



Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal

Knowledge sharing in online brand communities

Sarah Sloan Kelli Bodey Richard Gyrd-Jones

Article information:

To cite this document:

Sarah Sloan Kelli Bodey Richard Gyrd-Jones , (2015), "Knowledge sharing in online brand communities", Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal, Vol. 18 Iss 3 pp. 320 - 345

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/QMR-11-2013-0078>

Downloaded on: 20 January 2016, At: 02:11 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 97 other documents.

To copy this document: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 842 times since 2015*

Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

Laurence Dessart, Cleopatra Veloutsou, Anna Morgan-Thomas, (2015), "Consumer engagement in online brand communities: a social media perspective", Journal of Product & Brand Management, Vol. 24 Iss 1 pp. 28-42 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-06-2014-0635>

Jochen Wirtz, Anouk den Ambtman, Josée Bloemer, Csilla Horváth, B. Ramaseshan, Joris van de Klundert, Zeynep Gurhan Canli, Jay Kandampully, (2013), "Managing brands and customer engagement in online brand communities", Journal of Service Management, Vol. 24 Iss 3 pp. 223-244 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09564231311326978>

Xiabing Zheng, Christy M. K. Cheung, Matthew K.O. Lee, Liang Liang, (2015), "Building brand loyalty through user engagement in online brand communities in social networking sites", Information Technology & People, Vol. 28 Iss 1 pp. 90-106 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/ITP-08-2013-0144>

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:522623 []

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

QMR
18,3

320

Received 7 November 2013
Revised 19 August 2014
2 May 2015
Accepted 7 May 2015

Knowledge sharing in online brand communities

Sarah Sloan

Griffith University, Southport, Australia, and

Kelli Bodey and Richard Gyrð-Jones

Department of Marketing, Griffith University, Southport, Australia

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper was to explore the role knowledge sharing plays in both firm-sponsored (FS) and user-generated (UG) Online Brand Communities (OBCs) on Facebook. Branding through online mediums is an under-researched area that is slowly gaining attention in the literature. In some ways, action has come first as theory struggles to catch up with technological advances. Given that social sharing behaviours (i.e. online social networking) are arguably driving the strategic direction of marketers, it is important to understand the discourse that is being communicated. One such avenue is through participation in an OBC. While it is apparent that research is growing in the OBC area, there are still areas of interest that have gained little attention.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected using netnography, an appropriate yet under-applied methodological technique used to investigate the consumer behaviour of cultures and communities present on the Internet. Specifically, Facebook Pages relating to five OBCs based on the cruise-liner P&O Australia have been chosen for this case study.

Findings – Results indicate that in both the FS and UG OBCs, knowledge-sharing was seen to have an important influence on pre-purchase decision-making. It also acted as a mechanism for trust building and sharing brand experiences and as an important encouragement to developing a sense of community among community members. A particularly interesting outcome of this research was the way in which consumers have taken on an active role in co-creating brand identity, which seemingly illuminates the role of brand management in social media.

Practical implications – Given that this research was conducted with a real brand, with real customers, in a real OBC, the findings also point to some important practical applications. This study has found that the role of brands in their online forums is paramount, and as such, highlights the importance of effective brand governance. The rise of technology brings increased opportunities for a brand to reach out to their consumers. This study makes a further contribution by providing insights into how the consumer–brand relationship is shaped by the communication that occurs between consumers. To this end, consumers see it as the brand's responsibility to monitor such online platforms, thus indicating the management of OBCs needs to be at the forefront of brand management practices.

Originality/value – This study represents one of the earliest investigations of brand communities facilitated by social media, specifically focusing on Facebook as the communication platform. Importantly, this study increases our knowledge of consumer interaction in social media, with an emphasis towards the role that knowledge sharing contributes to OBCs and the differences prevalent between FS and UG online communities.

Keywords Facebook, Netnography, Knowledge sharing, Brand community, Online communication

Paper type Research paper



Introduction and background

Advances in technology have shifted the dynamic in branding and have created opportunities in which consumers can gain access to and influence the brand. One such avenue is through the formation and participation in an online brand community (OBC), which represents a means by which organisations and consumers can work together to give meaning to the brand through shared information. This concept of branding therefore becomes one of co-creation (Lusch and Vargo, 2006) whereby the brand not only defines the consumer yet the consumer defines the brand. Seminal work by Porter (2004) proposed a typology of online communities distinguishing between the establishment of online communities and the relationship orientation of such communities. Central to this research was the inclusion of both firm-sponsored (FS) and user-generated (UG) OBCs. FS OBCs are initiated and managed by the firm to build relationships with current and potential customers (McWilliam, 2000) and are under the firm's ultimate control. By forming and consistently maintaining OBCs, brands show that they value their consumers as partners in the development and enhancement of their relationships with current and future customers (Sung *et al.*, 2010). However, on the flip side are UG communities, those that are established, run and managed solely by the members that comprise the community. Consumers that create UG OBCs value exchange, authenticity and access (Yannopoulou *et al.*, 2013) and are seen as being especially active and empowered with respect to their brands. In this sense, they regard the brand as "belonging to us" rather than simply being company owned (Cova and Pace, 2006).

While this research is still preliminary, FS online communities have generally received greater attention in the literature (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Gummerus *et al.*, 2012; Royo-Vela and Casamassima, 2010). Interestingly, there has been little research focused on UG OBCs despite this area being considered "widely untapped" (Burmman, 2010, p. 1). Typically, scholars exploring OBCs have focused upon areas concerning affective commitment, word of mouth (WOM), satisfaction (Hutter *et al.*, 2013; Royo-Vela and Casamassima, 2010; Shang *et al.*, 2006), functional and social determinants of online communities (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002; Dholakia *et al.*, 2009), brand loyalty (Shang *et al.*, 2006), customer relationship management (Nambisan and Baron, 2007), purchase intentions (Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Hutter *et al.*, 2013) and value creation (Schau *et al.*, 2009), notably, all from firm-initiated OBCs.

Further examination of the OBC literature suggests that traditionally the common online platforms utilised were centred on websites (Dholakia *et al.*, 2009; Xue and Phelps, 2004), chat rooms (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002) and discussion forums (Antorini, 2007; Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Kozinets, 1998, 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Although we acknowledge the growth of literature regarding OBCs (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012; Royo-Vela and Casamassima, 2010), there is limited research explicating the use of OBCs in the context of social media platforms (e.g. Facebook). Social media is viewed as an important component governing brands and their ability to establish an effective and value-driven online presence (Hutter *et al.*, 2013). In fact, the social nature of brands (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) and the relevance of relationships in co-creating brand value (Fuller *et al.*, 2012) endorse the use of social media. In this sense, social media is a marketing channel which facilitates community building and active participation between consumers (Hutter *et al.*, 2013), enabling them to not only influence brand value

yet evoke challenges for brand managers to manage their brand more effectively. This study intends to explore the use of OBCs in the context of Facebook. It should be said that of the limited studies that have investigated the use of OBCs via social media platforms (i.e. most often through Facebook) limitations present, as consistently the findings are based on that founded through firm initiated OBCs (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012; Hutter *et al.*, 2013; Royo-Vela and Casamassima, 2010).

A major contribution of this study is that to our knowledge there are no studies that have *simultaneously* compared FS and UG OBCs of the one brand and through social media as two-sides of the continuum (FS → UG OBCs) need to be understood. We believe that the information shared on a FS OBC would differ from that offered on a UG OBC. Questions regarding the reasons why consumers initiate OBCs (i.e. UG OBCs) rather than simply connect with the FS OBC remain unclear. Although our study does not attempt to directly address why this occurs, we do seek to provide a greater understanding of how knowledge is exchanged through both FS as opposed to UG OBCs of the one brand. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that UG OBCs are founded due to first mover motives where no pre-established FS OBC exists, trust (Casalo *et al.*, 2007; Shang *et al.*, 2006) and control (Bernoff and Li, 2008; Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001). Despite such assertions, early research by Xue and Phelps (2004) suggest that the influence of information exchanged on forums that are hosted on corporate websites will differ from those hosted on independently owned websites. Similarly, this can be extended to FS communities and UG communities. They expect that the interaction given by the firm on sponsored, or “official” Facebook Pages decreases the credibility of the information exchanged. In fact, in a recent study using Facebook, Gummerus *et al.* (2012) found that few customers actively interact with the brands content and with each other concurrently. Commonly, most community members use the OBC as a source of information by means of reading posts. Based on the preceding discussion, it is apparent that there exists a limited understanding of how knowledge is shared across FS as opposed to UG OBCs; which is an important question to address.

Therefore, this study will explore the role of *knowledge sharing*, a construct considered central to explaining the communication that occurs between people and a key component driving social exchange theory (SET) (Bock and Kim, 2002). By definition, knowledge sharing offers people the opportunity to share and internalise their knowledge through experiences and to exchange their knowledge to assist in overcoming a certain problem (Ardichvilli *et al.*, 2003). Such benefits provided through knowledge sharing can reduce the time and cost associated with OBCs as customers act in a capacity which enables them to serve one another (McWilliam, 2000). The key objective of this study is to examine how *knowledge sharing* contributes to OBCs and identify any differences prevalent between FS and UG OBCs. Specifically, this study seeks to increase knowledge of consumer interaction in social media and thus the specific research question to be investigated is:

RQ1. How does knowledge sharing take place in FS versus UG OBCs on Facebook?

