ASSOCIATION FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH

The Impact of Market Use of Consumer Generated Content on a Brand Community

Albert Muniz, DePaul University, USA

Hope Jensen Schau, University of Arizona, USA

Many studies have demonstrated that members of brand communities are capable of extensive, and increasingly professional, creation of brand content. However, little work has examined how the use of such community-created content impacts the community or its members. We conducted a netnographic study of the Jones Soda brand community. Jones Soda relies heavily upon its community of loyal users for the creation of branding content, including product innovations, packaging, promotions and advertising. We found a brand community that possesses all three of the markers of brand community and allows for personal transformation and consumer empowerment, yet is largely inorganic in nature. These findings have implications for our conceptualizations of brand communities.

[to cite]:

Albert Muniz and Hope Jensen Schau (2007) ,"The Impact of Market Use of Consumer Generated Content on a Brand Community", in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 34, eds. Gavan Fitzsimons and Vicki Morwitz, Duluth, MN : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 644-646.

[url]:

http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/12952/volumes/v34/NA-34

[copyright notice]:

Processes and Outcomes of Consumer Interactions within Brand Communities

Stefânia Ordovás de Almeida, University of São Paulo, Brazil
Utpal M. Dholakia, Rice University, USA

SESSION OVERVIEW

Over the last decade or so, customer communities have become established venues of marketing action for many products and services. The surging academic interest in this area can be traced to Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001) seminal paper, in which they defined brand community as "specialized, non-geographically bound communit(ies), based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001, p.412), and laid the theoretical groundwork for studying such communities.

In many cases, brand communities are organized, sponsored, and orchestrated by marketers; in other cases, they are entirely developed and run by enthusiast customers. Brand communities are interesting for various reasons. One reason is that they are relatively new, and so, from a managerial standpoint, much remains to be learnt regarding how to make them work effectively as marketing programs, how they compare with more traditional programs like image advertising or event sponsorships in reaching the desired outcomes, and what their limits and limitations are. From a consumer behavior standpoint, there are many interesting psychological and sociological processes at work within these communities, often in conjunction with each other, that haven't yet been studied.

In this session we bring together cutting-edge research studying the processes and outcomes of consumer-consumer interactions within brand communities. The findings of the first paper by Muñiz and Schau reveal that the use of community-generated content impacts brand community members in interesting and significant ways. Using a netnographic approach, they studied the firm-sponsored community of the Jones Soda Company, and discovered it to have all the key markers of community that prior research had identified (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Yet, the firm tried to make the brand marginal to the community by strategically providing choices of flavors, promotional materials and distribution. The authors consider the theoretical and practical implications of this approach.

The second paper by Prykop, Tavassoli, and Herrmann bases its analysis on the sociological concept of scenes (Irwin 1973) where a shared fascination with an activity or topic provides a feeling of belonging to participants. The authors then adopted a social psychological lens to study the role of self-definition and social identification on brand choice within customer communities organized around product categories. They also studied how to persuade customers effectively under the different conditions, employing a structural equation model to test their hypotheses.

The third paper by Almeida, Dholakia, and Vianello uses a netnographic approach to compare customer behaviors and outcomes of managerial significance in firm-managed and customer-managed communities. They found that firm-sponsored communities tend to be targeted toward specific, well-defined consumer segments and seem to be used by consumers more for instrumental purposes. In contrast, customer-managed communities are more broadly appealing and are used for "off-topic" conversations and activities.

Despite the diversity in these papers, as evidenced by authors' different disciplinary perspectives, their use of diverse methodological approaches, and differences in the specific issues emphasized in the studies, they all unequivocally show that empowered and socially interacting consumers are transforming the way marketing is practiced by consumer-oriented firms.

EXTENDED ABSTRACTS

"The Impact of Market Use of Consumer Generated Content on a Brand Community"

Albert M. Muñiz, DePaul University
Hope Jensen Schau, University of Arizona

Many studies have demonstrated that members of brand communities are capable of extensive, and increasingly professional, creation of brand content (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry; Schau and Muñiz 2006). Indeed, the ascendancy of communally-embedded, empowered consumers is now a marketplace reality (Flight 2005; Ives 2004; Morrissey 2005). However, little work has examined how the use of such community-created content impacts the community or its members. While several marketers have played lip-service to this idea, and a few have included token amounts of user-authored content in advertising campaigns (Ferriss 2002), only a few marketers have made extensive efforts to use consumer-created content. As a result, we have no insight into how extensive use of consumer-generated content will impact a brand community.

