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Marketing

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Review



Brand activism

Transformation of  
BUZZ marketing messages

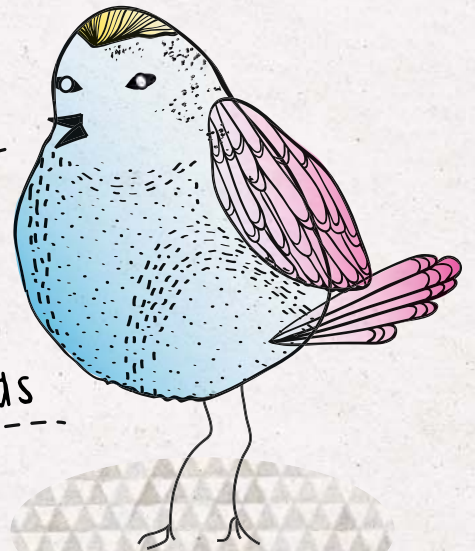
# Social Brand

## Engagement

Bloggers and their  
megaphones

Consumers' social media  
brand games

Community brands



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# Editorial



When Apple launched its Newton, one of the first intelligent handheld devices and precursor to the app-based smartphone, no one knew what it was or what it did. Was it a calendar? A personal organizer? A calculator? A computer that could run software? Despite being years ahead of its time, the Newton flopped. How are you supposed to use a tool if no one can agree what it is or what it does?

Unfortunately, marketers seeking to understand engagement are currently in exactly the same state of confusion. In this issue, I would like to help clear some of that confusion, and point a way forward for marketing managers and researchers. In doing so, I hope to clear the pre-cloud clouds that doomed the amazing Apple Newton.

We start with an introduction that outlines exactly what social brand engagement is, and exactly what it is good for. It provides some lucid definitions, some states of engagement to aim for and some clearly outlined strategies for success. The following articles cover a whole range of applications of social brand engagement and provide a bright picture of what's happening on the Web and how brand managers might handle all these different manifestations of engagement.

Read as a whole, this issue presents new knowledge in a new way. It advances our understanding of engagement and its new extension, social brand engagement. I hope that you benefit from reading it. But even more, I hope you engage with it, share it and put its ideas into action.

Yours,  
Robert V. Kozinets  
*Editor*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert V. Kozinets". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Toronto, September 2014

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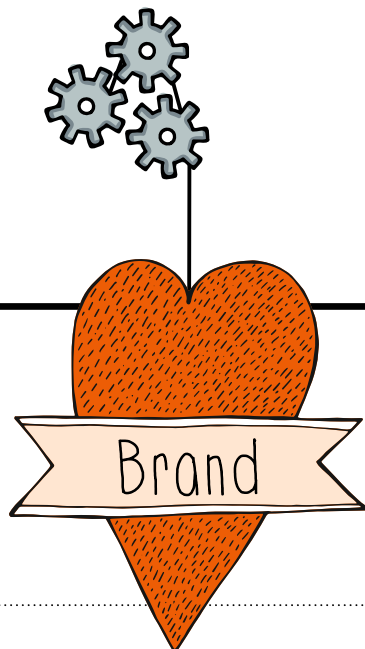
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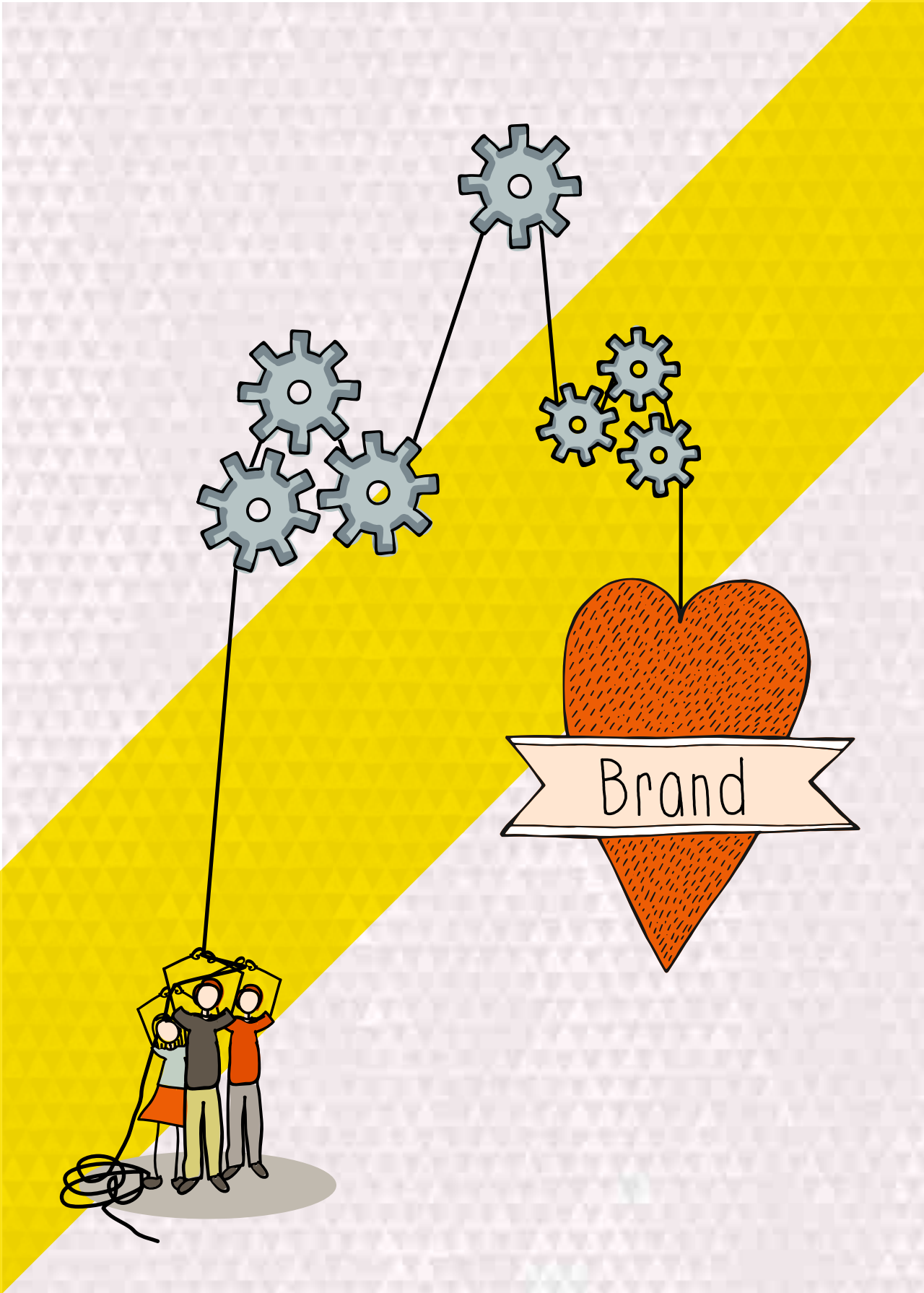
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# Social Brand Engagement: A New Idea

*Robert V. Kozinets*

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KEYWORDS

*Social Media,  
Branding,  
Consumer Engagement,  
Social Brand Engagement,  
Consumer Participation*

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**The quandary of engagement** /// Although it has become a popular buzzword, there is still considerable confusion about engagement or, as a number of academics tend to refer to it, “consumer-brand engagement”. From the mid-2000s on, influential brand consultants and writers like Kevin Roberts and Marc Gobé began telling marketers that brand awareness and loyalty were not enough, that managers now needed to seek emotional commitment and brand love. Social media marketing writers like Brian Solis, Francois Gossieaux, and Joseph Jaffe began to translate the love orientation of emotional branding and plug it into the engagement concepts of social media marketing analytics.

In industry, engagement has been defined operationally, as a type of multidimensional and multistep process guided by management. Many researchers have looked at brand engagement as an individual’s psychological state of mind regarding their physical, emotional, and active experiences with a brand.

Some recent scholars, however, have noticed the deficiency and expanded the engagement concept to include the active and social aspects of brand engagement, when a consumer begins to simultaneously interact with the brand and with other people. Particularly noteworthy here is the work of Rosella Gambetti and her colleagues, in which they suggest including consumer-to-consumer “interaction, participation, dialogue, co-creation, and sharing of brand-related values

and contents” as a necessary part of the brand engagement concept. However, now the concept has become overly large and inclusive. And, as a result, confused.

We need to begin to talk about a special type of engagement. If “consumer-brand engagement” is what happens in isolation, in a consumer’s own individual mind and thoughts, based on personal – even physical – experience between a product and person, then social brand engagement is the diametric opposite of this. Social brand engagement is a social act full of culture, meaning, language, and values.

**The social side of brand engagement** /// Social brand engagement is meaningful connection, creation and communication between one consumer and one or more other consumers, using brand or brand-related language, images and meanings. You cannot have social brand engagement in isolation. Engagement need not be strictly about economic transaction, either. Social brand engagement can happen when the brand is a celebrity, an idea, a cause, a destination, a country of origin, a nationality or even an activity or hobby. With social brand engagement, the relationship widens from person-brand to person-person-brand.

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using brands.

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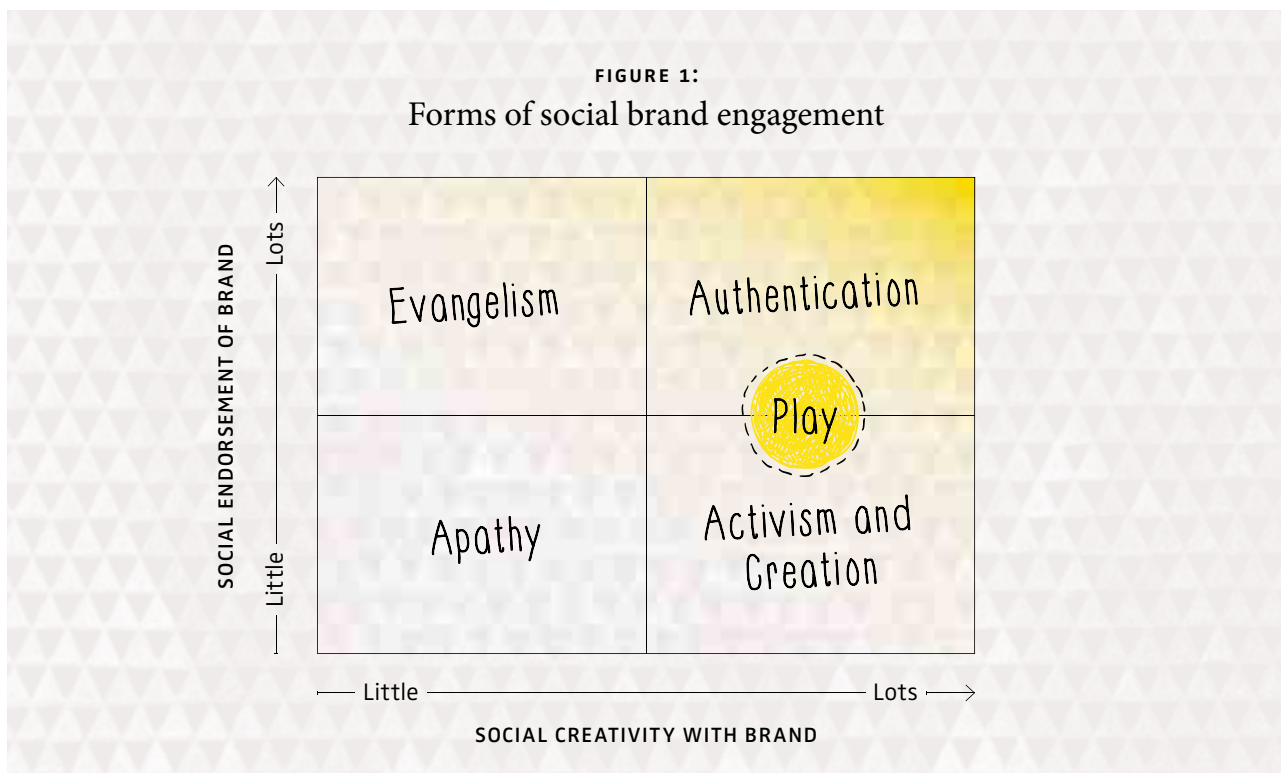
Social brand-engagement principles are based upon two notions. The brand-based consumer-consumer connection can vary by the type and level of endorsement of the brand: from little endorsement, which can also be negative critique, to lots of endorsement, as with appreciation and recommendation. The connections among consumers can also vary by the amount of creative work consumers are doing, from merely ticking a “like” box to creating detailed videos or organizing campaigns. These two dimensions give rise to some important types of social brand engagement for us to consider. (Figure 1)

First, if consumers are not endorsing the brand and not creating communications or connections around it, then no one cares. This is probably the worst engagement situation to face, but also the one all new brands face: *apathy*. Making consumers care enough to share is difficult and expensive, but can certainly be done. Increasingly, it must be approached through social branding principles such as the ones described and detailed in this issue.

Second, if consumers are willing to endorse the brand, but show little interest in or ability to create new material, they are engaging in *evangelism*. As we will see in the articles by Edward McQuarrie et al and Robert Kozinets et al, this type of behavior is often sought by marketing managers who want their message to spread or their new video to go viral. However, this type of engagement is minimal and may not be seen to be as genuine or authentic as more creative types.

Next are the various social and *creative activities* in which consumers engage that do not necessarily endorse the brand. People have their own uses for things, including brands. They may choose to play with brands – as our article by John Deighton and Leora Kornfeld illustrates. They may choose to play against brands or decide to become activists, seriously opposing the brand as the child-labor activists did in our article by Henry Jenkins. Or, unsatisfied with current offerings, they may choose to create their own new brands, as in our article by Johann Füller.

The optimal and desired state for marketers is to move the other states toward *believable, authentic, motivational endorsement* that is marked by creative expression and use of the brand. Here, people play positively and socially with the brand. They view it as a valued and valuable cultural resource. Social brand engagement has meaningful and significant social, creative and productive outcomes.

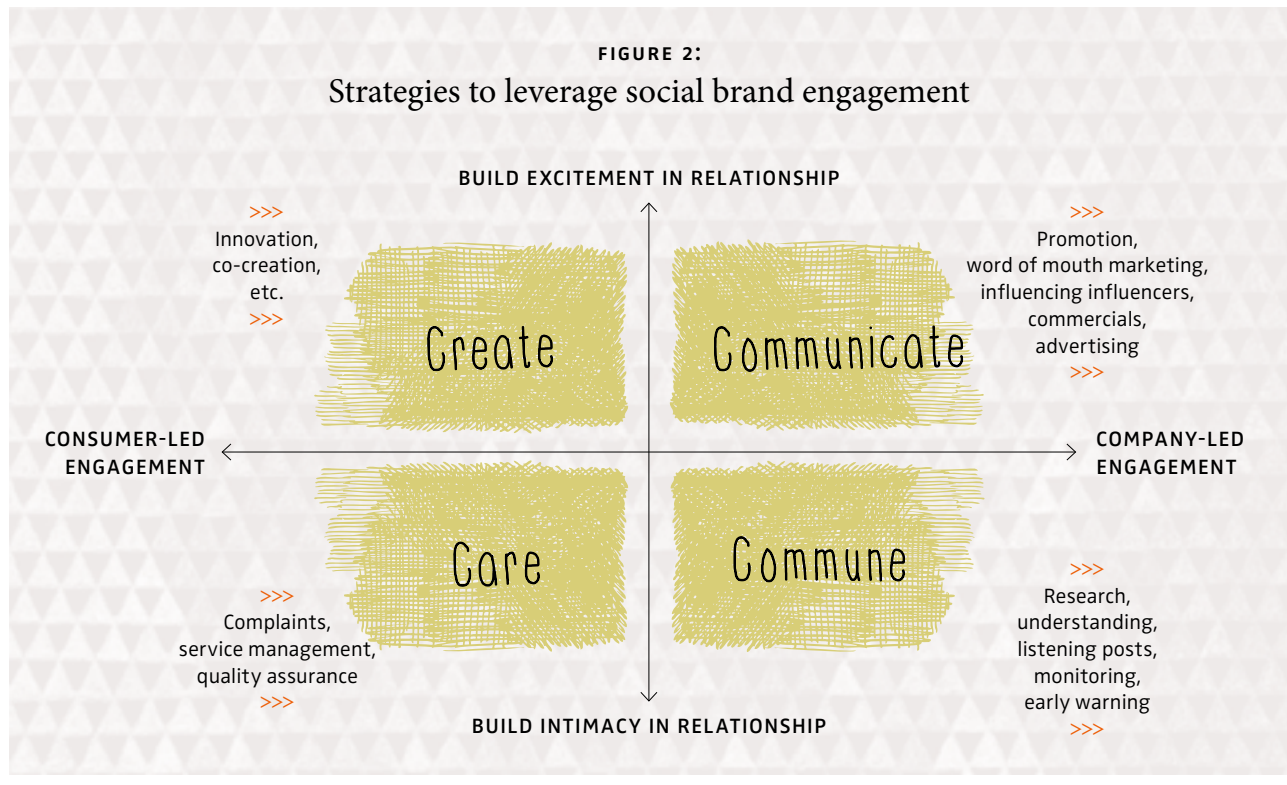


#### Four strategies for successful social brand engagement

/// The research work presented in this issue illustrates four general strategies for successful and positive social brand engagement. (Figure 2, page 12) These strategies are based upon two underlying premises. The initial premise is that social brand engagement is like a dance: Although there are two parties moving together, for it to happen gracefully, one party must take the lead. In this case, engagement practices, with their creativity and endorsement functions, can be largely initiated and maintained by either consumers or companies. And just as in an elegant waltz, it should be clear to both parties who is leading the strategy. Companies have historically had major problems letting consumers take the lead, but for successful authentication to happen, putting consumers in the driver's seat is sometimes – but certainly not always – necessary.

The following premise holds that, because social brand engagement is built on connection and relationships, it is also useful to think about the two polarities of successful relationships. Successful relationships must balance the security and comfort of intimacy with the stimulation and novelty of excitement. Successful social brand engagement is no different.

