

Chapter 2

UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMERS' ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITY USAGE

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INTRODUCTION

A new trend, internet-based communities, has become popular that internet users are signing up to join content sharing and talk to each other. LinkedIn.com, Facebook.com, youtube.com, Wkipedia.org and Twitter.com has shown a remarkable growth (Jensen, 2009). According to a report of China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in July 2010, almost half of the internet users have ever used online community (CNNIC, 2010 cited in Zhou, 2011). Globalization and information technology are changing the rules of the game and new digital life changed the borders that employees work more from home with laptop computers, smart phones not only for work but also for private (Jensen, 2009). Due to globalization, web sites are reachable from all over the World and internet gives opportunity to make worldwide branding which can be seen by everyone even if it is created for specific target. The web page is not just a way to enhance visibility; it is also becoming a way to monitor shop for many players in the information industry (Rowley, 2004b). Online platform gives both challenges and opportunities in terms of branding that it is significant to take attention on branding in digital platform and discover a number of the potential impacts of online channels for branding strategy (Rowley, 2004a).

Internet became one of the significant items to build a brand. Companies are doing different marketing activities to reinforce relationship with their customers. One of the marketing activities is to build an online community that Raban & Rafaeli (2007) defined online communities as self-organizing systems of informal learning which enable customers to interact and learn together by participating in common activities and discussions, helping each other and sharing information so that, a community and relationships can be built around the domain by helping of those interactions. The members of online community make contribution by sharing information and participating activities. A part of the sharing requires giving and taking emotional support in the online community (Chu, 2009).

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benefits such as belonging, pleasure, excitement and happiness.

Online brand communities can be more effective than traditional marketing efforts in some cases due to the high engagement. Individuals that make up the community can provide significant advantages to the business through word-of-mouth communication. In other words, consumers act as brand missionaries. Consumers adopting such a mission lead to the formation of brand loyalty and the business to gain significant advantages in the long term. By following the interactions that take place within the community, businesses can better understand consumers, consider the demands and needs of consumers while producing new products or services and shape their strategies in this direction. In particular, increasing interactions on social media and including consumers in these interactions ensure the adoption of the brand and new products.

Businesses that want to gain advantage in the increasingly competitive environment should keep up with technology and interact more with consumers. It should establish a bond with consumers in order to understand their wishes and needs and to meet these demands and needs in the right way. In particular, Consumers should also be involved in the process of enhancing or recreating the value of the brand.

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