Stephan Dahl

Social Media Marketing

Theories & Applications

3E

Social Media Marketing

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Few technological developments have created enthused and petrified marketing communication professionals and academics more than the loose concoction of different platforms referred to as social media. While some marketing professionals have hailed the social media as 'a game-changing technology with a major impact on business' (Corstjens and Umblijs, 2012: 433), even as a new paradigm of how to do business and connect to customers, others have been petrified by the possible onslaught of constant connectivity, the potential for ferocious customer intrusion and concerns with regard to nebulous **privacy**, as well as fearful of potential backlashes when engaging with the new media.

Social media has its fair share of success stories, and there are many examples of how socialising has reinvigorated traditional activities: think Spotify and SoundCloud, the social music platforms, which have revolutionised the way music can be shared, heard and listened to. Imagine how dull sales promotions and coupons used to be before Groupon made collecting offers fashionable. But there are also the spectacular failures on social media, for example when Disney informed Twitter users in 2020 that any tweet mentioning #MayThe4th (Star Wars Day) is owned by the company. Nor was it particularly intelligent when home electronics company Miele 'celebrated' International Women's Day with an image reinforcing 1950s housewife stereotypes (Dowden, 2019). Or the hacking of the Burger King social media account, which suddenly promoted McDonald's products, and bombarded followers with racial slurs and obscenities. And maybe it wasn't the right moment for American bank J.P. Morgan to ask Twitter users what they wanted to ask the bank, using #AskJPM in late 2013 as more than 24,000 users mocked the bank, rather than asking any serious questions (Kopecki, 2013). So much so that the social media managers themselves tweeted an apology: '… Bad Idea. Back to the drawing board' (Twitter, 2013a). Or asking people on Twitter what they wanted to know from British Gas (#AskBG) coinciding with the company announcing price hikes for gas and electricity customers.

The reactions by hundreds of Twitter users were similarly disastrous, from ' … which items of furniture do you, in your humble opinion, think people should burn first this winter? #AskBG' (Twitter, 2013b) to 'will you pass on the cost savings from firing your social media team to customers? #AskBG' (Twitter, 2013c).

So, while the transformative character of widespread and ubiquitous social media usage, and the rise of the 'networked individual', cannot be easily dismissed, condemning long-standing theoretical frameworks to the virtual scrapheap based on the assumption of a revolutionary technology is, however, both simplistic and naïve. Have any of the examples really changed the way we all communicate? Or have they just made communication more open? Are individuals really changing the way they listen to music? Or have they always recommended bands, records and playlists to their friends? Nevertheless, and indicating a seismic change in the way we communicate, a recent survey of leading peer-reviewed, academic marketing and public relations journals found that a staggering 60% of articles discussing social media made no reference to theoretical frameworks (Khang et al., 2012), something unquestionably inconceivable for articles examining traditional media or communication methods. Such results inevitably raise the question of which assumptions are being made about this mystical and preternatural paradigm shift that negate the need for an academic debate informed by theory? How come buzzwords such as **Web 2.0**, which have been described as plain jargon (Berners-Lee, n.d.), have deceived even hardened academics into assuming that somehow communication changed after social media was born?

Three fundamental, interrelated areas arise as a consequence of this debate. Firstly, what is meant by social media and related terms? Secondly, is social media really such a seismic move away from previous technology and communication that new theories need to be developed and the old ones are no longer applicable? Or does it merely represent an evolution of existing technology, with opportunities for adaptation and refinement of, but certainly not a replacement of, existing theories? Thirdly, which theories are being used to investigate social media-mediated communication and marketing?

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND RELATED TERMS

Without doubt, the seemingly rapid rise of 'social media' is astonishing, although what exactly is meant by terms such as social networking sites, social media, citizen media, participatory media, and consumer- or user-generated content, Web 2.0 technologies and social web, often used interchangeably, remains vague.

To clarify some of these terms, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) offer a widely accepted series of definitions. They define social media as 'a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User-Generated Content' (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010: 61). This definition encompasses a wide variety of sites and usages, from sites where the emphasis is on sharing of user-generated content, but not necessarily enduring interactions between different users, such as YouTube or TripAdvisor, to sites, or rather applications, which focus on continuous and ongoing contact between users, i.e. social networking sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook.

In order to distinguish social media and social networking, boyd and Ellison (2007) define social networking sites as:

> web-based services that allow individuals to (a) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (b) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, (c) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system and (d) create and share content. (2007: 211)

As boyd and Ellison point out, a distinguishing feature of successful social networking sites is not that these function primarily as 'networking' tools in order to initiate relationships amongst strangers, but rather that users of such sites 'are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network' (2007: 211). Hence, social networking sites are a distinct subgroup of sites from social media sites, fulfilling different functions in the daily routine of their users. Yet, social networking sites make use of social media technologies, as described by Kaplan and Haenlein, particularly emphasising the sharing of user-generated content. However, the intended audience of social networking sites is different from the more general social media sites.

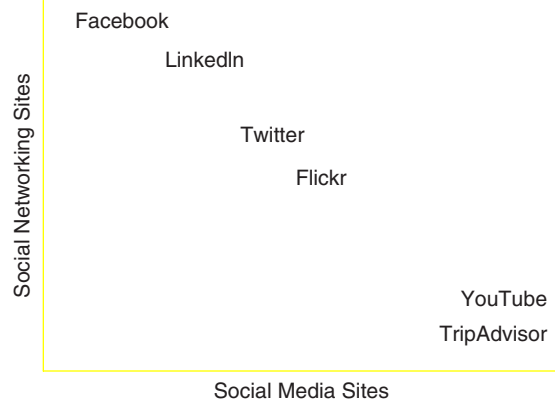

Figure I.1 Taxonomy of social media sites

Based on this distinction exemplified by using popular 'social' websites, Figure I.1 shows the distinction between social media and social networking sites.

Although delineation between social media and social networking sites is likely to be fluid and individual usage dependent, three broad classifications of sites can be made:

1. Social networking sites where the emphasis is on social networking between mostly personally known users, such as Facebook and LinkedIn.
2. Sites relying on user-generated content that is shared amongst users who may not be personally known to each other, such as TripAdvisor or YouTube.
3. Sites which can be used as both social networking sites and social media sites, integrating functionality for both elements dependent on the user. For example, a photographer can use Flickr to showcase user-generated pictures and share this with relative strangers, in the same way as the site can be used to circulate pictures from a family event to other members of a family.

Knowing the types of interactions that are likely to occur on different types of sites is important when considering how communication takes place on these sites, and the likely motivators for interactions. For instance, as interactions on primary social networking websites are amongst usually personally known users, considerations such as established interpersonal trust or social conformity are likely to be important. Conversely, on primary sites where the target audience remains largely unknown, such as TripAdvisor or similar review sites, trust in the message needs to be established first, and social conformity pressures are likely to be relatively insignificant, as users do not focus on interacting with each other. Thus, understanding the type of communication, social relevance and intended audience of user-generated content posted on these sites is important for successful interactions with users. For instance, social media disasters like the #AskBG campaign may have been avoided if the social media managers had considered the primary audience of people on Twitter. As the majority of Twitter users seek to connect with like-minded individuals, and therefore will pander to their perceived audience, trying to get users to engage with an unpopular brand is likely to backfire – who would be a user that asks a serious question instead of entertaining their followers by posting a witty and cynical comment?

Accordingly, having an in-depth understanding of the culture and type of site (or application as per the definition) and understanding the nature of the communication is important for social media managers. And while having a wide variety of different communication tools and types may seem revolutionary, the question is, is it really such a paradigm shift from previous communication methods – especially the early Internet?

EVOLUTION OR REVOLUTION?

It is not uncommon to find expressions such as 'social media explosion', as one advertising agency called the phenomenon (Euro RSCG, 2009). Similarly, characterisations of social media as 'the democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publisher … the shift from a broadcast mechanism, one-to-many, to a many-to-one model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers' (Solis, 2010: 37) are commonplace when describing social media. Yet, these characterisations are remarkably similar to predictions about the future of business made much earlier in the history of the Internet; for example, in 2000 prior to any notion of social media, the Cluetrain Manifesto proclaimed that the effect of the Internet is that 'your organization is becoming hyperlinked. Whether you like it or not. It's bottom-up; it's unstoppable' (Levine, 2000: 199).

The reason for the similarity is that many of the qualities ascribed to social media are neither novel nor did consumption co-creation and user generation start with Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other social media apps. Consumer and interest groups did not arise following the 'introduction' of social media. Groups such as the Boston Computer Group (BCG), founded in 1977, were active long before social media or even the widespread adoption of the Internet was conceivable. BCG would later on become a Macintosh User Group. These groups, popular in the 1980s, co-created computer consumption experiences of the emerging Apple computer technology. Consequently, web technology probably enhanced and increased visibility of such behaviour, but it has not created a new form of 'social media behaviour'. Before the first **World Wide Web** browser, **Mosaic**, was released in 1993, the Internet had already been characterised as presenting a 'growing diversity of user communities' (Hart et al., 1992: 683), and two years after the 1995 development of

the first Internet Explorer, scholars remarked that 'the Internet is as much a collection of communities as a collection of technologies' (Leiner et al., 1997: 106).