- > **Customer Care** /// The first strategy to consider is one that many if not most major companies have adopted regarding social media: using them for customer care. Customer care strategies often now involve the use of social media monitoring to find customer complaints and to channel them to appropriate customer-service personnel. Often, customer care conducted over social media serves a “quelling” function, seeking to prevent customer service “forest fires” before they happen. However, this seems overly reactive and negative. On the other hand, customer care initiatives can, indeed, be deeply meaningful and reassuring to consumers, providing a basis for comfort and intimacy in the relationship.



> **Co-Creation** /// The second strategy is to use social brand engagement to gather ideas from consumers and to co-create or collaborate in their creative endeavors. This can be a powerful tool for big brands, as recent successful efforts at crowdsourcing new products by Budweiser beer and the clothing brand Patagonia demonstrate. Finding and using consumer-generated ideas can generate excitement and authenticity, as well as lead to new insights into consumers' experiences and world.

> **Communing and Listening** /// The third strategy is about understanding. Communing is the use of social brand engagement strategies to listen broadly, widely, deeply and wisely to the ongoing conversations consumers have with one another as they communicate about the various matters related to brands. This should be done with big data, medium-sized data, smart data and small data. In this case, companies would silently initiate the process of listening or sagely employ their existing social media listening posts. They would then use the information to introduce greater levels of intimacy into their brand-consumer relationships.

> **Communication and Sharing** /// The final, and perhaps most familiar, social media-based strategy is the use of social branding techniques to share information, messages and images that, when spread by consumers, can promote and influence other consumers to purchase and use more of the brand's products or services. Out of necessity, these company-initiated messages should be stimulating and exciting and should give consumers a good reason to both spread them and to act upon them in the marketplace.

**This special issue on social brand engagement** /// This special issue of the GfK Marketing Intelligence Review provides insights that relate to all four types of social brand engagement strategy. Social brand engagement extends and refocuses work on word of mouth. It is particularly useful as we work to understand the social media context and how it provides easy access between consumers for social brand engagement to occur.



***The social power of “megaphone” holding consumers*** /// Peering into the worlds of both consumer creators and corporate needs to communicate, Edward McQuarrie and his coauthors detail the elaborate social and cultural process by which fashion bloggers take hold of the Internet “megaphone” to broadcast and influence taste (pp. 16). This work teaches us some general principles about the ways in which marketing is affected by these “citizen journalist” social media posters and the ways their behavior is affected by marketers. These megaphone-holding consumers have real power. Their consumer-to-consumer relationships depend on brands. In addition, brands are increasingly coming to depend on them as well. The social system involves and is based on the simultaneous use of both types of relationships: brand-consumer and consumer-consumer.

***How social branding messages are translated*** /// The next reading, based on our research, continues to look at both creation and communication (pp. 22). Continuing to explore the dance between companies and empowered social media consumers, we netnographically researched how social branding efforts are received culturally. This expansion of the original article illustrates how the general principles we found in blogging communities may be applied to the entire world of social media. As messages become translated into meaningful communally shared material, under particular cultural restraints, possibilities open up, rules become less constraining and the principles and guidelines for successful social branding engagement become much more about human relationships than one-way communications.

***Playing against and playing with social brands*** /// Continuing our cultural journey of social brand engagement is John Deighton and Leora Kornfeld’s exploration of the playful side of social media (pp. 28). According to them, social brand engagement is not merely about the turn-taking of communication and conversation, but about the turn-taking of competition and cooperation – playing against and playing with – that we typically see in game play. Touching on the responsiveness of care strategies as well as the power of communication strategies, the article shows how effective social brand engagement can result from marketers “getting in the game” by playing with consumers.

***Brand engagement can mean brand activism*** /// But what happens when consumers mock, resist or entirely take over your brand? What Deighton and Kornfeld see as “tomfoolery”, Henry Jenkins sees as brand activism (pp. 34). Jenkins’ article

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Engagement practices can be largely initiated and maintained by either consumers or companies. And just as in an elegant waltz, it should be clear to both parties who is leading the strategy.

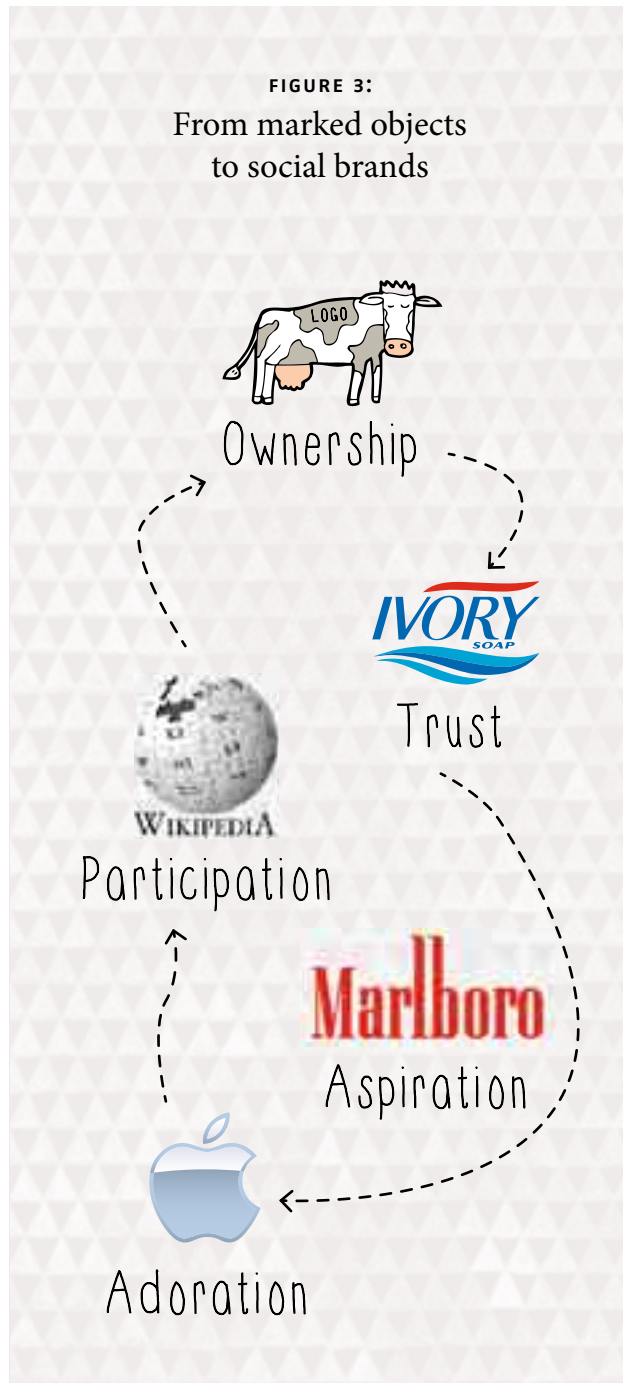
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relates how media fan culture and social brand engagement empower people to collectively seek social change. It deals with a combined care-and-create strategy that was mishandled by the Warner Bros. company. In this case, Harry Potter, a particular brand, is embraced. At the same time, the company who owns and licenses the brand is systematically scrutinized and criticized. The results are highly instructive to managers who increasingly face such challenges to their production and marketing methods. Social brand engagement, which draws consumers together to discuss brands, is a double-edged sword.

***Consumer-Created brands*** /// In our next article, Johann Füller explores both the ultimate usurpation as well as the ultimate ownership of a brand by groups of consumers (pp. 40). This occurs when engaged consumers create their own brand. “Community brands” are created by motivated groups of consumers engaged with a product or activity. As Prof. Füller explains, this phenomenon of engaged consumers producing their own brands places them in the same position as other producers and is both a challenge and an opportunity for companies.

**FIGURE 3:**  
From marked objects  
to social brands



**Harnessing social media** /// The “communing” notions of businesses needing to deal with and understand the complex realities of social brand engagement are a core theme of the interview conducted with Adam Froman, the Canadian digital entrepreneur who runs Delvinia (pp. 46). The discussion with Adam covers such central themes as the evolution of social media marketing, how social brand engagement is coming to be viewed holistically, the role of mobile, and how business-academic partnerships develop in this exciting new space.

**A view from the helicopter** /// Our final article presents a research project sponsored by the GfK Verein (pp. 52). Focusing clearly on care and communing strategies, Axel Maireder shows how buzz on the Web can be tracked taking a macro perspective. The method he develops allows business users to quickly observe how potentially engaging – or threatening – consumer conversations spread online and to locate and identify activist groups as well as admirers.

**The evolution of branding into social branding** /// Engagement – as both social communication and individual emotional commitment – has been empowered by current conditions as never before. Media channels are multiplying. Microcultures are fragmenting into multicultures, with cultural hybridization reaching new heights of speed and extents of change. Mass media channels are multiplying exponentially and also evolving into transmedia. Everything media is both flying apart by diversifying and coming together by digitizing at the same time.

Marketing, meanwhile, has split into its component parts. The gravitational field of the “four Ps” Kotleresque thinking has gradually been broken by the call of other fields. Pricing is a financial matter. Distribution and supply-chain issues have migrated into operations management. Segmentation is being called a general management strategy. As the digitization of marketing continues, more and more data is being shifted to the operations side of business. If marketing is to be about more than the tactics of sales, advertising and communications, it must find a new strategic focus.

A key component of this new strategic marketing focus should be social branding based on social brand engagement.

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## FURTHER READING

*Gossieaux, Francois; Moran, Ed (2010):*

The Hyper-Social Organization:  
Eclipse Your Competition By Leveraging Social Media,  
McGraw Hill.

*Jenkins, Henry; Ford, Sam; Green, Joshua (2013):*

Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning  
in a Networked Culture,  
New York University Press.

*Moffitt, Sean; Dover, Mike (2011):*

*Wikibrands:*  
Reinventing Your Company  
In a Customer-Driven Marketplace,  
McGraw Hill.

*Solis, Brian (2010):*

Engage!,  
John Wiley & Sons.

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The basic proposition is that brands are evolving into social brands (Figure 3). Brands began as marks people introduced to signify that something was theirs: their cattle or their property. From there, brands began their journey to the social. They became a symbol of something you could identify and then perhaps trust. Something you could compare, discuss and report on. But brands also became something with which you could build a relationship. Brands became shared, something you could participate in. Brands also became legal entities, departments in corporations, consulting and tax-collection projects. Brands had boundaries, and sharing and participation have had historical limits that are now increasingly being tested. In addition, through their centrality in the culture-production industry, brands began to take on cultural and archetypal characteristics of their own, such as with the anthropomorphic qualities of the Jolly Green Giant or of Mr. Clean. As brands become social things that we can rely on and relate to, in ever more intimate ways (think of the Old Spice Guy), we move back in novel ways to participating, sharing, and owning our brands, to subjectively feeling that they, once again, are – both collectively and individually – ours.

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# The Megaphone Effect in Social Media: How Ordinary Consumers Become Style Leaders

*Edward F. McQuarrie and Barbara J. Phillips*

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KEYWORDS

*Blog, Consumption,  
Consumer Culture, Social Brand Engagement,  
Fashion, Cultural Capital*

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**Using the Web as a megaphone** /// The world of fashion is glamorous and attractive to consumers around the world. Many people dream of being a part of this world dominated by the beautiful and the rich. Thanks to the Web, some ordinary consumers successfully enter this privileged scene simply by writing about fashion online. Even a 13-year-old girl was able to “grab hold of the megaphone” and reach thousands of other consumers despite having neither an institutional position nor a family background in the fashion business. This blogger took hold of the megaphone by her own actions. Starting out as an ordinary consumer, she publicly selected, evaluated and presented clothing and posted accounts of this consumption to a growing audience of strangers. Her success brought her fame, opening the door to exclusive fashion events, free designer pieces and other perks.

**Gaining social position by the public consumption of fashion** /// The idea of taste as cultural capital can explain why some bloggers enjoy such success. The theory of cultural capital was developed by the French sociologist Bourdieu in the 1960s. It is built around distinctions in what is considered tasteful and what is not. Being able to exercise good taste was, in Bourdieu’s early thinking, a matter of the milieu into which one was born. Later, he acknowledged that cultural capital is neither static nor linked to one’s position within society, but rather, it can evolve, be acquired and be amassed dynamically in specific cultural domains. Taste in fashion as well as in food or home decor can be an innate gift that is developed with practice. It can’t be learned in schools, but it can be acquired in

specific consumption domains. Once acquired, taste as cultural capital can be invested, further accumulated and traded for other forms of capital, much in the same way that money can. What consumers do on their fashion blogs can be described in these terms: They put themselves at risk to develop their power of judgment and taste and thereby amass more cultural capital. Their taste leadership wins over a large audience and provides an opportunity to improve their social position. Taste leadership elevates the bloggers from mere consumers to the status of insiders who stand at eye level with the professional fashion scene. It empowers them to earn returns on their public acts of consumption.

### The road to success for fashion bloggers

#### *From personal journal to sophisticated taste display* ///

Early posts give the impression that consumers were using the blog format as an online journal for personal disclosure, even though the blog names (e.g., “FashionToast” or “Style Bubble”) indicate that they were meant for larger audiences. Soon, the

posts ceased to resemble private social media posts aimed at friends and quickly begin to transition toward public displays of taste. The bloggers developed their individual profile by making their own fashion statements and not affiliating with specific groups or subcultures. They took risks by making unusual combinations, teasing out details of their choices and expressing opinionated and often eclectic evaluations. The vocabulary used for taste judgments was constantly refined, and these young women did not refrain from asserting strong points of view regarding what was and wasn’t fashionable. Since their risky displays were more often judged as fashionable than not, they increased their cultural capital.

*From community to audience* /// In the early stage of their blogs, the authors would interact with their followers by answering questions and asking them what they would like to see. But as their audiences grew, the bloggers tended to ignore their followers and cultivate their autonomy by no longer answering questions or addressing issues raised in comments. Interestingly, this behavior seemed to improve a blogger’s status, and they appeared to be perceived as even more audience-worthy. The bloggers established themselves as taste leaders with a sense of style.

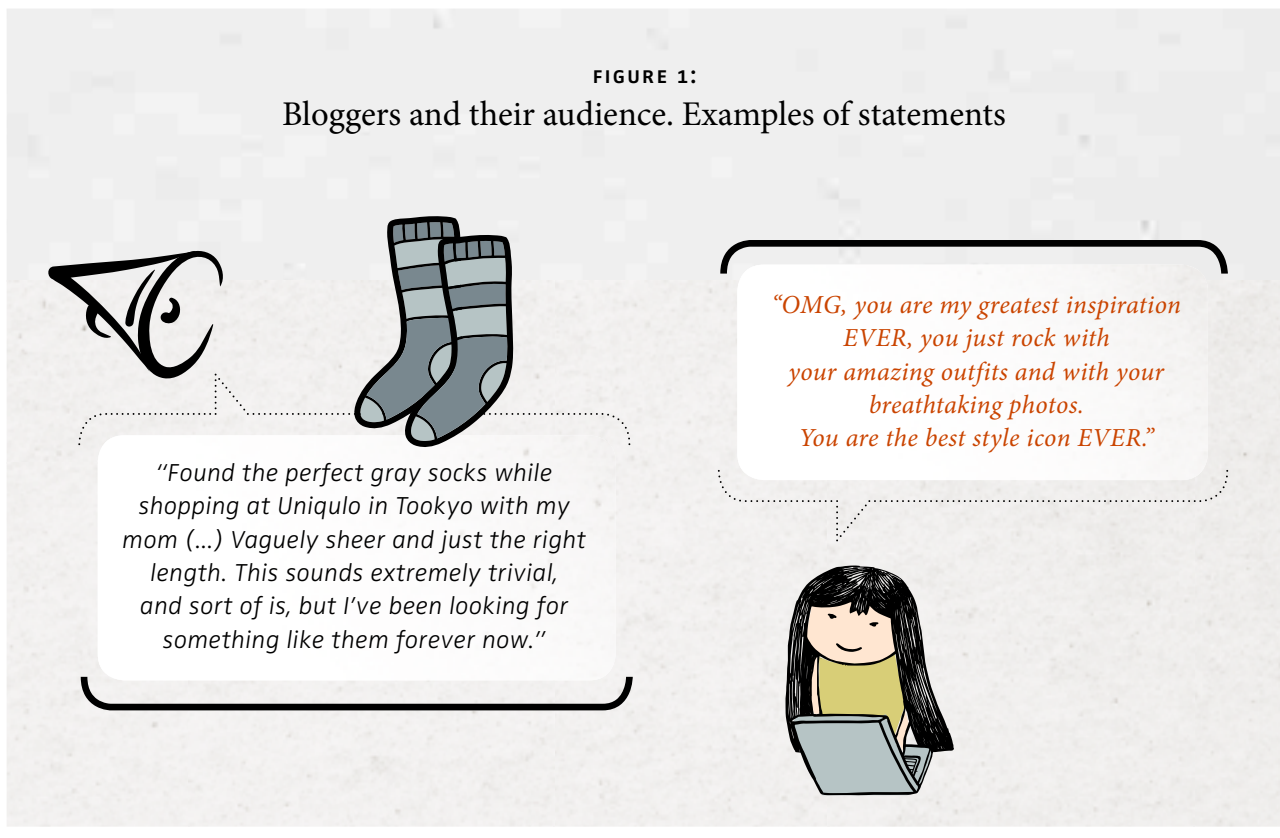
*From curating to modeling* /// The blogs started by pulling fashion pictures from hundreds of brands on the Web, and the bloggers curated styles and rendered taste judgments using these “borrowed” pictures. Nine out of 10 bloggers soon started “self-modeling”. Their audiences appreciated an active execution of their own styles. “Daily wardrobe” posts tended to be praised by followers and to increase their audience even more.