Jones Soda relies heavily upon its community of loyal users for the creation of branding content (Business Week 2005). From product innovations (flavors) to packaging (labels, cap quotes), promotions (stickers, web content, price points) and advertising, Jones Soda gives its 12-24 year old target consumers considerable input into the brand's attributes and personality (Underwood 2005). Through the Jones Soda interactive website, consumers are asked to rate suggested new flavors and are invited to submit photos and copy that would fit in advertisements and on the packaging. Jones Soda representatives follow up website research with a mobile Jones promotional vehicle that arrives at events like the X Games and high schools sports competitions to give away promotional material and have consumers try and rate Jones soda products. The promotional vehicle stocks flavors of interest (new and experimental) and actively solicits consumer feedback on site.

Jones Soda thus has several points of departure from most previously encountered brand communities. It is a new brand, which actively solicits and applies user input. It is from a product category not previously examined-consumer package goods-and thus represents a broadening of focus. It is largely inorganic, a corporately created brand community. Based on these difference, one could expect a vastly different form of brand community.

We conducted a netnographic study (Kozinets 2002) of the Jones Soda brand community. This community possesses all three of the markers of brand community identified by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001). We found a brand community that relies extensively on the Internet to organize an immediate feedback loop between consumers, the firm and the marketplace. We also witnessed an attempt by the marketer to make the brand marginal via the strategic choice of flavors, promotional content and distribution strategy. This strategy may have been deigned to instill "desired marginality" (O'Guinn and Muñiz 2005) in the brand and community. Finally, we found ample room for personal transformation and consumer empowerment via the Jones Soda brand community.

The construct of brand community is well-defined and yet still currently under-researched and under-theorized. This study of Jones Soda allows us to demonstrate the power of inorganic communities to harness consumers' creative efforts for marketing

success. Beyond the focus group approach to product development and marketing, Jones Soda has brought consumers into the production of value and given them unprecedented input into all marketing related decisions.

"How to Get in With the in Crowd"
Catja Prykop, Credit Suisse
Nader T. Tavassoli, London Business School
Andreas Herrmann, University of St. Gallen

Our findings contribute to the literature on brand communities (e.g. McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig 2002, Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001) and consumption-related interactions in high-risk leisure consumer contexts such as skydiving, where interactions represent strong interpersonal bonds: "a shared of ritualistic experience that transcends ordinary camaraderie" (Celsi, Rose and Leigh 1993; p. 12). Findings from this literature are most descriptive of consumers with a high degree of identification with a social category. Building on research on the notion of "collective" social identity, we find that there are qualitative differences to previous research in contexts with strong interpersonal bonds, in that different levels of self-definition represent distinct forms of self-representation with different origins, sources of self-worth, and social motivations (Brewer and Gardner 1996). Relatedly, we find that the drivers of brand choice are moderated by the strength of consumers' social identification with a scene.

The overwhelming focus of previous research has also been on the fabric and dynamics of the community and to some degree, in the case of brand communities that are centered on and supported by a single brand, their relationship to the focal brand. In contrast, our focus is on brand choice—among a competitive set of brands—for consumers affiliated with non-brand centered social categories. We base our theoretical framework on the sociological concept of scenes (Irwin 1973) where a shared—even mundane—fascination with an activity or topic provides a feeling of belonging. We tested our theoretical framework in a large-scale empirical study (N=1570) in two leisure scenes: the golfer scene and the snowboarder scene. We show that intra-personal (personal identity; Sirgy 1982) and interpersonal (social identity) aspects of the self jointly affect brand choice. We further demonstrate that (1) the effects of brand-self congruity and brand-scene congruity are mediated by functional-, emotional-, and social brand values, and (2) that these effects are moderated by consumers' level of social identification with the scene.

We further tested a managerial implication from the results of a structural equation model in an experimental study on advertising effectiveness. We found that ads advocating products' functional benefits provide a more successful positioning for individuals with low scene identification, whereas ads positioned around social benefits are preferred by individuals with high scene identification.

"Understanding Differences between Firm-Managed and Customer-Managed Brand Communities"
Stefânia Ordovás de Almeida, Unviersity of São Paolo
Utpal M. Dholakia, Rice University
Silvia Vianello, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia

Grappling with the waning effectiveness of advertising campaigns, the growing consumer resistance toward aggressive direct marketing programs, and increasingly empowered consumers, many marketers have become more and more interested in organizing, nurturing, and monitoring brand communities where their customers can interact with one another (Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann 2005; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig 2002; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995).

