

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Brand-sponsored versus Consumer-generated Online Brand Communities

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

Masters of Business Studies

in

Marketing

At Massey University, Auckland, New Zealand.

Stephanie J McKenzie

2009

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.

Acknowledgements

I sincerely thank my research supervisors Sandy Bulmer and Dr. Andrew Murphy for their continued support and guidance and all family and close friends, locally and globally, who encouraged and supported my return to academic research.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	9
2. Literature Review	11
2.1 Consumer-brand relationships	11
2.1.1 Introduction to brands	11
2.1.2 Introduction to consumer-brand relationships	13
2.1.3 Identifying and measuring the quality of consumer-brand relationships	14
2.1.4 Critique of consumer-brand relationship theory	16
2.1.5 Consumer-brand relationships in this research study	18
2.2 Approaches to, and definitions of communities	19
2.2.1 What is a community?	19
2.2.2 What is a brand community?	21
2.2.3 What is an online community?	23
2.2.4 What is an online brand community?	25
2.2.5 The role of the Internet in establishing communities	27
2.2.6 Summary of community approaches and definitions	30
2.3 Research into online brand communities	31
2.4 Consumption practices	34
2.4.1 Research into fans	34
2.4.2 Consumption practices and fans	35
2.4.3 Communities and consumption practices	36
2.5 Language and self-expression in online brand communities	40
2.6 Modes of interaction and member types within online communities	42
2.7 Summary and proposed research objectives and questions	45
3. Research Design	49
3.1 Overview of methods	49
3.2 Phase One: Analysis of discussions to identify consumption practices	51
3.2.1 Justification for choice of case study	51
3.2.2 Case selection criteria: brand-sponsored online community	53
3.2.3 Case selection criteria: consumer-generated online community	55
3.2.4 Immersion in online brand communities	56
3.2.5 Analysis of community discussions to identify consumption practices	58
3.3 Phase two: Marketing industry views on online brand communities	61
3.4 Ethical issues pertinent to data collection and analysis	62
4. Results and Analyses	65
4.1 Context of community discussions: Key events surrounding the All Blacks	66
4.2 Results and analysis of the brand-sponsored online community	68
4.2.1 Language dominating community discussions	69
4.2.2 Analysis of community discussions	72
4.2.3 Consumption practices	75
4.4 Results and analysis of the consumer-generated online brand community	83
4.4.1 Language dominating community discussions	84
4.4.2 Analysis of community discussions	86
4.4.3 Consumption practices	89
4.5 Differences in consumption practices	94
4.6 Marketing industry views on brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities	102
4.6.1 Online brand communities for goods versus for service or sports brands	103
4.6.2 Differences in online brand strategy for brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities.	106

4.6.3	Evolving trends in online brand communities	109
4.7	Summary of results and analyses	112
5.	Discussion	114
5.1	Consumption practices for brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities	115
5.2	Language and self-expression in online brand communities	117
5.3	Modes of interaction within online brand communities	119
5.4	Differences in legitimacy of online brand communities	122
5.5	Online brand communities for goods versus service or sports brands	125
6.	Conclusion	128
7.	Limitations and directions for future research	132
7.1	Research limitations and ethical concerns	132
7.2	Directions for future research	132
8.	Bibliography	134
	Appendix A: Interview guideline	140
	Appendix B: Ethical consent	144

List of Tables

Table 1: Top ten best global brands. Source: Interbrand, 2009.	12
Table 2: Definitions of communities	21
Table 3: Definitions of brand communities	22
Table 4: Definitions of online communities	24
Table 5: Definition of online brand community. Source: Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001.	26
Table 6: Brand communities and consumer durable products (a)	31
Table 7: Brand communities and consumer durable products (b)	32
Table 8: Communities and consumption practices	37
Table 9: Global All Blacks Awareness Study: Attitudes towards the All Blacks. Source: Continental, 2007.	52
Table 10: Identifying All Blacks online communities	54
Table 11: 2009 Philips Tri Nations Results. Source: NZRU, 2009.	67
Table 12: Frequency of interaction in online brand communities	69
Table 13: Codes from the brand-sponsored online community	73
Table 14: Codes from the consumer-generated online community	88

List of Figures

Figure 1: Six facets of brand relationship quality. Source: Fournier, 1998.	15
Figure 2: Four consumption interaction modes in online communities. Source: Kozinets, 1999.	43
Figure 3: Four community member types in online communities. Source: Kozinets, 1999.	44
Figure 4: Research Design Outline	50
Figure 5: Researcher immersion in the All Blacks community	57
Figure 6: Example of a typical online community discussion	68
Figure 7: Word cloud for the brand-sponsored online community	70
Figure 8: Consumption practices in brand-sponsored online brand community	76
Figure 9: Word cloud for the consumer-generated online community	85
Figure 10: Consumption practices in consumer-generated online community	90
Figure 11: Differences in consumption practices	95
Figure 12: Differences in key words dominating online communities	114

1. Introduction

Communities have always been of particular interest to marketers as communities provide insight into consumer behaviour (Kozinets, 1997, 1999; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Early definitions of community define community by shared geography. However, as societies modernise so has the concept of community. Definitions of communities have adapted to no longer rely on shared geography, but instead to consider shared consumption activities or shared consumption of brands (McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Developments in technology such as the introduction and growth of the Internet have significantly changed the way communities develop (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). The Internet has been praised for encouraging social cohesion, social networking and for providing a strong platform for online communities to develop (Andersen, 2005; Hagel & Armstrong, 1997). The Internet has been so successful in developing a community-like atmosphere that in recent years there has been phenomenal growth in online communities, online social networks and online brand communities (Andersen, 2005; Poynter, 2008; Smith 2009). Marketers and brand managers have quickly realised the strong potential of online brand communities to maintain and enhance consumer-brand relationships (Hanson & Kalyanam, 2007; Poynter, 2008).

The importance of enhancing consumer-brand relationships has also intensified in recent years. Marketing has evolved from a focus on managing transactions to emphasis on managing and enhancing relationships with consumers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Consumer-brand relationships have proved fundamental to maintaining customers, driving brand loyalty and brand equity (Blackston, 2000). The relationships consumers' form with brands can occur in a variety of ways but fundamental to all consumer brand relationships is the environment or context in which they develop (Fournier, 1998). Online brand communities are increasingly important and popular platforms fostering consumer-brand relationships and provide insight into how consumers form relationships and interact with brands.

Online brand communities bring numerous benefits to brand owners and marketers. Brand owners have created online brand communities for commercial intentions such as to provide consumers with brand meanings, drive brand experiences, to encourage brand preference and to strengthen brand loyalty (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry Jnr, 2003; Kozinets, 1997). Online brand communities also assist marketers in tracking campaigns and measuring consumer attitudes (Hanson & Kalyanam, 2007) and can even guide advertising copy or new product development (Kozinets, 2006). With a focus on the commercial benefits of online brand communities, literature into online brand communities has assumed marketers create online

brand communities for commercial purposes (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). However, the development of the Internet and the rise in online communities and online social networks has enabled consumers to also create online brand communities. (Algesheimer, Dholakia & Herrmann, 2005). To date, literature has failed to consider online brand communities created by consumers. Furthermore, as branding is frequently associated with products (Berry, 2000) the majority of literature into online brand communities considers online brand communities for consumer goods but does not consider online brand communities for service or sports brands. This is despite economies increasingly dependent on services and service brands as equally as powerful as brands for products (Berry, 2000).

Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to contribute to research on online brand communities by investigating differences in brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Specifically, this research examines differences in consumption practices between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities and investigates marketing industry experts to on brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. The rise in consumer-generated online communities, online social networks and online brand communities suggests this an increasingly important area for research. With a lack of research into online brand communities for service or sports brands, this research also aims to extend understanding of online brand communities for a sports brand with a unique New Zealand perspective.

The structure of this research report begins with a detailed review of literature into consumer-brand relationships, online brand communities and consumption practices. At the end of this literature review the research objectives and questions guiding this study are introduced. In the next chapter the research design of this study is outlined. Following this, the results from this research are presented and interpreted. Afterwards, the results and findings are discussed in relation to academic theory on online brand communities. Finally, this research report ends with a conclusion of results and the limitations of this study and directions for future research are acknowledged.

2. Literature Review

This literature review investigates research into online brand communities from a brand management perspective. Research into online brand communities is examined with a particular emphasis on how consumers form relationships and interact with brands. This literature review begins with a discussion on brands and consumer-brand relationships. In the next section of the literature review, approaches to, and definitions of communities are introduced with an outline on how the Internet influences communities. Following the discussion on communities, this literature review evaluates research into online brand communities. As online brand communities prove valuable in understanding consumer behaviour, an overview of research into fans, fans and consumption practices, and brand communities and consumption practices is presented. This literature review then considers the insights from studying language and self-expression within online communities. Afterwards, the next section of the literature review discusses four consumption interaction modes in online communities and four types of community members. Throughout this literature review limitations of previous research and opportunities and directions for future research are outlined. At the end of this literature review the proposed research objectives and research questions are presented, guided by the gaps in the literature.

2.1 Consumer-brand relationships











Consumer-brand relationships focus on the emotional connections consumers form with brands. To investigate consumer brand relationships this section begins with an introduction to brands followed by an introduction to consumer-brand relationships. Afterward Fournier (1998) presents 15 different consumer-brand relationships and six attributes of brand relationship quality. A critique of consumer-brand relationship theory is later presented before summarising consumer-brand relationships in this research study.

2.1.1 Introduction to brands

A core focus of marketing is strengthening the connections between suppliers and consumers. Frequently, the connection between suppliers and consumers is not just a product or service, but the connection is in fact a relationship and this relationship is more often than not, personified by a brand (McDonald, de Chermetony, & Harris, 2001). Brands are therefore essential to forge strong bonds or relationships between consumers and products or services (Fournier, 1998).

However, as marketing is often immersed in a product-dominant approach, this has also driven a product-centric approach to branding (Klaus & Maklan, 2007). There is a natural instinct to associate brands with goods, through packaging, product and logo design (Berry, 2000). However, brands are equally relevant to the services industry (Berry, 2000). The realisation that economies are no longer solely comprised of fast moving consumer goods, automotives and other consumer durable products, has meant a re-focus towards services such as financial services, entertainment, sporting events, travel, to name a few (Klaus & Maklan, 2007). Marketers are therefore just as dependent on service brands to form strong relationships with consumers. Commercial research suggests service brands are just as valuable and powerful in markets as brands for products. Interbrand commissioned research¹ into the best global brands in 2009. The top ten best global brands for 2009 are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Top ten best global brands. Source: Interbrand, 2009.

Brand	Sector	2009 Brand Value (\$m)
 Coca-Cola	Beverages	68,734
 IBM*	Computer services	60,211
 Microsoft*	Computer software	56,647
 GE*	Diversified	47,777
 Nokia	Consumer electronics	34,864
 McDonalds*	Restaurants	32,275
 Google*	Internet services	31,980
 Toyota	Automotives	31,330
 Intel	Computer hardware	30,636
 Disney*	Media	28,447

The research commissioned by Interbrand in 2009 shows the top ten global brands and those brands marked with an asterisk (*) in Table 1 are considered to be brands for services². Despite the natural instinct to associate brands with goods, this table shows more than half of the world's top

¹ Analysis of the top global brands commissioned by Interbrand is based on the following four key measures – financial analysis, brand analysis including how brands influence consumers at point of purchase, brand strength score and overall brand value in millions of dollars (USD).

² Some service brands marked with an asterisk (*) however, may also be considered as products. For example, Microsoft is often considered to be both a product and a service in commercial settings.

ten global brands are brands for services. This reinforces opinions that service brands are equally important in market-based economies as brands for products (Berry, 2000). The strength of service brands in the global market is a reflection of the world's economies and how economies have shifted from being solely dependent on manufacturing of goods, to now also depending on services for economic growth (Klaus & Maklan, 2007). This review of brands briefly shows how service brands are just as important in market economies. This literature also briefly shows how brands are an important tool to connect products or services with consumers and brands, including brands for services, are important to form relationships with consumers.

2.1.2 Introduction to consumer-brand relationships

The idea of strengthening relationships with consumers is fundamental to relationship marketing theory (Fournier, 1998; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; O'Malley & Tynan, 1999, 2000; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1986). In the past relationship marketing theory focused primarily on relationships between businesses and consumers, where the role of the service or product in delivering superior value was extremely important (O'Malley & Tynan, 1999; Veloutsou, 1997). However, in recent years relationships have formed through brands as brands have represented the products or services that create value for consumers (Veloutsou, 1997). Relationship marketing has therefore evolved to consider the networks of relationships between a brand and its consumers (Ambler, 1997 cited in Veloutsou, 2007, p.11). The concept of consumers forming emotional connections and relationships with brands is termed consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998; McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002). Consumer-brand relationships are important to marketing as they bring numerous advantages such as, acquiring and maintaining customers, maintaining brand loyalty, strengthening brand equity, and can reduce marketing costs (Blackston, 2000).

The relationship between a brand and a consumer can be compared with a relationship between two individuals (Blackston, 2000; Fournier, 1998). After all, the interaction between two personalities is analogous to the interaction between an individual and a brand personality (Blackston, 2000). In interpersonal relationships it is possible to understand the nature of the relationship by observing attitudes and behaviours people have towards each other (Blackston, 2000). As consumer-brand relationships are no different to interpersonal relationships, consumer-brand relationships also involve recognising consumer's attitudes and behaviours towards the brand and the brand's attitudes and behaviours towards the consumer (Blackston, 2000). The idea that consumer-brand relationships are analogous to interpersonal relationships emphasises the emotional connection consumers have with brands and that a sense of 'love' exists between consumers and brands (Smit, Bronner, & Tolboom, 2007). In a consumer-brand relationship the

brand is not dormant, instead the brand acts as a contributing partner in the relationship and consumers generally have little difficulty considering brands as if they were human characters in the relationship (Fournier, 1998).

2.1.3 Identifying and measuring the quality of consumer-brand relationships

The types of connections consumers form with brands or the benefits of consumer-brand relationships depend on the type of the consumer-brand relationship. Fournier (1998) identifies fifteen different consumer-brand relationships, which suggest an interpersonal connection between consumers and brands (Fournier, 1998). Fournier (1998) identifies different types of relationships such as friendships, marriages, dark sided relationships and temporally orientated relationships. Friendships include compartmentalized friendships, childhood friendships, best friends and casual friends. Marriages include marriage of convenience, committed partnerships and arranged marriage. Relationships that are relatively 'dark sided' include relationships of dependency, enmity, enslavement, secret affairs and rebounds. Finally, temporally orientated relationships such as courtships and flings are short-term relationships. The terminology used to describe the different consumer-brand relationships, such as best friendships, marriages, flings, kinships etc illustrate basic relationship principles and relate to common every day relationships between individuals (Fournier, 1998). The different consumer-brand relationships presented by Fournier (1998) reconfirm the approach to consumer-brand relationship theory, which assumes consumer-brand relationships are comparable to interpersonal relationships.

Fournier (1998) suggests the different relationships between consumers and brands should be interpreted in terms of the overall relationship quality, depth and strength. Fournier (1998) presents a six-faceted brand relationship quality construct that measures the quality of a brand relationship and can reflect the equity of a brand (see Figure 1). The six attributes, love and passion, self-connection, interdependence, commitment, intimacy and brand partner quality all combine over time to strengthen consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998). As consumer and brands meaningfully interact and evolve, the attributes of consumer-brand relationships can either amplify or weaken brand relationship quality (Fournier, 1998).

The six attributes presented in Figure 1 (next page) are fundamental to ensuring consumer-brand relationships are valuable, deep and strong as opposed to being merely superficial connections (Fournier, 1998). Interestingly, these six attributes that measure brand relationship quality all correspond to concepts of relationship quality in interpersonal relationships between individuals (Bengtsson, 2003). The analogy to interpersonal relationships is evident. For example, attributes such as love, passion, and intimacy are more often than not, indicators of the strength and type of

relationship between two individuals (Bengtsson, 2003). The six facets of brand relationship quality as presented by Fournier (1998) are now explored in greater detail.

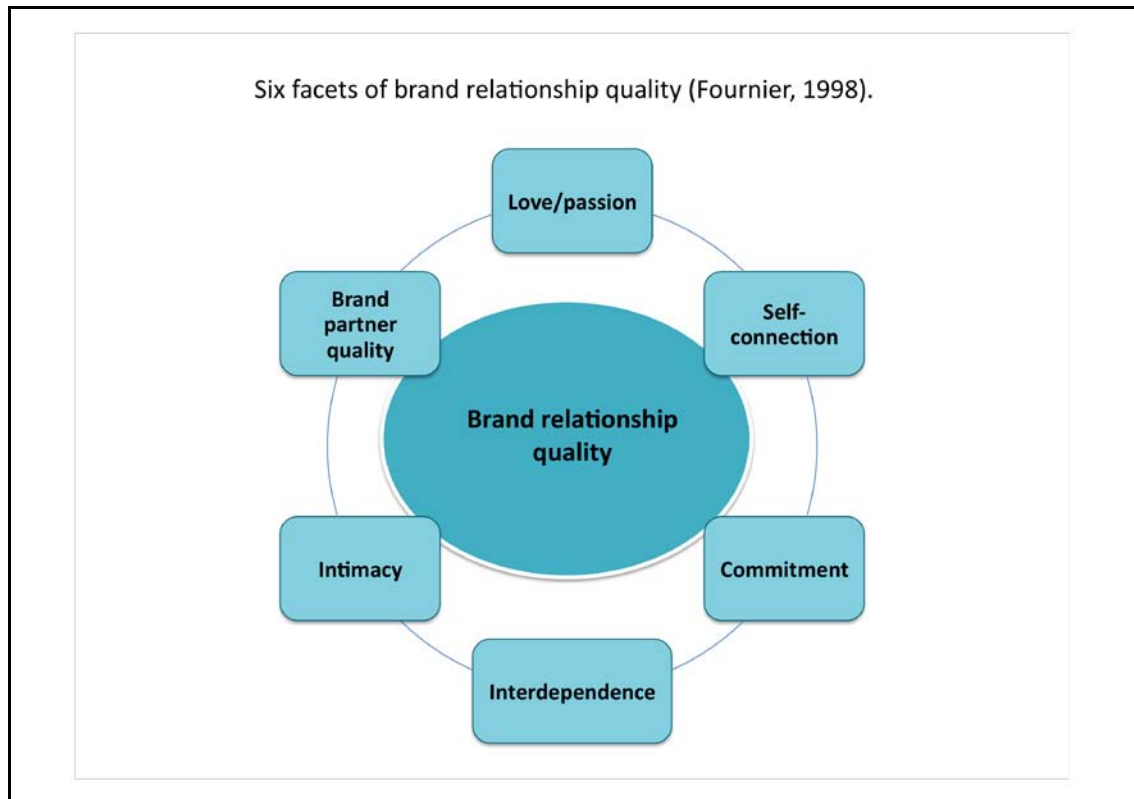


Figure 1: Six facets of brand relationship quality. Source: Fournier, 1998.

Two of the six attributes of brand relationship quality are socio-emotive attributes between consumers and brands and include love and passion and self-connection (Fournier, 1998). Love and passion refer to positive feelings about the brand and are essential in all strong brand relationships including consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998). Feelings of self-connection refer to the extent a brand delivers on identity concerns, tasks or themes and as a result encourages self-expression (Fournier, 1998). Fournier (1998) acknowledges the importance of behavioural ties such as interdependence and commitment in the brand relationship quality construct. Strong consumer-brand relationships have a high degree of interdependence, which involves frequent interactions between consumers and the brand in every day life (De Wulf et al, 2001; Fournier, 1998). Two-way commitment is also essential in quality consumer-brand relationships as strong stable relationships show high levels of commitment and support (Fournier, 1998; Smit et al, 2007). Lastly, Fournier (1998) proposes supportive cognitive beliefs such as intimacy and brand partner quality also contribute to the quality of a consumer-brand relationship. Intimacy refers to the psychological bonds between relationship partners (Fournier, 1998). Brand partner quality is also essential in driving strong consumer-brand relationships. Feelings such as, ‘the brand is positively orientated towards the consumer’, ‘the brand is reliable

and predictable in the relationship', 'the brand adheres to relationship rules', and 'the brand is accountable for its actions,' all drive a strong sense of brand partner quality (Fournier, 1998). The six faceted brand relationship quality construct presented by Fournier (1998) assumes the relationships consumers have with brands have comparable qualities to the interpersonal relationships with people (Bengtsson, 2003).

The idea that consumer-brand relationships are analogous to interpersonal relationships continues when Fournier (1998) proposes anthropomorphising aspects of the brand. Fournier (1998) suggests anthropomorphising the brand to highlight its human and personified characteristics. This will help to further legitimise the brand as a relationship partner and will help to strengthen its ability to be an active contributing partner in the relationship (Fournier, 1998). By assigning human qualities, consumers may find it easier to form relationships with inanimate objects such as brands (Fournier, 1998). Some examples of anthropomorphising the brand reside in animism theory and include introducing brand spokespersons that help to attach a personality and spirit to the brand (McCracken, 1989 cited in Fournier, 1998, p.345). Should a brand become sufficiently anthropomorphised it can then become an active partner in the relationship (Fournier, 1998). However, Bengtsson (2003) disagrees with this approach and suggests personifying a brand does not imply the brand can form an active relationship with a consumer. Regardless of whether human qualities are assigned to brands, it is likely consumers will still perceive brands to be anonymous (Bengtsson, 2003). Even if consumers do attribute anthropomorphous characteristics to brands, there remains debate over whether social and psychological theories on interpersonal relationship can even be applied to consumer-brand relationships (Bengtsson, 2003). These criticisms suggest literature on consumer-brand relationships is somewhat conflicting.

2.1.4 Critique of consumer-brand relationship theory

The fifteen consumer-brand relationships and six attributes of brand relationship quality outlined by Fournier (1998) make a powerful contribution to literature on consumer-brand relationships. Identifying the different relationships between consumers and brands is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, different types of relationships ultimately produce different benefits and thereby contribute differently to personality development (Fournier, 1998). For example, relationships such as best friendships or through dependencies can support egos (Fournier, 1998). Identifying the types of consumer-brand relationships can therefore explain how the brand relationship affects personality development and vice versa. Secondly, understanding the types of consumer-brand relationships can provide insight into maintenance requirements (Fournier, 1998). A consumer-brand relationship such as a committed partnership for example, requires constant maintenance and dedication whereas a childhood friendship relationship in comparison,

can endure long periods with little or no interaction (Fournier, 1998). The different types of consumer-brand relationships suggested by Fournier (1998) play an important role in how brands and personalities are developed and maintained.

However, consumer-brand relationship theory presented by Fournier (1998) is criticised for a number of reasons. O'Malley and Tynan (2000) question the circumstances under which a consumer-brand relationship exist. It is possible close relationships cannot develop between consumers and all brands simply because close relationships are special, unique and rare (O'Malley & Tynan, 2000). Belk (1988) and Wallendorf and Arnould (1986) also present differing approaches to relationships between people and objects. While Fournier (1998) assumes the relationship between a brand and consumers is two-way (person-object), Belk (1988) and Wallendorf and Arnould (1986) propose relationships between objects such as brands, are three-way (person-object-person). The social dimension of brand or object consumption is considered in this three-way approach to relationships (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1986). For example, an individual's attachment to an object or brand can act as a symbol of self-expression in interpersonal relationships, rather than a replacement to interpersonal relationships (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1986). In this sense attaching oneself to an object or brand can serve as an expression of connections to others and can act as a form of social linkage (Underwood, Bond, & Baer 2001; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1986). The object or brand therefore contributes meaning to the relationship (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1986). These approaches to relationship theory contrast to Fournier's (1998) assumption that consumer-brand relationships are two-way and relationships only exist between the consumer and brand.

There is also debate over the suitability of the relationship metaphor (O'Malley & Tynan, 2000; Smit et al, 2007). Bengtsson (2003) disagrees with the term 'relationship' and suggests it is not the best term to describe interactions between consumers and inanimate objects such as brands. The consumer-brand relationship theory presented by Fournier (1998) has also been criticised for assuming relationships between consumers and brands are analogous to interpersonal relationships. As brands cannot interact and respond to consumers in the same way as humans this may influence the quality of the relationship between consumers and brands, and this limitation challenges Fournier's six facets of brand relationship quality construct (Bengtsson, 2003). The brand relationship quality construct presented by Fournier (1998) is therefore heavily debated in literature.

This critique of literature suggests love and passion identified by Fournier (1998) as a key attribute of brand relationship quality should be re-evaluated. The term 'love' has strong interpersonal associations and it is likely consumers can only understand and identify love as a concept that exist between humans (Bengtsson, 2003). The feelings consumers assign to their brands may be

different from the feelings they have with humans (Bengtsson, 2003). Perhaps the term 'love' is not appropriate to describe consumer-brand relationships. Bengtsson (2003) suggests that the word love be replaced with the term fondness, which represents an act of liking. By inserting fondness into the brand relationship quality construct, this helps to acknowledge how consumer-brand relationships are not entirely analogous to interpersonal relationships as originally proposed by Fournier (1998) and Blackston (2000).

Other attributes in Fournier's (1998) brand relationship quality construct are also contested in literature. Commitment, which according to Fournier (1998) is an important attribute for maintaining strong and stable consumer-brand relationships, is critically reviewed for its lack of reciprocity (Bengtsson, 2003). Consumer-brand relationships may lack the degree of commitment present in interpersonal relationships merely because consumer-brand relationships are primarily unilateral and consumers may feel the brand cannot be committed to a relationship with individual consumers (Bengtsson, 2003). Consumers are therefore hesitant to accept consumer-brand relationships based on commitment and this could be attributable to brands lacking human character (Bengtsson, 2003). Furthermore, Bengtsson (2003) also criticises the interdependence attribute in Fournier's (1998) brand relationship quality construct. As opposed to interdependence, the term dependence is perhaps more appropriate to describe a consumer-brand relationship (Bengtsson, 2003). Finally, the attribute of intimacy also incorporated in Fournier's (1998) brand relationship quality construct is questioned. Intimacy, usually a personal attribute describing interpersonal relationships, is perhaps not appropriate to describe consumer-brand relationships as consumers may be unwillingly to associate intimacy with an inanimate object such as a brand (Bengtsson, 2003). This critique of literature suggests the terminology presented by Fournier (1998) to describe consumer-brand relationship quality needs reviewing. The relationships consumers have with brands are perhaps not so analogous to interpersonal relationships as originally assumed by Fournier (1998) and Blackston (2000). Furthermore, it is possible consumer-brand relationships are in fact three-way and brands act as a symbol of self-expression in interpersonal relationships as opposed to being a substitute for interpersonal relationships (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1986).

2.1.5 Consumer-brand relationships in this research study

Literature on consumer-brand relationships is particularly relevant to this research study, as it describes the different relationships consumers form with brands. One limitation of Fournier's

(1998) consumer-brand relationship approach is emphasis is placed on consumer-brand relationships from the consumer perspective. There is a gap in the literature concerning consumer-brand relationships from the perspective of the brand manager and this presents opportunity to extend research further to consider the role of the brand manager in consumer-brand relationships. The idea that consumer-brand relationships are in fact three-way also presents opportunity to consider how brands add meaning to relationships. Consumer-brand relationship theory also does not consider how consumer-brand relationships may evolve in different environments. As Fournier (1998, p.366) states, “deep knowledge of the consumer-brand relationship is obtained only through consideration of the larger whole in which that relationship is embedded”. There is opportunity to examine Fournier’s (1998) findings to consider the wider environment in which consumer-brand relationships are embedded and how differences in environments can affect consumer-brand relationships. In this case, there is opportunity for this study to consider consumer-brand relationships in online brand communities, which are becoming increasingly popular in today’s modern societies. With a focus on brand management and consumer-brand relationships, this literature review now investigates online brand communities and the various ways consumers can interact with brands in online brand communities.

2.2 Approaches to, and definitions of communities

This research study focuses on online brand communities. The following subsections examine approaches to, and definitions of communities. First, traditional communities are introduced, which emphasise shared geography. Then, brand communities are defined, which explain how communities can develop based on shared consumption activities. Next, online communities are introduced as societies modernise and become more dependent on the Internet. Following this, online brand communities are examined. The definition of online brand community presented by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) is outlined and will be employed as the definition of online brand community for the remainder of this research study. This section concludes with emphasis on the role of the Internet in creating communities and a summary of overall approaches to, and definitions of communities.

2.2.1 What is a community?

Communities are a popular topic for many marketers interested in market capitalism and consumer behaviour (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). While the topic of community is one of the most important and most historic topics in the social sciences, it is also one of the most complicated and contested (Kozinets, 2002b; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The debate over community means there are numerous contrasting definitions of community (Lawrence, 1995). Early definitions of community place emphasis on geography and place as a constructing factor binding a community together. The definitions presented in Table 2 (next page) by Tonnies (1912, 1967; cited in Li, 2004, p.2710) and Karp, Stone and Yoels (1977, cited in Rothaermel & Sugiyama, 2001, p.298) are two examples of how a traditional community has been defined in relation to geography or place. These early definitions of community suggest community cannot exist without shared geography. The early emphasis on geography and location as a means to defining community creates a feeling that communities do have boundaries and some basis for inclusion and exclusion (Lawrence, 1995).

While Tonnies (1912, 1967; cited in Li, 2004, p.2710) and Karp, Stone and Yoels (1977, cited in Rothaermel & Sugiyama, 2001, p.298) define communities in relation to shared geography, Anderson (1983) in his definition of 'imagined community' also suggests communities have a shared geographic boundary. However, Anderson (1983) acknowledges that due to the sheer size of communities it may not be possible for all community members to know, meet or hear each other. Instead community members are more likely bound by a shared and deep comradeship rather than a sense of physical familiarity and therefore they are 'imagined' (Anderson, 1983).

In comparison to earlier definitions of community presented by Tonnies (1912, 1967; cited in Li, 2004, p.2710) and Karp, Stone and Yoels (1977, cited in Rothaermel & Sugiyama, 2001, p.298), later definitions of community move emphasis away from geography and place and transfer emphasis to social interaction and shared meanings. The emphasis on shared geography in communities starts to weaken. Both McMillan and Chavis (1986) and Lawrence (1995) present new definitions of community, which are no longer solely dependent upon geography. McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggest communities comprise membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and share emotional connection. This definition is similar to that of Lawrence (1995) who also acknowledges the importance of social interaction in constructing communities. However, Lawrence (1995) also highlights the importance of membership rules and standards. These examples of community definitions in Table 2 show as time passes and societies modernise, the concept of community also changes with less emphasis on geography and greater importance on shared meaning, values and interaction.

Table 2: Definitions of communities

Definitions of communities		
Researchers	Year	Definition
Tonnies	1912; 1967	Community or Gemeinschaft is different from society or Gesellschaft, in that community (Gemeinschaft) is as intimate, private and exclusive living together where as, society (Gesellschaft) is the public life – that is, the world itself. There are three types of communities: community by kinship, community of locality and community of mind.
Karp, Stone & Yoels	1977	Communities are comprised of three attributes – sustained social interaction, shared attributes and values and a defined geographical place.
Anderson	1983	Imagined communities. Communities are imagined because even the members of the most smallest nation will never know their fellow members, meet them, or hear of them.
McMillan & Chavis	1986	A sense of community consists of four parts – membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, shared emotional connection.
Lawrence	1995	Communities have three common elements – social interaction, community standards and membership rules.

2.2.2 What is a brand community?

The shift from geography to shared meanings and values in defining community enables us to study communities no longer based on geographical boundaries but instead on other attributes such as identification through brands or through consumption activities (McAlexander et al, 2002). By doing so, this introduces this concept of brand communities. Key definitions of brand communities are listed in Table 3 (next page).

One of the earliest definitions of brand communities stresses consumption and defines particular communities as ‘subcultures of consumption’ (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Subcultures of consumption are characterised as having a hierarchical social structure, shared beliefs and values, unique jargons, rituals and modes of expressions (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) approach to defining brand communities is similarly employed by Cova and Pace (2006). Cova and Pace (2006) also acknowledge that brand communities comprise communal interest in a brand and a separate social entity and therefore, Cova and Pace (2006) present a comparable definition to Schouten and McAlexander (1995). However, there is criticism around the term of ‘subcultures of consumption’ as proposed by Schouten and McAlexander (1995).

Critics point out potential ambiguity as to whether the term 'sub' represents a segment of a larger culture or something subordinate to a dominant culture, something rebellious or substandard (Kozinets, 2001). Other critics suggest the word 'subculture' implies that the subculture is in some way opposed to the majority culture and the subculture therefore, attempts to create an identity that is unique to the majority (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). This conflicts with other definitions of online brand community (presented later in this literature review) that suggests brand communities do not reject aspects of their surrounding majority culture but instead embrace them.

Table 3: Definitions of brand communities

Definitions of brand communities		
Researchers	Year	Definition
Schouten & McAlexander	1995	Subculture of consumption is a distinctive subgroup of society that self selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand or consumption activity.
McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig	2002	A brand community is customer centric. The existence and meaningfulness of the community is inhere in customer experience rather than in the brand around which that experience revolves.
Cova & Pace	2006	A brand community or brand tribe is any group of people that possesses a common interest in a specific brand and creates a parallel social universe (subculture) rife with its own myths, values, rituals, vocabulary and hierarchy.
Bagozzi & Dholakia.	2006	A small group brand community is a friendship group of consumers with shared enthusiasm for a brand and a well developed social identity, whose members engage jointly in group actions to accomplish collective goals and/or to express mutual sentiment and commitments.

