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“Hey, What’S in It For Us?”: How to Initiate and Maintain Participation and Collaboration With Creative Consumer Crowds

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Social media sites are tempting spaces for crowdsourcing and community collaboration. Still, researchers are quite unaware of how to initiate and maintain cooperation with creative consumer communities. Drawing on two different examples of consumer engagement, we provide a framework and preliminary suggestions for participatory and collaborative practices in social media.

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and frequency of brand-related UGC can influence consumer brand perceptions, with negatively valenced messages having a greater impact on low-image brands. While these studies focus on UGC more narrowly, there is also community-level research (e.g. Kozinets, Hemetsberger, and Schau 2008; Füller, Matzler and Hoppe 2008) that conceptualizes UGC as part of collective consumer innovation processes that create value for firms. Collectively, these studies provide important substantiation of the value of online UGC for firms.

Complementing research that examines the value created for firms, some research also suggests that UGC creates value for other consumers; brand community research (e.g. Kozinets 2001; Muñiz and Schau 2005) is the most prominent in this regard. For example, in a recent meta-analytic study of brand communities, Schau, Muñiz and Arnould (2009) conceptualize the practices and processes through which brand communities create value. They identify twelve value-creating practices, grouped across four thematic areas: social networking, impression management, community engagement, and brand use. Online UGC is a component of a number of the practices identified.

While it has been extremely fruitful to explore value creation in brand communities, not all brand-related UGC is created within brand communities. Indeed, the majority of consumers are probably not impassioned brand advocates or brand community members. It is thus important that we develop a better understanding of the potential value to consumers of UGC that is not generated within a brand community. Our research takes up this challenge. It examines the applicability of recent brand community research on value creation (in particular Schau, Muñiz and Arnould's (2009)) but also looks for additional types of potential value-creating elements in online brand-related UGC generated in a context that does not require or presuppose a brand community: YouTube.

YouTube is a content community (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010) and popular social media site (Burgess and Green 2009) that draws approximately 490 million unique visitors per month (Elliot 2011). More than other popular user-driven social media channels (e.g. Facebook and Twitter), YouTube hosts consistently rich UGC and more permanent and accessible records of responses to posted content. This makes it an appropriate context for exploring how value may be created in brand-related UGC, such as consumer-created videos, and the value that other consumers, such as those responding to the videos, derive from that UGC or fail to derive from that UGC. While some have argued that the practice of viewing, but not responding to UGC, itself offers value to other users by supporting contributors and the overall community (e.g. Jenkins 2006), this study will focus only on those who do publicly respond online. The data for this study consists of approximately 50 UGC 'haul' and 'outfit-of-the-day' videos, and all accompanying comments for those videos, sampled around two brands – Lululemon and American Apparel – that were posted to YouTube between June, 2010 and January, 2011. The posts were selected at random from Google search results for: 'brand' on 'site:YouTube.com'. The two brands were sampled because they generate enough interest from consumers to be featured in UGC in this content community, and are in the same category: clothing manufacturing and retailing. The number of comments per video start at zero and run into the thousands, although most range from the tens to the low hundreds.

While YouTube is not a 'brand-community', it is conceivable – since only a small percentage of social network participants create content (Burgess and Green 2009) – that brand-related video postings and comments will be dominated by motivated Lululemon or American Apparel brand community members or brand 'haters'; this does not bear out in the data set, and the focal brands are often fea-

tured, with equal emphasis, alongside a constellation of other brands. Analysis of the data set suggests that some of the value-creating practices found in brand communities, such as 'evangelizing', are mirrored in content elements of UGC found on Youtube; other community practices are not. Moreover, the UGC of these less brand-involved consumers involves elements that may not feature in UGC created within brand communities. For example, one type of content we frequently observed was "multi-brand integration," in which consumers suggest appropriate pairings of multiple brands, none of which appears focal or central to the ensemble. Analysis also seeks to establish the connection between these potentially value-creating elements of UGC and what types of value 'vocal' consumers indicate they are deriving. This research seeks to contribute to the discussion on the socially engaged consumer by broadening our knowledge of the elements of UGC that may create value, and on the types of value consumers appear to derive from UGC when they are not embedded in brand communities.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