Literature review

To address the research question proposed, online communities, social networks as facilitators of online communities and customer-to-customer communication are reviewed. As knowledge sharing is a central component governing SET, the literature pertaining to SET in the context of online interaction will be discussed.

Online communities

Recently, the Internet has made it possible for consumers to form linkages with other consumers to satisfy their sense of community (Huang and Hsu, 2010) through online mediums such as websites, chat rooms, forums and most recently social media. An OBC is defined as a “specialised, non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of the brand” (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412). These OBCs are shaped by the contributions and discourse of like-minded *netizens* (Murphy, 1997), while the service personnel acts as moderators (Huang and Hsu, 2010), setting the stage for consumers to create their own experiences (Morgan, 2007). As a result, OBCs are effective vehicles for allowing consumers to communicate with each other. For example, commonly online communities are utilised as a mechanism to reduce risk prior to purchase. Adjel *et al.* (2010; Casalo *et al.*, 2007) found that consumers often seek to participate in a brand community to reduce uncertainty in the purchase decision-making process by obtaining valued input from others. It is through member participation and interaction in online communities that members become embedded in the online community. This process turns casual users into members, members into contributors and contributors into evangelists (Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001).

This raises the question of a brand’s participation in their online community. Krieger and Muller (2003) attest that brands need to take on the role of designers by igniting and maintaining interpersonal exchange and stabilising the community. This is essentially suggesting brands take a “front seat” in the management of their community. Contrasting this perspective is that put forward by Fournier and Avery (2011) of the uninvited brand. That is, consumers fighting back as brands push their way into consumer-dominated social spaces. This perspective turns strategies of brand promotion into brand protection. In essence, brands should take a “back seat”, as consumers become the creators and disseminators of content. Within this line of thinking, we can see that OBCs are changing the face of brands.

Social networks as a facilitator of online communities. The growth of social networking sites in the past few years facilitates the development of brand communities on social networking sites. For instance, some of the more popular FS OBCs on Facebook include Coca-Cola (more than 50 million fans), Pringles Australia (more than 1 million fans) and the X-Factor TV Show (more than 5 million fans) to name a few. Social media is defined by Kaplan and Hanlein (2010, p. 60) as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of the Web 2.0 that allow creation and exchange of UG content”. There are a number of different social network sites, including MySpace, Facebook, Google Plus, YouTube and LinkedIn where users can create a profile and build a personal network that connects them to other users (Lenhart and Madden, 2007). Members of such social networks use the sites to engage within their networks and create new network links with people they may not have known if they were not members of the social network (Sung *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, one can see that the purpose of social media is to exchange information, maintain relationships and collaborate.

A challenge lies, however, in the realisation that social media was built for use by people, not brands (Fournier and Avery, 2011). As such, consumers have been seen to actively rebut against brands that attempt to move into their social space (see, for example, consumers’ hijack of Jeep). On the other hand, this also presents an opportunity

for brands. Having access to so many users, who are also segmented by numerous categories gives brands unprecedented targeting opportunities. Ultimately, brands will learn to seize the opportunities presented by social media, and overcome the challenges this brings.

Recent research has explored the role of Facebook in online communities. For example, [Gummerus et al. \(2012\)](#) broadly explored customer engagement in OBCs. They found that customer engagement had positive effects on relationship benefits such as liking content, writing content and reading messages. Additionally, they identified positive effects regarding social and entertainment benefits yet negative transactional benefits such as increasing brand purchases. In a similar study, [Hutter et al. \(2013\)](#) explored user interactions on brand awareness and purchase intentions. Based on a Facebook fan page, their findings infer that engagement had positive effects on consumers' brand awareness, WOM activities and purchase intentions. Further to these findings, they suggest that commitment and involvement are negatively affected when members feel annoyed with the fan page. Although [Royo-Vela and Casamassima \(2010\)](#) used Facebook, they did so to establish the context of the study as to enable them to measure frequency of participation and to obtain an immediate sample, as opposed to providing further insight into the value of social media on OBCs.

Customer-to-customer communication. [Rothaermel and Sugiyama \(2001\)](#) highlighted the large potential the Internet has for multi-way information transmission, allowing one-to-one, one-to-many or many-to-many information. These extended communication opportunities have allowed consumers the chance to not only build relationships with the brand but also with other consumers, facilitated by OBCs. Such communities are becoming essential conduits for the customer-to-customer sharing of product information, know-how, experience and WOM ([Adjel et al., 2010](#); [Gruen et al., 2006](#); [Hagel and Armstrong, 1997](#); [Williams and Cothrel, 2000](#)). The extant literature has focussed on customer contact with the firm and service personnel, while less has been reported about customer-to-customer interactions. Typically, services marketing literature takes a rather narrow focus on the important role of customers in a service transaction. However, other customers' presence, and indeed communication with other customers, can impact on the overall service experience ([Huang and Hsu, 2010](#)). This customer-to-customer communication can be in the form of conversations, or one-off encounters. Conceptually, conversations between individuals can be viewed as a series of exchanges that generate obligations ([Emerson, 1976](#)). Online customer-to-customer communication refers to the ongoing communication processes that occur between consumers in an OBC, facilitated by technological platforms ([Hagel and Armstrong, 1997](#); [Williams and Cothrel, 2000](#)). These communications are shown to be quite complex ([Nicholls, 2010](#)), though driven by weak ties ([Gruen et al., 2006](#)).

[Martin and Pranter \(1989\)](#) were the first to explore customer-to-customer communication in a comprehensive manner. This article sparked a steady interest in this subject matter, which has opened the door for many researchers to explore alternative perspectives of customer-to-customer communication. Essentially, the study of customer-to-customer communication was born from the services marketing literature that focuses on the customers as the "people" aspect of the services marketing mix ([Elliot et al., 2010](#)). [Vargo and Lusch \(2004\)](#) suggested that customers should be viewed as operant resources. Such resources are said to be invisible and intangible, dynamic and infinite. The service-centred dominant logic highlights operant resources

as essential, due to the fact that they produce effects. Therefore, this affects the way customers are regarded. This is in line with the authors that investigate the role of customer participation in service production (Bowen, 1986; Johnston, 1989; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004), which led to the theoretical foundation of customer-to-customer communication as a form of co-production. As a result, a number of service frameworks have incorporated this into their models of production, delivery and consumption. However, these models fail to incorporate the consumer point of view, and instead view customers as disposable resources. This attitude is juxtaposed by Martin and Clark (1996) who proposed a model of relationships with three levels, and position customer-to-customer communication as part of a network of many relationships. Building on this, Baron and Harris (2007) model relationships from the perspective of a consumers experience. This approach repositions other customers as central to the network of consumer experience, and provides a healthy opposition to the dominant “focal firm” perspective. This perspective is useful to the understanding of brand communities, as these are driven by, and effectively exist, for consumers.

From a stakeholder point of view, understanding and managing customer-to-customer communications is crucial, as the purpose of maintaining an OBC is to facilitate customer-to-customer communications. This customer-to-customer communication has benefits for the firm, as customers can be viewed as a valuable resource, generating positive associations with the company. Product information received from other customers is perceived to be more credible than information given by the sponsoring firm (Martin and Clark, 1996). Conversations with other customers were found to lead to greater customer satisfaction (Casalo *et al.*, 2007; Harris *et al.*, 1997; Nicholls, 2010) and can have significant effects on the overall value of the firm’s offering (Gruen *et al.*, 2006), providing an opportunity that brands can leverage. Given the current growth of branding through social media sites, we cannot disregard that this presents key challenges to the brand. Of particular acknowledgement is the ability to retain control over all facets not only incumbent internally within a brand yet how the brand is portrayed externally among consumers. Loss of control of the brand (Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001) is considered one of the most difficult aspects prevalent in an OBC. For example, viral negative WOM administered through social media can have devastating consequences to an organisation. This is particularly evident when consumers take it upon themselves to establish their own online communities centred on a brand (UG) OBCs (Hautz *et al.*, 2013; Porter, 2004). While brands have ceded a certain degree of control to their community members, they do so to benefit from their investment in the OBC. As consumers are increasing their role in constructing the identity of the brand, it is important to monitor the actions that they use to do this, and seek to influence this process.

Social exchange theory

Social media exists to facilitate communication within a social context. As such, it is appropriate to examine communication on Facebook with SET as the theoretical framework. SET is one of the fundamental theories to aid understanding of communication that occurs between individuals, and within groups. It explains why people help each other, exchange knowledge and generate WOM (Blanchard, 2008). Embedded within the notion of SET is the concept of norms of reciprocity; inferring that knowledge occurs either between two people (i.e. direct) or between a group (i.e. indirect)

(Flynn, 2005). Further, it is suggested that the level of affective attachment that individuals have towards a person or group is largely determined by the level of support exchanged (Flynn, 2005). Although differing theories of social exchange exist, theorists do converge on the central essence of SET; social exchange comprises actions contingent on the rewarding reactions of others, which over time provide for mutually and rewarding transactions and relationships (Emerson, 1976). To conceptualise an exchange, there seems to be some agreement that it constitutes a series of interdependent transactions that produce some sort of interpersonal attachment – this notion is fundamental to SET (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchel, 2005; Emerson, 1976; Rheingold, 2000).