*From snapshots to professional images* /// Progress could be observed in their photographs. At the beginning, the photos appeared similar to snapshots ordinary consumers would share among themselves. Eventually, the bloggers learned to have professional-looking photographs taken of themselves as models. Part of the growing professionalism of the bloggers’ pictures came from better training, equipment and Web technology, but much came from copying the poses and settings found in traditional fashion magazine ads. Just as they refined their verbal skills, they became more adroit with the visual and aesthetic vocabulary already established in the professional fashion system.

## STUDYING FASHION BLOGS

We examined 10 personal fashion blogs that reached sizable audiences, all run by amateur consumers, all of them young women. The analysis included images and words and focused on displays of taste. What topics did the bloggers choose to discuss and not to discuss? What kinds of words and phrases were used and avoided? What was the content and style of the pictures displayed? We examined their development over time by comparing earlier and later blogging practices. The blog posts were our primary source; a secondary focus was placed on audience response to the taste judgments as seen in comments.

**FIGURE 1:**  
Bloggers and their audience. Examples of statements



The growing sophistication and professionalization of style displays, favorable audience reactions and increased the size of the audience interactions constituted a self-reinforcing cultural capital loop as displayed in Figure 2.

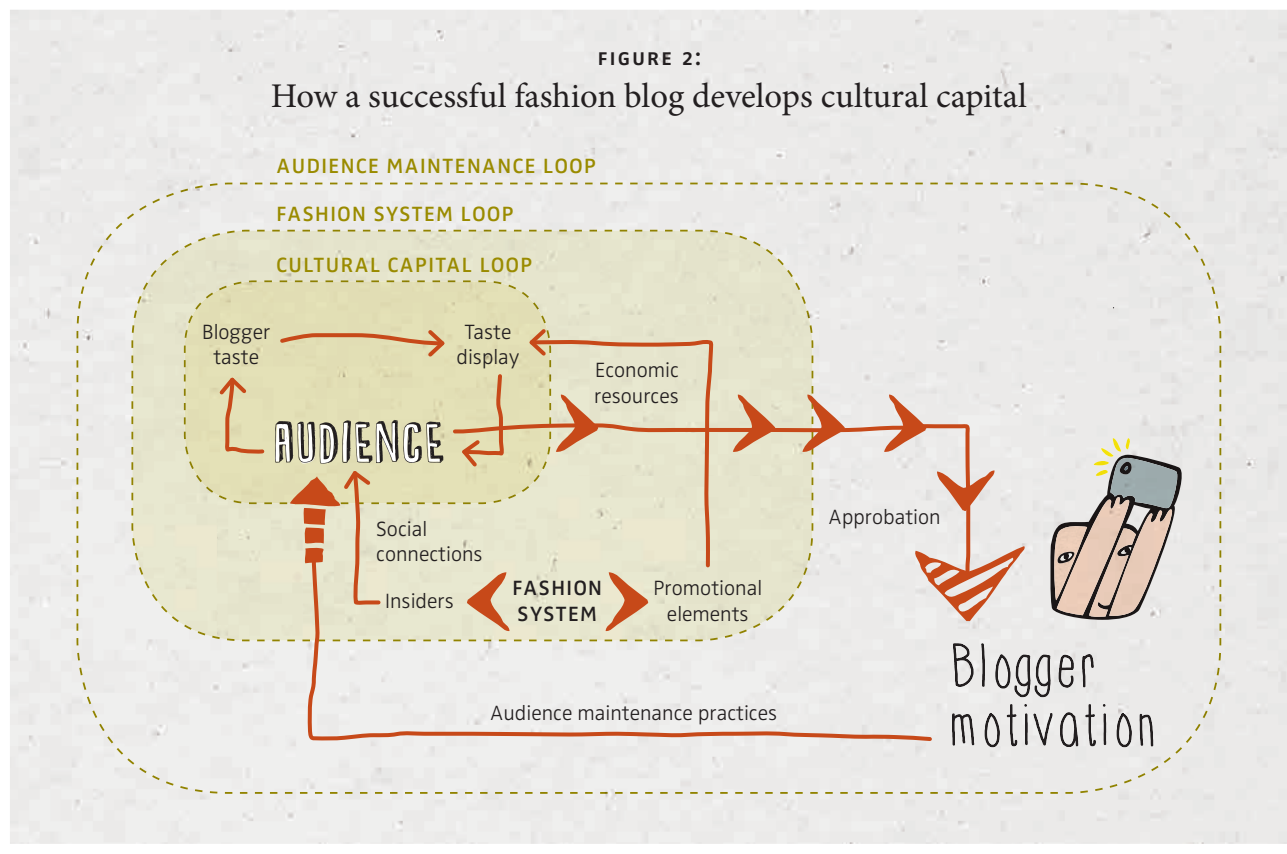
#### **The blessings and risks of economic and social rewards**

/// As their audience continued to grow, bloggers came to the attention of professionals in the fashion world, who sent economic resources their way. Economic rewards included gifts of branded fashion clothing and other merchandise, paid ad placements on the fashion blog and paid sponsorship of blog contests. Other paid assignments included modeling branded clothing, designing clothes and accessories and writing for publications. The social position of the bloggers improved as they received invitations to exclusive parties, runway shows, designer open houses, charity appearances and mentions in the media. These resources fueled further taste ventures and increased the bloggers' audience even more.

In this way the bloggers set up a second positive feedback loop. As their audience grew, they gained social connections to prominent insiders within the fashion world. This gave blog-

gers more prominence, which again enhanced the size of their audience among ordinary consumers, while also reinforcing the audience's perception of the blogger as a taste leader. Having an audience made a blogger valuable to marketers and to fashion insiders alike, and the interest of both increased their audience sizes and its approbation for them. This, in turn, recharged not only the fashion- system loop, but also the inner cultural-capital loop in Figure 2. Interestingly, increased commercialization of fashion blogs did not damage the authenticity of the bloggers or alienate followers. Rather the opposite effect could be observed: Unusual privileges and a bounty of gifts served to confirm a blogger's taste leadership.

However, the new privileges posed a different risk for the bloggers' success. The bloggers were no longer ordinary consumers like their followers. Their big advantage over professional fashion displays had always been that they were ordinary consumers, and their followers could easily believe, "I could look good in that, too!" Many blog comments illustrated this felt similarity and its importance. Privilege threatens this feeling. To maintain their audience, bloggers engaged in practices to deny the existence of boundaries. They feigned



similarity with their followers by addressing ordinary aspects of their lives, for example complaining about a small closet, or deliberately misrecognizing their privileges (“Hope to see you at fashion week!”) despite knowing that only those with invitations can attend fashion week. Such practices form the third and outermost loop of audience maintenance in Figure 2, which reinforces the other loops when the blogger succeeds in bridging the emerging gap.

**Beyond online communities** /// Amassing an audience by blogging is a very recent form of online consumer behavior. Earlier studies focused on the development of virtual communities and highlighted consumer efforts to find like-minded people. The emphasis was on peer-to-peer communities, what one might call the “horizontal operation of taste”, where taste displays serve to attract those who share the same preferences. But it appears that consumers do not only seek community on the Web, they also look for taste leadership from selected peers. A few also seek positions in society in the eyes of a mass of strangers. These positions can now be attained by acts of consumption. In fact, courtesy of the Web, a new kind of social position has emerged: the taste leader

who takes hold of the megaphone, builds an audience for his or her consumption, and thereby gains a status. Successful taste leadership by consumers is not limited to the domain of fashion, but may also be found in fields like food, interior design or decoration.

Although these bloggers started out as ordinary consumers, they were soon integrated into the professional fashion world and did not oppose it. Hence, they did not represent a threat to professional marketers so much as an alternative marketing opportunity within the complex web of social media.

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**Managerial summary of an article published in the leading academic journal “Journal of Consumer Research”:**

*McQuarrie, Edward F.; Miller, Jessica; Phillips, Barbara J. (2012): “The Megaphone Effect: Taste and Audience in Fashion Blogging”, Journal of Consumer Research, Vol. 40, June, pp. 136 – 158.*



## Between the Suit and the Selfie: Executives' Lessons on the Social "Micro-Celebrity"

Personal branding is not the exclusive domain of megaphone-wielding consumers like our fashion bloggers. Professionals of every shape and size deploy social media platforms to promote their brand image. What can the modern executive learn from this personal branding movement over the past five years? The fact is that social branding has been creating grassroots "micro-celebrities" with increasing frequency. Take Bethany Mota, for example: A young girl with a well-targeted YouTube video blog turned her social media fame into a successful line of clothing for Aeropostale.

We believe, however, that social media has a "celebrity threshold" – a finite level of popular attention. Beneath this threshold, a personal brand can maintain a professional voice. Aspirational lifestyles can then become the coin of the realm. However, once that limit has been breached, content becomes more oriented toward a dreamy and utopian mindscape, almost a fantasy with the personal brand playing an archetypal role.

Why does this limit exist? The answer relates to a basic branding principle, discovered by brand scientists like Sidney Levy and Grant McCracken: Brands must move from the functional to the symbolic to the cultural. For personal branders, being storytellers who are capable, yet fascinating and even fantastic is a sound strategy.

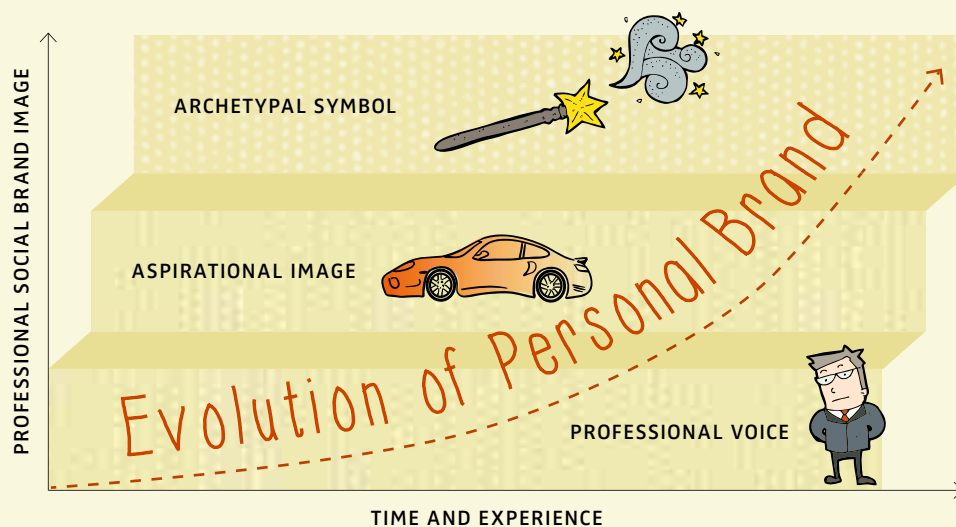
The average LinkedIn profile is insufficient to build a personal brand. It generally lacks a coherent content strategy and fails to show aspirations or to inspire. Without strategy, content providers are often flying blind, providing mere information when consumers hunger instead for intelligent insight and inspiration.

How is your profile serving your personal brand?

Robert V. Kozinets and Stefano Cerone,  
Schulich School of Business, Toronto

FIGURE 1:

Layers of threshold in the process of personal brand evolution





# Lost in Translation: The Social Shaping of Marketing Messaging

*Robert V. Kozinets, Kristine de Valck,  
Andrea C. Wojnicki and Sarah J. S. Wilner*

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KEYWORDS

*WOM, Blogs, Social Media,  
Product Seeding,  
Network Co-Production, Consumer-Marketer,  
Social Brand Engagement*

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Word of mouth (WOM) is a natural occurring phenomenon that has always been important in purchasing decisions. Now, with the Internet's reach and accessibility, WOM has gained a completely new dimension and so have marketers' opportunities to take advantage of it.

The classic approach for word of mouth marketing (WOMM) was to identify and target potential "opinion leaders". Marketers would be able to work through "friends who recommend a tried and trusted product" rather than "a salesman interested in his commission only". The opinion leader was assumed to transmit marketing messages more or less faithfully, without substantially altering them. As such, it was expected that marketing messages would spread through the market intact.

**Consumers are no simple multipliers, but coproducers of meaning** /// But more recent findings from research on consumer communities shows that the information flow of WOMM is not as unidirectional and straight as previously assumed. Rather, consumers are active coproducers of value and meaning. They translate and transform marketing meanings. WOM resulting from marketing communications can be everything from euphoric to resistant, and the discourse evolving around a product seeding has a strong impact on how this product is perceived. On the surface, WOMM may seem similar to public relations or other forms of paid promotion, but it is injected into a much more complex social environment, allowing and even encouraging new meaning. Figure 1 shows the processes occurring in coproducing consumer-networked narratives. However, even this is a vast oversimplification. The cultural environment is like a teeming sea full of different social forms and varieties. Launching a brand message into this environment is often akin to launching a message in a bottle out to sea.

## SEEDING PRODUCTS TO BLOGGERS

Our study focuses on a blog-based campaign in six North American cities. The campaign was designed to promote a new camera-equipped mobile phone for a global technology manufacturer. The actual product was seeded to 90 influential bloggers who were encouraged (but not obliged) to talk about the phone on their blogs. Of that group, 84 % did mention the phone in their blog, and the company was confident with its success as follow-up surveys showed that substantial sales were triggered by the bloggers' recommendations. In a netnographic study, we analyzed in depth how the messages unfolded and which cultural processes could be observed. The qualitative ground-up data analysis showed that bloggers not only communicated the marketing message, they also dealt with specific cultural tensions to convert it into socially relevant and desirable information.

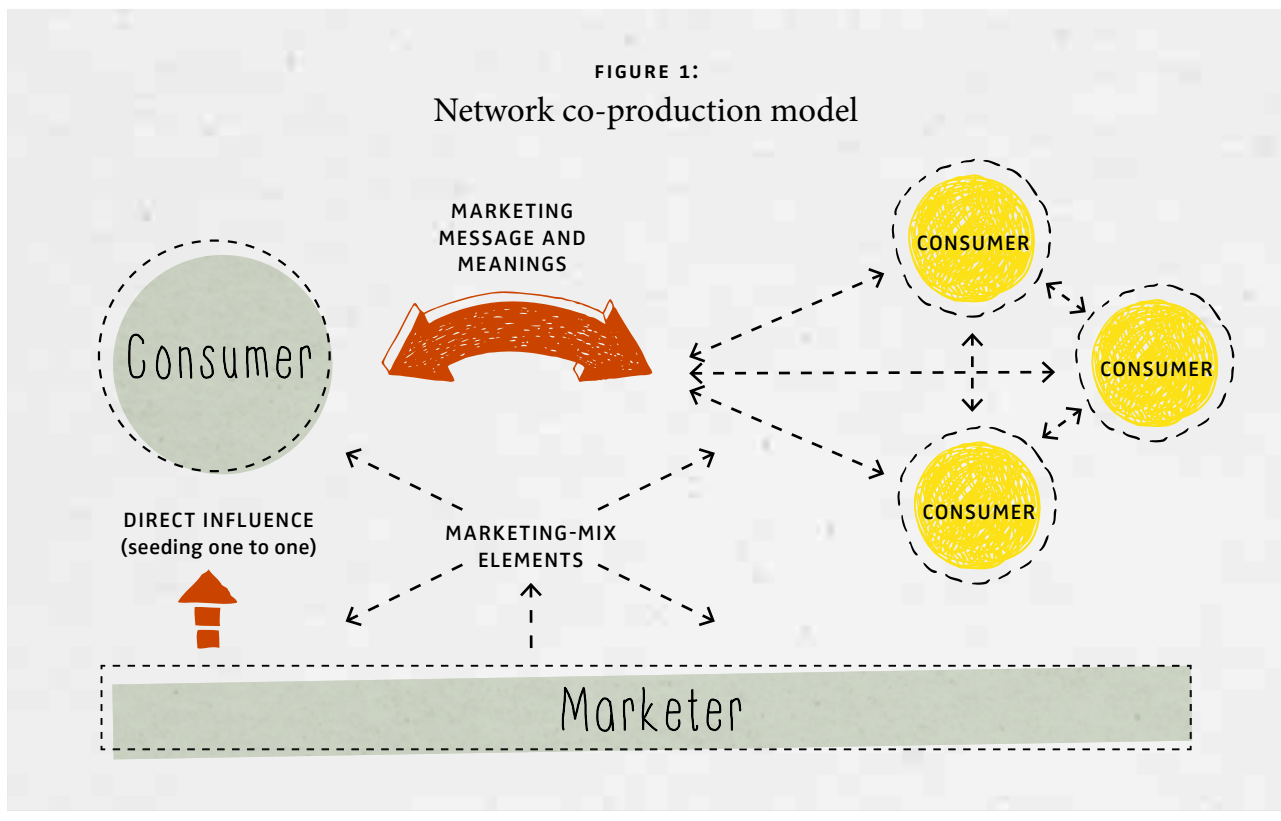


For marketers it is very relevant to assess how the coproduction of meaning evolves. This research therefore aims at detecting communication patterns to explain mechanisms surrounding the seeding of a WOMM campaign.

**Social brand engagement creates tension** /// Successfully introducing a commercial product into a consumer's social network creates tension because social relationships are trusted, while commercial ones may not be. Are you selling out your friends and family? Are you speaking as my trusted friend? Or as a paid or otherwise compensated advertiser?

This is the question all social media actors must be prepared to answer when they bring the brand “into bed” with their social media or other relationships. Our research revealed the four careful strategies these social brand marketers use to resolve the tension between being a trustworthy opinion leader and a commercial marketer (Figure 2, page 26).