You guys have been along long enough to know”: The collective development of consumer co-creation knowledge in social media

Social media have fundamentally altered our view of the consumer – from the ‘passive recipient’ to the ‘active agent’. Literature on how to monetize social media’s potential to activate consumers has exploded in recent years (Florida, 2004; Surowiecki, 2005; Tapscott & Williams, 2006) yet, the insights are mainly of tactical nature; its strategic implications are still under-theorized. But how should we initiate and maintain online cooperation with consumers? A classic answer would be to use all available channels to get access to online communities and social networks via promotional initiatives. Yet, typical exploitation strategies that aim to integrate consumer-users into marketing efforts of business organizations have also provoked susceptibility and conflict in social online media. A recent cross-cultural investigation into Facebook users’ reactions to advertising attempts indicate that the respondents do not find Facebook ads informative or funny and have a low threshold level for irritation. A large majority would definitively or possibly leave Facebook if commercials on Facebook became more dynamic or mixed with friends’ content (Kornum, Christensen, and Hemetsberger, under review). Similarly, Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, and Wilner (2010) problematized the tensions that arise in consumer communities when community bloggers are asked to act as both, a continuing community member, as well as a marketing agent, in order to establish a trustful, credible and persuasive word-of-mouth campaign. Their findings suggest that messages need to be consistent with the goals, context and history of the blog and the bloggers, acknowledge and discharge commercial-communal tensions, and fit with the community’s norms and objectives. Based on ample empirical evidence, researchers concordantly suggest that consumers should actually be treated as equivalent partners in a co-creative process of joint engagement in various value-creating practices (Merz et al., 2010; Schau, Muniz, and Arnould 2010; Kozinets, Hemetsberger, and Schau 2008). Consumers are creative, innovative participants and networked collaborators in a web of collective intelligence and partners for commercial endeavors in various ways. They are approached by companies as creative force (Tapscott and Williams 2006; Vargo and Lusch 2004; Lévy 1997), as innovators (Füller et

al., 2007; von Hippel 2005; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004), and as marketers, engaging in word-of mouth (Kozinets et al. 2010). In the context of creative consumer crowds, where companies' interests are less informative-persuasive but more work-oriented, tensions among company intent and consumer interests take on a different quality and rather revolve around issues of accessing resources, and ownership (Giesler and Humphreys 2007).

In this special session we would like to present a framework that addresses these issues. Our framework proposes two main forms of interaction – participation and collaboration – and discusses feasible patterns of interaction. We distinguish primarily telo- from communo-ludic oriented communities and suggest appropriate participation and collaboration strategies of two-way interaction among communities and business organizations, based on two exploratory cases of participative and collaborative practices. Depending on the communal orientation, we see both models of community activation characterized by a 5-stage process. Participation processes are characterized by: (1) motivating: the allocation of resources to the consumer community, (2) asking: launching the idea and elicitation of consumer responses, (3) measuring: the evaluation of the outcome of these processes, (4) answering: providing meaningful responses to the creative contributors of the consumer community, and (5) responding: giving back to the community. Collaboration processes encompass: (1) education: both internal and external knowledge sharing, (2) sharing: provision of appropriate resources and a type of “social contract” governing intellectual capital sharing, (3) coordination: systems and processes to streamline the active consumer participation process, (4) evaluation: a communally-directed, producer-controlled, or hybrid-cooperative model of judging output, and (5) implementation: some sort of meaningful “closure” to the process and the sharing of results or collective outcome.

Our discussion carves out important strategic and tactical implications for each of the five stages, and details their differential expression for participation and collaboration business strategies. Different forms of activation demand different input and processes on the company's side, depending on the communo-ludic or telo-specific orientation of the contributor(s). For example, although the notion of sharing is important in both types of communal interaction, the boundedness, directionality, and hierarchical control of resources can be markedly different in the pursuit of participation versus collaboration strategies. Second, whereas communo-ludic oriented contributors need a lot of communal space and exchanges, relatively little resources and know-how, telo-specific orientation is characterized by knowledge sharing and creation and access to resources. These notions have important implications for marketing theory and practice. Creative consumer crowds are equipped with different power based on their amount of social and intellectual capital. Companies who are willing to cooperate will need to legitimate their leading role through careful development of participative and collaborative practices.

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