In an alternative approach, McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002) move away from earlier subculture definitions and portray brand communities as customer-centric. McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002) take the stance that consumers and their experiences play a significant role in enhancing relationships not only between consumers and brands but also between consumers and products, consumers and firms and amongst consumers themselves. Therefore, consumers and their experiences are the focal point to forming and maintaining community relationships. Consumers are so central to communities that McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002) suggest that consumers integrated in a brand community are not just consumers, but instead 'brand missionaries'. Consumers carry on the marketing message, they can withstand product failures, they are loyal to the brand and they can provide feedback

(McAlexander et al, 2002). McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig's (2002) definition of brand communities therefore highlights the importance of consumer experience and considers the social context in which the experience occurs.

Like McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002), Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) also consider the role consumer experience plays in brand communities. Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) take a socio-centric approach to brand communities and re-define brand communities as small group brand communities, communities where it is difficult to distinguish brand related activities from social activities. The inability to differentiate brand related activities from social activities in small group brand communities could be attributable to the fact that brand-related activities are frequently heavily interlinked with group social activities to the point that, community members become personally and socially attached to the community (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). For example, Bagozzi and Dholakia's (2006) suggest communities form for social and psychological reasons such as, to strengthen social intentions and social identity. This approach to brand community emphasises the social and psychological aspects of the consumers experience when forming and participating in brand communities. These definitions of brand communities portray the shift from communities being originally defined by shared geography to communities later defined through shared consumption activities.

2.2.3 What is an online community?

The variations in definitions of communities over time reflect the development of different forms of community and imply communities must not always be geographically bound. Social network analysts Fischer (1982) and Wellman (1999) support this idea and suggest, "social aspects of community should be emphasised over spatial aspects" (cited in Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002, p.346). It is only through recent developments in electronic communication and the growth of the Internet that the media and public have started to accept that supportive social relationships can exist at a distance (Rheingold, 2000, cited in Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002, p.346). As economies have adapted to modernity, media such as the Internet has played a significant role in re-shaping traditional communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The transition from traditional to modern day communities has seen a shift in focus from unmarked commodities to branded goods, from personal selling to mass advertising and from communal citizens to individual consumers (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). These changes also brought changes in definitions of community.

The introduction of the Internet has enabled communities to develop online without relying on shared geographical space, introducing the concept of online communities (see Table 4).

Armstrong and Hagel (1995), Kozinets (1999) and Rothearmel and Sugiyama (2001) present definitions of online communities as shown in Table 4. Research by Armstrong and Hagel (1995) identifies four types of online communities based on online user needs. Communities of relationships are identified as groups of people who are aware of each other's identities and regularly interact to build up a relationship history. Communities of fantasy are groups of people who regularly interact, but will not be aware of each other's identities and could operate in a fictional manner by creating new environments, personalities and stories. Communities of transaction are groups of people who interact for the purpose of buying or selling online products or services online. Finally, communities of interest are referred to as groups of people who interact intensively with one another on limited subjects of mutual interest. It is these communities of interest that closely resemble an online brand community.

Table 4: Definitions of online communities

Definitions of online communities		
Researchers	Year	Definition
Armstrong & Hagel	1995	A online community of interest is defined by subject matter. It is made up of users who interact intensively with one another on a limited topic. They may be based on geography, subject knowledge, social or experimental interests or transactional interests.
Kozinets	1999	Virtual communities of consumption can be defined as affiliate groups whose online interactions are based upon share enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity or related group of activities.
Rothearmel & Sugiyima	2001	A virtual community is similar to a community of mind described by Tonnies (1912; 1967) except that it forms through an electronic communication medium and is not bound by space and time.

However, the definition of communities of interest by Armstrong and Hagel (1995) is somewhat broad as Armstrong and Hagel (1995) propose communities of interest can develop around a range of components such as subjects or geography, as opposed to solely developing around a brand. The definition of virtual communities of consumption presented by Kozinets (1999) in Table 4 also suggests virtual communities of consumption are not tied by a brand. Kozinets (1999) gives an example of virtual communities of consumption as "regular posters to a bulletin board devoted to connoisseurship of fine wine" (p.254). Rothearemel and Sugiyama (2001) also make a unique

contribution to definition of online community. Rothearemel and Sugiyama (2001) apply Tonnie's early traditional concept of community to the modern day and suggest that Tonnie's third type of community – community of the mind – closely resembles an online community. The major difference between the two are online communities are developed through electronic communication and are therefore, bound by neither space nor time.

2.2.4 What is an online brand community?

An online brand community is a specialised non-geographically bound community where brand admirers amalgamate (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). In order to research online brand communities we must identify what contributes to an online brand community. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), the pioneers of online brand communities, define an online brand community as having a brand at the core of the community binding consumers together (see Table 5 next page). Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) conceptualise online brand communities as having three core components: shared consciousness of kind, presence of shared rituals and traditions, and a shared sense of moral responsibility. According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) these three core components are fundamental to all online brand communities and will now be explained in greater detail.

Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) definition of online brand community characterises consciousness of kind as the intrinsic connection members feel with one another and the collective sense of difference they feel from others not part of the community. Consciousness of kind is driven by two components - legitimacy and oppositional brand loyalty. Legitimacy refers to a process where members differentiate between true and sincere community members and those that are merely opportunists. For example, legitimate members "really know the brand" where as others may be using the brand for the "wrong reasons" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p.419). Oppositional brand loyalty refers to members opposing competitor brands and by doing so this constitutes an important part of the community experience and influences the meaning of the brand. The second component in Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) definition of online brand community is shared rituals and traditions and this component is responsible for driving the community's shared sense of history, culture and consciousness. The presence of shared rituals and traditions is accentuated in an online brand community by showing appreciation for the history of the brand as well as sharing brand stories. By sharing brand stories members connect with each other through brand experiences. Finally, the third component of an online brand community according to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) is a shared sense of moral responsibility. Shared moral responsibility refers to the obligation members have to the community as a whole and to its individual members. By retaining current members and integrating new members, as well as assisting members in their consumption of this brand, this helps to drive a sense of shared moral responsibility in an online

brand community. Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) three-component conceptualization of online brand community is one of the most widely accepted definitions of online brand community.

Table 5: Definition of online brand community. Source: Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001.

Definition of online brand communities		
Researchers	Year	Definition
Muniz & O’Guinn	2001	A brand community is a specialized non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. It is specialized because at its centre is a branded good or service.

Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) accentuate the role of the brand in online brand communities, which contrasts from other definitions that emphasise customer experience and the social context (see for example Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; McAlexander et al, 2002). With the brand at the heart of an online brand community, any consumer that is devoted to the brand can become a community member and online brand communities can form around any brand (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). However, communities are more likely to develop around brands that have a rich and established history, strong competitors and a strong image (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Online brand communities play an important role in the brand’s larger social construction and help determine the brand’s legacy (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). This may explain why brand communities generally have a commercial focus and that they are established and organised by marketers to achieve specific marketing goals (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Nevertheless, regardless of the purpose for establishing an online brand community, online brand communities represent very real, legitimate forms of community that embrace the development of the Internet and identify with postmodern consumers (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001).

This critique of literature suggests Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) definition of online brand community is unique for three reasons. First, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) do not emphasise geography and place of consumption in their definition. Instead they place emphasis on computer-mediated communal consumption. Communities can therefore form without shared geographical space and they attribute the spread of online brand communities to the rise of the Internet (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Second, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) shift importance away from homogeneous lifestyle segments or consumer consumption groups and transfer importance to *brands* linking community members – “this is the tie that binds” (p.426). The brand as the focal point to a brand community contrasts from other definitions where the consumer experiences are the focal point of a brand community (see for example McAlexander et al, 2002). Third, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) assume online brand communities are “explicitly commercial” (p.415). This contrasts with other definitions of brand community such as that presented by Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006), which assumes brand communities have social purposes. Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) definition of online brand community reflects the development of new forms of community from definitions of traditional community and reflects the importance of social developments such as the Internet in driving changes to communities. The role of the Internet in influencing and changing communities is now further discussed.

2.2.5 The role of the Internet in establishing communities

The explosion of the Internet has changed market dynamics and many fear the influence of the Internet on traditional communities for a number of reasons. Wellman and Haythornthwaite (2002) suggest the Internet weakens private communities by reducing social contact with family, friends, neighbours and colleagues. The Internet may also adversely affect a sense of public community by reducing gatherings in public places as well as reducing commitment and service to organisations and local communities (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). Individuals may also become disengaged with their local communities and as a result, there may be reduced levels of positive attitudes towards community life and wellbeing (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). Despite these concerns, the Internet undoubtedly brings with it many interesting opportunities, particularly for marketers (Kozinets, 2002a; Thorbjonsen, Supphellen, Nysveen, Pedersen, 2002).

One of these opportunities is that the Internet may be used to *create* communities or may transform existing communities, which contrasts with Wellman and Haythornthwaite’s (2002) opinions. Hagel and Armstrong (1997) believe that the idea of community formation has been central to the Internet since its early creation. Andersen (2005) also agrees with Hagel and Armstrong (1997) and claims the Internet provides infrastructure for enhancing the development of communities for two reasons. First, the Internet expands the reach of communities by reducing

barriers for interaction (Andersen, 2005). The Internet has been praised for encouraging connections and communications among people regardless of race, creed, gender or geography (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). Second, the Internet increases communication effectiveness by providing greater possibilities for interaction among users (Andersen, 2005). The Internet provides a space for social interaction and for people to meet others with similar interests, and therefore it is without doubt the Internet creates social cohesion and a platform to create communities (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002).

In recent years, the ability of the Internet to encourage social cohesion and social interaction has meant online activity has progressed towards user-driven technologies such as blogs and social networks (Smith, 2009). The movement towards online social media has driven the creation of online social networks on Internet platforms such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and Twitter, which are now integrated into consumers' every day lives (Smith, 2009). Online social networks are growing exponentially. Facebook had more than 71 million visitors in April 2009, a 217% increase in visitors from the same month one year ago (Johnson, 2009). The number of consumers globally who have written a blog on an online social network increased from 54% in 2006 to 77% in 2008 (Smith, 2009). In 2009, social network usage exceeded web-based email usage for the first time in history (Wilson, 2009). The Internet is responsible for the rise in online communities and online social networks. Online communities are a growing opportunity for social interaction and cannot be ignored.

From a commercial perspective online brand communities bring numerous benefits to marketers as the Internet provides an effective medium to contact customers and maintain relationships (Casalo, Flavian & Guinaliu, 2008). As Poynter (2008) suggests, brand managers are realising the need to engage with consumers, and online brand communities on platforms such as Facebook are popular means for doing so. Online brand communities established by marketers or brand owners for commercial reasons are termed for the purpose of this research, '*brand-sponsored' online brand communities*. Maintaining customer relationships are not the only benefits of brand-sponsored online communities to firms. Marketers may generate and maintain brand-sponsored online communities to measure community efforts; track success of campaigns, map social networks, or identify potential problems with products or consumers (Hanson & Kalyanam, 2007). In some instances, firms directly ask community members regarding their likes or dislikes towards advertising campaigns and other marketing materials (as identified in the All Blacks Official social network community, May 2009).

Previous research also indicates online brand communities are advantageous to marketers by driving brand loyalty (see for example Andersen, 2005; Bagozzi, & Dholakia, 2006; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) state, "brand

communities clearly affect brand equity” (p.427). By having a brand at the core of the community brand communities are able to directly influence all four components of brand equity: perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness and brand associations (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). For example, online brand communities foster essential components of brand equity by encouraging sharing of information, enhancing the brands’ culture and history and providing assistance and contact with consumers (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). These are just some of the potential commercial advantages online communities may bring to a firm and for these reasons; firms may invest time and resources into creating and maintaining strong online brand communities.

While there is minimal research into the benefits of online brand communities for consumers, online communities in general prove to be advantages to consumers and consumers also clearly benefit from establishing online communities. Online communities foster communication between people allowing individuals to easily express their personal thoughts, reactions and opinions (Dellarocas, 2003). Infrastructure present in online communities such as message boards and chat rooms, encourage new forms of communication to develop not just between close friends but also between acquaintances and strangers (Hanson & Kalyanam, 2007). Consumers can therefore socially interact with not only geographically distant friends or family but can they also use online communities to form new relationships with strangers who may have shared interests (Hanson & Kalyanam, 2007). Relationships with strangers or ‘weak ties’, which may have been otherwise difficult to pursue without the Internet, are important as they provide new information and access to new and diverse networks (Granovetter, 1973). Kozinets (2002b) also suggests that online communities can enhance consumer’s self-expression and strengthen weak ties, perhaps even more so when not dictated by firms or marketers. People can communicate with each other either through simple short message postings or through in-depth real time conversations on sensitive and personal topics (Hanson & Kalyanam, 2007). Online communities therefore provide a real means for social interaction between people and members can spend as little or as much time as they prefer, participating in online communities (Hanson & Kalyanam, 2007).

These social benefits suggest online communities are not only valuable to marketers but also to consumers. With these benefits in mind, it is possible consumers may also invest time and resources into creating and maintaining online brand communities and online brand communities may not just be brand-sponsored but also consumer-generated. Online brand communities established by consumers are termed for the purpose of this research, ‘*consumer-generated online brand communities*’. The idea of consumer-generated online brand communities conflicts with Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) approach to online brand communities (presented in earlier in this literature review), which presumes online brand communities are only created by firms for commercial purposes. Researchers acknowledge, many successful brand communities are

organised and facilitated entirely by enthusiastic customers with little or no firm involvement (Algesheimer et al, 2005). Consumers may not only generate online brand communities differently to marketers, but their interaction and resulting output within online brand communities may also differ from marketers (Hanson & Kalyanam, 2007). This suggests online brand communities may differ in content from a consumer-generated versus brand-sponsored perspective and understanding these differences is worthy of research. With the rise in consumer-generated social networks and communities, research into online brand communities generated and maintained by marketers versus consumers warrants attention. This provokes thought about consumer-generated online brand communities and potential differences between online brand communities created by brand owners and online brand communities created by consumers.

2.2.6 Summary of community approaches and definitions

This review of literature reveals how definitions of communities have changed with the shift from traditional to modern day communities. Early definitions of communities define communities in relation to shared geographical space. However, the rise of the Internet enables communities to form around shared consumption of a brand and over the Internet, thereby facilitating the creation of online brand communities. Through examining definitions of communities it is clear different perspectives of brand communities and contrasting definitions exist (Cova & Pace, 2006; Li, 2004). Cova and Pace (2006) acknowledge the need for further clarification around definitions of brand communities. The widely accepted definition of online brand community presented by Muniz and O'Guinn in 2001 is now perhaps outdated. Researchers (see for example Smith, 2009; Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002; Wilson, 2009) indicate huge growth in social networks and online communities, particularly in the last two years. It is possible that due to the large growth in online communities, the purpose for creating an online brand community may have changed since Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) definition.

Current literature into online brand communities shows definitions of online brand communities currently do not consider potential differences that may exist in consumer-generated online brand communities compared with brand-sponsored online brand communities. Literature on online brand communities fails to consider online brand communities created by consumers as opposed to created by brand owners. There is an underlying assumption marketers create online brand communities for commercial purposes (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), and there is a lack of consideration for the role of the consumer in creating online brand communities for other non-commercial purposes. It is possible online brand communities are no longer only established by marketers for commercial purposes as suggested by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), but could also be established by consumers for other purposes. This literature review indicates an increase in social

networking sites and online communities and clearly shows online communities bring benefits to both marketers *and* consumers. This presents opportunities to extend research of online brand communities by considering differences between consumer-generated and brand-sponsored online brand communities. Investigating consumer-generated online brand communities compared with brand-sponsored communities may be beneficial and may further understanding of online brand communities.

2.3 Research into online brand communities

The majority of research into brand communities has provided valuable insights by focusing on consumer durable products. A snapshot of key studies into brand communities and consumer durable products are presented in Table 6 and Table 7. Research on brand communities around vehicles and motorcycles proves popular. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) examine brand communities of Ford Bronco and Saab to explore the characteristics, processes and composition of brand communities. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) and McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002) investigate brand communities of Jeep and Harley Davidson to provide a broader view of brand communities. European car clubs for cars such as Ford or Volkswagen are also the focus of Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann’s (2005) research into customer relationships and how these relationships influence members’ behaviour and intentions to participate in brand communities. Additional research into brand communities specifically around vehicles and motorcycles includes, investigating of the role of the social environment in the brand community of Hummer (Luedicke, 2006) and member behaviour in small group brand communities of Harley Davidson (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006).

These examples (shown in Table 6 and Table 7) illustrate the depth of research into vehicle and motorcycle brand communities. Researchers suggest one reason for the intense focus on automotives is because consumers are “emotionally engaged with automotive brands and highly involved in the product and product purchase” and this encourages participation in a brand community (Algesheimer et al, 2005, p.20). Even with this extensive research into brand communities around vehicles and motorcycles researchers acknowledge the need to look beyond the consumer market (Andersen et al, 2005; McAlexander et al, 2002).

Table 6: Brand communities and consumer durable products (a)












Brand communities and consumer durable products				
Brand	Researcher & Year	Objectives	Methodology	Online component
	Schouten & McAlexander, 1995	Studying subcultures of consumption to understand consumer behaviour	Ethnographic research over 3yrs of Harley Davidson subcultures of consumption.	None
  	Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001	To explore the characteristics, processes and composition of brand communities	Face to face research in local communities, content off brand world wide web pages.	Yes - no commercial brand sites studied
 	McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002	To provide a broader view of brand communities	Ethnographic research at brandfests, quantitative research online	Yes – in conjunction with ethnographic research

Table 7: Brand communities and consumer durable products (b)

Brand communities and consumer durable products				
Brand	Researcher & Year	Objectives	Methodology	Online component
  Mercedes-Benz	Algesheimer, Dholakia & Hermann, 2005	Consumer's relationships with the brand community & how this influences their intentions and behaviours	In depth interviews from European car club members.	None
	Belk & Tumbat, 2005	Brand cults - extreme devotion community members have towards brands	In depth interviews of Mac Users combined with a collection of newspaper articles, advertisements, promotional material, online material and books.	Yes – although minimal
	Luedicke, 2006	Brand communities and their social environments	Face to face interviews, netnographic analysis of fan pages, websites, owner clubs, online discussion forums, mailing lists	Yes – in conjunction with F2F
	Cova & Pace, 2006	To analyse the possibilities of brand communities for mass market convenience brands	Netnographic analysis of the 'my Nutella' website, followed up with face to face interviews with consumers and managers.	Yes core component – with posthoc F2F interviews

Despite the need to look beyond the consumer market, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) remain focused on consumer products and research online brand communities for the Macintosh brand.

Macintosh is also the centre of research into brand cults by Belk and Tumbat (2005) who consider the extreme devotion community members have towards certain brands. Through researching brand cults around the Macintosh brand Belk and Tumbat (2005) extend understanding of the virtual cult-like behaviour consumers have towards brands and the encompassing role brands play in consumers' lives. With the majority of research into brand communities focusing on niche consumer products such as vehicles, motorcycles and computers, Cova and Pace (2006) address the need for research into online brand communities that centre on consumer convenience products. Cova and Pace (2006) investigate the 'my Nutella' online community in order to identify community differences between niche luxury products and food convenience products. Cova and Pace (2006) make a unique contribution to research by examining the possibilities of online brand communities around brands for basic convenience products.

While all of the above research makes valuable contributions to understanding online brand communities, three gaps in the literature prevail. Firstly, few studies have focused on brand communities that primarily exist *online*. Studies have focused on the real life and online components of brand communities. Online brand community studies use ethnographic techniques such as face-to-face interviews as the core methodology to investigate online brand communities. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) for example, combine findings from brand communities that prevail in local neighbourhoods with findings from brand communities online. This brings into doubt whether research into online brand communities has in fact really focused on how the Internet is used to create and maintain online brand communities. Secondly, with research focusing on consumer durable products there is a clear gap in online brand community literature addressing service or sports brands. The majority of research into online brand communities has focused on products such as computers, automotives, motorcycles etc but has failed to consider online brand communities for service or sports brands. A third gap in the literature for online brand communities is the large proportion of research into online brand communities has been conducted in the U.S. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) for example investigate communities of U.S Harley Davidson owners but acknowledge there is ambiguity about the nature of consumption subcultures in other non-American markets. Outside of the U.S market, Cova and Pace (2006) investigate online brand communities for consumer convenience products in Italy. Casalo, Flavian and Guinaliu (2008) also investigate participation in online communities amongst Spanish speaking consumers (not illustrated in Tables 6 and Table 7 as this research does not specifically focus on online communities for brands). However, Casalo, Flavian and Guinaliu (2008) also identify the need for research into online communities to span a greater diversity of nationalities. There is opportunity to research online brand communities in other non-U.S. markets. These three gaps in the literature point to opportunities to extend research into online brand communities. Research that can focus on online brand communities specifically over the Internet, examine online brand

communities around service or sports brands and investigate online brand communities that reside outside of the U.S. will be advantageous.

2.4 Consumption practices

This literature review is particularly concerned with how consumers interact and form relationships with brands in online brand communities. Consumption practices are therefore an important part of this literature review. Consumption practices are defined as “the type of social actions in which people make use of consumption objects in a variety of ways” (Holt, 1995, p.1). Understanding the different ways in which people consume objects such as brands and how these differences vary across groups, situations or conditions is an important, yet undeveloped part of consumer research (Holt, 1995). A significant amount of research into consumption practices has been on fans of popular culture and sports teams (Holt, 1995; Kozinets, 1997, 2001, 2006). Exploring the consumption practices of fans enables us to understand how fan cultures or communities of fans are created and maintained (Kozinets, 1997).

The beginning of this section begins with an overview of research into fans in order to acknowledge the large amount of research that exists on fans and sports fans. However, the majority of this research has focused on fans in the offline environment, which is outside the scope of this study. Instead, this research is primarily focused on consumption practices of fans and the next section then introduces research into fans and consumption practices. Lastly, consumption practices within brand communities are evaluated and the importance of studying consumption practices within brand communities is outlined.

2.4.1 Research into fans

Fans are unique brand loyalists as they generally show extreme commitment to brands, high levels of devotion, passion, love, emotional attachment, and enthusiasm (Chung, Beverland, & Quester, 2005; Cova & Cova, 2001; McAlexander et al 2002). Fournier (1998) acknowledges consumers with extreme devotion to brands such as fans, will participate in behaviours that are beneficial to consumer-brand relationship. The relationships between fans and brands may therefore be stronger and more intense than relationships between regular consumers and brands (Fournier, 1998; McAlexander et al, 2002). For example, sports fans typically show extreme passion and are extremely interested in the competitive success of their team (Belk & Tumbat, 2005). There is extensive research into sports fans.

Research by Funk and James (2001) investigates sport fans to develop a psychological continuum model that explains individual's connections to, and experiences with sports teams. Funk and James (2001) propose four stages, which connect fans to sports teams. Fans initially show awareness of the sports team but may not yet have a favourite. Afterwards fans then develop and form attraction to a sports team by acknowledging they have a favourite. Following this, fans show attachment to the sports team and a psychological connection between the fan and sports team starts to develop. Finally, fans form an allegiance with the sports team and fans become loyal and committed. The psychological continuum model for sports fans presented by Funk and James (2001) makes an important contribution to understanding fans connections to sports team and an individual's psychological attachment to sports teams. Other research into sports fans investigates the effects of sportsapes in relation to fan's attachment to sports teams, including game attendance, future game attendance and loyalty (Hill & Green, 2000). Research has also explored factors that contribute to brand loyalty among sports fans. Bristow and Sebastian (2001) for example, provided insights into fan loyalty to professional sports teams by studying the Chicago Cubs baseball fans.

Research on fans however, does not just focus on sports fans. There has been extensive research into fans for technology (see for example Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), automotives (see for example McAlexander et al, 2002; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), science fiction (see for example Kozinets, 1997, 2001, 2006) and food and beverage (see for example Fournier & Yao, 1997; Kozinets, 2002a). This brief review of literature shows there is extensive research into fans and sports fans in the offline environment. However, the large majority of research into fans and sports fans in the offline environment falls outside of the scope of this research study and is less relevant to this research. This research is primarily concerned with fan behaviour and consumption practices of fans in online brand communities.

2.4.2 Consumption practices and fans

Early consumer research into consumption practices by Holt (1995) investigates consumption practices of baseball fans. This research presents a strong framework and typology for understanding consumption practices of fans. Through observations and case studies Holt (1995) conceptualises a four-component framework of consumption practices

The first of the four components in Holt's (1995) typology of consumption practices is Consuming as Experience. This is conceptualised as the consumer's subjective, emotional reactions to the consumption object and is made up of three parts. First, accounting, the ability to make sense of what people encounter throughout their experience; Second, evaluating, passing judgment on the





situation, people and action they experience; and finally appreciating, an emotional response to the situation, people or action. The second component in Holt's (1995) typology of consumption practices is Consuming as Integration, which describes how consumers acquire and manipulate object meanings. By doing this, consumers are able to enhance the feeling that the consumption object is part of their identity or self-concept. Consuming as Integration may be enhanced through assimilating – becoming competent and engaged participants in the consumption activity; through producing – creating methods to enhance involvement in the consumption activity or through personalising – taking extra steps to assert their individuality of their relationship with the consumption activity. The third component is Consuming as Classification. This refers to the way consumers use consumption objects to classify themselves in relation to others. Holt (1995) identifies two methods of classifying – through objects or through actions. Finally, there is Consuming as Play, which refers to the way consumers engage with consumption objects and use consumption objects as resources to interact with other consumers. Consuming of Play may be further enhanced by communing – consumers sharing the consumption experience together and interacting so the experience is mutual; and by socializing – using the consumption experience to entertain each other. These four components represent a holistic framework of consumption practices.

The four-component framework by Holt (1995) makes a strong contribution to research on consumer behaviour by describing consumption practices of fans that are directed toward a consumption object. This complements research on online brand communities, where focus of behaviour is directly centered on the brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Further, by introducing a new component 'Consuming as Play' Holt (1995) introduces a new description of consumption practices and acknowledges the importance of how consumers use objects to interact with each other. By doing so, Holt (1995) implies objects aid in forming communities with interested consumers. However, Holt (1995) acknowledges the need for additional research that focuses on the institutional *frameworks* that consumers apply to consume objects. Frameworks provide the raw structure for consumers to construct experiences with the object or brand and undoubtedly influence the consumer's experience and consumption practices (Holt, 1995). There is need to extend research into consumption practices that considers the surrounding frameworks of communities as, "frameworks provide the raw materials with which consumers construct their experiences" (Holt, 1995, p.14).

2.4.3 Communities and consumption practices

One reason why online brand communities are of such interest in this study is because they allow insight into consumer behaviour (Kozinets, 1997). To examine consumer behaviour in online brand communities it is possible to investigate consumption practices. As communities change from traditional to modern day communities, understanding consumption practices and how they change within communities is beneficial (Kozinets, 1997). In addition, as the way communities develop with the influence of media such as the Internet, studying consumption practices helps to better understand the relationship between media and consumption (Kozinets, 1997). Online brand communities provide a strong environment for insight into consumer behaviour and the relationship between the Internet and consumption. Table 8 presents an outline of key research into communities and consumption practices.

Table 8: Communities and consumption practices

Communities and consumption practices				
Brand and Subculture	Researcher & Year	Objectives	Methodology	Online component
	Holt, 1997	To provide a comprehensive typology of consumption practices among fan members.	Observational case study of Chicago baseball fan members.	None
	Kozinets, 1997	To identify key characteristics of consumption practices.	Ethnographic and netnographic analysis of X-File fans at fan conventions, of official fan websites and usenet group websites.	Yes – core component
	Kozinets, 2001	To examine the cultural and subcultural construction of consumption practices through mass media.	Ethnographic research of Star-Trek fans through fan clubs, conventions, internet groups, in depth interviews.	Yes – small component
	Kozinets, 2002	To explore and analyse the meanings and symbols within contemporary online coffee groups.	Netnographic analysis of <alt.coffee> online coffee group in conjunction with coffee-related web pages, web rings, mailing lists, books about coffee and in-person discussions.	Yes – core component

To examine consumption practices we can identify the themes or meanings that surround specific consumption groups (Kozinets, 1997, 2002a). Kozinets (1997) investigates the consumption practices of fans in X-Files communities. After studying the X-Philes³ subculture of consumption Kozinets (1997) suggests three themes appear, which form the foundation to the online X-Philes community. The three themes: shared aesthetic tastes, shared experience of awe and mystery and shared drive to consume the relevant X File symbols; unite X-Phile members and bind the X-Philes

³ Fans of the X-Files have created their own nickname X-Philes. 'Phile' derived from the Greek word *philos* 'to love' (Kozinets, 1997, p.470).

community (Kozinets, 1997). By studying an online coffee community it is also possible to identify the meanings that unite members of an online coffee community (Kozinets, 2002a). Through netnographic analysis the following four themes appeared to unite the online coffee community: distinction of coffee, consumption webs and mapping the paths of desire, commodified brands and brand image and community concerns, and religious devotion to coffee and uncovering meaningful metaphors. Research into consumption practices of fans by Kozinets (1997, 2002a) provides comprehensive understanding of fan behaviour in communities. Kozinets (1997) acknowledges there is opportunity to expand this research by investigating online brand communities and consumption practices of sports fans (Kozinets, 1997).

Studying the meanings and themes that unite a community is fundamental to appreciating consumption practices in communities. Cova and Cova (2001) suggest that the meanings and themes that unite a culture or community are so important that consumers may be participating in the community less for the purposeful value of the product or service, but more for the community's *linking value* (Cova & Cova, 2001). The linking value refers to "the product or service's contribution to establishing and or reinforcing bonds between individuals" (Cova & Cova, 2001, p.70). As consumers bond together in communities, they share similar experiences or emotions and it is the 'shared glue' or 'linking value' that keeps members in the community (Cova & Cova, 2001). The more a product or service can contribute to the development of a bond or 'linking value' within a community, the greater its linking value (Cova & Cova, 2001). Older brands in particular may provide a stronger linking value because of their ability to create a sense of utopia (Kozinets, 2002a). Cova and Cova (2001) suggest that is more important to interpret and consider the community from its linking value rather than its purposeful value as it better to understand what is supporting and sustaining group membership. Here we see the importance of meaning or themes in creating a linking value between community members as they consume a product, service or brand.

Research into consumption practices suggests meanings and themes uniting a community are sub-culturally mediated the Internet and the surrounding social environment (Kozinets, 1997). Kozinets (1997, 2001, 2002a) pays particular attention to the role of the Internet in mediating consumption practices. The meanings and themes that unite cultures or brand communities do not reside in individuals but instead are discussed among community members and are reinforced through consumption exchanges on the Internet (Kozinets, 1997). Brands themselves are comprised of meanings or themes and as consumers consume brands in communities, brand experiences are shaped and changed (Brown, et al 2003; Kozinets, 1997; Luedicke, 2006). The meanings of brands are heavily influenced by online community interaction, so much so the Internet may not just influence brand meanings but may also influence consumer's enthusiasm and preference for

goods or services, perceived attributes of goods or services and even purchase (Kozinets, 1997). Luedicke (2006) investigates the role of the social environment and reveals how brand communities depend on and interact with their surrounding social environments. Even though the core functions and aesthetic qualities of the brand are determined by firms Luedicke (2006) proposes, through social interaction brands can further develop aesthetic or social distinctions and therefore break free from corporate marketing influences. These findings suggest that meanings and themes uniting a brand community are fluid and online interaction plays an important role in shaping and altering these meanings and themes. Consumption practices within online brand communities could therefore vary with different online interaction. As consumption practices are negotiated in social environments, marketers may not always be able to control consumption practices.

Marketers may go to great lengths to provide brand meanings and themes to consumers (Brown et al, 2003). However, some suggest that consumers need to be freed from constraining forms of consumption as marketers can homogenize consumers and suppress consumers' self-expressions (Kozinets, 2002b). Market and organizational influences can go as far as limiting consumers' creative roles and identities and forcing consumers to absorb certain perspectives of reality (Kozinets, 2002b). By doing so, marketers can weaken the degree of authenticity in a community (Leigh, Peters, & Shelton, 2006). Therefore, despite efforts of marketers to provide consumers with brand meanings and themes, consumers will still create their own brand meanings and themes and will communicate these back to the marketer and rest of the community (Brown et al, 2003). With such desire to maintain their sense of self, consumers can even go as far as creating 'consumer communities' where they are able to break away from large corporations and are able dictate their own consumption meanings and practices, roles and identities (Kozinets, 2002b; Leigh et al, 2006). The meanings and themes that unite consumers in communities are therefore, not always dictated by organisations or marketers but instead can also be determined by consumers. The role of the consumer in an online brand community may therefore influence consumption practices. This implies consumption practices could vary across communities generated and maintained by marketers, compared with communities generated and maintained by consumers. There is a gap in the literature addressing this. Investigating consumption practices for brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities is an opportunity for future research.