- > First, a *strategy* of “**product evaluation**” deals with cultural anxiety by avoiding it; the WOMM campaign is hardly mentioned, and attention is drawn directly to the product. Social media posters demonstrate the trustworthiness of their information and opinions. Yet, in ignoring the moral tension inherent in acting as a marketer, the evaluative strategy can backfire. The community questions why the blogger would conceal his participation and some feel betrayed. The apparent incongruity of a blogger benefiting at the individual level while professing a communal orientation can result in explicit hostility.
- > Second, there is the “**campaign embracing**” strategy. It also keeps the cultural anxiety implicit, but here the consumer-marketer mentions the WOMM campaign and their participation in it, using terms of enthusiastic acceptance. Bloggers offer a bold, self-interested justification for their dual role as consumer and marketer. They adopt the professional language and terms of marketing and also often include requests for further opportunities to promote other products. Communal responses to this strategy in the study were polarized. Some found the honesty and self-interest refreshing, particularly when it fit well with the existing style and norms. However, there were also many unfavorable responses. In these cases, the trustworthiness of the communicator was often called into question.
- > Third, we found an “**endorsement**” strategy. In this approach, the consumer-marketers expressed and acknowledged the commercial-communal tension by disclosing the WOMM campaign and their participation in it. They signaled awareness of marketers' intentions but attempted to discharge community concerns about the trustworthiness of the given information. Often they argued for their own self-interest and asked for the assistance, support, and understanding of their audience. These communicators also adopted a professionalized promotional language and signaled a willingness to favor other marketing requests. In our data, this type of strategy did not seem to arouse hostility when bloggers were connected emotionally with community members. In other blogs, such appeals were received much less successfully.



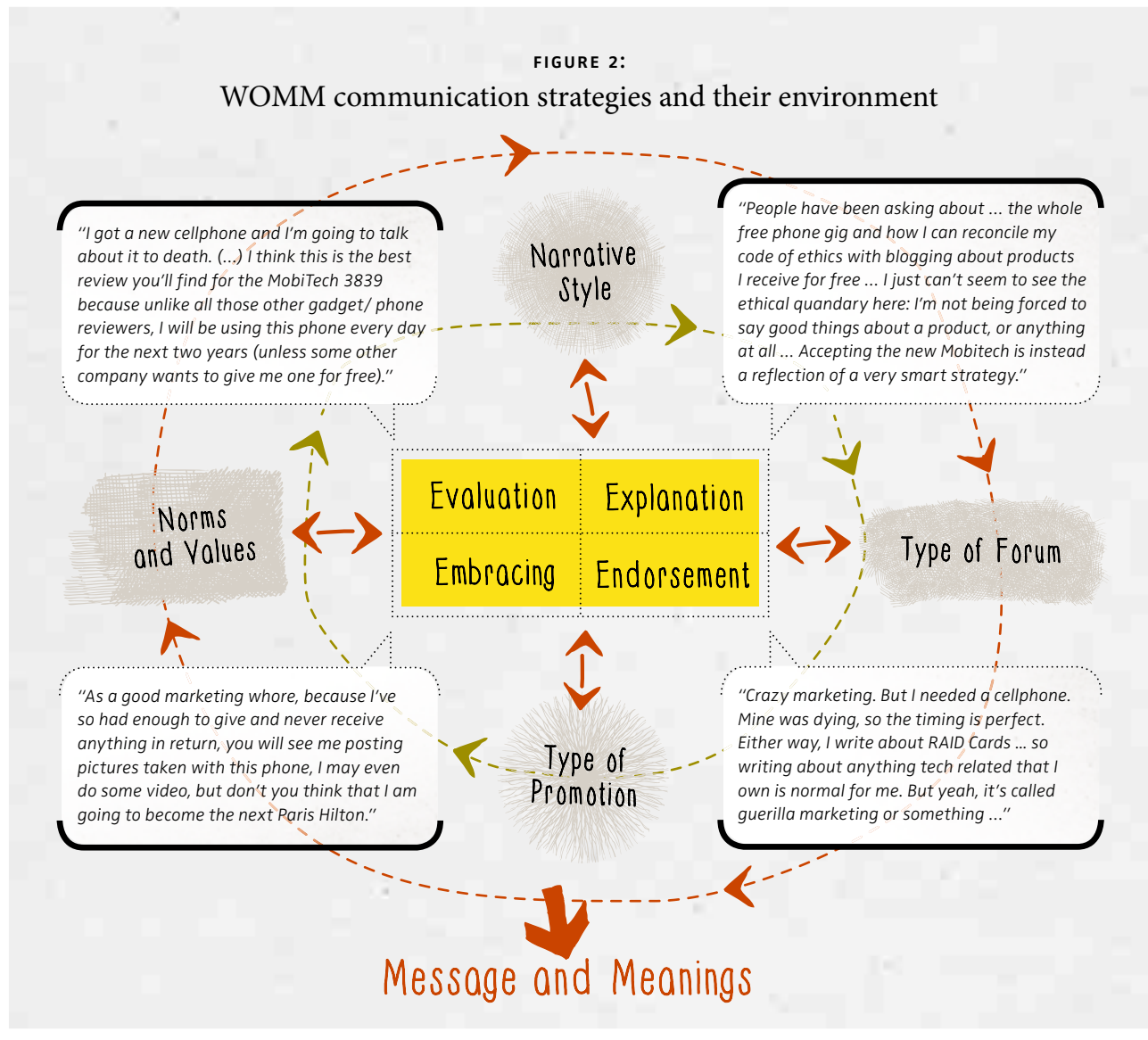
> The fourth WOMM communications *strategy of “participation explanation”* is the most open one. Bloggers openly disclose the presence of the WOMM campaign and analyze the various communal impacts of participation in it. They explicitly discuss the potential conflict of interest associated with WOMM, but they do so while asserting the importance and interests of their communities in a manner that affirms their own value to the community as a safe or preferred source of information. They present the WOMM campaign in a way that has the potential to even strengthen the communal ties. In instances of this strategy during the research period, community members were either positive or neutral regarding the WOMM campaign.

#### The art of strategically aligning WOMM with social brand

/// Deciding on the appropriate strategy depends on the individual characteristics of the social media posters, their communication style, the established rules of communication within the forum, and the characteristics of the campaign, product, and brand.

Each forum has its own *norms* of communication. Such implicit rules depend on factors like the average age of its members and their interests, lifestyles, or social class. In situations where values and norms are favorable toward the marketplace – the way they are in many brand communities, for instance – embracing and endorsing strategies are viewed favorably. Audiences expect these narratives and accept them willingly. Alternatively, communities that tend to resist profit motives and the logics of the marketplace – such as those that are rather secretive, personable, local, and “caring and sharing” – resist the blatant commercialism and self-promotion of an embracing strategy. These communities respond much more favorably to explicit explanation.





The *type of social media site* also shapes the response to WOMM. For example, consumers have grown to expect and perhaps even welcome certain kinds of commercial promotions on Facebook or Twitter, but there are still social boundaries that can be breached. When messages seem out of place or insincere – such as when Facebook appropriated people’s names and photos and used them on advertisements (for which they later were sued) – people tend to resist and mistrust the communication. Alternatively, when communications are already more commercial, as with Pinterest, LinkedIn, or Twitter, audiences can respond quite well to any of the strategies, especially an evaluative or openly embracing one.

One of the key aspects to consider is the individual consumer’s own *narrative style*. Who is the person engaging in this act of social brand engagement? What is their personal brand? What are they trying to achieve? Tweeters, bloggers, Pinterest-posters and other personally branded consumers may enact archetypical characters like the citizen journalist, the tell-it-like-it-is mother, the satirical exhibitionist, the making-ends-meet professional and so on in their efforts to engage other consumers.



Finally, *the promotional characteristics of the product, the brand, and the entire 360-degree brand marketing campaign* impact the process of message transmission as well. Strategies differ between types of products or brands as well as objectives. Technology and other high-involvement products tend to naturally inspire more evaluation, while fashion and entertainment products result in more embracing narratives (as in the article on megaphone effects detailed by McQuarrie et al on page 16). Hard-sell offers result in more explanation and evaluation, while soft-sell campaigns, such as funny, viral or embedded advertising created to be spread rapidly among large numbers, inspire endorsing or embracing narratives (if any).

**Social brand engagement success factors** /// It is essential to realize that social brand engagement is not about the amplification or accurate spread of a marketing message. It is not about the spread of so-called “positive” brand messages or recommendations. Social brand engagement is a genuine and natural-seeming interconnection between brand mentions and consumer-to-consumer social experiences. Therefore simply observing reach and valence of product mentions is too short-sighted. To effectively attain social brand engagement, promotions need to seem authentic and congruent with people, media, other content and the offline or online context. A deep analysis of what is going on in the prospective environment of a message to be seeded is a precondition for the optimal design of a WOMM campaign and the accurate interpretation of its success. Managers should therefore consider the following recommendations for their WOMM campaigns:

- > **Explore the nature of potential social branding candidates to optimize campaigns** /// Being able to understand and classify personal brand characteristics, styles, preferred communication modes and types of forum as well as knowing the ropes of the different social media sites and their communities: all of these things are essential for wise social brand managers. Managers should also attune the type of social branding effort to the characteristics of the WOM environment. Click-through, e-commerce and other short-term, buy-this-now offers lend themselves to strategies of explanation and evaluation, while embracing and endorsing narratives would be congruent with image-driven, soft-sell, long-term brand-building campaigns.
- > **Apply a refined set of success measures** /// Don't over-emphasize positive mentions, likes, and recommendations. Our research shows that negative information is often necessary and useful in the social branding process to negotiate cultural tension and to enhance consumer-to-consumer trust and credibility. Famous cases of negative

social media mentions, such as United Breaks Guitars and the humorous McDonald's McStories fiasco, have not led to any discernible damage to the brand or erosion of market share. One conclusion might therefore be to predict success by the strict volume of online WOM mentions, rather than their positive or negative valence. However, the narrative strategies of evaluation, embracing, endorsement and explanation depict a multidimensional storytelling process. Not all mentions are created equal, and the cultural side of this process and its elements require a more sophisticated assessment of the narrative outputs of these campaigns. Forward-looking marketers are therefore already using and applying criteria like social brand engagement, types of consumer-brand value communicated, narrative forms of persuasion, and interaction roles and styles in addition to simply measuring raw impressions.

- > **Use netnography to sharpen managerial awareness and engagement** /// There is also an opportunity for marketing managers to focus on the valuable qualitative insights that emerge from their own managerial engagement with social branding processes. All forms of social media can be considered to be (semi)permanent archives of consumer feedback. Using a process of manager-oriented “operational netnography”, managers can and should experience the conversational quality and content of these interactions for deeper insights into their brand, their product experience and even their marketing programs. Social branding should be viewed as an opportunity for marketing managers to gain familiarity with more recent marketing phenomena such as participatory consumer culture, creative consumer communities, open-source branding, natural brand communities and the innovation communities that Henry Jenkins and Johann Füller write about in this issue (see articles on pages 34 and 40). Netnography, social branding, and WOMM are important and subtle new tools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century marketing manager's toolkit. They are changing the way marketing is being conducted.

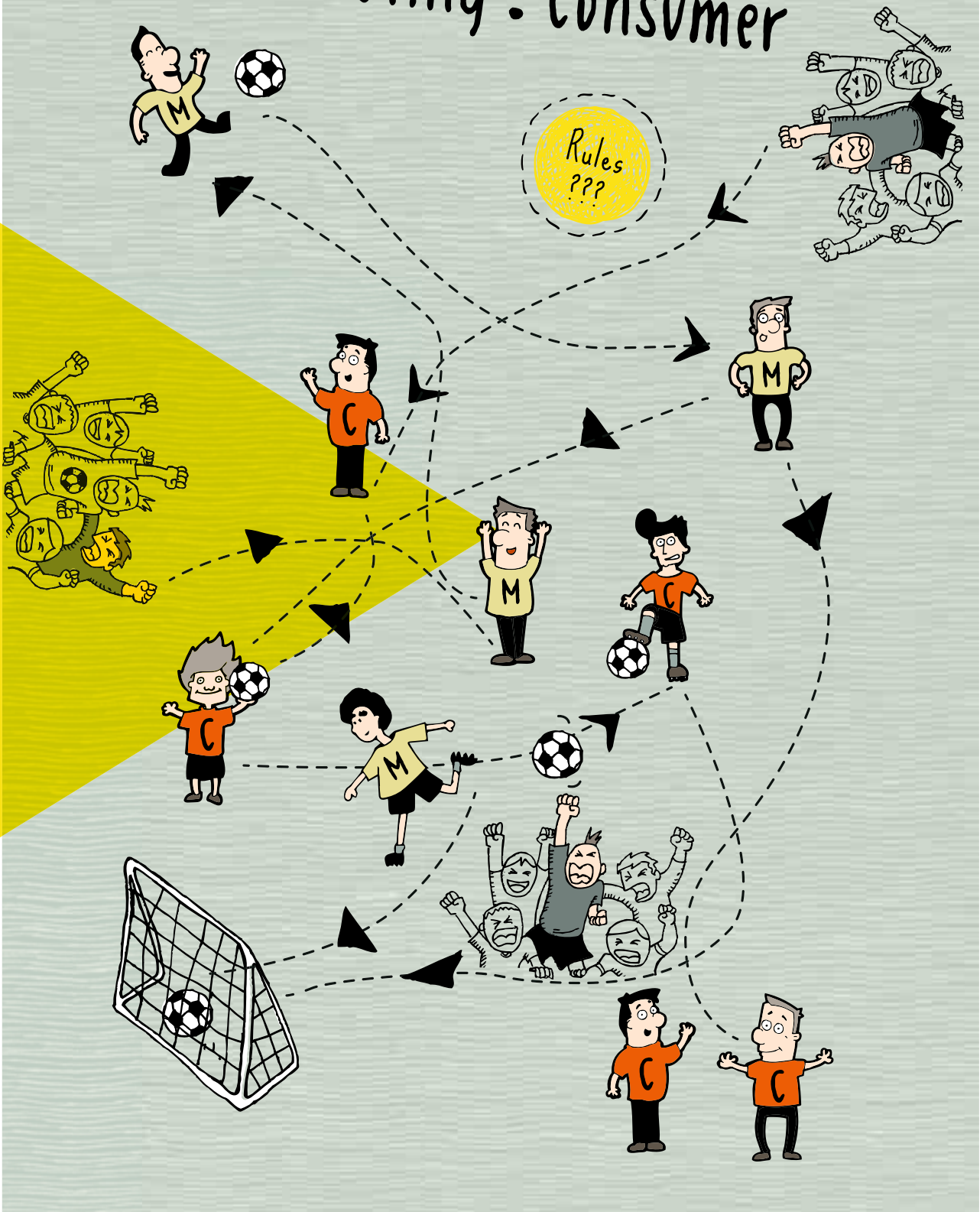
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**Managerial Summary of an article published in the academic top journal “Journal of Marketing”:**

*Kozinets, Robert V.; de Valck, Kristine; Wojnicki, Andrea C.; Wilner, Sarah J. S. (2010):*

“Networked Narratives: Understanding Word-of-Mouth Marketing in Online Communities”, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 74, pp. 71 – 89.

# Marketing : consumer



# Beyond Bedlam: How Consumers and Brands Alike Are Playing the Web

*John Deighton and Leora Kornfeld*

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KEYWORDS

*Interactivity, Social Media,  
Brands, Consumer Participation,  
Social Brand Engagement*

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The new marketing order, as played out on media platforms like YouTube, Twitter and Instagram, is so unlike the order it is displacing that it might seem like bedlam, an asylum of sorts for ideas intelligible only to their creators. And yet, surely, something systematic is going on. It must have purpose; all the vigorous uploading, posting, commenting, and sharing must be generating results. We claim that the new order is, in fact, rule-governed, and the rules are the rules of play.

## **Play as the Organizing Principle of Online Activity** ///

The word “play” has many contradictory meanings and forms. One plays to win, or just the opposite, to idle away the time. Some play is rule-bound, and some – in the form of playfulness – ignores the rules. Players can be tricksters, or they can be sincere. Play can be collaborative, or, when one plays into the other’s hands, it becomes adversarial. But in every case, play implies intentional interaction and to turn-taking. That is true even in solitary play, when one takes turns with a machine or interacts with facets of oneself.

So, play is our word for the tomfoolery of much of the current online activity: Interaction is present in all of it. And turn-taking, or at least engagement between the communicator and the communicated-with, is a feature of each case. We can see shades of intent, from benign to exploitative. Now we will take a look at some of the consumer-marketer games in the context of digital marketing.

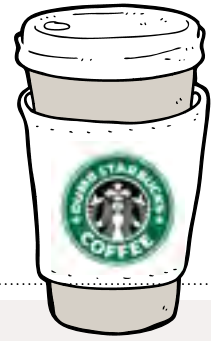
**Playing against** /// Sometimes one player plays against the other. The relationship, for example, between a marketer with a message to deliver and a consumer wanting to be left alone, is often a little adversarial, and it is necessary to resort to subterfuge to gain attention. There is no subterfuge in conventional ads: They announce their own arrival. On television, the flow of a program is typically suspended and a cluster of six or eight ads is inserted into the break. On social media, on the other hand, the ad attacks are less straightforward, more playful and paradoxical, and it is not always clear what is actually being advertised. Consider a stunt by Nathan Fielder, a performer best known for his television show “Nathan For You”, broadcast on the Comedy Central channel in the U.S., to see paradox at work.

When marketers use the Web to play against expectations and defenses, they build their audiences slowly, not borrowing the attention given to programming, but drawing people to the content itself. Once the audience is assembled, self-contradiction begins to dawn – we are attending the event, but the event is unworthy of our attention. A resolution of the contradiction is sought, from which the resolving fact is advertised.

**Playing with** /// Sometimes marketers and consumers play with each other instead of against each other. Straightforward collaboration is common in marketing, as when Ikea asks consumers to assemble their own furniture or store promotions rely on shoppers to collect coupons. The play element in collaboration becomes possible because social media and interactive technologies enable collaboration to emerge spontaneously, often, in fact, without design or intention. Two examples of this concept are outlined in the case studies on this page: The LAY’S® Do Us A Flavor™ contest illustrates this kind of momentum, while the singer Pharrell Williams’ unusual oversized hat demonstrates a relatively complex case of play, with elements of deliberate intention as well as opportunism.

The “playing with” frame can take various forms. Consumers played with the Lay’s contest. It is unlikely that Lay’s intended to place the resources for such extensive brand bricolage in the hands of the public, but consumers are playful and used their chance. Arby’s played with Pharrell’s hat. Repartee in the background of live broadcast cannot be planned, but it can really charm audiences.