SETs roots can be traced back to at least the 1920s (Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 1925), bridging such disciplines as anthropology (Firth, 1967; Sahlin, 1972), social psychology (Gouldner, 1960; Homans, 1958; Thibault and Kelley, 1959) and sociology (Blau, 1964). Most recently, Blanchard (2008) utilised SET to examine communication in an online community. She explored the idea of a sense of virtual community (SOVC), finding that norms should mediate the relationships between the public exchange of support and SOVC. In addition to this successful utilisation of this framework, much of the literature supports the use of a social communications framework online (Brown *et al.*, 2007). Online communities are self-sustaining social systems in which members engage and connect with each other (Rheingold, 2000) and are likely to form interpersonal attachments. There are a variety of ways in which members exchange support in online communities. This support may be exchanged publicly through Facebook wall posts, or privately through Facebook-facilitated private messages. Public exchanges on the Facebook wall are more beneficial to the community, as all members can benefit from the support exchange even if they were not active in creating it (Blanchard, 2008). SET ascertains that certain aspects of an exchange, including knowledge sharing can aid understanding of communication between individuals. As such, knowledge sharing within both FS and UG OBCs will be the focus of this study.

Knowledge sharing exchanges. One example of eWOM that primarily results in generation of utilitarian value is knowledge sharing exchanges (also known as know-how exchange). Knowledge sharing exchanges can be viewed as the accumulated practical skill or expertise that is shared among interactions among individuals to enhance knowledge and improve efficiency (Gruen *et al.*, 2006; Orr, 1990). Knowledge sharing can be viewed with regards to motivation, opportunity and ability drive (MOA) (Siemsen *et al.*, 2008). That is, community members are motivated to share knowledge, they have access to the community which provides the opportunity to share knowledge and the ability to share knowledge comes from the intrinsic knowledge they possess. While this type of knowledge is tacit, complex and difficult to codify, it has also been acknowledged that it is valuable and can lead to a sustainable competitive advantage (Bock and Kim, 2002).

To this end, knowledge sharing is regarded as a key success factor of communities (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Shang *et al.*, 2006) and a probable factor influencing customer perceptions of brand value and likelihood to recommend the brand (Gruen *et al.*, 2006). It is suggested that collective knowledge, when shared, builds relationships and strengthens trust amongst community members. In fact, trust in a community has been found to be the strongest predictor of knowledge exchange (Usoro *et al.*, 2007). From an online context, Corritore *et al.* (2003) found trust to be a key factor driving success in an

online environment. Additionally, as OBCs lack face-to-face contact, there is a higher degree of perceived risk on part of participants whereby other members may act in an untoward manner impeding the reliability of OBCs (e.g. opportunistic behaviour). Contentions proposed by [Usoro *et al.* \(2007\)](#) suggest that the more competent an online community is (i.e. knowledgeable, effective and capable), the more likely members will share knowledge. In this sense, the transference of knowledge between participants must be considered valuable to each party ([Casalo *et al.*, 2007](#)). Further, they suggest that the stronger the emotional feelings are towards a brand, the greater the commitment of members to that brand successively increasing the likelihood of trust in the brand. Not surprisingly, if trust is not evident in an online community, this may influence a member's willingness to participate in the OBC ([Casalo *et al.*, 2007](#); [Shang *et al.*, 2006](#)). Such inferences may provide further validation for the initiation of UG OBCs. Although a small proportion of studies have explored trust in an online community, often trust is linked to member participation (e.g. frequency of posts) ([Casalo *et al.*, 2007](#); [Shang *et al.*, 2006](#)) rather than the value of the content of knowledge exchanged by community members; an outcome of this study.

Research design

To answer the research question, netnography was used to analyse multiple OBCs that exist on Facebook. Facebook was chosen as the communication platform as over 79 per cent of social media log ins by online retailers are with Facebook, compared to 12 per cent for Google+, and 4 per cent for Twitter ([GIGYA, 2013](#)). Most importantly, more than 50 per cent of active adult social networkers follow a particular brand/s using social networking sites such as Facebook ([de Vries *et al.*, 2011](#)).

The purpose of this research was to shed light on the differences in communication between FS and UG OBCs as to highlight the role that knowledge sharing played in an OBC. To maintain confidentiality, the brand aligned with the Facebook pages will not be disclosed; however, to provide depth and clarity to the analysis, the context of this research was based on a cruise liner company (Brand X). The setting ultimately chosen comprised of the FS Brand X Facebook Page, and four UG Facebook Pages devoted to each of the four ships that Brand X operate in Australia, namely, Brand X1, Brand X2, Brand X3 and Brand X4. Facebook Pages relating to Brand X have been chosen for this case study for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is an official Brand X Facebook Page, as well as four community-created Facebook Pages dedicated to Brand X. This will allow for comparisons across FS and UG OBCs while still maintaining the same primary topic and target market. Secondly, these OBCs meet the criteria proposed by [Kozinets \(2002\)](#) for choosing suitable online forums for netnography. The criteria are that desirable online communities have: a focused topic, high posting traffic, a high number of discrete message posters, detailed or descriptively rich data and a high level of member-to-member interaction of the type required by the research question. Thirdly, these Facebook Pages have a large number of participants, with the FS Page members numbering more than 55,000 at the time of data collection, and exhibit a steady rate of growth. Together, the four UG Brand X Facebook Pages (i.e. X1, Brand X2, Brand X3 and Brand X4) have a total of over 4,600 members. This will allow a great depth of information to be extracted during the data collection phase of this research.

The technique of netnography was pioneered by Robert Kozinets as a new qualitative method, devised specifically to investigate the consumer behaviour of

cultures and communities present on the Internet (Kozinets, 1998). Both the fieldwork and the textual account are methodologically informed by the traditions and techniques of cultural anthropology. Therefore, netnography represents a convergence between a long established qualitative research technique and an emergent research context (Prior and Miller, 2010; Kozinets, 2002). Internet-based research is a relatively new approach to empirical social science, though the guiding objectives of utilising this technique are related to authentic ethnography, to gain acceptance of the group and fit in as a cultural insider of the OBC, while still pursuing the goal of research. As such, one can see that the methods used to capture marketing data via the Internet resemble those found prior to the advent of the Internet (Prior and Miller, 2010), and is informed by the traditions and techniques of cultural anthropology (Kozinets, 1998). Netnography is used to understand online communities in the same ways that anthropologists seek to understand the cultures, norms and practices of face-to-face communities (Sandlin, 2007). Essentially, netnography is the application of ethnographic methods to an online context. Though netnography has been in use since the late 1990s in the fields of consumer behaviour and marketing in an online context (Cova and Pace, 2006; Kozinets, 2002), it has rarely been utilised by researchers to investigate social media (Raghe *et al.*, 2013).

Essentially, the use of netnography involves a three-stage process: the cultural entrée to establish oneself as an insider of the community, the collection and subsequent analysis of customer-to-customer communication (Kozinets, 2002). The entrée process was conducted over a period of one year, and involved the following four fairly distinct activities; lurking, joining the OBC, responding to other community member's posts and creating one's own posts. This entrée process was adapted for Facebook use from previous recommendations given by Kozinets (1998, 2002). Successful completion of this entrée process enabled the researcher to become absorbed into the culture of the group, and to understand the nuances of online conversations. Secondly, the analysis of customer-to-customer communication was undertaken over a two-week period, as this is the common guideline by which previous studies have been conducted (Adjel *et al.*, 2010). That is, every "post" on each of the Facebook Page "walls" or "timeline" that appears during this time was extracted and analysed. Replies to these posts were monitored and extracted up to a period of 72 hours, after which it has been found that responses do not usually occur (Adjel *et al.*, 2010). This was done manually ensuring that context of the conversation is not lost. To apply SET, thematic analysis was used to analyse the conversations. That is, the researcher used deductive reasoning to search for exchanges within the OBC's that exhibited knowledge sharing, and these were then coded as such. These exchanges were further analysed, sub-coded and compared to each other, using a constant comparative method. This analysis was conducted by one coder as advocated by Kozinets (2002) as a means to ensure maximum reliability.

Analysis and results

Conversations from the FS and UG OBCs were collected over a two-week period and analysed thematically. It was noted that the FS Facebook Page was extremely active, receiving an average of 85 original posts per day, with some average of 340 reply comments to those posts. On the other hand, the UG communities were less active, with only an average of only six original posts, and an average of two reply comments to these posts. This lower level of postings and corresponding comments can be attributed to the low number of community members, and associated low level of traffic (refer to Table I).