The current research outlined above makes a strong contribution to understanding communities and consumption practices. Research (see for example Kozinets 1997, 2001, 2002a) suggest the Internet mediates consumption practices as the meanings and themes uniting communities are often discussed, adapted, and reinforced through online community participation. The Internet

and the way consumers interact in online communities play an important role in mediating consumption practices and Holt (1995) acknowledges the surrounding frameworks are important in influencing consumption practices. A large amount of research has examined consumption practices by investigating the meanings and themes uniting fan cultures (Kozinets 1997, 2001, 2006). Despite this, there is a gap in the literature addressing consumption practices for sports fans in online brand communities and this presents opportunity to extend research into online brand communities, consumption practices and sports fans. While marketers often provide consumers with meanings and themes and therefore attempt to control brand consumption practices, consumers frequently alter consumption practices through community interaction and could therefore co-produce brand meanings. Furthermore, consumers may in fact be searching for ways to break free of brand-sponsored communities in order to control their self-expressions, self-identities, and consumption meanings (Kozinets, 2002b). This presents opportunities to further examine how consumption practices differ across consumer-generated and brand-sponsored online brand communities.

2.5 Language and self-expression in online brand communities

In addition to providing insight into consumption practices, online brand communities are powerful tools for marketers as they also provide a wealth of information on the language and meanings that appear within consumer groups (Kozinets, 2006). Kozinets (2006) recommends observing online brand communities for an extended period of time through in-depth qualitative techniques, such as online ethnography or netnography. By doing so, it is possible to gain remarkable insight into the language and communication uniting consumers within a culture or online community (Kozinets, 2006). Understanding and recognising the language within a culture or online community can provide insight into how consumers participate and interact with consumers and brands in online communities.

One advantage of recognising the language that unites a culture or online community is that it can guide the development of advertising campaigns and advertising copy (Kozinets, 2002a, 2006). Through netnographic analysis of a Star-Trek consumer culture, Kozinets (2006) acknowledges how consumer discussions and interactions provide valuable information to marketers. Marketers can carefully interpret discussions and language within the culture or online community and then use consumers' own language to further corporate brand strategy (Kozinets, 2006). For example, Kozinets (2006) suggests that by observing the language in the Star Trek culture, marketers can then use this language and direct it back to consumers. In this sense, communication strategies can target consumers using their own language and terms (Kozinets, 2006). By critically evaluating language and communication styles within online communities, findings can also guide advertising

campaigns (Kozinets, 2002a, 2006). Results from netnographic analysis of an online coffee community showed key words such as 'passion', 'hero', 'world of beauty' and how the coffee 'flowed forth', reflected coffee conversations between community members (Kozinets, 2002a, p. 69). The use of language was also interesting when consumers termed the absolutely perfect shot of espresso as the "god shot" (Kozinets, 2002a, p.69). By analysing the language and key words that appeared in this online coffee community it was clear members were united through religious devotion coffee consumption (Kozinets, 2002a). It is these powerful and unique terms such as the 'god shot' that marketers could use to guide advertising copy or advertising campaigns (Kozinets, 2002a, 2006).

Understanding the language and communication within a consumer culture or online community can also assist in new product or service development (Kozinets, 2006). Analysing the language and communication through netnographic analysis can provide researchers and marketers with rich detailed information (Kozinets, 2002a). Marketers can recognise the innovative ideas that appear in detailed communication and use these ideas for innovative product development (Kozinets, 2002a). For example, through netnographic analysis Kozinets (2006) identifies "ripping" as a key word in the Star Trek community as fans enjoy "ripping" on the movies for further challenge. Kozinets (2006) then makes the suggestion that a book could be produced for fans, which focuses on the "ripping" of Star Trek movies. It is evident by studying language in online brand communities; consumers discuss what is important to them and generate new consumer insights for marketers (Kozinets, 2002a). Through the language and communication of online communities it is possible to identify opportunities for new product development (Kozinets, 2002a, 2006).

Kozinets (2006, p.287) admits, "Understanding the particular language and customs of a tribe is the only way to meaningfully communicate with them". Although understanding the use of language and communication styles in an online brand community depends on how a consumer presents themselves to the community. The way a consumer presents themselves to the community is termed 'self-presentation' and refers to the social actions of individuals such as displaying signs, symbols, brands and practices that present the desired impression of one's self (William & Bendelow, 1998 cited in Schau & Gilly, 2003, p.387). Presentation of one's self involves expressing ideal values, such as the value a person hopes to aspire to but may not be able to maintain in reality (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Schau and Gilly (2003) discuss the concept of self-presentation in computer-mediated environments compared with self-presentation in the real world and they recognise the power of online communication, such as websites, in providing consumers with greater freedom to express their ideal values than they may otherwise have in real life. Schau and Gilly (2003) acknowledge individuals may find it easier to disclose and express

their sense of self in computer-mediated environments rather than in the real world, where individuals may feel a social desirability presence. It may be worthwhile to consider how individuals express themselves in online brand communities and whether any social desirability bias exists in online brand communities.

This research acknowledges the importance of analysing language and communication in the online brand communities and how language and communication provides insights into consumption practices in online brand communities. Kozinets (2002a, 2006) provides strong evidence for analysis of language in strengthening marketer's advertising campaigns and driving new product development. However, there is a gap in the literature considering how language and communication within an online community may differ depending on how the online community is created and maintained. While Schau and Gilly (2003) recognise individuals find it easier to communicate and present their 'true' self in computer-mediated environments, they do not consider how self-presentation may change within different online environments. There is the possibility to extend research into language and self-expression within online communities by comparing consumer language and self-expression across different online brand communities. It may be beneficial to consider how the presence of a brand-owner in an online brand community may influence language and how language differs across brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities.

2.6 Modes of interaction and member types within online communities

Identifying the way consumers consume brands and interact within an online brand community is important as it provides insights into how consumers form relationships (Kozinets, 1999). Kozinets (1999) outlines four consumption interaction modes within an online community, which can be identified based on examining the purpose of communication and the orientation of communication. Figure 2 summaries Kozinets (1999) four consumption interaction modes in online communities.

The first of the four consumption interaction modes according to Kozinets (1999) is the Informational mode. In this Informational mode community members use online communication as a means to an end such as, informing themselves about new services. Communication is individualistic and focuses on short-term personal gain. The second mode of interaction within an online community is the Relational mode and is adopted by community members who have stronger social ties to the community. This mode of interaction is characterised by social involvement and by members focusing on longer-term personal gains, such as encouraging co-

operation or enforcement of community standards. In contrast, the third mode of interaction within an online community may be a Recreational mode, which is also characterised by strong social involvement within the community but instead members focus on shorter-individualistic gains. Flirting and having ‘small talk’ with community members are an example of interaction in an online community through the Recreational mode. Finally, members can interact through the Transformational mode, where communication is pursued for a longer-term social gain. The Transformational mode is often used by community members who have strong social ties to the community and by those where the consumption activity is important to their self-image. Kozinets (1999) gives an example of interaction through the Transformational mode as consumer activists forming online communities.

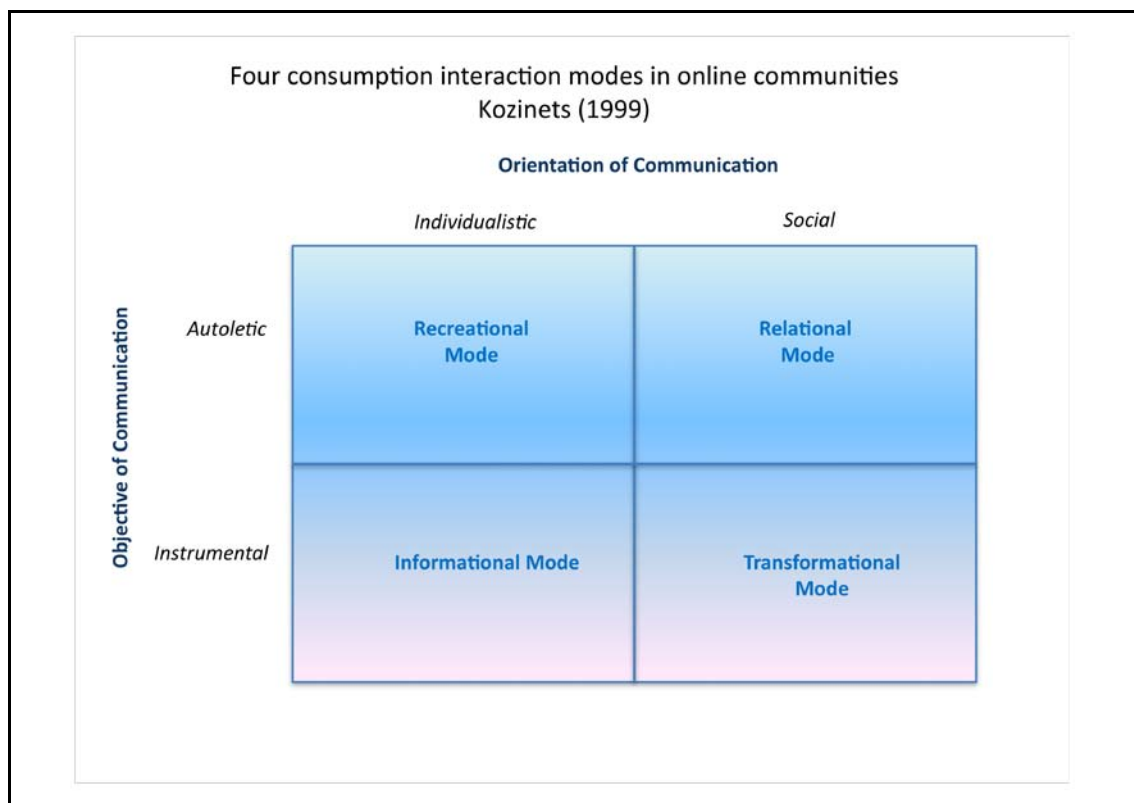


Figure 2: Four consumption interaction modes in online communities. Source: Kozinets, 1999.

Through these four consumption interaction modes (shown in Figure 2) it is possible to drive consumer behaviour and participation in an online community and dictate types of community membership (Kozinets, 1999). The way members participate in online communities can be segmented into four member groups based on the relationship a member has with the consumption activity and the intensity of social relationships a member has with other community members (Kozinets, 1999). The four online community member types proposed by Kozinets

(1999); Tourists, Minglers, Devotees and Insiders explain the methods and motivations for online communication. These are shown in Figure 3.

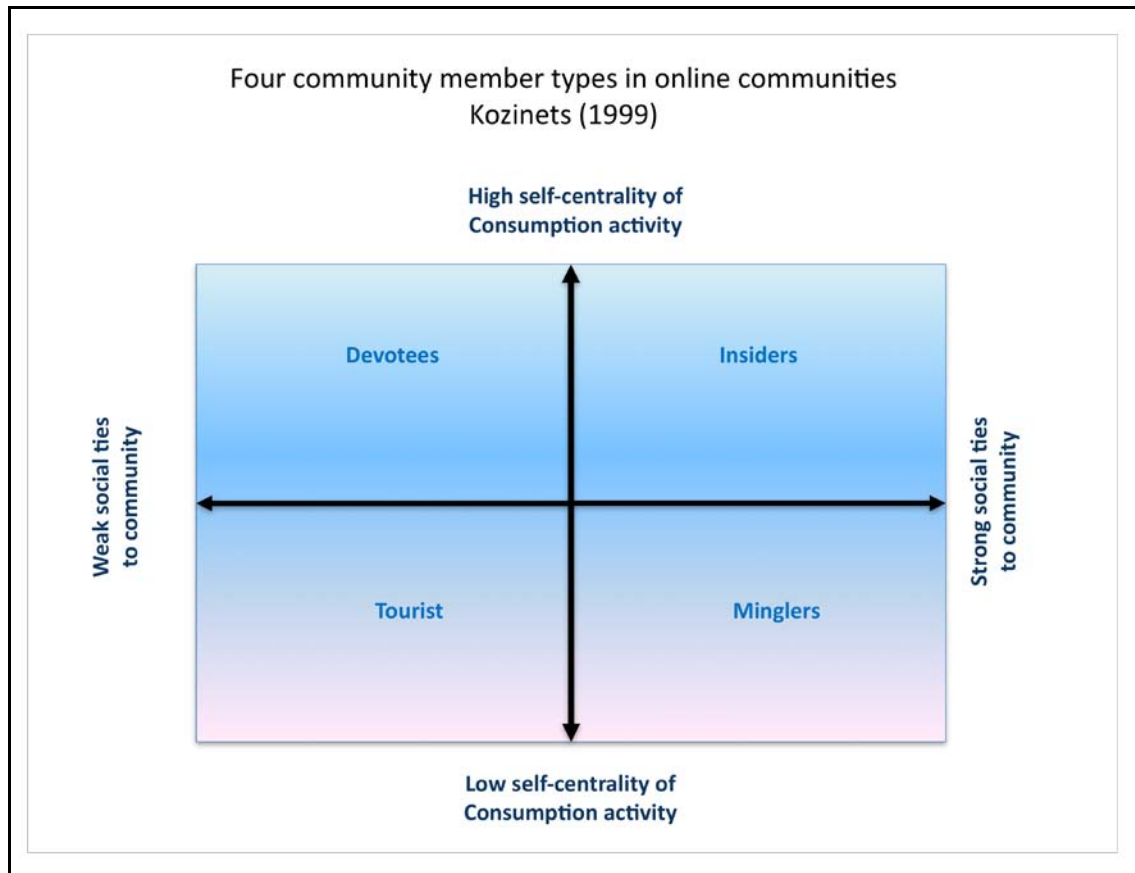


Figure 3: Four community member types in online communities. Source: Kozinets, 1999.

Tourists are those that lack strong community involvement and have weak interest in the activity. They maintain only a brief superficial interest in the consumption activity. Minglers have strong involvement but minimal interest in the consumption activity. Devotees have strong interest in the consumption activity and are enthusiastic but may lack social or personal attachments to the community. Finally, Insiders have strong ties to the consumption activity as well as strong personal attachments to the community (Kozinets 1999). Online communities generally comprise Devotees or Insiders, as when loyal consumers obtain access to the Internet they become loyal members of communities (Kozinets, 1999). These Insiders and Devotees are the most valuable segments for marketers in terms of maintaining and driving brand loyalty as they are usually the most loyal consumers (Kozinets, 1999).

Research into these four consumption interaction modes and community member types within online communities suggests, as online communities have commercial purposes it is up to the marketer to provide the appropriate modes of interaction and encourage the appropriate community member types within an online community (Kozinets, 1999). However, there is a gap in

the literature discussing how consumption interaction modes and community membership types vary with the purpose of the online community. Online communities created and maintained by marketers may provide and encourage different consumption interaction modes and community membership types compared with online communities created and maintained by consumers. This research by Kozinets (1999) fails to consider how the presence of a brand owner may influence community interaction or membership. It may be worthwhile to consider how the presence of brand owners in an online brand community influences the relationship members have with the consumption activity, or the relationship members have with each other. There is opportunity for further research that considers how interaction modes and community membership varies across brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities.

There is the underlying assumption that marketers create and maintain online communities and thereby influence interaction modes and community types (Kozinets, 1999). Andersen (2005) also acknowledges it is the responsibility of the firm to create and maintain the online community by acting as community host. Miller, Fabian and Lin (2009) also believe that one of the roles a firm can play in an online community is acting as community host or sponsor by creating and maintaining websites. On the other hand, Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann (2005) point out that the firm's role in sponsoring brand communities should not always be assumed as the firm's role as brand sponsor can potentially lead to negative community influences. This may be because community members view firms or marketers suspiciously because of their market motives, despite firms or marketers acting in a caring or contributing manner (Kozinets, 2002b). It may be best for marketers to therefore adopt a passive 'behind the scenes approach' (Algesheimer et al, 2005). This critique of literature questions what the role of the firm in an online brand community really is (Algesheimer et al, 2005; Andersen, 2005) and creates debate whether online brand communities should always be created and maintained by firms.

2.7 Summary and proposed research objectives and questions

This literature review shows how definitions of communities have changed over time with the shift from traditional to modern day communities due to the global accessibility of the Internet. The Internet reduces barriers for interaction, provides a strong platform for social cohesion and can be used to create communities (Andersen, 2005; Wellman & Haythornwaite, 2002). As a result, communities are no longer defined by shared geographical space but instead can be defined through shared interests or shared consumption (McAlexander et al, 2002; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Online brand communities, with the brand at the heart of the community binding consumers together, enable communities to develop through shared consumption and admiration for a brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). This evaluation of previous research into online

brand communities shows focus has primarily been on consumer durable products such as motorcycles, automotives, and computer brands. While previous research has proved valuable into furthering understanding of online brand communities, the focus on consumer durable products has been to the detriment of service or sports brands. Little is known about online brand communities from a service or sports brand perspective. There is opportunity to extend research on this topic by examining online brand communities for service or sports brands.

This literature review focuses on consumer-brand relationships. As online brand communities provide insight into consumer behaviour, research suggests understanding consumption practices and how community members make use of brands in various ways helps us to understand the relationship between media such as the Internet and consumption (Kozinets, 1997, 2001). The majority of research into consumption practices has focused on fans and fan cultures, such as baseball fans (Holt, 1995), X-Files (Kozinets, 1997) and Star Trek fans (Kozinets, 2001, 2006). There are opportunities to extend research into consumption practices of online communities from fans of 'pop culture' to other areas such as fans of sport brands (Kozinets, 1997). Despite marketers often providing consumers with brand meanings and themes, consumers frequently dictate their own consumption practices (Kozinets, 2002b). Research suggests consumption practices are fluid and vary with different online interaction and therefore consumption practices could change in different online communities. Future research that can investigate consumption practices across different online brand communities may strongly contribute to literature on this topic. There is opportunity to investigate consumption practices between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities.

Finally, this literature review shows existing research into online brand communities is based on presuming online brand communities are created and maintained by marketers or brand owners for commercial purposes and literature has focused on online brand communities from a brand-sponsored approach (Kozinets, 1997, 1999; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). This is despite research suggesting online communities have a number of benefits for consumers as well as marketers, and other researchers indicating huge growth in consumer-generated social networking communities (Hanson & Kalyanam, 2007). While some research has acknowledged the importance interaction and member types in online communities (Kozinets, 1999), research does not acknowledge how interaction or member types may be influenced by the presence of a brand owner in an online community. Research fails to consider the role of the consumer in creating an online brand community, despite research suggesting the role of the firm in creating and maintaining online brand communities is becoming increasingly unclear (Algesheimer et al, 2005). An examination of previous literature shows few or no studies demarcate between brand-sponsored and consumer-

generated online brand communities. Further research into online brand communities from a brand-sponsored versus consumer-generated approach is needed.

The objectives of this research have come from gaps identified in the literature. There is a noticeable absence of research into online brand communities generated by consumers and research into online brand communities fails to differentiate online brand communities generated by consumers from online brand communities created by marketers or brand owners. This gap in the literature may be attributed to researchers presuming online brand communities are generated and maintained by firms or brand managers for commercial purposes only (see for example Kozinets, 1999; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). To further understanding of online brand communities and extend literature on this topic, the first objective of this research is therefore:

1. To contribute to a greater understanding of online brand communities by examining differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities.

A second gap in the literature reveals research into online brand communities has also primarily focused on online brand communities for consumer durable products such as automobiles and computers (see for example Algesheimer et al, 2005; McAlexander et al, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Few studies exist on online brand communities for service or sports brands, despite researchers acknowledging the need for research into online brand communities expanding beyond consumer durable products (Andersen, 2005; McAlexander et al, 2002). To rectify the gap in the literature the second objective of this research is:

2. To extend research into online brand communities by examining online brand communities for service or sports brands.

To address these two gaps in the literature and achieve the research objectives, two research questions will be investigated. These are outlined below.

In order to investigate differences between online brand communities created by consumers and marketers or brand owners, it is essential to understand how community members participate in brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities, how members form relationships with the brand and the meanings and themes that unite consumers in brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. The first research question is developed to further understanding of consumption practices across different online brand communities.

1. How do consumption practices differ between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities?

To explore differences in consumption practices we can identify the themes and meanings that surround consumption groups (Kozinets, 1997, 2002a). Research shows meanings and themes are sub culturally mediated by interaction in an online community and this suggests meanings and themes may differ with different online interaction (Brown et al 2003; Kozinets, 1997, 2001). There is opportunity to extend research into consumption practices by identifying the themes and meanings that unite consumers in different types of online communities, such as online communities created by consumers compared with those created by marketers or brand owners. Furthermore, research into consumption practices in online brand communities has primarily focused on 'pop culture' communities (see for example Kozinets, 1997, 2001, 2006). We can therefore extend understanding of consumption practices in online brand communities by examining the meanings and themes uniting sports fans in an online brand community.

The second research question is developed to further understanding of differences in brand-sponsored versus consumer-generated online brand communities, by investigating marketing industry expert views of online brand communities.

2. How does the marketing industry view brand-sponsored versus consumer-generated online brand communities?

Investigating marketing industry experts' views on consumer-generated and brand-sponsored online brand communities may aid in understanding how these online brand communities differ. Furthermore, hearing the perspective of marketers or brand managers in service organisations, sports teams and advertising agencies will contribute to understanding of online brand communities centred on service or sports brands.

3. Research Design

3.1 *Overview of methods*

The design of this research study was guided by the research objectives and questions and comprised two phases. To investigate differences in consumption practices between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities, the first phase of this research involved observing and analysing discussions in two online brand communities to identify themes. Two All Blacks online communities – one generated by the brand owner and the other generated by consumers – were used as a case study and were observed for eight weeks. Discussions were observed and analysed to identify the themes and different consumption practices that united consumers in each community. The consumption practices within each online community were then compared.

For ethical reasons, this research observed and analysed discussions and produced themes through a coding process. Due to ethical concerns comments in the two online brand communities were observed, analysed and immediately coded into themes. Therefore, this research did not involve any collection of raw comments or discussions. By analysing discussions through a coding process it was possible to identify recurrent themes and therefore the consumption practices within the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. The ethical reasons behind this method explained further in Section 3.4.

To investigate marketing industry expert views on the differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities, the second phase of this research involved three interviews. The researcher interviewed marketing experts from the New Zealand Rugby Union (NZRU), an airline service organisation and an advertising agency. A brief summary of the two phases of the research design is illustrated in Figure 4 (next page).

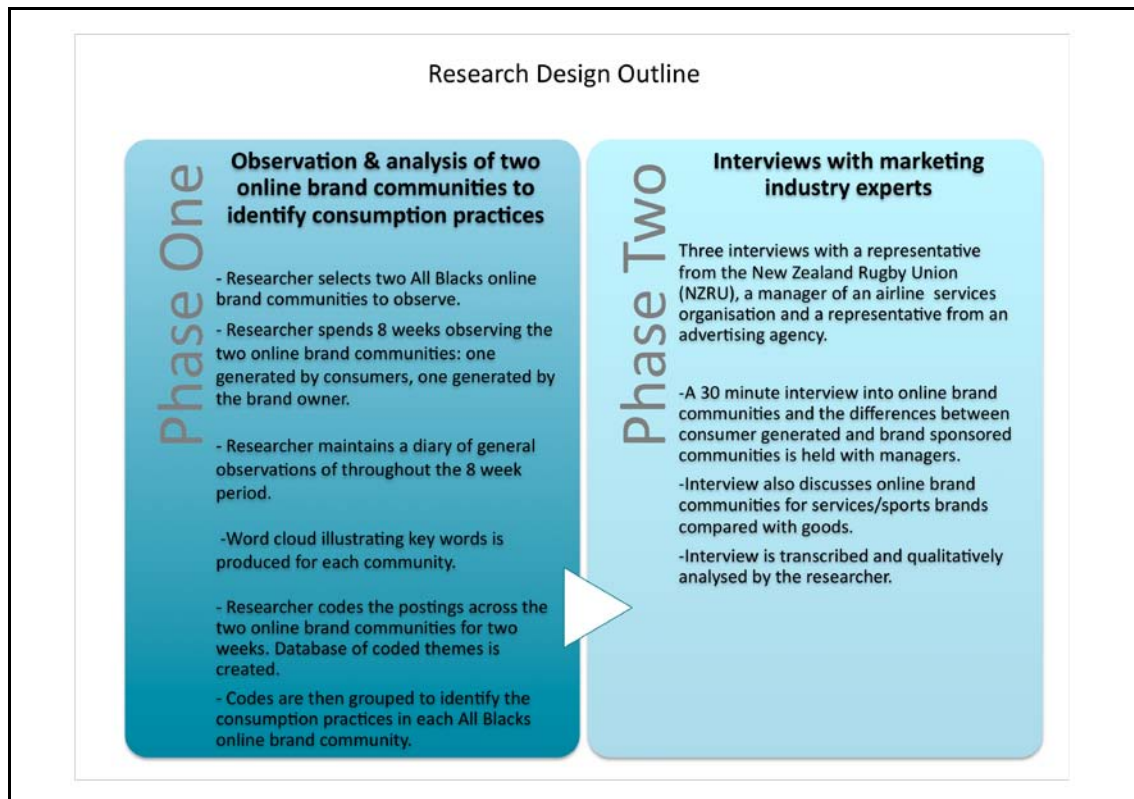


Figure 4: Research Design Outline

This section begins with an outline of the first phase of the research design: Analysis of discussions to identify consumption practices. The justification for the choice of case study is explained and the online brand community selection criteria. The reasons for observing the two communities are explained and the method to analyse discussions and identify consumption practices is outlined. Afterwards, the second phase of the research design is described: Interviews with marketing industry experts. The method for conducting interviews is discussed. Finally this section acknowledges the ethical concerns pertinent to this research design, which explains why raw comments and discussions were not collected from the two online brand communities but instead were immediately coded into themes.

It is important to note, this research study was designed in June 2009. The online brand communities selected for this research are specific to this time period. Since the design of this research, the online brand communities have changed. The consumer-generated online brand community selected for this research was dissolved in November 2009. A search on online social networking platforms will therefore no longer produce the consumer-generated online brand community that was selected for this research and it is no longer possible to access this community. No reason was provided as to why this consumer-generated online brand community was dissolved.

3.2 Phase One: Analysis of discussions to identify consumption practices

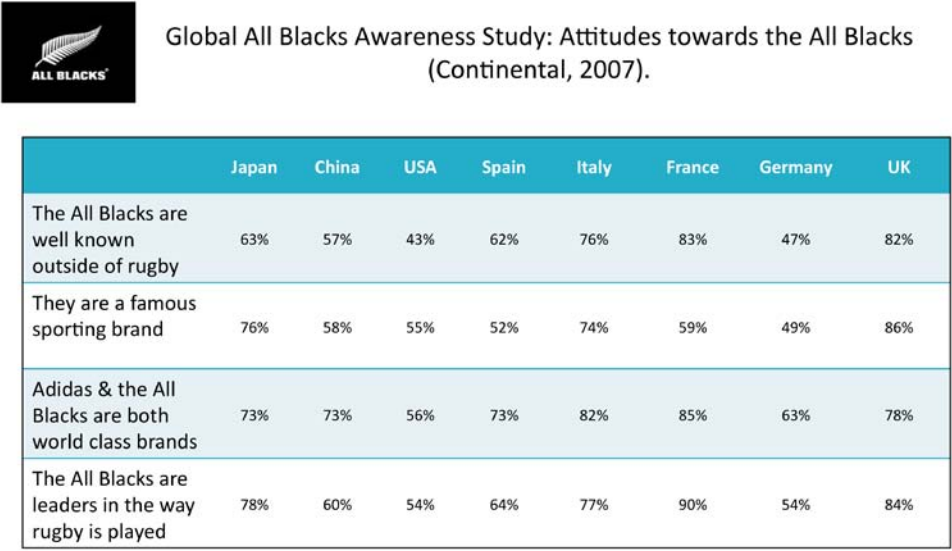
3.2.1 Justification for choice of case study

One objective of this study was to extend understanding of online brand communities by examining online brand communities for service or sports brands. The All Blacks brand was selected as the case study for this research for two key reasons. First, the All Blacks brand represents some essential values of New Zealand culture and psyche. By studying the All Blacks brand, this research may bring a unique New Zealand perspective to literature on online brand communities. One limitation of current research is that studies have primarily focused on online brand communities for brands originating from the U.S. (see for example, McAlexander et al, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001, Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Second, with an impressive win rate and strong global awareness the All Blacks represent a strong global sporting brand with a large consumer following.

The All Blacks are the national rugby team of New Zealand, a team that has well been rated amongst the best rugby teams in the world for the past 100 years (New Zealand Rugby Union, 30th June, 2009). Rugby union "shapes New Zealand social history and everyday life" and an outcome of an All Blacks test frequently dominates New Zealand media and sets the work-place mood (McConnell, 1999, p.11). Frequently, the All Blacks provide New Zealanders with an immense sense of pride however; they can also cause intense disappointment when they unexpectedly lose (Owen & Weatherston, 2002). The name 'All Blacks' was christened in 1905 when the New Zealand national rugby union team toured the UK, France and America (New Zealand Rugby Union, 30th June, 2009). Despite the All Blacks having already been established for years, it was not until August 1995 the International Rugby Board (IRB) declared rugby to be a professional sport, allowing many New Zealand rugby players to become professionals of the game (Owen & Weatherston, 2002). This shift to professionalism had a major impact on the All Blacks and the All Blacks brand. In November 1997, the All Blacks signed a contract with Adidas, who became the major sponsor of the All Blacks (Motion, Leitch, & Brodie, 2003).

The co-branding strategy of Adidas and the All Blacks in 1997 enabled the All Blacks brand to be carried into the global sporting market and brought strong financial and branding benefits (Motion et al, 2003). Globally the All Blacks are now ranked as one of the best sports teams and enjoy strong global brand awareness. Survey research commissioned by the NZRU in 2007 across eight

key markets⁴ suggests a high proportion of consumers all over the world perceive the All Blacks to be one of the truly great teams in world sport (Continental, 2007). Statistics presented in Table 9 demonstrate levels of global awareness and attitudes towards the All Blacks brand. These statistics further suggest levels of awareness for the All Blacks brand remain high even across non-rugby player nations such as China, Germany, Spain and the U.S.



Global All Blacks Awareness Study: Attitudes towards the All Blacks (Continental, 2007).

	Japan	China	USA	Spain	Italy	France	Germany	UK
The All Blacks are well known outside of rugby	63%	57%	43%	62%	76%	83%	47%	82%
They are a famous sporting brand	76%	58%	55%	52%	74%	59%	49%	86%
Adidas & the All Blacks are both world class brands	73%	73%	56%	73%	82%	85%	63%	78%
The All Blacks are leaders in the way rugby is played	78%	60%	54%	64%	77%	90%	54%	84%

Percentages based on proportion of those who scored 6+ on a 10 point agreement scale where 1 means you disagree and 10 means you agree.

Table 9: Global All Blacks Awareness Study: Attitudes towards the All Blacks. Source: Continental, 2007.

In terms of brand positioning, the All Blacks brand is positioned around key values that reflect the New Zealand psyche (Motion et al, 2003). The All Blacks brand is shaped around three core values – ‘excellence’, ‘respect’ and ‘humility’ (Motion et al, 2003). Extending this, other values encompassing the brand include ‘power,’ ‘masculinity’, ‘commitment,’ ‘teamwork’, ‘New Zealand’, ‘tradition’ and ‘inspiration’ (Motion et al, 2003). Identifying these values is important as they not only encompass the All Blacks brand but these values may influence the social aspects surrounding the All Blacks, including how fans engage and form relationships with the brand and with other fans. As the All Blacks are such a strong global brand with a large consumer following there are likely to be multiple online brand communities for the All Blacks. Identifying which All Blacks online communities to use in this research was important part of this research design.

⁴ Eight key target markets include Japan, China, USA, Spain, Italy, France, Germany and the UK (a mix of rugby and non-rugby playing nations).

3.2.2 Case selection criteria: brand-sponsored online community

Selecting the All Blacks brand-sponsored online brand community for this research study occurred in June 2009. To source the All Blacks brand-sponsored online brand community to be used as a case study for this research, a conversation was held with an online expert at the NZRU. This was done as a scoping exercise. A representative from the NZRU confirmed there are three brand-sponsored All Blacks communities: All Blacks the official [social network] site, All Blacks on Twitter and All Blacks the Official website (NZRU Representative, personal communication, March 2009). Identifying All Blacks online communities was based on ensuring each of the All Blacks websites had the following four characteristics – individuals are familiar with each other, members identify themselves in discussion so comments are not anonymous; there is group specific language, symbols or norms; and there is maintenance and enforcement of in-group/out-group boundaries (Kozinets, 2002a). Without these four characteristics, it is likely websites are simply temporary Internet gatherings or information sites, as opposed to online communities (Kozinets, 2002a).

Table 10 (next page) illustrates the three brand-sponsored communities and four largest consumer-generated All Blacks online communities, to see if they contained the four characteristics of an online community as determined by Kozinets (1999, 2002a). As Table 10 shows, the All Blacks official website and All Blacks on Twitter did not meet the characteristics of an online community as proposed by Kozinets (2002a). The All Blacks official website did not enable individuals to interact with each other, people did sometimes not identify themselves in communications and there was no maintenance of in group/out group boundaries. Furthermore, the information found in the FanZone on the All Blacks official website where consumers and fans can write opinions and contribute to the website, come largely from a part time paid NZRU employee (NZRU Representative, Personal Communication, June 2009). The All Blacks official website was therefore not an online community, instead a website where All Black fans can retrieve information. To confirm the researcher's evaluation of the All Blacks official website this issue was discussed with an online expert at the NZRU -

While there is a large community of All Black fans⁵, I would not class the allblacks.com website as a community website itself. To be a community website I believe you need a good two-way interaction mechanism and relationship – allblacks.com is largely a one-way message site.

