of Etsy's Seller-based community fit with the conditions of a consumption community. However, it can also be said that Etsy's community values and ideals are similar to those of a new consumption community. Szmigin and Carrigan (2003) introduced and established the idea of new consumption communities by conducting an exploratory investigation of two counter-culture consumption communities: *Ithaca Hours* and *Garstang Fair Trade Town*. In short, a new consumption community is a consumption collective that exhibits consumption behaviors and habits counter to mainstream culture. Specifically, members are often unified by the goal to create a market that counters mainstream corporate

culture, and are also typically geographically bound (Bekin, Szmigin, & Carrigan, 2005, 2007; Szmigin & Carrigan, 2003).

As with the notion of new consumption communities, data collected for this dissertation indicate that Sellers and Etsy Administration often engage in behaviors counter to mainstream corporate culture. For instance, some Sellers engage in counter-culture market practices, such as bartering and sharing selling strategies and advice. Likewise, in the following conversation with Samantha, a long time Buyer, an example of this counter-culture mindset emerges as a motivation for shopping on Etsy:

S: ...well you know, as I sit here in all of my mass produced, crappy clothes...

Me: But, you can't buy everything handmade all the time. That is not the world we live in.

S: But, you know, as far as gift giving, or even when I just buy things for myself. I really do, as a personal value, really like supporting the little guy, someone who has a skill set.

In this conversation Samantha reveals that, like other members, she likes to shop on Etsy as a way to support small businesses. Moreover, she shares that it is a "personal value" that drives her overall purchase decisions. Other members, including Sellers, Buyers, and Administrators, expressed similar sentiments, sharing that by purchasing on Etsy they felt they were doing something good by giving back to small business, rather than corporations. These findings reflect Szmigin and Carrigan's (2003) assumptions about new consumption communities. Moreover, the authors suggest that new consumption community members are concerned about the community and/or the environment. In general, these members are looking to make the world better by engaging in new

consumption processes or practices (Szmigin & Carrigan, 2003). The same can be said for many members of the Etsy community.

Although Etsy has the markers of a new consumption community, it is important to note that it is a case of a new consumption community that is less extreme than others. For instance, the consumption communities studied by Szmigin and Carrigan (2003) did not engage in a capitalist market economy, instead they were closed markets that relied on the exchange of human resources, such as time, rather than money. Moreover, it appears that members of *Ithaca Hours* and *Garstang Fair Trade Town* were unified by this anti-corporation sentiment. In the present study, not all members of Etsy's community share the same level of passion or interest in "changing the world" through commerce. Last, Etsy is primarily an online community, whereas the majority of new consumption communities discussed in the literature are offline communities.

These theoretical reflections on the thematic interpretation add to the body of knowledge within new consumption community research in two ways. First, they provide additional insight into the structure of a new consumption community, as this is a newer topic, and therefore there is a scant amount of research. Specifically, this dissertation provides insight into a new consumption community that exists within the capitalist market context rather than against it (Szmigin & Carrigan, 2003). Second, Etsy is mostly an online community. As such, as a community it harnesses the power of online technologies, such as social media to spread and reinforce its particular counter-culture market messages and practices. Altogether, findings reveal that in the case of Etsy, new

consumption communities can exist as part of a traditional market and within the online context.

Etsy as a brand community. As members of Etsy's community-based market, participants expressed a love and admiration for not only selling handmade goods, but for Etsy as an online market in which to sell their goods. To this end, it appears that some Sellers bond over a shared love or admiration for Etsy. This sentiment can be explained by Muñiz and O'Guinn's brand community model (2001), which is defined as a specialized community that shares social relationships based on an admiration for a brand. Specifically, the thematic interpretation revealed that Etsy's Sellers exhibited the three markers of a brand community (with Etsy as the brand), which are: consciousness of kind (love for selling handmade), moral responsibilities (honesty and transparency in product production and sale), as well as rituals and traditions (the act of selling, sharing information, and handmade process) (p. 412).

The data also reveal that some Sellers enjoy the community aspect of Etsy's market; seeking out and building social bonds with other members. For instance, the interpretation revealed instances in which Buyers and Sellers formed friendships through the exchange process. In the following passage, Madison, a Seller, shares her perspective on this issue.

M: Maybe it's just me, but I hold myself to a standard, where... I think of them [Buyers] as family and friends, where if I have a conversation with somebody I always want it to be on that level, where it's not super dry business like, where it's more friendly, but also have the business aspect, where you get a timely response...

Madison's point is just one example of how members, including Sellers, Buyers, and Etsy Administration, create friendships within Etsy's community. This type of behavior can be explained by findings in McAlexander et al.'s (2002) study, indicating that individuals join brand communities to engage not just with the brand, but with other consumers, and even marketers, of the brand.

As shared in Chapter VI, Sellers often join Etsy instead of its competitors because they think Etsy provides a new or different selling opportunity. Fiona, a Seller on Etsy, shares this community sentiment.

F: [Selling on Etsy]...it seemed just like the perfect fit. We thought about listing them [her products] on Craigslist, but it just didn't seem like the right Forum. And I had used Etsy enough that I knew it would be the perfect place to list them. Um...actually, till this day I still don't know where else I would have sold them.

Fiona, as with other Sellers, thinks that Etsy provides such a unique platform that nothing else really compares. In turn, and as Fiona mentions at the end of her excerpt, many Sellers do not know of other sites to sell their goods. The perceived uniqueness of Etsy's market can be explained by a finding from Muñiz and Schau's (2005) brand community study. In this study, the authors concluded that brand communities provide consumers with an alternative consumption experience by making the consumption process a communal rather than an individual experience. Consequently, the authors concluded that brand communities have "remystified community." Similar to Muñiz and Shau's (2005) brand communities, Etsy "remystifies community" for its consumers. However, in the case of Etsy, community is remystified for Sellers. Randy, an Etsy Administrator touches on this idea in the following excerpt.

R: I think some Sellers are drawn by our mission. I think some Sellers are drawn by our fee structure. Um... [for some Sellers they] understand we get a fair amount of traffic. So, I think that there are those practical considerations and sometimes the moral considerations.

Randy provides four explanations as to why Sellers join Etsy: its mission, fee structure, site traffic, and moral considerations. It is important to note that Randy begins his comment citing Etsy's mission and then ends by suggesting its moral considerations as reasons why Sellers choose to sell on Etsy. In contrast to the existing discussion on the topic, this point suggests that the remystification of community for Etsy is also tied to the remystification of the market. For this reason, the remystification of community within the realm of Etsy is much more complex, and differs notably from what has been explored previously within brand community research.

In the case of Etsy, the convergence of community and consumption occurs among consumers within a market, not necessarily consumers who simply admire a brand. Second, Etsy's community members are Prosumers, consuming Etsy's selling service and at the same time producing goods sold within its market. Third, the products that are sold within Etsy's market ultimately shape the Etsy brand. This is in contrast to brand communities, wherein marketers and owners shape the brand's image and product offerings for the consumers. Last, the remystification of community for Sellers impacts Buyers, suggesting a type of relationship that has yet to surface within existing brand community research.

In short, it can be said that Etsy is unique and different from the current understanding of brand communities because Etsy integrates community into the entire

retailing experience, remystifying the notion of community from the producer side of the exchange process, rather than just the consumer side. Therefore, this dissertation contributes to the literature by providing perspective on how producing and selling goods can also remystify community, and in turn can remystify the market experience. It also adds insight into how producers within a market can bond over the experience of creating, merchandising, and selling goods within a market. Last, findings of this dissertation reveal that when producers share these types of bonds, a community can form within a market.

Community trust. Members of Etsy's community appear to be very trusting of Etsy as a business and of one another. For instance, Sellers feel comfortable sharing tips with one another about how to achieve market success. Likewise, Sellers express very little concern over other Sellers stealing ideas. In the passage below, Laura, a vintage Seller shares her perspective on community of trust.

L: There's a women in Kentucky, my home state...who's a Seller of ... fabric stuff, like old clothes, and old quilts, and this and that. And if I have a textile question, like how to clean something for example, I go to her, and she's super nice, very helpful. I have written her a couple of times with some questions. Um... "How do I describe this," because I'm not a textile person. And she'll say, "It's counted crossed," if it's this, or if it's that.

As revealed by Lilly, participants that are Sellers, for the most part, trust the information provided to them by other Sellers. Similarly, Sellers also trust Etsy Administration, often implementing tips, tools, and Etsy's moral mission into their shops. For instance, in Chapter VI, I shared my experience at two Etsy events, one of which was a handmade Valentine's Day Card workshop. For this workshop Etsy coordinated with City-Meals-

on-Wheels, a New York based organization that brings meals to citizens that are unable to leave their homes. During this event we crafted handmade Valentine's Day cards to accompany the meals that were delivered to seniors on Valentine's Day. This is just one example of how Sellers contribute to Etsy's moral mission.

Clearly, a unique aspect of Etsy is that Sellers trust Etsy and its Sellers, and are loyal to its community and mission. The trust and loyalty displayed by Sellers aligns with findings from Matzler et al.'s (2011) brand community study, which found that individuals who self-identified as members of a brand community had more loyalty to and trust in the brand when compared to those that did not identify themselves as members. Particular to the present study, it is obvious that loyal Sellers similarly trust Etsy's community and market. Moreover, it appears that for these members, being a Seller also means being a part of the community. However, unlike brand communities, a Seller is automatically a community member, as such, the concept of Seller and community member are one and the same.

In summary, the first aim of this section of the chapter was to explore the relationship between Etsy's culture and community as a means to address the intersection of two larger questions: *How is Etsy a culture?* and, *How is Etsy a community?* Based on the data it can be stated that Etsy has a culture which is shaped by all of its market members, including: Buyers, Sellers, and Administrators. However, Sellers are the most influential members. Similarly, Etsy's culture is shaped through a reciprocal and iterative process that involves negotiating, adopting, and integrating values within and across its community and market. Within Etsy's culture are subcultures, which are shaped by the

roles of different members within Etsy's market, as well as the products sold in it.

Although Etsy's market possesses characteristics of a participatory culture, its culture can be described as one that is equally shaped by its existence as a market and its community members' values and ideals. Specifically, Etsy's culture can be identified by the following values: (1) shared admiration for craft, handmade, and vintage goods, (2) shared desire for an alternative exchange experience, (3) shared search for uniqueness and creativity in market and product offerings, and (4) shared desire to give back to small business and local community.

The second aim of this section of the chapter was to explore how Etsy is a community. As discussed, as a community, Etsy aligns with several perspectives/models offered in the literature. For instance, in many ways Etsy appears to be an online consumption community, new consumption community, and brand community. However, the thematic interpretation indicates at least two points of difference between Etsy's community and these community models. First, unlike these community models, Etsy's market and community shape one another. Second, Etsy's market setting fosters the development of community members (e.g., Seller, Buyer) that do not exist within existing consumption community models.

All things considered, Etsy's community is unique within the community literature as examined in the field of consumer behavior. Unlike most consumption communities, Etsy's community relies on a market, which is made up of consumers/prosumers that manufacture the goods sold within the community. Community members bond over experiences with producing, merchandising, and

retailing craft, handmade, and/or vintage goods, not just over the end product. In the next section of this chapter, I further explore Etsy's community from a market perspective. To do so, I will examine how, as a community, Etsy operates as a market.

Blurred Lines: Etsy as Community and Market

The second objective of this study was to investigate the extent to which Etsy's community shapes its' practices and functions as a market. To achieve this objective, two research questions guided the exploration of the data: *(1) How do the products and services exchanged embody the values and ideals of the Etsy community?* And, *(2) How does collaboration between community members in the exchange of goods shape Etsy as a market?* These guiding research questions were used to frame the discussion of the data relative to the literature on markets and community, as well as the conceptual model used in this study. Overall, both questions focus on exploring the convergence of Etsy's community with its existence as a market (see Figure 37).

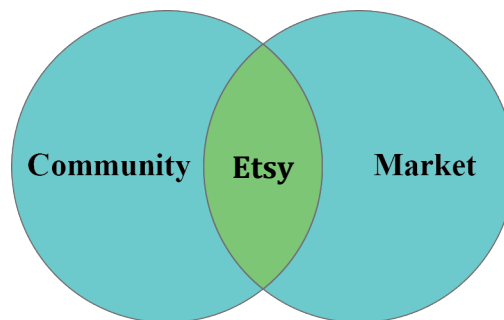


Figure 37. Conceptual Framework: Focus on the Integration of Etsy's Community and Market

Based on the thematic interpretation of the data, it is difficult to capture where Etsy's community stops and its market begins. Indeed, at times, exchanges between

Sellers and Buyers appear to be intensely personal, while at other times, strictly professional. Conversations with participants, as well as online observation, revealed that, among Sellers, market issues are community-based. Thus, some community issues are also market issues. The blurred line between Etsy's community and market aligns with the moral market literature, which treats markets, culture, and economy as interdependent within a society (Fourcade & Healy, 2007). Findings of the interpretation suggest that Etsy supports this foundational component of moralized markets, as there are indeed moments when market and community emerge as a united element within Etsy. In order to explore the theoretical implications of this phenomenon, and to investigate it in relation to how Etsy's community shapes its market practices and functions, three theoretical dimensions will be examined in the following sections: (a) *A Mirror Image*, (b) *Crafty Collaboration*, and (c) *Crafty Communications*.

A Mirror Image

The handmade products, craft goods, and vintage products sold on Etsy, as well as the way in which these goods are exchanged, mirror the values and ideals of Etsy's community. For instance, Sellers sell products that they feel are unique and/or creative, such as the example of the Chernofsky children's cups with lenticular eyes. Similarly, Buyers use Etsy to purchase goods and services that embody these values. Lilly, a Buyer, and one time shop owner, highlights this shared value when describing what draws people to Etsy, "You just get this huge sampling of creativity, literally from all over the world, and you find stuff... it's neat that they just share stuff that you wouldn't find down the street." Sellers seek to make the purchasing experience as unique and creative as the

products that they sell in their shops. In turn, Buyers expect “fan fare” when receiving products from an Etsy shop. Anne, a Buyer explains the excitement associated with receiving a package from Etsy, “[it’s] always fun ‘cause it’s like you bought yourself a present... plus you just feel special when you get the little package and it’s done up really nice. It’s got the color and the bow and things like that.” This love for not just the product but the process highlights the lack of distinction between what Etsy sells and what Etsy means to its members.

From this explanation it can be concluded that Etsy’s community values and its market values mirror one another, which is similar to the idea that values are shared among markets and societies. For instance, the premise of the moral market concept asserts that markets and societies are one and the same, and therefore they simultaneously influence one another and share values. The data revealed that Etsy’s community and market often influenced one another, resulting in the same set of core values.

However, in contrast, Sellers are the consumers of Etsy’s services. At the same time, Buyers are the consumers of Sellers’ products and services. Although brand community research has studied instances of co-collaboration between a brand and its consumers (Kim, Bae, & Kang, 2008; Maria & Finotto, 2008), no attention has been paid to brand communities that exist within a market. As such, the brand community model does not account for communities in which the consumers (Sellers) are actually the providers of the goods and the services of a brand (Etsy).

The process of mirroring values. The multiple consumers involved in Etsy’s market complicate how values are shared between consumers and the brand. Compared

to a typical brand community, like Harley Davidson, the cultural process of sharing and adopting values between the brand of Etsy and its consumers is more complex. For brand communities like Harley Davidson, what the brand stands for is what draws consumers together. In turn, the values of the brand are adopted and are what ultimately shape the brand community (Schau & Muñiz, 2002).

For Etsy the process is not the same. Instead, it involves feedback from community and market members. As discussed in the previous section, Buyers, Sellers, and Etsy's Administration are subcultures within Etsy. The values and ideals of these subcultures are shaped by their respective market roles, and influence the values and ideals of Etsy's community as a whole. To complicate matters further, Etsy's community influences the values and ideals adopted by its market, subcultures, and larger culture. In turn, the cultural process of adopting and revising values and ideals simultaneously involves its market and community. The interdependent relationship shared between Etsy's community and market results in a community that is continuously being molded by all members (Buyers, Sellers, and Administrators).