What can be said with some certainty is that the widespread adoption of communication technology has increased the speed of and lessened the effect of geographical boundaries on information exchange. This book aims to contribute to a more informed debate about the real impact of social media by looking beyond the hype and examining how current theories can be used to explain social media, and particularly, how such theories can help to develop effective and successful social media marketing campaigns.

To examine the questions, the book is divided into four parts: Actors, Platforms, Content and Contexts as shown in Figure I.2.

Part 1 looks at the actors and their immediate activities, and how these shape, or are shaped by, social media. The first chapter examines consumers and their motivation to form **tribes** and engage with other, similar individuals in various media forms. This is followed by a look at the process of co-creation in Chapter 2, looking at the processes that emerge when organisations and customers work together. Chapter 3 then focuses specifically on organisational actors, specifically from a branding perspective, and investigates the increasingly anthropomorphic nature that brands adopt as co-creators and content-providers in a user-generated environment. The final chapter in this section focuses on the rising stars of social media – influencers, and their role in social media marketing.

Part 2 examines closely the media platform in which these actors are operating. Reflecting on the increasing convergence of different media types, the three chapters of this part chart the development of computer-based social networking, game-driven social networking and finally mobile and location-based social networking.

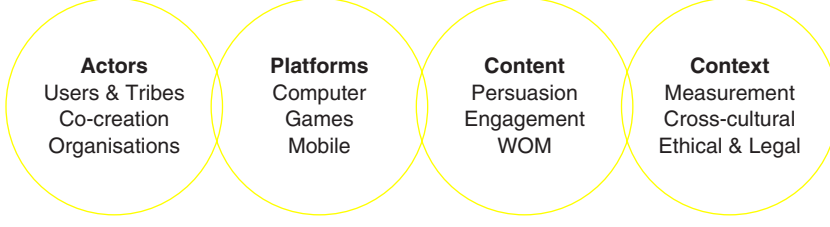

Figure I.2 Structure of the parts in the book

In Part 3 the chapters examine different aspects of communication taking place amongst the actors in the various channels. Persuasion is the focus of Chapter 8, while Chapter 9 focuses on **engagement**. Chapter 10 then combines much of the discussion from the previous chapters and applies it to the most important aspect of user-generated media: the exchange of **word of mouth**.

Finally, Part 4 examines the contextual elements of social media marketing. Chapter 11 critically reviews measuring social media effectiveness, while Chapter 12 discusses cross-cultural aspects of social media. Chapter 13 focuses on important ethical and legal aspects of social media marketing.

The book concludes by taking a look towards the future, and how new technological developments will shape future communication between users and organisations – and how theories discussed during the course of the preceding chapters can help to guide marketers, by making sense of the changes and by being active participants.

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PART 1

Understanding Actors in Social Media Marketing

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter puts the rise of the Internet and social media in particular into the wider societal context, which occurred concurrently with the advancement in and popular adoption of information technology. The chapter shows that emerging tribal and symbolic consumption patterns and **subcultures of consumption** were substantial driving forces of technological adoption, with subcultures adopting online technology as a means to network, before a more widespread adoption and adaptation in mainstream culture.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- understand how marketing and consumer behaviour have moved from an exchange-based emphasis to emphasising the experience
- appreciate the importance of subcultures and subcultures of consumption for consumer behaviour
- distinguish between tribes and **brand communities**, and critically evaluate the influence of symbolic consumption on everyday purchase decisions
- understand the basics of researching brand communities online, through the use of netnography.

TOWARDS TRIBAL CONSUMPTION

To understand the rise of the Internet and the emergence and influence of social media as a particular evolution of the widespread adaptation of information technology, it is essential that we put these two phenomena into a broader context of culture shifts occurring at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Although it is tempting to think of the emergence of social media as the game-changing event that swept away any of the previous models and theories, when the phenomenon is looked at from a more holistic, cultural perspective, the development and subsequent popularity of social media is more a lucky combination of technological advancement combined with post-modern consumption behaviour.

Even years after the meteoric rise of social media, 'gurus' love to amaze by showing impressive numbers about the continued growth of the latest social media sites. A favourite comparison is comparing the time it took for radio and television to **reach** a similar audience: it took 13 years for television to reach 50 million viewers, yet only 3.5 years for Facebook to accumulate the same amount of users (Annan, 2012). TikTok reached 800 million active users in 4 years, or 16 times as many as radio or Facebook achieved (Iqbal, 2020). However, these comparisons are problematic. Such comparisons imply that it is the appearance of a social media platform that has sparked a revolution in consumer behaviour – a shift that could not have happened without the appearance of the particular platform being talked about. An alternative view would be that social media emerged to fulfil a need online that was already evident offline. In other words, social media did not actually change existing consumer behaviour, but rather it brought it online and made it more visible.

To clarify these issues, the remainder of this chapter examines whether social media was the spark that lit the fire, or if it simply added fuel to an existing fire. In other words, was social media accelerating a change in society and with it a change in consumption behaviour, or was it the initiator?

The 'Usefulness' of Social Media

If regarded from a purely theoretical and practical perspective, any technology, including social media, the Internet, the video recorder, the telephone or any other innovation, needs to achieve widespread adoption to become 'significant'. A simple but useful model to analyse this is the **Technology Acceptance Model** (TAM). The model focuses on the **usefulness** and the ease of use of the invention (in this case social media) as the key variables to explain why a technology gets adopted (or, indeed, does not get adopted).

Technology Acceptance Model

To achieve adoption on a large scale, technology needs to be perceived as both 'useful' and 'easy to use' by the adoptees, according to the model (Davis, 1989).

The key component however is the usefulness: new technology does not become successful because it is simply easy to use, as social media tools in comparison to traditional online media doubtlessly are, nor does it become successful because it is a new technology

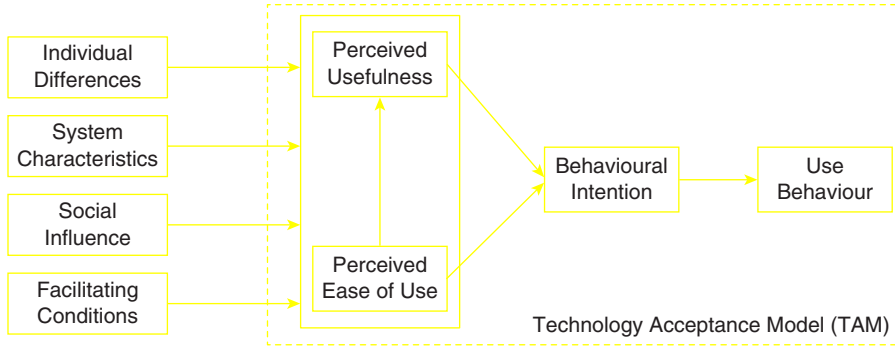

Figure 1.1 Technology Acceptance Model

per se. The important questions to ask are therefore: Why was social media considered so useful that it did spread rapidly? Which underlying needs did social media fulfil to become useful? And which social trends and consumer behaviours were affected by the widespread adoption of social media?

To investigate these questions, we will later look at the conceptualisation of consumption behaviour by the individual, but first, we look at the wider, social context of consumption – and how this led social media to become a useful tool.

The Social Context: Subcultures and Tribes

Wider society had been in a state of flux and change well before social media appeared in the mid-2000s. In fact, even before the rise of the Internet in the 1990s. In the late twentieth century, individuals around the world progressively sought to free themselves from traditional social restrictions and establish new social norms. This liberation resulted in a fragmentation of society, a severe social dissolution and what some researchers have called 'extreme individualism' (Cova and Cova, 2002). Following significant cultural shifts, often attributed to the aftermaths of two world wars, individuals were no longer adhering to the constraints of previous generations, and stopped following collective ideals. Rather, people individualised and personalised their existence (and with it their consumption), paying little attention to societal constraints and instead emphasising individual choice.

Paradoxically though, as Goulding and colleagues (2001) point out, mounting individualism did not result in everyone pursuing their life alone. Instead, individualism impelled individuals to seek alternative social arrangements. These came in the form of new 'communities' in which individuals could find a sense of belonging. These communities were often away from the mainstream, and free from traditional and established social structures. An analogy that is often used to describe this phenomenon is the mainstream breaking up into a 'plethora of subcultures'. These 'subcultures' offered a community, or spiritual home, to post-modern consumers seeking a replacement for the outgrown

conventional, social bonds of previous generations. Many early researchers into consumer behaviour focused particularly on consumption behaviour in subcultures as representative examples of consumers breaking away from the societal mainstream. We therefore briefly explore this stream of research – and related to this the 'plethora of subcultures' in the next section.