(NZRU Representative, personal communication, June 2009).

⁵ Approximately 200,000 fans access the All Blacks official website each month and approximately 20% of those who access the website are repeat visitors. Depending on the time of year 30% – 40% of those fans who access the website are from New Zealand. (NZRU Representative, personal communication, June 2009).

Table 10: Identifying All Blacks online communities⁶

Name of community	Brand sponsored or consumer generated?	No. of members	Individuals interacting with each other	Communication is identity specific	Group specific language, symbols or norms	Maintenance of in-group or out-group boundaries
All Blacks – The Official Website www.allblacks.com	BS	n/a	✗	✗	✓	✗
All Blacks	CG	160,284	✓	✓	✓	✓
All Black Supporters	CG	31,144	✓	✓	✓	✓
All Blacks Fan Club	CG	7,706	✓	✓	✓	✓
All Blacks – The official [social networking] site	BS	62,669	✓	✓	✓	✓
All Blacks '08	CG	2,325	✓	✓	✓	✓
All Blacks on Twitter	BS	818	✗	✓	✗	✓

The All Blacks on Twitter was also not classed as an online community. This website had little to no interaction between members and there was no evidence of group specific language or norms. This website appeared to be more of an RSS feed, where the content consisted of updated links to various news websites. As the All Blacks on Twitter and All Blacks the Official website did not meet the requirements of an online community, these websites were excluded from consideration for this research. The chosen All Blacks brand-sponsored community for this research was therefore the All Blacks the official [social network] site and this is highlighted in yellow on Table 10. This community was appropriate as it had a higher number of postings, large number of members, detailed discussions and had strong between member interactions (Kozinets, 2002a). The NZRU created the All Blacks official [social network] site because they “wanted to go where the party is, i.e. where the fans are” (NZRU Representative, personal communication, 10th June 2009). The NZRU joined this independent social networking platform and created an official site so they would have the opportunity to have two-way conversations with fans and they were interested in what the fans had to say (NZRU Representative, personal communication, 10th June 2009). While

⁶ All Blacks online communities as at June 2009. These online communities changed during the course of this research. Membership numbers altered and some consumer-generated online brand communities, including the one selected for this research, have since dissolved.

this official [social network site] was moderated by the NZRU, any member could place comments on the discussion boards and the NZRU very seldom⁷ removed comments from the discussion boards (NZRU Representative, personal communication, 10th June 2009).

3.2.3 Case selection criteria: consumer-generated online community

To source consumer-generated All Blacks online brand communities' searches across two different social networking sites were conducted in June 2009⁸. Both of these social networking platforms produced thousands of All Blacks communities. A search on social platforms for 'All Blacks' produced more than 500 online groups and a search on Bebo produced more than 5,700 results. Due to the sheer number of online communities, results were then narrowed down to the four largest communities. These were identified in Table 10. The four largest All Blacks consumer-generated were the following; 'All Blacks', 'All Blacks Supporters', 'All Blacks Fan Club' and 'All Blacks '08'.

These four All Blacks consumer-generated communities were examined in detail for two weeks before deciding which community would be researched. This was to ensure the researcher was familiar with the community characteristics and could make an informed decision about community selection. The 'All Blacks' community with 160,284 members was selected as the consumer-generated community for this research for various reasons and this is also highlighted in yellow on Table 10. Kozinets (2002a) suggests online communities should be chosen with a higher traffic of postings. This All Blacks online community had the highest number of members and frequent postings. This All Blacks online community was averaging four postings a day at the time this was written on June 13, 2009 compared with smaller communities, such as 'All Blacks '08' with 2,325 members, where the most recent posting was four days ago on June 5, 2009. The All Blacks online community with 160,284 members met the requirements of the research questions and aligned with Kozinets' (2002a) suggestions for suitable online community selection as it contained rich, descriptive data, frequent between-member interactions, a large number of discrete messages and a range of infrastructure providing means for various ways of interacting. However, this consumer-generated online community chosen for this research later dissolved in November 2009. Therefore, while the chosen consumer-generated online community 'All Blacks' with

⁷ At the time this was written, only two comments in the past year had been removed by the NZRU had been removed from the online community discussion boards. These comments were removed because they were highly offensive to members and were deemed to be inappropriate (NZRU representative, personal communication, 10 June 2009).

⁸ A search on <google groups> was inefficient and not appropriate. Over 249,000 results for 'All Blacks' came up on <google groups> and many of these results were not groups of consumers but instead news feeds, team information, game feedback and results etc. The search took place during June 2009 and therefore search results are only applicable to this time period.

160,284 members existed for the duration of this research period, this community can no longer be accessed.

The chosen consumer-generated online community 'All Blacks' was established on the same independent social networking platform as the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community. This was convenient and it meant biases such as differences in online infrastructure that may influence consumption practices were minimised. Therefore, members in both online communities had the opportunity to interact with the brand and members in the same way. The independent social networking platform in which the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online communities resided was a global social network. Both All Blacks online brand communities were open to members from all countries. It was impossible to determine the proportion of members who were New Zealanders versus other nationalities, as the researcher did not have access to personal member information. However, the researcher had the general feeling that the large majority of fans were New Zealanders although there were a small proportion of members who clearly came from Australia, South Africa, Italy and the U.S. The researcher also did not have access to any other demographic information on the membership of the two online brand communities. The researcher did have general feeling though that there was an even mix of male and females.

3.2.4 Immersion in online brand communities

After selecting the All Blacks brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities, the researcher then spent eight weeks observing these two communities from 14 July – 14 September 2009. As the researcher plays a key role in determining observation, selection, and coordination of data and in interpretation, it was clear that the researcher was instrumental in qualitative research techniques such as identifying consumption practices (Sanday 1979, cited in Spiggle, 1994, p. 492). It was therefore essential that the researcher was familiar with the characteristics of each online brand community and was embedded in the All Blacks community (Kozinets, 1999, 2002a). This required prolonged engagement not only within the All Blacks online brand communities but also active participation in real life facets of the community (Kozinets, 2002a). For these reasons, the research observed the online communities for eight weeks from 14 July – 14 September and also immersed herself in the All Blacks communities in the offline environment. Figure 5 (next page) demonstrates various ways the researcher was embedded in the All Blacks community, both in offline environment and in the virtual world.

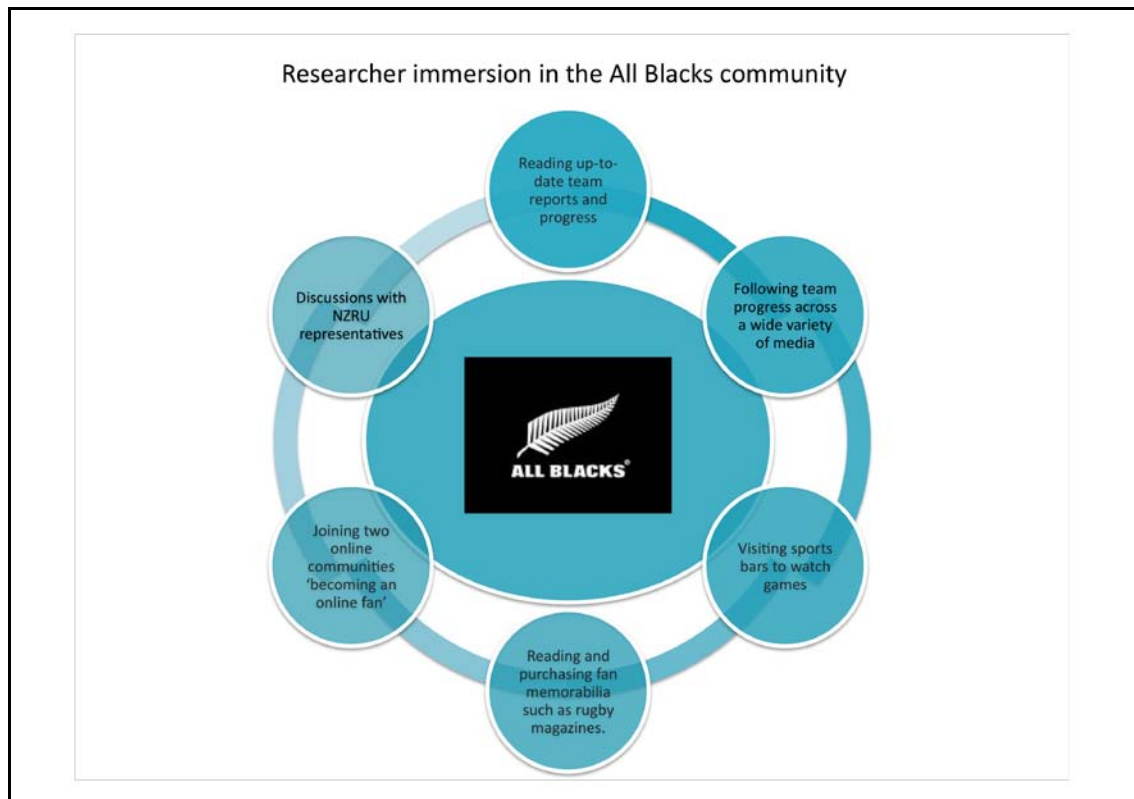


Figure 5: Researcher immersion in the All Blacks community

In the virtual world the researcher was an active observer of the two All Blacks online communities by reading all discussions and posts daily. The purpose of observing behaviours and reading discussion content for eight weeks was to become familiar with the characteristics of online brand communities, such as key words and language, in order to increase understanding of online brand communities for later qualitative research. Another purpose was also to familiarise herself with the characteristics of both online communities and the discussion content, to aid in establishing a framework for coding discussions. This required thorough understanding and familiarity of *what* was being discussed in the two All Blacks communities and *how* it was being discussed. In the offline environment the researcher participated in the All Blacks community through means such as watching All Blacks games with fans in public and private places, reading game reports, keeping up with news and events, and reading blogs by fans. This required in-depth reading of a variety of media sources such as newspapers, rugby specific magazines, All Blacks websites and following other social networks.

Such extended active participation in the All Blacks community is termed participant observation and is a distinctive feature of research designs such as this that have basic roots in ethnography and netnography (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). The benefits that came from participant observation enabled the researcher to have access and insight into All Blacks fan behaviour that came from consumption activities (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). For example, it is likely the

researcher gained insight into how group decisions were made, consumers' evaluation judgments, consumption norms and consumption values (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). Furthermore, in addition to gaining access and insight into consumers' complex behaviour, personal involvement and prolonged engagement in numerous facets of the All Blacks communities meant the researcher had greater community understanding and this aided in triangulation of analysis (Kozinets, 1997, 2002a).

The eight weeks of observing the All Blacks online brand communities produced two outcomes. One outcome of observing the two All Blacks online brand communities was a word cloud. A word cloud for the All Blacks brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online community was produced based on observing the language that dominated discussions in each community. Throughout the eight weeks of observations the researcher followed the key words that appeared frequently in conversations and noted these each week. At the end of the eight weeks the researcher then went back and re-read discussions in each community and identified the key words that had the strongest presence in conversations. Those words that appeared frequently and dominated conversations were strongly weighted in the word cloud by appearing in large bold coloured font in the centre of the word clouds (Lohmann, Ziegler & Tetzlaff, 2009). In comparison, those words that were less important and appeared less frequently in discussions were placed on the perimeter of the word cloud in smaller font (Lohmann et al, 2009). The word clouds were an important method for identifying the key words and representing the language that dominated discussions in each online brand community. They were extremely appropriate for this research design given that word clouds are frequently used in online communities for social purposes, as a means of conveying a sense of activity in an online community (Lohmann, et al, 2009). The word clouds for each online community are presented later in this report (see Section 4 Results and Analysis).

A second result of observing the two All Blacks online brand communities for eight weeks was a diary containing the researcher's key notes and observations. The diary recorded key observations across the two online communities that come from general immersion in the All Blacks community, such as – news updates, player updates, game analysis and results. These notes aided in interpretation of content within the online brand communities and aided in triangulation of analysis, particularly when it came to discussing community language. Spiggle (1994) also strongly encourages maintaining a diary in qualitative research techniques.

3.2.5 Analysis of community discussions to identify consumption practices

After observing the consumer-generated and brand-sponsored All Blacks online brand communities for eight weeks, the researcher then analysed discussions to identify consumption practices. Threads in both online brand communities were analysed for two weeks from 23 August – 5 September 2009. In order to analyse individual postings, this had to be completed through a coding process due to ethical concerns. To code discussions the researcher first developed framework for coding. This was developed after observing discussions in the two online communities during the previous eight weeks. The original framework for coding contained 12 codes although the framework was extended and modified as discussions were analysed. The adaption of the framework for coding came from the coding process being highly iterative, as suggested by Spiggle (1994).

As the framework for coding discussions was developed, threads in each of the two All Blacks online brand communities were read and immediately coded. The purpose of coding threads was to identify the consumption practices in each community. The coding process used categorisation, abstraction, the constant comparative technique, and iteration to analyse data in order to generate themes that unite All Blacks consumers in each online brand community (Kozinets, 1997; Schouten, 1991; Spiggle, 1994). The first step in the coding process was categorisation, where the researcher took an individual thread from the discussion board in each online community and named it during a coding process (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994; Kozinets, 2002a; Spiggle, 1994). A thread was frequently multi coded as a thread could often identify with more than one code. For example, the following thread could appear in a discussion:

“I love the All Blacks”.

This thread could then be coded three times as, ‘emotive comment’, ‘short comment’ and ‘non-event based comment’. This one thread could therefore identify with three codes.

Kozinets (2002a) suggests that text that contains rich content and rich descriptions, relevant topic matter, and participation from a range of community members should be chosen for categorisation (Kozinets, 2002a). In this instance, the majority of threads were chosen for categorisation with the exception of a few. Threads that contained no meaningful information or were completely off topic were excluded from categorisation. According to Spiggle (1994) this frequently occurs in coding processes. Furthermore, threads written in foreign languages were excluded from categorization. The categorisation of appropriate text emulates ‘purposive sampling’ in ethnography (Kozinets, 2002a). The data collected from analysis of discussions in the two All Blacks online brand communities produced two Excel files containing a list of codes. For ethical reasons none of the individual comments were collected off the online discussion boards instead comments were immediately coded. Therefore, after two weeks of observing comments

the only output was a list of codes. The raw comments relating to each code were therefore not collected (explained further in Section 3.4).

After two weeks of coding and categorising the individual discussions in each online brand community, the researcher then collapsed the codes into more conceptual themes. The researcher selected to codes to be collapsed into themes through qualitative interpretation. Those codes that dominated community discussions, were deemed to best reflect community behaviour or appeared to be unique to the community were selected to be collapsed into themes. Collapsing codes into wider themes is known as abstraction and involves taking identified categories and merging these into fewer and more general categories to form constructs or themes (Spiggle, 1994; Kozinets, 2002a; Nelson & Otnes, 2005). At the same time, the researcher also compared the data when categorising and abstracting through the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 cited in Spiggle, 1994, p.494). Comparing the data involved comparing a piece of text within a category to other pieces of text in the same category, to identify similarities and differences (Spiggle, 1994). This assists in creating more conceptual constructs or themes. These themes represented the wider consumption practices within each online community. By coding discussions and collapsing codes into wider themes, the unit of analysis was not individual consumer comments but instead the wider themes and consumption practices across the two communities. As soon as the consumption practices for each community were identified, these were then compared in order to examine the differences in consumption practices between the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online community.

Finally due to the in-depth nature of this research and large amount of data collected from the two online brand communities, the three stages in the coding process to identify themes were iterative. Analysis was therefore not performed in discrete sequential steps but instead the researcher moved back and forth between stages (as proposed by Spiggle, 1994; Schouten, 1991). This required the researcher to frequently go back to the online discussion board in both All Blacks online brand communities and re-read discussions and the associated stored codes. An iterative approach to analysis has advantages. Iteration allows for the development of constructs or themes by encouraging induction. It allows for “unified interpretation of data” as the researcher continuously moves back and forth between the individual categories and greater constructs or themes (Spiggle, 1994, p.495). However, iteration is rather time consuming and in this study was somewhat difficult and as the raw comments and discussions could not be collected.

To summarise, the first phase of this research design involved eight weeks of observing the All Blacks brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. After eight weeks of observation the researcher produced two word clouds illustrating the key words and language that represented discussions in each community and a researcher’s diary of notes and observations.

Afterwards, the researcher spent two weeks analysing discussions in each community. By analysing discussions through a coding process the researcher was able to identify the themes that united consumers in each community and thereby examine the consumption practices of the All Blacks brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities.

3.3 Phase two: Marketing industry views on online brand communities

The second phase of this research design involved three interviews with marketing industry experts. The purpose of these interviews was to investigate marketing industry expert views brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. These contacts included representatives from a local advertising agency, an airline services organisation and from the NZRU. The representative from the NZRU was a particularly important participant as the All Blacks were used as a case study for this research, and the NZRU representative was able to provide insight into behaviour of the brand owner. Furthermore, these three contacts reflected the objectives of this research. By interviewing representatives from an airline services organisation and rugby organisation, the research could investigate online brand communities from a service and sports brand perspective.

To invite the three marketing industry experts to participate in this research, the researcher wrote a letter to participants introducing herself and the topic of her research: Differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. The researcher outlined the purpose of her research and invited the three marketing industry experts to participate in a 30 minute interview. The three contacts then accepted this invitation in writing and an appointment was set up for the interview at the participant's work location during a convenient time. By outlining the topic of the research and research purpose, participants had ample time to think about the topic and thereby provided detail examples and opinions in the interview (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). The interviews with the three marketing industry experts took place between 4 - 11 September 2009. A copy of the interview guideline used for the three interviews can be found in Appendix A at the back of this research report.

The three interviews were open and un-structured and were conducted one on one between the researcher and participant. They were un-structured in that the interview was similar to a natural conversation between the researcher and the participant, guided by a general topic (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). The purpose of the interview was to allow the researcher to explore the deeper structure of ideas and opinions presented by participants (Stylianou, 2008). The questions and prompts within the interview were guided by the research objectives. Open-ended questions

therefore aimed to extend knowledge into online brand communities by asking participants about differences in brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities and investigating differences in online brand communities between goods and service or sports brands. While there were a number of prompts throughout the interview, the researcher was flexible with interview structure but ensured the interview only lasted approximately 30 minutes.

The researcher recorded the three interviews after gaining permission from participants. After completing the interviews each interview was then transcribed by the researcher and a copy of the transcript was sent back to participants for their approval. The participants had the opportunity to edit the transcripts by correcting grammar, removing comments, or inserting new comments that did not come to mind at the time of the interview. The researcher then accepted the edited transcripts and verbatim from interviews were later used to help explain results and findings.

3.4 Ethical issues pertinent to data collection and analysis

There were several ethical issues pertinent to this research design. These include the following concerns:

- Collecting comments off the online discussions boards: Gaining individual consent from community members when individual postings are collected.

Individual comments could not be collected from the two online discussions board due to number of ethical reasons according to the Massey University Human Ethics Code of Conduct. This meant this research study could not collect raw comments or discussions and instead, comments and discussions had to be immediately coded. Collecting individual comments raised a number of ethical concerns. There was debate whether information placed on the online brand community discussion boards was public or private information. As the two All Blacks online brand communities required individuals to become members of the communities, these were private online brand communities and the public could not readily access community information. Postings or discussions on the two All Blacks online brand communities were therefore private information and individual consent was required to collect postings. Furthermore, by becoming a community member the research agreed to the terms and conditions of community membership, which included obtaining individual consent when individual comments are collected. For all comments and discussions to be collected, the researcher needed individual consent from all community members.

Due to the sheer number of original threads and direct replies present on the two online discussion boards, it was not possible to obtain permission from all members who posted threads or participated in discussions. Therefore, the researcher coded comments as they appeared. However, when the research identified a particular posting she wanted to collect as an example of the wider themes present in that online community, she replied to the participant's thread to seek their permission. In this post the researcher introduced herself, the purpose of her research, and the reasons for wanting to collect their comments. The researcher also provided participants with an email address and assured participants of their anonymity. Participants gave their permission either by replying to the researcher's thread or via email. This enabled the researcher to collect some comments as examples. Where permission was not obtained from community members, individual comments or threads were not collected.

Due to these ethical concerns, this research study contains no raw comments or discussions. Furthermore, the few raw comments located in Section 4 Results and Analysis are only examples of themes. While other comments existed in community discussions and reinforce these findings, it was not possible to collect these, as the researcher did not have individual consent from other members.

- Identity protection of interviewees

Phase two of this research design included interviews with three online managers, who are experts in online marketing. Ethical concerns with interviewing online managers included protecting managers' identities and the identity of the organisation, which they work for. To overcome these ethical concerns, the researcher assured managers of their anonymity and assured managers that the organisation and their clients will also not be named in the research report. Where an organisation was named, permission was obtained from the managers in writing. Furthermore, the researcher also provided a copy of the transcript of the interview, which managers approved before being used in this research report.

To ensure this research project thoroughly addressed the above ethical concerns, a full ethics application was submitted to Massey University Human Ethics Committee and the researcher discussed these ethical concerns with committee members. The Massey University Human Ethics Committee approved this research on 12 August 2009. See Appendix B for a copy of the Ethics Approval. The wider ethical concerns for this research are also discussed in Section 7.1 Research limitations and ethical concerns.

In summary, this research design comprised two phases. The first phase involved observation and analysis of discussions in two All Blacks online brand communities to identify consumption practices. Two All Blacks online brand communities, one generated by the NZRU and the other by

consumers, were observed for eight weeks and discussions were analysed for two weeks. By coding discussions the researcher could identify the consumption practices within each community. The second phase involved three interviews with marketing industry experts in order to further understanding of differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. The findings from the research design will now be explained according to the research objectives and questions directing this study.

4. Results and Analyses

The results and analyses of this study have been guided by the research objectives and questions. These results further develop an understanding of online brand communities by examining differences in brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Results and findings from this study also extend research into online brand communities by examining online brand communities for a sports brand. The first research question of this study was to examine differences in consumption practices between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. The first part of results examines three aspects of each online brand community: language that appeared in discussions, analysis of discussions and finally, the wider themes that represented the consumption practices within each community. To answer the first research question, the consumption practices within each online brand community are compared and the differences in consumption practices between the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities are analysed. Findings imply the majority of consumption practices differ between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities.

The second research question guiding this study examined how the marketing industry views brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Results from three interviews with representatives from the NZRU, an airline services organisation and an advertising agency are presented. These findings reveal marketing industry expert views on similarities between online brand communities for good versus for service or sports brands, differences in online brand strategy for brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities and finally, future trends in online brand communities. It is essential to note, results from this study were influenced by period of analysis. The first phase of this research examined the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online communities for the All Blacks and therefore, the events surrounding the All Blacks at the time of these results influenced community discussions and participation. In order to interpret results and findings and to follow community discussions, it is important to understand the context in which they were written. The key events surrounding the All Blacks at the time of analysis will now be examined prior to introducing the results of this study.

4.1 Context of community discussions: Key events surrounding the All Blacks

As previously outlined in Section 3 Research Design, the All Blacks brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities were observed for two months from 14 July – 14 September 2009. Discussions in the two communities were analysed for two weeks during this time from 23 August – 5 September 2009. This was a crucial period for the All Blacks and All Blacks fans as this period occurred during the middle of their two biggest annual competitions - The Bledisloe Cup between New Zealand and Australia, and Philips Tri Nations between New Zealand, Australia and South Africa.

General news reports suggested the 2009 rugby year from July - October marked a crucial year for the All Blacks fans for a three main reasons. Firstly, the public was extremely interested in coaching decisions and performance between the All Blacks and Wallabies. The Australian Wallabies had recently controversially appointed a new coach, a renowned New Zealand provincial coach from Canterbury, Robbie Deans. Robbie Deans had unsuccessfully applied for the coaching position of the All Blacks after their World Cup loss in 2007 and All Black fans were torn between supporting Robbie Deans or the current All Blacks coach, Graham Henry who had been partially held responsible for the previous poor World Cup performance. Games against Australia were viewed with increased intensity -

Whether they [Robbie Deans and Graham Henry] like it or not, their head-to-head is now the subplot to every All Blacks and Wallabies encounter.

(Thomas, 2009)


News reports from the New Zealand Herald illustrated the intensity between the All Blacks and Wallabies was even more passionate this season due to both teams having New Zealand coaches. All Blacks fans were hoping the NZRU had chosen the better coach for the All Blacks and coaching performance between Deans and Henry was measured by Bledisloe Cup wins. Players, games and coaches were equally scrutinised during the 2009 rugby season. The All Blacks and Graham Henry were under pressure to win against Australia and Robbie Deans.

Secondly, during the period of the Bledisloe Cup and Philips Tri Nations, typical news headlines at the time suggested the All Blacks were plagued with injury. Daniel Carter had been out of rugby action for months due to injury and did not resume playing professionally until 25th July. Key players such as Luke McAlister and Conrad Smith were also frequently out with injury concerns.

The loss of such crucial players only enhanced intensity in competitions and placed further pressure on the All Blacks.

Finally, this period of analysis was critical for All Blacks fans as this was the time of the 2009 battle for the Philips Tri Nations. This year the competition was particularly intense. The South African Springboks proved strong and resilient and were dominating the Tri Nations annual competition. In order for the All Blacks to have a chance of winning the Tri Nations, they needed to win more games and needed South Africa to lose to Australia. This drove All Black fans to temporarily support the Wallabies when they were playing against the Springboks. At the end of the competition with each team having played six games, the Springboks proved to be the 2009 Philips Tri Nations champions having won five of their six games. The overall results of the 2009 Philips Tri Nations are shown below in Table 11.

Table 11: 2009 Philips Tri Nations Results. Source: NZRU, 2009.

 2009 Philips Tri Nations Results		
Date	Game	Result
18 Jul	All Blacks vs. Wallabies	22 - 16
26 Jul	Springboks vs. All Blacks	28 - 19
2 Aug	Springboks vs. All Blacks	31 - 19
9 Aug	Springboks vs. Wallabies	29 - 17
22 Aug	All Blacks vs. Wallabies	19 - 18
29 Aug	Wallabies vs. Springboks	25 - 32
5 Sep	Wallabies vs. Springboks	21 - 6
12 Sep	All Blacks vs. Springboks	29 - 32
19 Sep	All Blacks vs. Wallabies	33 - 6

On occasion members also discussed rugby union provincial games. At the time of analysis the National Provincial Cup (NPC) was also underway. Therefore, comments in the online brand communities occasionally referred to local provincial games. These events surrounding the All Blacks during the 2009 rugby season may help to explain the comments that appeared in the two All Blacks online communities. It is important to consider these events when interpreting and following discussions that appear in the following sections.

4.2 Results and analysis of the brand-sponsored online community

The All Blacks brand-sponsored online community was analysed for two weeks from 23 August – 5 September 2009. The structure of the online brand community platform⁹ for the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online communities comprised of threads, positive emoticons and direct replies. Participants could interact in the communities through either posting a thread, directly responding to a thread or alternatively, placing a positive emoticon in reaction to a thread. An example of the typical structure of the online community discussions and how participants interacted through threads, emoticons, and direct replies is shown in below Figure 6. The names and comments shown in Figure 6 are entirely fictitious and are examples only.

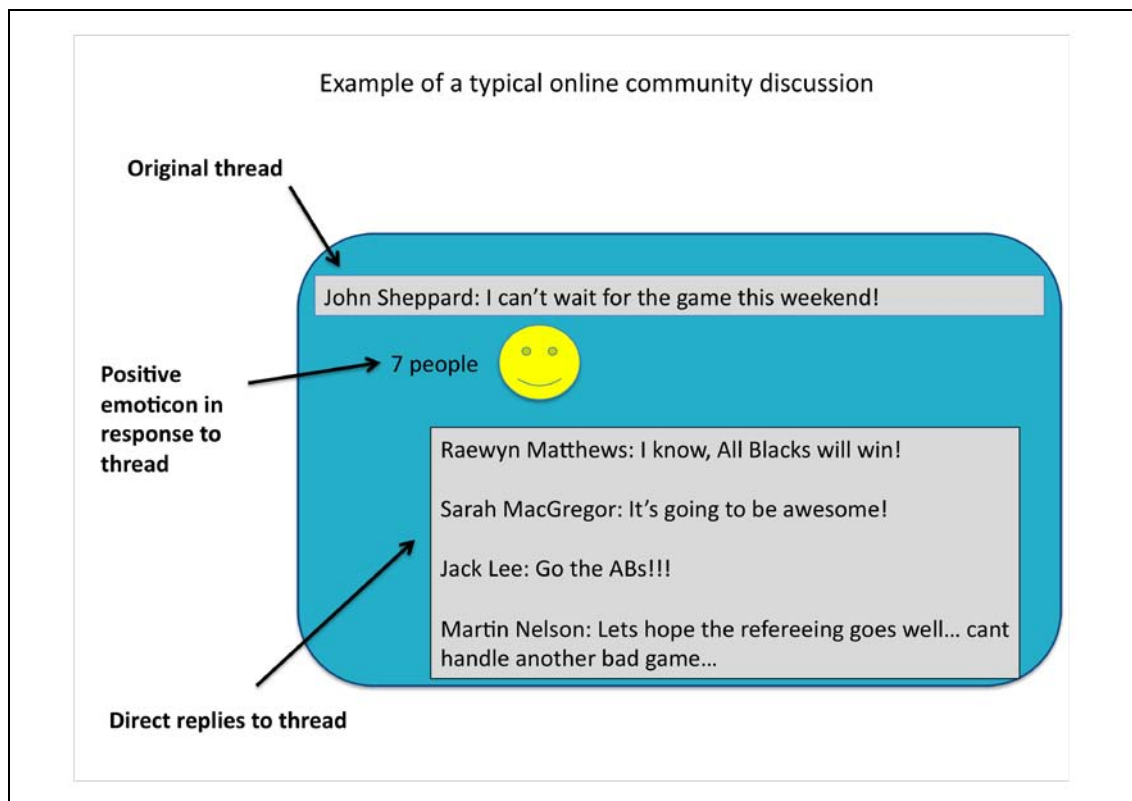


Figure 6: Example of a typical online community discussion

⁹ As outlined earlier in Section 3.2.3 Case selection criteria for the All Blacks consumer-generated online community; both the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities selected for this research study resided on the same social networking platform.

During the period 23 August – 5 September 2009, 55 threads were placed on the brand-sponsored online community discussion board. The 55 threads elicited 272 direct replies and 403 people placed a positive emoticon to these threads. The brand-sponsored online community had approximately 62,000 members. In comparison, over the same two weeks members in the consumer-generated online community generated 78 original threads, which provoked 74 direct replies and 25 positive emoticons. The consumer-generated online community had approximately 160,000 members. These results are illustrated in Table 12. These findings suggest, despite having fewer members, the brand-sponsored online community was more active than the consumer-generated online community in that fewer threads provoked a larger number of replies and positive emoticons.

Table 12: Frequency of interaction in online brand communities

Community type	No. threads	No. replies	No. emoticons	No. of members
Brand-sponsored online community	55	272	403	62,629
Consumer-generated online community	78	74	25	160,284

The results from the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community will now be examined at three levels. First, the key words that appear in community discussions are presented in the form of a word cloud. Then the most frequent discussions are analysed. Finally, the consumption practices within the brand-sponsored online community are identified and explained in detail.

4.2.1 Language dominating community discussions

To examine the key findings in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community it is beneficial to identify the language that appear in community discussions. The word cloud shown in Figure 7 (next page) depicts key words that represent and describe conversations in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community. Words that are larger, bolder and more central in the word cloud were more dominant in community discussions than words that are smaller and on the perimeter of the word cloud. The words that are larger, bolder and more central were more important in community discussions and are stronger indicators of how members formed a relationship with the team and brand. They provide insight into how members participated in the community. The word cloud for the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community is shown in Figure 7.



Figure 7: Word cloud for the brand-sponsored online community

A key word that frequently appeared in the brand-sponsored online community discussion board was 'game' and this word immediately stands out in the centre of the word cloud. Observations from the researcher's diary and examinations of conversations in the All Blacks brand-sponsored community, suggest comments in the brand-sponsored community were very event-focused and often critically analysed game performance. Observations in the researcher's diary state "Brand-sponsored community discussions are very focused on the game and this is central to community talk at the moment". The word 'game' is therefore depicted large bold font in the word chart above, showing its importance in the All Blacks brand-sponsored community discussions.