As an example, Etsy Administration values giving back to local, national, and regional communities. This value is reflected in Etsy's Special Delivery event, as explained on the website:

Valentine's Day is just around the corner, and with it comes an opportunity to extend some love and kindness. You may remember our Special Delivery project from years past, and we're excited to be working with City-Meals-on-Wheels to bring nutritious meals, handmade greeting cards and companionship to elderly Americans once again. (Etsy.com)

As this excerpt shows, this is an event that Etsy has offered multiple times, revealing that giving back is something that Etsy continuously does. However, this value is not fully adopted by all Buyers and Sellers, as many Sellers and most Buyers do not engage in these or similar activities either inside or outside of Etsy.

Regardless, because Etsy Administration is a subculture within Etsy, this value still shapes and influences its market. Madison, a successful Etsy Seller, discusses her own charitable contributions, "...from each Furry sold I'll take 10%... and I will hold it till I get 50 dollars and then I pick a different organizations to donate to." Similar to Etsy Administration, Madison values giving back to others. Madison does so by giving a portion of her proceeds to different dog charities.

Etsy Administration and Sellers often negotiate their shared values. A passage from Mary, a long time Etsy Administrator, demonstrates this point. Mary said, "... you know, the Captain Quarters Team was you know, 500 Captains 2 years ago and now it is well over 1,000. And that's just a lot more voices, and we want to be there to listen to them." This is just one of the ways that Etsy Administration works with Sellers to integrate community into the market side of Etsy.

As previously discussed, the values and ideals that shape Etsy's community are influenced by its community and market members. For instance, promoting honesty is a shared value found among Etsy members. Erin explained how she and other Sellers adopt this value instilled by Etsy's Administration and carry it out relative to stopping resellers.

E: Yeah, I'd say just about everybody, you know this was a huge problem before Etsy was bigger than this, but Admin would go on vacation on the weekends so there would be no Admin people there on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, and like

you'd get these resellers like from China and stuff would show up on you know, like, Thursday night and start selling crap you sell at the dollar store and like, pawning it off as handmade. And the Sellers would just like get together on the Forums, and be like, "I found the shop, flag it. It needs to get like 20 flags, and then it would notify Admin." ...you know, I think everybody has a really strong idea that it's got to be vintage or handmade feeling.

Obviously, these Sellers reinforce the values of honesty in Etsy's community and market.

Exchanges regarding values often occur through Etsy's social media platforms. For instance, community Forums provide a place where Sellers discuss, debate, and adopt values and ideals as a community-based market. This process is in line with the consumption community literature, which posits that consumption communities often negotiate a brand's meaning, philosophies or ideologies that shape the production and consumption of the brand's goods (Cova, 1997; Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1988; Thomas, Schau, & Price, 2011). Particular to Etsy, these findings reveal that, like consumption communities, Etsy's members negotiate the brand's meanings, philosophies, and ideologies, however, they also shape the production and exchange of goods within Etsy's market. Moreover, in the case of brand and consumption communities, when values and ideals are negotiated, it occurs in one of two ways: (1) between community members, and/or (2) between community members and the brand (McAlexander, Shouten, & Koenig, 2002). Yet, the roles of Administrators and Seller do not exist in such communities as they do in Etsy, nor are they influenced by market considerations, as Etsy is.

In sum, this dissertation contributes to brand and consumption community research by exploring a community that bonds over a shared interest in a market.

Through this exploration, it is clear that Etsy is unlike most brand and consumption communities because it is influenced and shaped by multiple producers (Sellers and Etsy Administration) and consumers (Sellers, Buyers and sometimes Etsy Administration), which do not exist within typical brand and consumption communities. Indeed, these members are distinct to Etsy's community, and help to mold the values and ideals that shape Etsy's market and community. In addition, compared to typical brand and consumption communities, members' values and ideals are integrated into the products sold on Etsy, which also influences its market. In short, this study contributes to the literature in the areas of consumption and brand community research by offering new dimensions to the understanding of how a community bonds over a market.

Crafty Collaboration

Etsy Administration provides information about selling on Etsy and its handmade mission, which serves as the foundation that Sellers use to influence and give shape to Etsy's market. As discussed in Chapter VI, Etsy educates its' Sellers about selling on Etsy via the Etsy Seller handbook, Blog, as well as Forum discussions. The data revealed that Sellers often support, add to, or critique this information as a community, providing additional information and insight. Moreover, Sellers adopt and mold selling information, as well as Etsy's handmade mission, to fit the needs of their own stores, as well as their own personal beliefs about selling on Etsy.

At the same time, Etsy Administration seeks out Sellers' opinions and feedback, as it wants to make sure the information it provides is in tune with Sellers' needs and values. For instance, the interpretation of data revealed that Etsy Administration uses

Teams, including its Prototype Teams, to gather information about Etsy and then shares this information with Sellers. Mary, an Etsy Administrator shares,

M: ... you know it's [Etsy's Prototype Teams] a way for us, to ask questions, and tons of Sellers to really, participate in that... It's something that we... want to continue, growing this sort of dialogue. Like, how do we create these discussions, around concerns that are really, that are really valid for our community? Um... learn from them and then deliver solutions for them.

Teams, like the Prototype Teams, provide Administration with a deeper understanding of Sellers' concerns and help them to develop possible solutions. In the following quote, Nicole shares additional ways Etsy Administration engages Sellers, "I think that we try to be incredibly open with community, hosting Q&As in the Forums, things like that, having a recent Town Hall... where Sellers are able to ask their questions directly in a live environment." Etsy's Administration also uses face-to-face events, such as Etsy Craft Parties and Town Hall meetings, to engage with Sellers and listen to their feedback about various market- and community-related issues.

The collaboration that occurs among Sellers, as well as between Etsy Administration and Sellers ultimately shapes Etsy's market. This process is reflective of the moralization of markets (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). As discussed in Chapter II, one of the markers of a moralized market is that producers and consumers collaborate to shape the development of goods and services (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). With respect to Etsy, the producers of Etsy (Administration) shared several instances in which they seek to collaborate with their consumers (the Sellers). In a similar vein, collaboration between Sellers and Buyers can result in the production of products that meet Buyers' needs. To

this end, Etsy's market has layers of producer and consumer collaboration, each with the aim of producing products with and for consumers.

As discussed in the thematic interpretation chapters, Sellers often emphasize the importance of Buyer reviews, and Buyers emphasize the important role that these reviews play in their purchase decisions. For instance Catherine, a Buyer shared, "I like the reviews, reviews are important to me when I am buying something on Etsy, because I want to know the quality, and know the experience is good." Similar to traditional online markets, such as Amazon and eBay, customer service practices are shaped by how Sellers engage with Buyers. However, it is important to note that the interpretation revealed that the similarities shared among these electronic markets are minimal, and at most relate just to the technical components of running an e-commerce site (i.e., allowing customers to post reviews).

Crafty Communications

Findings of this study illustrate how Etsy's social media is the cornerstone of its market, as the former facilitates member-to-member interactions that allow for community/market collaboration to occur and to support market exchanges. In Chapter VI, I discussed the different purposes and applications of Etsy's social media tools by Administrators, Sellers, and Buyers. Specifically, all members of Etsy's community use Etsy Convos to carry out market collaborations and exchanges. In contrast to Etsy Convos, Etsy's Forums and Blogs are mainly used among Sellers and Etsy Administration to share information as well as discuss and negotiate market policies and practices.

The literature on virtual communities (Kozinets, 2010; Rheingold, 2003), brand communities (Muñiz & Schau, 2005), electronic markets (Gregg & Walczak, 2008; Tomoi, 2011), as well as moralized markets (Stehr & Adolf, 2007) suggests that social media platforms can and do facilitate collaboration between communities and markets. This collaboration was definitely found to be the case with Etsy, and is illustrated in the following passage from my observation notes:

During my online observation as a Seller, I participated in some of these activities, and experienced this “feedback loop.” For instance, I joined a couple of Etsy’s Prototype Teams, which is an online program used by Etsy Administration to get feedback from Sellers about tool prototypes. Etsy describes these Teams as places “for people who want to test and provide feedback on new Shop Stats Features before they’re available to everyone...” In particular, as a member of the “Shop Stats Improvement Team,” I used the tool in my shop and provided feedback to an Etsy Administrator about bugs as well as the tool’s overall usefulness.

This passage is just one example of the extent to which Etsy uses social media tools, tailor-made as well as public Forums, to foster collaboration among its market and community members. To this end, the interpretation of data points to how Etsy uses these online platforms as a location where producers and consumers can exchange and harmonize ideals and values to achieve market and community symmetry. Moreover, this notion further supports the idea that Etsy is a moralized market. For instance, Capecea and Costa (2011) found that when social networking sites are used to generate conversation between members, it actually enhances their overall sense of community. A point of difference between Etsy and other community models is that Etsy relies mostly on its own social media. Moreover, its social media tools are tailored to meet the needs of

its market and community, as was pointed out in the passage above about Etsy's Prototypes Teams.

A myriad of examples emerged from the data to highlight the similarities and differences between Etsy's community-based market and those discussed in the current community and market literatures. For one thing, Etsy's community and market act as interdependent elements. In turn, values and ideals shared within the market and community reflect one another. This finding is similar to those of Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001) and Fourcade and Healy's (2007) research. For another, and as found in studies on some consumption communities (Cova, 1997; Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998; McAlexander, Shouten, & Koenig, 2002), these values are shaped by collaboration, specifically collaboration between Buyers and Sellers, which is heavily mediated by Etsy's tailor-made social media, including its Forums, Blogs, and Convos.

At the same time, this process also brings to the forefront differences between Etsy and more conventional consumption communities and markets (Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2005; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). For instance, unlike with conventional models, Etsy's members provide the goods that drive the brand. These members use tailor-made social media tools to carry out market exchanges as well as community activities. This is in contrast to brand communities, in which these tools are typically used only to carry out community activities. Thus, findings of this dissertation reveal how social media tools can be used to not only foster community engagement, but also market engagement, including co-production. Moreover, Etsy is exemplary at crafting social media tools to

meet its specific market and community needs. As a result, its able to offer customized support that meets the needs of its community, and, in turn, its market.

In conclusion, in this section of the dissertation, *Blurred Lines: Etsy's Community and Markets*, I explored the intersection of Etsy's community and its market. From this discussion it can be said that Etsy's market and community are intertwined and interdependent. Indeed, throughout this discussion it has proven difficult to separate Etsy's community from its market, and vice versa. This complexity is reflected in the three major subthemes of this section. The first subtheme, *Mirror Image*, captures how Etsy's market and community values overlap. Second, *Crafting Collaboration* illustrates how all of Etsy's market players (Sellers, Buyers, and Etsy Administration) influence both the community and the market. The third and the last subtheme, *Crafty Communications*, highlights how members use the same social media tools to carry out market and community activities. In conclusion, Etsy's community and market are one and the same. This finding is in contrast to current community and market research, making Etsy, as a case, unique within the current culture, community, and market research. The last section of this chapter, *Etsy's Market and Beyond*, further focuses on the uniqueness of Etsy from a market perspective. As such, the goal of the last section is to consider this uniqueness relative to online retailing in general. To achieve this goal, theoretical implications are drawn by exploring Etsy's market and community in the context of online retailing.

Etsy's Market and Beyond

In the final section of this chapter, I explore the theoretical implications of Etsy as a market in order to achieve the last objective of this study, which is to examine the implications of Etsy as a community-driven market for online retailing. Again, guiding research questions were implemented to achieve this objective, including: (1) *Does Etsy, as a community-driven electronic market, reflect the principles of a moralized market?* and, (2) *as a community-driven market that connects producers with consumers through craft, how does Etsy offer a new or alternative online consumption community experience?* The aim of these questions is to understand how, considering its community and market, Etsy differs from other online retailing platforms. As such, this section of the chapter examines the data in relation to the full conceptual framework, and in order to understand how the convergence of culture, community, and market make Etsy a unique market player (see Figure 38). This discussion is presented into two parts: (1) *Moralizing Consumption Through Craft* and (2) *Reimagining Commerce*.

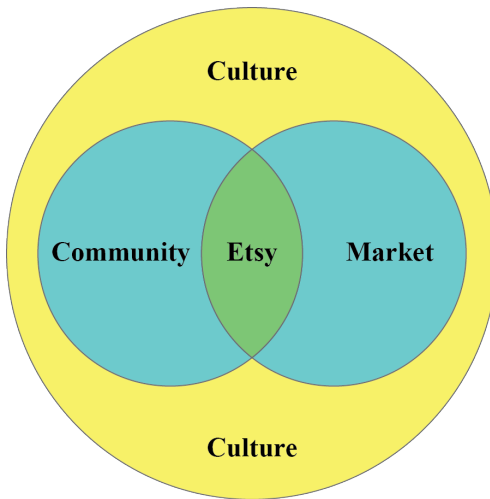


Figure 38. Conceptual Framework: Convergence of Culture, Community, and Market

Moralizing Consumption Through Craft

In the literature review chapter, I concluded with a discussion of the moralized market phenomenon, which is signaled by a shift in power within the producer/consumer market relationship (Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009). This concept, originally introduced by Fourcade and Healy (2007), suggests that consumers and producers share a reciprocal relationship, and, in turn, both mutually effect supply and demand. The following section explores Etsy relative to the moralized market concept, focusing on the three characteristics that structure this phenomenon: *moralized conditions*, *moralized members*, and *pockets of moralized markets*.

Moralized conditions. From an emic perspective, Etsy’s market possesses the characteristics and conditions of a moralized market. As shared in Chapter II, a moralization of the market occurs when, “market behavior in modern societies is no longer determined primarily by the self-interest of market participants, and that this

process of change ultimately becomes a self-realizing and self-reinforcing process” (Stehr & Adolf, 2010, p. 225). Characteristically, in moralized markets consumers are not driven by self-interest, rather they are interested in changing the products they consume as well as the production and/or the consumption process in moral or ethical ways. To achieve this end, these markets mutually rely on both consumers and producers, which, in turn, marks a shift in power from producer to consumer (Stehr & Adolf, 2010).

As discussed throughout the thematic interpretation chapters, Etsy’s Administration fosters and relies on collaborations with Sellers to craft market policies and practices. In the following passage, Randy, an Etsy Administrator shares an example of this collaboration.

R: ...what members do as well as what they say is really important to the work that we do. Um... you know let’s say that, um... our data is showing that something is really successful, but there are people in the Forums posting that they are having some sort of issue with it. Those are two important signals and they might not jive sort of at first glance, but because of how Etsy operates we’ll investigate it. We’ll get to the bottom of it, we’ll do everything we can to try to satisfy the concerns of members that are speaking about it.

Randy’s points illustrate not only how Etsy Administration collaborates with Sellers, but the importance of this collaboration. Throughout the interpretation chapters, several instances in which Etsy Administration collaborated with Sellers to shape the practices and functions of Etsy’s market were discussed.

In a similar vein, Etsy fosters a platform that allows Sellers and Buyers to work together to create products. For instance, Etsy provides Sellers the option to offer custom

orders, by featuring a *Request A Custom Order* button on the shop page (see Figure 39)

Through this device, Sellers and Buyers can work together to co-create a product.

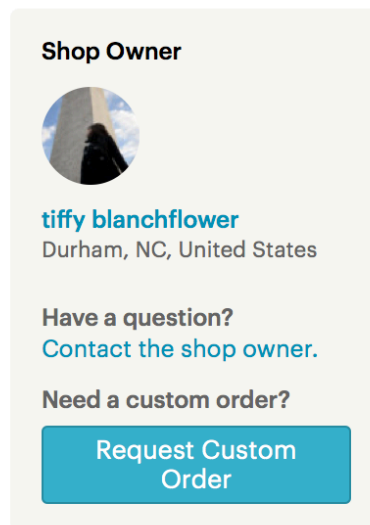


Figure 39. Custom Button Feature

As a Seller, I made this feature available in my shop, and fulfilled a custom order using this process. To do this, I worked one-on-one with a Buyer, from conception to production, to co-produce earrings as an anniversary gift for his wife (see Figure 40).