{ Box 1 }



## HOW NATHAN FIELDER PLAYED AGAINST STARBUCKS

On a Friday afternoon in 2014, a coffee shop appeared in the Los Angeles area in the style of a Starbucks store, but called “Dumb Starbucks”. All product names were prefixed with the word “dumb”, right down to Dumb Blonde Roast coffee on the rack and compact discs displayed by the cash register with titles like “Dumb Jazz Standards” and “Dumb Taste of Cuba”. With the courts closed for the weekend, no injunction could be served, and by Monday mentions on Twitter and other social media had attracted crowds that formed lines that ran around the block. International media attention followed. Fielder explained on a nationally syndicated late-night television show, “I think a lot of Americans maybe lost hope that innovation in business was [possible] and I think people saw, wow, there’s a whole new way of doing things now. It kind of allowed people to dream again, in a way.”<sup>1</sup> His innovation in business, he contended, was that the parody exemption to trademark law allowed anyone to appropriate well-known brands and logos as long as they put “dumb” in front of them. The point of his store, he said, was to demonstrate this principle. Fielder did not link the stunt to his show on Comedy Central, in which his character was a top business school graduate who offered what turned out to be very bad advice to small businesses. The stunt’s function as promotion for the show was eventually deduced by journalists and the public. The delayed reveal was an element of play.

1 Debbie Emery, “Nathan Fielder Tells Jimmy Kimmel He Could Get Jail Time For ‘Dumb Starbucks’ Joke”, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/video-nathan-fielder-tells-jimmy-679673>, February 11, 2014



{ Box 2 }

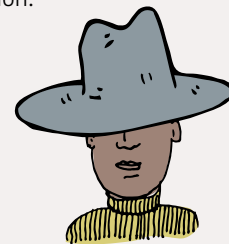
## PEPSICO AND THE LAY'S® DO US A FLAVOR™ CONTEST

PepsiCo launched and designed the LAY'S® Do Us A Flavor™ contest as a straightforward competition that offered a \$1 million prize to the person who proposed a new potato chip flavor that received the largest number of votes on the Lay's website. Pairs of images of chip bags with two flavor descriptors would appear on the website and viewers would vote one up and the other down. While many entrants played to win, others were unable to resist the opportunity to create a picture of a bag of chips with flavors like "7<sup>th</sup> grade locker room", "Tooth-paste and orange juice" and "Crunchy frog and blue cheese". Still others moved beyond disgusting flavors to non sequiturs, including "Dad never came home", "Summer bike ride bug inside mouth" and "Blood of my enemies". The noncompetitors took their images to Tumblr, Twitter and other social media, and Lay's received many hundreds of thousands of incremental impressions.

{ Box 3 }

## PHARRELL WILLIAMS AND HIS HAT

During his appearance at the 2014 Grammys, Pharrell Williams wore an unusual and oversized hat. First, Pharrell put the icon in play through the act of wearing it, and social media posters picked it up in such images as Pharrell as a forest ranger with the tagline "Please. Only you can prevent forest fires." Then, the fast-food outlet Arby's played off the similarity between Pharrell's hat and its own logo. They tweeted a message to him during the Grammys broadcast: "Hey @pharrell, can we have our hat back #GRAMMYS." Pharrell ended up auctioning off the hat for a charitable cause, and with a bid of just over \$44,000, Arby's won the auction.



In some instances, brands even commit "intentional fouls" by deliberately making an error or releasing a misleading statement for the sake of a spike in online discussion and the mainstream-media coverage likely to follow. With varying degrees of success, the brands reveal, subsequent to the publicity, that their statements had been intended as stunts. When brands play with their consumers, some in the industry think that they are taking playfulness too far. Old-school command-and-control marketing strategists believe the gap between playfulness and incompetence is territory that brands should never visit. But strategists in the new marketing order break this rule because that is where they find the energy that fuels their markets.

**Playing with play** /// Sometimes play exploits ambiguity of form just as, in a Mobius strip, it is unclear where things begin, which surface is to be read as facing up, and which is to be understood as facing down. This kind of play with form has been found in a few notable videos posted on YouTube recently, such as the one for the HUVrboard. Sometimes posted with one intention and interpreted with another meaning, play becomes an interplay of genres and categories.

Just days after the HUVrboard video made the rounds, another video began to circulate on social media, with even greater force. It showed strangers kissing, and had a wistful and nostalgic feel. It seemed innocent yet sentimental, voyeuristic yet



{ Box 4 }

## BACK TO THE FUTURE: THE REAL HOVERBOARD

In the first week of March 2014, a new company posted a video for a product called HUVrboard, featuring skateboarding legend Tony Hawk and Christopher Lloyd, the actor that played Emmett “Doc” Brown in the hit “Back to the Future” movies in the 1980s. The video showed Hawk demonstrating a skateboard that allowed the rider to remain suspended in the air for an extended period, similar to the hover board ridden by Michael J. Fox’s character in “Back to the Future”. Viewers couldn’t believe their eyes, yet they were so exhilarated by what they saw and so convinced by Hawk’s performance that they began tweeting, posting on Facebook and sharing the video at a frantic pace. The video received 12 million views in just a few days. Then came the follow-up video, an apology from Hawk, in which he admitted that the

video had been a prank and misleading. He stated “This was not a promotion for a new movie or videogame, nor did I get paid (unrelated: I am releasing a game for mobile devices relatively soon). My reward was riding in a DeLorean with Doc, and pretending to be a stuntman.”<sup>2</sup> YouTube comedy channel “Funny or Die” later took credit for the stunt. Was it comedy for the sake of comedy? Was it an ad for “Funny or Die”? For Tony Hawk? For Christopher Lloyd? For something we’ll find out about later?

<sup>2</sup> Tony Maglio, “Funny or Die behind Tony Hawk, Christopher Lloyd Hoverboard Hoax”, <http://www.thewrap.com/funny-or-die-hoverboard-huvrtech-tony-hawk-christopher-llyod>, March 5, 2014

real, and within a few days it had received 25 million views on YouTube. And then, as often happens with videos at first thought to be authentically “viral”, it was revealed to be an ad for the fashion house Wren. Wren’s founder, Melissa Coker, claimed to have had no plan for the video to propagate the way it did.

Often, there is no single answer, but we do know that attention, that most precious of commodities, had been seized, and in the loop that is digital marketing, that can be enough to proclaim victory.

**Who’s Playing Whom?** /// In play, the actor makes moves that are calculated to produce an effect. Sometimes the effect is constructive, but sometimes it seems quite the oppo-

site. What is Rob Ford, controversial and ubiquitous mayor of Toronto, playing at? The resources of YouTube and camera phones have made him arguably the best-known mayor in North America. There is no reason at all to pose for a “selfie” photograph with the average mayor; with Ford the shot goes to Instagram and Facebook and Twitter, and in the process amplifies Ford’s name recognition thousandfold, while buying cachet for the person who posts it. Whether he is re-elected or not, he has won that most elusive brand status, iconicity.

But playfulness is of the essence. When Boston Red Sox’s David Ortiz took a selfie with President Obama it seemed playful until it emerged that Ortiz was acting on behalf of Samsung cameras. Then the soft edge of play was displaced by the hard edge of a trick.





Radio Shack's 2014 Super Bowl ad played at self-parody when it showed a Radio Shack store clerk putting down the phone and telling his colleague, "The '80s called. They want their store back." The ad went on to announce a new store design, but the 3 million YouTube views in three weeks likely were driven more by enjoyment of the self-mockery than by admiration for the new design. In fact, immediately following the airing of the Super Bowl ad and its subsequent success on YouTube, Radio Shack announced the shuttering of numerous stores, following a loss in 2013.

**Game instructions for brands playing the social media game** /// Play can refer to the conduct of a game with winners and losers, as we suggest it does in the first of our forms of play, when marketers defeat the consumer's wish to be left alone. It can refer to the collaboration between players to achieve – if not exactly a common purpose – at least separate purposes with joint resources. Or it can refer to conduct that bemuses and befuddles, leaving no one, perhaps not even the marketer, completely sure what the relationship will be between marketer and consumer when it is all over, except that the marketer has gained visibility. So, are there any rules to lean on for playing these games successfully?

- > **Lighten up a little** /// One important element of playing games is fun. Dead-serious planning of social media interactions is a contradiction in terms. Marketing has, for a century, been a deliberate business, with goals and the corresponding campaigns to achieve them. For brands that want to enter, it may be time to lighten up a little.
  - > **No risk, no result** /// It is apparent that people want to play with the brand, and brands must therefore decide if they want to actively invite participation and surrender to whatever form consumer play may take. However, they should be prepared for surprising turns. Attention and consumer engagement are the prizes at stake for taking the venture, awards that are increasingly difficult to gain with more traditional communication campaigns.
  - > **Rule out the rules** /// A good deal of charm can be generated by new forms of play and generous interpretations of its rules. As long as it does not involve trickery, much will be forgiven. Creativity and flexibility in the conception and handling of single episodes will help to maintain the attraction and success of this alternative form of consumer communication.
- ./.

## FURTHER READING

*Deighton, John; Kornfeld, Leora (2009):*  
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*Journal of Interactive Marketing,*  
 Vol. 23, pp. 4–10.



# Participatory Culture: From Co-Creating Brand Meaning to Changing the World

*Henry Jenkins*

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KEYWORDS

*Fan Communities, Activism,  
Culture Jamming,  
Cultural Acupuncture, Branding,  
Social Brand Engagement*

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**A new generation of change makers** /// Over the past two decades, a growing portion of the general public has expanded its communication capacities, exerting a much greater degree of control over the production and circulation of media than ever before. In the process, they have been participating in the culture around them in powerful new ways.

Culture jammers in the 1990s overtly opposed their targets, in particular global organizations and their brands. Naomi Klein's book "No Logo" was one of the most known initiatives of that movement. The media landscape was much different in those days: Television was dominating mass communication, and the culture jammers' objective was to block and jam the flow of what they perceived as manipulated images created by Madison Avenue and the culture industry. Back then, activists felt they could remain on the outside looking in and did not participate in the culture of consumption they were critiquing.

Today's change-makers are still strongly invested in appropriating and remixing content from "the empire of signs" and are still holding corporations accountable for their unhealthy impact on our lives. The means they use to broadcast their messages out to the world and the modes they use to motivate popular support behind their causes, however, have changed. Young people's personal use of social media like blogs, networks and online platforms allows for collective action. This generation moves seamlessly between being socially and culturally active to being politically and civically

## THE HARRY POTTER ALLIANCE (HPA)

Established in 2005, at the peak of the media hype surrounding J. K. Rowling's best-selling children's book series, the Harry Potter Alliance has mobilized more than 100,000 youth by its own estimates. These members have formed more than 90 chapters worldwide (mostly in the U.S.) through which they participate in various forms of human rights activism. The organization connects fans through campaigns and calls to action, a loosely knit network of chapters, and an online presence that includes discussion forums, a well-designed website, frequent vlogs, and a presence on a wide range of social media platforms. The community members consider themselves "Dumbledore's Army of the real world", seeking to make the world a better place. The organization's website explains their approach as follows:

"Just as Harry and his friends fought the Dark Arts in JK Rowling's fictional universe, we strive to destroy real-world horcruxes like inequality, illiteracy, and human rights violations."

"Our mission is to empower our members to act like the heroes that they love by acting for a better world. ... Our goal is to make civic engagement exciting by channeling the entertainment-saturated facets of our culture toward mobilization for deep and lasting social change."

Some of the HPA's successes include raising over \$123,000 for Partners in Health in Haiti in a two-week period, collecting and donating books for community centers, and registering voters during Equal Marriage referendums around the country.

<http://thehpalliance.org/what-we-do/May 8, 2014>

engaged, applying skills they learned making fan vids or recording skateboarding stunts to capture and share what was happening at their local Occupy encampment. Popular culture is their shared mythology; remix is how they share meaning and motivate others to action. This isn't a Twitter revolution; they are trying to change the world through any media necessary. As opposed to the former culture-jamming paradigm, this form of participatory action is referred to as "cultural acupuncture". Cultural acupuncture seeks not to block the flow but to tap into the culture's circulation.

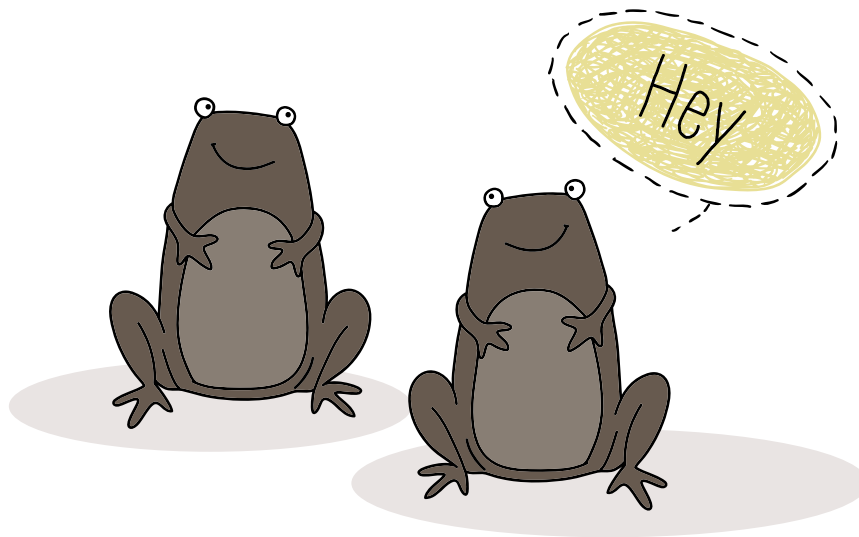
**The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), cultural acupuncture, and fan activism** /// Stories, signs and symbols play a crucial role in such culture-change-projects and so do fan communities emerging around popular themes. Previously, fan subcultures were known for activities such as attending conventions, making fan videos, writing fan fiction, engaging in cosplay, or debating interpretations with likeminded around their objects of enthusiasm. Now they are applying those skills to promote social justice. The Harry Potter Alliance is a powerful example of what we are calling fan activism, deploying those shared stories to rally support around new political agendas. (see Box for information on the HPA)

Pinning political and social causes to Harry Potter works because the story world has a huge following and is familiar to an even larger number of people. It has its own built-in mechanisms for generating publicity and is apt to attract many subsequent waves of media interest. Harry Potter constitutes a form of cultural currency that can carry the group's messages to many who would not otherwise hear them. The following example shows how "cultural acupuncture" works and what it can mean for related brands.

**Not in Harry's Name: No chocolate from child labor** /// In its "Not In Harry's Name" campaign, the HPA pits itself against Warner Brothers, the creator of the Magical World of Harry Potter in Orlando and licensor of the edible products and collector items sold there and online. In particular, the focus is placed on Chocolate Frogs (the real-world version of a popular candy in the fiction) that they suspect are being produced in unfair ways, possibly even involving child labor.

In an initial effort, the HPA attracted more than 16,000 signatures on a petition calling for Warner Brothers to make all Harry Potter chocolate fair trade. They argued that young Harry Potter fans should not be sold chocolate that was produced by child labor, a perspective that grew from fan

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“engagement” with and sense of “ownership” over the Harry Potter franchise. In order to stress the effort’s grassroots nature, they had more than 200 members send along pages of signatures. Even this tactic was motivated through references to the core texts: Readers might remember what happened when Uncle Vernon tried to ignore Harry’s Hogwarts letters: More letters showed up ... and this is what the HPA organized as well. The studio responded to the HPA petition by (some would say patronizingly) reassuring their fans that they were complying with all operative international laws and their own internal standards. Additionally, that they had investigated the companies producing their chocolate and were satisfied with their labor practices. The response contained all standard elements of traditional corporate responses to such concerns.

#### **Signatures, shared messages and HPA fair-trade frogs**

/// Rather than accepting the company’s claims at face value, the HPA demanded that the studio release a report from their internal investigations. The community gathered more than 60,000 signatures on their new petition and gained significant media coverage. They used all sorts of social media messages like videos, blogs or vlogs to point out that fans of the Harry Potter series were responsibly advocating for children while the leaders of Warner Brothers were acting irresponsibly.

In a third phase, the HPA contracted with a fair-trade chocolate company to produce and market their own chocolate frogs. They actually demonstrated that such products could be produced without relying on companies with exploitative working conditions, when there is a commitment to do so.



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 A more complex set of  
 relationships between producers  
 and consumers is emerging,  
 with the fans often pursuing  
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Though Warner Brothers has remained nonresponsive, choosing to sit out the storm of bad publicity rather than open up their labor practices and subcontracts to closer public scrutiny, the message did not remain unheard. Can Warner Brothers withstand mounting pressure from a grassroots movement comprising their own core fans? Will they respect this grassroots effort to hold them accountable? For the Harry Potter fans, this is about more than chocolate contracts: They are seeking to educate their following about the issues surrounding fair trade, so they can be even more effective advocates in the future, whether they win or lose the current battle. This is all part of what the Nerdfighters, another fan group that has partnered with the HPA, calls “decreasing world suck”, a goal that allows the group to act upon a range of different social concerns, identified bottom up by their core followers.

**Participatory culture and commercial brands** /// All of this is to say: Corporations often worry about losing control over their brands. The reality is that they had already lost control years ago, and well-organized groups of their supporters, not simply their foes, can use their brands and their fictional franchises as resources for their own cultural and political efforts.

Corporations have reacted to the digital revolution in different ways, but much interest has centered on ways of benefitting from consumers’ desire to participate. Media companies are seeking to increase fan engagement, brands want to build brand communities, and many businesses are deploying crowdsourcing to identify potential new products or reframe their messages. As they attempt to “harness the wisdom of crowds”, they have had to allow greater space for fan expression and participation, ceding some degree of control over their content in hopes of building a new relationship with their consumers. A more complex set of relationships between producers and consumers is emerging, with the fans often pursuing their own interests even in the face of opposition from media companies and brands. As a result, brand managers should be prepared for action beyond their immediate control and might like to consider the following recommendations to prevent brand-damage.