Also important in conversations were key words ‘performance’, ‘skills’, and ‘coach’. Members in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community placed great importance on discussing game and player performance. Comments from the researcher’s diary suggest, “There is a strong thread in the brand-sponsored community of talk about Henry¹⁰ and his performance. I was surprised to read such critical comments in this community.” Comments from the researcher’s diary further affirm, “There are highly detailed discussions of All Blacks performance in the brand-sponsored community... There is lots of controversy and mixed opinion of the performance of Graham Henry”. Corresponding to this, conversations in the All Blacks brand-sponsored community regularly featured key words such as ‘performance’, ‘skill’, ‘coach’, ‘Henry’, ‘decision’, ‘selection’, ‘referee’ and ‘injury’. These words really stood out as important words in the brand-sponsored community and accordingly, these words are larger and bolder in the word cloud. Competitor performance was also heavily discussed. The Springboks, being the current team to beat¹¹, had greater weight and importance in discussions than the Wallabies. Key words ‘Springboks’, ‘Wallabies’ and ‘Deans’¹² are represented in the word cloud accordingly. However, while discussions in the community focused on analysing games and performance, there was also clear evidence of enthusiasm and support for the team and key players such as Daniel Carter and captain Richie McCaw. Key words ‘Carter’, ‘Richie’, ‘go’ and ‘player’ were also popular in community discussions. These key words reinforced findings that discussions in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community were extremely focused on games and performance.

Other key words that prevailed in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community demonstrated how members participated in the community. ‘News’ frequently dominated community postings and key words ‘update’, ‘website’, ‘video’ and ‘tickets’ were also often present. These key words suggested that members in the brand-sponsored community were actively sharing information and they were utilising other interactive media sources to drive participation with the All Blacks. The researcher noted this observation in her diary stating, “There are quite a few media links to information articles, videos etc placed on brand-sponsored community in recent days. A lot of people are commenting on these posts.” On one occasion the community manager posted a comment on the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community discussion board reminding fans to purchase tickets. The researcher remarks, “The community manager in the brand-sponsored

¹⁰ ‘Henry’ refers to Graham Henry, the coach of the All Blacks.

¹¹ As explained previously in Section 4.1 Context of community discussions: Key events surrounding the All Blacks; the Springboks were the Tri Nations champions in 2009.

¹² ‘Deans’ refers to Robbie Deans, the coach of the Australian Wallabies.

community posts a message with Telecom saying there is opportunity to win tickets to Sydney for two if you join the XT fan site. 36 members directly replied and another 61 placed positive emoticons". This was interesting as it provided insight into how community members were consuming the All Blacks brand and how Internet capabilities were guiding consumption methods. The key words 'website', 'video' and 'ticket' are appropriately illustrated on the word cloud in Figure 7.

Discussions in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community also suggested there is some emotional attachment to the team and members sometimes expressed themselves emotionally. Key words such as 'fans', 'win', 'love', 'forever', 'best', also sometimes prevailed in community postings and are accordingly depicted on the word cloud. Presence of these key words in postings implies that while discussing team performance was extremely important to community members, positive emotional ties to the team were also sometimes evident. Brand-sponsored community members therefore may not just participate in the community to discuss game and performance and access information, but they may have also participated in the community to reinforce in their loyal support and enthusiasm for the team.

These findings suggest discussions in the brand-sponsored online community was based upon key words such as 'game', 'performance', 'skills', 'coach' and 'news'. These words help to explain how members in the brand-sponsored online community communicated and participated in and discussions.

4.2.2 Analysis of community discussions

Discussions in the brand-sponsored online community were analysed from 23 August – 5 September 2009 and the key words that featured in the brand-sponsored community conversations reflected results from analysis of online discussions. As the raw discussions and comments could not be collected off the brand-sponsored online discussion board, the comments were analysed and immediately coded (see Section 3.4 Ethical issues pertinent to the research design). A framework for coding was established to analyse and code all of the 55 original threads and 272 direct replies that prevailed in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community, to identify the wider consumption practices. Twenty-nine codes were identified throughout discussions in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community. The 29 codes are shown in the Table 13 (next page) ranked from those codes that appeared most frequently to those that appeared less frequently. As previously outlined in Section 3.2.5 discussions were often multi

coded and therefore the number of codes in Table 13 exceeds the total number of threads and replies in the community.

Table 13: Codes from the brand-sponsored online community

Codes	Frequency
Event-based comment	151
Direct reply to community manager/brand owner	148
Long comment (>3 sentences)	140
Short comment (<2 sentences)	112
Cognitive/rational comment	82
Non event-based comment	77
Enthusiasm and passion for one particular player	64
Enthusiasm and passion for the All Blacks	62
Discussion/analysis about game performance	62
Perceived ability to coach/analysis of coaching	61
Highly emotional comment	53
Constructive analysis of player skill/competency and other environmental factors	47
Consumption of news feeds/interactive media for information	41
Pro competitors/temporary support for competitors	27
Maintaining group membership requirements e.g. All Black fans only	21
Resiliency	16
Revenge	10
Mana/pride in team or country	10
Consumption of national symbols	8
Negative beliefs/comments about All Blacks	5
Supremacy	4
Direct reply to personal photos	4
Foreigners devotion to New Zealand's national identity	4
Immortality	3
Use of personal photos	3
Comment by community manager/brand owner	3
Lack of participation in the game	2
Foreigners anti New Zealand/anti All Blacks	2
Total number of postings	55
Total number of 'like comments'	403
Total number of replies	272
Total number of interaction	327

The most frequently occurring code that appeared in the brand-sponsored community discussions was the code for 'event-based comment', which appeared 151 times in community discussions. This contrasts with 'non event-based comments', which appeared only 77 times in community discussions. A comment was analysed as an 'event-based comment' when it was clearly directly related to an event or event outcome. Discussions in the brand-sponsored community were therefore twice more likely to be event-based rather than non-event based. This finding reinforces earlier observations that members in the brand-sponsored community were very event and game focused and explains why key words such as 'game', 'performance', 'coach' and 'skill' dominated postings. The high frequency of event-based comments that appeared in discussions implies discussion of events was critical to consumption of the All Blacks in the brand-sponsored online community.

The number of times 'direct reply to community manager/brand owner' appears is also remarkable. Members in the brand-sponsored community made a direct reply to the brand owner

148 times, despite the brand owner only posting three original threads. While the brand owner seldom posted comments on the brand-sponsored online community discussion board, the impact of those comments in driving community discussions was great. One example of this is observed in the researcher's diary stating, "The brand owner in the brand-sponsored community places a message saying that they will be live scoring the game via Twitter and encouraging fans to follow them on Twitter. This created an overwhelming response from members generating 50 direct replies and 77 positive emoticons". The brand owner therefore played a fundamental role in igniting discussions and this suggests that members in the brand-sponsored community were actively engaged with the brand owner and were highly responsive to his messages.

Findings from analysis of discussions also suggest comments in the brand-sponsored community were more cognitive or rational rather than emotional. 'Cognitive/rational comments' appeared 82 times in conversations compared with 'highly emotional comments' that appeared only 53 times. A comment was analysed as a 'cognitive/rational comment' when it was clearly thoughtful and detailed, more rational and logical as opposed to being emotional. Members were more likely to respond to comments in a rational, rather than highly emotional manner, but it is fair to acknowledge cognitive rational thoughts did not *always* dominate discussions. While emotional comments did appear 53 times in community discussions, the brand-sponsored community was still dominated by highly cognitive rational comments. These results show members were more likely to think carefully about the discussions being held in the community and think carefully about their responses. While comments were more cognitive than emotional, discussions in the brand-sponsored community also showed high levels of enthusiasm and passion. 'Enthusiasm and passion for the All Blacks' and 'enthusiasm and passion for one particular player' appeared in community conversations 62 and 64 times respectively.

Corresponding to earlier findings that conversations in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community were regularly event focused, discussions also frequently focused on player and coaching performance and discussions. Analysis of discussions shows 'discussions/analysis about game performance' were present 62 times and 'discussions about perceived ability to coach/analysis of coaching' appeared 61 times. Comments 'constructively analyzing player skill/competency and other environmental factors' also appeared 47 times in community discussions. Such frequent discussions about game performance, coaching decisions and player skills, also supports the above analysis, which found discussions in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community were more cognitive and thought provoking. These findings clarify why key words 'decision', 'selection', 'line out', 'injury', 'NZRU', 'Henry' were so prevalent in conversations.

Finally, the way in which members in the brand-sponsored community discussed these topics is also interesting. Members frequently placed links to other official news sites, articles or other interactive media such as videos or blogs on the online discussion board in order to interact with each other. When members did so this was coded as 'consumption of news feeds/interactive media for information'. 'Consumption of news feeds/interactive media for information' appeared 41 times in community discussions. This is a key finding as it suggests community members placed great importance on sharing official information in community discussions. These results reinforce earlier observations that key words 'news', 'video', and 'website' regularly appeared in the brand-sponsored online community discussion board.

Other discussions that appeared less frequently in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community were regarding 'foreigners oppositions to New Zealand/All Blacks', 'lack of participation in the game', 'immortality', 'foreigners devotion to New Zealand's national identity', 'supremacy', 'negative beliefs/comments about the All Blacks'. As these codes represented only a small handful of discussions, these codes minimally represent the way community members consume the All Blacks brand and participate in the community. In summary, results suggest 'event-based comments', and 'direct reply to brand manager' had the greatest presence in the brand-sponsored online community.

4.2.3 Consumption practices

Analysis of discussions and identifying the codes that appeared most often in the brand-sponsored online community helped to determine the consumption practices through themes or meanings that united the members of the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community. Those codes that dominated discussions, best reflected community behaviour or appeared to be unique to the online community, were selected to be collapsed into themes. Four themes were identified as representing the way community members participated in the brand-sponsored online community and consumed the All Blacks brand. The four consumption practices of the brand-sponsored online community are illustrated as wider conceptual themes in Figure 8 (next page).

The All Blacks brand-sponsored online community featured shared drive to consume official information, expression through detailed thoughts, critique of game performance, and shared positive emotional bonds. The first theme 'shared drive to consume official information' refers to the way members seek and share official information, through interaction with the brand owner or through posting news feeds and other interactive media. The second theme 'expression through detailed cognitive thoughts' refers to the way members think carefully about discussions in the brand-sponsored online community and respond rationally. Emphasis on rugby games and

overall performance is obvious in the third theme ‘critique of game performance’, in which members discuss events, analyse game and coaching performance and player skill. Finally, the fourth unifying theme ‘shared positive emotional bonds’ refers to the enthusiasm and passion members display for the All Blacks and individual players. These themes shown in Figure 8 featured in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community and differentiated this community from the consumer-generated online community (explained further in Section 4.4). The four themes will be now explored in further detail.

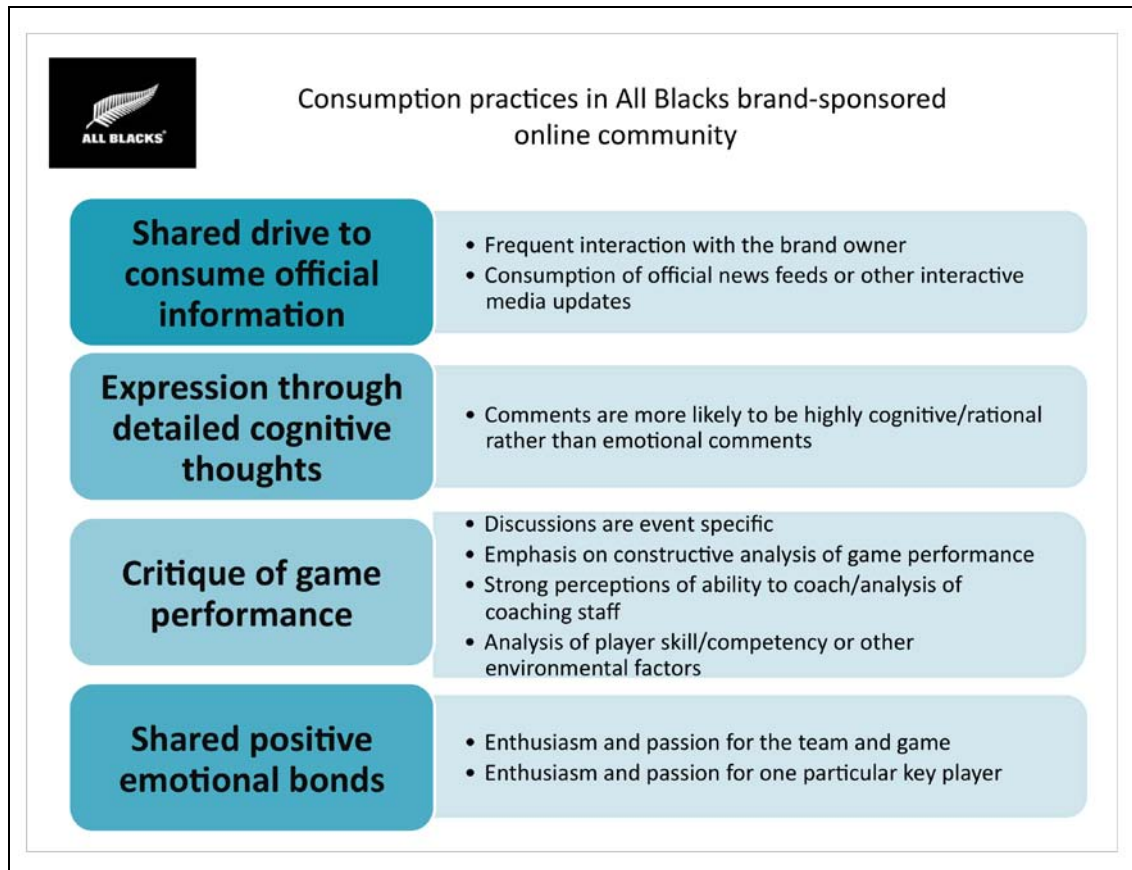


Figure 8: Consumption practices in brand-sponsored online brand community

‘Shared drive to consume official information’

The All Blacks brand-sponsored online community was built upon community members’ shared drive to consume official information. While this is an online social community, consuming official information was fundamental to consumption of the All Blacks brand and central to participation in the brand-sponsored online community. The recurrent theme of members’ shared drive to consume official information was exemplified by two specific actions. First, through community members frequent interaction with the brand owner and second, through continuous consumption of news feeds or other interactive media for information. Through continuous interaction with the brand owner and consumption of news feeds, videos, articles for information,

members of the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community participated and interacted in the community based on their shared drive to consume official information.

On many occasions, members' drive to consume official information was initiated by comments posted by the brand owner. The brand owner placed comments or links to information on the community discussion board and as a result, ignited a large number of responses from community members. Messages from the brand owner appeared to have two general purposes. First, to encourage participation and support for the All Blacks. Second, to provide members with up to date recent official information. A number of comments made by the brand owner attempted to encourage participation and support for the All Blacks. For example, the brand owner posted the following comments on the brand-sponsored online community discussion board in attempt to encourage participation and support through ticket sales–

Only 900 tickets left for All Blacks v Springboks in Hamilton on Sept 12 - get in quick!

(NZRU, 24th August 2009).

With the above thread the brand owner visibly attempted to encourage participation and support through game attendance. In this case the brand owner took advantage of the large consumer following within the online brand community in an attempt to drive ticket sales and build support for the team. In other cases the brand owner interacted with community members in an attempt to drive participation and support through the virtual world. In the below thread, the brand owner tempted members with additional up-to-date information should they extend their community membership to the Official Rugby World Cup site.

Become a friend of the Official Rugby World Cup 2011 page and get all the up to date news on tickets, qualifications, volunteering.

(NZRU, 2nd October 2009).

In this thread the brand owner leveraged the large consumer following that was present in the online brand community to build a wider consumer base extending beyond the All Blacks. The underlying theme of members' shared desire for official information is also further illustrated in the following comment. The brand owner was aware of members' demand for official information and repeatedly reminded members of their position as an official information provider. The brand owner capitalised on the ability to provide official information directly from the All Blacks headquarters and prompted members of this inside advantage. Two original threads placed on the online discussion board by the brand owner are shown below.

Squad gets named at 10am NZT on Sunday. Will be looking to place it up on allblacks.com as it gets announced. Will also link it to facebook and twitter also of course :)

(NZRU, 14th October 2009).

You know where to come to get the inside news on the end of year tour! We look forward to keeping you up to date over the next 6-7 weeks - cheers, the ABs.com team :)

(NZRU, 18th October 2009).

While the brand owner clearly posted messages to interact with community members and remind them of their official information ties, members also capitalised on the opportunity to interact with the brand owner. On a number of occasions community members took advantage of their ability to have contact with official managers of the All Blacks to pass on their opinions. One member for example, placed the following thread:

This online community is run by the NZRFU yeah? Well do us a favour and send a message to Graham Henry for us... Give Hosea Gear or Cory Jane a go on the wing! Highly doubtful we'll retain the silverware, so why not experiment why you got the chance!

(Jonathon Ioane¹³, 9th September 2009)

The desire to use the online brand community as a means of expressing opinions to the brand owner was apparent. Therefore, while the brand owner clearly used the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community to interact with members, members too used the online brand community as a way of communicating with NZRU officials. Communication between the brand owner and members was clearly two-way. The ability to communicate directly with officials also meant members were not only communicating their opinions or thoughts but could also directly approach officials for specific information, which members could not otherwise find.

I noticed that the official, All Blacks' website (not the facebook site) sells merchandise for fans...but sadly no automobile 'bumper-stickers'. Am I mistaken?

(Eric Breiby¹⁴, 5th September 2009).

However, the underlying theme of desire to consume official information did not solely reside in interaction with the brand owner. Members in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community

¹³ Jonathon Ioane was a brand-sponsored community member who gave permission to collect his threads and specifically asked to be named in this research report.

¹⁴ Eric Breiby was a brand-sponsored community member who gave permission to collect his threads and specifically asked to be named in this research report.

did not just rely on the brand owner to provide information and to generate threads. The strong desire to consume official information meant community members proactively shared official information amongst themselves in order to provoke community activity. On many occasions members placed threads on the online discussion board that linked to news articles, videos, or official blogs, in order to maintain a constant supply of current news and information. One player posted the following news feed sourced from Yahoo UK Rugby page with a provoking question addressed to community members at the end:

ACCORDING TO YAHOO UK RUGBY PAGE:

McAlister fractured his cheekbone while Smith tore his hamstring in a torrid clash that left both teams bloodied and bruised. The All Blacks won the match 19-18 to remain in contention for the Tri-Nations title but coach Graham Henry said it was unlikely McAlister and Smith would play in their two remaining matches. "The two centres are not too good and I think Conrad will take some time," Henry said. McAlister was involved in two heavy head clashes. He was left dazed and bleeding from the mouth after colliding with Australia scrumhalf Luke Burgess (pictured with McAlister) in the opening minutes of the match then broke his cheekbone after running into replacement wing Peter Hynes in the second half.

I've already mentioned it in the lions' den so to speak, and even discussed it with a member here too. The general consensus is that a helmet w/cage would lesson the tradition that is rugby. As a fan (new) to the sport, what's your thoughts?

(Eric Breiby, 24th August 2009).

The way community members used official information to generate discussion and encourage participation in the community is noted. In this case, the member used the article from Yahoo UK Rugby to stimulate a conversation on the use of head helmets to protect players. The member therefore not only provided the community with current news but also used the content in the article to initiate discussion. Another posting also illustrates how community members shared official information through interactive media as means of stimulating and participating in discussions. One member placed a YouTube video on the discussion board followed by the below comment:

Fans: this YouTube clip is 'favourited' in my list on YouTube. I was beginning to wonder, as over the weeks/months, some Kiwis have told me some Samoan players either by residence or transfer, they play for the All Blacks? If I'm correct, who is ...that guy on the Samoan side, who starts their Haka? He's seen at 0:03 to 0:04 starting it and they show him again at the end of

the clip at 1:06. He exudes a magnetism, a strength: I think he'd be good on the All Blacks...not sure why but maybe his charisma has a lot to do with it? Peace.

(Eric Breiby, 2nd October 2009).

In this scenario, a community member updated members with current news and also to discussed the ability of one particular potential player using a YouTube video. Interactive media such as YouTube videos therefore influenced the way community members consumed the All Blacks brand and participated in the online brand community. The shared drive to consume official information thereby meant members employed a variety of media types.

The above examples of postings from the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community demonstrate how the underlying theme of 'shared drive to consume official information' was apparent in this community. Frequent interaction between the brand owner and members as well as consumption of official news feeds or other interactive media had strong implications on the way members not only participated in the community, but also formed a relationship with the brand. It is clear this online brand community was strongly centred on members shared drive to consume official information.

'Expression through detailed cognitive thoughts'

A large proportion of discussions in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community were expressed through detailed cognitive thoughts. Discussions expressed through detailed cognitive thoughts were characterised by cognitive/rational comments as opposed to highly emotional comments. Throughout discussions in the brand-sponsored online community members' negotiated opinions amongst themselves, rationally analysed comments, and thought carefully about their responses. Detailed cognitive discussions amongst members were frequently apparent and an example of the detailed thoughts that members presented to the brand-sponsored community is shown in the following thread:

At 28 years of age (relatively young) why is Jerry Collins still NOT playing for the All Blacks? Considering the rule that many here have explained to me, I assume Collins is forbidden to wear a black kit since he's played overseas? I guess the Blacks' management broke this rule for Dan Carter letting him return? Or was Dan only playing locally in the NZ before his return for the Bledisloe?

(Eric Breiby, 25th August 2009).

The detailed and depth of thought in this comment suggests the poster thought carefully about why Jerry Collins was not playing for the All Blacks. This comment provoked four members to directly reply, after which the poster then finally concluded:

Ah.... I see it clearly now! Crystal clear! Thanks! If one is playing rugby overseas then the door is shut for the All Blacks. Once he returns to local New Zealand shores, signs his 'John Hancock' on the proverbial dotted line, then voila' ...that door down the road at the mecca that is All Blacks' headquarters is theoretically OPEN...as long as he's playing rugby locally. Then and ONLY then he can wear that all important black kit!

(Eric Breiby, 25th August 2009).

The postings above illustrate the depth of thought in member's postings. The intensity of this discussion increased through detailed interaction with other community members and through negotiation and expression of rational thoughts, an outcome was reached. While discussions were generally detailed and rational, members were still able to communicate clearly and concisely. The thread below is both detailed and rational, although the poster communicates his thoughts in a very short and concise manner using bullet points:

Courtesy of 'Tackle-With-Your-Face' technique, Luke McCallister is out.

- Who is his replacement and more importantly. ...
- How badly will this affect the Blacks?
- How good or notso good are his replacement's stats?

(Eric Breiby, 25th August 2009).

The above comments show how members in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community primarily interacted, discussed, negotiated opinions and participated in the community through detailed cognitive thoughts. Emotive outbursts dominated in community discussions less. The theme 'expression through detailed cognitive thoughts' shows how members thought carefully about discussions and responded rationally. Carefully thinking about comments and analysing comments, united members in the way they participated in the community and consumed the All Blacks brand.

'Critique of game performance'

The All Blacks brand-sponsored online community was built around members shared critique of game performance. Continuous critique of game performance was manifested and exemplified in community discussions through four actions. First, discussions were event specific. Second, there was clear emphasis on constructive analysis of game performance. Third, members showed strong perceptions of their ability to coach or analysed coaching staff. Finally, there was strong analysis of player skill, competency or other environmental factors such as game rules or conditions. Through these four actions members in the brand-sponsored online community participated in the

community and consumed the All Blacks brand based on their shared critique of game performance.

The underlying theme of unity through critique of game performance was characterised by discussions frequently being event focused. Discussions were twice more likely to be specifically related to an event, than not. This holds true even when the All Blacks were not playing, as members were equally keen to discuss competitor games. Furthermore, members frequently constructively analysed game performance. This constructive analytical approach to games and results suggests the community was highly event focused and consuming and analysing events was fundamental to community participation.

Frequently members in the brand-sponsored online community also displayed strong perceived ability to coach and often analysed coaching decisions. Through making coaching suggestions members showed their passion and understanding of the game but also showed high levels of involvement. Through analysis of coaching, members reiterated their ability and shared drive to analyse game performance. An example of this is shown below:

Wallabies can pull a miracle win! If they place Quade Cooper in at fly half and Gitaeu back at 12 where he belongs... They only lost by 7 points, that's the least against the Boks in this years Tri Nations... They were on a surge at the last 12 mins last week when Cooper came on, he's the key to attack!

(Jonathon Ioane, 1st September 2009).

This thread evidently shows how members constructively analysed games and performance and in this example, suggested alternative coaching tactics to increase the likelihood of a win. The ability of members to analyse performance to such a high degree and display their perceived ability to coach with conviction, illustrates the high level of involvement members have consuming rugby games. The united desire to critique game performance to this degree also illustrates the depth of participation in community discussions.

The All Blacks brand-sponsored online community also displayed a shared critique of game performance through analysis of player skill/competency or other environmental factors. Discussions were often centred on who the best players were and why, and player strengths and weaknesses. There were also plenty of discussions around other environmental factors such as the rules of the game, playing conditions, playing atmosphere etc. Frequently members analysed the Tri Nations point system in attempt to understand what strategies were needed to win the competition. An example of comments that displayed critique of game performance through analysis of other environmental factors is shown below:

If the Boks win vs. the Wallabies, does that mean the All Blacks are mathematically out of contention for regaining 1st place?

(Eric Breiby, 27th August 2009).

By focusing on events in discussions, analysing game and coaching performance, and analysing player skill or other environmental factors, the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community was clearly based on critique of game performance. Through critique of game performance, members were united in the way they consumed the All Blacks brand and participated in the community.

'Shared positive emotional bonds'

A large amount of activity in the All Blacks brand-sponsored online community displayed shared positive emotional bonds. Consuming the All Blacks brand and participating in the online community meant members displayed shared positive emotional bonds through their enthusiasm and passion for the team and for individual players. Members discussed amongst themselves their passion for the All Blacks and their enthusiasm for All Black games. It is possible shared enthusiasm and passion for the team and individual players may be a requirement of members when they join the online community.

These four themes explain how members in the brand-sponsored online community participated in community discussions and consumed the All Blacks brand. Members were united in their shared drive to consume official information, expression through detailed cognitive thoughts, critique of game performance and shared positive emotional bonds. These results imply the role of the brand manager may have had some influence on consumption practices within the brand-sponsored online community. In order to clearly examine the influence of the brand manager in consumption practices within the brand-sponsored online community, it is essential to compare results with findings from the consumer-generated online community.

4.4 Results and analysis of the consumer-generated online brand community

Results of the consumer-generated online community¹⁵ will follow the same structure as per the results for the brand-sponsored online community. First, the language that represent discussions are examined and illustrated in a word cloud. Next, community discussions are analysed. Lastly, the wider consumption practices of the consumer-generated online community are interpreted. The All Blacks consumer-generated online community was observed for two weeks from 23 August

¹⁵ As outlined earlier in this research report, the All Blacks consumer-generated online brand community was dissolved in November, 2009 and therefore can no longer be accessed.

– 5 September 2009. Throughout this time, 78 original threads were placed on the online community discussion board. The 78 threads provoked 74 direct replies and 25 members placed a positive emoticon to these comments. The frequency of interaction was lower in the consumer-generated online community than in the brand-sponsored online community and this could be attributable to the presence of the brand owner in the brand-sponsored online community who generated large amounts of discussions.

4.4.1 Language dominating community discussions

The language that dominated discussions in the consumer-generated online community is illustrated in Figure 9. The key word that dominated discussions in the All Blacks consumer-generated online community was 'love' and this word immediately stands out in the centre of the word cloud. Members in the consumer-generated online community repeatedly expressed their love for the individual players, the All Blacks, and for New Zealand. Notes from the researcher's diary indicated this observation early stating, "There is lots of emotional commitment to the team in the consumer-generated community. Comments such as 'I Love the All Blacks' appear frequently". The word 'love' was often used by members in their comments and discussions and was important in consumer-generated online community discussions. Similarly, the word 'heart' also often appeared in conversations in phrases such as 'You guys are in my heart'. This word is also appropriately depicted in the word cloud. Members in the consumer-generated online community therefore did not hesitate to share their emotions or show affection for the All Blacks.

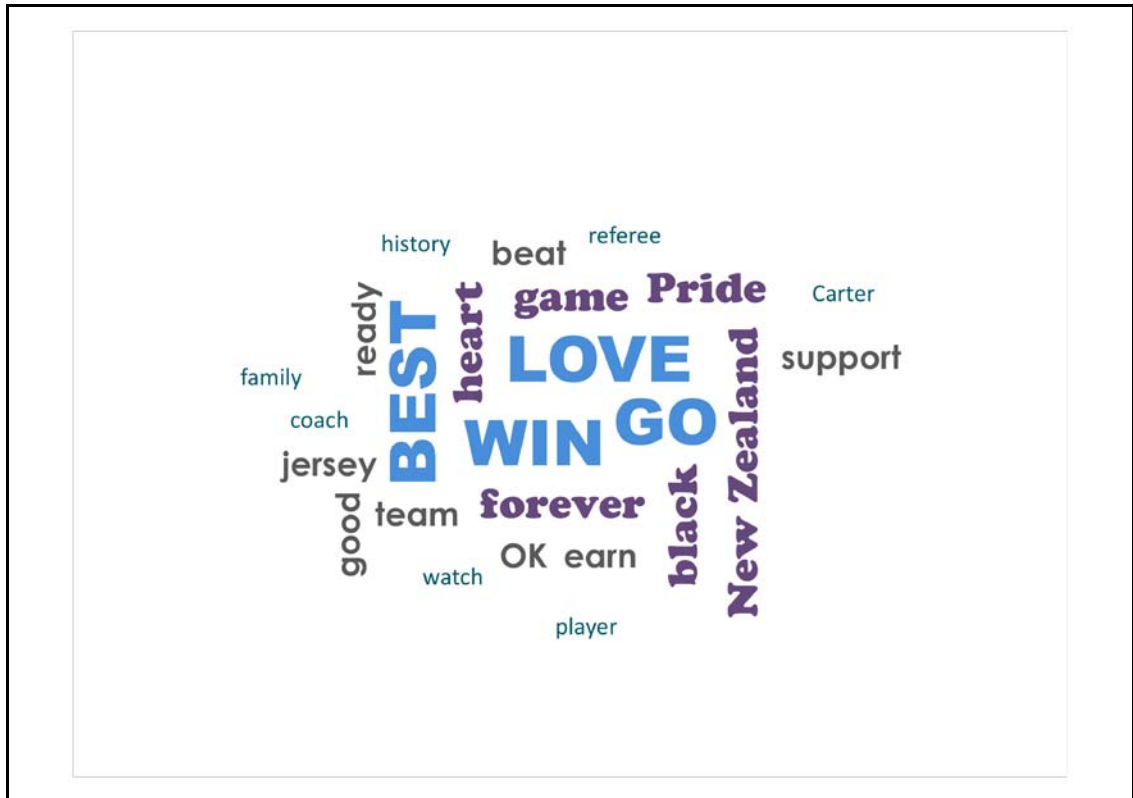


Figure 9: Word cloud for the consumer-generated online community

Other words that frequently appeared in comments and were also emotive were key words ‘go’ and ‘best’. Members constantly placed comments on the consumer-generated online discussion board with typical phrases such as ‘Go the All Blacks’, or ‘All Blacks are the best’. The researcher also noted this finding in the researcher’s diary suggesting, “Comments in the All Blacks consumer-generated online community are very short at the moment with one line comments such as ‘Go the All Blacks’ dominating the discussion board”. Members in the consumer-generated online community were also enthusiastic and passionate about their team and comments were generally positive. The key word ‘win’ was also regularly dominated conversations. These key words stood out as important key words representing conversations in the consumer-generated online community and therefore they are shown in large bold font in the word cloud.

Support for the All Blacks was clear in community discussions. Members of the consumer-generated online community were often supportive towards the team, suggesting resiliency. Key words such as ‘support’, and ‘forever’ often appeared in conversations and are accordingly depicted in the word cloud. Observations in the researcher’s diary affirm this observation; “There are lots of supportive comments in the consumer-generated online community showing how much people love the All Blacks.” These words played an important role in showing how community members consumed the All Blacks brand and participated in community discussions.

Discussions in the consumer-generated online community also sometimes portrayed a degree of loyalty and national pride. Key words such as 'black', 'New Zealand' and 'pride' were present at times. These key words are accordingly illustrated in the word cloud. The words 'black', 'New Zealand' and 'pride' suggested that members in the consumer-generated online community acknowledged the roots of the All Blacks and showed pride in their national team. Members in the consumer-generated online community were aware of the All Blacks origins and sometimes discussed these amongst themselves. The researcher observed this in her diary stating, "I have a feeling the consumer-generated online community has more comments regarding consumption of New Zealand's national identity. There are more comments about mana and pride". In line with this finding, key words 'history' and 'jersey' were also sometimes prevalent.

Occasionally members in the consumer-generated online community discussed All Blacks games and events. Key word 'game' therefore appeared in community discussions as members discussed games, performance and outcomes. The word 'game' is shown in the word cloud indicating the importance this word had on community discussions. Along with 'game' came other key words also associated with events and performance. 'Referee', 'Coach', 'team', 'beat', 'player', 'ready', and 'good' also sometimes appeared in conversations, showing community members were intermittently discussing these aspects of rugby events. These key words are shown in smaller font in the world cloud, showing their relative unimportance or irregularity in consumer-generated online community discussions.

Analysis of the language in discussions implies members in the consumer-generated online community showed strong affection towards the All Blacks. With conversations frequently dominated by the words 'love', 'win', 'go' and 'best', members communicated with emotion and enthusiasm.