Etsy - Conversations - Custom Request for Flying Chains- Dangle Earrings, Dangle Chain Earrings, Crystal Earrings, Long Chain Earrings, Crystal Chandelier Earrings, Tear Drop Earring

The screenshot displays the Etsy 'Conversations' interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the Etsy logo and user account information: 'Hi, tiffany. Your Shop: TiffanyBlanchflower Your Account'. Below this, the 'Conversations' section is active, showing a list of folders on the left: 'Compose Message', 'Inbox', 'Sent', 'All', 'Spam', 'Trash', 'Folders', 'Custom Requests', 'Etsians convo', 'Jewelry inquire', and 'Sales convo'. The main content area shows a conversation with Tom Turner. A progress bar at the top of the message indicates the status of the order request. A green notification banner states: 'Success! We've emailed Tom Turner that their order is ready to purchase.' Below this, a product listing for 'Valentines Day Surprise- Pearl Earrings' is shown, including a photo of the earrings, the price (\$25.00 USD), and shipping information (1-3 business days). The conversation history shows Tom Turner's initial request, tiffany blanchflower's response with an attached image, and Tom Turner's reply. The interface includes standard email actions like 'Add to', 'Archive', 'Mark as Unread', 'Report Spam', and 'Delete'.

Figure 40. Customized Products: Valentine's Day Surprise

This process showcases one of the many ways that consumers (Buyers) and producers (Sellers) work together in Etsy's market to produce goods. This process supports the assumption that the presence of a moralized market is marked by a shift of power from producer to consumer. Indeed, as in this scenario the producer (Seller) gives

power to the consumer (Buyer) by providing the option to create a custom item. In turn, this process invites the opportunity for producers to work with consumers to integrate their particular demands.

According to Stehr and Adolf (2010), the following conditions are present in moralized markets: (1) moralization of consumption, (2) moralization of consumer goods, and (3) moralization of consumer goods production. Etsy's platform allows examples wherein consumers and producers mutually affect the production process. This, in turn, fosters moralized conditions, and does so for at least two reasons. First, this process allows Buyers to integrate their moral demands at the beginning stages of the production process (Stehr & Adolf, 2010), which ensures that goods produced meet Buyers' moral demands. Second, the process generates goods within Etsy's market that are moralized from production to consumption, providing a market that attracts consumers that demand goods which embody their moral values.

A reoccurring idea that surfaced within and across the thematic interpretation chapters is the notion of Etsy Administration not just preaching the importance of transparency of market practices, but practicing it as well. For instance, Mary, an Etsy Administrator, described the importance of transparency in a conversation about Etsy's social media use.

M: One [value] that I'd say that we very much try to bring the whole community into is this idea of transparency... [W]e've been posting weather reports, which is like site-wide stats for the community for years, which is really quite rare to see a company sharing that much information. And then I think that we try to be incredibly open with the community, hosting Q&A's in the Forums, things like that, having... Town Hall [meetings]... where Sellers are able to ask their questions directly in a live environment, you know no editing... [A]t the same

time we are trying to encourage sellers to have that same kind of transparency with their buyers.

This excerpt reinforces that as an online retail site, Etsy practices transparency in its business functions, and as a result, it promotes this behavior among and between Sellers and Buyers. Transparency is a crucial characteristic of a moralized market. In order to create goods that meet consumers' moralized concerns, transparency between consumers and producers in production and distribution practices must exist (Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Knippenberg & de Jong, 2010; Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010).

As seen throughout the thematic interpretation, one way that Etsy ensures transparency is through its manufacturing approval process, which allows shops to use manufacturing assistance. However, these shops must go through an approval process, wherein Etsy must preapprove the manufacturer prior to its use to produce goods. This practice, and others like it, ensures that producers (Sellers) seek out supply chain partners and raw goods that align with consumers (Buyers) as well as Etsy's moral demands (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). Moreover, moralized markets require that consumers' moral demands are integrated into the early, rather than the later stages of the production process (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). This requirement can be seen in the ways that Administration seeks out Sellers' input when constructing its market practices, policies, and even Seller tools.

Clearly, Etsy's market members—Etsy Administration, Buyers, and Sellers—engage in activities that foster moralized characteristics as well as moralized conditions within Etsy's market. However, there are two striking differences between Etsy's market

and moralized markets as discussed in the literature (Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Stehr & Adolf, 2010). First, Etsy's market is private, and as such, members must join to participate. In contrast, moral markets are usually examined in the broader overall Capitalist market. Second, Etsy is a niche market. Thus, it sells specific types of products and enforces a particular body of rules to maintain this unique niche structure. In comparison, traditional markets often only rely on government mandated rules for their structures. Thus, this dissertation therefore contributes breadth to the notion of moralized markets by studying the presence of moralized characteristics and conditions within a private, niche market. This study introduces a new body of literature into consumer behavior research, specifically that of moralized markets. Consequently, it is one of the first studies to examine the moralized market concept within consumer behavior research. Specifically, this dissertation provides insight into how moral markets are constructed in the context of the e-commerce environment and sheds light on how social media can be used to foster moralized market characteristics and conditions.

Moralized members. As discussed in the previous section, Etsy's market possesses the characteristics and conditions of moralized markets (moralization of consumption, consumer goods, and production), yet Etsy's market is not fully moralized. This is largely due to members' either total lack of adoption, and/or just partial adoption of the values and ideals that drive the characteristics and conditions that define a moralized market, such as transparency, sustainability, goodwill, and philanthropy (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). Based on the data collected for this dissertation, it appears that Etsy

Administration is the most receptive to these values and ideals, followed by Sellers and then Buyers.

Etsy Administration not only adopts these values, but it integrates them into the site's market policies and practices, which fosters moralized market conditions. For instance, a specific value shared by Etsy Administration is giving back to local communities. In the following screen capture from the post, *Notes From Chad: 30 Million Members Strong from Chad*, the CEO of Etsy, Chad Dickerson, shared some of the ways Etsy gives back to communities.

Making the world more like Etsy

When we think about our growth, we don't want Etsy to follow a path paved by other companies. Instead, we want to [make the world more like Etsy](#): a world based on community, shared success, commitment to sustainable operations, and using the power of business for a higher purpose. Last year, we became a [Certified B Corp](#), and deepened our commitment to running a values-based business for the long-term.

We committed to raising our [B Corp assessment score](#) over the last year, and our annual reassessment is underway. I'm confident we will receive a positive increase because of company-wide efforts, including: [tracking our carbon footprint](#), increasing learning and development opportunities for employees, continuing to buy from Etsy sellers for our business needs, advocating for our community in the [halls of power](#), and increasing [volunteerism](#) and charitable donations in the company. We want to run a company that is not just the best in the world, but also the best for the world, and a company that you are proud to do business with for a long time to come.

Etsy has always been a community-based platform — one that extends even beyond the online community. We're leveraging the reach of the platform to partner with Etsy members to help transform local communities around the world. In Rockford, IL, we've [partnered with local government and the Rockford Etsy Team](#) to develop a craft entrepreneurship program to be taught in public schools and public housing. Mayor Larry Morrissey said in a [recent update](#) to the project: "Etsy generates the energy and opportunities for entrepreneurship that once characterized communities like Rockford all around the country."

When we make it easier for people to transact directly with each other around the world, and make it possible for anyone to start and grow their own creative business, we're building stronger communities everywhere. Our work in Rockford points the way to a brighter economic future with people at the center. That's making the world more like Etsy.

Figure 41. Notes From Chad: 30 Million Members Strong | Etsy News Blog

Likewise, on its Blog, Etsy Administration shares how it supports the notion of re-imagining commerce from the community perspective by reporting on Etsy's

community outreach programs, such as Etsy’s Entrepreneurship program. In Figure 42, a post from Etsy’s Blog by Dana, an Etsy Administrator, goes in more detail this program.



Story by [Dana Mauriello](#)
Published on Dec 20, 2013 in [Company News](#)

For the last few months, we have been incredibly lucky to work with the communities of Rockford, Illinois, and New York City to [launch the first pilots of Etsy’s Craft Entrepreneurship program](#). Now that those pilots have wrapped up, we wanted to share the results and celebrate the talented Etsy sellers who have joined our community.



Dana

[Nearly a year ago](#), we started collaborating with Mayor Larry Morrissey of Rockford and the Rockford Etsy Team to create a new type of economic development program. While local economic development is frequently focused on creating new full-time jobs and training residents to fill them, we believed that there was room for an approach that leveraged the community’s existing skills and emphasized supplemental income and entrepreneurship.

The Craft Entrepreneurship Program now includes an in-person class that uses Etsy as a learning lab. In these courses, low-income individuals with craft skills learn how to earn supplemental income selling their handmade items. We partnered with the Housing Authority in Rockford for one pilot class and the Department of Small Business Services in New York City for three pilot classes, and we had a total of 69 participants who opened 22 Etsy shops and made 41 sales on Etsy. Some participants also felt inspired to sell at craft fairs and have generated additional income there as well.

Figure 42. Year in Review Excerpt: Etsy’s Craft Entrepreneurship Program– Company News Blog

Community outreach, as a particular value that is shared among all Etsy Administration is just one example of how Etsy Administration adopts values that influence Etsy’s market practices, and ultimately, foster moralized market conditions. These types of philanthropic behaviors align with the following statement regarding

moralized markets: “[M]arket behavior in modern societies is no longer determined primarily by the self interest of market participants, and this process of change ultimately becomes a self-realizing and self-reinforcing process” (Stehr & Adolf, 2010, p. 225). In short, Etsy’s Administration reflects the concept of working in a market that looks beyond profit and shares a vision of making the world better through reimagining commerce.

Some Sellers and a few Buyers shared this perspective. When compared to Etsy Administration, Sellers seem less receptive to these moralized values and practices. For instance in Chapter IV, the subtheme *Going Against the Grain* and in Chapter V, the subtheme *Debbie Downers*, both capture instances in which Sellers do not abide by these values and practices. Madison, a long time Seller, shares a story about one of them.

M: ...[the Seller] no longer has a shop, she [use to] sell dog collars. She would sell them to people, take their money, and either never ship the product or ship it two months later. And she would also create the shipping stickers for people, but never actually ship it.

Every Seller and Buyer interviewed for this study shared a similar kind of story. Fortunately, the data do not suggest that this is common within Etsy’s market. For the most part, the majority of Sellers in Etsy’s market adopt, reinterpret, and implement values and practices into their shops that reinforce moralized market conditions. For instance, the following passage provided by Erin highlights the collaborative efforts of Etsy’s market, and the generally positive disposition of its members:

E: You know there is so much advice out there that’s positive. So if you have questions or [are] just starting out, there are so many tips from seasoned Sellers...

When you're starting out it's a nice way to reach out.... You know, if you're feeling like you're not doing the right thing or you just need some encouragement it's nice to be able to reach out in the Forums or to a Team or something like that and kind of get advice on what to do right.

Based on Erin's experiences, she, like many other Sellers, regards Etsy's Forums and Blog as positive, knowledgeable, and helpful. The juxtaposition of Madison's story with Erin's experience highlights how moralized values are adopted, and at the same time, can be violated by Etsy's Sellers.

Buyers seem to be the least aware of and receptive to the values and practices that create Etsy's moralized market conditions. Buyers interviewed for this dissertation were asked to describe ethical or moral values that potentially unite Etsy's community, and in the majority of cases Buyers were unable to do so. However, when talking about why they choose to shop at Etsy over similar retailers, like Amazon and eBay, some Buyers referenced values they admire about Etsy and/or Sellers, as well as practices that tie back to the moralized conditions present within Etsy's market. For instance, Chrissy, a Buyer, describes one of these shared values, that of supporting small business:

C: Um... yeah definitely, I think that they want to support the little man, the people that buy... it's, I just feel like, it makes you feel better, just feel good about yourself, when you buy from straight up a person, rather than Target or, you know, Wal-Mart!

This excerpt reinforces the idea that some Buyers think that by purchasing on Etsy, they are doing something "good" by giving back to small business. These Buyers made the connection that when shopping at an Etsy shop, they are supporting an individual, helping her or him pursue a dream. This motivation for shopping behavior is similar to a

core facet of a moralized market, which is that its consumers are not driven by purely hedonic needs or economic goals (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). Instead, they purchase goods with other values in mind, such as environmental values or a “shop local” mentality.

Overall, it can be said that each member of Etsy—Administrator, Seller, and Buyer—adopts and integrates moralized values into their consumption experiences differently. The difference in members’ adoption of moralized values can be explained by Stehr and Adolf’s (2012) perspective on the boundaries of moralized markets. They assert that the moralization of markets is a newly emerging concept, and as such, it has not been fully adopted by all markets, therefore it has yet to meet consumers’ moral demands to the same degree. This perspective aligns with what was found throughout the interpretation, as Etsy’s market does not completely embrace moral values and ideals, and all members do not adopt them to the same degree.

Indeed, a members’ role influences the adoption of these moralized market values. For instance, as discussed above, almost all of Etsy’s Administrators adopt such values, whereas Buyers are often unaware of their moral motives. For instance, as employees, Etsy Administration are expected to adopt and apply such values back into their work within Etsy’s market and community. In contrast, Buyers are not expected to adopt any of these values, and are often only exposed to them when making purchases. Likewise, a member’s role influences how much interaction that individual will have with Etsy’s market and community, which influences her or his awareness and adoption of these moral values. This aspect is characteristic of moralized markets, in that they are context dependent and the behaviors or actions that are defined as moral within a moral

market are dependent on the environment and people involved (Anteby, 2010; Beckert, 2009; Fourcade, 2007). Thus, when applying this characteristic of moralized markets to Etsy, it can be said that the context of members' roles creates differences in the extent of their adoption of moralized market values.

Pockets of moralized markets. Within Etsy, it appears that smaller groups of producers and consumers adopt moralized values and practices, creating “pockets” of moralized markets within Etsy’s overall market. Several examples of smaller moralized markets within Etsy’s larger market can be seen through an examination of the values among Buyers and Sellers. For instance Kaitlin’s example of buying soap on Etsy sheds light on such interaction.

K: I think Etsy really caught on, it’s because it’s unique in what it does. It brings tons and tons of artists together in one forum, to be able to sell their products. So, when you want handmade soap you don’t have to go to necessarily *Whole Foods* to get your soap. You can go online and you can have a conversation about what goes into their product or if you want a special scent. There are so many different things that you can talk about in one place, where that has never really been available before.

Kaitlin’s excerpt illustrates an instance wherein the values of the Buyer merge with those of the Seller to drive the production as well as the consumption of goods within Etsy’s market. This excerpt also highlights how Buyers and Sellers engage in the co-production of products, starting with the initial phase of product development. In sum, this scenario sheds light on how Buyers can reach out to Sellers to co-produce a particular segment of goods that meet moralized values. This co-production can be explained by Stehr and Adolf (2010) notion of the “democratization of the market,” which asserts that saturation

in the current market has led to producers engaging with consumers to create products that directly satisfy the wants of their customers (Cova & Dalli, 2009; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Zwick, Bonsu, & Darmody, 2008). Under the guise of this concept, consumers are considered active participants in the market, influencing the entire production process. As shared above, Etsy affords Sellers and Buyers multiple opportunities to be active participants in Etsy's community. As such, some Sellers and Buyers take advantage of this opportunity and engage in Etsy's community to create and participate in moralized segments of Etsy's market.

Administration, as it regulates Etsy's market, oversees the practices that reinforce these pockets of moralized markets. For instance, Randy, a long time Etsy Administrator, elaborated on one of the values shared within them:

R: [Etsy Buyers] don't want you to go to Bath & Body Works, they don't want you to go to Target. They want you to come to them, come to other soap sellers, and buy your soap from somebody who hand-makes it.