Topics	FS OBC	UG OBC
Importance of knowledge sharing within the community	Knowledge sharing a key driver of the OBC Occurs between cruising novices and more experienced past passengers	Not a key driver of the OBC Generally, OBC members are highly knowledgeable past passengers Occurs between community members and also between community members and Page administrators
Topics	<i>A range of topics</i> Pre-cruise checklist Information about shore excursions and spa treatments What to pack and Theme nights	<i>Modest range of topics</i> When the Brand X3 cruise ship would leave the fleet Features of the ships Upgrades to the ships Scheduled maintenance to ships and Information relevant to cruising with Brand X No influence from Brand X itself
Firm influence	Driven in large part by the firm itself Brand X advertises the OBC as a place where "You can ask all your cruising questions" Likely to influence community member's usage of OBC and solicit knowledge sharing among members	Administrators regularly interact with OBC members Administrators regularly start conversations for entertainment value Administrators play an active part in value creation for the firm
Negative use of page	Some community members use knowledge sharing as an opportunity for self advertisement and self promotion	Rare acts of negative use of the Page Status not really an issue in User Generated community Administrators who would usually be afforded a higher status in the community act in a way that belies this assumption
Positive use of page	Some members display selfless acts of kindness Members go to extraordinary lengths to help new cruisers Community member David created his own website and has been recognised by the firm for his contribution	Community members volunteer for the role of administrator of the OBC Community members aid each other by answering questions and sharing knowledge Community members utilise the OBC as a form of entertainment, and as part of an overarching hobby regarding cruise ships Community members exhibited a sense of community
Sense of community	Knowledge sharing encourages interaction and participation between community members As people get to know one another, come to recognise the regulars, and this in turn builds the community OBC members begin to feel a sense of belonging to a community	Knowledge sharing encourages interaction and participation between community members As people get to know one another, come to recognise the regulars, and this in turn builds the community OBC members begin to feel a sense of belonging to a community
Value creation	Collective knowledge, when shared, creates value for the firm The knowledge that was shared was highly individualistic, timely and relevant, providing advice to those new to cruising Tacit information voluntarily shared by past Brand X cruisers Value was primarily created by customers, unprompted by the firm	Administrators play an active part in value creation for the firm OBC members rarely began conversations, and low traffic to the OBC was as an issue OBC page administrators provided the value in this instance by generating discussion, posting pictures and questions to stimulate OBC involvement

Table I.
Results and
comparison of
knowledge sharing in
FS and UG OBC's

Knowledge sharing in a FS OBC

The FS community received a high degree of posts and traffic during the data collection period. This can be attributed to the high number of OBC members that Brand X has, being 55, 271 at the end of the data collection period.

Based on the research question, knowledge sharing was found to be a key driver of the FS OBC. This occurred between cruising novices who would use the OBC's as information-seeking devices, and experienced past passengers of Brand X who would answer the questions using their tacit knowledge. Such knowledge that was shared is that acquired through past experience cruising with Brand X. This knowledge is highly individualistic, and is viewed among community members as highly valuable. With Facebook usage at an all-time high, community members found they could access individualised responses to their questions in a convenient online location. Knowledge sharing in the FS OBC was largely given by a select few, and in fact these few community members were seen to dominate the community with their knowledge sharing behaviours.

There is a high degree of knowledge sharing on the Brand X FS Page, which has been driven collaboratively by the firm and participants. Essentially Brand X has cultivated a self-sustaining community that can be regarded as a sustainable competitive advantage for the firm. One could assert that Brand X recognises the benefits to be gained by encouraging and sustaining an OBC. As such, Brand X often advertises this fact in their online and offline communications. The value to current community members and those not yet acquainted with Brand X is recognised and promoted by the firm in their advertisements, with a focus on the Brand X Facebook Page being a place where "You can ask all your cruising questions". This encouragement is likely to influence community member's usage of the site and solicit knowledge sharing among members. It is also likely to encourage a community centred on the key topic of cruising, thereby reducing off-topic posts (Porter, 2004). When analysing knowledge sharing on the FS Page, it was found that a range of topics were covered, people used the community as an avenue for self-promotion and to contribute selfless acts, which ultimately generated a sense of community among community members.

Topics. Knowledge shared on the FS OBC concerned a large range of topics. The most represented topics were a pre-cruise checklist, information concerning shore excursions and spa treatments, what to take and pack for the cruise and which theme nights would feature in the entertainment schedule. This is information that has been gained by consumers through experience cruising with Brand X, and as such, those experienced community members could answer these questions.

This can be seen in the following Facebook conversation:

My children want to send postcards to their friends [...] do I need to search for somewhere to post them on land, or can I hand them in somewhere on the ship for posting?" (Original Facebook Post [Jenny]).

Stamps and mailbox at Pursers Desk. Be prepared to get home before post cards arrive (First Facebook Comment [Joanne]).

The information that was shared can be judged to be extremely useful, and was highly individualised to the question that had been asked. Often, the person replying will not only answer the question being asked but also add extra unsought information in that

they think would be useful. This can be seen in the following exchange between four Brand X OBC members:

Does everyone get seasick or is it only certain people. I have never cruised before and heard some horror stories about people getting seasick and I wonder if I should take medicine or not (Original Facebook Post [Lynette]).

You will be fine, just keep yourself busy and don't worry about it, you can also get some products for seasickness on board if needed (First Facebook Comment [Paul]).

Hi Lynette, until two weeks ago I had never been on a cruise before so I got myself some travacalm with ginger seasickness tablets, the first night onboard I felt nauseas and I had a tablet, the 2nd day I only had one tablet and I was alright after that. Keep yourself hydrated and I'm sure you'll be fine (Second Facebook comment [Wendy]).

Just take some preventatives. If you suffer any type of motion sickness (car, plane, boat). If you do get sick there are medications available on board as well as a visit to the ship's doctor (although this costs quite a lot) (Third Facebook Comment [Shelly]).

In this way, community members are sharing tacit information that is individualised (Bock and Kim, 2002), relevant and likely to be useful to the individual, and which adds to the community knowledge bank.

Self-promotion and selfless acts. As evidenced in the literature (Lakhani and von Hippel, 2003), acts of self-promotion and selfless acts can be perceived as one of the other. That is, an act which is perceived to be selfless could also be perceived as an act of self-promotion. The first part of this section relays acts of self-promotion, whilst the later part of this section illustrates an example of what can be perceived as both a selfless act and an act of self-promotion simultaneously.

In some cases, Brand X FS OBC members used their level of knowledge to display how many cruises they have taken with Brand X. Essentially, these can be viewed as acts of self-promotion whereby the community member is attaining a sense of self from displaying this behaviour:

My 9th cruise and even done two Brand X UK ships twice each (Original Facebook Post [Josh]).

In this case, Josh is referring to additional cruise ships in the Brand X fleet and delighting in the number of cruises he has taken, and which ships he has experienced. However, another example of how FS OBC members establish their seniority within the community is shown by Meme:

Woo Im off on J216 soon, my 6th cruise overall and 3rd with Brand X. Bring it on! (Original Facebook Post [Meme]).

I love Brand X too, but I'm only up to my second cruise which is booked for June (First Facebook Comment [Paula]).

Keep cruising with them Paula, Brand X are lovely and I love the benefits we get for repeated cruises with them (Second Facebook Comment [Meme]).

Both of the above excerpts from Josh and Meme can be considered as simply acts to increase their status in the online community and in consequence failing to contribute any new relevant information or knowledge to the community. It can be said that some cruisers believe this is acceptable self-promotion behaviour, as OBC members are evidently showing enthusiasm for the Brand X brand.

There are some community members in the FS community that were found to contribute both selfless acts of kindness and elements of self-promotion simultaneously. For example, going to extraordinary lengths to share information with less knowledgeable community members can be said to be a selfless act. Within this community exists a community member known as David. He is a past cruiser of Brand X Australia, and is often regarded as a leader or an *aficionado* by community members. He is seen to contribute to the Brand X FS OBC Page on a daily basis, and has gone to unexpected lengths to help new cruisers. However, David has also established his own Facebook Page where he posts information for first time Brand X cruisers and constantly redirects cruisers to this page; this could be perceived as an act of self-promotion. David has also gone to the extraordinary step of creating his own website where he also hosts relevant information about cruising with Brand X. Such information found on the website includes a guide to each of the ports that Brand X visits, maps of such ports and pictures of his past travels. Additionally, David can be seen offering other Brand X community member's further information regarding cruising, which he subsequently emails to them:

Bags are out but what to pack and we leave in three days! Fiji cruise [...] can anyone give suggestions plz, TIA! (Original Facebook Post [Donna]).

Uncertain if you are aware or interested, but I have developed a set of what to pack lists, and a cruise cost calculator, as well as plenty of other cruising hints and tips. It also includes information on the ports, together with suggestions and links for tours which are available for download on my new website: www.gdbucko1.magix.net/website (First Facebook comment [David]).

Through these acts, David has built a reputation among the community as an extremely knowledgeable community leader. Accordingly, the firm has recognised his contribution to the community, and has been featured in the Brand X blog.

Sense of community. In the Brand X FS community, it was observed that sharing knowledge encourages interaction and participation between community members. By doing this, people get to know one another, come to recognise the regulars, and this in turn builds the community. Not only this, but community members can begin to feel a sense of belonging to a community. Through their interaction, they can begin to feel they can identify as an insider, a "cruise junkie" or "cruise addict" as many Brand X community members refer to themselves, as shown below:

I am afraid!!! (Original Facebook post [Anne-Marie]).