The Emerging Importance of Subcultures

At the beginning of the 1970s, so around 20 years before the Internet became a household name, researchers examined the consumption practices of subcultures. A famous example of this is the work carried out at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Much of the work focused on the relationship between various subcultures and the perceived dominant (or mainstream) culture. Against the background of social upheaval in the 1970s, what emerged was an overabundance of 'subcultures': frequently young consumers, rebellious against the perceived mainstream and adult culture. Yet, the rebellious nature of these subcultures did not result in an unswervingly antagonistic relationship with the mainstream. Rather, with time, mainstream culture incorporated aspects of many subcultural meanings or behaviours back into the mainstream and adopted these (Hebdige, 1979). An example is the originally 1960s London-based subculture of 'mods', with various revivals in different places in later years. While the original mod culture started to fade away in the second half of the 1960s, many of the brands and even places became adopted for mainstream consumption – brands such as Fred Perry, motor scooters such as Lambretta or Vespa, insignias such as the original Royal Air Force roundel all of which were originally associated with the mods – re-emerged in the mainstream. Carnaby Street, the original shopping street of many mods, became the focal point of 'Swinging London' in the late 1960s. It continues to draw on this legacy today as an upmarket, youth-oriented shopping area, although there are no connections with the original mod subculture anymore.

Over time, researchers studied an increasing number of subcultures, often based on readily identifiable groups, existing 'away' from the mainstream. For example, ethnic minorities, gays or 'alternative lifestyle' groups – ranging from punks to skinheads, from hippies to rockers – were the focus of research projects, and behaviour first identified in subcultures often became a prototype for subsequent, mainstream consumer behaviour (such as the mods example above).

These subcultures drew together individuals who felt neglected or outcast by the majority culture. Outside the mainstream, these subcultures recreated their own social norms, shared behaviours and knowledge. Researchers realised that subculture members often seized commercially available material taken from the mainstream culture, but interpreted these items according to a different set of values shared amongst subculture members. An example of this is Dr Martens shoes. The shoes were first popular with people who walked a lot as part of their profession, for example police officers and postal workers. Within the skinhead subculture, the Dr Martens shoes were reinterpreted: away from the functional aspect of being a product that provided the wearer with comfort to walk, the shoes became a sign of belonging to the particular subculture. Within the

context of the skinhead subculture, the shoes identified the wearer as a fellow skinhead, and the consumption of these shoes (i.e. wearing them) carried symbolic and potentially political meaning.

Increasingly, researchers uncovered that the behaviour they observed in the subcultures was by no means restricted to subcultures: individuals of all walks of life used commercially available goods, reinterpreted these and used them as a symbol of their individual beliefs or persuasions. Referring to these groupings as subcultures of consumption, these subculture-like groups, largely comprising self-selected members, defined themselves based on a communal commitment to a particular brand, product or other consumption activity (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Similar to traditional subcultures, members of these subcultures of consumption came from different socio-economic backgrounds, crossed diverse age ranges, had different ethnic backgrounds or bridged the gender divide. Instead of specific demographic similarities, members of these 'subcultures' shared certain experiences, arising from a particular consumption activity. For example, the ownership of a motorcycle brand, such as the Harley Davidson community (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), or watching specific television shows, such as *Star Trek* (Kozinets, 2001).

However, while membership of subcultures of consumption was self-selected, rather than ascribed, it was not entirely free of the influences of established factors such as social class, gender or ethnicity. Holt (1997) cautioned that basic demographic principles were still influential factors for consumption behaviour. However, Holt conceded that existing social patterns became subtler and started to be increasingly complemented by consumption activities. Nevertheless, members needed to have the financial means to purchase certain goods that were required to participate in these subcultures, for example purchasing and owning an Apple computer, despite members not sharing other, traditional socio-demographic similarities.

Concurrent with the research into subcultures and consumption taking place in Britain, the French sociologist Michel Maffesoli (1988) studied a similar phenomenon though his work was based on work with French 'conventional' consumers, rather than based on rebellious youth subcultures in Britain. He focused particularly on the rise of the perceived individualism in mainstream culture. However, paradoxically, in his book *Le Temps des Tribus* (*The Time of the Tribes*, published in 1996) he concluded that, rather than rising dramatically as many people feared, individualism is outdated in contemporary society. Instead, he found that post-modern society is best understood as an assortment of intermittent social groupings, which are characterised as fluid, occasional and in constant formation and dispersal. Alluding to indigenous structures, Maffesoli called these communities 'tribes'. In his view, contemporary 'tribes' replaced traditional tribes, which were life-long, static and based on membership by ascription or birth, such as social class. Tribes, as described by Maffesoli, had strong similarities to the subcultures of consumption described by Cova and Cova, both being 'inherently unstable, small scale, affectual and not fixed by any of the established parameters of modern society; instead they can be held together through shared emotions, styles of life, new moral beliefs and consumption practices' (Cova and Cova, 2001: 67), and many researchers started to use both terms, often interchangeably.

Some scholars, for example Bennett (1999), suggested distinguishing between historical tribes, such as Indian tribes in America, and contemporary, fluid tribes, by using the term 'neo-tribes' to describe these contemporary communities of belonging, where members enact particular, shared lifestyles. However, works by, for example, Cova and Cova, Maffesoli and Godin (2008) popularised the simpler notion of 'tribes'.

Fundamentally, both subcultures of consumption and tribes describe similar concepts characterising contemporary consumer behaviour, based on a post-modern, fluid society, where consumers self-ascribe to communities of meaning and belonging. In other words, consumers choose to be part of several, occasionally even seemingly contradictory, communities or tribes. Consumers can navigate between the selected communities, while choosing to join and relinquish their membership from communities as they wish. For example, people can opt freely to join a Mac User Group, or to no longer take part in meetings of a local Mac User Group. Or they can buy a different computer. It is important to note that much of the research into consumer tribes significantly predates the emergence and widespread adoption of social media.

These tribes have primarily three functions:

1. They enable sharing of functional knowledge, for example, how to use emerging technology in the case of computers, or share new software and experiences with new hardware in the local Mac User Group.
2. They offer a place of social bonding, support and belonging, allowing individuals to create an identity that helps distinguish them from 'others'. For example, Mac users vs. PC users, also famously used in Apple's 'I'm a PC, I'm a Mac' advertising campaigns.
3. These tribes create and share a set of collective rules and behaviours, which allows tribe users to distinguish each other from non-tribe members, for example, camping out in front of Apple stores before their opening.

While social barriers, in principle, were coming down as early as the 1970s and 1980s, geographical distance often made it difficult for consumers to join tribes they wanted to be a part of, but which were not local to their community. Think of being a solitary punk in a small community, or the only gay in the village in the 1970s or 1980s – or simply the only Mac user based in a small township where a Mac User Group was far away. If a specific tribe was not established in the local community, consumers had no access to any of the support functions of the tribe. For example, there was no access to shared social support, such as personal support *vis-à-vis* non-tribe members who may question the rationale for tribe membership. Similarly, a geographically remote tribe member had no easy access to knowledge about tribe practices and behaviours, for example, for *Star Trek* fans, practising speaking or writing Klingon, reading about events organised for other 'Trekkies' or knowing where to purchase Trek memorabilia. The evolution of technology brought the possibility of tribal support beyond confined geographical borders, offering access to global support and access to knowledge independent of locality. Maybe it is therefore unsurprising that many 'traditional', ascribed subcultures, for example homosexual men, ethnic minorities as well as other self-selected, alternative lifestyle tribes, were amongst the earliest adopters of the Internet (boyd and Ellison, 2007).

The Internet, almost from the beginning, offered subcultures 'social networking' features: it enabled people to connect to other subculture members globally. More details of these features are discussed in Chapter 4, but especially the introduction of the World Wide Web made connecting to fellow tribe members via the Internet easy and convenient. Gay.com, arguably the first social networking site in the world, launched in 1994 (Campbell, 2005). It offered 'perceived usefulness' and enhanced ease of use by enabling access to social and emotional support from other gay men. It encouraged the early adoption of new technology in this subculture around a decade before the emergence of 'mainstream' social networks.

Similarly, as boyd and Ellison (2007) point out, other minority groups quickly followed in the 'social networking' footsteps with their own sites: Asian-American social networking site AsianAvenue and African-American social networking site BlackPlanet both launched in 1999, while MiGente, aimed at Hispanic Americans, launched in 2000. Friendster, arguably the first mainstream social networking website, launched in 2002. However, while Friendster targeted the social mainstream, it nevertheless initially focused much of its marketing activities on alternative lifestyle tribes. For example, Friendster ran promotions at the Burning Man festival (boyd and Ellison, 2007), an annual summer solstice art and radical self-expression festival held in the Nevada desert, described as a place where the participants are 'not the weirdest kid in the classroom' (Steenson, n.d.). It is, therefore, fair to say that subcultures have been a vital part of the early development of the Internet and social networking. Just as observed by the researchers at the Birmingham CCCS, original subculture-linked behaviour became, over time, adopted by the more mainstream audience. Concurrently, society as a whole moved from societal mainstream to a society of subcultures or tribes. Subculture-like behaviour is further a fundamental part of contemporary offline behaviour and mirrored in social online behaviour. However, it is important to point out that consumer tribalism predates social networks significantly. Therefore, while technological progress, and with it social networks, are likely to have accelerated the trend, social media has not instigated it. Rather, social media has taken online, facilitated greatly and made more visible, the emerging tribalisation of society. Thus, social media fulfils a very different role than traditional media. Rather than informing consumers, social media is a means of self-expression of consumers, where consumers can declare their allegiance to certain tribes, at least temporarily. Consequently, the social media environment for brands and marketers is likely to be highly distinctive from traditional marketing environments. Rather than being an environment in which consumers seek primarily information, consumers seek self-expression. Are brands therefore 'uninvited' as Fournier and Avery (2011) suggest? Or do brands play a different role?