Randy's statement illustrates how Etsy's Administration recognizes that many Buyers shop on Etsy to satisfy their moralized demands, particularly handmade goods. In this excerpt, Randy also emphasizes the importance of connecting the product to an individual craftsman or artisan, which is another value that frames moralized consumption within Etsy's market. Along these same lines, the data expressly indicate that Etsy Administration recognizes, supports, and works toward shaping a community-based market with a moral focus and mission.

In contrast to Kaitlin and Randy, other members, mostly Buyers and Sellers, did not recognize or engage in these smaller moralized markets within Etsy. For instance, some Sellers sold on Etsy just to make money, and were not necessarily passionate about creating, selling or engaging in a production process that met consumers' moral demands. Likewise, there were many instances in which Buyers purchased goods for their uniqueness, and were not concerned with the ethical implications of their purchases, even if products had moral qualities, like being recycled, up-cycled, or contributed to a philanthropic mission. This finding is in line with the ideas that the notion of moral markets may be present in small sects of society, and that not all markets meet moral demands to the same degree (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). Most of the moral market literature explores this idea from the traditional markets perspective. For this reason, this dissertation is unique because it examines the concept as it emerges among specific members of a market. In doing so, this study generates insights about how moralized markets can be developed through smaller segments of a traditional market. In addition, it provides information about how co-production operates in these smaller market environments.

From this discussion, it can be concluded that while Etsy fosters moralized market conditions, only parts of Etsy's market are actually moralized. That is, while Etsy Administration fully adopts the values and foster the conditions of a moralized market, not all Sellers and Buyers adopt these values or recognize these conditions. These differences result in a market wherein some producers and consumers are driven by responsible consumption values, whereas others are driven by self-interest. Members that

share the former values seek out one another to produce and exchange goods, thereby resulting in moralized pockets within Etsy's community. As will be discussed in the next section, the presence of smaller moralized markets within Etsy is one of the characteristics that make it unique, and ultimately support its mission to "reimagine commerce."

Reimagining Commerce

The interpretation of data revealed that Etsy integrates elements of Web 2.0 into its market, which results in a novel approach to the production, distribution, and consumption of goods. Etsy achieves this by using a community-based platform as well as social media to connect producers and consumers of craft, craft-related, and vintage goods. As a result, Etsy has fostered a platform that has reimaged commerce for both the consumer and the producer. To understand what "reimagining commerce" means for online retailing, more generally, four subthemes will be examined: (1) *Reimagining shopping*, (2) *Reimagining retailing*, (3) *Reimagining consumption*, and, (4) *The third wheel: The Prosumer*.

Reimagining shopping. Shopping on Etsy is often described by participants as a unique experience, something that is drastically different from shopping on comparable websites, like Amazon and eBay. Indeed, this was a recurring sentiment shared by the majority of participants. For instance, Samantha, a long time Buyer, shared the following about why people shop on Etsy: "You are getting something special, like I always feel that things that I buy on Etsy are special and I um... really like that. You don't have to

spend a lot.” Another long-time Seller and one-time store owner, Lilly, had the following to say about Etsy as compared to eBay.

L: It’s like a less shady eBay, I just trust it more. I don’t know why? Just because it, since a lot of it’s handmade, I feel like they have more of vested interest in the product they are selling. And they just, I feel like people like what they’re selling, maybe more so than eBay, where you [are] just trying to turn a profit and get stuff out the door.

Lilly, like other Sellers, believes that Etsy offers not only unique products, but also a unique shopping experience. Etsy provides this unique shopping experience by integrating the affordances of Web 2.0 into its retail platform, which include: social networking, personalization/customization, interaction orientation, and user-added value (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). As an example, Etsy has implemented both tailor-made and public social media platforms (social networking), which all members rely on to some degree. Specific to the affordance of personalization/customization, Etsy’s social media tools, such as Etsy Convos and customized button features, provide Buyers and Sellers with the opportunity to exchange information to co-produce goods. The result is a highly personalized object for the Buyer as well as a personalized Seller-to-Buyer experience. Both can be seen in the example of Sam’s customized jewelry and key chains for her husband and in-laws as discussed in the interpretation. At the same time, these social networking tools provide members with the opportunities to create personal connections with one another, as seen in Madison’s description of her interaction with other members as “pen pals.” Etsy uses social media to integrate another Web 2.0 affordance, that of being user-added (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). The user-added

value occurs when consumers have the opportunity to provide content to a retail platform. For instance, Buyers provide content to Etsy's platform by way of product and shop reviews. In the case of Sellers, user-added value takes the form of Seller comments to Blog posts, conversations in Forums, developing Treasuries, as well as posting items to their shops.

Along similar lines, the interpretation of data revealed that Etsy's platform is dependent on interaction between producers and consumers, however individual members dictate the degree of their interactions. This point aligns with Wirtz, Schilke, and Ullrich's (2010) Web 2.0 characteristic of "interaction orientation," which refers to "a firm's ability to manage effectively the rising customer demand for a more intense and authentic dialogue between firm and customer" (p. 277). Again, the social media foundation of Etsy's market provides the means by which these interactions can occur. As discussed throughout the interpretation chapters, these interactions foster business connections, smaller Seller communities, as well as personal relationships between and among Etsy's Sellers, Buyers, and Administration.

Reimagining retailing. Buyers and Sellers were found to hold similar sentiments regarding the uniqueness of commerce within Etsy's platform. Particular to Sellers, the data interpretation illustrates that Sellers are unaware of venues similar to Etsy, and, as such, they think that Etsy is a unique place that provides small artisans, crafters, and collectors with an opportunity to be successful at pursuing their respective trade or passion. Etsy achieves this shared sentiment by, again, integrating the benefits of Web

2.0 (e.g., social networking, interaction orientation, personalization/customization, and user-added value) into the Seller side of its market (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010).

As discussed throughout the interpretation, Etsy's market is a social product of Etsy's Administration and Sellers. The social production of Etsy's market is carried out via Etsy's social media tools. In turn, Etsy's market reflects the major subthemes of social networking: social identity, social trust, virtual word of mouth, and consumer power (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). For instance, Etsy allows Sellers to create a social identity, specifically through information about their shops, shop policies, employees, as well as about themselves to share with others. With respect to social trust, the interpretation of data revealed that members trust Etsy and its community. For example, Nicole, an Etsy Administrator, shared that Sellers "...really are, such, like honestly, genuinely kind people who are trying to find success as artist and as makers." Like other members, Nicole conveys that Sellers are genuine and trustworthy people. Electronic word of mouth is something that members often discussed when describing how they heard about Etsy, or a particular shop or product on Etsy. Moreover, Sellers rely on electronic word of mouth from Buyers by way of shop reviews to generate shop credibility. Anne, a Buyer, explains the importance of this type of electronic word of mouth.

A: I don't leave reviews a lot when I purchase things like, just online. Um... but for them [Etsy Sellers] I do, because I feel like it is really important, because they're not selling the volume that like Nordstrom or somebody is. So I think that like every review [on Etsy] is important. Definitely leave them reviews because the people that come in after you are going to want to read those reviews and hear what you have to say.

Anne, like other Buyers, finds shop reviews to be an important aspect of her experience within Etsy's market. Moreover, just as Buyers use shop reviews to determine the credibility of a shop, Sellers rely on these reviews to draw Buyers to their shops.

The last component of social networking is consumer power, which is defined as a "firm's awareness of user opinions and thus their influence vis-à-vis the firm" (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010, p. 277). A thread woven throughout the interpretation of the data is the importance of Sellers' opinions and feedback to Etsy Administration. Randy, an Etsy Administrator shares, "...what members do as well as what they say is really important to the work that we do." It is apparent that Etsy Administrators are reliant on Seller opinions and feedback to help them fulfill their roles and responsibilities as Etsy employees. Thus, it can be stated that Etsy Administrators are aware of Sellers' opinions and use these opinions to shape Etsy's market.

Particular to the affordance of interaction orientation, the interpretation revealed that Sellers use Etsy's Convos, Forums, and Blog to air their grievances as well as debate with one another about policies and practices that shape Etsy's market. These interactions and the use of this information among Etsy Administration and Sellers mirrors the Web 2.0 dimensions of interaction orientation: interaction configuration, consumer centricity, customer response, and cooperative generation (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). For instance, the social media tools created by Etsy are interaction configurations (i.e., how a firm structures interaction and communication with its customers). Etsy uses its social media such as Convos, Blogs, and Forums in an asynchronous way to structure how members engage and communicate with one another.

In keeping with the consumer centricity concept, the data interpretation revealed that Etsy Administration places its consumer, i.e., the Seller, on center stage. An excerpt from a conversation with Nicole about who makes up Etsy's community reveals this unique position: "That is a very interesting question... Yeah, 'cause I would say when people talk about the Etsy community, they are often are thinking of the Sellers." In line with this, Etsy Administrators often seek out and listen to Sellers' opinions and feedback to shape the site's business practices, thus placing Sellers at the center of how Administration runs Etsy as a business.

Etsy also masters the interaction orientation dimension of integration of customer response, defined as a "... firm's ability to manage the dialog with its customers, and develop capabilities to allow it to react and respond to individual customer feedback while simultaneously codifying the acquired information in order to improve future customer dialog" (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010, p. 277). One exemplar of Etsy's customer response is the Prototype Team. Etsy describes these Teams as places "for people who want to test and provide feedback on new Shop Stats Features before they're available to everyone..." Etsy uses Prototypes Teams to allow Sellers to test out new Seller tools, and engage in a dialog with them about the usefulness of these tools. Etsy then uses Seller feedback to determine if a tool will actually improve the selling experience.

Etsy Teams also provide an example of the integration of cooperative value generation. This idea refers to a firm's efforts to equalize the power relationship between it and its consumers. This is often achieved by developing and integrating customer-led

initiatives (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). Particular to Etsy, Teams are customer-led initiatives, as they are created and managed by Sellers. In the following passage, Mary, an Etsy Administrator, shares how Etsy's self-directed Teams are useful to her as an Administrator, "[I find] where the magic is happening, and really help them [Teams] do what they need to be doing, and what they want to be doing. And [Etsy] Teams is a great way to do that." Likewise, Nicole's job is to seek out the unique things that are happening in Etsy's market, and to do this she reaches out to Etsy Teams. This is just one example of how, as a firm, Etsy relies on its customers to generate content for its site. Unlike other retailers, however, Etsy also relies on its customers to manufacture its products. For these reasons, Etsy relies on its consumers more than traditional retailers, and in so doing, Etsy places these consumers (Sellers) in a powerful position, thereby equalizing the power relationship.

Throughout the thematic interpretation, the reoccurring idea of "creating your own experience" aligns with the user-added value benefit of Web 2.0 specific to personalization/customization. This affordance is comprised of three dimensions: personal customization, group customization, and social customization (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). Specific to personal customization, the data indicate that Etsy allows its Sellers to personalize their selling experiences by selling a wide array of goods, customizing their Shop pages, as well as Seller profiles.

According to the literature, group customization typically refers to the social construction of products (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). However, Sellers on Etsy are constructing an experience, in particular, a selling experience. As such, it can be said that

while Etsy does not provide Sellers or Buyers with the opportunity to congregate to create products as a large group, it does provide Sellers with the opportunity to congregate to shape their market experiences. An example of this is, again, Etsy Teams. Etsy provides Sellers with a space and the tools to foster their development. In short, they provide group customization in the form of shaping a customized market experience that relies on community.

Social customization refers to a firm's ability to provide customers with customized products particular to a distinct social group, such as providing products for the virtual world, Second Life (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). Etsy develops customized features for Sellers, a distinct social group within Etsy's market. These products are then included in Etsy's Seller Handbook, Forums, as well as Treasuries.

Creativity and a love for selling are characteristics that Sellers often cite when describing Etsy's community. For instance, Erin, a long-time Seller, had the following to say, "I think that most people want to... put their heart and soul into items... [and] ...work from that ideal... Love what you do." Etsy relies on user-added affordances to foster a market that is driven by a community of Sellers. Along similar lines, Wirtz, Schilke, and Ullrich (2010) have identified the following user-added trends: user-generated content, user-generated creativity, user-generated innovation, and user-generated revenue. The data interpretation indicates several ways by which Etsy relies on these user-added trends to maintain and foster its market. For instance, Etsy relies on Sellers' creativity and innovation to generate products to sell within its market. In the

following passage, Lilly, a Buyer, shares an example of Sellers' user-generated creativity and innovation:

L: I guess in correlation with Etsy, vintage is, a lot of found items... and a lot of people who are really creative have no problem repurposing stuff that's older, seemingly outdated, or even just presenting it to the community and letting them use it the way they want to. Like old hats, and things like that, that you haven't necessarily done anything to. But there's a market for it, because people either collect them or might even wear them, that kind of thing.

Lilly explains how the process of finding vintage items and making them new is a creative and innovative act within the Etsy community. As a Buyer, I had a similar experience when I found a Seller that creates slide show notebooks. This particular Seller was innovative in her use of these materials, as she used vintage Kodak photography slides as the front and back covers of the notebook. These are just a few examples of the user-generated innovation and creativity exercised by Etsy Sellers. Ultimately, this user-generated innovation and creativity generates revenue that Etsy relies on to maintain itself as a business and ultimately makes it a market. However, user-generated creativity and innovation relative to Etsy is different than that of other firms. For instance, Etsy Sellers are creative and innovative offline, creating and developing products outside of the Etsy context, which are then sold within its market. In comparison, for most firms, the Web 2.0 trend of user-generated creativity and innovation are exercised within the online context, such as using these tools to brainstorm ideas with consumers about new products that the firm then develops, such as seen with Lay's, "Do Us A Flavor" campaign. For, this campaign Lay's used social media to engage their customers to help develop new potato chip flavors.

Last, user-generated content is another user-added value trend that Etsy adopts and integrates into its market. An example of Etsy’s user-generated content is that of Etsy Treasuries. The Will Ferrell Treasury in Figure 43 is an example of a Treasury that I created as a Seller. As discussed in the interpretation, Treasuries feature items from other Sellers’ shops that are crafted around a theme or a topic selected by the curator. Sellers select the items, create descriptions of the Treasuries and then share them with the Etsy community.

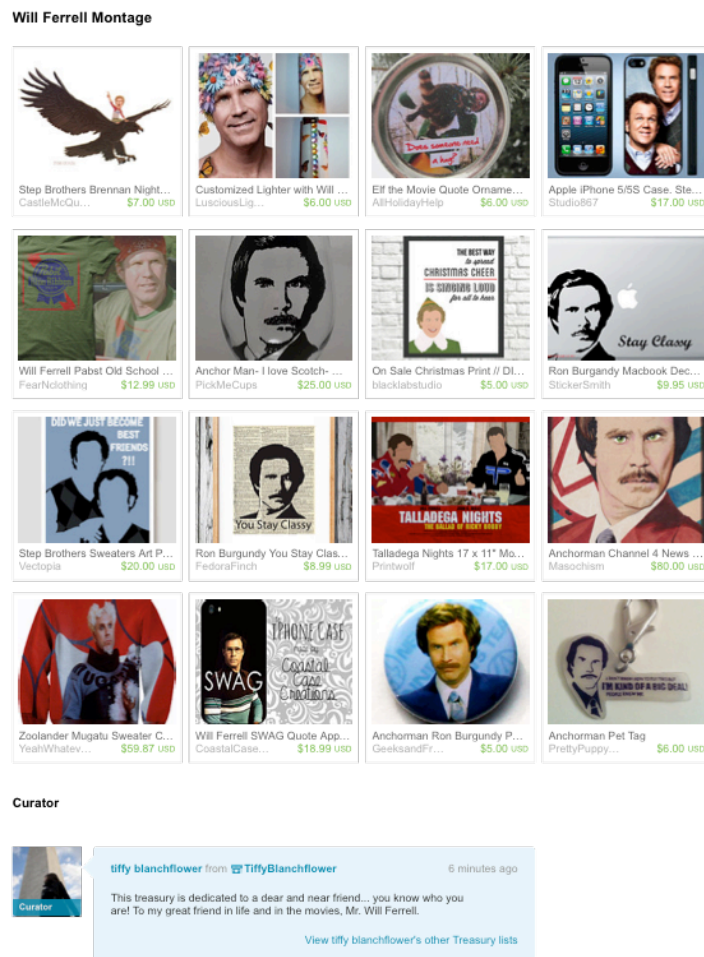


Figure 43. Will Ferrell Treasury

While many retailers have adopted and implemented Web 2.0 into their online sites, Etsy has done so in an extraordinary way. As the findings illustrate, Etsy has integrated virtually every affordance into its market. In turn, this study provides insight into how the various Web 2.0 affordances can be used to create a successful community-based market. This is one of the first studies to examine in-depth how these affordances are applied. As a result, this dissertation offers insight into how these affordances can be harnessed to create a successful online community and a popular and profitable market.