[...] of what? (First Facebook comment [Sally]).

[...] of becoming a cruise-a-holic!!!! hee hee (Second Facebook comment [Anne-Marie]).

As a community member begins to identify as a member of the FS Brand X OBC, they can begin to understand the "insider acts" such as posting up a picture of how many days left until your next Brand X cruise, and the insider terminology, such as referring to the Brand X ships in the shortened version (e.g. Brand X1 becomes "the 1"). A highly interesting example is relayed below:

Exactly five months today and we steal the brand X1 again! (Original Facebook post [Cassie]).

Here, Cassie is showing ownership and possessiveness of brand elements, and has used some insider terminology, which other OBC members would understand. She is also

counting down until her next cruise, which is a common way for OBC members to relate to each other.

In addition to displaying their belonging to the group, many OBC members also praised the usefulness of the group, and the helpfulness of its members. In particular, many community members noted how other community members would go out of their way to help them. As one member recounted:

I love this site. So many wonderful people who have never met me, and most never will, offering fantastic advice and encouragement. Thank you everyone. Ps. In 22 minute[s] it will be eight days until I sail!!!! (Original Facebook post [Jenny]).

This original Facebook Post is a great example of a community interaction that integrates the elements of belongingness, praise for the group, and shows that there is a sense of community among these geographically diverse individuals. As community members began to exhibit feelings of belonging to the community, they were more likely to return to the Facebook page, and continue to interact, further driving this sense of community.

Knowledge sharing in the UG OBCs

The UG OBCs received a comparatively low degree of posts and traffic during the data collection period. This can be attributed to the comparatively low number of OBC members that these communities have, being 7,373 collectively at the end of the data collection period. Communication was informal between community members, who largely discuss their experiences aboard the cruise ships. Analysis of conversations showed that participants in the UG communities communicated in a more emotionally charged way; they tended to use strong words and express their opinions more subjectively. This can be attributed to the fact that these communities are strictly fan pages, created for the purpose of admiring the brand “Brand X”, and celebrating the four (at the data collection period) cruise ships in the fleet.

While knowledge sharing did occur in the UG communities, it cannot be said to be a key driver of the community. In general, community members in UG communities are past Brand X passengers and are, therefore, already highly knowledgeable and experienced with the brand, and so perhaps do not have the need to seek answers to questions relating to cruising travel. When analysing knowledge sharing on the UG page, it was found that a modest range of topics were covered, knowledge was shared on the page for entertainment and that administrators of the page were quick to provide responses to community members.

Topics. Knowledge shared on the UG OBC concerned a modest range of topics. The most represented topics were discussions of when the Brand X2 cruise ship will leave the fleet, the features of the ships, upgrades and maintenance scheduled for the ships and, more rarely, information relevant to cruising with Brand X. Such information that was discussed on the UG OBC may only be interesting to dedicated fans of the brand, and not to the average Brand X cruiser. Such topics that are discussed require knowledge of Brand X that is likely to have been gained through cruising with the brand. As you can see in the following Facebook conversation, a highly detailed response is given to a general topic of conversation on the Facebook page:

Does anyone know what will happen when Brand X2 leaves, will Newcastle get another ship, I hate going to Sydney to get on a cruise (Original Facebook post [John]).

Sorry [John], that is it for Brand X home porting in Newcastle, the word was that they were not getting enough local interest and had to heavily discount the cruises out of Newcastle. But on the bright side, we do have 11 cruises visiting Newcastle from November through May 2013; the Brand X3 is two of those visiting ships. The others Celebrity cruises. But unfortunately you can[‘t] board them here in Newcastle (First Facebook comment [David 2]).

The findings indicated that conversations were highly specialised and that participants in the conversations would need to have a high degree of knowledge about Brand X to understand the insider terminology.

Entertainment value. Some conversations showed that community members utilise the UG OBC page as a forum for entertainment. That is, community members are motivated to begin conversations and share knowledge because they believe the topic to have a degree of entertainment value. Additionally, when community members reply to the original Facebook Post, they are thereby showing their desire for entertainment as they keep the conversation going. This finding shows that members of the UG OBC were seeking out and engaging in active entertainment, which is shown in the following Facebook exchange:

She is looking a bit run down, in need of paint job outside (Original Facebook post [Jason]).

Agreeeed! (First Facebook comment [Shelly]).

Funny you should say that [Jason]! In Jan/Feb I was amazed while at Port Vila they had the scaffolding out and the paint and roller. I have pictures. They worked tirelessly must be some big wave out there wearing all the paint off LOL (Second Facebook comment [Rob]).

These responses to the original Facebook Post were received in the space of 13 hours and were from community members showing a high degree of enthusiasm and emotive writing. Using such expressions as “agreeeed!” and “Funny you should say that [Jason]!” displays that the community members have strong positive emotions towards the conversation. This is a key indicator that they are actively participating in the conversation for entertainment value.

Administrator role. Individuals who were self-selected as administrators of the UG OBC displayed a high level of dedication to the community by giving timely responses, driving interaction and performing the role of the expert. Community members were likely to receive a very specific and helpful response to their queries when seeking knowledge on the UG OBC. Additionally, this information which is shared plays an active part in value creation for the firm. This can be seen in the following Facebook conversation:

Hi can someone help me I am trying to book flights for the day we get off the boat [...] does anyone have any idea how long it takes and how long of a drive to the airport. Urgent thanks in advance guys xx (Original Facebook post [Daisy]).

[...] oh [...] lol from Brisbane (First Facebook comment [Daisy]).

Hi Daisy – 8km/10min according to info from the Brand X website (look under “Already Booked”/“Arrivals and Departures”. I would be inclined to book something around lunchtime (assuming cruise gets in at 7/8am) which gives you a bit of leeway if it’s a bit late arriving. Disembarkation is done on a priority basis based on travel arrangements and/or deck – you get allocated a coloured ticket and luggage tags for your group – it is reasonably quick compared with getting on (Second Facebook comment [Gerrard]).

[...] thanks heaps Gerrard [...] a big help! (Third Facebook comment [Daisy]).

In this example, Daisy solicits an answer to a question regarding their upcoming trip. In response, Gerrard, an administrator of the Facebook page gives them a timely, specific, useful answer to her question. Gerrard provides information based on his previous experience with his own cruises on the Brand X2 cruise ship, and directs her to the official Brand X website for more information. They also volunteer extra information that is not asked for, but is likely to be helpful to the recipient. This is an example of administrators being directly involved in the community, and playing an active part in value creation for the firm.

Summary of key differences between FS and UG OBCs

Knowledge sharing behaviour was evident in both FS and UG communities, though to differing extents. Table I provides a comparison of the results of how knowledge sharing has occurred in both the FS and UG communities.

Discussion and implications

The overarching objective of this study was to investigate the value that knowledge sharing plays in both FS and UG OBCs on Facebook and to elicit the differences prevalent across both communities. Drawing on the extant literature, we argued that although FS and UG OBCs are descriptively explored independently of one another (Hutter *et al.*, 2013; Shang *et al.*, 2006) and within the context of social media (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012), the dichotomy of exploring both FS and UG OBCs simultaneously has not. Further, there are no known studies that have empirically investigated UG OBCs, with the vast attention directed towards FS OBCs. This is an important gap in the literature as such knowledge may provide greater insight into the implications of knowledge sharing via OBCs through social media and the comparative value of the content expressed across both groups. To begin, this section will present the discussion conjointly with the theoretical implications aligned with the findings of this study followed by insights for brand managers.

The major theoretical contribution of this study is the application of SET to the context of customer-to-customer communication in online communities, particularly social media communications. Although our findings do support previous, yet limited research, exploring SET in online communities (Blanchard, 2008), our findings also advance previous research. SET is based on the premise that independent transactions result in some degree of interpersonal attachment (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchel, 2005; Emerson, 1976; Rheingold, 2000). Knowledge sharing's role in this framework is based on the ability to transfer credible, practical skill and expertise to improve efficiency of knowledge exchange (Gruen *et al.*, 2006). Our results suggest that the notion of knowledge sharing in the context of SET is fundamentally influenced by the OBC group. For example, our findings suggest that knowledge sharing was found to be a key factor driving FS OBCs; however, limited evidence suggests the same holds true for UG OBCs. UG OBCs appear to be largely driven by emotions, resulting in less informative, relevant and often subjective information exchanged contributing little if any value to the OBC. Although we are not suggesting that such information is not important, it does infer that FS OBCs may be considered more credible and possibly trustworthy than UG OBCs, an outcome opposing previous research (Xue and Phelps, 2004) yet considered a common factor found to influence knowledge sharing (Usoro *et al.*, 2007). Given that there is often a higher degree of perceived risk involved in online communities

(Usoro *et al.*, 2007), participants may feel a sense of security when interacting on a FS versus UG OBC. This finding is interesting as commonly anecdotal evidence would suggest that UG online communities have a more influential effect on a consumers perception of a brand and thereby their willingness to participate in the FS OBC. In fact, Casalo *et al.* (2007) does suggest that the more emotionally involved a participant is with a brand, the greater trust they have in the brand. We suggest that whilst emotional attachment does lead to commitment (Bateman *et al.*, 2011), feelings of competence in an online community are more likely to engender trust and, therefore, result in a higher transference of brand knowledge. This is an important outcome of this study as it does infer that knowledge sharing on FS OBC may be considered contextually superior to that of UG OBCs thereby questioning the relevance of UG OBCs altogether. Although this may appear self-evident given that FS OBCs have brand/firm involvement, such conclusions are drawn from the notion of consumer-generated information exchanged on the FS OBC rather than the brand overtly controlling what and how knowledge is transferred.