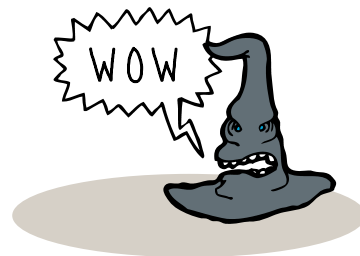
- > **Understand cultural trends** /// Cultural and social developments are more relevant for brand management than ever before. Missing or underestimating developments and being caught flat-footed can cause a great deal of harm because dissatisfaction is often voiced powerfully and may spread very quickly.
- > **Live up to what you promise** /// Brands often actively participate in, draw on and even promote cultural trends, but any source of inauthenticity can serve as a hook for critical questions. To avoid becoming the target of grassroots resistance, brands should very carefully confirm that all their touchpoints are truly in line with the values they promote. And as the “Not in Harry’s Name” campaign shows, consumers are no longer satisfied with nice words; they demand proof.
- > **Take a stand or get labelled** /// In these kinds of environments, it becomes increasingly difficult to take a neutral standpoint when it comes to socially relevant views. If brands do not take a clear stance and prove it in their everyday actions, they can anticipate that their most hardcore supporters may be among the first to hold them accountable with little chance of being stopped by the official rights-holders. Anything you say can and will be used against you in the court of public opinion. The best way to respond is not to shut them down, not to ignore them, but to get into the game. Keep in mind that in this age of networked communication, if it doesn’t spread, it’s dead. And if they aren’t talking about you, they are going to be talking about someone else.

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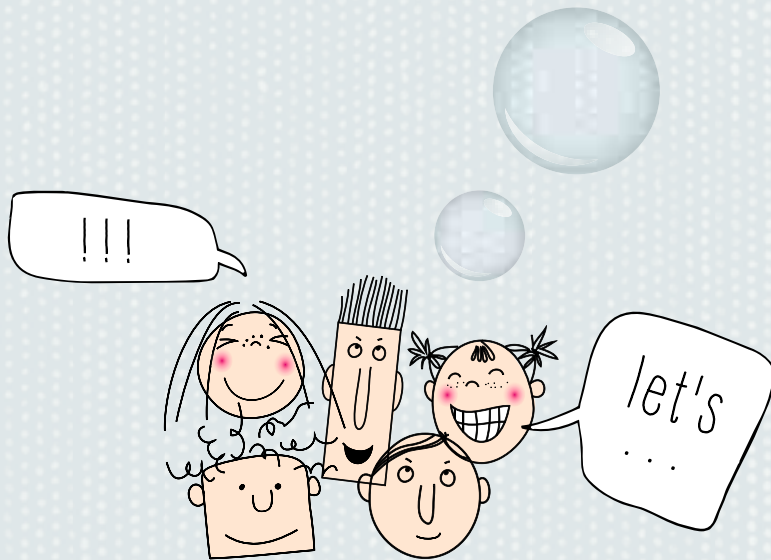
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# BIG IDEA



# For Us and by Us: The Charm and Power of Community Brands

*Johann Füller*

KEYWORDS

*User Innovation,  
User-Generated Brands,  
Innovation Communities,  
Open Source, Virtual Collaboration,  
Social Brand Engagement*

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**Consumers' creative vein** /// Users can be very demanding. Thanks to virtual collaboration opportunities they either help established brands deliver what they want or simply develop products themselves, without the structure or funding of a sponsoring corporation.

Innovation leaders such as P&G, BMW, Siemens, Nokia or Beiersdorf have successfully co-created products with consumers and used this new paradigm of collaboration as a fruitful source of innovation. But users do not just sit around and wait to be asked to collaborate: They are also able to develop their own products. Many examples exist of users' joint, successful initiatives to come up with new products tailored to their needs. The mountain bike and the rodeo kayak as well as some medical equipment, computer games and services like computerized commercial banking applications originate from users and not from companies.

Online collaboration presents a real alternative to the company-centered innovation paradigm and some users do more than just innovate; they go the extra mile and actually create brands themselves. The open-source movement, for instance, has produced a series of well-known brands such as Linux, Apache, and Mozilla Firefox. The outdoor hiking community OutdoorSeiten.net serves as another example. Its members are dedicated to all types of outdoor sports and created their own gear to better fit their needs. They designed their own logo (Figure 1) and began to develop products for commercialization under their own brand.

**Developing brands ‘accidentally’** /// Almost every online community engages in some kind of branding activity – whether it is finding a name or designing a logo for their community. Some make products like T-Shirts with their logo, but so far only a small minority of communities has been able to develop high-quality products that can be used by community members or other consumers. In several qualitative and quantitative studies, we analyzed the open-source software community of Apache and the outdoor-sports community outdoorseiten.net (ODS) to explore how their community brands emerge and what makes them attractive. Although the products they develop are completely different, their principles and processes of brand creation are amazingly similar:

The community brands were not planned, but evolved accidentally as byproducts of community interactions. The Apache community did not intend to create a strong brand, nor did the community engage in any advertising, marketing or branding activities. At the beginning, it was only a group of people who shared a common interest and a passion for programming. The Apache brand emerged as a virtually cost-free side effect of activities carried out for other community or usage purposes. The Apache Software Foundation has only recently begun to engage in active, purposeful brand-management activities.

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The brand’s value  
is seen not only within  
the community,  
but within the whole industry.  
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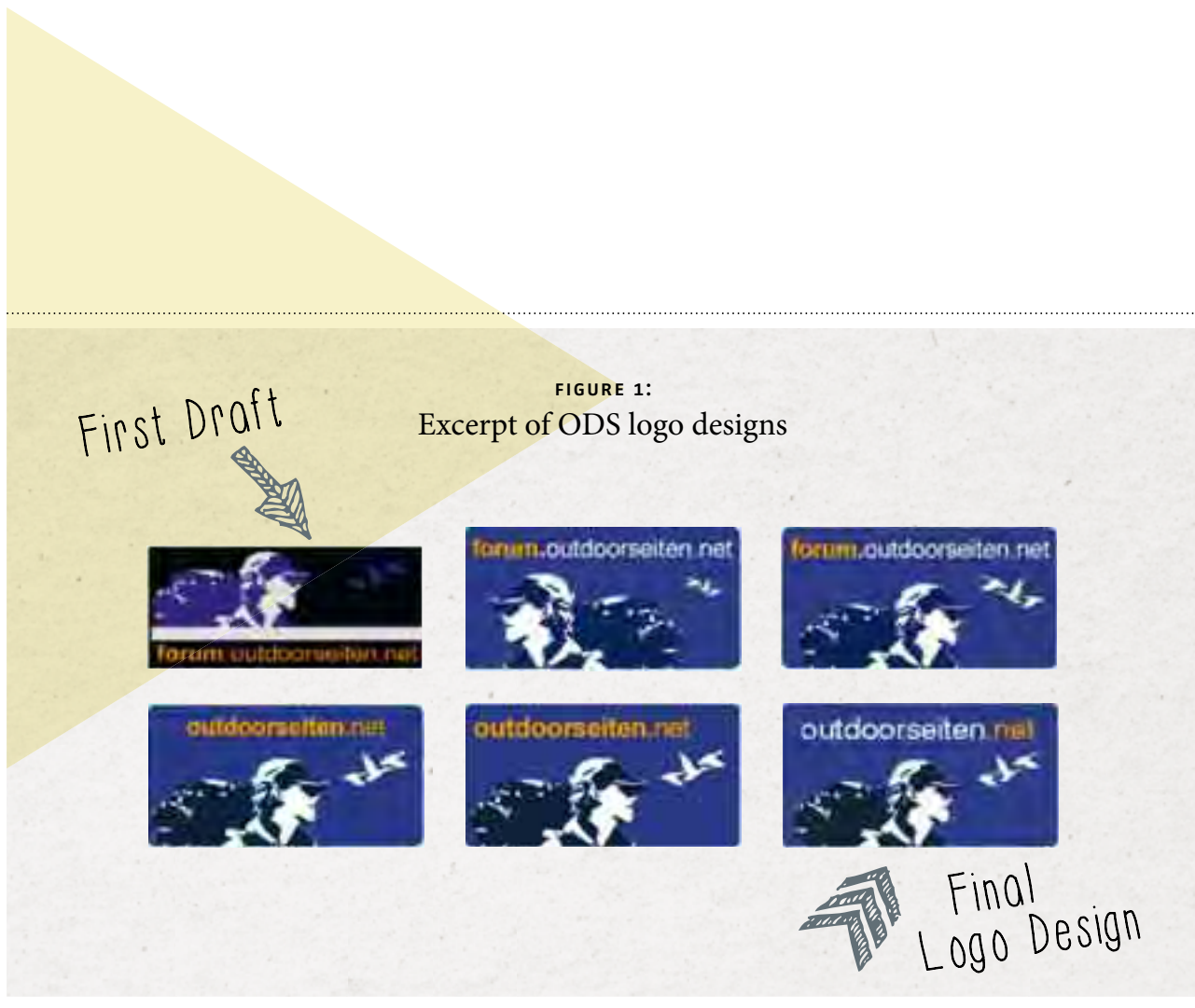
The ODS brand was created and strengthened in a similar manner. The community spent essentially nothing on developing its brand, on shaping its meaning, or on strengthening their affiliation to the brand. Members voluntarily engaged in all those activities for free. Again, the brand emerged as a side effect of participation in community activities that members valued and enjoyed for their own sake.

**Community brands’ secret of success** /// One of our studies on the Apache brand compared community members and other IT experts with respect to their brand evaluation. Both groups perceived the brand as high-quality, authentic and associated with expertise – almost to the same extent. In both groups, Apache was the most preferred Web server with 66 % overall market share, and both groups were willing to pay a price premium for this brand in a conjoint-experiment. The results show that the brand’s value is seen not only within the community, but within the whole industry. But how do such self-created brands become so successful beyond their own communities?

Community brands are created by people who share common interests. To them, their relationships to each other are often more important than the thing that emerges. The brands result from joint activities that community members perceive as joyful and rewarding. This leads to excellent products, and the brands are seen as highly authentic because they represent the deeds and interactions of their members. They represent meanings, ideologies, and modes of self-organization that suit the needs of the most active members rather than the needs of economically interested shareholders. These brands are inspired by the independence, creativity, knowledge and distinction of their members. The ability to jointly design ideal products at lower cost and without the threat of being exploited or overtaken by the next fashion wave appeals to users and fans alike.

In contrast, enthusiasts of commercial brands are constantly threatened by corporate decisions: If they object to a branding decision, the only option they have is to leave. Apple abandoned the Newton handheld; Harley Davidson launched bikes for yuppies; and Hummer introduced a small, mass-market sport utility vehicle. Some fans have struggled with these decisions, often because they resented the destruction of a brand element that was important to them. While firms can dictate and strongly influence the meanings and experiences of





brands, community brands create their own ideologies, define their own qualities, advance with their own pace, and define the prices they want to pay or charge democratically. Community brands fulfill the same functions as commercial brands, but they differ along various dimensions (see Figure 2).

**Competing against 'for free' ///** Many corporate brands are a major source of profit for companies because they enable them to charge high premiums. If communities create their own products, build their brands essentially without expenses and, on top of that, have no interest in earning money, they may become serious competitors. Releasing self-generated brands onto the marketplace for free can disrupt existing commercial markets for similar offers, because it is difficult to compete with free. The effect can be disastrous and occur even when communities do not actually manage their brands or attempt to profit from them. For example, Apache offers free Web-based software labeled with a

trusted, authentic and user-generated brand. This poses a serious challenge to Microsoft, both in terms of its software products and in terms of the brand premium that the Microsoft brand commands. Wikipedia is another good example of a brand that represents a product generated by a large user community, one that has ruined the market for commercial brands like Encyclopedia Britannica.

The availability of virtually cost-free collaboration and communication opportunities on the Internet eases not only the creation of user-generated brands, but also their diffusion. For that reason, it is possible that community brands may become progressively more powerful and attractive relative to commercial corporate brands. In particular, digital goods like software, information and games have the potential to become strong community brands. However, a strong meaning coupled with dedicated members can produce similar results for physical products as well.



**From foe to friend: The chances of communal product creation** /// Commercial brands cannot compete with brands that offer high-quality products for free. But community brands do not necessarily have to be rivals; they could form partnerships with corporate brands.

- > **Co-branding** /// When the meaning of a community brand is consistent with the meaning of a corporate brand, co-branding might be in the interest of both. Not all communities will be able to complete all the tasks necessary to actually market a product. For example, the ODS community collaborated with Wechsel, a tent manufacturer, to manufacture and distribute their own community tent. They decided to look for a partner with excellent manufacturing and distribution skills to actually produce their product. In cases like this, co-branding could add more value, than each brand would generate on its own.
  
- > **Co-creation** /// Other communities might be won over right from the beginning and act as partners and lead users in the product-creation phase. They might be less interested in creating their own brand and instead more drawn to influencing the creation of a product tailored to their needs. Co-creation, however, entails a new perspective on brands and brand management. The role of brand managers changes from creating and promoting finished entities to facilitating consumer interactions. There is a need for increased know-how to successfully develop inspiring platforms where brand fans and communities can generate and exchange ideas and where ordinary consumers can contribute and diffuse content. The marketing department's key competence will change to being a network integrator and facilitator that provides compelling experiences and great value to their participants throughout the creative process.
  
- > **Fulfillment and complimentary services** /// Finally, community brands may also open doors to new business opportunities. It can be interesting for members to find partners with access to complementary skills and expertise as well as access to production facilities and distribution channels. Companies like Threadless, Quirky, Spreadshirt, and Local Motors, for instance, have already proved that

providing services for creative community brands can be profitable. They offer professional fulfillment services for products created and branded by the community. Producers of commercial brands may also find great value in leveraging the resources of a community brand: their knowledge, creativity, brand meaning and purchasing power. Complimentary, commercial services around the community brand offerings may be another growing business opportunity. Red Hat and IBM for example, draw substantial business from products related to Linux open-source software. Smart business leaders will still contrive ways to achieve success in the age of user innovation.

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#### ABOUT DELVINIA

From digital strategy to data collection, Delvinia's business units offer a range of services dedicated to helping companies transform their organizations. Founded in 1998, Delvinia's Digital Consulting Group uses a human-centric approach to envision and bring to market new business models, digital customer experiences and products that enable its clients to realize accelerated growth.

Delvinia also owns and manages AskingCanadians™, an online data-collection firm with access to a research community of 600,000 Canadians who have opted in to participate in online surveys. Since its inception in 2005, AskingCanadians™ has grown into one of the leading data collection firms in Canada, enabling market researchers to quickly gather and deliver high-quality information from Canadian consumers.

[www.delvinia.com](http://www.delvinia.com)  
[corporate.askingcanadians.com](http://corporate.askingcanadians.com)

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#### ABOUT ADAM FROMAN

Adam Froman is the CEO of Delvinia, a Toronto-based digital strategy and innovation firm he founded in 1998. He is also the founder of AskingCanadians™, an online data collection business as well as the Centre for e-Democracy, a not-for-profit organization that teams up with academic institutions to study the impact digital technologies have on democracy. Adam sits on the Board of Directors of the Canadian Opera Company (COC). After earning a degree in engineering with a specialization in the area of human factors from the University of Toronto, he received an MBA in strategy and finance from the Schulich School of Business.

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#### THE INTERVIEWER

The interview was conducted by  
 Professor Robert V. Kozinets in June 2014.

# Creating Sustainable Digital Experiences

*MIR Interview with Adam Froman,  
CEO of Delvinia and AskingCanadians™*



Is the social media hype about being cool or about making money?

For Adam Froman, the answer is easy: Marketers need to be very clear about how social media activity supports overall business strategy. Only if the digital experience fits into the whole customer journey will consumers become engaged and add value to the company ... and only then will the social brand become cool.

**MIR:** Adam, you have been in the multimedia and digital technology space for more than 25 years. How have things changed over that time?

**ADAM FROMAN:** Well, the only constant in this field is the constant change. On the other hand, the basic question for successfully creating digital experiences has remained the same: How do you create digital experiences from a human-centered perspective? Back in the '90s, companies would approach me and say, "We need a website, but what should it do?" But instead of just building one, we had to first find out WHY they needed one, and what it should look like, and then build it.

**MIR:** So, in those early years was it mostly creating websites for clients?

**ADAM FROMAN:** Yes, it was mostly technology and building applications. The market dramatically changed around 2007 or 2008 with the growth of social media. Marketers realized that digital technologies provided users with choice and control for how they interact with companies. The idea of having a consumer-centric approach to technology started emerging.

**MIR:** What are the challenges with implementing a human-centered perspective today?

**ADAM FROMAN:** Today, companies often start with the question: “Hey, how can we market and be cool using social?” But it is actually not a question of just leveraging social. It’s helping companies look at how social media fit in the lives of particular consumers and how brands should utilize social media to create a better customer experience. If you’re looking at things from a customer-centric point of view, then it’s less about how to leverage social media for marketing purposes. Instead, it’s about strategically leveraging social media in an omni-channel environment. You’re trying to find out how social media fit in the context of a consumer’s journey or a consumer’s experience.

**MIR:** *How do you find out which social media platforms fit in the picture?*

**ADAM FROMAN:** You have to look at a customer’s journey from the point of view of the customer. What we’re doing often these days is mapping the customer journey. A company needs to analyze how its brand fits into the social experience of its customers. It’s all about context and relevance and this is challenging because there are lots of tools and technologies available, and they keep on emerging.

**MIR:** *What is the role that mobile offers in this context?*

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**ADAM FROMAN:** Social and mobile go hand in hand now. You overlay the role of social and mobile in a customer’s journey. If you’re getting gas for your car, for instance, the journey would be to get gas and then go and use the variety store attached. So you analyze the role of social media on that whole path and identify the opportunities for the organization. The real potential lies in making it relevant. When you advertise to your customer through any channel and your customer can come and interact with you through any channel, you need to make sure that you’re providing and looking at social media in the context of that consumer-centric, omni-channel environment. I know that sentence is full of buzzwords, but it’s such a major thing.