Reimagining consumption. Etsy's success reflects Muñiz and Schau's (2005) assumption that brand communities provide an alternative consumption experience, remystified by integrating community back into the consumption process. As discussed earlier, participants who are Buyers often describe the experience of purchasing on Etsy as unique, and one that connects them directly with the producer of the goods. In a similar vein, Etsy remystifies the act of selling by using a community to build a market platform. As Fiona, a shop owner, points out, "You just feel like you are part of like the artist community... You felt like you have something in common with these really cool people." To this end, Etsy actually remystifies the exchange process, a finding that is unique to the literature and different from how the concept has been explored in brand community research. However, this finding does in fact reflect ideas found in the new consumption community literature, particularly that both parties, Buyers and Sellers, are ultimately looking for a better ways to consume goods (Szmigin & Carrigan, 2005, 2007).

Similarly, Etsy fosters a market in which members desire goods with moral foundations. For instance, Kaitlin values goods that are all-natural, such as products free of chemicals and parabens. When asked about her last purchase, she explained that she bought natural deodorant because she could not find what she liked in retail stores, “Yeah, everything out there mostly just has a lot of chemicals and nasty stuff in it and um... and even the stuff that claims it is natural, it really isn’t, so I just was kind of looking around on there [Etsy] for something that works.” Thus, Kaitlin looks for products on Etsy that align with her values related to health and the environment. In a similar vein, another Buyer, Chrissy shares that she thinks people shop on Etsy because it reflects their values, such as supporting small business, including those that are online. She shares that she shops on Etsy because, “I think that they want to support the little man... it makes you feel better, just feel good about yourself, when you buy from straight up a person, rather than, Target or, you know, Wal-Mart!” For participants like Kaitlin and Chrissy, purchases have a moral foundation, supporting the ideas discussed within new consumption community literature (Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2005; Szmigin & Carrigan, 2003) and moral market literature (Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Stehr & Adolf, 2007). That is, a key characteristic of both is a concern for the community and/or environment.

The third wheel: The Prosumer. Thematic interpretation of the data revealed the important role of the Prosumer within Etsy’s market. Specifically, findings indicate that Etsy Buyers, Sellers and even Administrators can and often do assume the Prosumer role. For instance, Etsy Administrators can assume the role of producer as an employee of Etsy

as well as Seller on Etsy. It is important to note that these integrated roles appear to be beneficial to Etsy and lucrative to all involved, which aligns with the idea of the prosumer in the brand community collaboration research (de Almeida, Dholakia, & Vianello, 2007; Kim, Bae, & Kang, 2008). For instance, several brand community studies have found that prosumers are a great source for brand and consumer collaboration, often providing valuable market information, such as insight into consumers' taste as well as revealing emerging consumer trends (de Almeida, Dholakia, & Vianello, 2007; Kim, Bae, & Kang, 2008).

On the other hand, the role of Etsy's Prosumers differs from what has been explored in the literature thus far. Unlike other prosumers, Etsy Prosumers can assume up to three roles in the market. For instance, an Etsy Administrator might work for Etsy collaborating with Buyers, but can also enter the market as a Seller and purchase products as a Buyer. This particular finding is important to consumer and market research, as within both bodies of research this third role has not yet been identified (Kim, Bae, & Kang, 2008; Maria & Finotto, 2008; Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011). In addition, the current body of prosumer literature directs attention toward the producer/consumer dynamic or brand community/brand dynamic, and has yet to examine the market/producer relationship, such as the one that exists within Etsy's market.

To conclude, Etsy has reimagined selling by creating a new way to buy and sell goods online. The end result is a new kind of consumption experience. Much like brand communities, Etsy has "remystified" the consumption experience by creating a platform that integrates several elements of Web 2.0. As a result, consumers and producers are

able to seek out and participate with like-minded market players, creating small moralized markets within Etsy's overall market. In addition, Etsy's market is driven by Prosumers, or those who engage in the creative process of producing/selling/buying goods as well as overseeing Etsy's market.

As a final point, the concept of culture and community are often referred to as the two of the most complicated terms in the literature, with a myriad of perspectives and interpretations available (Kozinets, 2010). At the same time, the concept of market is equally expansive. In order to narrow the focus of this dissertation, it was necessary to select particular perspectives, concepts, and topics that are relevant to the context of Etsy. Because this dissertation is the first study to fully explore the topic of Etsy, findings shed light on where Etsy fits within the context of research on consumer behavior, markets, and online retailing in the world of Web 2.0.

Summary

In this chapter, I framed Etsy's market-based community by tying together the theoretical concepts of culture, community, and market that were discussed in Chapter II, the review of literature. In particular, this chapter explored the theoretical implications of the interpretation relative to the topics of subcultures, participatory culture, consumption communities, Web 2.0 and moralized markets. In so doing, an understanding of how Etsy's market aligns with, differs from, and adds to these bodies of knowledge was discussed. In the next chapter, practical implications of the findings are presented along with potential areas of future research.

CHAPTER VIII

REFLECTION AND IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation is one of the first in-depth academic studies to be conducted on Etsy. The aim of this dissertation was to develop an in-depth understanding of Etsy as a community and market. To this end, I sought to understand what it means to be a member of Etsy's community, how Etsy's community influences its market, and what Etsy means in the context of online retailing. In this dissertation, I approached these objectives from sociological as well as consumer behavior perspectives, and drew from the relevant culture, community, and market literatures to develop conceptual and theoretical implications. In doing so, findings bring new light to the convergence of culture, community, and market, which is a topic that is neglected in consumer behavior research overall. Specific to consumer behavior and community research, this dissertation offers reexamination of the consumption community and brand community concepts within a new consumption context: the community-based electronic market. In this dissertation, I also examined a relatively new concept in sociological market research, that of moralized markets. Thus, it is one of the first studies to bridge the gap between moral market research and consumer behavior research. As a result, findings of this study have implications for expanding theory related to consumption community and moralized market concepts. Last, findings of this dissertation have practical implications for online retailers as well as online markets.

The aim of this chapter is to reflect on the research process and explore the implications of the findings for the topic broadly. To do so, this chapter is divided into three sections: (1) *Reflecting on the Process*, (2) *Implications of the Outcomes*, and (3) *Limitations and Future Research*. In the first section, I reflect on the goals and objectives relative to the netnographic and ethnographic research process employed to collect and interpret data. In the second section, the discussion centers on the key findings that emerged through the interpretation of data, and the implications of these findings for online retailing and markets. I conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this study and suggest potential future areas of research.

Reflecting on the Process

In this study, I employed the research methodologies of ethnography and netnography to gain an in-depth understanding of Etsy. These interpretative methodologies were blended to provide a complete picture of Etsy by capturing offline and online interactions. Overall, the online interactions were found to be more dominant than the offline ones. As such, netnography served as the primary approach for data collection, and ethnography as the secondary approach. In short, this process allowed me to engage with and observe Etsy's community online and offline, providing a comprehensive means of data collection.

The netnographic and ethnographic data collection process allowed me to gain insider access to Etsy's culture, community, and market. For example, as a Seller I was able to experience all the ups and downs of selling, like the joy of making a sale, and the dismay of going weeks without one. In addition, I was able to experience the difficulties

of selling online, such as taking good product photographs and properly tagging and labeling products. This experience included participating in Etsy's community by reaching out to Sellers for advice, attending Etsy events like Craft Parties, and joining Etsy Teams, such as the Prototype Team. As a Buyer, I was able to participate in the other side of the exchange process. Similar to other Buyers, I experienced times when I had little to no interaction with the Seller, and at other times I would fully engage the Seller. During the latter interactions, I often shared why I was buying the product with the Buyer. Similar to other Buyers, I experienced the joys of receiving uniquely packaged gifts with handwritten letters. At the same time, I experienced the pains of shopping on Etsy when I did not receive a response from a Seller about a customized product. Comparable to other Buyers, I did not engage in the community, as a Buyer it was something that I was not interested in. However, I did read shop reviews and Seller profiles to learn more about the Sellers, their shops, and their products.

As a researcher, taking on all of these roles (Researcher, Buyer, and Seller) at times was difficult, as I found that during observation I often had to move fluidly in and out of different roles. For example, I encountered instances where I would be reading an article about a shop as a researcher, and then would slip into the role of a Buyer, checking out items in the shop to purchase. To help navigate this experience, in my own notes I would indicate when the observation ended and my experience as a Buyer or Seller began. However, the messiness of this process did allow me to fully immerse myself in Etsy's community. In turn, I was able to experience Etsy's culture fully from the various market and community perspectives.

Overall, I found that netnographic and ethnographic participant observation was the best method of data collection and interpretation for this dissertation. Participant observation provided the opportunity to collect data from the two main perspectives within Etsy's community: Buyer and Seller. In turn, during data interpretation, I found that what I experienced as a member (Buyer and Seller) mirrored and confirmed what I observed online and offline, as well as what was shared by participants during interviews. Ultimately, this role resulted in the triangulation of the data, which yielded findings that can be confirmed by multiple sources.

Although this method provided fruitful data collection that resulted in a comprehensive analysis of Etsy, it was not without challenges. Particular to the data collection process, the online environment did not invite the opportunity to openly reveal my dual role in Etsy's community (Seller and researcher). For instance, it would have been out of place or unnatural to post in the Forums that I was a researcher when I was looking for help with my shop. In contrast to my online experience, it was more natural and seemed easier to share my dual role as a researcher and Seller with other members during offline interactions. When I was able to share my dual role with members (Buyers, Sellers, and Etsy Administrators), they were often excited to hear about what I was doing, and receptive to my researcher role.

Another challenge I encountered during data collection was the feeling of isolation when collecting data online. At times, especially in the beginning, I felt alone, even though I was part of Etsy's community. In general, I craved face-to-face interaction. I found that this sentiment aligned with some of my participants who expressed that it

would be nice to meet like-minded individuals face-to-face. Although this issue did not interfere with the data collection process, it is an interesting thing to note as it is a sentiment that was shared by other members of the Etsy community.

Overall, I found it challenging to balance online (netnographic) and offline (ethnographic) observation throughout the data collection process. In my dissertation proposal, I had planned to join an Etsy Team that also met offline to observe face-to-face interactions among Etsy Team members. Unfortunately, the one Etsy Team within a reasonable driving distance stopped meeting offline. When I discovered this, I conducted a regional search for other Etsy Teams that regularly meet face-to-face. Unfortunately, I was unable to find a nearby Team. To remedy this problem I attended two Etsy Craft Night events at its headquarters in Brooklyn, NY. Luckily, these events provided rich observational data, as I was able to speak with Sellers, Buyers, and Etsy Administration in a relaxed and natural setting. In addition, I was able to see Etsy's headquarters and get a feel for the spirit of its culture in person.

Along these same lines, another dilemma emerged during data collection: that of having limited access to Etsy Administration as a result of a gatekeeper's behavior. Initially, I contacted a handful of Etsy employees, via Etsy Convos, who aligned with topical areas proposed in Chapter III. At first I only heard back from two and to conceal their identities I will refer to them as Frank and Lisa. I planned to meet Frank at Etsy headquarters when I visited Brooklyn for the Etsy Craft Party. Lisa said she would sit down for a brief online interview and would set up interviews for me. Needless to say, I was really excited about these two opportunities.

I headed up to Brooklyn, and on the morning that I was preparing to visit Frank at Etsy headquarters, I received an email from Lisa telling me to cancel my meeting. Lisa told me that she wanted to hand pick Etsy employees for interviews. I was torn, as I wanted to visit Etsy's headquarters, and was on my way to do so, but I did not want to upset Lisa, since she was supposed to line up additional interviews for me. I felt like I was caught between a rock and a hard place, and had to make a difficult decision. I contacted Frank via Etsy's Convos and let him know what Lisa said. Frank agreed that it was best that we canceled our meeting.

I found myself in Brooklyn for an extra day, with no real reason to be there early, and I was upset from the perspective of not only a researcher, but a member of Etsy. I felt like Lisa's behavior negated what Etsy stands for, which is transparency and community. I did not get my hopes up, and sought to bracket my feelings and move on with the Etsy Craft Party I had planned to attend that night. When I returned home from New York, Lisa had set up three interviews, one being her own interview. I thanked her for the interviews, via Etsy Convos, and even wrote her a handwritten thank you card and included a small piece of jewelry from my shop. When I was done interviewing the three Etsy employees, I asked her if there was anyone else I could interview, as I told her I needed around 5-7 total Etsy employees. She responded that Etsy could not afford to devote further resources to my study, and would be unable to set up more interviews. I replied politely with a thank you, and decided that I would reach out to others on my own.

After Lisa's communication, I set out to contact Etsy employees on my own. This time, I decided to craft personalized messages that reflected two things: (1) I was really interested in learning more about the individual, and (2) I wanted to learn about his or her role within Etsy. To do so, I reviewed each Administrator's profile to find something in common. I then used this shared point of interest to create a deeper connection that would hopefully lead to an interview. Only one Etsy Administrator contacted me about a face-to-face interview, however the time that I was in Brooklyn did not align with her schedule, and when contacted about an online interview she did not respond. Given what happened between Frank and Lisa, I felt as if I was perhaps "black listed" by Lisa within the Etsy community. As a long-time member of Etsy, and someone invested in learning more and potentially able to offer the Etsy community valuable information, I felt hurt and a bit defeated. It was not the response that I expected from Etsy Administration. Again, I felt like the behaviors of Etsy Administrators were not in keeping with what they preach on the site. However, I sought to keep my feelings from entering into the process of analysis and interpretation, and instead I focused on the data I collected that captured members' experiences. I also reminded myself that these experiences were particular to my data collection process as a researcher, and not related to understanding what it means to sell, shop, or work for Etsy.

Implications of the Outcomes

Etsy has reimagined commerce by integrating community back into the consumption process as well as the market experience. As was discussed in the previous chapters, Etsy's market and community are interdependent and shaped by the different

members participating in its platform: Administrators, Sellers, and Buyers. The integration of community into the production side of the exchange process has resulted in a unique commerce experience that relies on a community of Sellers, rather than a market of competition. Etsy's novel approach to blending an online community and market has theoretical implications for the fields of Consumer Behavior and Sociology as well as practical implications for online retailing. As such, this section of the chapter discusses these implications, and is organized into the following four sections: (1) *Consumption, Community, and Market*, (2) *Etsy's Application of Web 2.0*, (3) *The Market Prosumer*, and (4) *Moralized Markets*.

Consumption, Community, and Market

As discussed in previous chapters, Etsy does not align with just one particular consumption community model. That is, even though consumers bond over the "brand" of Etsy, they do not bond over a physical good, rather, they bond over the experience of selling in Etsy's market. Although the consumption community literature (Cova, 1997; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998), and brand community literature (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001) asserts that consumers can bond over a service experience, this study found that Etsy's consumer does so in a way that has yet to be discussed in the research.