An additional outcome regarding FS OBCs founded from this study was that commonly participants both exchanged knowledge as a means to act altruistically for the good of the community (Lakhani and von Hippel, 2003) and as a means of self-promotion, vindicating conflicting motivations for FS OBCs. Explanations regarding this may be explained through Avolio and Locke (2002) whom independently infer that there are varying degrees of leadership motivation ranging from being overtly selfish (i.e. egoistic) to self-sacrificing acts of altruism. In fact, although it is important to acknowledge the prevalence of egoistic behaviour on FS OBC, our study proposes that it provides no value in terms of knowledge exchange. Further, it is possible that acts of altruism may be considered norms of behaviour for opinion leaders. This supports recent research founded through Gummerus *et al.* (2012) whom suggest that commonly members use OBCs as a source of information rather than as a means to reciprocate knowledge. This may endorse the use of opinion leaders as they are considered a referent providing objective, informative product content and thus regarded as a more credible and trustworthy source than brand-driven content (Brown *et al.*, 2007). Lyons and Henderson (2007) regard online opinion leaders as “product champions” (p. 326) whom disseminate knowledge to less confident and less knowledgeable consumers. In the context of OBCs, it appears that leaders are often formed and subsequently play a dominant role in the exchange of information between group members. This does align with the central argument of SET to the extent that it infers that knowledge sharing is used as a mechanism to provide support to community members (Blanchard, 2008) and importantly that the value of knowledge gained is heightened by the social ties between members not directly the brand itself.

An extended outcome from the perspective of SET is that often social interaction through knowledge exchange is driven by the *quantity* of knowledge shared in online communities (Chiu *et al.*, 2006) as opposed to the *quality* of knowledge espoused. Our findings suggest that the quality of knowledge is valued as in the likelihood of exchange, participants reciprocated with positive and appreciative gratitude for the insightful comments posted. According to Corritore *et al.* (2003), reciprocity through knowledge exchange builds trust, which in turn is centrally important to social exchange relationships. Although trust is often branded as a mechanism encouraging social

interaction, our findings suggest that it may also enhance the quality of information exchanged between community members.

This study also contributes to the technology and branding literature that focuses on consumer interactions in a branded forum. The finding that external influences play a significant role in shaping users' reactions and use patterns is important because prior work primarily looks at instances where the consumers drive such interactions (Antorini, 2007; Balasubramanian and Mahajan, 2001). This study is different as it investigates one situation in which consumers choose to congregate and communicate in a technological context where the brand has ultimate control. As a result, issues of power and control have arisen in this study, as it has highlighted the new challenges that social media bring. Commonly, issues of power and control governing a FS OBC limit the influence of the information dispersed by the brand, as generally community members perceive FS OBCs as bias and acting in the interests of themselves (Casalo *et al.*, 2007). However, this does not appear to perpetuate from our findings. Knowledge exchange in an OBC is one type of social exchange behaviour that comprises two major activities: viewing (receiving) and posting (giving) knowledge (Chiu *et al.*, 2006). Our study suggests that a brand's involvement in their OBC is to engage in both forms of active and passive knowledge exchange behaviours. It appears that the brand aims to obtain a balance between the knowledge they disperse and that which is reciprocated. Such behaviours appear to influence the level of connectivity community members have with the brand. Although this is not a new finding, it is a finding that is commonly witnessed from the perspective of the consumer (Chiu *et al.*, 2006) as opposed to the brand. Acting via a less intrusive controlled approach may benefit the brand as the influence of UG OBCs may be largely counteracted by those established by the brand (FS), however largely driven by the consumer. This supports previous findings (Hutter *et al.*, 2013) inferring that branding through social media is considered less invasive than other forms of marketing communications. This would suggest that the use of social media platforms (such as Facebook) may work in favour of the brand. For example, if the brand initiates the OBC yet has the ability to balance their input and dominance over the OBC, community members may perceive the OBC as acting in the interests of the community; allowing the brand to indirectly maintain power to shape the behaviour of participants and influence the way they interact with the brand.

Moreover, our findings have given rise to the idea that as brands are active participants in this social sphere, they do have the potential to influence consumer interactions and participation in their branded forums. Such findings were evident in our study, highlighting the role of consumers in co-creating brand identity through interaction on Facebook. Previous research (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012) found that members are more often interested in the content than each other. Whilst our findings support this assertion, our findings also infer that members value each other in the realm of knowledge input. Inevitably, the use of social media platforms increases consumer engagement with the brand; however, it also provides a platform for which consumers have increasing power to influence the brand through their ability to exchange knowledge with one another. In consequence, this reiterates the importance of consumers as co-creators of brands (Hutter *et al.*, 2013) via social media platforms and additionally recognising that knowledge sharing can be used as a mechanism to not

only create a sense of community among community members but also contribute to the strength and perception of the brand and the level of consumer involvement and commitment in shaping the brand.

A final theoretical contribution drawn from this study was the use of the methodological technique netnography. Netnography is a relatively new analytical technique which to date has been utilised in a limited capacity (Rageh *et al.*, 2013). Our findings have provided further validation of the incorporation of netnography as a marketing research tool. Further, the use of this technique has enabled this study to uncover the value of knowledge sharing in online communities via social media platforms. This may encourage the use of netnography as a methodological tool able to further research within the field of marketing.

Given that this research was conducted with a real brand, with real customers, in a real OBC, the findings also point to some important practical applications. Such implications relate to the level of brand governance associated with the OBC and the ways in which the firm can facilitate knowledge sharing among customers to create value for the firm.

While previous research has highlighted the fact that brand governance is critical to maintaining effective online communications (Casalo *et al.*, 2010), this study found that P&O Australia exhibited a highly active and effective OBC, despite not exhibiting overt control. While traditional effective brand governance may call for constant monitoring of this branded platform (Pinnel, 2007), findings from this study would suggest that taking a “back seat” approach to control within the OBC might enhance the level of knowledge sharing that occurs. In a sense, the FS community appeared to have almost reached a self-sustaining level whereby consumers were conferring with each other, and relying on other members to answer their questions and share knowledge. This shows an opportunity whereby constant overt control by the firm may not be necessary in all contexts.

As always, establishing and maintaining a relationship with these consumers in a realm such as social media also brings increased risks; however, it would appear that these can be mitigated with surreptitious governance mechanisms. Using computer-mediated monitoring programs that filter certain words, phrases and Facebook posts by community members allows this to be done covertly and without influencing the knowledge sharing that is already occurring. In summary, the rise of technology brings increased opportunities for a brand to reach out to their consumers, which can be achieved through surreptitious managing of these communications to facilitate a positive platform for consumers to congregate online.

Knowledge sharing acts between community members was found to be highly valuable to the organisation, whether it occurred in either FS or UG OBC's. Going forward, a corporate culture that regards knowledge exchange as a high-value mechanism could be cultivated. Such a culture would promote the exchange of information between community members, which is the key for enhancing community member participation (Morais *et al.*, 2008). Additional promotional tools could be used to push customers to use the OBC's as a forum to have their questions answered, thereby freeing up the resources of the firm. This may involve utilising an integrated marketing communications approach to push consumers to use Facebook, and potentially other social networks to share knowledge. In such a way, Facebook, as a host of OBC's and a facilitator of high-value knowledge sharing

exchanges, can become an integral facet of the promotional mix of the organisation and enhance the overall image of the brand. Ideally, the integration of both FS OBCs and UG OBCs can create a unique positioning strategy for the brand. In this sense, the brand can essentially leverage the knowledge shared from UG OBCs as a mechanism to facilitate or create greater value of the brand. For example, issues addressed in the UG OBC which were not actively addressed by the FS OBC (e.g. ship upgrades) could be integrated into the FS OBC as a means of building rapport or loyalty with FS OBCs. While not intending to exploit these knowledge sharing occurrences, the firm can instead recognise the value that such interactions offer, and steer customers to become active community members.