From Subcultures and Neo-tribes to the Tribal Mainstream

While this social movement was originally most evident in the case of subcultures, such as minority ethnic groups, and teenage groupings, it soon spread to almost all parts of society. However, rather than grouping around shared sexual practices or ethnicities,

the mainstream adaptation of community seeking focused on gathering around shared practices as well as 'ordinary possessions' (Bromberger, 1998).

An important aspect of tribes is that they develop their own distinctive rules, norms and behaviour. Tribes often develop a particular shared language that helps tribe members identify each other (Berger et al., 2020), and in turn can be used to identify tribe members (Gloor et al., 2020). For example, using a technical term like 'aquafaba' would most likely identify someone who is vegan (or avoiding eggs). Such language use makes it possible to identify tribe members through software tools, such as Tribefinder. Alternatively, tribe members can often be identified by **hashtags** (Cuomo et al., 2016), for example, #Winelovers.

This means that simple goods become items through which an individual simultaneously expresses their individuality while at the same time these possessions allow the individual to buy into a community of belonging. These may be communities that are completely brand-neutral, for example a vintage car owner club, where the criterion of admission is not a particular brand of car, but simply possession of a vintage car. However, in many cases, they may be brand-specific, for example, Mac User Groups, which were extremely popular amongst Apple Mac users in the 1980s and 1990s, and have been a significant factor in creating the 'cult'-like image of the Apple Mac (Belk and Tumbat, 2005).

In both cases, products and brands were no longer just providing a utilitarian value, as seen in traditional marketing (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009). Instead, specific brands or products became means of self-expression, through which consumers express their self-concepts (ideal or actual) and act as a **linking value** (Cova, 1997) – further discussed as a theoretical concept in the next chapter – providing social links in a post-modern consumer society. Using social media, many consumers rely on marketing techniques, in the form of self-branding and seeking 'micro-celebrity' status, which frequently include the display of brands. The main aim is to build their own personal brands as a way to form tribes around them using social media (Khamis et al., 2016).

Tribes or Brand Communities

There is some terminological confusion about *tribes* and brand communities. In fact, some contemporary practitioners and occasionally researchers use both terms interchangeably. Especially within the marketing profession, the term 'brand community' appears more popular because of an implied direct connection to a specific brand, although it is sometimes applied to what are brand-unrelated tribes. This confusion is understandable, particularly as both words have become major buzzwords for modern marketers. In some ways, both terms describe similar concepts, but as they are different in focus it is important to differentiate between them.

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001: 412) define an online brand community as 'a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations amongst admirers of a brand'. Tribes on the other hand are a specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations and shared behaviours, also expressed or experienced through the consumption of shared products of symbolic

meaning. Thus, as previously implied, the difference between these two in relationship to brands and consumer behaviour is that brand cultures have an explicit and specific brand focus. Tribes are broader, based on other aspects, but consume products that have a symbolic meaning for tribe members, for example through rituals or as a way to recognise other tribe members.

However, even brand communities are not singularly fused on brands, and social aspects play a noteworthy role in maintaining the community and brand loyalty (Marzocchi et al., 2013; Scarpi, 2010; Zaglia, 2013). Therefore, while the 'wider' tribes may be more opaque to the marketer than communities explicitly linked to a brand, a successful marketing campaign, online or offline, is less likely to maximise its effectiveness if the marketer focuses only on the specific brand community. Ultimately, both brand community and wider tribe are in most cases bound together by social connections. For example, members of the Fountain Pen Network forum on the Internet share information about fountain pens they collect both via brand-specific forums as well as cross-brand forums, for example, members will interact with fellow tribe members in forums related to finding inks or discussing retailers and collector shows. However, tribe members split into brand-specific communities for discussing specific pens by visiting brand-specific forums or writing brand-specific blogs on the general 'tribal' website.

It is important to point out that much of the research into the effect of tribalism and post-modern consumer society was originally focused on high-value brands and high-involvement products. To some extent, these products still provide the most enduring examples. However, there is now increasing evidence that low-involvement products, such as chocolate spread (Cova and Pace, 2006) and drinks (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009), are equally influenced by tribal connections. This is somewhat counterintuitive when considering traditional models of involvement, which conventionally suggested that consumers tend to create emotional bonds nearly always with high-involvement products (Martin, 1998).

THINKBOX TRIBAL CONSUMERS

List some of the 'tribes' you are familiar with.

Can you identify members for each tribe?

Describe how each of these behaviours signals membership to the tribe.

Tribal Consumers and Traditional Marketing Concepts

As can be seen from the discussion, modern consumers are best characterised by tribes rather than socio-demographic variables. This shift has a significant impact on the way

modern marketing approaches such consumers, as much of traditional marketing theory suggests a static approach to marketplace behaviour.

Bearing this in mind, it is tempting to think of tribes as comparable to, if not synonymous with, traditional 'market segments'. However, there are some stark differences. Segments are usually seen as subgroups of a market, made up of clearly defined, homogeneous consumers who share similar characteristics. Customers are seen as passive in selecting which segment they belong to and segments are furthermore mutually exclusive.

However, tribes, while indeed subgroups of a market, don't share any of the other characteristics of traditional segments:

- Tribes are commonly not clearly defined, particularly on social networks, where people may follow a brand religiously – or indeed visit a brand community sporadically. Therefore, membership of a tribe is by definition hard to establish.
- Tribes are often a community of heterogeneous consumers, bound by consumption behaviour and shared experiences, but few other demographics. While some common demographics may be evident in some cases, for example, in the case of tribes related to highly priced goods, members are likely to have a relatively high income; this is not true in other cases. For example, income, age, gender or many other segmentation variables cannot be used to characterise *Star Trek* fans effectively. Therefore, traditional tools have only limited validity in a tribal marketplace.
- Tribes are often interconnected and tribe 'members' can be a member of seemingly contradicting tribes. For example, owning a VW Beatle does not preclude the owner from owning another car, maybe even a similar 'cult-like' car such as a Mini.
- Tribe members are seen as active, although to varying degrees. Often tribe members don't simply consume – they are advocates and active promoters of consumption in their own right. This view is different from segments, which see members as passive consumers, incapable of collective action (Cova and Cova, 2002).

For example, a netnographic study of 'wine lovers' on Instagram showed that this tribe is best segmented considering their knowledge and awareness of different wines. Traditional, more rigid market segmentation ideas are less useful (Cuomo et al., 2016). The more fluid view of tribes is therefore contradictory to some established marketing assumptions, challenging the static and positivistic conventions underlying many traditional marketing approaches.

Moreover, tribal consumers challenge some other assumptions made in traditional marketing, for example, marketing practices such as relationship marketing, which place great emphasis on enhancing customer–brand relationships. Customers in a traditional marketing view are enticed and loyalty gained through frequent contact and consistent, personalised customer service at the point of contact between customer and brand. In the tribal view, the contact between brand and customer is subordinate to the contact between customers; the brand supports the relationship between different consumers and acts as a link between individuals.

Importantly for tribes, brands are not consumed for their utilitarian value and contemporary consumers, especially when engaging in tribal marketplace behaviour, are not focusing on rational, utilitarian, logical or largely cognitive brand choices. Rather, consumers choose brands because of their experiential or indeed affectionate value. One could argue consumers are developing an affective loyalty (Cova and Cova, 2002) to the products they consume because of the consumption experiences at different stages, rather than the product attributes. Especially, social media can enhance brand attitude as well as brand trust, leading to increased willingness to pay a premium price (Dwivedi and McDonald, 2020) and loyalty.

Consequently, brands depend upon their consumers to forge relationships. Thus, the traditional view of the exchange between organisation and consumer has lost importance. This view is replaced by a more fluid view, where brand and a community of consumers are in a perpetual state of 'mutual indebtedness' (Cova and Cova, 2002: 614), whereby the brand enables the consumer to recognise fellow tribe members while simultaneously individual tribes rely on brands to provide products in accordance with the values of the tribes, and to provide the tribes with means to recognise fellow tribe members. Many social media sites rely on rapid identification of fellow tribe members, for example, when reading reviews on a user-generated website like TripAdvisor, small clues in the reviews can identify reviewers as tribe members and make their reviews more relevant to the reader, for instance, when a child is mentioned (tribe = parents), or a preference for healthy food at breakfast (tribe = green), etc. Similarly, when posting pictures on Twitter, Instagram or Facebook, brands that appear and the type of picture are all part of self-expression by the individual users, enabling browsers to quickly identify the poster as a fellow tribe member, or not. Brands in particular have then become paradoxical in a social media context. On the one side, they are uninvited, commercialising a space originally made for people to connect. On the other side, they are essential tools for recognising tribal allegiances and enabling social networking beyond the point of close friends. But to do so, brands need to be prominently displayed or alluded to, so that casual friends or browsing bypassers can recognise the individual characteristics of the poster through the embedded meaning, or linking value, of the brands.