Despite having considerable practical significance, little research has examined differences between firm-managed and customer-managed brand communities. This issue is especially pertinent to many firms that have recently launched community sites only to find pre-existing thriving communities established and managed by their own customers. Some unanswered questions that we focus on are: Do customers favor a particular type of community and are they entrenched within it? Does company involvement reduce the enthusiasm of participating customers? Which communities have a greater number of social interactions and are more effective in disseminating knowledge? Do these communities favor different sorts of interactions? To examine these questions, we compared and contrasted brand communities supported by the firm and those organized by customers for two different branded products: NI's LabVIEW software and the Microsoft XBOX game console.

Results of our Netnographic analysis (Kozinets 2002) revealed considerable overlap in customer memberships across the firm- and customer-managed communities. Many of the most active participants tended to post and respond to messages actively in both community venues. However, there was a clear demarcation in what these communities are used for. Firm-managed communities tended to be employed primarily for instrumental purposes by customers, such as seeking assistance with a specific problem, learning about upcoming product launches, events, etc. In contrast, customer-managed communities allow more for broader "off-topic" interactions not necessarily involving the firm's products and brands. In these communities, we found the emergence of small friendship groups of a firm's customers.

Furthermore, we also found firm-managed communities to be largely targeted toward specific, well-defined consumer segments by the firm. In contrast, customer-managed communities appeared less clearly targeted, and were likely be formed by members of customer groups that the firm may have overlooked. As such, customer-managed communities may enable the discovery of new marketing opportunities for the firm. Based on these and other findings, we will discuss how firms can manage their own communities more effectively, and how they can play a meaningful role in customer-managed communities. In the ACR session, we will also discuss the theoretical issues emerging from our research, as well as highlight promising research opportunities.

REFERENCES

Algesheimer, René, Utpal M. Dholakia, and Andreas Herrmann (2005), "The social influence of brand community: Evidence from European car clubs," *Journal of Marketing*, 69(3), 19-34.

Brewer, Marilynn B., and Wendi Gardner (1996), "Who is this 'We'? Levels of Collective Identity and Self Representations, " *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71 (July), 83-93.

Brown, Stephen, Robert V. Kozinets and John F. Sherry, Jr. (2003), "Teaching Old Brands New Tricks: Retro Branding and the Revival of Brand Meaning," *Journal of Marketing*, 67 (July), 19-33.

Businessweek Online (2005), "Keep Up with the Jones, Dude!" (October) accessed January 2006.

Celsi, Richard, Randall Rose and Thomas Leigh (1993), "An Exploration of High-Risk Leisure Consumption through Skydiving," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20 (June), 1-23.

Ferris, Paul (2002) "Jeep rides with new logo, old tag," *Marketing Magazine*, 10/14/2002, Vol. 107, Issue 41.

Flight, Georgia (2005), "Companies Tap Into Consumer Passion," *Business 2.0*, October 2005.

Irwin, John (1973), "Surfing: The Natural History of an Urban Scene," *Urban Life and Culture*, 2, 131-160.

Ives, Nat (2004), "Unauthorized Campaigns Used By Unauthorized Creators To Show Their Creativity Become A Trend" *New York Times*, December 23, section C, 3.

Kozinets, Robert V. (2002), "The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities, " *Journal of Marketing Research*, Volume 39, Number 1, 61-72.

McAlexander, James H., John W. Schouten, and Harold Koenig (2002), "Building Brand Community," *Journal of Marketing* (January), 38-54.

Morrissey, Brian (2005), "Crowd Control: handing Creative to the Masses," *AdWeek*, September 26.

Muñiz, Albert M. Jr., and Thomas C. O'Guinn (2001), "Brand Community," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27 (4), 412-432.

O'Guinn, Thomas C. and Albert M. Muñiz, Jr. (2005), "Communal Consumption and the Brand," for *Inside Consumption: Frontiers of Research on Consumer Motives, Goals, and Desires*, David Glen Mick and S. Ratneshwar (eds.) New York: Routledge, 252-272.

Schau, Hope Jensen and Albert M. Muñiz, Jr. (2006), "A Tale of Tales: Narratives of the Apple Newton Brand Community," *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, Numbers 1 and 2, Volume 14.

Schouten, John and James H. McAlexander (1995), "Subcultures of Consumption: An Ethnography of the New Bikers," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (June) 43-61.

Sirgy, Joseph (1982), "Self-Concept in Consumer Behavior," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9 (December), 287-300.

Underwood, Ryan (2005), "Jones Soda's Secret," *Fast Company*, Issue 92 (March).