Another key theoretical implication of this study for the literature is that Etsy's consumers are also the main producers of goods that ultimately perpetuate the Etsy brand. This is in contrast to what the brand community literature usually suggests. For example, brand community members of Harley Davidson bond over goods that Harley Davidson develops and places in the market. Thus, Etsy relies on the consumers of the service

(Sellers) to produce the goods to be purchased by the consumers of goods (Buyers). As another example, Joe's Soda is known for co-producing goods with its customers to generate new soda flavors. Even without customer engagement or its brand community, Joe's Soda would still be able to produce and distribute its products. In contrast, Etsy relies on its community to provide goods to sell in its market, and ultimately generate revenue from fees, sales, and advertisements. In turn, without Sellers' constant engagement in the community and market, Etsy would be unable to offer goods for sale. As a result, unlike firms within other types of brand communities, Etsy invests time and energy into making its primary consumer (Sellers) successful at producing rather than purchasing goods.

Market consumption community. Etsy's unique model consequently offers a platform from which Sellers can bond over the market experience of selling on Etsy, thereby fostering what I call a *market consumption community*. Keeping in mind the definition of consumption community, as well as the similarities and differences between Etsy and existing consumption community models, I propose that this *market consumption community* can be described as a collective group of producers that unite through the selling experience, forming social bonds and relationships based on shared values and ideals that shape the respective market. Particular to Etsy, the values and ideals shared are related to engaging in the process of selling handmade, unique, and craft based goods within Etsy's market. Sellers bond by sharing experiences, advice, and a passion for selling these goods. Thus, they ultimately form a community whose mission is to produce, sell, and promote the consumption of these goods in Etsy's market.

Markets like Etsy, which rely on its consumers to produce goods for its market, appear to be a growing trend in online retailing. For example, I learned about ArtFire from a Seller that I interviewed. She shared a story about how another Seller that she was friends with left Etsy to sell strictly on ArtFire. Similar to Etsy, ArtFire has replicated the community-based electronic market model by integrating social media, and drawing from the handmade community to foster a community of Sellers to produce and sell handmade goods within the digital walls of an online shop. Given Etsy's growth, and the introduction of copycat sites like ArtFire (Figure 44), this study reveals the extent to which community-based markets are a growing trend in online retailing. As such, the concept of market consumption communities will likely continue to grow as this type of electronic market gains popularity. The concept of *market consumption community* could therefore be a useful tool to further investigate community-related behaviors within community-based electronic markets.

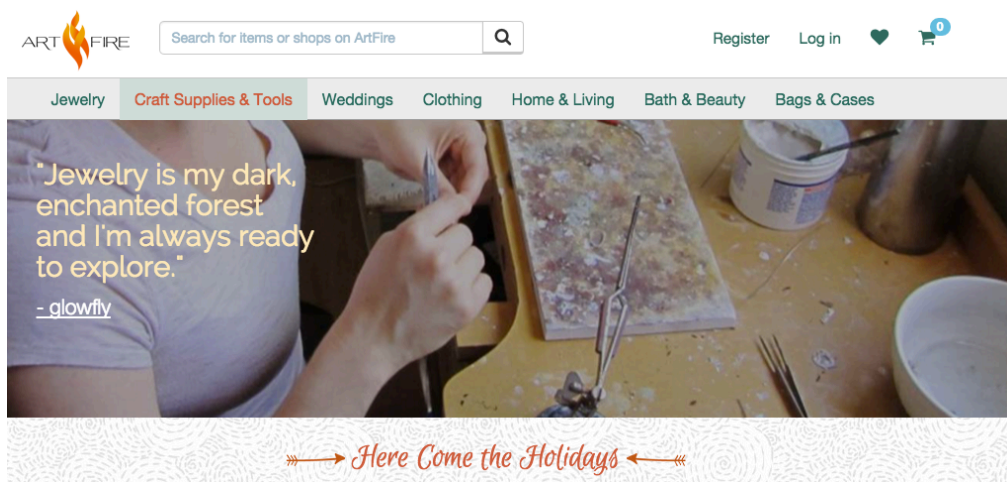


Figure 44. ArtFire's Homepage

Etsy as a community-based electronic market. Based on the findings of this study, Etsy is more than just an online craft store. Instead it is an electronic market driven by a craft-focused community. As revealed by this dissertation, the marriage of craft culture, community, and market has been key to Etsy's success.

Other retailers have realized the success of this formula, and have retrofitted the Etsy model to gain market share in the handmade market. This type of retailing approach can be described as a *community-based electronic market (CBEM)*. Using Etsy as an exemplar, this dissertation reveals how such electronic markets can foster a relationship between community and market that is interdependent, and one wherein each entity supports and shapes the other. The result is a community of Sellers that unite over shared values and ideals related to the selling of a particular category of goods. Thematic interpretation from this study revealed that this approach has several benefits to a market-based business, whether it Etsy or Amazon.

Indeed, it appears that the communal experience of selling and shaping Etsy's market gives many Sellers a sense of ownership over Etsy. As a result, Sellers act as "brand ambassadors" of sorts. For instance, Sellers not only promote their own shops, but Etsy as a whole, often discussing how it is a great place to sell and there are so many unique items. Likewise, the communal selling experience generates positive word-of-mouth about Etsy, increasing brand recognition for Etsy's market. Moreover, this approach fosters a participatory culture, one in which competing Sellers often work together as a community and/or Team to help individual Sellers grow their business, and in turn, make Etsy's market a financial success.

Although capitalizing on this idea of communal selling has increased Etsy's market growth and generated positive word-of-mouth, as discussed in the thematic interpretation chapters, this process has not been without challenges. For instance, Etsy Administration works continuously to appease Sellers, spending its resources on developing education to create successful Sellers, as well as reinforce Etsy's cultural values. In doing so, Etsy quickly expanded its market of both Buyers and Sellers. This expansion became a double-edged sword for Etsy, as an increase in Sellers made Etsy's market appear oversaturated to newer Sellers, and, in turn, made it difficult for anyone to find a niche in the market. In addition, this growth forced Etsy to reevaluate its market policies, as it had to decide whether to stay the same or shift to new policies to encourage successful Seller growth. As discussed throughout the thematic interpretation chapters, Etsy ultimately decided to change its policies regarding mass-manufacturing, which shifted it away from the values and ideals that had originally united members.

Another challenge that surfaced has to do with authenticity. For instance, as Etsy's market grows, so does the number of inauthentic Sellers, such as resellers. Both Sellers and Buyers noted an increase in the number of resellers with Etsy's market growth. The inability to identify and eliminate these "Sellers" could, over time, tarnish Etsy's reputation by diminishing the authenticity of its handmade mission. When it began, Etsy cleverly tapped into the pre-existing craft culture, which then served as the foundation for Etsy's market and community. As one of the first electronic markets to integrate a community and market in this way, Etsy has first mover advantage among other community-based electronic markets. For now, it appears that Etsy's site remains

authentic due to its craft community roots, which potentially hinders other sites from achieving the same success with a craft focused, community-based electronic market. For instance, Amazon Handcrafted or ArtFire may appear inauthentic to the consumer because they are copying Etsy, and doing so for solely financial gains, rather than helping the handmade community to grow and flourish.

Clearly, alongside the implications for theory offered by this dissertation there are potential implications for practice. For Etsy, integrating a community focus into a market platform has proven to be a very successful approach. Other *community-based electronic market* retailers like Amazon and eBay can learn from Etsy's use of community and market to bring similar financial success and growth to their markets. To do so, these *community-based electronic markets*, should focus efforts on fostering a *market consumption community* as was found to be the case with Etsy.

Also as seen with Etsy, social media tools, such as its Blog and Forums, are successful tools for generating Seller-to-Seller, as well as Seller-to-Administration interaction, which are interactions that are pivotal to the success of *market consumption communities*. This dissertation revealed that such tools foster social interaction among market members, allowing Sellers to provide feedback and additional insight to one another and to Etsy Administration. Social interaction via social media is critical to these communities, as it can result in bonding among members, which can lead to online community development.

As seen in this dissertation, the *market consumption community* within Etsy bonds over the experience of selling in its market, and this shared experience is what helps its

market maintain a community spirit. Therefore, when creating a sense of a community within these markets, it is best for retailers to focus on the values and ideals shared related to a market's products and exchange process. In addition, these retailers should focus on the importance of community, Seller-to-Seller engagement, and overall market success. That is, if the market itself does not focus on competition, Sellers will follow a similar path, directing attention to other Sellers, and over time, create a community of Sellers.

Along similar lines, other values found to generate this sense of community within Etsy as a *community-based electronic market* are honesty and transparency. For instance, by encouraging Sellers to be honest and transparent, it is likely that they will be more willing to share their experiences and tips with other Sellers, generating a sense of camaraderie or collaboration instead of competition. However, it is important to note that firms need to lead by example. As in the case of Etsy, Administration sets the precedent by modeling these behaviors, which encourages Sellers to do the same. In turn, many Sellers pick up on these behaviors, and often integrate them into their shops and exchange practices. In sum, when a firm focuses its attention on community development, instead of just financial success, its members will likely shift their attention away from competition and redirect it toward community and overall market success.

Last, this study reveals that a unique feature of *community-based electronic markets* is that they rely on Sellers to generate revenue. In turn, from a business perspective, Sellers are not only the *community-based electronic market* customers but also their manufacturers. In turn, as Etsy Administration stressed, it is very important to

understand the needs of Sellers, as they offer the perspective of customers consuming the selling service offered by Etsy. Similar businesses should invest resources back into their Sellers by providing Seller education and feedback tools. As this dissertation has shown, social media is an efficient way to disseminate this information from business to Seller, as well as provide Sellers the opportunity to share information with each another. Moreover, types of exchanges, such as those that are transparent or involve co-collaboration, also perpetuate a sense of community based on the selling experience, which is essential to *community-based electronic markets*.

Etsy's Application of Web 2.0

Findings from this dissertation highlight the benefits of Web 2.0 for retailers like Etsy in particular and online stores in general. Etsy's exchange process is communal, achieved by integrating social media and other Web 2.0 elements within the site (e.g., personalization/customization, social networking, user added value, interaction/orientation). As such, Etsy can be seen as an exemplary form of a user-driven online retailing site that industry can use to understand how to achieve particular types of consumer and producer experiences. Moreover, by focusing on the experiences of Etsy Administration and Sellers, practical implications can be drawn for other *community-based electronic markets*, as well as other online service providers, such as online personal styling sites, travel sites, and banking sites.

As this dissertation reveals, Etsy is innovative in the way it uses social media to work with Sellers in the development and improvement of its Seller tools. As discussed in previous chapters, Etsy Administration developed the idea of Prototype Teams, where

Sellers join Teams to adopt and use potential site tools, as well as provide feedback about the usability and overall applicability of these tools. This approach provides Sellers the opportunity to engage with Etsy Administration. In so doing, Sellers invest time and energy in the market, as well as provide Administration with valuable information. This information is then used by Etsy Administration to make decisions about moving forward with, revising, or eliminating its potential Seller tools. To this end, Etsy is able to conserve resources by eliminating tools that are not viable before they are fully developed. At the same time, Etsy opens an authentic dialogue with its Sellers, one that results in the development of tools that directly impact the Sellers. This is just one of the ways by which Etsy integrates social networking to generate interaction with its customers and create a partnership between producers (Etsy Administration) and consumers (Sellers). Likewise, Etsy Administration develops and uses Forums and Blog comments to survey and address community needs, as well as assess community sentiments regarding different market practices and policies.

A reoccurring theme throughout the interpretation is the extent to which Etsy develops and implements tailor-made social media to create a dialogue with its customers (Sellers). Etsy develops tailor-made social media tools to meet the needs of all members within its community-based electronic market. The purpose of these tools is to foster and encourage an open dialogue between producers (Etsy Administration/Sellers) and consumers (Sellers/Buyers) within Etsy (producer and consumer interaction), as well as foster the development of user-added value and personalization/customization. For instance, unlike with other electronic retailers, there are no 1-800 numbers or customer

service representative chat-rooms. Instead, Etsy Administrators have an employee profile page, and Convo (e-mail). The profile page can be personalized so members can share personal information, like where he/she is from, his/her favorite food, role at Etsy, etc. On this page, members can directly interact with Etsy Administrators via Etsy Convo's. As such, unlike other online retailers, Etsy Administrators field customer complaints without hiding behind a name or pseudonym. Indeed, each Etsy profile includes the Administrator's name and picture. One Etsy Administrator shared that this personal touch is very important to Etsy, as it reinforces market transparency and gives Etsy Administrators power and ownership over their work. To this end, it also humanizes online producer/consumer exchanges, thereby making Etsy Administration more approachable to consumers (Sellers).

In sum, Etsy integrates the four affordances of Web 2.0 (social networking, personalization/customization, interaction orientation, and user-added value) as defined by Wirtz, Schilke, and Ullrich (2010), which results in a highly interactive and successful community-based electronic market. Out of the four attributes of Web 2.0, integration of social networking is the most pivotal, as it serves as the cornerstone of Etsy's success, and one that it uses to integrate and foster the other main characteristics of Web 2.0. A summary of practical implications and insights for how similar online retailers can harness these Web 2.0 affordances is provided next.

Social networking. Social networking as an affordance of Web 2.0 is identified by the application of four trends: social identity, social trust, virtual word of mouth, and consumer power. Social identity refers to the ability to create belonging among social

groups. Image management is important to achieving social identity. As such, it would be important for online markets to allow their Sellers to create a market identity by providing customization through the selling experience. For instance, this can be achieved by allowing Sellers to customize their shop pages, including the overall aesthetic, product descriptions, categories, shop policies and mission statement. As found with Etsy, it is important to allow Sellers to have a space where they can create a “Seller identity.”

The next social networking trend, social trust, is pivotal to creating a sense of community in community-based electronic markets. There are several practices a firm can put in place to establish social trust. However, it is important to note that trust is something that must be earned and maintained in these markets. Indeed, based on findings of this dissertation, trust and transparency go hand-in-hand. For this reason, social media tools are a great way to establish social trust within a community-based electronic market, as they help it to be transparent, which allows dialogue about market practices and problems public to the entire market. Along similar lines, holding events like Etsy’s Town Halls, where all members are invited to join online or face-to-face, provide Sellers with the opportunity to ask questions directly of the firm, which also creates an open and transparent dialogue. Based on the findings presented here, other tools that would help establish this social trust are forums and blogs, wherein both parties (the firm and its customers) can share information and ideas with one another. Forums are a great space for question and answer sessions, as they are open to all members. A blog is another successful space for Administration to share business, community, and

market information with Sellers, as it provides Sellers with the opportunity to offer direct feedback. These tools are useful for establishing social trust because they are transparent in the sense that all the information lives online for the entire community to view.

However, to build and maintain social trust, sometimes private conversations are also needed. In these instances, a closed e-mail system works well or an instant messaging service. Particular to building social trust among Sellers, it is a good idea to provide Sellers with online spaces in which they can congregate as smaller groups. For instance, this dissertation points to the ways that Etsy provides a space where smaller groups of its members can congregate, known as Etsy Teams. This is important because, as was found in this dissertation, forums were seen as intimidating because they involve the entire community. Sellers will often turn instead to smaller groups, reaching out to one another for advice and shop help, and through these interactions social trust is established in the smaller group. Then, over time, it can be established between the Seller and the broader market.

In order to build social trust within a community-based electronic market, the messages communicated through the various social media tools must be well planned. The messages distributed over social media should be related to the community as well as the market. It is important to note that messages about the market should be created from the perspective of Sellers. For instance, instead of focusing on how well the market is doing compared to other markets, focus on Sellers that are doing exceptionally well and moving the market and community forward. These tools also provide firms with the ability to communicate and discuss market changes, rather than just push these changes

onto the Sellers. Last, some messages should be directed toward the values and ideals that move the market and community forward, serving as a reminder of why their customers sell in that particular market.

The next trend, virtual word of mouth, has been found to be vital to Buyers and Sellers within these markets. As such, firms should provide shop review tools and methods, as Sellers rely on virtual word of mouth to build credibility. At the same time, Buyers rely on virtual word of mouth when making purchases. Virtual word of mouth can be established outside of these community-based electronic markets by way of public social media. In turn, these firms should integrate such public social media tools seamlessly into their own interface from the Buyer and Seller perspective. Particular to this dissertation, it was found that Pinterest and Instagram generate the most positive virtual word of mouth, often leading Buyers to Etsy and to specific shops.