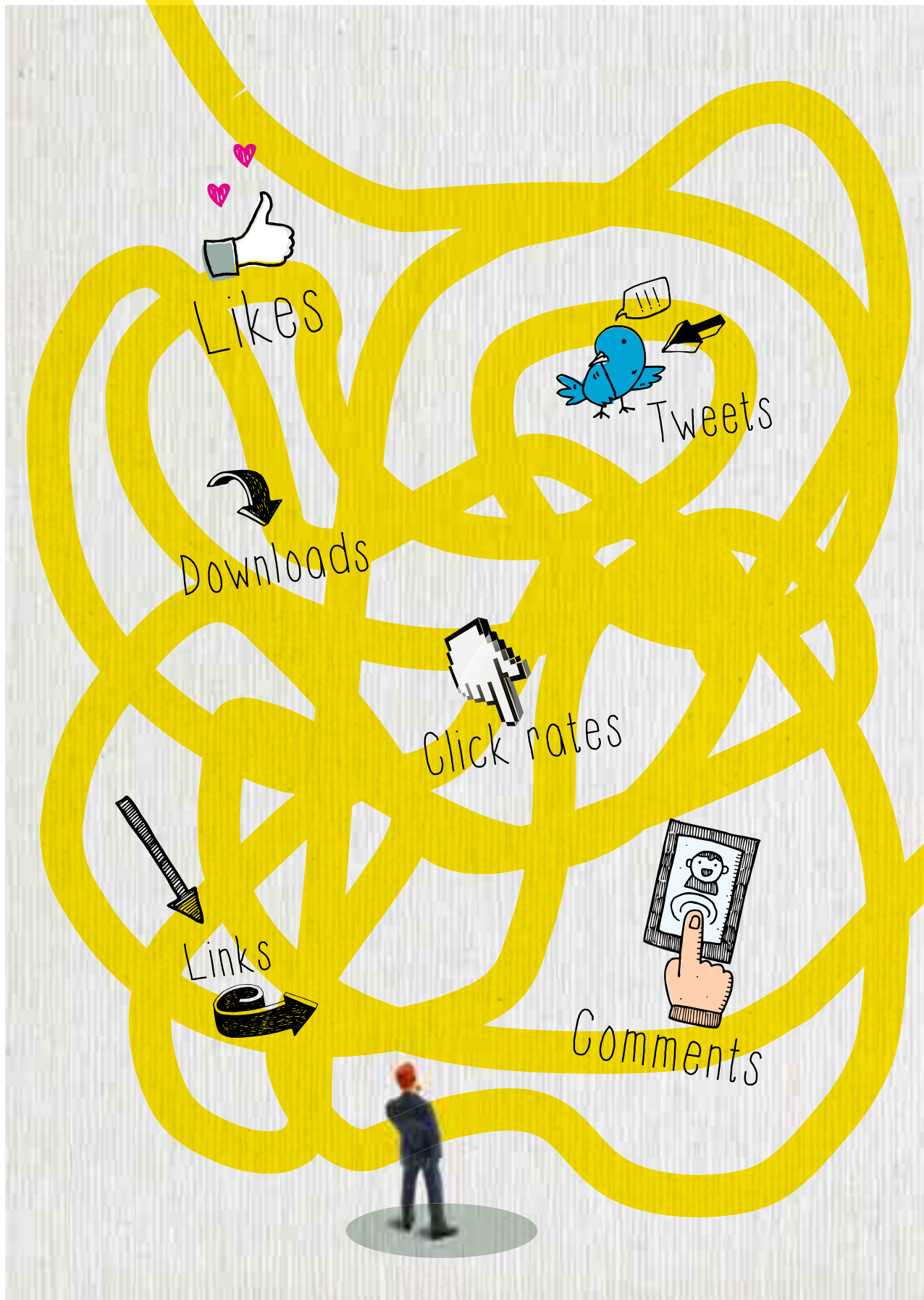
**MIR:** *Everybody is talking about customer engagement and participation in social media now. For many managers engagement means how many likes and how many Facebook fans or how many comments you get and how many people click through or how many people view your page. What’s your opinion on engagement?*

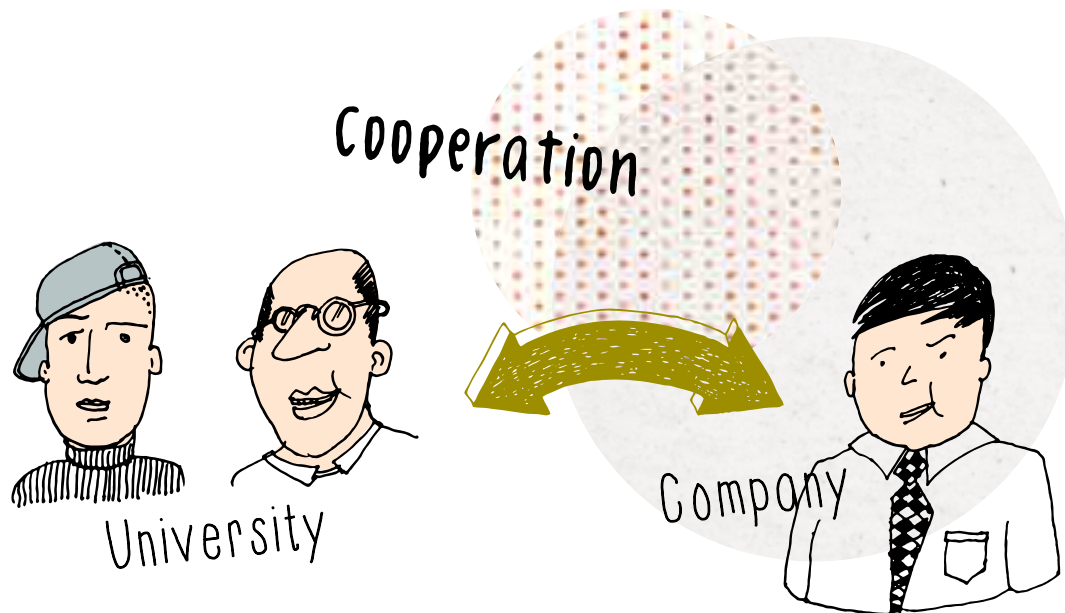
**ADAM FROMAN:** It’s a real challenge because everyone is digital these days. Managers are confronted with it from vastly different angles. They’re hearing it from the social media companies. They’re hearing it from the technology platform companies. They’re hearing it from the management-consulting firms. They’re hearing it from the ad agencies. Their heads must be spinning. A lot of these marketers are focused on the short term, and they need something that will work for the next quarter.

**MIR:** *How do you bridge that gap between the holistic view that you have and the micro-operationalized view of engagement that most people still work with?*

**ADAM FROMAN:** I look at things from a broader perspective. What we try to do is ask the questions strategically, because while technology keeps changing, hopefully the strategy remains the same. If you don’t understand your customers’ behaviors in this context, then how are you going to prioritize and make decisions about where you want to invest your money? It’s a question of how to measure your business. What does success look like to you, and how do you link engagement to the success of the business or return on investment?







**MIR:** So, you look at how likes or downloads or page views are linked to strategy?

**ADAM FROMAN:** Yes, you might have a certain number of likes, but how do you translate that? How does that fit into either improving a customer experience or selling more? Or you have to translate a focus on app downloads into an explanation for how that helps to move your business ahead. Then you can go back and be tactical and say, “Hey, our job is to get as many downloads of this app as possible, because we know, strategically, it’s going to help do X, Y and Z.”

**MIR:** And how do you adapt your strategy to the continuous change you mentioned?

**ADAM FROMAN:** The strategy shouldn’t change, just the tactics. In a year from now, an app might be irrelevant. But if the strategy is sound, you can identify the next opportunity or the next new social tool and assess it within the context of the strategy. Taking this approach is not always easy, because, like I said, managers are being bombarded and advised from a million different directions, and many of them are measured on a quarterly basis.

**MIR:** Yes. It’s very tactical ...

**ADAM FROMAN:** It creates a real challenge in the marketplace for doing really meaningful work that will have a long-term impact on the business. If you’re going to do something in this space, it’s not like, “We’re just going to put it on social media, and everyone will go buy the brand.” You have to think about how you’re going to actively engage and trigger people to participate.

**MIR:** All these online activities leave their traces and there is a huge pool of data that companies might use. How can managers use all this information?

**ADAM FROMAN:** Taking it to the data context is another fascinating area. There are companies that are aggressively pursuing this use of passive and unstructured social data. They build algorithms or prediction models to find trigger points, and they analyze data to either quickly know what they should be doing to engage and use social or derive other insight.

**MIR:** So, this is like an alternative to doing conventional surveys?

**ADAM FROMAN:** Yes, it’s a huge opportunity, and some companies are really focused on trying to figure out the opportunities. We have one client in the United States who helps sports teams increase ticket sales. He tracks some social data and

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What does success look like to you,  
and how do you link  
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of the business?

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sort of listens to what's going on in social media, then runs it through his algorithms. It's unstructured data, but he's pooling it. In real time, he can come up with recommendations for where they should be spending more money on advertising. It's really fast.

**MIR:** *It's still at a very early, exciting stage, for sure.*

**ADAM FROMAN:** Oh, yeah, it's a lot of fun. It's challenging because there are not many companies that have the foresight or the budgets to be able to really invest in this. We're only a sixty person company and I can't just invest in resources. But I build partnerships with the academic community to look at these problems while they're emerging.

**MIR:** *So you cooperate with academic institutions to develop new approaches and innovations?*

**ADAM FROMAN:** Yes, it's a win-win situation. For instance, I did a project with a marketing professor in social media. We collaborated on a government-funded research project on how to motivate people to participate in market research in the future. It was a really interesting research question for her, and I organized the funding. She got some publications and presentations at academic conferences out of it. It helped her get published. I got a perspective on the strategy to move forward with my AskingCanadians business.

**MIR:** *I think academic researchers get passionate about methods. They don't always get that passionate about things that are going on in the real world. It's nice to see these kinds of collaborations.*

**ADAM FROMAN:** I also saw a role for myself to provide mentorship to any students who wanted to work on some of our projects and to help students gain real world experience. Part of what was driving me to that was a shortage of talent in the marketplace. We needed to create an environment where we would help stimulate the next generation of talent to have a more applied experience base that a company like mine could hire. The best way was to let students work on some industry-led projects that they cut their teeth on within an academic context. They bring in new ideas, and you can find the people who are worthwhile.

**MIR:** *We have talked about the past and present of digital media. Let's finish with an outlook on what to look for in the future.*

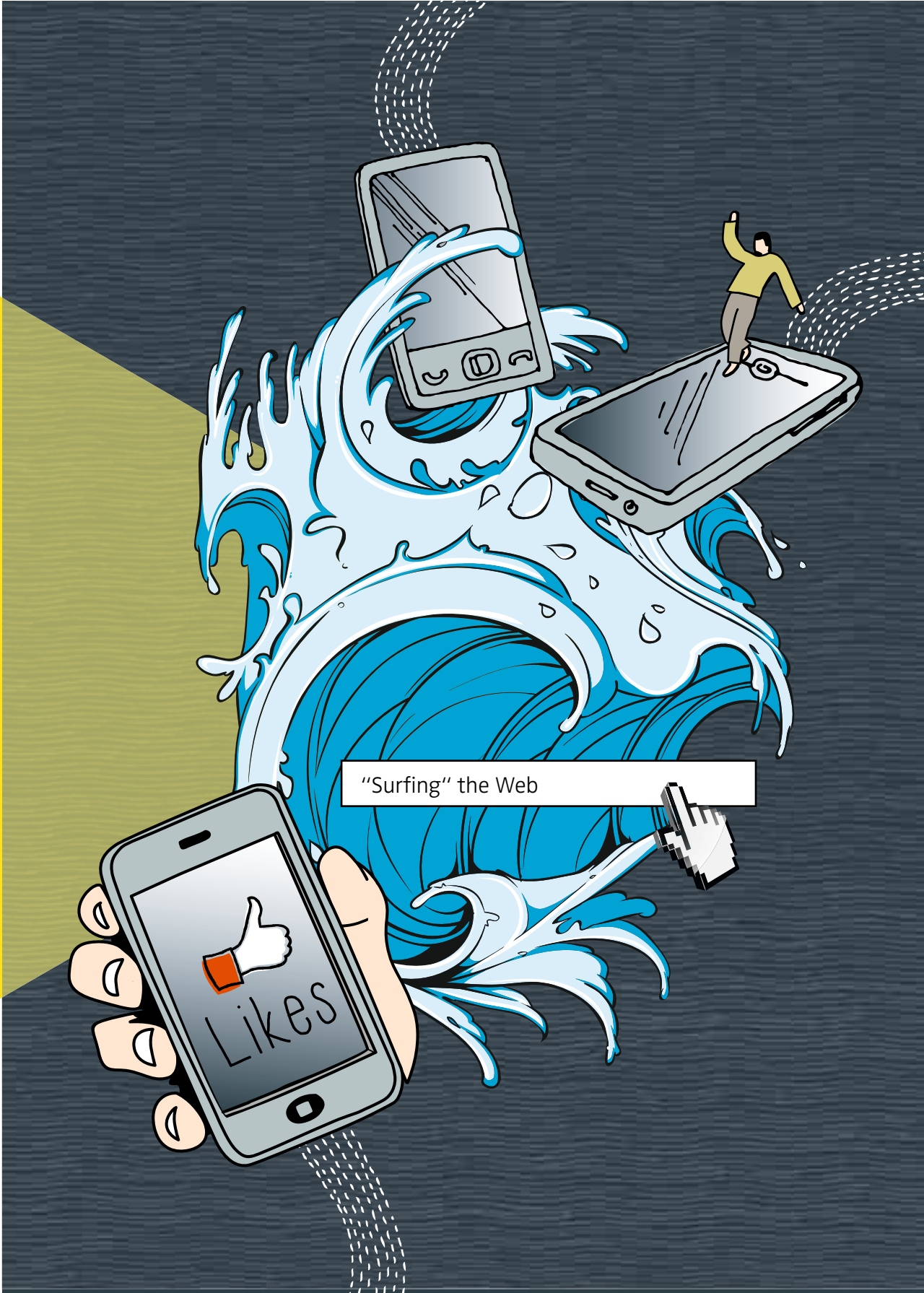
**ADAM FROMAN:** We've moved into a phase in which interactive digital technologies are coming of age. So much of where we're going is about how to harness this area of data. I'm just intrigued by this stuff and by constantly learning and working with others who want to take on these challenges. You never know, in this area, where the next great commercial opportunity is going to be. But a lot of it is really driven by having that curiosity to keep on learning from it all.

**MIR:** *It sounds like some of your contact with universities and academia helps keep that intellectual spark alive, and to also keep you thinking about the interplay between basic research and applications.*

**ADAM FROMAN:** The only way you can do all this is partnership. We're partnering with our clients. We're partnering with the universities. Even if they're pursuing knowledge, and I'm running a business, we share that passion and understanding of learning ... and therefore I feel we are well-equipped for any new challenges in digital media to come.

**MIR:** *Thanks so much for sharing your thoughts with us. We're on board for taking up the challenge.*

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"Surfing" the Web

# Follow the Connections! Finding the Big Picture of Internet Communications

*Axel Maireder*

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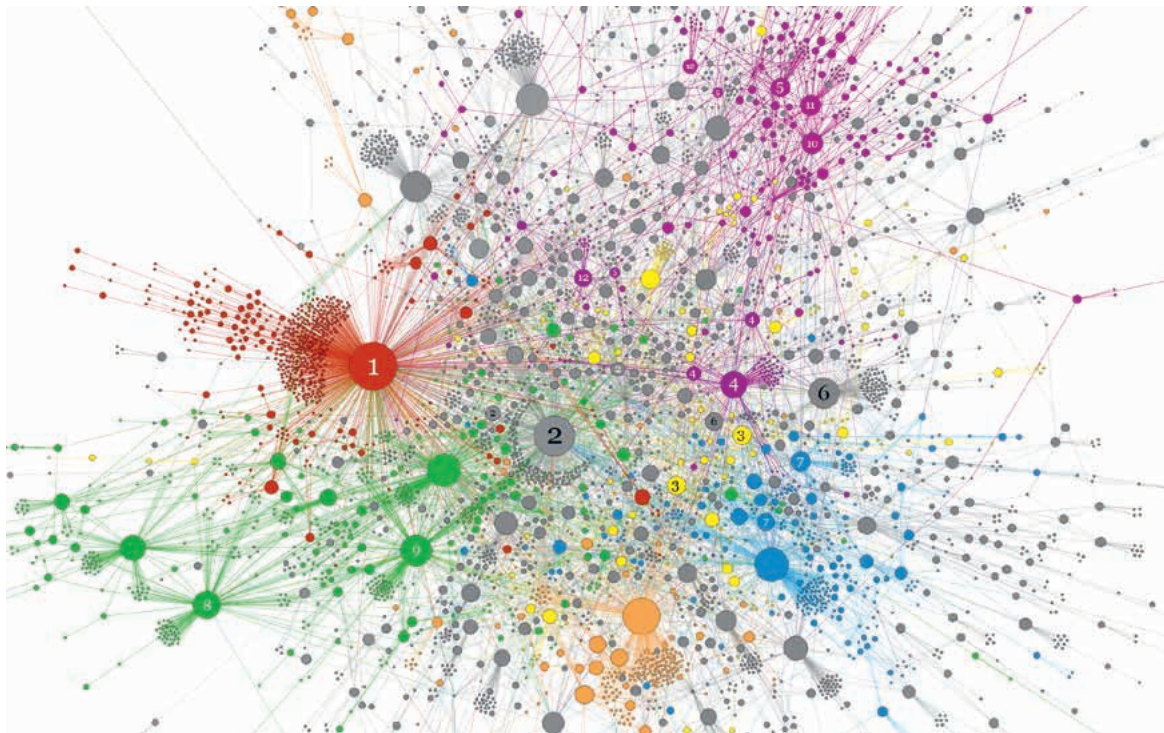
**Everybody has a say** /// Our media landscape is no longer populated by just the mass media and professional players. As far as market communications go, it is also increasingly evolving into an open, diverse and multilayered vista: Products and services are evaluated on ratings platforms and discussion forums. Advertising campaigns are dissected on social networks. Blogs report on the latest fashion, sports and technology trends. Consumers then continue the conversation on Facebook and Twitter. For this reason, markets can be viewed as conversations in which an online community, often a global one, passionately discusses issues related to consumption and consumer society. Companies have taken on the challenges posed by this new means of social discourse: They promote their products in “viral” ads, chat with their customers on Facebook and insert their names into Twitter conversations.