4.4.2 Analysis of community discussions

The language that featured in the All Blacks consumer-generated online community also reflects results from analysis of community discussions. The raw comments and discussions could also not be collected from the consumer-generated online community due to ethical concerns. Therefore, discussions in the consumer-generated online community were analysed and immediately coded. A framework for coding was established to analyse all of the 78 original threads and 74 direct replies that appeared in the consumer-generated community. The framework for coding discussions in the consumer-generated online community was similar to the framework used in the brand-sponsored online community, although was slightly adapted to allow for differences in

discussions. The codes collected were used to identify the wider consumption practices that united members in the community. Thirty-four codes were identified in discussions throughout the consumer-generated community and these are shown in the Table 14 (next page) ranked from those codes that appeared most frequently to those that appeared less frequently.

The most frequently occurring code in the consumer-generated online community illustrates the way members communicated with each other and participated in the community. The code 'emotional comment' represented a large proportion of community discussions. A comment was analysed 'emotional' when the content of the comment was much more emotional and showed little or no cognitive thoughts. Emotional comments appeared 89 in community discussions. This finding suggests participants in the consumer-generated online community were very emotional and participation in the community was very much through emotive expressions as opposed to rational comments. Complementing this finding, the code 'enthusiasm and passion for the team/reply to a player' also occurred frequently in conversations. Community members expressed their enthusiasm and passion for the team/player/reply to players 78 times. Members in the consumer-generated online community therefore were able to openly express their shared enthusiasm for the All Blacks, individual players or even respond enthusiastically to player comments. These findings reinforce earlier findings that suggest key words such as 'love', 'go', 'best', 'support', 'forever' and 'heart' appeared frequently in conversations. The way members participated in the consumer-generated online community and consumed the All Blacks brand was highly emotional and wholehearted. The code for 'short comment' also appeared 73 times in community discussions. This differs from the code for 'long comment', which appeared as little as 16 times. A comment was analysed 'short comment' when the comment was less than less than two sentences long. The lack of long comments also suggests conversations were less detailed.

Table 14: Codes from the consumer-generated online community

Codes	Frequency
Emotional comment	89
Enthusiasm and passion for the team/game/ reply to players	78
Short comment (<2 sentences)	73
Non event-based comment	68
Event-based comment	55
Supremacy	33
Consumption of national symbols/pride in the team/country	25
Cognitive/rational comment	20
Use of personal photos	20
Direct reply to All Black player	18
Constructive analysis of skill/competency	17
Resiliency	16
Long comment (>3 sentences)	16
Discussion about game performance	15
Pro competitors/stinted support for competitors	15
Perceived ability to coach/analysis of coaching	14
Mana/pride	14
Revenge	11
Participation in the game	11
Enthusiasm and passion for one particular player	10
Direct reply to personal photos	7
Specifically seeking information (game, players, other)	7
Immortality	6
Foreigners anti New Zealand/anti All Blacks	6
Maintenance of ingroup/outgroup boundaries	4
Embeddedness in body and soul	3
Consumption of news feeds	3
Negative beliefs about All Blackss	3
Constructive analysis of other environmental factors e.g. rules	1
Use of interactive media (video or link to news feed)	1
Comment encouraging promotion of game/tickets/event	1
Comment by All Black player	1
Foreigners devotion to New Zealand's national identity	1
Total number of postings	78
Total number of 'like comments'	25
Total number of replies	74
Total number of interaction	152

Conversations in the consumer-generated online community did not only pivot around rugby events. The code for 'non event based comment' appeared 68 times in discussions, compared with 'event-based comments' that appeared 55 times. Therefore, while members did discuss rugby events often, they did not rely on events as the focal point of conversations. 'Non event comments', or comments not specifically related to events appeared more frequently.

Other important codes that reflected community discussions were codes for 'supremacy' and 'consumption of national symbols/pride in the team'. Discussions embraced feelings of supremacy and it was clear, conversations in the consumer-generated online community used key words such as 'go' and 'best' to enhance feelings of supremacy. The code for 'supremacy', defined as comments that showed supreme attitudes towards the All Blacks or players, appeared 33 times in community discussions. Conversations in the consumer-generated online community also reflected member's strong attitudes towards pride in New Zealand's national symbols or pride in the team. These comments were analysed as 'consumption of national symbols/pride in the team' and appeared 25 times in community discussions.

The use of personal photos was also somewhat unique to this community. The consumer-generated online community used personal photos 20 times to communicate and interact with

each other. This finding shows how discussions in the community were primarily short and often involved the use of photos as a means of contributing to, or initiating, conversations. Members must have felt some personal and emotional connection to the consumer-generated community, as they were comfortable sharing their personal photos with more than 160,000 members. Notes from the researcher's diary observed the use of personal photos, "In the consumer-generated community there are lots of photos being put of fans with players, and also professional photos of players. There are even photos of little babies being put up dressed in All Blacks gear". The strong appearance of personal photos implies members had short spontaneous conversations with each other sometimes using personal visual memorabilia as a means of communicating. Also interesting was the code for 'comment by an All Black player'. Daniel Carter was supposedly a member of the consumer-generated online community and placed one comment on the community discussion board. This comment generated 18 replies. However, members were skeptic as to whether this really was Daniel Carter.

These findings illustrate the most frequent codes that appeared in discussions in the consumer-generated online community. Codes such as 'short comment', 'emotional comment' 'enthusiasm and passion for the team/game/reply to player' really dominated conversations. The purpose of analysing discussions was to identify the consumption practices in the consumer-generated online community. These consumption practices will now be explained further.

4.4.3 Consumption practices

Analysing discussions helped to identify the consumption practices in the consumer-generated online community. Four themes were identified as representing the way members participated in the community and the way they consumed the All Blacks brand. Figure 10 (next page) illustrates the four consumption practices of the All Blacks consumer-generated online community.

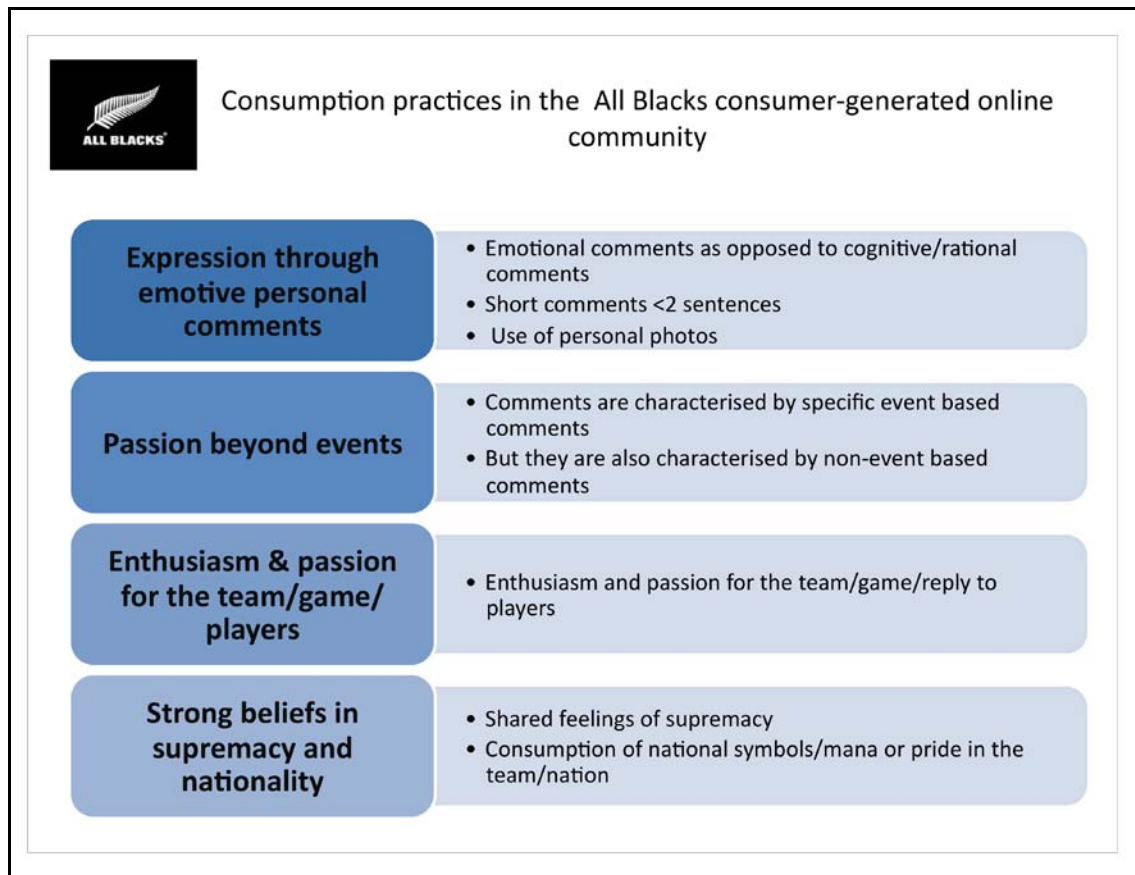


Figure 10: Consumption practices in consumer-generated online community

The All Blacks consumer-generated online community was based on expression through emotive and personal comments, passion beyond events, enthusiasm and passion for the team, and strong beliefs in supremacy and nationality. The first theme ‘expression through emotive personal comments’ refers to member’s expression through emotional comments as opposed to cognitive or rational comments, or short comments with less than two sentences, or the use of personal photos. The second unifying theme ‘passion beyond events’ refers to the way community members specifically discuss rugby events but also move beyond events as the focus of conversations and community discussions are therefore, also characterised by non-event based comments. Members are united in their enthusiasm and passion for the All Blacks and rugby games and this is obvious in the third theme ‘enthusiasm and passion for the team/game/reply to player’. Lastly, the fourth theme ‘strong beliefs in supremacy and nationality’ refers to members in the consumer-generated online community showing beliefs of supremacy in the All Blacks and the way members consume national symbols and display mana/pride in the team/nation. These four themes characterise the way members participated in the consumer-generated online community and consumed the All Blacks brand through unique consumption practices.

The four themes will now be discussed in greater depth. Unfortunately, there are no extracts of these themes from the consumer-generated online community, as the researcher could not collect

raw comments or discussions without gaining individual consent from members (as explained previously in Section 3.4). While the researcher approached a number of members in the consumer-generated online community to collect their comments, no one replied with permission to do so. As a result of these ethical concerns the results presented below do not include specific examples from community discussions.

'Expression through emotive personal comments'

The All Blacks consumer-generated online community was built upon expression through emotive personal comments. This fundamental theme that united consumer-generated members in their consumption practices was exemplified by three specific actions. First, comments were much more likely to be emotional and expressive as opposed to cognitive or rational. Second, comments were generally shorter, less than two sentences long, or used member's personal photos as a means of communicating or initiating discussions. Members in the consumer-generated online community used personal photos of themselves or with fans to interact in the community. An example of some of the types of photos that were presented in the consumer-generated online community is shown Images 1 and 2 (next page). These photos are only examples of photos presented on the consumer-generated online community discussion board, as real photos could not be collected due to ethical concerns.

Consumption through emotive personal comments implies members were less likely to think rationally about their comments or discussions and instead were more likely to respond in an emotional manner. While rational thought may be less apparent in conversations, members in the consumer-generated online community showed depth of participation by openly expressing their emotions and sharing personal photos with community members. Members in the consumer-generated online community participated, discussed, and formed a relationship with members and the All Blacks brand through emotive, personal comments.



Image 1: Example All Blacks fan off to an All Blacks game



Image 2: Example All Blacks fan with Richie McCaw

'Passion beyond events'

The All Blacks consumer-generated online community was united through passion beyond events. Members displayed passion beyond events through a mix of event-based comments and non-event based comments. This implies community members may have been even more interested in participating in the online community and consuming the All Blacks brand for reasons other than to discuss rugby events. Events were therefore clearly not a binding factor in community participation or discussion. The scope of the consumer-generated online community was therefore broad. For members of the consumer-generated online community, consumption of the All Blacks brand and participation in the online community did not just equate to consumption of events, but instead also expanded beyond rugby events.

'Enthusiasm and passion for the team/game/reply to player'

Another underlying theme in the consumer-generated online community was enthusiasm and passion for the team/game/reply to player. Members were united in their shared enthusiasm and passion and this was displayed regularly in discussions through enthusiastic or passion comments towards the All Blacks or towards an All Blacks game. Comments such as 'Go the All Blacks' were examples of enthusiasm and passion for the team/game. Members in the consumer-generated online community were united through their enthusiasm and passion for the All Blacks, which suggests this may be an important influencing factor in deciding to join this online community. Interestingly, an All Blacks player Daniel Carter was supposedly a member of this All Blacks online community and placed one original thread on the online discussion board. Members showed some enthusiasm and passion by directly replying to this player and therefore this player did generate some threads. Although, some of these threads also showed skepticism and doubt as to whether this really was Daniel Carter. Participation in the consumer-generated community and consumption of the All Blacks brand was fundamentally driven by a shared enthusiasm and passion for the team/game/reply to player.

'Strong beliefs in supremacy and nationality'

The consumer-generated online community was based on member's strong beliefs in supremacy and nationality. This was characterised by two specific actions. First, members displayed shared feelings of supremacy towards the All Blacks through comments such as 'All Blacks are the best'. Second, members frequently consumed national symbols or showed pride towards the team/nation. National symbols were identified as symbols specific representing New Zealand such as, the silver fern, All Blacks jersey and New Zealand flag. Members often placed comments on the discussion board displaying their consumption of national symbols, for example, 'the flag is flying strong tonight', or 'I'm wearing the jersey right now'.

The underlying theme of strong beliefs in supremacy and nationality suggests members of the consumer-generated online community may be consuming a number of aspects of the All Blacks brand. Through their shared beliefs in supremacy and nationality, it is possible members are also absorbing and identifying with the wider values of the All Blacks brand such as 'New Zealand', 'tradition', 'excellence', 'respect', 'inspiration' (as explained earlier in Section 3.2.1 Justification for choice of case study). When consuming the All Blacks brand, members in the consumer-generated community may be aligning with the brand's positioning that reflects the New Zealand psyche. This may suggest, the wider values of the All Blacks brand is important to community members when they participate in the consumer-generated online community and consume the All Blacks brand.

These results show participation in consumer-generated online community featured expression through emotive personal comments, passion beyond events, enthusiasm and passion for the team/game/player and strong beliefs in supremacy and nationality. These themes clearly united members in the consumer-generated online community and results show there are similarities and differences in consumption practices between the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online community. The differences in consumption practices will now be explained in the next section.

4.5 Differences in consumption practices

The first research question guiding this study was to investigate differences in consumption practices between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Having identified the consumption practices within each community in the previous sections, it is evident similarities and differences in consumption practices prevail. This section identifies and explains how consumption practices between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities are different (see Figure 11 next page), using the themes identified in the previous sections. Findings are also supported with insights provided by three marketing industry experts who participated in interviews.

Results from the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online communities clearly show consumption practices differed between the two communities as illustrated in Figure 11. While the brand-sponsored online community displayed unity through shared drive to consume official information, this theme was not evident in the consumer-generated online community. The brand-sponsored online community featured expression through detailed cognitive thoughts. This contrasts with the consumer-generated online community, which was based on expression through emotive personal comments. Furthermore, discussions in the brand-sponsored online

community were event specific based on critique of game performance. In comparison, discussions in the consumer-generated community displayed passion beyond events with conversations expanding beyond rugby games and were often not related to events. Finally, the consumer-generated online community featured strong beliefs in supremacy/nationality. However, this was not evident as an underlying theme in the brand-sponsored online community as members seldom embraced beliefs of supremacy, mana or pride in the country and seldom consumed national symbols.

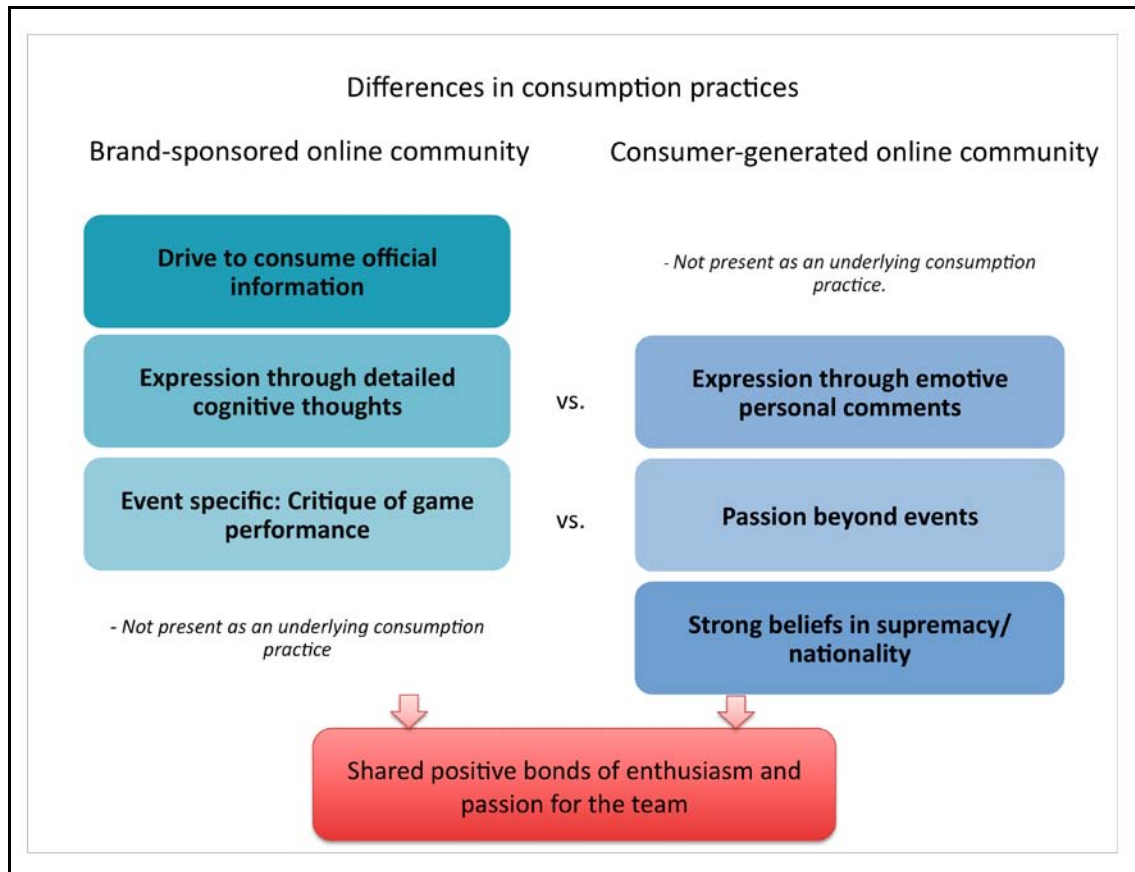


Figure 11: Differences in consumption practices

Despite the differences in consumption practices, the two communities did share one similarity suggesting members were united in one aspect. Evidence of shared positive bonds through enthusiasm and passion for the team/game/player was apparent across the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online communities. This suggests all online community members were enthusiastic and passionate for the All Blacks and for All Blacks games. As both online community members were united in their shared enthusiasm and passion for the All Blacks, this may have been seen as a fundamental requirement to online community membership. Figure 11 illustrates the differences and one similarity in consumption practices between the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online communities. The differences in consumption practices between the

brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities will now be discussed in greater detail.

'Brand-sponsored community shared drive to consume official information'

Consumption practices differed between the two online brand communities in that the brand-sponsored online community was based on shared drive to consume official information, whereas this was not evident as a shared consumption practice in the consumer-generated online community. The theme 'shared drive to consume official information' was characterised by frequent interaction with the brand owner and consumption of news feeds. Frequent interaction with the brand manager had a major impact on discussions and contributed to the shared drive for official information in the brand-sponsored online community. In contrast, there was no interaction with a brand manager or community manager in the consumer-generated online community, there was minimal consumption of news feeds or interactive media and few searchers for information. This suggests the consumption practice of shared drive to consume official information was influenced by the management of the online community.

Interaction with the brand manager in the brand-sponsored online community had an important role in driving the desire to consume official information. It was evident, the brand manager encouraged sharing and consuming of official information within the brand-sponsored community. A representative for the NZRU who is an online marketing expert discussed the differences in consumption practices within the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online communities in an interview and elaborated on the brand manager's role. The following excerpt from the interview with a NZRU representative shows how the brand manager may have encouraged a shared drive to consume official information in the brand-sponsored online community and may explain why this practice is not evident in the consumer-generated community -

The only difference [between consumer-generated and brand-sponsored online brand communities] in terms of the content that is generated and in the discussions and dialogue that is being had, is that we [the brand manager] can offer the official view. We can get the inside word, whether it is with the coaches or player or management within the business. So if there are questions, we can literally go and see them or pick up the phone and say, 'this is a question that is being put to us, what's your view? You're the one that can answer this'. I can then go back and interact with our community whereas anyone else outside the organisation can't do that. That's probably the main difference.

(NZRU Representative taken from interview, 4 September 2009).

The NZRU representative recognises that the ability of the brand manager to provide the official perspective and interact with community members, influences the content, discussions, and dialogue in the brand-sponsored online community. The position of the brand manager and their ability to contact management and directly pass on official information to members, explains why the brand-sponsored community was uniquely based on a shared drive to consume official information. The NZRU representative acknowledges -

Yes, a large part of it is about providing new, breaking information to our fans. We can come along in real time and provide that story if there's a different side to the story that they may not be aware of. Then they may have all the facts as opposed to one side of it.

(NZRU Representative taken from interview, 4 September 2009).

This difference in consumption practice may also be attributable to members in the brand-sponsored online community having different expectations from members in the consumer-generated online community. An online marketing expert from an airline service organisation proposes, members in a brand-sponsored online community expect continuous interaction with brand managers and have lower tolerance for failure. This may be because it was the brand manager who reached out to consumers through initiating and maintaining an online community in the first place.

So consumers... once they have connected they want to feel loved. They want something back and that is where, for a corporate, it becomes a resource challenge. Once you become engaged with that person then you have to remain engaged with them... sometimes on that one to one basis, sometimes one to many... And life is all good if you keep talking to me. But if there's just that once when you don't respond to my question, then I'll ditch you faster than I ever would previously. So the tolerance for failure with a corporate in the social media world is a lot lower.

(Airline service representative taken from interview, 11 September 2009).

This finding suggests, as the brand owner has proactively reached out to consumers and provided them with information in the brand-sponsored online community, the brand owner must continue doing so in order to maintain member's expectations. This clarifies why consumers in the brand-sponsored community were united in their frequent interaction with the brand owner and constant consumption of official news feeds. In contrast, members in the consumer-generated online community may have had no expectations of the community manager. These conclusions imply the role of the brand manager and high expectations of community members may influence the shared drive to consume official information in the brand-sponsored online community.

'Expression through detailed cognitive thoughts versus expression through emotive personal comments'

Consumption practices in the two online brand communities further differed in that the brand-sponsored online community was based on expression through detailed cognitive thoughts, whereas the consumer-generated online community was based on expression through emotive personal comments. Brand-sponsored community members therefore communicated with reason, thought, and using detail. In comparison, members in the consumer-generated community participated in discussions by expressing their emotions, making short comments or using personal photos as a way of communicating. These differences suggest once more, consumption practices differed depending on who created the online community and how the online community is maintained.

Expression through detailed cognitive comments compared with emotive personal comments suggests members in the two communities communicated their experiences in contrasting ways. This may be attributable to the fact that brand-sponsored community members were interacting with a brand manager and corporation; where as consumer-generated community members were interacting with their fellow consumers. The role of the brand manager as the community manager may be further influencing expression and language within the brand-sponsored online community for the following reason -

When people talk about their experiences; the language is a bit different for a start. They aren't talking to their mate, they understand a corporate is behind this group and that the way they talk with them is a bit difference, they aren't so 'buddie buddie'.

(Airline service representative taken from interview, 11 September 2009).

A marketing expert from an airline service organisation acknowledges the way community members expressed themselves in an online community may have been influenced by who is managing the community. The degree of friendliness and affection may be lower when consumers know they are interacting with a corporate as opposed to interacting with their fellow consumers.

Earlier results also proved consumer-generated and brand-sponsored online communities differed in the types of key words that dominated discussions. As brand-sponsored community members' expressed themselves with detail and reason with few emotive words, it is likely they were

adapting their comments and language to suit the brand manager. In comparison, consumer-generated community members were discussing amongst their fellow peers and may have felt no obligation to adapt their speech or hide their personal or emotive feelings. A marketing expert from an airline service organisation reinforces this finding -

I think people coming through tend to tailor these messages a bit depending on who they are communicating with. I think that's quite a natural thought process, people understand there are differences in the way you talk to a corporate compared to the way you talk to your mate in a pub.

(Airline service representative taken from interview, 11 September 2009).

The finding that the consumer-generated online community was based on expression through emotive personal comments suggests members participated in the consumer-generated online community in a more affectionate, natural and personable manner. Whereas members in the brand-sponsored online community were more likely to have thought carefully about their comments, used rational logic when communicating and may have been less personal in their expressions. This difference in natural, affectionate communication versus detailed cognitive communication may mean –

A consumer-lead online community often go places that maybe brands and marketers haven't envisaged...in natural conversations [for example] that have no corporate agenda whatsoever. The purity of humanity is more evident in those [consumer-generated] communities... That's kind of the key difference [between a brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand community], is that it's the organic nature of those conversations.

(Advertising Agency representative taken from interview, 8 September 2009).

This finding questions the degree of authenticity in a brand-sponsored online community. The use of cognition and rationalism in conversations may have meant members were attempting to control their discussions and as a result conversations may have been less natural and authentic. It is possible consumers were self-censoring their conversations on a brand-sponsored online community. A representative from an advertising agency acknowledges -

There is a degree of authenticity to a consumer built online community. And that really because there is no policy or corporate agenda to control the content on those sites. They are very much lead verbatim and they are a real snapshot of what people are saying and the language they are actually using to describe their interest and dedication to a brand...The more they [brand managers] try to control and edit those, the less engaging and authentic the experience is with the consumers that want to engage that way.

If I'm blogging about the All Blacks on an independent blog site that I have created for example, for my very own personal agenda because I love the All Blacks and I have watched them and I want to talk about all the concerns and issues that I see for that brand. Whereas when I'm doing that through a corporate relationship of some sort, I'll be thinking very carefully about the corporate agenda and the right thing for the corporate and its customers. And so I think that's the difference, that casual individually responsible content versus something that has wider more formal responsibilities and agendas.

(Advertising Agency representative taken from interview, 8 September 2009).

The finding that members in the brand-sponsored online community were communicating with detail and cognition may be attributable to the fact that they were also attempting to consider the perspective of the brand owner in their discussions. Comments and discussions were perhaps influenced by the knowledge that consumers were interacting with a brand owner as opposed to interacting with their peers. The above findings suggest differences in the way members expressed themselves in brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities could be attributable to the presence of the brand owner.

'Event specific: shared critique of game performance versus passion beyond events'

Consumption practices further differed in that the brand-sponsored online community was based on shared critique of game performance. Members in the brand-sponsored online community were united in that discussions were event specific; there was strong emphasis on analysis of game performance, coaching ability, player skill, or other environmental factors. The consumer-generated online community however contrasted in that it was based on passion beyond events. Members in the consumer-generated online community did discuss events but also moved beyond events as the focus of conversation and accordingly, comments were often non-event based.

This difference in consumption practice implies members in the brand-sponsored online community were more specifically focused on discussions around one topic: rugby events. Whereas in comparison, members in the consumer-generated online community were more open to discussions expanding beyond rugby events and accordingly, the scope of discussions was wider. One explanation for this could be, members in the brand-sponsored online community may have felt more obliged to discuss topics that are specifically relevant to the online community. A representative from an airline service organisation also agrees -

[The consumer-generated online community] ... it's a lot more free spirited, you know what I mean? Whereas a community that has a corporate has created, there is probably more boundaries that people have to play within.

(Airline service representative taken from interview, 11 September 2009).

The perceived boundaries in a brand-sponsored online community may explain the differences in consumption practices between the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. As brand-sponsored members may perceive their community to have boundaries due to their communities being established by a corporate, they may be less inclined to broaden the scope of discussions to topics less relevant to the community and corporation. The presence of a corporate in an online brand community may be again, influencing consumption practices such as, the focus and scope of discussions.

'Consumer-generated community strong beliefs in supremacy/nationality'

Finally, the consumer-generated online community was uniquely based on strong beliefs in supremacy or nationality. This was characterised by comments showing supreme beliefs for All Blacks or through consumption of national symbols and mana/pride in the team or nation. In this sense the consumer-generated online community was distinctive in that member's pride and passion extended beyond the team to the wider nation. In comparison, the displays of beliefs in supremacy/nationality were not evident as an underlying theme in the brand-sponsored online community. Members in the brand-sponsored online community seldom showed beliefs in supremacy, mana/pride in the team/nation, or consumed national symbols.

The difference in the way members interacted within the community and absorbed the brand suggests the reasons for joining the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online community may differ. One expert from an advertising agency suggests it is strong pride and passion that is the fundamental basis to a consumer-generated online community. Members in a consumer-generated online community are likely to join that online community because they are proud and passionate -

And typically it's pride and passion that give rise to consumer lead online communities in my experience. You know it is an affinity with the brand, a nostalgic connection with the brand.

(Advertising Agency representative taken from interview, 8 September 2009).

Members in the consumer-generated online community may have therefore joined an All Blacks online community for different reasons compared with those who joined a brand-sponsored

online community. The consumer-generated online community was based on shared beliefs of supremacy/nationality and this may be because members joined the community in order to embrace all aspects of the All Blacks brand such as their impressive win rate, national origins, and New Zealand heritage, which they can easily identify with. This may differ in a brand-sponsored online community:

A consumer commences... or starts following a brand because they feel some empathy or associated with the brand. Whereas a corporate goes, I want people to feel some empathy or some connection with my brand and corporates spend a lot of time and a lot of money trying to figure out what that connection could or should be.

(Airline service representative taken from interview, 11 September 2009).

These findings imply members in the consumer-generated community may have already possessed attributes such as supreme beliefs in the All Blacks or mana/pride in New Zealand before they joined the online brand community. These attributes may have been responsible for the creation of the consumer-generated online community in the first place. In comparison, the brand-sponsored online community may have been created for other reasons, such as for the sole purpose of a brand owner to connect with consumers. These findings may help to explain the differences in consumption practices and imply consumption practices could differ depending on why an online community has been established.

To conclude, the results of this study show differences in consumption practices between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities exist. The role of the brand owner in the brand-sponsored online community may have influenced members shared drive to consume official information, expression through detailed cognitive thoughts and shared critique of game performance. In comparison, the idea that consumers are interacting amongst themselves for non-commercial purposes in the consumer-generated online community, may explain why members communicated through emotional personal comments, displayed passion beyond events and have shared beliefs of supremacy and nationality.

4.6 *Marketing industry views on brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities*

The second research question pertinent to this study was to identify how the marketing industry views brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. This section identifies further marketing industry expert views on differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities using findings from three interviews. Results from interviews

with a representative from the NZRU, an airline services organisation and an advertising agency are discussed.

These results begin with an overall perspective of online brand communities for goods versus for service or sports brands. One objective of this study was to extend research into online brand communities by examining service and sports brands. Findings suggest there are perhaps minimal differences in online brand communities for goods versus online brand communities for service or sports brands. Next, differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities are examined. Findings indicate online brand strategy varies for brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Finally, despite differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities; experts identify three future trends applicable to all online brand communities.

4.6.1 Online brand communities for goods versus for service or sports brands

Findings from marketing industry experts initially indicate there may be differences between online brand communities for goods compared with service or sports brands. The potential difference lies in the way consumers participate in the community and form relationships with brands. At the beginning of interviews, experts propose consumption practices in online brand communities for goods are perhaps more pragmatic and consumers are more likely to be participating in the online community to seek practical advice on the product. In comparison, experts suggest at the beginning of interviews, consumers in online brand communities for service or sports brands are likely to be participating for emotive reasons. Consumers may be participating in the online community to extend their social interaction or to form an emotional connection with the brand.

One marketing expert from an advertising agency acknowledges how consumption practices in online brand communities for goods may be pragmatic because consumers are looking for advice and detailed information about the product. This may be attributable to the fact that products are tangible items, where as services are not. In comparison, experts initially propose consumption practices in online brand communities for service or sports brands are emotive and aspirational as members may be trying to drive a sense of pride or passion in the brand.

But when you are talking about a general computer brand, as an example, it's about value and it's about nuts and bolts. It's about ease of purchase, getting it delivered and the fact that it works. So that is a more pragmatic role of the brand online. People are looking for advice about the products, that it works, it's more practical rather than aspirational. Whereas sporting brands are about pride

and passion, less about pragmatics, apart from perhaps seeing if you can get tickets to the game next week, those kind of things.

(Advertising Agency representative taken from in-depth interview, 8 September 2009).

Perhaps another explanation for pragmatic consumption practices in online brand communities for goods is that the purpose of the online community for goods may be to increase sales. Experts suggest online brand communities for goods may be encouraging purchase amongst consumers. Where as on the other hand, online brand communities for service or sports brands are focused on driving an emotional and social connection.