The last social networking trend is consumer power, which is defined as a “firm’s awareness of user opinions and thus their influence vis-à-vis the firm” (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010, p. 277). To achieve consumer power, it is essential for a firm to keep a clear line of communication between its Sellers and Administration. Moreover, a firm should make it the Administrator’s responsibility to seek out Sellers’ opinions about the projects they are working on, and make decisions based on these opinions. In turn, similar to what has been discussed with the other three trends, again, social media is pivotal to achieving consumer power in these community-based electronic markets for several reasons. First, social media tools provide a conduit to connect the Seller to Administration. As such, there are a myriad of ways that Administration can create social

media tools to generate awareness of Seller opinion, and then show them how their opinions are integrated back into these markets. For instance, these firms can create groups that members can join to help Administration develop ideas, practices, or tools particular to Sellers, similar to Etsy's Prototype Teams. Another way to achieve consumer power is to show how Sellers' opinions are integrated back into the market and community by way of blog posts. At the same time, Administration can use forum and blog comments to get a feel for Sellers' opinions. Furthermore, these tools create a good point of contact for Administration, as they can reach out to individual or groups of Sellers for more feedback about particular topics when making decisions.

Interaction orientation. The next affordance, interaction orientation, refers to a firm's ability "to manage effectively the rising customer demand for a more intense and authentic dialogue between firm and customer" (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010, p. 277). The following are four dimensions of interaction orientation: interaction configuration, customer response, consumer centricity, and cooperative generation.

Interaction configuration refers to the way a firm structures interaction and communication with its customers. Particular to community-based electronic markets, social media is a good way to structure interaction and communication between Sellers and Administration. In particular, asynchronous social media communication has proven to be fruitful. For instance, a blog or forum uses asynchronous communication, as the sender and receiver share back and forth messages. As already discussed, closed e-mail systems are another useful interaction configuration, as some communication between members needs to be private.

The second dimension of interaction orientation is customer response, which refers to a "... firm's ability to manage the dialog with its customers, and develop capabilities to allow it to react and respond to individual customer feedback while simultaneously codifying the acquired information in order to improve future customer dialog" (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010, p. 277). The successful use of customer response is dependent on the interaction configurations and interaction orientation within a firm; the application of these two dimensions ultimately supports customer response. For instance, as shared in Chapter VII, an exemplar of Etsy's customer response is its use of Prototype Teams. These provide a place "for people who want to test and provide feedback on new Shop Stats Features before they're available to everyone..." Along these lines, firms should implement tools and ask their Sellers to evaluate and provide suggestions to improve on them for community and market exchange purposes.

The customer centricity concept refers to a firm placing its customer on center stage. This is achieved by integrating customer thoughts and opinions into everyday firm practices and functions, like customer responses. In line with this train of thought, it is important to create and manage communication tools that allow for Sellers to voice their opinions and have a stake in the company. In addition, the firm should communicate back to Sellers about how these ideas were then used to make company decisions and to structure the market.

The successful integration of the previous three dimensions (interaction configuration, customer response, and consumer centricity) can result in the seamless integration of the final interaction orientation trend: cooperative value generation.

Cooperative value generation refers to a firm's efforts to equalize the power relationship between the firm and its consumers (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). As seen in this dissertation, this can be achieved by developing and integrating customer-led initiatives, and placing the Seller in the driver's seat of community and market decision-making. To achieve cooperative value, a firm should find ways give power back to its customers, allowing them to shape, mold, and/or have a say in the values and ideals that form the market in which they engage. For instance, allowing members to vote on new rules and regulations, or holding open forums where members debate topics that will impact the market. In addition, community-based electronic markets should allow Sellers to have power over the community aspects of a firm. In this study, it was found that when consumers feel that they have power over the community, they are more invested and therefore are more willing to participate in it.

Personalization/customization. Personalization/customization refers to a firm's ability to allow individuals, groups and societies to customize the online retailing experience. Thus, this affordance is defined by three dimensions: personal customization, group customization, and social customization (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). Focusing on individuals, firms can achieve customization by allowing members to shape the selling experience to their own needs. To achieve this, it is suggested that Sellers be allowed to customize shop pages, profiles, shop policies, product offerings, as well as the degree of interaction they have with the community and market. In short, the selling experience should be one that is tailor-made by a Seller to meet her or his own wants and needs.

For community-based electronic retailers, it can be difficult to incorporate the group and social customization dimensions. However, some examples emerged from the findings of this dissertation that are specific to how they can be adapted to the community-based market context. Group customization refers to the social construction of a product. However, for Sellers in community-based markets, the selling experience is the end product. Thus, these markets can provide their consumers with the opportunity to congregate in groups to shape their market experiences. This can be done by providing open spaces in which members can meet and unite over a shared interest related to selling, as seen with Etsy Teams. Although Etsy does not have an option for members to create products as a group, similar firms could provide spaces where groups create products together. Similar to Etsy Teams, a firm could provide an open online space where members can share their ideas about creating products that could be sold on behalf of the firm. For instance, members could form a group that could meet to discuss creating t-shirts or other merchandise that features the firm's logo.

Last, social customization refers to a firm's ability to provide customers with customized products particular to a distinct social group (Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010). For these firms, customers usually purchase a selling experience, therefore these firms should customize online products to meet their Sellers' needs. For instance, Etsy's community embraces a wide variety of Sellers, from bakers to carpenters. Other consumer-based electronic market retailers have a similar range of Sellers. As such, tools should be developed to meet the distinct needs of the different groups of Sellers. An example could be using a blog to post articles and advice particular to different categories

of Sellers. For example, multiple articles covering photography of a range of products, such as one for baked goods, another for jewelry, and a third for large furniture items.

User-added affordances. As this dissertation reveals, Etsy relies on user-added affordances to foster a market driven by a community of Sellers, and is a key marker of consumer-based electronic retailers. Wirtz, Schilke, and Ullrich (2010) have identified the following user-added trends: user-generated content, user-generated creativity, user-generated innovation, and user-generated revenue. Etsy offers examples of all four.

Community-based electronic markets rely on user-generated content to drive and shape them, as well as provide them with user-generated revenue. Thus, it is vital for these firms to encourage the continuous development of user-generated content. That means that such firms should provide inspiration, insights, and tips on how to be successful in their markets. One way to do this is by educating Sellers through firm generated, Seller-related guides, blog posts, and videos. At the same time, it is important to provide ways Sellers can reach out to one another for advice, by forming smaller selling groups or posting to blogs and forums. Within blogs and forums the firm should encourage Sellers to be creative and innovative with the products they sell as well as the way they approach the selling process. As seen within this dissertation, user-generated creativity and innovation is not only important when it comes to the goods sold on Etsy, it is also important to the Buyer's experience of Etsy.

It is important to again note that these implications are developed from the study of one community-based electronic market: Etsy. However, the introduction of Amazon's Handcrafted site signals the success of this format and, as such, Amazon and similar

online retailers have adopted these Web 2.0 attributes in a similar way. Moreover, since its introduction, Etsy has enjoyed continuous market growth. This suggests that the consumer-based electronic market is an ongoing trend in retailing. Findings presented here are the first to shed light on what Seller services mean for markets and their community members.

The Market Prosumer

Within this study of Etsy, a unique market actor emerged: the Prosumer. As discussed, a prosumer is a market actor that assumes multiple roles within the market, typically adopting the role of both consumer and producer (Denegri-Knott & Zwick, 2012; Kim & Wulf, 2009; Kotler, 1986). Particular to Etsy, interpretation of the data indicates that many Sellers, Buyers, and Administrators assume two or more roles in the market. Similar to what has been found in brand community research, the prosumers within Etsy also engage in brand collaboration (de Almeida, Dholakia, and Vianello, 2007; Füller, Matzler, & Hoppe, 2008; Kim, Bae, & Kang, 2008; Maria & Finotto, 2008; Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Wu & Fang, 2010). For instance, it was found that Sellers collaborate with Buyers to create customized goods. At the same time, Sellers and Etsy Administration collaborate to create Seller tools, such as Prototype Teams. Like other prosumers, Etsy's Prosumers are more invested in their community and market as compared to non-prosumers, often adopting and perpetuating these values within and beyond Etsy's community.

As an idea yet to be examined in the current prosumer literature, sometimes an Etsy Administrator will also adopt the role of Prosumer, thereby engaging in all of the

available market roles within Etsy (Buyer, Seller, and Administrator). Thus, the idea of Administration taking on the role of prosumer creates a type of market player that has not been identified in market or prosumer literature, the *market prosumer*. This type of prosumer is specific to *community-based electronic markets*, as it requires an employee to have the opportunity to sell and buy within the same market in which she or he is employed.

Indeed, online observation of and conversations with Etsy Administration revealed that it is common practice, and even advocated by Etsy employees that they have an Etsy shop as well as purchase items from Etsy. For instance, when Rob Kalin was the CEO of Etsy, all new employees received a \$200 Etsy gift card to use to purchase supplies for their office spaces. Moreover, an Etsy Administrator interviewed was at one point also a Team Captain for one of the most successful Etsy Teams and a shop owner. She has since stepped down as Team Captain, but is still a shop owner.

A *market prosumer* must assume three roles within one electronic market: (1) an employee, (2) producer, and (3) consumer. As members, Prosumers are extremely invested in Etsy, but perpetuate Etsy's values and ideals through three different Etsy channels: the employee channel, the buying channel, and the selling channel. This is beneficial to Etsy, and can potentially be beneficial to similar community-based electronic markets. That is, hiring employees that are also Sellers and Buyers is beneficial to Etsy, and can be a beneficial practice for other community-based electronic markets. By hiring employees that are already aware of Etsy's community-based market approach, there is very little learning curve for new employees. In addition, these employees have

already adopted the values and ideals that shape Etsy as a market from the Seller perspective. Consequently, it is more likely that they will integrate and align with the values and ideals that shape the corporate culture of Etsy. Indeed, all of the Etsy Administrators in this study embraced and promoted Etsy's mission.

Moralized Markets

According to Stehr and Adolf (2010) there are three market conditions required for moralized markets—moralization of consumption, moralization of consumer goods, and moralization of consumer goods production—all of which rely on the interplay between consumer and producer. Stehr and Adolf (2010) recognize that not all markets are moralized or meet consumers' moral demands to the same degree. As the findings of this dissertation revealed, these characteristics exist within Etsy, but are not prevalent throughout Etsy, as not all members adopt moralized values. This point aligns with the moralized market assumption that not all markets are moralized and/or meet consumers' moral demands. Particular to this point, Etsy's market exists within the capitalistic system, but is a private market. It is private because it requires the user to join Etsy to sell, buy, and engage in the market, whereas anyone can engage in the overall capitalistic system. By making each member, Buyer and Seller, join Etsy, Etsy is able to notify members of the practices and policies that foster the moralized conditions within its market. At the same time, this introduction to Etsy provides a moral point of departure from which it ensures that Sellers and Buyers abide by these policies and practices.

Markets within markets. Findings from this dissertation add to the body of moral market literature by identifying a market that meets the moralized market conditions, yet

is not fully moralized. As discussed, Etsy in its entirety is not moralized, in that not all market players seek out moralized goods or adopt moralized consumption values. However, findings suggest that within Etsy's market, smaller moralized markets exist. Moreover, the different moralized markets within Etsy meet different moral demands. For instance, one type of item sold on Etsy meets consumers' moralized demands particular to the consumption of green or "all natural goods." In a similar vein, other categories within Etsy that speak to the notion of moralized markets are products made in America, handmade products that can be customized, and goods made using ethical production practices.

Etsy practices what it preaches to the extent that it does not just invest in and care for its community of Sellers, but it also offers several outreach programs to help communities external to Etsy. For instance, Etsy harnessed the power of its Selling community to develop outreach programs to help groups like senior citizens. Etsy is an example of how a retailer can rely on its community orientation to develop outreach programs that give back, as well as spread the word about its handmade mission.

Moralized markets and B-Corp certification. One of the ways Etsy fosters moralized market "pockets" could be attributed to its B-Corp certification. A B-Corp certification is to business "what Fair Trade certification is to coffee or USDA Organic milk" (B-Corp, 2015b). In short, B-Corps are for-profit companies that abide by policies of transparency, accountability, and performance within the five areas of environment, workers, customers, community, and governance. B-Corps like Etsy apply for B-Corporation status through B Labs, and reapply yearly to maintain the B-Corp

certification. Only 80 out of 200 points are required to obtain and maintain a B-Corp certification. In 2013, Etsy scored 105 on its B Impact Report.

This is one of the first studies to explore a B-Corporation from a culture, community, and market perspective. By approaching the topic this way, I discovered how Etsy fostered an environment wherein its Administrators and its Sellers adopt values and practices that reinforce B-Corp standards. Practical implications can be articulated based on how Etsy carries out these practices within its unique community-based electronic market, which will be discussed next.

The first measure in Etsy's B-Impact report is an assessment of the impact on the environment of its business practices and functions, as well as the ability of its products to resolve environmental issues (B-Corp, 2015b). As a business, Etsy practices and promotes environmental responsibility in several ways, including: recycling, composting, and using energy efficient technologies, as well as educating members about environmentally friendly practices, and providing a platform for the retail of environmentally friendly goods (up-cycled and organic products). Etsy communicates and promotes these practices throughout its community via its Blogs and e-mails. For instance, Administrators often post on their Blogs about Etsy Sellers or Teams engaging in these environmentally friendly practices.

The second measure of a company's B-Corp status, workers, is measured by the B-lab through evaluating how Etsy treats its' employees in terms of compensation, benefits, training, and ownership opportunities, work environment, manager/employee communication, and corporate culture (B-Corp, 2015b). The data revealed several ways

that Etsy upholds the worker measure of B-Corps. For instance, at Etsy, employees are able to claim ownership over their work by using their actual names and photos to mark their contributions to Etsy's website. Etsy Administration does not hide behind pseudonyms or false identities. By using the employee's actual name and image, she or he is held accountable by not just other Etsy Administration, but by Sellers and Buyers. Moreover, the corporate culture at Etsy appears to be very creative, flexible, and fun. Etsy strives to make the work environment home-like. For example, the company allows employees to bring their dogs to work, provides funds for decorating their desk space, and provides lunch at least once a week. In turn, employees seem to truly love working for Etsy, adopting and promoting its values and ideals.

The impact that a firm has on its customers' welfare is the third measure of the B-Impact report. This section of the report specifically focuses on Etsy's overall impact on the public at large and underserved populations, and how products and services resolve social and environment issues (B-Corp, 2015b). Etsy's mission of reimaging commerce fits with expectation of making a positive impact on society. Etsy provides an international population with the means to create economic opportunity by turning passion into a viable business. In addition, Etsy gives back to its customers in several ways (i.e., the Etsy Entrepreneurship program and Etsy Team grants).

The fourth measure for a B-Corp certification is a company's contribution to communities, both local and beyond. Etsy is heavily involved in giving back to the Brooklyn community, at the same time it encourages other Etsy members to be involved within their own local communities. As shared throughout this dissertation, events are

hosted at headquarters and Etsy partners with other organizations to make charitable contributions. Sellers within Etsy practice similar behaviors. For instance, a Seller interviewed for this study donates a portion of her sales back to local and national charitable organizations for dogs.

The last measure in the B-Impact report is governance. The B-lab evaluates a company's governance by focusing on its overall accountability and transparency (B-Corp, 2015b). In this area, the B-lab measured Etsy's accountability and transparency relative to its policies and practices, mission statement, and stakeholder communications. As discussed, transparency is the key to how Etsy promotes moralized conditions, and ultimately, small pockets of moralized markets are formed.