Limitations and future research

Although this research adds significantly to the understanding of communication in an online branded forum, it should also be acknowledged that this research, as with all research, presents limitations. In the first instance, due to the methodology of this study, the representativeness of the sample is limited. Moreover, the size of the groups (i.e. UG and FS OBCs) was comparatively different. For example, FS OBCs had on average 85 original posts per day from a member base of 55,000 as opposed to UG OBCs occupying approximately six original posts per day from a member base of 4,600. As this is a case study, the findings may not be able to be generalised to other brand community contexts. Additionally, the sample that formed this case study was drawn exclusively from cruise industry forums, which may inhibit the generalizability of findings. Moreover, cruising could be considered a hedonic service that is relatively exclusive and essentially an experience service, which may overtly influence people's willingness and need to discuss the service. One must caution that cruise ship enthusiasts may be different from the general population and, therefore, may not be representative of all online communities (Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001). Secondly, another limitation with this research is that it represents a cross-sectional snapshot of a point in time, while the literature points out that this phenomenon builds over time. Hence, there is a need for future research that is longitudinal in nature. Longitudinal studies could provide a more thorough understanding of how user's communications change over time as they become more or less engaged with the brand. Lastly, limitations inherent in ethnographic research must also be considered in this study. Ethnographic tradition advocates active participation in the community (Sandlin, 2007). To a certain extent, however, this has the potential to influence the community being studied during the entrée process and data collection. Additionally, the interpretation of qualitative data is inherently subjective, so researcher bias can intrude.

The limitations of this study suggest that there is considerable scope to conduct further research on customer-to-customer communication within OBCs. Specifically, this study identifies three specific areas for future research: examination of other communication mechanisms and a longitudinal study. Firstly, SET provides a theoretical lens through which we can learn more about consumer-to-consumer interactions in an OBC, and the impacts for the brand. It is hoped that the promising exploratory findings presented here using this lens will promote more research of this nature, so more can be learned about the complex customer-to-customer conversations that take place in branded social media platforms. This research provides support that

future research which should examine other communication mechanisms that lie within the context of SET and which are utilised by consumers such as; exchange of support, rewards, transactions and obligations which can extend the use of this framework. Secondly, to overcome the cross-sectional nature of this study, a longitudinal study that examines the consumer – brand relationship over time to understand how customer-to-customer might change with the level of brand engagement is a logical next step. Finally, to build on this research, it would be possible to investigate other OBCs to overcome the lack of generalizability of the results in this study. These could come from other industries, be facilitated by other brands and be FS or UG. Further studies of this nature will help to extend the body of knowledge on customer-to-customer communication in OBCs.

References

- Adjel, M.T., Noble, S.M. and Noble, C.H. (2010), "The influence of C2C communications in online brand communities on consumer purchase behaviour", *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 38 No. 5, pp. 634-653.
- Algesheimer, R., Dholakia, U.M. and Herrmann, A. (2005), "The social influence of brand community: evidence from European car clubs", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 60 No. 3, pp. 19-34.
- Antorini, Y.M. (2007), "Brand community innovation; an intrinsic case study of the adult fans of lego", PhD Dissertation, Copenhagen Business School.
- Ardichvilli, A., Page, V. and Wentling, T. (2003), "Motivation and barriers to participation in virtual knowledge-sharing communities of practice", *Journal of Knowledge Management*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 64-77.
- Avolio, B.J. and Locke, E.E. (2002), "Contrasting different philosophies of leader motivation: altruism versus egoism", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 169-191.
- Bagozzi, R.P. and Dholakia, U.M. (2002), "Intentional social action in virtual communities", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 2-21.
- Balasubramanian, S. and Mahajan, V. (2001), "The economic leverage of the virtual community", *International Journal of International Commerce*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 103-138.
- Baron, S. and Harris, K. (2007), "Interactions and relationships from the consumer experience perspective", *Proceedings of the QUIS 10 Conference, Orlando, FL*.
- Bateman, P.J., Gray, P.H. and Butler, B.S. (2011), "Research note – the impact of community commitment on participation in online communities", *Information Systems Research*, Vol. 22 No. 4, pp. 841-854.
- Bernoff, J. and Li, C. (2008), "Harnessing the power of the oh-so-social web", *MITSloan Management Review*, Vol. 49 No. 3, pp. 36-42.
- Bickart, B. and Schindler, R.M. (2001), "Internet forums as influential sources of consumer information", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 31-40.
- Blanchard, A.L. (2008), "Testing a model of sense of virtual community", *Computers in Human Behaviour*, Vol. 24 No. 5, pp. 2107-2123.
- Blau, P.M. (1964), *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, John Wiley, New York, NY.
- Bock, G. and Kim, Y.-G. (2002), "Breaking the myths of rewards: an exploratory study of attitudes about knowledge sharing", *Information Resources Management Journal*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 14-21.

- Bowen, D.E. (1986), "Managing customers as human resources in service organizations", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 371-383.
- Brown, J., Broderick, A. and Lee, N. (2007), "Word of mouth communication within online communities: conceptualizing the online social network", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 2-20.
- Brown, J.S. and Duguid, P. (1991), "Organizational learning and communities-of-practice: toward a unified view of working, learning, and innovation", *Organization Science*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 40-57.
- Burmahn, C. (2010), "A call for user-generated branding", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 1-4.
- Casalo, L., Flavian, C. and Guinaliu, M. (2010), "Antecedents and consequences of consumer participation in on-line communities: the case of the travel sector", *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 137-167.
- Casalo, L.V., Flavian, C. and Guinaliu, M. (2007), "Promoting consumer's participation in virtual brand communities: a new paradigm in branding strategy", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 19-36.
- Chiu, C.-M., Hsu, M.-H. and Wang, E. (2006), "Understanding social capital and social cognitive theories", *Decision Support Systems*, Vol. 42 No. 3, pp. 1872-1888.
- Corritore, C.L., Kratcher, B. and Wiedenbeck, S. (2003), "On-line trust: concepts, evolving themes, a model", *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, Vol. 58 No. 6, pp. 737-758.
- Cova, B. and Pace, S. (2006), "Brand community of convenience products: new forms of customer empowerment: the case 'my nutella community'", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 40 Nos 9/10, pp. 1087-1105.
- Cropanzano, R. and Mitchel, M. (2005), "Social exchange theory: an interdisciplinary review", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 31 No. 6, pp. 874-902.
- de Vries, L., Gensler, S. and Leffang, P.S.H. (2011), "Popularity of brand posts on brand fan pages: an investigation of the effects of social media marketing", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 83-91.
- Dholakia, U.M., Blazevic, V., Wiertz, C. and Algesheimer, R. (2009), "Communal service delivery: how customers benefit from participation in firm-hosted virtual P3 communities", *Journal of Services Research*, Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 208-226.
- Elliott, G., Rundle-Thiele, S. and Waller, D. (2012), 2nd ed., *Marketing*, QLD, Wiley, Milton.
- Emerson, R. (1976), "Social exchange theory", *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 335-362.
- Firth, R. (1967), *Themes in Economic Anthropology*, Tavistock, London.
- Flynn, F.J. (2005), "Identity orientation and forms of social exchange in organizations", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 737-750.
- Fournier, S. and Avery, J. (2011), "The uninvited brand", *Business Horizons*, Vol. 54 No. 3, pp. 193-207.
- Fuller, J., Matzler, K., Hutter, K. and Hautz, J. (2012), "Consumers' creative talent: which characteristics qualify consumers for open innovation projects? An exploration of asymmetrical effects", *Creative and Innovation Management*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 247-262.
- GIGYA (2013), "The landscape of social login and sharing", available at: www.bloggigya.com/the_landscape_of_social_login_sharing_consumers_want_choice/ (accessed 8 October 2013).

- Gouldner, A.W. (1960), "The norm of reciprocity: a preliminary statement", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 161-178.
- Gruen, T.W., Osmonbekov, T. and Czaplewski, A.J. (2006), "eWOM: the impact of customer-to-customer online know-how exchange on customer value and loyalty", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 59 No. 4, pp. 449-456.
- Gummerus, J., Liljander, V., Weman, E. and Pihlstrom, M. (2012), "Customer engagement in a Facebook brand community", *Management Research Review*, Vol. 35 No. 9, pp. 857-877.
- Hagel, J. and Armstrong, A.G. (1997), *Net Gain: Expanding Markets Through Virtual Communities*, Harvard Business School, Boston, MA.
- Hautz, J., Fuller, J., Hutter, K. and Thurridl, C. (2013), "Let users generate your video ads? The impact of video source and quality on consumers' perceptions and intended behaviors", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.06.003>
- Harris, K., Davies, B.J. and Baron, S. (1997), "Conversations during purchase consideration: sales assistants and customers", *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 173-190.
- Homans, G.C. (1958), "Social behaviour as exchange", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 63 No. 6, pp. 597-606.
- Huang, J. and Hsu, C. (2010), "The impact of customer-to-customer interaction on cruise experience and vacation satisfaction", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 49 No. 1, pp. 79-92.
- Hutter, K., Hautz, J., Dennhardt, S. and Fuller, J. (2013), "The impact of user interactions in social media on brand awareness and purchase intention: the case of MINI on Facebook", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 22 Nos 5/6, pp. 342-351.
- Johnston, R. (1989), "The customer as employee", *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, Vol. 9 No. 5, pp. 15-23.
- Kaplan, A.M. and Hanlein, M. (2010), "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media", *Business Horizons*, Vol. 53 No. 1, pp. 59-68.
- Kozinets, R.V. (1998), "On netnography: initial reflections on consumer research investigations of cyberculture", *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 366-371.
- Kozinets, R.V. (2002), "The field behind the screen: using netnography for marketing research in online communities", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 39 No. 1, pp. 61-72.
- Krieger, B.L. and Muller, P.S. (2003), "Making internet communities work: reflections on an unusual business model", *Database for Advances in Information Systems*, Vol. 34 No. 2, pp. 50-59.
- Lakhani, K. and von Hippel, E. (2003), "How open source software works: 'free' user-to-user assistance", *Research Policy*, Vol. 32 No. 6, pp. 923-943.
- Lenhart, A. and Madden, M. (2007), "Social networking websites and teens: an overview", *The Pew Internet & American Life Project*, Washington, DC, available at: www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2007/PIP_SNS_Data_Memo
- Lusch, R.F. and Vargo, S.L. (2006), "Service-dominant logic, reactions, reflections and refinements", *Marketing Theory*, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 281-288.
- Lyon, B. and Henderson, K. (2007), "Opinion leadership in a computer-mediated environment", *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, Vol. 4 No. 5, pp. 319-329.
- McWilliam, G. (2000), "Building stronger brands through online communities", *Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 41 No. 3, pp. 43-54.