Consumption in Context: From Exchange to Experience

Traditionally, marketers focused narrowly on the concept of exchange, for example, the exchange of money for goods or services (Bagozzi, 1975). In this traditional view consumption is seen as a matter of pre-purchase activities, such as identification of need, search for information, evaluation of alternatives, followed by an exchange (purchase) succeeded by a series of post-purchase activities, such as assessing if the product met the desired objectives. In essence, consumption is seen as an essentially utilitarian concept, which enables both parties in the process (consumer and producer) to achieve their means through exchange, i.e. the producer earns money from the consumer, and the consumer gains satisfaction through the use of a product or service.

However, since the 1960s and 1970s, this utilitarian view of consumption, based on a strictly rational view of the consumer, has been replaced by more interpretative methodologies seeking to go beyond one-dimensional approaches to market exchange and consumption. Consumer behaviour research and marketing have broadened their research focus to include non-utilitarian attributes, such as experiences and meanings in the consumption process as well as going beyond a simple purchase-focused approach. This extension enabled a much broader view of consumption. Consumption is no longer seen as restricted towards the sequential processes involved in purchasing a new product, for example a new computer. With a broader perspective, using the purchased computer, and even disposing of the computer once it has outlived its usefulness, are included in the concept of consumption, studied and explained.

Of particular note within this broader theoretical framework are two lines of enquiry – **Consumer Culture Theory** (CCT) and liquid consumption – both of which merit a brief review here, as they help to make sense of the preceding discussion of marketplace and consumer behaviour, including when using social media.

Consumer Culture Theory

CCT as a research tradition emerged around the middle of the 1980s. CCT refers to a 'family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings' (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 868). In other words, CCT focuses on the contextual aspects of consumption, such as the symbolic nature of consumed products and services, and experiential aspects of consumption activity.

By taking a holistic view of marketplace behaviour, CCT challenges the traditional focus on studying marketplace behaviour merely at the purchasing stage. Arnould (2004) contends further that the experiential aspects of consumption, i.e. consumer experiences during the wider stages of consumption preceding and proceeding the purchase, have become an important, if not the most important, aspect for contemporary consumers. Fundamentally, Arnould and CCT theorists in general describe consumption as experiences encountered during four stages of consumption:

1. *Pre-consumption stage*: Searching for, planning and imagining the actual consumption experience, for example, looking at fashion magazines, imagining what it would feel like to wear a certain coat, etc.
2. *Purchasing stage*: The definite purchase experience involving choosing, paying and service experience linked to the actual purchase, such as the experiences encountered when choosing the coat, trying it on, paying and leaving the shop.
3. *Core consumption stage*: The actual sensation and experiences during and immediately after the consumption of the product, including satisfaction or dissatisfaction. For example, occasions when the coat is worn, such as a special occasion or the occasion when the coat was worn for the first time.
4. *Remembered consumption stage*: The nostalgic stage following the consumption experiences, in which the experience is relived, for example, through looking at photos of one wearing the coat, and remembering certain events and sensations or feelings related to this occasion.

Extending the focus allowed researchers to explore how for contemporary consumers, the consumption-associated experiences, for example feelings and sensations, rather than the product's utilitarian function, are the main aspect of consumption. These experiences, encountered during the extended consumption process, can be more important (or valuable) for the consumer than the product itself.

Many of these stages require an active involvement on behalf of the consumer. This challenges the traditional view of the passive consumer, considering instead the 'productive aspect of consumption'. Rather, consumers are seen as active participants in the consumption process, in fact, the consumers co-produce, together with vendors or producers, their experiences and the meanings attributed to the consumption process during each of the stages of consumption. For example, in the context of social media, this wider focus can elucidate the practice of 'unboxing', where consumers share videos or pictures of themselves opening a package of a new, often coveted item (Jenkins, 2011), such as a mobile phone. They are extending the core consumption experience, and sharing the emotions with their wider social network, a practice that can be observed in some 370,000 videos on YouTube showing individuals ritually 'unboxing' goods.

An extensive body of research, much of which is in the CCT tradition and beyond, has looked further at how consumers rework and reinterpret meanings they encounter throughout the consumption process, for example, when exposed to advertisements, the brands themselves, or through the consuming of goods. The overwhelming consensus is that consumers consume as a way to express their individual personal and social circumstances – or to assert their identity or advance personal lifestyle goals. While we will revisit the notion of the active, i.e. co-producing, consumer in depth in the next chapter, it is important to recognise that the focus of consumption for contemporary consumers has shifted significantly from a utilitarian consumption motive to become a largely symbolic act through which consumers aim to express themselves.

Early works highlighting the symbolic nature of consumption can be found in the 1960s and 1970s (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1980), and it is therefore reasonable to assume that current technology has played little role in instigating this type of consumption. Modern technology has, nevertheless, been useful for symbolic consumption, for example, social media enables people to rapidly share consumption with friends, such as in the example of unboxing above, therefore extending the experience beyond people present during the consumption process.

Liquid Consumption

Liquid consumption refers to consumption that is ephemeral, access-based and dematerialised (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017). A typical example of liquid consumption is car sharing schemes, where consumers 'consume' a car for a very short period of time (ephemerally); it is access-based, as the car isn't owned, but only accessed when required. In addition, liquid consumption assumes a preference of digital over physical products, for example, using an app and an online car-club membership to access a car, rather than traditional brick and mortar, material, car hire offices. Similarly, music streaming services do not transfer ownership of a physical product, instead listening to music is just when it is needed (access-based); apart from the application used, it is entirely dematerialised – and

often only lasts the time it takes to play the track (it is ephemeral), rather than owning the record forever.

Liquid consumption is traditionally associated with Digital Nomads (Bardhi et al., 2012); that is to say, in a context with high global mobility, flexibility, but also uncertainty. However, liquid consumption has since moved beyond this context, for example, with services like Netflix or Spotify becoming mainstream and replacing traditional CD/Blu-ray ownership.

A side-effect of liquid consumption is that for items consumed liquidly, the relevance to the self is much lower than for items consumed solidly (owned). For example, there is little relevance to the self and no strong emotional tie between a car from a car club and the driver. On the contrary, many people who own a car have strong emotional ties to the car. In an environment where much of the consumption is liquid and the person has only a few owned possessions, it is conceivable that these few items have more relevance to the self than in a context where most consumption is solid (owned).

Compared to the view offered by CCT above, liquid consumption complements that view by introducing consumption behaviour that does not create an extensive bond between the consumer and the product. Instead, the focus for items consumed liquidly is on fast acquisition, brief use and quick redistribution of the object.

And while liquid consumption is often exclusively online, an interesting aspect of online communities is that they are located mid-way between strong and liquid consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017): online communities have both aspects of a traditional community but happens in a domain that is inherently liquid.

THINKBOX CONSUMPTION

Clothes are probably the most symbolic item many people are consuming (or wearing), because they signal a lot about the wearer. Thinking about the clothes that you are wearing now, try to answer the following questions: Why are you wearing these? What do they say about you? Are there brands that you particularly like to wear? Why? Are there certain brands that you would never wear? Why?

How about hiring clothes, for example for a special occasion. What shifts in your perception and relationship to the hired clothes in contrast to clothes that you own? Why would you choose to liquidly consume clothes, rather than own them? How about other objects?

SUMMARY

This chapter discussed how consumption and consumer behaviour have changed in the last part of the twentieth century. Some aspects of consumption have moved from a largely

utilitarian function to a symbolic and experiential one, while others have become liquid and therefore ephemeral and dematerialised. Tribal structures, often centred around shared consumption activity, have taken the place of established social structures. Technical advancements, such as the Internet and social media, have further accelerated these changes by allowing tribe members to communicate and share consumption experiences almost irrespective of geographical location.

Tribal consumption challenges established marketing thinking, because tribe members are by their very nature fluid, frequently contradictory and exist in a mutual indebtedness with brands, which are used for tribal membership recognition and providing social links.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT NETNOGRAPHY

Netnography is a type of ethnographic research used to study behaviour of individuals online. The word is a contraction of eth*nography* and Inter*net*. While netnography shares many aspects with ethnographic research, such as being immersive, adaptable and naturalistic, it offers some advantages over traditional ethnographic research, namely, data collection is frequently faster and less expensive as researchers can rely largely on existing, textual data available rather than having to conduct, for example, interviews or observe participants over an extended period of time.