Transparency is achieved by fostering direct communication between and among Sellers, Buyers and Administrators, as well as by making members accountable for upholding Etsy policies. For instance, a key policy is the Reseller policy. Etsy provides members with an open line of communication to report, clarify, and, if necessary, reprimand Sellers that do not abide by this policy, or other Seller and Buyer policies. As discussed, Etsy wants Sellers to become stakeholders by taking part in the process of shaping the market. For example, Town Hall meetings and Prototype Teams provide opportunities for Sellers to directly impact Etsy's business.

This discussion of the different ways that Etsy has achieved B-Corp status can be used to help similar businesses achieve B-Corp certification. That is, these methods could help similar online retailers achieve B-Corp certification, and foster moralized conditions between retailers and consumers. As shared, this is just one of the ways that Etsy fosters

moralized conditions, which ultimately supports the pockets of moralized markets that have emerged within its overall market.

Limitations and Future Research

In this dissertation, I investigated Etsy's community and market using netnographic and ethnographic methods. By doing so, I was able to explore the depth and breadth of Etsy, uncovering rich findings to explain the outcomes of converging culture, community, and market in an online environment. While these findings are significant to enriching and enhancing literature in the area of community, culture, and market, findings are limited to a single retailer: Etsy. In light of this limitation, it is suggested that future studies be carried out on similar markets, such as ArtFire and Amazon Handcrafted, to explore similarities and differences among markets and points where culture, community, and market converge in the creation of an online retailing platform. More can be discovered and substantiated particular to the ideas of a community-based electronic market as well as the market prosumer.

As discussed in the reflection portion of this chapter, the role that Etsy Administration fulfills for its market and community is vital, however this is a newer concept in online retailing. In turn, the literature on this topic is scant at best, and there is a need to explore this role further. This dissertation provides a foundation for exploring this particular role, and, as such, can be used to support the investigation of similar members in other community-based electronic markets. Along similar lines, it was also found that market prosumers are vital to these markets. However, the concept of a market prosumer was discovered in this study, and therefore this is the first academic study to

explore the idea. As discussed, it appears that the role of a market prosumer benefits these type of markets (i.e., acting as brand ambassador and generating positive word-of-mouth). Considering the benefits prosumers can potentially provide to online retailers, and this role needs to be explored further.

Etsy is a female dominated market. As such, nearly all of the participants in this study are female. Future studies are needed to seek out and understand the male perspective on the topic of Etsy's culture, community, and market. As seen in the consumer behavior literature there are differences between the way females and males engage in the consumption experience, therefore it would be interesting to know if these differences exist particular to a community-based market such as Etsy.

This study was conducted over a 3-month period of time. Since data collection ended, much about Etsy has changed. For instance, in 2015 the company went public on the New York Stock Exchange. Future studies are needed in light of these changes, particularly examining how Etsy's market has either stayed the same or changed as a result. For instance, Etsy no longer provides *Weather Reports*, which reported monthly financial and growth figures. Instead it provides yearly and quarterly financial reports, which also include other pertinent corporate information. It is also unclear whether Etsy is still a B-Corp, as it only includes a B-Impact report from 2014 on its website.

Because the notion of B-Corps is relatively new, there is limited information available as to how companies actually achieve this status. Consequently, this is another new area for researchers to explore. Academics and practitioners need to understand the impact that B-Corp status has on employees, a company, and what this status truly means

to customers. For instance, in this study, Buyers and Sellers were unaware of Etsy's B-Corp status. Making this status known among consumers could potentially have positive and profitable results for a company.

Last, this study explored the sociological topic of moralized markets. Despite the growing interest in green consumption and ethical business practices, few studies have explored this topic, and to date, no studies have explored this topic within a consumer behavior framework. Future studies are needed to better understand how the moralized market concept is influencing consumer behavior. This is a concept that could possibly explain the current status and expansion of moral trends, such as consumer interest in farm-to-table food consumption, and "Made in America" products. Moreover, this concept can be used to examine the various strategies retailers may use to collaborate with consumers when creating products that meet consumers' ethical demands.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Etsy functions as an electronic market driven by a craft-focused community. By exploring how Etsy functions as an electronic market in the context of culture, community, and market, an in-depth understanding of a new type of online retailing context, the *community-based electronic market*, was achieved. This exploration was guided by three objectives: (1) to explore what it means to be a member of the Etsy community, (2) to investigate the extent to which this community shapes Etsy's practices and functions as a market, and (3) to examine the implications of Etsy as a community-driven market for online retailing. Specific to the first research objective, it was found that Sellers are the key members of Etsy's community. As such, Sellers, engage with Buyers, Etsy Administration, as well as

other Sellers to carry out their roles in Etsy's community and market. Relative to the second objective, it was found that Etsy's market and community are interdependent, as the community influences the market and the market influences the community. Moreover, it was discovered that Etsy relies on community through the adoption of participatory culture values and ideals as well as artisans and crafting communities to adopt, develop, and implement values that shape the market's policies. In so doing, it creates a unique and collaborative community that is interdependent, and shares the value of making the world better through reimagining commerce. Relative to the final objective of this study, findings direct attention to the implications of Etsy as a community-based market for online retailing. This investigation revealed that Etsy does not align with existing community and market models, in turn, Etsy is described as community-based electronic retailer. It was further discovered that Etsy offers an example of a market consumption community.

In conclusion, this dissertation brings to light new concepts that add depth and breadth to existing consumer behavior literature, thus opening new research avenues within the field. Etsy was found to be a new type of online retailing model, a *community-based electronic market*. As discussed, it relies on *market consumption communities* to create products to be sold within its market as well as to shape its community. Etsy is therefore unique within community and culture research, in that it is a collective group of producers that unite through values and ideals that attracted them to sell on Etsy. The relationship between community-based electronic markets and market consumption communities points to how these electronic markets likely rely on one another to foster

interdependence. The structure of Etsy's platform as a community and market results in the formation of a new market player: the *market prosumer*. This type of prosumer is specific to *community-based electronic markets*, as it requires an employee to have the opportunity to sell and buy within the same market in which they are employed.

Etsy relies on the affordances of Web 2.0 to support community and market exchanges, the most vital being that of social networking. Etsy uses social media in unique ways, such as creating Treasuries and Etsy Teams, thereby further promoting the communal spirit within its platform as well as the exchange of values that ultimately shape its community and market. Within Etsy, some consumers bond over moral based values, such as sustainability, which is one of the factors that led to the development of moralized conditions, moralized market players, and ultimately moralized "pockets" within Etsy.

The fast paced growth of Etsy, coupled with other retailers' adoption of Etsy-like platforms (e.g., Amazon Handmade and ArtFire) signals that this business model is a growing trend within online retailing. As this is the first study to delve into the cultural, community, and market aspects of these retailers, future studies need to look forward to further grow and develop this body of knowledge. The concepts of a *community-based electronic market*, *market consumption communities*, and *market prosumers* should serve as entry points for such research.

As this dissertation has shown, Etsy has taken a unique approach to online retailing, as it diverges from the traditional online retailing model by seamlessly integrating community into its market. In so doing, Etsy brings a new format to online

retailing, the *community-based electronic market*. This particular retail format is unique in that it is dependent on *market consumption communities* to not only purchase goods and services, but to provide the merchandise to be sold within the market. Another distinct characteristic of Etsy is the *market prosumer*, a member that buys, sells, and works for Etsy. Again, this market player is unique to the *community-based electronic market*, and new to the literature. Such findings point to a new era in online retailing, and offer new avenues for research on consumer behavior.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Schedule: Etsy Administration

Etsy Administration Employment History

1. When did you join Etsy? How long have you been in your current role? Have you fulfilled any other roles in Etsy?
2. Describe your path to Etsy, and why you decided to work for Etsy?
3. Describe your role and duties as an Etsy administrator.

Community and Communication

4. Who do you interact with in the Etsy community to fulfill your role and duties?
5. How do you communicate with other members of Etsy? (Seller, Buyers, and Other Administrators)
6. Do you interact and communicate with Etsy members offline? When and where do these interactions take place? How often do they occur?
7. What type of Etsy-generated social media tools do you use to do your job? (Etsy Convos, Forums, Blogs, etc..)
8. What type of public social media tools do you use to do your job?

Community

9. Describe Etsy's community. Do buyers and sellers benefit from joining the community? Why or why not?

10. Describe your relationship with other members of Etsy's community (Sellers, Buyers, and Other Administrators).
11. Are there traditions shared among members that give shape to the community? If so, please describe.
12. Are there specific beliefs or goals shared among community members? If so, please describe.
13. Are there moral principles/guidelines to selling and participating within Etsy market?
14. What are the challenges the community faces?
15. Are there any online or offline communities or groups you belong to that assist with your role as an Etsy member?

Administrator's Experiences and Perceptions

16. What are the challenges you personally face as administrative member of Etsy?
17. Do you feel Etsy administration influences Etsy as a market?
18. How do seller and buyers influence Etsy? (Functions and Practices)
19. What do you like the most about Etsy? About being an Etsy Administration?
Least?

Etsy As An Online Retailer

20. How is Etsy similar to other online retailers? Different?
21. What makes Etsy similar or different from other electronic markets, such as Amazon or eBay?
22. What do you think attracts sellers and buyers to Etsy?

23. Do you think the products sold within Etsy unite sellers and buyers? Explain.

24. Is there anything else that you think is important that we did not talk about?

Interview Schedule: Etsy Seller

Selling on Etsy

1. When did you join Etsy?
2. Describe your product assortment. What do you sell? How many items do you sell on a monthly basis? What is the average price per item? What are your average monthly sales?
3. Do you ever sell customized merchandise? If so, could you please describe the experience.
4. Describe what is involved in selling on Etsy.
5. What is the most and least challenging aspect of selling on Etsy?
6. Why did you decide to sell goods on Etsy rather than other electronic markets, such as Amazon, eBay, or RubyLane?

Community and Market Communications

6. What type of Etsy generated social media tools do you rely on the most often? (Convos, Treasuries, Forums, Blog, Seller Handbook etc..)
7. Are there any other types of social media you use to interact with Etsy members, such as Facebook or Meetups? (These interactions can include promotion or advertising from buyer to seller).
8. How do you use the social media provided by Etsy to interact with customers and promote your shop? (Etsy Convos, Treasuries, Forums, Blogs)

9. How often do you communicate and interact with other members of Etsy, both online and offline? Please describe these communications and interactions.

Community

10. What does Etsy mean to you as a community?
11. Could you share an experience that describes your relationship with other members of Etsy's community? (Buyers, Other Sellers, and Administration)
12. Would you describe Etsy as an online community? Why or why not? Who is included in this community?
13. Are there traditions shared among members that give shape to the community? If so, please describe.
14. Are there specific beliefs or goals shared among community members? If so, please describe.
15. Are there moral principles/guidelines to selling and participating within Etsy market?
16. Are there any other online or offline communities or groups you belong to that assist with your role as an Etsy seller?
17. Are you a member of an Etsy Team, and if so what Teams do you belong to? Describe your interactions with Team members? How often do you meet? Do Teams support you as a seller and Etsy as a community?
18. Describe what you like and dislike about Etsy's community. Why?

Administration

19. How do you feel about Etsy administration?

20. As seller, do you impact Etsy's market functions and practices? Why or why not?

Etsy as a Retailer

21. Would you describe Etsy as an online retailer? Why or why not?

22. In particular, what makes Etsy similar or different from other electronic market retailers? Amazon or eBay?

23. Why do you think Etsy has grown to be such a popular site among sellers and buyers?

24. Describe how you define craft, handmade, and vintage in relation to Etsy?

25. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss that we did not talk about?

Interview Schedule: Etsy Buyer

1. How long have you been a member of Etsy?

Buying Experiences

2. Describe your last purchase on Etsy. What did you buy? Why did you buy it?
How much did it cost?

3. Have you ever purchased a customized product from Etsy? If so, can you describe this experience?

4. What are your main considerations when shopping for goods or services on Etsy?

5. Describe your best and worst purchasing experience. What made it bad/good?

6. Describe what you like and dislike about Etsy. Why?

7. Could you please describe why did you decided to join Etsy and shop for handmade products, vintage, or crafting supplies?

Social Media

8. Do you communicate with other members of Etsy (Sellers, Other Buyers, and Administration)? If so, how?
9. In particular, what type of Etsy generated social media tools do you use to communicate with other members? (Etsy Convos, Treasuries, Forums, Blogs)

Community

10. Have you ever interacted with Etsy members offline? If so, describe these experiences.
11. Describe the relationship you share with other Etsy members. (Sellers, Other Buyers, and Administration)
12. What does Etsy mean to you as a community?
13. Are there traditions shared among members that give shape to the community? If so, please describe.
14. Are there specific beliefs or goals shared among community members? If so, please describe.
15. Are there moral principles/guidelines to selling and participating within Etsy market?
16. As a buyer how do you feel you influence the goods sold on Etsy market? Market guidelines and rules? Etsy community? Why/why not?
17. Are there any online or offline communities or groups you belong to and interact with that influence your interactions and purchases on Etsy?

Perceptions of Etsy

18. How would you describe Etsy as an online retailer?
19. What makes Etsy similar and different from other online retailers that sell similar goods? (Amazon, eBay, Urban Outfitters etc...)
20. Describe how you define craft, handmade, and vintage in relation to Etsy.
21. Why do you think Etsy has grown to be such a popular site among consumers?
22. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss that we did not talk about?

APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM



OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE
2718 Beverly Cooper Moore and Irene Mitchell Moore
Humanities and Research Administration Bldg.
PO Box 26170
Greensboro, NC 27402-6170
336.256.1482
Web site: www.uncg.edu/orc
Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #216

To: Nancy Hodges
Cons, Apparel, and Ret Stds
213 Stone Building

From: UNCG IRB

Date: 6/19/2012

RE: Notice of IRB Exemption
Exemption Category: 2.Survey, interview, public observation
Study #: 12-0219

Study Title: Crafters and Collectors: A Study of Etsy Retailers

This submission has been reviewed by the above IRB and was determined to be exempt from further review according to the regulatory category cited above under 45 CFR 46.101(b).

Study Description:

This study explores the selling dimension of Etsy and will explore what it is like to be a retailer member of Etsy as a means to examine the selling dimension of Etsy.

Investigator's Responsibilities

Please be aware that any changes to your protocol must be reviewed by the IRB prior to being implemented. The IRB will maintain records for this study for three years from the date of the original determination of exempt status.

CC: Tiffany Machado

Study Number: 12-0219

Title: Crafters and Collectors: A Study of Etsy Retailers

Letter of Consent

Subject Line: Etsy Shop Owners Volunteers

Hi, my name is Tiffany Machado Blanchflower, I am not only a crafter but a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro. I have been lucky enough to combine my two passions creating handmade goods and apparel research. As a long time crafter and consumer of Etsy goods I am interested in learning more about what is like to be an Etsy shop owner. A large component of being an Etsy shop owner is the shop owner/consumer relationship.

I am contacting you to see if you would consent to participating in my study of the Etsy retailer. As a participant you would be asked to engage in a brief 20 to 30 minute conversation about your experiences as Etsy retailer, specifically the customer/retailer relationship. The mode in which our conversation will take place is your choice, we can discuss these topics online through instant message, over the phone or have a face-to-face conversation. No additional information or questions will be required; I am only asking permission to use our conversation about the customer/retailer relationship. As a participant your name and Etsy username will not be disclosed or used in the research study.

Your consent to participate in my study would be greatly appreciated and further my understanding of what is like to be an Etsy shop owner. Results from this study will benefit you as an Etsy retailer, providing you with a deeper understanding of your role as an Etsy's retailer. This study will also benefit society, providing an insiders purview of how this one-of-kind retail format functions through the small successes of online crafters and creators retailing handmade and vintage goods.

Any additional questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Nancy Hodges who may be contacted at (336) 256-0291 or at nancy_hodges@uncg.edu. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351. By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Tiffany Machado Blanchflower.

UNCG IRB
Approved Consent Form

Valid 6/19/12 to 6/18/15

Signature: _____ Date: _____

In lieu of signing this document you can respond through email to indicate your consent to participate in this study.

UNCG IRB
Approved Consent Form
Valid 10/19/12 to 10/18/15