With the product community you come in and just give opinion about how good the product is, where I think it's difficult or quite hard to get some sort of emotional meaning about the product and get right into it. Where as with a sports team it is something you're passionate about, usually when you're are member of that community. It is about extending that social interaction to an online environment, it is that pub talk but online...With a product online, you are still just trying to sell something.

(NZRU Representative taken from interview, 4 September 2009).

A representative from the NZRU acknowledges the pragmatic nature of online brand communities for goods. However, in comparison, online brand communities for service or sports brands may be focused less on encouraging purchase and may be focused more on driving an emotional connection with consumers by strengthening the relationships between their brand and consumers.

From an online sports brand perspective, it's a way to be able to get closer to a team and to the organisation and I guess having an area to have an emotional outlet and for members to have their say... so its really that emotionally connection and the ability to get closer to a team. Whereas I get that cannot get closer from a product point of view...

(NZRU Representative taken from interview, 4 September 2009).

While online brand communities for goods prove to be pragmatic compared with online brand communities for services, which are more emotional, this finding is somewhat generalistic and marketing experts acknowledge this as they progress through interviews. It would be wrong to assume that an online brand community for a product is *always* pragmatic. As marketers think more carefully about this topic in interviews they evolve their thoughts. Marketers suggest later in interviews, it is likely that pragmatic versus emotional differences in online brand communities for good versus service or sports brands depend on the brand, rather than on the category. Therefore,

it would be too generalistic to say all online brand communities for products are pragmatic and all online brand communities for service or sports brands are emotive. As experts think more carefully about this, they attribute differences to the brand rather than to the category. For example, online brand communities for premium product brands may also be about driving an emotional connection with consumers. Whereas other online brand communities for more convenient products may be more about tangible product attributes. A representative from an advertising agency suggests- -

If you were being generalistic you would say that products are more pragmatic and more specific and detailed about the product features. But it really depends on the brand because ultimately the consumers prioritise and think of things in terms of the benefits to them.”

(Advertising Agency representative taken from interview, 8 September 2009).

It is evident as marketers progress through interviews they evolve their thoughts. Later in the interview experts propose a brands positioning may therefore influence whether an online brand community for a good, service or sports brand, encourages pragmatic or emotional consumption practices. Experts recognise, regardless of the differences in online brand communities for good versus for service or sports brands, the decision to consume any brand is emotional and there still needs to be some element of emotional connection with consumers. As consumers continue to build emotional connections with brands it is possible that the current differences between online brand communities for goods versus service or sports brands may actually decrease in the future.

I mean in our business the decision to purchase a brand is an emotional one. The only thing that is different is that people typically will rationalise some decisions but are still driven by the emotional appeal... ultimately they will still make their decision on emotional drivers. I mean they can trust the brand and it's been there for a long time its not going to vanish overnight. Those are the emotional things. I think I would see further convergence between services and product brands rather than separation.

(Advertising Agency representative taken from interview, 8 September 2009).

As marketers progress through interviews they start to realise perhaps the differences between online brand communities for products versus for service or sports brands are not so great after all. Their original assumption that there are clear differences between online brand communities for goods and online brand communities for service or sports brands is perhaps not as clear cut as they initially suggested. After thinking more about this, marketing industry experts eventually conclude perhaps there are minimal differences for online brand communities for services, sports or product brands as all online brand communities are based on both pragmatic and emotive reasons.

Definitely one [online brand communities for sports brands] is more emotive than the other. Well actually I'm not sure that that's true now that I think about it. Think about all that talk back commentary you get about endlessly - the dissecting the All Blacks selection, coaching and the training regime and the merchandising...

(Advertising Agency representative taken from interview, 8 September 2009).

The above findings suggest there are perhaps minimal differences between online brand communities for goods compared with online brand communities for service or sports brands. In the beginning of interviews experts acknowledge online brand communities for products are more pragmatic and one reason for this may be because they are promoting tangible attributes or attempting to encourage purchase. In comparison, online brand communities for services or sports brands are more emotive and are encouraging an emotional connection between brands and consumers. However, as marketing experts evolve their thoughts they recognise these differences cannot be entirely determined by category and instead, are perhaps more likely to be determined by brand. A brand's positioning may influence whether consumers in online brand communities are likely to interact on a pragmatic or emotional level. Marketing experts eventually conclude after thinking carefully about this topic, differences between online brand communities for goods versus service or sports brands are minimal. Consumption practices in all online brand communities are likely to be based on both pragmatic and emotive reasons, regardless of whether the brand represents a good, service or sports team.

4.6.2 Differences in online brand strategy for brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities.

Marketing experts also identified in interviews, differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities in terms of their online brand strategies. Marketing industry experts agree online brand strategies for brand-sponsored online communities are influenced by activities in consumer-generated online communities. However, the reverse may not always apply and there is some ambiguity surrounding this. Experts suggest online brand strategy for consumer-generated online communities may sometimes be influenced by what happens in a brand-sponsored online community, but not always. Corporate online brand strategy may therefore have little or no impact on consumer-generated online communities. This is contrary to brand owners hoping their online marketing activity will have a significant impact on consumer-generated online communities.

Activity in a consumer-generated online community influences online brand strategy for brand-sponsored online communities in two ways. First, consumer-generated online brand communities

provide insights into consumer consumption practices, such as how consumers interact with each other in online communities and how they consume the brand. Second, consumer-generated online brand communities provide brand owners with a greater understanding of their consumers in the wider online social media space. Consumer-generated online communities are therefore acting as a market research data source for brand managers. To make the most of these two influences and capitalise on this data source, brand owners are using the skills and resources of online advertising agencies. Agencies are playing an increasingly important role in guiding online brand strategy for brand owners.

Brand owners and their agencies are observing consumer-generated online communities to guide their online brand strategy and even the creation of online communities. Consumer-generated online communities provide brand managers with insight into conversations topics, how consumers are communicating and the language used. Brand owners can then use these findings, such as recognising the language and words used in conversations, as part of their online brand strategy. By observing and following the activity in consumer-generated online communities, brand owners are able to adapt their online brand strategy to better align with consumers. A marketing expert from an advertising agency confirms online brand strategy is strongly influenced by activity in a consumer-generated online community -

I think, for our agency it's very influenced. We will look at the message content and the language they are using in the communication based on how consumers are speaking about it. We want to do is use terminology that is already out there in day-to-day conversations. We don't want to use industry speak or corporate speak to describe things that consumer already have a way of talking about. So we definitely use it to a very high degree, increasingly more and more.

(Advertising Agency representative taken from interview, 8 September 2009).

Observing what happens in consumer-generated online communities provides brand owners with a strong understanding of how consumers interact using online social media. Brand owners are recognising that the online social media space is extremely large and online brand strategy may be also influenced by consumer activity outside of consumer-generated online communities and they are expanding their observations into the wider online social media space.

We don't just look at the consumer-generated online community, we look at what is happening on Facebook discussions about it, what people are tweeting about around that brand and that category, among those messages.

(Advertising Agency representative taken from interview, 8 September 2009).

The scope of online consumer behaviour is extremely broad and brand owners acknowledge the importance of consumer-generated online communities as well as other online social media in informing online brand strategies. A marketing expert from an airline services organisation admits brand owners are employing agencies progressively more to provide them with a greater understanding of online consumer behaviour.

Yeah, we use an agency to keep an eye on everything out there because we certainly can't do everything ourselves. You can get terribly bogged down with everything in this media space. There are a lot of people talking to themselves out there... So we use an agency to give us the wider picture, so overall across the globe this is what people are thinking about our competitors so we can keep an eye on that and what they are talking about.

(Airline service representative taken from interview, 11 September 2009).

It is clear consumer-generated online communities influence online brand strategy for brand-sponsored online communities. However, corporate online brand strategy may have minimal impact on consumer-generated online communities. Experts propose consumer-generated online communities may only be influenced by corporate online brand strategy if consumers have a positive relationship with the brand. Should consumers have positive associations with the brand it is likely they will access corporate websites and brand-sponsored online communities for further information. However, should the association with the brand be negative or if consumers have little trust in the brand, it is unlikely consumer-generated online communities will be influenced by corporate online brand strategy.

If it's a positive endorsing online community then I think they will be often influenced by the content on an official site. But if you're talking about a kind of quirky interpretation of a brand or possibly a slightly more negative interpretation... there are still online communities that are about disagreeing with a brand's position or critiquing it. It's either one or the other. The ones that are very positively influenced or affiliated with the brand will look to the official communications and online brand communities, not necessarily for guidance but for updates and content and things that are topical about what's going on with that brand. Where as quite obviously if all of that is negative, the official online brand community will be viewed with skepticism and mistrust.

(Advertising Agency representative taken from interview, 8 September 2009).

These findings suggest two differences in online brand strategy techniques for brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Online brand strategy for brand-sponsored

online communities is particularly influenced by activities in consumer-generated online communities. Brand owners and their agencies are investing time and resources into observing consumer-generated online communities in order to understand how consumers participate in the online social media and how they consume brands. In many cases, activity in consumer-generated online communities is guiding the creation of brand-sponsored online communities. In comparison, online brand strategy for consumer-generated online communities may only be influenced by online corporate behaviour if consumers have a positive relationship with the brand. This is despite brand owners desperately hoping their online brand strategy will have a strong influence on activity in consumer-generated online communities, as shown below.

Certainly we like to think there is an influence [on consumer-generated online communities], otherwise there is not much point doing it.

(Airline service representative taken from interview, 11 September 2009).

4.6.3 Evolving trends in online brand communities

Marketing industry experts identified three key trends in online brand communities. One trend experts predict is online brand communities will have to continuously adapt as online media becomes more fragmented. A second trend experts propose is brand managers in online brand communities may shift focus away from controlling conversations and interactions, towards creating positive, trusting and honest experiences with the brand. Finally, experts indicate consumer-generated and brand-sponsored online brand communities may become more comparable and differences between the two may be diminish. These three evolving trends of online brand communities are explained further.

Online marketing industry experts predict a trend of fragmentation in online and mobile media, mimicking the fragmentation of mainstream media. One current example of fragmentation in the online social media world is the mobile channel, which is extremely personable to consumers and something they have with them at all times. Experts currently predict online social media needs to have a strong mobile component. With this example in mind, adaptation in online brand communities may be required in order to keep up with the spread and fragmentation of online and mobile media.

The trends [of online brand communities] are fragmentation... it's definitely one that is followed the same way that mainstream media has gone but quicker. You know everything online is short time frame so... in five years from now we have seen two or three fads come through in the last year. Ten years from now there maybe 20 or 30 fads that are just 'bang bang bang' as people

exploit new ways to do things online and as online becomes standard... so what I'm trying to say that you get more and more people online you get more and more people finding new ways of doing things.

(Airline service representative taken from interview, 11 September 2009).

With more and more consumers participating in online brand communities and in the online social media space, experts suggest more trends will develop, driving fragmentation of online communities. The structure and nature of both brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities may have to adapt as online media becomes more disjointed.

A second trend experts identify may be that the relationship between consumers and brand owners could change. At present the majority of consumers have little trust in brands and rely on word of mouth recommendations from close associates to advise them on brands. This current trend may be attributable to the explosion in consumer-generated online brand communities, which have amplified the power of word of mouth amongst consumers and have meant consumers are less dependent on brand owners for information.

In our industry, what we have discovered is that in over the last decade, consumers have lost an enormous amount of trust in a brand to give them transparent information. We have statistics like, 80% of consumers don't believe what a brand tells them and 90% will believe what other consumers, friends, family and colleagues will tell them about the brand. So that endorsed trust I think has shifted with the growth and advocated power in consumer online communities

(Advertising Agency representative taken from interview, 8 September 2009).

Consumer-generated online brand communities may have been responsible for enhancing a sense of mistrust between consumers and brands by driving word of mouth recommendations between consumers. However, experts predict this may change as brand-sponsored online brand communities adapt to consumer attitudes. According to a marketing expert at an advertising agency brand-sponsored online communities may have to become increasingly more transparent and honest in order to regain trust with consumers.

The ideal for me would be consumers coming back to trusting brands. The onuses is very much on brands to be open, honest and transparent... I would like to think that corporate based and consumer based online communities will come closer together and have more connections with each other. And so smart brands will use those online communities they have set up as a voice to reach out to consumers, take on board their feedback, to be seen to be open and honest and

sharing information. And then hopefully the pendulum will swing back a little bit in terms of people trusting brands.

(Advertising Agency representative taken from interview, 8 September 2009).

For consumers to regain their trust in brands, brand-sponsored online brand communities in particular, may have to develop their ability to communicate openly, honestly and transparently to consumers. For this to happen, industry experts predict brand owners will focus less on controlling and monitoring conversations in online communities and focus more on providing consumers with positive experiences. An advertising agency representative acknowledges -

But what I have noticed is that they are becoming much more relaxed about letting consumers talk up their brands. They are really focusing their energies much more on doing a great job on the services they provide and the customer experiences they deliver in order to make sure those conversations and verbatim are positive. So they have moved from thinking they need to try and control the conversation to understanding that they need to create experiences that make the conversation positive.

(Advertising Agency representative taken from interview, 8 September 2009).

As brand owners realise the potential for online brand communities to connect with consumers and take on board their feedback, they acknowledge that the role of the brand owner in an online community may need to change in order to encourage trust and positive interaction with consumers. To do this, brand owners are favouring introducing brand advocates in their online communities.

The smarter brands have actually set up brand advocates within their organisation that are just as capable of using verbatim, being empowered to do not be constrained by this typical risk adverse corporate approach. And braver brands are actually embracing the web as an opportunity to connect with consumers.

(Advertising Agency representative taken from interview, 8 September 2009).

These evolving changes to online brand communities, allow some experts to identify a third trend that brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities may become increasingly similar. The idea of online communities adapting to the changing online social media world, and brand-sponsored online communities introducing brand advocates to encourage positive dialogue and a strong feedback within in their communities, suggests previous differences between the two may be decreasing.

These results reveal online brand communities are a dynamic and evolving medium for consumer interaction. Findings from interviews with marketing industry experts identify three trends for online brand communities; fragmentation of online brand communities, a shift from controlling discussions to creating positive, trusting experiences with the brand and, increased similarity between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities through the introduction of brand advocates. These trends have strong implications for consumer's online consumption practices, in terms of how they participate in online brand communities and how they form relationships with brands.

4.7 Summary of results and analyses

In summary, all of the above results and analyses from this research were guided by the overall objectives and research questions. To contribute to a greater understanding of online brand communities by examining the differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities, this research investigated marketing industry expert views brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. The results from interviews with marketing industry expert suggested three key findings. Firstly, marketing experts concluded there are minimal differences in consumption practices for online brand communities for goods compared with online brand communities for service or sports brands. Secondly, there were differences in online brand strategy for brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Activities in consumer-generated online brand communities may influence corporate online brand strategy and even the creation of brand-sponsored online communities. Thirdly, marketing industry experts identified three general trends for all online brand communities. One trend is online media may become more fragmented. A second trend is brand owners may have to shift from controlling conversations to encouraging open and honest conversations with consumers to regain their trust. Finally, experts predict current differences in consumer-generated and brand-sponsored online communities may diminish as a result of these changes and as brand advocates are introduced into brand-sponsored online communities.

The results and analyses presented in this section also identified clear differences in consumption practices between the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online community. The brand-sponsored online community was united through a shared drive to consume official information. Members in the brand-sponsored online community interacted frequently with the brand manager and consumed official news feeds such as news articles and videos, and were thereby united in their drive to consume official information. This theme was not evident in the consumer-generated online community. The brand-sponsored online community featured expression

through detailed cognitive thoughts. However, the consumer-generated online community emphasised expression through emotive personal comments. Members in the brand-sponsored online community therefore communicated with detail and reason whereas members in the consumer-generated online community communicated with affection and emotion, sometimes even using personal photos as a means of interacting. Discussions in the brand-sponsored online community were event specific as members were united in their shared critique of game performance. In contrast, discussions in the consumer-generated online community displayed passion beyond events and conversation were not only specific to rugby events. Finally, the consumer-generated online community was unique in that it was based on strong beliefs in supremacy and nationality. Members in the consumer-generated online community frequently displayed supreme beliefs in the All Blacks, pride in the team or in the nation, or consumed national symbols. This theme was not evident as an underlying consumption practice in the brand-sponsored online community.

The language that dominated discussions also varied between the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online communities. Discussions in the brand-sponsored online community emphasised key words such as 'game', 'performance', 'news', 'coach' and 'skills'. In comparison, the key words that dominated discussions in the consumer-generated online community were words such as 'love', 'win', 'go' and 'best'. These differences in key words, as shown in Figure 12 help to explain differences in consumption practices.

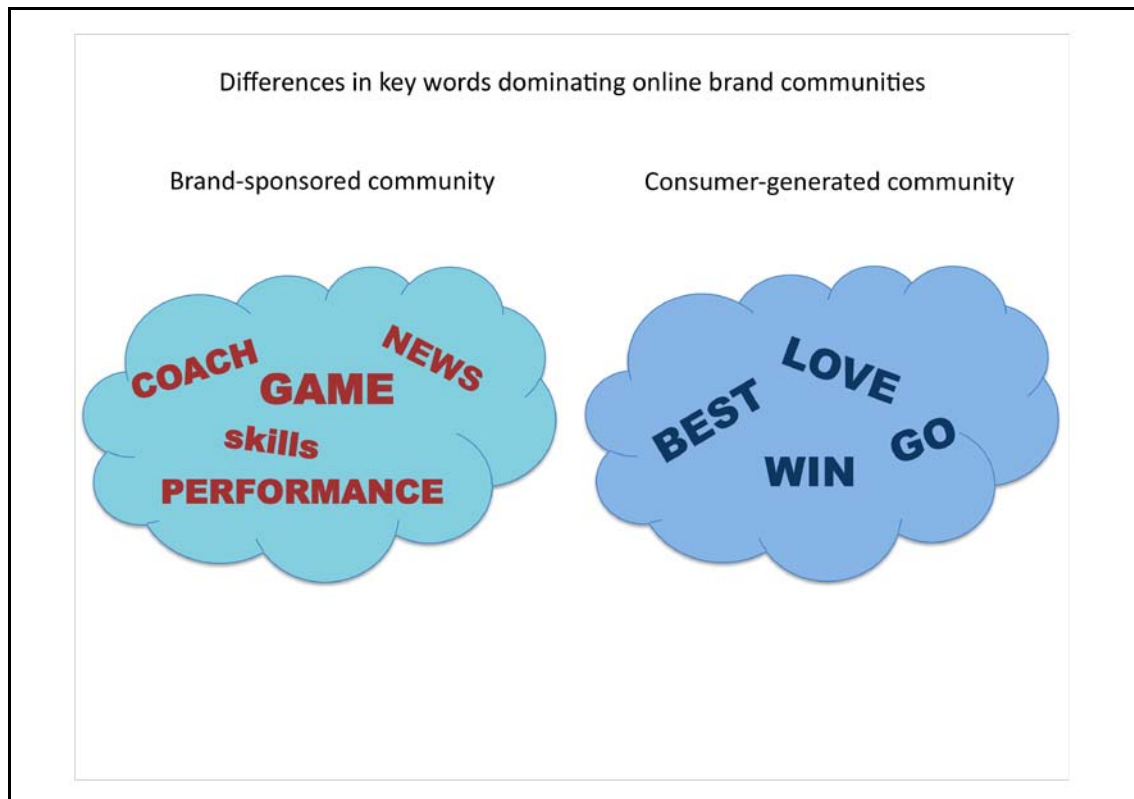


Figure 12: Differences in key words dominating online communities

These results suggest there are clear differences in the way consumers participate in an online community and form a relationship with a brand, depending on whether an online brand community is brand-sponsored or consumer-generated. The differences in consumption practices imply the role of the brand manager in an online community influences consumption practices in online brand communities. The implications of these findings on online brand community theory and in reality will be now discussed in the following sections.

5. Discussion

The results from this study contribute to literature on online brand communities by identifying differences in consumption practices between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities, and by examining marketing industry views on brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. The beginning of this discussion explains how brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities differ in consumption practices, language, self-expression, modes of interaction, and legitimacy. Results from this study portray how each of these differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities may further online brand community theory and could influence marketing

practice. Results from this study also extend research into online brand communities by examining online brand communities for a sports brand.

5.1 Consumption practices for brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities

This research contributes to literature on online brand communities by demonstrating differences in consumption practices for brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Findings suggest consumption practices vary between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities and this implies the presence of a brand owner in an online brand community influences the way members participate in the community and form relationships with the brand. Analyses of results indicate the meanings and themes that unite members within an online brand community are negotiated amongst community members and the presence of the brand owner can influence how meanings and themes are negotiated.

Kozinets (1997, 2001, 2002a) suggests the meanings and themes that unite consumers in online brand communities are discussed, modified and negotiated through online interaction. However, Kozinets (1997, 2001, 2002a) underestimates how the presence of a brand owner in an online brand community influences the discussion, modification and negotiation of meanings and themes. Results from this study indicate the brand-sponsored online community featured shared drive to consume official information, expression through detailed cognitive thoughts, and focus on games and critique of game performance. The brand owner in the brand-sponsored online community encouraged consumption of official information by posting threads with up to date official information and providing members with news links, both of which frequently ignited discussions. By discussing game performance and posting news links on match analysis, it is likely the brand owner also encouraged discussions to focus on events and encouraged critique of game and performance. It is likely the brand owner went to great lengths to provide these themes to members of the brand-sponsored online community, as previously suggested by Brown, Kozinets and Sherry Jnr (2003).

The findings from this research imply the themes in the brand-sponsored online community were perhaps not true representations of how consumers participated in the online brand community and interacted with the brand, but may have instead been provided by the brand owner. This is an important finding as it suggests consumers create their own consumption practices in online brand communities when they are not influenced or controlled by brand owners (Kozinets, 2002b). The themes in the consumer-generated online brand community - expression through personal emotive comments, passion beyond events and shared beliefs in supremacy and nationality, were

not present in the brand-sponsored online community and imply consumers developed these themes on their own accord. These results propose, with greater freedom from marketers consumers will dictate their own consumption practices (Brown et al, 2003; Kozinets, 2002b). Despite the fact that the brand owner went to great lengths to provide these themes to members in the brand-sponsored online brand community, it is possible the presence of a brand owner in the brand-sponsored online brand community could have negatively influenced the community by forcing obligations to abide to group norms (Algesheimer et al, 2005). The presence of the brand owner may have adversely restricted the development of themes, may have altered the brand meanings consumers have towards their brands and thereby had a negative influence on the brand-sponsored online brand community. Brand owners could therefore consider adopting a silent 'behind the scenes' approach in online brand communities as proposed by Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann (2005). In contrast, by dictating their own consumption practices it is possible consumers interacted in the consumer-generated online community and brand in a more natural and original manner.

Results from this research study also suggest consumer-brand relationship were perhaps stronger in the consumer-generated online brand community than consumer-brand relationships in the brand-sponsored online brand community. Findings indicate when consumers were interacting amongst themselves in the consumer-generated online community participation was based on expression through emotive comments, passion beyond events, and beliefs in supremacy and nationality. Through these themes consumers in the consumer-generated online community displayed attributes such as love and passion for the team, intimacy through beliefs in superiority, and self-connection through pride in nationality. According to Fournier (1998), attributes such as love/passion, intimacy and self-connection, which were present in the consumer-generated online brand community, enhance the quality and depth of the relationship between consumers and the brand. Applying Fournier's (1998) consumer-brand relationship quality theory to these results, the bond between the brand and consumers may have therefore been stronger in a consumer-generated online brand community. Attributes such as love/passion, intimacy and self-connection were less present in themes the brand-sponsored online brand community and as a result, the consumer-brand relationship is likely to be weaker in the brand-sponsored online brand community. By interpreting the consumption practices in each online brand community, it is possible to examine the strength of the consumer-brand relationship as proposed by Fournier (1998) and therefore we can assume consumer-brand relationships are stronger in the consumer-generated online brand community based on the themes that unite these consumers. The themes in the consumer-generated online brand community also align with core values of the All Blacks brand such as 'New Zealand', 'tradition', 'inspiration', which could suggest members in the consumer-generated online community better identify with the brand.

Findings from this study present a unique perspective on online brand communities by suggesting consumption practices differ between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. These results further imply members participate in the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities for different purposes. Interestingly, without investigating personal member information, there were a small number of individuals who were simultaneously members of both online communities. This suggests these individuals were members of the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online communities for different reasons. Perhaps investigating the reasons for members joining each community may help to further explain differences in consumption practices.

5.2 *Language and self-expression in online brand communities*

The presence of a brand owner in an online brand community not only influenced consumption practices in an online brand community but may have also influenced the type of language that dominated community discussions. Results from this research make a valuable contribution to literature by proposing language and degree of self-expression differs between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. The word clouds for each online brand community highlighted the key words that dominated online discussions and suggest strong differences in the use of language between the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. This is remarkable, given members are consuming the same brand at the same time. The differences in language between the two online communities suggest again the presence of a brand owner, influences the use of language.

Differences in the use of language between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities suggest members present themselves differently in the two communities. Language that dominated the brand-sponsored online brand community was centred on rugby games and performance. Key words such as 'game', 'performance', 'coach', 'news' and 'skill' reflect how members communicated rationally and focused on relevant rugby topics. In comparison, the consumer-generated online brand community was characterised by emotive and affectionate key words such as 'best', 'love', 'win' and 'go'. These differences suggest the presence of a brand owner could have influenced the choice of words in the brand-sponsored online brand community by perhaps encouraging only relevant rugby-related conversations and by discouraging emotional self-expression. Results from interviews with marketing experts also confirmed that the presence of a brand owner influences language in an online community. When consumers interact with a brand owner as opposed to with other consumers, they adapt their language to match the corporate. Marketing experts participating in interviews attribute differences in language between

brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities to the presence of a brand owner.

In earlier research, Kozinets (2002b) acknowledges the presence marketers or brand owners in a community can homogenize consumers and suppress individual self-expressions. Results from this study support this and suggest the degree of self-expression in a brand-sponsored online community could be lower than in a consumer-generated online community, due to the presence of the brand owner. It is likely members in the brand-sponsored community present language they think the brand owner may want to hear and could be suppressing their true thoughts. This outcome questions research by Schau and Gilly (2003) who imply computer-mediated environments amplifies individual's self-expression as computer-mediated environments reduce the social desirability presence that exists in real life. Findings from this research suggest that the social desirability bias may still influence self-expression on the Internet under certain conditions. A degree of social desirability bias may be present in brand-sponsored online community due to the presence of the brand owner or corporate and as a result, consumers may modify their language to suit the brand owner and may be more likely to only discuss relevant topics. In comparison, the degree of social-desirability bias in a consumer-generated online brand community may be minimal and accordingly, consumers communicate with greater self-expression and through emotional language.

These results have a number of implications for marketers. If language in an online brand community is being used to guide advertising copy or new product development as proposed by Kozinets (2006), perhaps marketers need to analyse language in a consumer-generated online brand community as language is more natural and reflects consumers true feelings. Using language in a brand-sponsored online brand community to guide advertising copy or new product development may be no different than brand owners initiating advertising copy or new products on their own accord without any consumer input. As marketing experts acknowledge in interviews, consumer-generated online brand communities are powerful tools that guide corporate online brand strategy. Perhaps marketers may need to go even further and use consumer-generated online brand communities to develop marketing activities such as new product development (Kozinets, 2006). This extends research by Kozinets (2006) by illustrating differences in language between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities.

The finding that consumer-generated online brand communities may have greater self-expression through their emotional language, again provokes thoughts on the purpose of a consumer-generated online brand community. Perhaps one explanation for the differences in language and self expressions in brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities, is

provided by Kozinets (2002b) who suggests consumers are searching for ways to break away from marketers so they are able to present their own free self-expressions. Consumers may be creating their own online brand communities to remove themselves from marketer's control in order to have greater freedom in self-expression. This conflicts with the assumption that online brand communities are created solely for commercial purposes (see for example Kozinets, 1999; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) and is worthy of further thought. However, regardless of the purpose for creating a consumer-generated online brand community, this research clearly shows differences in language for brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. These differences suggest members in a consumer-generated online brand community communicate with greater emotion and self-expression and the presence of the brand owner may influence language and reduce self-expression in brand-sponsored online brand communities.

It is possible that because members in the consumer-generated online brand community communicate with greater emotion and self-expression, consumer-brand relationships in the consumer-generated online brand community are perhaps more analogous to interpersonal relationships than consumer-brand relationships in the brand-sponsored online community. The use of emotion and self-expression may mean members in the consumer-generated online brand community have fewer difficulties identifying with the brand and forming relationships with the brand as if it was human. In comparison, members in the brand-sponsored online community communicate through cognition and less self-expression and therefore, perhaps have difficulty relating to the brand as if it was human and may not perceive the consumer-brand relationship to be the same as interpersonal relationships. These findings extend Fournier's (1998) theory by suggesting consumer-brand relationships differ between consumer-generated and brand-sponsored online brand communities. Furthermore, this brings into doubt the idea of anthropomorphizing the brand to strengthen consumer-brand relationships. Fournier (1998) suggests anthropomorphizing the brand to strengthen consumer-brand relationships by introducing spokespersons to humanise brands and attach personalities to brands. However, in the case of the brand-sponsored online community where a brand manager is attached to the brand and humanises the brand through constant community interaction, anthropomorphizing the brand does not appear to strengthen consumer-brand relationships.

5.3 Modes of interaction within online brand communities

Results from this study suggest the presence of a brand owner influences the way members interact in an online brand community. Findings from this research make a unique contribution to literature by proposing there are differences in interaction modes and types of community members between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities.

First of all, results suggest differences in frequency of interaction between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. The brand-sponsored online community had a much greater number of replies to threads, compared with the consumer-generated online community. This is likely to be attributed to the three threads placed on the brand-sponsored online community discussion board by the brand owner, which generated 148 replies. Members in the brand-sponsored online community were also more likely to use emoticons as a means of expression. These findings imply the presence of a brand owner in an online community may have driven differences in interaction within brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. If the purpose of establishing the brand-sponsored online brand community was to encourage consumption of news feeds then perhaps the brand-sponsored online brand community is achieving its goals by having such high interaction. However, if the purpose of the brand-sponsored online brand community was to strengthen and deepen consumer-brand relationships then the benefits of large amounts of interaction may be debatable. There is doubt whether encouraging greater interaction should really be the goal of a brand owner in an online brand community.

While the presence of a brand owner in the brand-sponsored online brand community could have encouraged greater interaction it is unsure whether members in the brand-sponsored online community interacted at a deeper level compared with those in the consumer-generated online community. The brand-sponsored online community was characterised by detailed cognitive comments. In comparison, the consumer-generated online community was based on expression through emotional thoughts. The difference in consumption practices between the two online communities suggests members in the brand-sponsored online community, while they may have been interacting more frequently, were more likely to think carefully about what they were saying and present their thoughts in a rational manner. Members in the consumer-generated online community were on the other hand more likely to express their emotions and use personal photos and thereby interacted at a deeper more personal level. These findings debate whether an online brand community should aim to generate greater interaction or deeper interaction between members. It may be beneficial to consider whether brand owners benefit more from frequent consumption of their brand or consumption of their brand at a more deep and meaningful level.

Applying previous theory by Kozinets (1999), this study suggests interaction modes differ between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Members in the brand-sponsored online community could be characterised as Devotees – those that have strong interaction and enthusiasm for the All Blacks but have fewer social attachments to the group (Kozinets, 1999). Devotees have weaker social ties to online communities and interact through the Informational mode (Kozinets, 1999). It is possible because members in the brand-sponsored

online community interact at a cognitive and rational level; they may have fewer personal and social attachments to the community. Therefore, we also can assume members of the brand-sponsored online community are using the community for informational purposes, as opposed to for social reasons. Results from this study demonstrate how members in the brand-sponsored online community interacted through the Informational mode. Analyses of consumption practices showed participation in the brand-sponsored online community was based on shared drive to consume official information. Frequent interaction with the brand owner and consumption of official news feeds may have therefore encouraged an Informational mode of interaction within the brand-sponsored online community.

Contrastingly, members of the consumer-generated online brand community may be characterised as Insiders – those that have strong social and personal ties to consumption activity (Kozinets, 1999). Members such as Insiders, who interact for social reasons for longer-term personal gain, interact through the Transformational mode (Kozinets, 1999). Members in the consumer-generated online community may therefore be interacting through the Transformational mode and are participating in the online community for longer-term social gain (Kozinets, 1999). Consumption practices that united the consumer generated online community such as expression through emotional comments, use of personal photos, and shared beliefs in supremacy and nationality compliment this finding. These differences imply the way the community is maintained and created and the presence of a brand owner in guiding discussions may also influence the mode of interaction within an online brand community. Modes of interaction and types of community membership differ between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities.

While the brand-sponsored online community may have more frequent interaction, the benefits for the marketer or brand owner of greater interaction within an online brand community are questionable. Casalo, Flavian and Guinaliu (2008) propose greater participation in a brand community will strengthen identification and emotional ties to the brand, thereby driving the level of affective commitment. However, findings from this research conflict with Casalo, Flavian and Guinaliu's (2008) research and suggest, perhaps more beneficial than the frequency of interaction is the depth of interaction. Through this research and applying Kozinets (1999) theory, these findings make a valuable contribution to research by proposing interaction modes in online brand communities could differ depending on whether an online brand community is brand-sponsored or consumer-generated. Kozinets (1999) suggests it is more beneficial for the brand owner to drive deeper social ties in online brand communities and encourages a Transformational rather than Informational mode of interaction. Perhaps the brand owner in the brand-sponsored online brand community needs to consider encouraging a Transformation mode of interaction.