Kozinets (2002) divides the netnographic research process into five stages:

Selecting an appropriate online community.
Gathering and analysing data.
Analysing the data.
Ensuring ethical research standards.
Triangulating the findings.

1 Selecting an appropriate online community

After formulating specific research questions, researchers have to spend some time getting to know the online community they are researching, which includes identifying where community participants congregate; that is, they need to identify specific websites, newsgroups, forums or chat rooms for investigation – and evaluate which of these, or which combination of these, will be included in the research project.

Because each online group may be made up of different participants, use group-specific language and have other interests and behaviours distinguishing the group,

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the researcher should take care to know as much about each of the groups as possible prior to selecting appropriate groups and starting the data collection.

Kozinets (2002) suggests that when deciding between different groups, preference should be given to communities which have five research-relevant advantages:

Communities that are focused as much as possible on the research question.
Communities that have a high enough traffic, i.e. number of postings.
Communities that have a large number of posters (or participants) to yield potentially fruitful results.
Communities that yield rich and detailed postings or data.
Communities that offer appropriate between-member interactions related to the research question.

2 Gathering and analysing data

Once the researcher has chosen the online communities to be investigated, the data selection process can begin, focusing on two types of data – firstly the copied data from the online groups or originating from group members, and secondly data in relation to researchers' observations, feelings and ascription of meanings.

In order to deal with the likely large amounts of data the researcher encounters upon data gathering, Kozinets recommends a number of ways to categorise the data to help the researcher make sense of the online interactions.

Firstly, messages can be categorised into primarily social and primarily informational messages – or on-topic messages and off-topic messages – depending on which is more suitable for the research context. For example, an online forum about handbags may contain messages in which members talk to each other in a social way, such as playing word games with each other. These messages are likely to be off-topic. Messages relating to identifying handbags in television shows and messages discussing newly released handbags would be classified on-topic messages.

Secondly, the contributors (or posters) of the messages may be categorised based on their involvement with the community. Kozinets, in previous research (1999), identified four levels of involvement with the community, which may be used to classify the contributors:

Tourists are contributors that have loose ties to the community and are not highly involved in the community. This type of contributor can often be identified by trivial questions being posted.
Minglers have well-established social ties in the community – but do not, or only to a minimal extent, engage in the consumption behaviour of the group.
Devotees are the opposite of minglers, in that they engage significantly in the consumption behaviour that is the subject of the group, but have relatively few ties.
Finally, *insiders* combine both strong social ties to the group and extensive consumption behaviour.

A particular focus point for researchers is not just the information related to the consumption activity, but also the interactions between different groups of contributors, specifically, researchers should focus on how consumption is socially reinforced and minglers and tourists are converted to become more engaged in either or both consumption activity or online community.

During the research it can useful to write reflective notes on the messages reviewed, including notes on how many messages were evaluated and from how many participants. However, as most online data can be stored relatively easily, an alternative way to collect data is to download the data without writing notes. Data collection online should continue until no new insights are produced.

3 Analysing the data

Data analysis in netnography relies on analysing the textual data derived from the data collection. Relying only on the analysis of textual data makes netnography different from ethnography, which aims to balance both observational (behavioural) and discursive (spoken) data. Therefore the focus of netnography shifts towards recontextualising the data collected rather than contextualising behaviour in ethnographic research (c.f. Kozinets, 2002 for a discussion of this shift).

Some of the data analysis can be assisted by software traditionally used in qualitative research, such as NVivo, as well as widely available web-based tools in order to enhance the analysis. See Kozinets (2010) for a discussion of several tools that researchers may find helpful for locating online groups and analysing the data.

4 Ethical considerations

Contrary to traditional ethnographic methods, where participants agree to take part in an interview or focus group, posts and messages used by netnographic researchers are unlikely to have been created with the intention or consideration of being studied. Therefore, it is important that netnographers follow strict ethical guidelines to ensure that netnographic research does not become perceived as disrespectful or intrusive, potentially damaging the reputation and possibility of future research efforts.

To avoid ethical problems, Kozinets recommends that netnographic researchers should follow four steps:

They must disclose their identity, affiliations and presence when conducting the research openly and fully.
Researchers should reassure participants that any data collected will be kept confidential and anonymous.

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Researchers should seek to triangulate their results (see also step 5), i.e. they should incorporate feedback from participants when reporting about the online communities they have studied.

Kozinets further recommends in the case of quoting participants verbatim, for example, by inserting postings directly from a bulletin board or Twitter updates, participants should be contacted directly and permission sought, even if the material is available in a public forum.

5 Triangulation of results

As a final step, the researcher should make the findings available to the communities studied, for example, by posting the report or reporting highlights on a web page and inviting comments and feedback, or by sending the report to community members. This final step is useful as it can enable the generation of additional insights, can prevent ethical issues from arising and, importantly, can establish an on-going interaction between researcher and online community.

For a more extensive and updated discussion of using netnography as a research approach, see Kozinets, 2019.

CASE STUDY PURE PORTUGAL

Every year, thousands of northern Europeans decide to quit the rat race and to live the good life: in the sun, away from the big cities – and in harmony with nature. This often means a small holding or similar property, engaging in sustainable practices, growing food yourself and living a life focused more on social and ecological aspects.

In Europe, Portugal has emerged as a country with many 'Good Life' seekers. Properties are relatively cheap, the cost of living is low and there is universal health care. While best known abroad for the beaches and seaside resorts of the Algarve, the hinterland of Portugal remains largely untouched by tourists. At the same time, urbanisation has resulted in a plentiful supply of rural properties, from large farms to smallholdings, from newly built properties to, more often, abandoned properties with ruins to rebuild by their future owners. In short, there are plenty of possibilities to create your dream life in the sun.

Just as everywhere else in the world, there are plenty of real estate agents offering properties to potential clients: from large multinational agency chains to small, local estate agents. Most rely on traditional models of selling their properties. These real estate agencies are complemented by online property portals, such as Idealista,

which allow agents to list their properties and clients to search for their desired properties.

Pure Portugal on the other hand approaches the property market from a very different perspective: rather than seeing itself as an estate agent, Pure Portugal harnesses the power of the tribe in focusing on the tribe members' needs while transitioning to their new life in the Portuguese countryside.

Of course, an essential part of achieving the dream of sustainable living in the sun is owning a suitable property. However, while most traditional real estate agents will focus on completing a sale, Pure Portugal takes a more holistic, community driven approach.

Pure Portugal is a worker's co-operative that operates as a property advertising portal. The core business activity of Pure Portugal is their website (https://pureportugal.co.uk), which is the main tool for listing properties. The properties on the website are listed mostly by their owners, who pay a 2% fee of the sales price in the event of a sale. As Pure Portugal puts it: 'Selling properties allows us to give back, supporting sustainable living in Portugal and offering the ability to be part of the global movement towards environmental regeneration. We contribute to the local economy through social connections and play a key role in transforming monoculture landscapes and addressing desertification. The people behind Pure Portugal share the same values and vision as their clients. We learn from you so that we can grow together' (Pure Portugal, n.d.).

In addition to the properties, the website also has a service directory, specifically for people wanting to move to Portugal or living there. The directory includes, for example, English-speaking builders, workshops on creativity and wellness, financial advisers and many other services that are useful for expats living a more sustainable and natural life in a foreign country.

The main website has no online-community functions, instead, Pure Portugal uses social media channels to create a community around the company – and connect to and with their main tribe, e.g. people seeking an alternative lifestyle in Portugal. As of 2020, the company had two inactive channels linked on their main website: a blog (last post in 2018) and a podcast, with the last episode from 2019.

More actively used is the company's YouTube channel. The focus here is mainly on presenting property videos. These are interspersed with other videos ranging from environmental activism to tips on wildfire resistance (an important topic during the summer in Portugal).

The company is most active on Facebook. Pure Portugal has a page where new properties are advertised, which has over 12,000 followers. In addition, Pure Portugal maintains a very active group on Facebook. With over 12,000 members, members interact on many different levels in the group – many ask for advice, for instance, before moving to Portugal. Others are seeking recommendations for local tradespeople. Some members share events, from local Portuguese events to events specifically for

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expats, others post about the renovations they are doing on their property, and yet others share articles, jokes and personal pictures.

Reference

Pure Portugal (n.d.) www.pureportugal.co.uk/about-us/ (accessed 23 May 2020).

Questions to Consider

How does Pure Portugal connect with their tribe? Think about the difference between consumption and purchase. How does this view differ between traditional estate agencies/portals and Pure Portugal?

How does the business model and marketing of Pure Portugal compare with traditional real estate agencies or property portals? Discuss the relative advantages and disadvantages of this approach – and how these are linked to the tribe Pure Portugal is serving.

Discuss the way they use social media to connect to potential purchasers. Why is the Facebook group so active? Why are they not using other channels? Why are there no community tools like forums on their own website?

Which strategies does Pure Portugal use to enable tribe members to fulfil their goals? Why is this important? And why is this important for this tribe?

Visit the Facebook group of Pure Portugal and identify tribal roles group members take. Identify the different types of community interactions members perform, and identify instances where members are acting as **prosumers**.