**Online discourse – a mother lode for market researchers**

/// At the heart of this process is the constant monitoring and analysis of communications. In recent years, a broad market has emerged for such Web and social media monitoring. Many tools can be used to track down, store and comprehensively evaluate digital objects, things like how “buzz” develops and how “sentiments” are determined. This information can be used to develop a general evaluation of certain products or a schedule for releasing marketing material on these products. At the same time, the relevance of individual digital objects (e.g., tweets, blog posts and YouTube videos) and actors (e.g., individuals, media and organizations) frequently remains just as much of a mystery as the high-level networking and



**FIGURE 1:**  
 Central segment of the hyperlink document network for the discourse  
 on HTC First and Facebook Home



- Red: Comments contain a reference to Google Play store
- Yellow: Discussion about usability
- Pink: Discussion about data security
- Blue: Information about weak sales
- Orange: Information about canceled sales launch in Europe
- Green: Hacker community

In the period from April 4 to June 3, 2013. The home pages of Facebook and HTC were removed from the network. A total of 5,393 nodes, 8,028 edges; colors based on clusters.

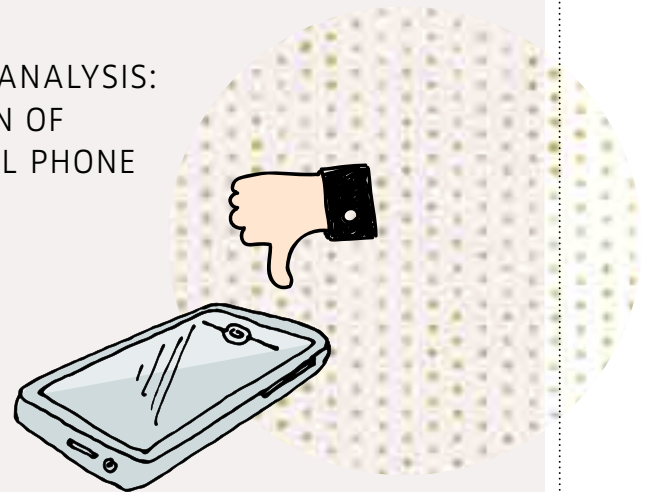
dynamics of the discussion do. It is the dynamics of these networks that most significantly contribute to the way that opinions are shaped on the Internet and determine whether videos go “viral” and discussions become “flame wars.” As part of the TANEP (Towards an Analytics of Networked Publics) project, the GfK Verein is funding research on methods that can bring these dynamics to visual life and, as a result, reflect the essence of the Internet as a network.

**What hyperlink networks reveal: the structure of discourse** /// “The link is the heart of the Web,” says Tim Berners-Lee, the father of the World Wide Web: The linking of documents using hyperlinks represented the first step in its evolution and even now remains central to its existence. Writers add hyperlinks as a way of referencing particular objects. Today, this process involves linking and embedding texts, images and videos in online social networks like Facebook



{Box 1}

## MACRO DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: INTRODUCTION OF THE HTC FIRST CELL PHONE



During a major press event held on April 4, 2013, HTC and Facebook announced the first cell phone that runs the Facebook operating system: the HTC First, which features a version of Android called Facebook Home. The phone went on sale in the United States on April 12. But it went nowhere. After a month of lethargic sales, AT&T dropped the device from its product line. In Europe, the sales launch was repeatedly put off. What happened? An analysis of the public discussion about the cell phone offered a few starting points: From the beginning of April until mid-June, a total of 5,339 documents were identified on websites with the keywords “HTC First” and “Facebook Home” and were analyzed for the ways they were paired with hyperlinks (see Figure 1). This underscored the relevance of the largely negative user comments in the Google Play Store [1] to which many blog posts and commentators referred (the red section of the graphic).

Through the employment of cluster analysis, a process that can be used to identify very strongly linked parts of a network, it was also possible to track diverse thematic and discussion threads: The integration of Facebook into the operating system was frequently criticized from a usability perspective (the yellow seg-

ments of the illustration), and data-security concerns were expressed as well (pink). Technical blogs like Techcrunch [2] summarized these opinions, which seemed to be confirmed by issues related to weak sales (blue) and the delay in the sales launch in Europe (orange). The device's actual technical specifications were only discussed in passing. It turns out that linking its cell phone to Facebook software backfired for HTC. Contributing to this was also the hacker community, which quickly swung into action, modifying Facebook Home within just a few days and enabling it to work on other cell phones (green).

Central sites for the discourse could be identified as well. In addition to the Google Play [1] store, the technology portals Techcrunch [2], The Verge [3], Cnet [4] and Wired [5] as well as business media like Bloomberg [6] and Business Insider [7] played a role here. One particularly interesting analysis tracked discussions on the top sites arranged by subject, showing, for instance, the XDA Developers community [8] and Modaco [9] covering the software hacks as well as the blogs GigaOM [10] and TechNet [11] along with some specific YouTube [12] videos tackling the privacy issue.

and Twitter. They facilitate the nonlinear navigation that we know informally as “surfing.” Analysis of hyperlink networks from a macro perspective makes it possible to retrace diffusion processes online. On the one hand, the reconstruction displays various subject fields and their linking. On the other hand, it facilitates the attribution of relevance to individual objects and actors: Which documents and websites played a key role in the development of particular argument patterns? How did the actors refer to one another in the process? By including additional data, particularly information taken from social media like Twitter and Facebook, the complex diffusion patterns can be reconstructed. This approach makes it possible to follow discussions about campaigns, identify key actors and platforms for media planning and map the structure of special-interest communities.

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The following example, a network analysis of the discussion about the HTC First cell phone, shows just what sort of insights can be gleaned.

#### **Account networks: identifying interest groups** ///

Monitoring networking processes among actors on individual sites and objects appeals to market research for another reason as well: People regularly use the Internet to form groups according to their shared needs, problems and interests. For this reason, link-sensitive Web and social media analysis can provide deep insights into the constellations of interests among users. Account networks in social media applications reflect these shared interests and form the foundation for the dissemination of information.

Another goal of the TANEP project is to discover and analyze such communities in social media networks. This approach is not based on hyperlinks. Instead, it concentrates on the interactions among user accounts in such places as Twitter. Here, follower networks are viewed as being representatives of interest groups. Even though the reasons for “following” a certain Twitter account can be very diverse, it can be assumed that the users have an interest in the tweets posted by this account. When the macro perspective displays clusters of nodes, it can be assumed that shared interests exist. Companies, brands and products can be a part of these communities' identities and the communications within them, even though they can hardly be viewed as “brand communities” because they are not primarily organized by brands. The groupings can be interpreted by further analysis of the account descriptions or the published tweets. The data provide far-reaching insights into the segmentation of markets according to user interests. In addition, information is gained regarding the relevance of certain accounts and account groups for the diffusion of information. For instance, an analysis of the Twitter account “Red Bull X-Alps” shows how communities can be identified and interpreted.

{ Box 2 }

## TWITTER ACCOUNT ANALYSIS: COMMUNITIES RELATED TO RED BULL X-ALPS

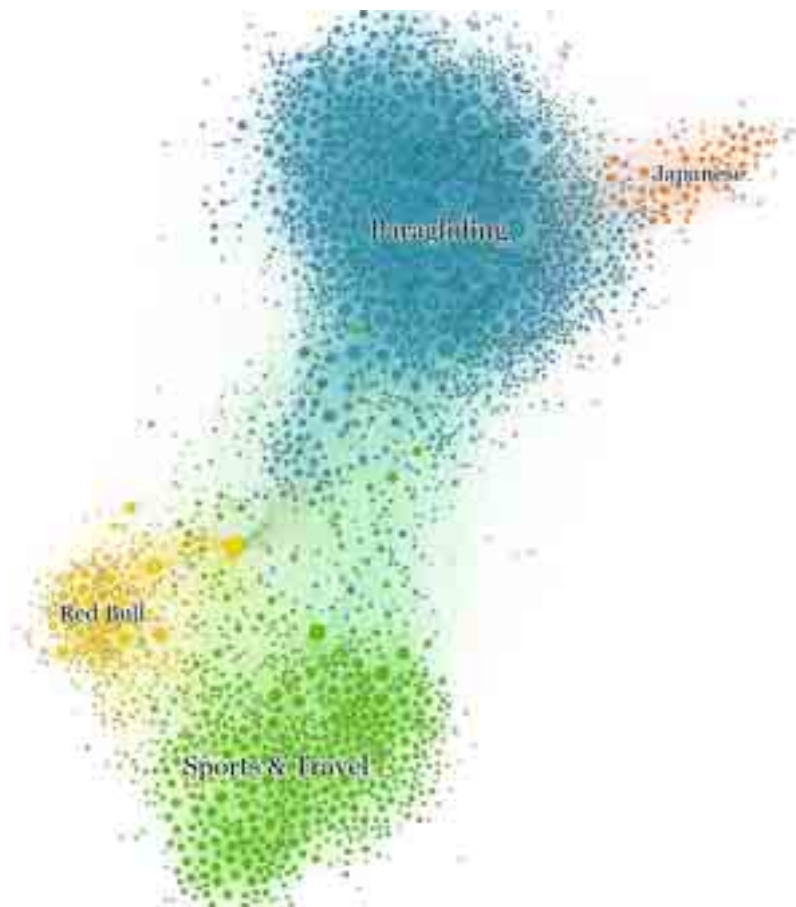
Red Bull X-Alps is a two-week sporting event, in which paragliders race across the Alps from Salzburg to Monaco by flying down one mountain, climbing the next one and then taking off again. The event is part of Red Bull's extreme-sports marketing activities and captures global attention.

An analysis of the follower networks of Red Bull X-Alps found four very different communities. The profile information of Twitter users provided by aggregated analysis showed diverse constellations of interests (see Figure 2). The paragliding community formed the largest cluster (the blue section of the illustration). This group could be broken down into English-language and Spanish-language groups. Accounts of athletes, special-interest blogs and pertinent YouTube channels were the most prominent. The second-largest user group was formed by people interested in winter sports and sports travel (green). In addition to the pages of snowboard pros and travel blogs, accounts from brands (e.g., Mammut, Arcteryx) were found. The two small clusters reflect accounts related to Red Bull (yellow) and Japanese paragliding accounts (orange).

And what else interests people who are attracted to Red Bull and paragliding or sports travel? What makes the respective communities tick? One answer was provided by an analysis of those accounts that community members followed outside existing networks: In addition to other pertinent accounts, paragliding fans were interested in the Dalai Lama and NASA. Users in the sports and travel cluster followed athletes like Lance Armstrong and Tony Hawk as well as National Geographic and the brands Oakley and The North Face.



**FIGURE 2:**  
Twitter account network for  
Red Bull X-Alps



- Blue: Paragliding community
- Green: Community for sports and travel
- Yellow: Red Bull accounts
- Orange: Japanese accounts

4,103 nodes, 56,117 edges. Color by cluster.

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Online communications  
represent social communications  
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The analysis described here revealed much about the distribution of interests among users who follow a specific sporting event. The same methodological principles can also be applied to other identified constellations of users, including user lists generated from keyword-based searches in the Twitter stream. Particularly in the much-discussed area of social TV, account network analysis can deliver interesting insights into interest structures of users taking part in the conversation, and these insights make it possible to draw careful conclusions about segments of the entire audience.

#### **Online communications process as a mirror of society?**

/// The processes described here are methodologically time-consuming, but can provide surprising insights that will be helpful in making strategic PR and marketing decisions: From a macro perspective, they show how online communications processes work. Both key players and dominant issues can be identified. Insights about the range of interests among diverse consumer groups and the structure of markets can be gained as well. The data must be interpreted with great care, and the social context of social media use must be considered.

Online communications represent social communications in a much broader manner than traditional mass media do because they encompass additional groups of players. But it must be remembered that the communications process monitored on the Internet primarily reflect those needs, wishes, problems, worries and interests that citizens and consumers share with one another in media-transmitted, public conversations. But these public communications processes are highly relevant to selection and purchasing decisions, and the methods of structural analysis of online communications described here serve as a valuable complement to market research.

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## FURTHER READING

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# Executive Summaries

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## Social Brand Engagement: A New Idea

*Robert V. Kozinets*

If “consumer brand engagement” is what happens in isolation, in a consumer’s own individual mind and thoughts, then “social brand engagement” is the diametrical opposite of this. Social brand engagement is a social act full of culture, meaning, language, and values. With social brand engagement, relationships widen from person-brand to person-person-brand.

This can take different forms. While some consumers remain passive, others act more or less creatively in favor of or against brands. Some marketers are happy with the forms of evangelizing in which consumers simply spread brand messages. But the most authentic and believable form of endorsement, and therefore the optimal state, is marked by the creative expression and use of the brand. Here, people play positively and socially with the brand. They view it as a valued and valuable cultural resource and such social brand engagement has meaningful social, creative and productive outcomes.

In successful social brand engagement, both consumers and producers play active roles, but one party has to take the lead. Companies have historically had major problems letting consumers take over some of their former responsibilities. For successful authentication to happen, however, putting consumers in the driver’s seat is sometimes – but certainly not always – necessary.

## The Megaphone Effect in Social Media: How Ordinary Consumers Become Style Leaders

*Edward F. McQuarrie and  
Barbara J. Phillips*

Amassing an audience by blogging is a very recent form of online consumer behavior. Consumers not only seek community as earlier studies show, they also look for taste leadership from certain peers. Fashion bloggers take hold of the Internet “megaphone” to broadcast and influence taste within an elaborate social and cultural process. It teaches us some general principles about the ways professional marketing is affected by these “citizen journalists” on social media, and how their behavior is affected by marketers. These megaphone-holding consumers have real power, and their consumer-to-consumer relationships depend upon brands. Brands are increasingly coming to depend upon them as well. Although these bloggers started out as ordinary consumers, they were soon integrated into the professional fashion system and do not oppose it. They therefore pose no threat to professional marketers, but rather offer an alternative marketing opportunity within the complex web of social media.

## Lost in Translation: The Social Shaping of Marketing Messaging

*Robert V. Kozinets,  
Kristine de Valck, Andrea C. Wojnicki  
and Sarah J. S. Wilner*

Word of mouth marketing (WOMM) does not travel as unidirectionally and straight as previously assumed. Rather, consumers are active co-producers of value and translate and transform marketing meanings. Word of mouth resulting from marketing communications can be anything from euphoric to resistant, and the discourse evolving around a product seeding has a strong impact on how this product is perceived. As messages become translated into meaningful, communally shared material, particular cultural restraints cause possibilities open up, rules to become less constraining, and the principles and guidelines for successful social branding engagement to become much more about human relationships than one-way communication.

Social brand engagement is a genuine, natural interconnection between brand mentions and consumer-to-consumer social experiences. Therefore, simply observing the reach and valence of product mentions is too short sighted. To effectively attain social brand engagement, promotions need to seem authentic and congruent with people, media, other content and the offline or online context. A deep analysis of what is going on in the prospective environment of a message to be seeded is a precondition for the optimal design of a WOMM campaign and the accurate interpretation of its success.

## Beyond Bedlam: How Consumers and Brands Alike Are Playing the Web

*John Deighton and Leora Kornfeld*

Effective social brand engagement can result from marketers "getting in the game" by playing with consumers. Play can take many different forms and can refer to different aspects. It can produce winners and losers, for example when marketers conquer the consumer's wish to be let alone. It can refer to the collaboration among players to achieve, if not exactly a common purpose, at least separate purposes with joint resources. Or it can refer to conduct that bemuses and befuddles, leaving even the marketer unsure about the purpose of the game, except that he will be better known.

It is apparent that people want to play with brands, and their managers must therefore decide if they want to actively offer participation and surrender to whatever form consumer play may take. However, brand managers should be prepared for surprising turns. Attention and consumer engagement are the prizes at stake for taking the venture, awards that are increasingly difficult to gain with more traditional communication campaigns.



## Participatory Culture: From Co-Creating Brand Meaning to Changing the World

*Henry Jenkins*

Young people's personal use of social media like blogs, networks and online platforms is actually a double-edged sword. Creativity and action can endorse brands, but they can also harm a brand as the new generation moves from being socially and culturally active to being politically and civically engaged. Brands can be the perfect plugs on which to hang their campaigns. In the example outlined in this article, the Harry Potter brand serves as a good of example to demonstrate such activism. Its entire magical world was embraced, and the company who owns and licenses the brand was systematically scrutinized and criticized. Warner Bros. mishandled this form of social brand engagement. The whole case is highly instructive to managers who increasingly face such challenges to their production and marketing methods every day.

## For Us and by Us: The Charm and Power of Community Brands

*Johann Füller*

Online collaboration presents a real alternative to the company-centered innovation paradigm, and some users do more than just innovate, going the extra mile and actually creating brands themselves. The open-source movement, for instance, has produced a series of well-known brands such as Linux, Apache and Mozilla Firefox. The outdoor hiking community OutdoorSeiten.net serves as another example. Its members are dedicated to all types of outdoor sports and created their own gear to better fit their needs.

Often, community brands are not planned but evolve accidentally as byproducts of community interactions. Their value is seen not only within the community but throughout the whole industry. The ability to commonly design "ideal" products at lower expenses and without the threat of being exploited or overtaken by the next fashion wave enchants its users and fans alike. This phenomenon of engaged consumers producing their own brands places them in the same position as other producers, which is both a challenge and an opportunity for commercial companies.

## Next Issue Preview

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True Synergy for Integrated  
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