Practically, applying Kozinets (1999) suggestions, maybe the goal of the brand-sponsored online brand community should be to drive a Transformational mode of interaction by strengthening social aspects and reducing commercial applications such as providing information. Perhaps one method to encourage a Transformational mode of interaction in a brand-sponsored online brand community could be to convert current members who are Devotees to Insiders (Kozinets, 1999). In terms of practical marketing steps to move from an Informational to Transformational mode, the brand owner in the brand-sponsored online brand community could deepen social connections and strengthen personal ties by encouraging more emotive discussions, remove emoticons to reduce the reliance on emoticons as a means of expression, and reduce the reliance on information as a way of uniting consumers. The introduction of brand advocates as suggested by marketing industry experts in interviews may also encourage a Transformational mode. There is opportunity to drive a Transformational mode of interaction within a brand-sponsored online community as Devotees are likely to intensely follow a Transformational modes of interaction due to their strong interests in the consumption activity will encourage them to seek positive change (Kozinets, 1999). Perhaps encouraging the same mode of interaction in a brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online community may also minimise differences between the two communities.

5.4 *Differences in legitimacy of online brand communities*

The results of this study also reconfirm a core foundation of online brand communities. Both the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities featured shared positive bonds: enthusiasm and passion for the team/game/player, and these results corroborate with Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) definition of online brand community, which is based on shared consciousness of kind. Regardless of whether the All Blacks online communities were created by the brand owner or by consumers, both communities were united through their shared theme of enthusiasm and passion for the All Blacks, players and rugby games. This supports Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) definition that shared consciousness of kind is fundamental to all online brand communities. However, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) suggest consciousness of kind is characterised by a degree of legitimacy in an online community. While findings support a shared consciousness of kind between the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities, results from this research suggest there is possibility that the degree of legitimacy between the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online communities varies.

Findings from interviews with marketing experts suggest consumer-generated online brand communities are likely to have greater legitimacy than brand-sponsored online brand communities because there is no corporate agenda or corporate policy to control these communities. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) suggest the degree of legitimacy can also be established by differentiating between those who are true believers and those who are merely opportunistic. It is possible, that members in the brand-sponsored online community could be more opportunistic as they may be participating in the online community merely to consume official information. It is possible that the presence of a brand owner in the brand-sponsored online community is decreasing the degree of legitimacy by presenting an official corporate agenda to encourage members to participate in the community through consumption of official information. In comparison, members in the consumer-generated online community are united through their passion beyond events and shared beliefs in supremacy and nationality. Members in the consumer-generated online community may therefore be more legitimate members because they are participating in the community due to their passion for the All Blacks, beliefs that they can win and for their pride in New Zealand. These findings corroborates with Leigh, Peters and Shelton's (2006) research, which suggests the lack of marketer's involvement in a community may strengthen member's commitment to the brand and community and communities may therefore be more legitimate.

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) further suggest a key feature of an online brand community is shared rituals and traditions and one way this is represented is through community members celebrating the history of the brand. According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), appreciation for history of the brand is a key indicator differentiating those who are true supporters and those who are merely opportunists. Applying Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) theory, results from this study further suggest members in the consumer-generated online community may be more legitimate as they are celebrating the history of the brand and they are united in their shared beliefs in supremacy and nationality. Members in the consumer-generated online community consume national symbols and display mana or pride in the team and nation. This suggests these members are appreciating and celebrating the history of the All Blacks brand by acknowledging and identifying with New Zealand origins. In comparison this theme is not evident in the brand-sponsored online community and celebrating the history of the brand does not unite brand-sponsored community members. Therefore, celebrating the history of the brand is weaker in the brand-sponsored online community. Interestingly, these findings challenge Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) assumption that the brand owner and marketers assist in driving a brand's shared history through appropriate marketing communications. In this case, it appears the presence of a brand owner may have hindered the appreciation for the brands history. Practically this has implications for brand owners. There is opportunity for brand owners to further enhance the legitimacy and sincerity of a

brand-sponsored online brand community by purposively encouraging interaction that celebrates the history of the brand.

Findings from this study imply the consumer-generated online community may be more legitimate compared with the brand-sponsored online community. This may be attributable to a consumer-generated online community having no corporate agenda, members being less opportunistic and more sincere, and members displaying stronger appreciation for the history of the brand. By applying Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) assumptions, the consumer-generated online brand community may therefore show stronger community foundations. The suggestion that a consumer-generated online brand community has greater legitimacy than a brand-sponsored online community also supports research by Leigh, Peters and Shelton (2006) who state, marketers should consider the power of consumers as co-creators of brand legitimacy. These results make a positive contribution to research by suggesting a consumer-generated online brand community may be more legitimate than a brand-sponsored online brand community and this difference could be attributable to the presence of the brand owner. Consumer-generated online brand communities are therefore powerful tools encouraging sincere and legitimate interaction between brands and consumers.

These findings also help to explain insights from interviews with marketing experts. As consumer-generated online brand communities are more legitimate and authentic than brand-sponsored online brand communities this helps to explain insights from marketing experts who suggest corporate online brand strategy is strongly influenced by activity in consumer-generated online brand communities. It is possible marketing experts are aware of the differences in legitimacy and acknowledge how corporate online brand strategy is often guided by activity on a consumer-generated online brand community. Perhaps marketing experts have already recognised a consumer-generated online brand community is more legitimate and are using consumer-generated online brand communities to guide their corporate online brand strategy in hope to make brand-sponsored online brand communities more legitimate, authentic, personal and in hope to foster stronger relationships between consumers and brands. The idea that brand-sponsored online brand communities have lower legitimacy and authenticity than consumer-generated online brand communities also explains a predicted trend of online brand communities outlined by marketing experts in interviews. Experts envisage a future trend of online brand communities is that brand owners in online brand communities will need to shift away from controlling conversations to creating positive, open and trusting experiences. By doing so, marketing experts suggest brand-sponsored online brand communities may become more authentic and legitimate and they may form stronger relationships with consumers.

Extending these findings even further, it may be worthwhile to consider how differences in legitimacy between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities influence brand equity. Applying Fournier's (1998) theory we could assume consumer-generated online brand communities have higher brand equity than brand-sponsored online brand communities. Fournier (1998) suggests the legitimacy of consumer-brand relationships is an indication of brand equity. These results show consumer-generated online brand communities may have a stronger, deeper, more legitimate, and authentic relationship between the brand and consumers, compared with brand-sponsored online brand communities. If the finding that consumer-generated online brand communities have stronger brand equity than brand-sponsored online brand communities, the impact for marketers may be vast. Investigating differences in brand equity between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities is an opportunity for future research.

5.5 Online brand communities for goods versus service or sports brands

A second objective of this research was to extend understanding of online brand communities by examining online brand communities for service and sports brands. This research contributes to literature on online brand communities by examining online brand communities for a sports brand. While this research does extend knowledge of online brand communities by examining a sports brand, results suggest there are minimal differences between online brand communities for products versus online brand communities for service or sports brands.

Findings from interviews with marketing experts originally proposed online brand communities for service or sports brands are based on emotive reasons. Marketing experts believe there is an emotional component to an online brand community for service or sports brands as marketers use online brand communities for service or sports brands to drive an emotional and social connection between the brand and consumers. According to marketing experts interviewed, online brand communities for sports brands for example, may focus on driving a sense of pride or passion in the brand a building a personal connection between the team and fans. These findings suggest online brand communities for service or sports brands have emotive and social intentions. It is possible, because marketing experts originally perceive online brand communities for service or sports brands to have emotive and social intentions, they could instead emulate small group brand communities as identified by Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006). Online brand communities for service or sports brands could emulate small group brand communities, as brand-related activities are infused with group social activities (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). These findings from marketing

experts suggest online brand communities for services or sports brands are based on emotive and social intentions.

However, the original idea that online brand communities for service or sports brands are fundamentally based emotional and social connections between consumers, fans and brands is not unique to online brand communities for service or sports brands. Previous research implies there is also an emotional component present between consumers, fans and brands in online brand communities for products. Research by Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann (2005), Belk and Tumbat (2005), McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002), and Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) acknowledge the emotional and social connections present in brand communities for products and the emotional connections between product brands and consumers. Fournier (1998) and Smit, Bronner and Tolboom (2007) also agree that emotional connects exist between consumers and *all* brands and the emotional component in consumer-brand relationships is not specific to service or sports brands. This suggests that online brand communities for services and sports brands may be no different to online brand communities for products in terms of having an emotional component. Online brand communities for products, services and sports brands may be similar in that they are all based on emotive connections.

Through their interviews, marketing experts originally suggested online brand communities for goods may differ for online brand communities for service or sports brands as they are primarily based on pragmatic purposes. At the beginning of interviews marketing experts propose participation and interaction in an online brand community for goods is possibly more centred on discussing product advice, products attributes, benefits, or perhaps focus on driving sales. These differences suggest the reasons for establishing and participating in online brand communities for service or sports brands compared with online brand communities for goods may vary. Online brand communities for goods have a stronger more pragmatic foundation. However, as marketing experts continued with their interviews their opinions on this subject also evolved. Marketing experts later arrived at the final conclusion that online brand communities for service and sports brands are also pragmatic, as they too are attempting to drive pragmatic aspects such as merchandising and ticket sales. Therefore, marketing experts eventually confirm online brand communities for products, services and sports brands are all based on pragmatic aspects. These findings suggest again there are perhaps minimal differences between online brand communities for goods, services and sports brands as the pragmatic nature of online brand communities is evident across all categories.

This research makes a valuable contribution to examining online brand communities for a sports brand. One limitation of previous research was studies into online brand communities primarily focused on consumer durable products such as automotives, computers, and motorcycles, to the

disadvantage of service of sports brands (see for example Belk & Tumbat, 1995; McAlexander et al, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). While this approach to online brand communities is unique as it considers online brand communities for a sports brand, findings suggest there are minimal differences in online brand communities for service or sports brands compared with online brand communities for goods. Furthermore, this research also contributes to literature on brand communities and consumption practices by extending research to consider consumption practices of sports fans. Previous research (see for example Kozinets, 1997, 2001) investigates consumption practices in brand communities but primarily for fans of popular culture.

To conclude, this discussion suggests findings from this research make a strong contribution to literature on online brand communities. The results of this research further understanding of online brand communities by examining differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Consumption practices, language, self-expression, modes of interaction and legitimacy all differ depending on whether an online brand community is brand-sponsored or consumer-generated. This suggests the presence of a brand owner in an online brand community plays an important role in influencing the way community members interact with each other and form relationships with the brand. Furthermore, this study extends research into online brand communities by examining online brand communities for a sports brand. This research addresses gaps in the literature by examining online brand communities from a service or sports perspective and investigating the consumption practices of an online brand communities for a sports brand. Results suggest there are minimal differences between online brand communities for service and sports brands and online brand communities for products, as all online brand communities are based on pragmatic and emotive reasons.

6. Conclusion

This research investigates online brand communities from a brand management perspective with a particular emphasis on how consumers form relationships with brands in online brand communities. The results from this study make a unique contribute to literature on online brand communities by investigating differences in brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Through eight weeks of observation and two weeks of analysing discussions in the All Blacks online brand communities, the consumption practices uniting members in each online brand community were identified. Results suggest consumption practices differ in brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. The All Blacks brand-sponsored online brand community was based on shared drive to consume official information, expression through detailed cognitive thoughts and critique of game performance. In comparison the All Blacks consumer-generated online was based on expression through emotive personal comments, passion beyond events and strong beliefs in supremacy and nationality. Despite these differences, there was one similarity in consumption practices. Both online brand communities were based on shared positive bonds: enthusiasm and passion for the team, game, and players. As both online brand communities were united through shared enthusiasm and passion for the team, game and players, this research confirms Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) definition of online brand community, which proposes online brand communities are based on shared consciousness of kind.

The differences in consumption practices between the brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand community have a number of implications for literature on online brand communities. The finding that consumption practices differ across brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities extends literature on this topic by suggesting, with greater freedom from marketers consumers create their own consumption practices. As consumption practices differ when consumers are not influenced or controlled by brand owners, brand owners are potentially restricting the development of consumption practices and brand meanings in brand-sponsored online brand communities. Furthermore, the consumption practices uniting consumers in the consumer-generated online brand community provoked feelings of 'love', 'passion', 'self-connection' and 'intimacy' between members and the brand. Extending Fournier's (1998) consumer-brand relationship theory these findings suggest, consumer-brand relationships are stronger in consumer-generated online brand communities than in brand-sponsored online brand communities where these attributes are less prevalent.

Outcomes from this research further contribute to literature on online brand communities by illustrating how language differs across brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand

communities. Language in the brand-sponsored online community consisted of cognitive and rational words whereas language in the consumer-generated online brand community was dominated by emotive words. The differences in cognitive versus emotional language imply members in the consumer-generated online brand community communicate with greater emotion, which is likely attributable to consumer-generated online brand communities encouraging greater self-expression. Participation in the consumer-generated online brand community is therefore more natural as this study shows members in the brand-sponsored online brand community probably adapt their language to suit the brand owner and the presence of the brand owner in an online brand community may enhance a social desirability bias. These findings confirm earlier research by Kozinets (2002b) who suggests the presence of a brand owner in a community can inhibit self-expression. Marketers may therefore need to be cautious of using language in a brand-sponsored online brand community for techniques such as guiding advertising copy or new product development (Kozinets, 2006).

Results from this research reveal modes of interaction and types of community membership also differ in brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. This research extends literature presented by Kozinets (1999) by demonstrating modes of interaction and types of community membership in an online brand community vary depending on whether the community is created and maintained by the brand manager or consumers. Findings from this research show members in the brand-sponsored online brand community were characterised as Devotees, as members generally had strong interaction and enthusiasm for the community but had weaker social ties. The brand-sponsored online community also interacted through the Informational mode of interaction. Members in the brand-sponsored online community participated in the community for informational purposes such as to consume official information. In comparison, members in the consumer-generated online brand community were characterised as Insiders, as they had strong interaction and enthusiasm for the community but also had equally strong social ties. A review of consumption practices suggests the consumer-generated online brand community participated through the Transformational mode of interaction. Members in the consumer-generated online brand community were participating in the community for long term social gain. These findings demonstrate modes of interaction and community membership types vary in brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities and these differences are largely attributable to the presence of the brand owner in the brand-sponsored online brand community. These results extend theory on modes of interaction and community membership originally presented by Kozinets (1999) by considering how interaction and community membership varies across brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities.

Findings from this research also make a worthwhile contribution to literature on online brand communities by suggesting variations in legitimacy between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Results suggest consumer-generated online brand communities are more legitimate than brand-sponsored online brand communities as members in a consumer-generated online brand community are less opportunistic, more sincere, show greater appreciation for the history of the brand and are more passionate. These findings corroborate with Leigh, Peters and Shelton (2006) who propose a brand owner's presence in a community may weaken consumers' commitment to brands and reduce authenticity. These findings align with opinions from marketing experts who acknowledge brand owners in brand-sponsored online brand communities need to shift away from controlling conversations to developing open and trusting relationships with consumers in online brand communities. By doing so they could improve the sense of legitimacy in a brand-sponsored online brand community. The finding that consumer-generated online brand community is more legitimate compared with the brand-sponsored online brand community also extends Fournier's (1998) consumer-brand relationship theory by suggesting, as the consumer-generated online brand community is more legitimate and authentic than the brand-sponsored online brand community, brand equity is also likely to be higher in consumer-generated online brand communities.

Results from this study extend research into online brand communities by examining online brand communities for a sports brand. While this study has extended research into online brand communities from a sports brand perspective, interviews with marketing industry experts suggest there are perhaps minimal differences in online brand communities for goods versus online brand communities for service or sports brands, although this conclusion was not immediately obvious in interviews. Marketing experts originally proposed online brand communities for goods are more pragmatic compared with online brand communities for service or sports brands that are more emotive. However, after careful thought marketing experts eventually concluded that online brand communities for goods, service and sports brands are both pragmatic and emotive. Experts acknowledge all online brand communities attempt to drive an emotional connection between consumers and brands, regardless of whether they are for goods, services or products. This supports previous literature that acknowledges the social and emotional connections between consumers and brands in online brand communities (Algesheimer et al, 2005; Belk & Tumbat, 2005; McAlexander et al 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Results from this research therefore contribute to research on this topic by investigating online brand communities for a sports brand but suggest the differences between online brand communities for products, services and sports brands are perhaps minimal.

This study strongly contributes to literature on online brand communities by examining similarities and differences in brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities and by examining an online brand community for a sports brand. These results identify a number of differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Findings contribute to academic literature on online brand communities by considering consumer-generated online brand communities. The results from this research prove marketers do not always create online brand communities and online brand communities may not always have commercial purposes as originally suggested by researchers (Kozinets, 1999; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Practically, by recognising and acknowledging the differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities, marketers have opportunity to further align their brand-sponsored online brand communities to consumer behaviour. As a result, the differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities could decrease in the future, as predicted by marketing experts. However, while these results make a strong contribution to literature on online brand communities the limitations of this study should be considered as well as opportunities for future research.

7. Limitations and directions for future research

7.1 *Research limitations and ethical concerns*

One limitation of this study is the results of this research are based on a single case study of brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities for the All Blacks. Therefore results are specific to this one case and lack generalisability to all online brand communities. For findings to afford stronger generalisability, research needs to investigate multiple brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities that exist for the same brand. A second limitation of this research is results are entirely based on *online* community behaviour, through observing participation and interaction of two All Blacks online brand communities. This research does not investigate or consider offline scenarios such as how fans interact in All Blacks fan communities offline, how fans interact with the brand owner offline, or how fans interact with each other offline. Findings therefore cannot be applied to offline behaviour.

Finally, the two All Blacks online brand communities used as a case study in this research were located on a popular independent social networking platform. The use of this social networking platform for academic research raises ethical concerns as member's purpose for joining these communities was primarily for social reasons, not for the purpose of academic research. Furthermore, while this research has received ethical approval from Massey University Human Ethics Committee (see Appendix B) there may still be an element of invasion of privacy by using participant's discussions for purposes other than they were originally intended. The debate over whether information in an online social networking community is public or private information remains. Ethical limitations of this research also meant raw comments and discussions could not be collected from the two online brand communities but instead had to be analysed through a coding process. Future research that could ethically collect raw comments and discussions and reduce the reliance on coding as a means of analysis, could improve reliability of analysis.

7.2 *Directions for future research*

This research suggests there are clear differences in brand-sponsored and consumer-generated and further research is needed in this area. Specifically, both academics and practitioners may benefit from research investigating the purposes for creating brand-sponsored and consumer-

generated online brand communities. Understanding the purpose for establishing brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities may provide further insight into why consumer-brand relationships, consumption practices, language, self-expression, interaction and legitimacy differ between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. Furthermore, research could investigate how brand equity varies across brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities to determine if these differences impact on consumer's perceptions of brands and brand value. Perhaps one opportunity could also be to examine differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities for products to see if differences also prevail. Researchers could also expand this study by pursuing this research based on multiple online brand communities for sports brands. Finally, this research study shows the number of online social networks and online brand communities are increasing and consumers are playing a particularly important role as creators of online social networks and online brand communities. Researchers may wish to consider the opportunity of developing a more up-to-date definition of online brand community that considers potential differences between brand-sponsored and consumer-generated online brand communities. It is important to continue research into online brand communities that considers consumer-generated online brand communities and other consumer-generated online social networks or communities, if academic literature on this subject is to have any relevance to marketers and if academic literature is to keep up with advances in online consumer behaviour and online social trends.

8. Bibliography

- Algesheimer, R., Dholakia, U.M., & Herrmann, A. (2005). The social influence of brand community: Evidence from European car clubs. *Journal of Marketing*, 69, 19-34.
- Andersen, P.H. (2005). Relationship marketing and brand involvement of professionals through web-enhanced brand communities: The case of coloplast. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 34, 285-297.
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities*. London: Verso.
- Armstrong, A., & Hagel, J. (1995). Real profits from virtual communities. *The McKinsey Quarterly*, 3, 127-141.
- Arnould, E.J., & Wallendorf, M. (1994). Market-oriented ethnography: Interpretation building and marketing strategy formulation. *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol XXXI, 484-504.
- Bagozzi, R.P., & Dholakia, U.M. (2006). Antecedents and purchase consequences of customer participation in small group brand communities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 23, 45-61.
- Belk, R.W. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15, 139-168.
- Belk, R.W., & Tumbat, G. (2005). The cult of Macintosh. *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, 8, 3, 205 – 217.
- Bengtsson, A. (2003). Towards a critique of brand relationships. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 30, 154-158.
- Berry, L.L. (2000). Cultivating service brand equity. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 28, 1, 128-137.
- Blackston, M. (2000). Observations: Building brand equity by managing the brand's relationships. *Journal of Advertising Research*, November/December, 101 – 105.

- Bristow, D.N., & Sebastian, R.J. (2001). Holy Cow! Wait 'til next year! A closer look at the brand loyalty of Chicago Cubs baseball fans. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 18, 3, 256-275.
- Brown, S., Kozinets, R.V., & Sherry Jr., J.F. (2003). Teaching old brands new tricks: Retro branding and the revival of brand meaning. *Journal of Marketing*, 67, 19-33.
- Casalo, L.V., Flavian, C., & Guinaliu, M. (2008). Promoting consumer's participation in virtual brand communities: A new paradigm in branding strategy. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 14, 1, 19-36.
- Chung, E., Farrelly, F., Beverland, M., & Quester, P. (2005). Exploring consumer fanaticism: A fresh perspective on the concept of loyalty. Presented at the ANZMAC 2005 Conference: Consumer Behaviour.
- Continental (2007). Global All Blacks awareness study: Interest in the All Blacks team and merchandise. Commissioned by the New Zealand Rugby Union for market research. *Wellington: New Zealand Rugby Union*.
- Cova, B., & Cova, V. (2001). Tribal aspects of postmodern consumption research: The case of French in-line roller skaters. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 1, 1, 67-76.
- Cova, B., & Pace, S. (2006). Brand community of convenience products: New forms of customer empowerment – the case “my Nutella the community”. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40, 9, 1087-1105.
- Dellarocas, C. (2003). The digitization of word of mouth: Promise and challenges of online feedback mechanisms. *Management Science*, 49, 10, 1407-1424.
- De Wulf, K., Oderkerken-Schroeder, G., & Iacobucci, D. (2001). Investments in consumer relationships: A cross-country and cross-industry exploration. *Journal of Marketing*, 65, 33-50.
- Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24, 4, 343 – 373.
- Fournier, S., & Yao, J.L. (1997). Reviving brand loyalty: A reconceptualization within the framework of consumer-brand relationships. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 14, 451, 472.

- Funk, D.C., & James, J. (2001). The psychological continuum model: A conceptual framework for understanding an individual's connection to sport. *Sport Management Review, 4*, 119-150.
- Glaser, B.G., & Strauss, A.L. (1973). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Granovetter, M.S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *The American Journal of Sociology, 78*, 6, 1360-1380.
- Hagel, H., & Armstrong, A. (1997). *Net gain: Expanding markets through virtual communities*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Hanson, W., & Kalyanam, K. (2007). *Internet marketing and e-commerce*. Canada: Thomson South-Western.
- Hill, B., & Green, B.C. (2000). Repeat attendance as a function of involvement, loyalty and the sportscape across three football contexts. *Sport Management Review, 3*, 145-162.
- Holt, D.B. (1995). How consumers consume: A typology of consumption practices. *Journal of Consumer Research, 22*, 1-16.
- Interbrand (2009). Best Global Brands: 2009 rankings. Retrieved 20th November, 2009 from: http://www.interbrand.com/best_global_brands.aspx.
- Johnson, S. (2009). How Twitter will change the way we live. *Time, 173*, (23), 24-29.
- Klaus, P., & Maklan, S. (2007). The role of brands in a service-dominated world. *Journal of Brand Management, 15*, 2, 115-122.
- Kozinets, R.V. (1997). "I want to believe": A Netnography of The X-Philes' Subculture of Consumption. *Advances in Consumer Research, 24*, 470 – 475.
- Kozinets, R.V. (1999). E-tribalized marketing?: The strategic implications of virtual communities of consumption. *European Management Journal, 17*, 3, 252-264.
- Kozinets, R.V. (2001). Utopian enterprise: Articulating the meanings of Star Trek's culture of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research, 28*, 67-88.

- Kozinets, R.V. (2002a). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. XXXIX, 61-72.
- Kozinets, R.V. (2002b). Can consumers escape the market? Emancipatory illuminations from Burning Man. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29, 20-36.
- Kozinets, R.V. (2006). Click to connect: Netnography and tribal advertising. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 279 – 288.
- Lawrence, T.B. (1995). Power and resources in an organizational community. *Academy of Management Best Paper Proceedings*, 251-225.
- Leigh, T.W., Peters, C., & Shelton, J. (2006). The consumer quest for authenticity: The multiplicity of meanings within the MG subculture of consumption. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 34, 4, 481 – 493.
- Levitt, T. (1981). Marketing intangible products and product intangibles. *Harvard Business Review*, May-June, 94-102.
- Li, H. (2004). Virtual community studies: A literature review, synthesis and research agenda, in: *Proceedings of the Americas Conference on Information Systems*, August 2004 (New York).
- Lohmann, S., Ziegler, J., & Tetzlaff, L. (2009). Comparison of tag cloud layouts: Task related performance and visual exploration. *Interact 2009, Part I*, LNCS 5726, 392-404.
- Luedicke, M.K. (2006). Brand community under fire: The role of social environments for the HUMMER brand community. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 33, 486-493.
- McAlexander, J.H., Schouten, J.W., & Koenig, H.F. (2002). Building brand community. *Journal of Marketing*, 66, 1, 38-54.
- McConnell, R. (1999). *Inside the All Blacks behind the scenes with the world's most famous rugby team*. London: Collins Willow.
- McDonald, M., de Chermetony, L., & Harris, F. (2001). Corporate marketing and service brands: Moving beyond the fast moving consumer goods model. *European Journal of Marketing*, 35, 4, 335-352.

- McMillan, D.W., & Chavis, D.M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology, 14*, 1, 6-23.
- Miller, K.D., Fabian, F., & Lin, S. (2009). Strategies for online communities. *Strategic Management Journal, 30*, 305-322.
- Motion, J., Leitch, S., & Brodie, R.J. (2003). Equity in corporate co-branding: The case of Adidas and the All Blacks. *European Journal of Marketing, 37*, 7/8, 1080-1094.
- Morgan, R.M., & Hunt, S.D. (1994). The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing, 58*, 20-38.
- Muniz, A.M., & O'Guinn, T.C. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research, 27*, 412-432.
- Nelson, M.R., & Otnes, C.C. (2005). Exploring cross-cultural ambivalence: A netnography of intercultural wedding message boards. *Journal of Business Research, 58*, 89 -95.
- Noble, J. (2006). Branding: From a commercial perspective. *Journal of Brand Management, 13*, 3, 206-214.
- O'Malley, L., & Tynan, C. (1999). The utility of the relationship metaphor in consumer markets: A critical evaluation. *Journal of Marketing Management, 15*, 587-602.
- O'Malley, L., & Tynan, C. (2000). Relationship marketing in consumer markets. *European Journal of Marketing, 34*, 7, 797-815.
- Owen, P.D., & Weatherston, C. R. (2002). Professionalization of the New Zealand Rugby Union: Historical background, structural changes and competitive balance. Otago University Economics Discussion Papers.
- Poynter, R. (2008). Facebook: The future of networking with customers. *International Journal of Market Research, 50* 1, 11-12.
- Rothaermel, F.T., & 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, 27*, 297-312.
- Sandlin, J.A. (2007). Netnography as a consumer education research tool. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 31*, 288-294.

- Schau, H.J., & Gilly, M.C. (2003). We are what we post? Self-presentation in personal web space. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30, 3, 385-404.
- Schouten, J.W. (1991). Selves in transition: Symbolic consumption in personal rites of passage and identity reconstruction. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17, 412-425.
- Schouten, J.W., & McAlexander, J.H. (1995). Subcultures of consumption: An ethnography of the new bikers. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22, 43-61.
- Smit, E., Bronner, F., & Tolboom, M. (2007). Brand relationship quality and its value for personal contact. *Journal of Business Research*, 60, 627-633.
- Smith, T. (2009). The social media revolution. *International Journal of Market Research*, 51, 4, 559-561.
- Spiggle, S. (1994). Analysis and interpretation of qualitative data in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21, 491- 503.
- Stylianou, S. (2008). Interview control questions. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11, 3, 239 – 256.
- Thomas, P. (2009). Rugby in crisis – aah, I must be home. Retrieved 22nd August, 2009 from: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/sport/news/article.cfm?c_id=4&objectid=1059232&pnum=0
- Thorbjorson, H., Supphellen, M., Nysveen, H., & Pedersen, P. (2002). Building brand relationships online: A comparison of two interactive applications. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 16, 3, 17-34.
- Underwood, R., Bond, E., & Baer, R. (2001). Building service brands via social identity: Lessons from the sports marketplace. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Winter, 1-13.
- Veloutsou, C. (2007). Identifying the dimensions of the product-brand and consumer relationship. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 23, 1-2, 7-26.
- Wallendorf, M., & Arnould, E.J. (1986). "My favorite things": A cross-cultural inquiry into object attachment, possessiveness, and social linkage. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14, 531-547.

Wellman, B., & Haythornthwaite, C. (2002). *The Internet in everyday life*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Wilson, J. (2009). Social networking: The business case. *Engineering and Technology*, 4, 10, 54-56.

Appendix A: Interview guideline

Interview Guideline

The central topic of my research project is online brand communities. By definition, an online brand community is a specialised non-geographically bound community based around admirers of a brand. It is specialised because at the heart of the community is a brand. More loosely and as we know it, an online brand community is a type of online social community where members unite because they are fans or loyal consumers of a brand. The topic of online brand communities is obviously very broad. However, I am particularly interested in the differences between online brand communities for one brand generated by consumers and online brand communities for the same brand generated by marketers or brand owners.

1. How are online brand communities generated by consumers different from online brand communities generated by marketers or brand owners?

Probe: Why/when what?

Probe: Can you clarify please/elaborate on/explain further/tell me a bit more

Probe: Can you give me an example/What makes you say that?

2. How do you (or your clients) judge or measure the success of a brand in an online brand community?

Probe: Success for example may be measures of consumer loyalty to the brand, preference, liking, word of mouth recommendations etc.

Now let's just think about the way consumers participate in the community.

3. If we had two online brand communities for the same brand, one generated by the marketer/brand owner and the other generated by consumers; what differences might we see in the way consumers participate in the online community?

Probe: Can you think of an example of how you as the brand owner/marketer (or your clients), may have influenced the way consumers participate in the online brand community?

4. If we had two online brand communities for the same brand, one generated by consumers and the other created by the brand owner/marketer; what differences might we see in the way consumers form a relationship with the brand?

Probe: Different relationships with the brand may mean different attitudes towards the brand, different emotional responses, different behaviours etc.

Probe: Can you think of any examples of how you as the brand owner/marketer (or your clients) may have influenced the way consumers form a relationship with the brand in the online community?

Sometimes we see online brand communities created by brand owners/marketers pop up and a short while later, consumers also create an online brand community for the same brand. Other times, consumers are the first to create an online brand community for a brand and a while later the brand owners/marketers then introduces an official online brand community for the same brand.

5. How is online brand strategy influenced by what happens in a consumer generated community?

Probe: For example, is online brand strategy reactive/dynamic/proactive to changes in the online environment as it relates to a given brand?

Probe: For example are consumer generated communities observed in detail first before creating a brand sponsored community?

Probe: Why/what benefits are there in this/Would you say this is typical?

6. How are online brand communities created by consumers influenced by brand strategy?

Probe: For example, are online brand communities created by consumers reactive to brand strategies?

Probe: Why are they reactive/benefits?

Online brand communities can obviously centre on any brand and there are many online brand communities for goods such as cars and computers. However, there are also many online brand communities for services such as airlines, hotels, cellphone providers, as well as for sports teams like the All Blacks.

7. How do online brand communities for goods differ from online brand communities for services or sports brands?

Probe: For example, what differences might we see in the way consumers participate in the online community?

Probe: What differences might we see in the way consumers form a relationship with the brand?

Online brand communities are a relatively new and dynamic way of communicating and we have seen lots of developments in this area in the past few years.

8. How do you think online brand communities will evolve in the future?

Probe: For example, what are the trends of online brand communities?

Probe: How do you think the role of a consumer and the role of a marketer/brand owner in an online brand community will change in the future?

Probe: How will online brand communities evolve differently for goods versus for services?

9. What new strategies or techniques might be introduced (or suggested to your clients) to drive the effectiveness of online brand communities in the future?

10. In the future, what do you see as the most crucial factor in driving the success of online brand communities going forwards?

Probe: Is this the same for all online brand communities or does this differ across consumer generated and brand sponsored communities?

Probe: Does this differ across online brand communities for goods versus for services?

Thank You.

Appendix B: Ethical consent