FURTHER READING

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Following on from the discussion in Chapter 1, this chapter focuses on how the extended consumption process influences consumer behaviour; particularly how social media has created an instantaneous social space in which post-modern consumption-linked practices can readily occur. The chapter asks how do consumers co-create the social consumption experience? How do consumers become active participants in the creation of value using online tools? And which roles do consumers play in the co-creation of experiences and value?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- understand the process of co-creation as an integral part of consumption
- be able to critically reflect on the notion of value
- identify consumer roles in the context of co-creation
- understand different consumption communities enabled through social media, including anti-consumption communities
- critically discuss the concept of co-creation and how it relates to traditional marketing.

CONTROL AND CO-CREATION OF VALUE

Control

Post-modern, tribal consumption practices in an increasingly liquid economy pose unique challenges for marketing professionals. On the one side, experiences shared on social media can enable marketing managers to examine more closely how customers create value from their consumption practices. For instance, participative netnography can be used to examine how tourists create value from their experience, helping tourism managers to better understand their visitors (Conti and Lexhagen, 2020). On the other side, consumers have become more powerful and assumed many roles traditionally occupied by marketers. A classic example of this is the case of the Newton, a discontinued personal digital assistant originally manufactured but later abandoned by Apple (similar to the iPhone and iPad). The Newton Community is an online-based brand community, which, after the Newton was discontinued, maintained the brand collaboratively, despite no longer receiving support from Apple (Muñiz and Schau, 2007). Whereas previously, consumers were largely unable to influence, or even revive and maintain brands long after brand managers had abandoned them, these communities are now making 'claims on core competencies formerly reserved for the marketer' (O'Guinn and Muñiz Jr, 2005: 269). Tribes and brand communities are laying claims to owning and controlling a brand, thereby taking away brand ownership from the company and claiming the brand as their own (Cova and White, 2010). It is true that social media tools have made it significantly easier for consumers to voice their dissatisfaction about abandoned or altered brands, or even to keep them alive. Social media storms have become part and parcel of interaction with brands on social media (Scholz and Smith, 2019). Nevertheless, prior to widespread adoption of the Internet, consumers also assumed similar powers: the now legendary relaunch of 'New Coke', a newly formulated version of the traditional Coca-Cola drink, resulted in large protests by consumers resulting in the reintroduction of the 'Classic Coke' as far back as 1985.

Moran and Gossieaux describe this phenomenon as **social messiness**, which replaces conventional hierarchy and control in contemporary consumer society (Moran and Gossieaux, 2010). Marketing practitioners are forced to adapt to this social messiness, something that traditional marketing strategies, deeply rooted in a positivist, modernist vision of controllability, equate to a total change of paradigm. Some researchers have asserted that this is a democratisation of the marketplace, where marketers used to have almost total power, but are now finding themselves *primus inter pares*. Consumers have become active participants, rather than passive recipients of brand messages (Rydén et al., 2015). As a result, 'the brand manager […] has now become a host whose main role is not to control (this is impossible) but to facilitate' (Christodoulides, 2009: 143).

Consumers now have three basic levels of interaction with brands (Asmussen et al., 2012):

1. Consumers can choose a passive way of interacting. Thus consumers create meaning out of brand manifestations that they get to experience, but which are not created or co-created by themselves, for instance, when shopping or watching adverts, or when being exposed to brand-originated messages on social media networks, for example retweets by friends, sponsored posts or indeed online advertising in the conventional form.
2. Consumers can choose to become active through co-creating brand meaning, aiming to create brand manifestations themselves in a limited way. They can create, with the facilitation of brand stakeholders, their own messages, spreading them across their individual networks. Examples of such practice would include retweeting, sharing or adapting content created by marketers, for instance viral videos or other sharable content posted on Facebook or other social media pages.
3. Consumers can create brand manifestations autonomously. This means that there is no control of the brand owner, and may include the establishment of rival brands. Typical examples can be found in the open source (OS) software community, where amateur developers develop software with similar functionality to commercial software for free. Similarly, users creating or restaging fake adverts and posting them on YouTube, some of which may involve real brands, are examples of this. Other examples are some of the pictures frequently found on some Facebook pages, where brand owners entice fans to submit pictures of them using the product or displaying the brands, which are then posted to all the fans.

Following this shared creation and control over the brand and brand narrative, and taking the consumer perspective as a central point, the remainder of this chapter looks at the idea of the co-creation process, discussing the notion of value and value creation in the process.

The chapter then moves on to explore how the co-creation manifests itself – from positive organisation and consumer collaboration to antagonistic forms of consumer empowerment in the form of value destructive co-creation – and in the form of reactive co-creation. The chapter concludes by looking at critiques of co-creation and implications of co-creating for traditional marketing theories.

Co-creation

Traditional economic theory, and by extension most traditional marketing models, conceptualises the roles of consumers and producers as distinct and separate – companies were producing goods for consumers. On the other side, most consumers are passive recipients of these goods, not directly involved in the production process (at least beyond market research activities).

However, McLuhan and Nevitt envisaged a more active consumer, directly involved in production, in the early 1970s. They suggested that, aided by technological advancement, the roles of consumer and producer would begin to merge (McLuhan and Nevitt, 1972). They did not foresee social media, or indeed communication technology, as a production tool. Rather, they assumed a more technical co-production. Nonetheless, through

the synergistic rise to popularity of communication technology and a move towards experiential consumption beyond the purchasing process, social media in many ways substitutes the original tools envisaged by McLuhan and Nevitt. However, as Ritzer (2004) argues, even without communication technology advancement, and rather as a result of pressure to rationalise, companies already started to 'put consumers to work': McDonald's restaurants have relied on consumers to perform the role of waiters since the 1940s, and even ATMs rely on 'everyone to work, at least for a few moments, as unpaid bank teller' (Ritzer, 2004: 63). The term prosumer, a producing consumer, was coined in the 1980s to describe consumers actively involved in production (Toffler, 1980). Prosumers originally described consumers who customise generally standardised goods by adding limited production to their consumption experience, for example in the case of DIY products, or individuals who decorate relatively standard products (e.g. by decorating the cover of a standard Apple laptop) to create an individual computer and consumption experience when using the computer.

In the sharing, liquid economy, consumers habitually take the role of prosumers (Eckhardt et al., 2019). For instance, consumers take over many of the traditional functions of a taxi service: they co-ordinate the ride via a platform with the driver, deliver quality control by providing feedback about their experience and can promote the company by sharing their experience through social media.

Therefore, aided by technological advances, prosumption moved beyond the mere customisation of products to active involvement of consumers in the creation of goods, services and brands – indeed everything related to a particular organisation. Even core competencies of companies are prosumed – consider the case of peer-to-peer lending, where consumers screen the loan applications for the people they will be lending to (Vallée and Zeng, 2019). The concept of co-creation can be seen as emergent from the earlier ideas related to prosumers and the **Experience Economy** and co-creation plays a central role in Service Dominant Logic, being frequently described in marketing terms as a way to empower consumers as active participants in the production process (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

Experience Economy

The management concept of the Experience Economy is mostly linked to the work of Pine and Gilmore (1999), who argue that a product is an object around which customers have experiences, and that the value of the object is therefore not the value of the object or product itself, but rather the value of the consumer's experiences surrounding it.

However, the link between experiences and product value had been discussed in the marketing literature well before Pine and Gilmore coined the term. For example, 17 years before Pine and Gilmore, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982: 132) argued for an 'experiential view that focuses on the symbolic, hedonic and aesthetic nature of consumption'. Similar to the view in Experience Economy, Holbrook and Hirschman suggest that consumers do not make consumption choices, or indeed derive value from objects, based merely on rational information processing. Rather, consumers pursue emotions, such as feelings of

fun or fulfilment of fantasies, when consuming. Although neither Holbrook and Hirschman nor Pine and Gilmore talk explicitly about social experiences, such as the experiences in tribes, tribal consumption or indeed online consumption through social media, as covered in the previous chapter, it is easy to see how the pursuit of experiences as a goal in consumption is companionable with a sharing of such experiences, as the literature around brand communities and tribes suggests.

Social media aids in this shared experience building and can effectively turn mundane events into a shared consumption experience. Consider, for example, the case of unboxing a new electronic item. Through sharing the process, using a YouTube video for example, other tribe members can participate in the excitement of opening the product. Thus, such a process creates valuable experiences not only for the unboxer, but his wider community (Mowlabocus, 2018).