- Malinowski, B. (1922), *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagos of Melanesian New Guinea*, Routledge, London.
- Martin, C.L. and Clark, T. (1996), "Networks of customer-to-customer relationships in marketing", in Iacobucci, D. (Ed.), *Networks in Marketing*, Sage, London, pp. 342-366.
- Martin, C.L. and Pranter, C.A. (1989), "Compatibility management: customer-to-customer relationships in service environments", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 3 No. 3, pp. 5-15.
- Mauss, M. (1925), *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, The Norton Library, New York, NY.
- Morais, D.B., Dorsch, M. and Backman, S. (2008), "Can tourism providers buy their customers' loyalty? Examining the influence of customer-provider investments on loyalty", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 42 No. 3, pp. 235-243.
- Morgan, M. (2007), "We're not the Barmy Army! Reflections on sports tourist experiences", *International Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 9 No. 5, pp. 361-372.
- Muniz, A.M. Jr. and O'Guinn, T.C. (2001), "Brand community", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 412-432.
- Murphy, I.P. (1997), "Web 'communities' a target marketers dream", *Marketing News*, Vol. 31 No. 14, pp. 2-3.
- Nambisan, S. and Baron, R.A. (2007), "Interactions in virtual customer environments: implications for product support and customer relationship management", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 42-62.
- Nicholls, R. (2010), "New directions for customer-to-customer interaction research", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 87-97.
- Orr, J. (1990), "Sharing knowledge, celebrating identity: war stories and community memory in a service culture", in Middleton, D.S. and Edwards, D. (Eds), *Collective Remembering: Memory in Society*, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, CA, pp. 169-189.
- Pinnel, R. (2007), "Brand-driven shareholder value creation", *European CEO*, (May-June), pp. 47-49.
- Porter, C.E. (2004), "A typology of virtual communities: a multi-disciplinary foundation for research", *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 141-156.
- Prahalad, C. and Ramaswamy, V. (2004), "Co-creation experiences: the next practice in value creation", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 5-14.
- Prior, D.D. and Miller, L.M. (2010), "Webethnography: a typology of online contexts and consequent research implications", *Proceedings of ANZMAC Conference 2010*, Christchurch.
- Rageh, A., Melewar, T.C. and Woodside, A. (2013), "Using netnography research method to reveal the underlying dimensions of the customer/tourist experience", *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 126-149.
- Rheingold, H. (2000), *The Virtual Community – Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Richins, M.L. (1984), "Word of mouth communication as negative information", *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 697-702.
- Rothaermel, F.T. and Sugiyama, S. (2001), "Virtual Internet communities and commercial success: individual and community-level theory grounded in the atypical case of TimeZone.com", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 297-312.

- Royo-Vela, M. and Casamassima, P. (2010), "The influence of belonging to virtual brand communities on consumers' affective commitment, satisfaction and word-of-mouth advertising", *Online Information Review*, Vol. 35 No. 4, pp. 517-542.
- Sahlins, M. (1972), *Stone Age Economics*, Aldine, New York, NY.
- Sandlin, J.A. (2007), "Netnography as a consumer education research tool", *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, Vol. 31 No. 2, pp. 288-294.
- Schau, H.J., Muniz, A.M. and Arnould, E.J. (2009), "How brand community practices create value", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 73 No. 5, pp. 30-51.
- Shang, R.-A., Chen, Y.-C. and Liao, H.-J. (2006), "The value of participation in virtual consumer communities on brand loyalty", *Internet Research*, Vol. 16 No. 4, pp. 398-418.
- Siemens, E., Roth, A. and Balasubramanian, S. (2008), "How motivation, opportunity and ability drive knowledge sharing: the constraining factor model", *Journal of Operations Management*, Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 426-445.
- Sung, Y., Kim, Y., Kwon, O. and Moon, J. (2010), "An exploratory study of korean consumer participation in virtual brand communities in social network sites", *Journal of Global Marketing*, Vol. 23 No. 5, pp. 430-445.
- Thibault, J.W. and Kelley, H.H. (1959), *The Social Psychology of Groups*, John Wiley, New York, NY.
- Usoro, A., Sharratt, M.W., Tsui, E. and Shekhar, S. (2007), "Trust as an antecedent to knowledge sharing in virtual communities of practice", *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 199-212.
- Vargo, S.L. and Lusch, R.F. (2004), "Evolving to a new dominant logic of marketing", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 68 No. 1, pp. 1-17.
- Williams, R.L. and Cothrel, J. (2000), "Four smart ways to run online communities", *Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 41 No. 4, pp. 81-91.
- Xue, F. and Phelps, J. (2004), "Internet-facilitated customer-to-customer communication: the moderating role of receiver characteristics", *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*, Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 121-136.
- Yannopoulou, N., Moufahim, M. and Bian, X. (2013), "User-generated brands and social media: Couchsurfing and AirBnB", *Contemporary Management Research*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 85-90.

Further reading

- Abfalter, D., Zaglia, M.E. and Mueller, J. (2012), "Sense of virtual community: a follow up on its measurement", *Computers in Human Behaviour*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 400-404.
- Arndt, J. (1967), *Word of Mouth Advertising*, Advertising Research Foundation, New York, NY.
- Bristor, J. (1990), "Enhanced explanations of word of mouth communications", *Research in Consumer Behaviour*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 51-83.
- Dholakia, U.M., Bagozzi, R.P. and Pearo, L.K. (2004), "A social influence model of consumer participation in network- and small-group-based virtual communities", *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 241-263.
- Facebook (2012), "Newsroom", available at: <http://newsroom.fb.com/content/default.aspx?NewsAreaId=22> (accessed 28 July 2012).
- Facebook (2013), "Newsroom", available at: <http://newsroom.fb.com/content/default.aspx?NewsAreaId=22> (accessed 29 September 2013).

- Harris, L.C. and Goode, M.M.H. (2010), "Online servicescapes, trust, and purchase intentions", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 230-243.
- Hoffman, D.L. and Novak, T.P. (2012), "Toward a deeper understanding of social media", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 69-70.
- Koh, J. and Kim, Y.G. (2004), "Knowledge sharing in virtual communities: an e-business perspective", *Expert Systems with Applications*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 155-166.
- Roya-Vela, M. and Cassamassima, P. (2011), "The influence of belonging to virtual brand communities on consumers' affective commitment, satisfaction and word-of-mouth advertising", *Online Information Review*, Vol. 35 No. 4, pp. 517-542.
- Smith, A.N., Fischer, E. and Yongjian, C. (2012), "How does brand-related user-generated content differ across YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter?", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 102-113.
- Social Media Today (2013), "101 vital social media and digital marketing statistics", available at: www.socialmediatoday.com/tompick/1647801/101_vital_social_media_and_digital_marketing_statistics_rest_2013 (accessed 8 October 2013).
- Tsai, W. and Ghoshal, S. (1998), "Social capital and value creation: an empirical study of intrafirm networks", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 41 No. 4, pp. 464-476.

About the authors

Sarah Sloan is a Research Academic in the Department of Marketing. Her interest lies within the areas of branding and social media. She is an active contributor to the area of social media marketing at both national and international conferences, through public blogs and in the radio. Currently, she is exploring the use of brand communities for value creation, particularly shedding light on the realm of social media.

Kelli Bodey is an Academic in the Department of Marketing and a member of the *Asia-Pacific Centre for Franchising Excellence at Griffith University*. She holds a PhD in franchising specialising in the area of multiple unit franchising arrangements. She has published her research in international academic-refereed journals including the *Journal of Services Marketing*, *Psychology and Marketing*, *Journal of Asia-Pacific Business*, *Journal of Business Economics and Management* and *International Management and Entrepreneurship Journal*. Currently, Dr Bodey is working within the areas of franchising, marketing education and the branding of social media. Kelli Bodey is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: k.bodey@griffith.edu.au

Richard Gyrð-Jones' research focus is in the areas of brand management. He is interested in how both for-profit and not-for-profit organisations manage their brand in the context of their brand eco-systems. His most recent research looks at safeguarding brand value and issues around the implementation of branding strategies at a managerial level; he is particularly interested in the interplay between branding, corporate strategy and innovation in a multi-stakeholder perspective.

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com