The Relationship Between Online Brand Community Participation and Consciousness of Kind, Moral Responsibility, and Shared Rituals and Traditions

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Despite the importance of and growing interest in brand communities, there are no scales to measure the three important characteristics of brand communities: consciousness of kind, moral responsibility, and shared rituals and traditions. This paper focuses on the development of scales for these three characteristics as well as online brand community participation and also investigates their relationships empirically. Using a sample of 470 members from six different online brand communities, the study found online brand community participation to be significantly related to consciousness of kind, moral responsibility, and shared rituals and traditions.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In the last few years scholars have shown tremendous interest in researching brand communities (Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann, 2005; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001). The three characteristics of brand communities that were identified by several scholars are consciousness of kind, moral responsibility, and shared rituals and traditions (McAlexander et al. 2002; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001; Schau and Muniz 2002). However, there are no existing scales to measure these characteristics. The lack of scales for measuring these three defining characteristics complicates the efforts of researchers to understand brand communities better.

Likewise, over the past few years, rapid advancements in the field of Information Technology, especially the Internet, have facilitated the formation of numerous online/virtual brand communities. For example, we found nearly 2000 Yahoo groups dedicated to different brands of motorcycles; nearly 500 Yahoo groups devoted to Harley-Davidson motorcycles alone. Though members’ participation is considered the core of a community’s existence and a key indicator of the performance of online communities (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2002), there is no scale to measure the extent of members’ participation in online brand communities. Hence one of the goals of this paper was to develop scales for these four constructs.

The other goal of this paper was to investigate the relationship between members’ participation and their consciousness of kind, moral responsibility, and shared rituals and traditions. While current literature clearly identified that consciousness of kind, moral responsibility, and shared rituals and traditions are present in members of brand communities, what is not clear is when these three characteristics are developed. McAlexander et al. (2002) ethnographic study of brandfests suggests that these characteristics are developed in members after participating in brandfests. They report that, “...these characteristics of brand community did not all and equally exist before the brandfest events (p.42).” In line with McAlexander et al. (2002), in this paper we argue and provide empirical support for the positive relationship between online brand community participation and the three brand community characteristics.

In order to develop new scales, an initial list of items was generated based on the review of relevant literature on brand communities and virtual communities. These items were examined by a pool of experts and four members of different online brand communities for ambiguity, clarity, and relevance to the domains of the constructs. In the first study, data were collected from a convenience sample of 328 students. A number of internal consistency and item-based statistics were examined for item retention. The goal of this study was to refine the initial list of items that was generated.

In the second study, data were collected from members belonging to six Yahoo groups formed around different motorcycle, car and camera brands. Yahoo! Groups were chosen for the following reasons: Yahoo! Groups is the most popular and well-known provider of electronic mailing list facilities compared to Google groups, or MSN groups. Also, for any group formed around a particular brand, it was found that Yahoo! Groups had the largest membership compared to Google or MSN. Additionally, similar to McKenna and Bargh (1998), only those groups with at least 400 posts/month for the last six months were included in the survey. A web based survey hosted by surveymonkey.com was utilized for data collection. After discarding incomplete responses, there were 470 usable responses. The majority of the respondents were from the USA. Ninety-two percent of respondents were male.

Data were analyzed using SPSS and LISREL 8.51. All of the four scales exhibited acceptable level of reliabilities of alpha ≥ 0.70. Convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs was assessed as suggested by Fornel and Larker (1981). All the three hypotheses were supported. Online brand community participation is positively related to members’ consciousness of kind (α=0.67, t=13.10), shared rituals and traditions (α=0.53, t=9.38) and moral responsibility (α=0.72, t=11.69).

References