Co-creation Concept

Co-creation, as introduced by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000), is going beyond the ideas put forward in the Experience Economy. Co-creation advocates a more interactive stance between company and customer, beyond shared experiences or customisation. Prahalad and Ramaswamy argue that the role of the company has moved beyond focusing on providing experiences for largely passive customers to customers becoming active prosumers, producers and consumers at the same time, stretching way beyond the traditional notion of prosumers' limited involvement. Central to this process is the co-production of value, which goes beyond the price of a product or service. In their words: 'the consumer and the firm [are] intimately involved in jointly creating value that is unique to the individual consumer' (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004: 16). Although Prahalad and Ramaswamy do not explicitly reference online co-creation opportunities in their original work, Ramaswamy and Gouillart (2010) later on acknowledge the pivotal role of social media in the co-creation process, and the influence of social networks, where consumers 'now expect to be able to communicate directly with one another and share and shape their own experiences' (2010: 2). As can be seen from studies into the selfie culture, consumers now challenge brand assemblages with their own versions of pictures of the brand (Rokka and Canniford, 2016). It could be argued that, through sharing of experiences and stories in the form of selfies and other social media posts, consumers are actually creating competing brand communication.

Co-creation is therefore an interactive and reciprocal action between consumer and producer. And although the power balance in this interaction may be asymmetric, co-creation is frequently described as mutually beneficial – or at least framed as a process which empowers consumers to have an active input into the creation process (Füller et al., 2006), i.e. moving from passive consumer to active co-producer alongside the organisation. Consequently, for managers, providing possibilities for co-creation of the consumption experience becomes a key objective: whether it is through simple facilitation of sharing activities, such as providing free Internet enabling social sharing of consumption, for

example in Apple stores, or where co-creation becomes more elaborate, facilitating tribal goals through brand objectives.

Service Dominant Logic

The concept of co-creation has been further integrated into the Service Dominant Logic (sometimes abbreviated to S-D Logic). Proponents of S-D Logic argue that modern consumption is no longer focused on tangible resources and goods. Rather, even around tangible products, the focus has been replaced by an emphasis on the co-creation of value through service, based on the interactions and relationship between producer and consumer (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). S-D Logic therefore evolves the concept of consumers as active agents, who create the value of their consumption experiences through dialogue and actively co-producing 'services'.

Vargo and Lusch argue that these new perspectives are converging to form a new 'dominant logic' where service provision is fundamental to economic exchange.

S-D Logic recognises social media and real-life social networks as indispensable tools for facilitating the co-creation of value (Edvardsson et al., 2010), although it aims to be a holistic marketing theory reaching beyond the scope of social media exclusively.

The view of brand creation in S-D Logic also complements the observations made in Chapter 1, and as Merz and colleagues (2009) suggest, marketing has evolved from what they call an 'Individual Goods-Focus Brand Era' to a 'Stakeholder-Focus Brand Era'. In this new area of marketing, brands are a dynamic, social process, involving engagement and co-creation of multiple stakeholders. In these aspects, S-D Logic elaborates on the tribal perspective, in that it adds other stakeholders to the creation process, i.e. it is not just friends, or other tribe members, who create a particular brand, but the creation process may also involve the company, brand managers and even individuals completely unrelated to the consumption process.

While S-D Logic generally tends to see co-creation as a positive process, the potential for a negative outcome has been highlighted (Echeverri and Skålén, 2011; Plé and Cáceres, 2010). See also later in this chapter where destruction of created value is discussed.

THINKBOX SERVICE OR PRODUCT?

Think of a product you bought recently, for example a coffee or a sandwich. What influence did the service element of the purchasing experience have on you? Have you ever shared such an experience using social media, by for example checking into a place or commenting on the experience? How did the price of the product relate to the experienced value?

Value

The concept of 'value' is both widely discussed as well as controversial in different disciplines, including in the marketing literature (Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007).

From a managerial perspective value is often discussed, simplistically, as a concept of profit maximisation: where a market price exceeds production cost, value is created for a company (Jensen, 2001). Similarly, in the context of marketing, value has been conceptualised in easy terms as the price paid for a product; that is, the value is something that can be measured objectively in terms of monetary value, which again is fundamental to the concept of exchange, conventionally considered at the heart of traditional marketing theory.

On the other side, for the consumer, the concept of value representing the understanding of the 'worth' of an object is significantly more complex. Value can include such diverse factors as the value of the product itself, augmented or linked attributes such as the product's brand, added services, etc. Therefore, value for the consumer is different from just the functional 'worth' or even the 'price' of a given product or service: it has a symbolic meaning at the same time. This symbolic meaning can be different from the purely functional meaning expressed as the price of a product. For example, Curasi and colleagues (2004) discuss how items of small or even no economic value become highly treasured items if they are connected to family history. Consequently, the value attached by consumers to individual items is not reflective of the monetary value of the item.

Table 2.1 Consumer value types (Holbrook, 1999)

		Extrinsic	**Intrinsic**
Self-oriented	Active	*Efficiency* Output/input, convenience	*Play* Fun
	Re-active	*Excellence* Quality	*Aesthetics* Beauty
Other-oriented	Active	*Status* Success, impression management	*Ethics* Justice, virtue, morality
	Re-active	*Esteem* Reputation, materialism, possessions	*Spirituality* Faith, ecstasy, sacredness

Source: Republished with permission of Routledge, from *Consumer Value: A Framework for Analysis and Research*, Holbrook, M.B., 1999

Consumer value perceptions are, consequently, individual to consumers: consumers perceive value differently depending on how, for example, an item helps them achieve their personal life or career goals. As Firat and colleagues (1995) show, the same product may have a different value – and type of value – attached to it depending on the consumer, for

example, one consumer buys a specific brand of sports shoes because they are comfortable to wear, while another consumer may be buying the same shoes in order to look fashionable. Holbrook, expanding on Firat's concept, describes eight different types of consumer values (see Table 2.1).

To add to the complexity of value for the consumer, the perceived value of a product can change over time; that is, the value is fluid and flexible, rather than static as the simple managerial view would suggest (Holbrook, 2006).

Holbrook acknowledges explicitly the role of a specific 'other-oriented' dimension of value, i.e. products being valued explicitly by consumers in relation to others, such as attempting to impress other people through the use of highly priced products, or as a way of entering a tribe.

Linking Value

Cova and Cova (Cova, 1997; Cova and Cova, 2002), by studying neo-tribal consumption practices, added a further level to the discussion of value creation. Rather than focusing on the value as seen by the consumer or the producer, they argued that products, and especially certain brands, also possess a value arising from the collectives of consumers using them. Thus, their focus on the value is going beyond the individual value perception that underlies Holbrook's work, or the managerial definitions of value.

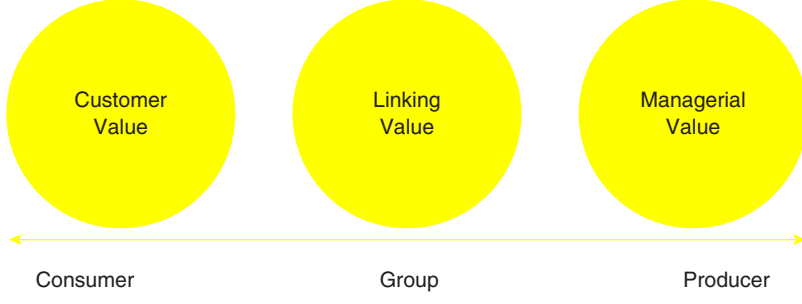

Figure 2.1 Value types

Linking value is derived from the social links a product or brand provides. As such, it is neither the producer who instils linking value into their products, nor is it the consumer individually who can create this value. Rather, linking value arises through the 'social links' a product creates between individual tribe members at a communal level.

In summary, three different sources of value can be identified (see Figure 2.1), all of which can be explicitly modified through social media influence.

Consumers can express different types of customer value in a form of self-expression, for example by posting pictures of products they consume. If they are doing this mainly as a way to increase their own self-perception, or even expecting rewards (e.g. likes) from friends, then the value arises from within the consumer, rather than the producer. On the opposite extreme, such self-expressions can increase managerial value through (positive)

word of mouth, allowing a higher price to be charged. However, ultimately, managerial value arises out of the price paid by consumers. Finally, linking value – arising from the wider group rather than the individual or the producer, in the form of the symbolic value of brands or consumption practices amongst tribes or brand communities – underlies much of social media consumer behaviour as it enables tribe members to identify other tribe members, for example, through identifying other individuals checking in at similar locations using location-based social networks.

THINKBOX VALUE

Think of different ways in which you can measure the value of an item you are currently wearing. Decide which of Holbrook's value types describes the value you attach to the item.

Check recent social media posts of people you follow. Can you identify brands or objects and attribute different types of value to them?

Creating Value

Rather than examining the types of value that can be created, Schau and colleagues (2009) focus on the practices that create value, especially in online communities. They identify 12 practices, covering four broad areas, of how brand communities create 'value' (see Table 2.2). Although their study was specifically aimed at brand communities, given the discussion in Chapter 1, it is likely that these practices also occur in non-brand-oriented tribes (i.e. tribes where brands or products are not the primary focus).

Table 2.2 Value creation in brand communities

Area	Practice	Description
Social networking	Welcoming	Welcoming new members to the community
	Emphasising	Lending emotion or physical support for brand-related issues
	Governing	Articulating behavioural expectations within the community
Community engagement	Staking	Recognising variance in group membership and emphasising intra-group similarity
	Documenting	Detailing brand relationships in narratives