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Brand-sponsored versus Consumer-generated Online Brand Communities

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of:

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I declare that this research study is entirely the product of my own work and that it has not been taken from the work of others. When the work and ideas of others have been used in the study, the work has been properly cited in the text.

Stephanie J McKenzie

December 2009

Abstract

This research focuses on online brand communities from a brand management perspective. The purpose of this study is to contribute to understanding of online brand communities by examining differences in brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities, and to extend research into online brand communities by examining online brand communities for a sports brand. The first phase of this study investigates how consumption practices differ in brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Online brand communities for the All Blacks brand were selected as a case study for this research. The All Blacks brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities were observed for eight weeks and afterwards discussions in both communities were analysed for two weeks to identify consumption practices. Ethical issues pertinent to this research design meant raw comments and discussions could not be collected and instead discussions were immediately analysed through a coding process. The second phase of this study investigates marketing industry expert views on brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Interviews with three representatives from service and sports organisations were held. The findings from this research contribute to literature on online brand communities by demonstrating brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities differ in consumption practices, language, self-expression, modes of interaction, and legitimacy. This study also extends research into online brand communities by investigating online brand communities for sports brands. Findings imply there are minimal differences between online brand communities for service or sports brands compared with online brand communities for goods. The outcomes from this research may also have a number of implications for marketers, hoping to capitalise on the growth of online brand communities.

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