

The Role and Impact of Online Community from Corporate Marketing Perspective



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Abstract

Community is a sociological rather than a marketing concept until the Internet was invented. Today, the concept has a “socio-marketing” meaning especially with social network continuing to thrive as a new marketing tool in the digital world. Companies traditionally look for consumers who have similar needs and interests so that they don’t waste their marketing mix efforts and develop related marketing mixes for each segment. In traditional marketing, all these segments were generally accepted as passive recipients but not active participants and creators of market value. Such grouped and/or segmented consumers were not even aware that they are part of a homogenous group of consumers based on some artificial attributes used by the company for profit. However, in today’s digital markets, consumers created their freedom zones where they can act the way they want to be free from company interruption. And that is empowering. In other words, the center of gravity of marketing activities has been shifted from companies to consumers with social networks and digital communities. In these communities, consumers are aware that they are part of some common idea and cause, and they are organically tied to each other unlike traditional company-originated segmented group of consumers. Furthermore, while individual consumer is technologically empowered in the digital world, their power reaches new levels when combined with other like-minded consumers within digital communities. Thus, companies need not only understand consumers as their new partners but also find a way to develop relationships to be a part of new market value-creation processes in the digital markets.

Keywords: Community, Viral Marketing, Consumers, Digital World, Content, Brand Meanings

JEL Classification: C88; D83; M31; M37; O33

Community is a place where a group of people share the same or common interests, passion, values, and tastes. However, the sheer existence of a group of people who have similarities does not necessarily create a community. From a traditional marketing perspective, commonality attributes are created by company and exposed to consumer groups in segmentation strategies. But today's consumers have freely picked such attributes to form a community organically. Similarly, in order to talk about a community, each member should also have a desire to connect, share, and communicate with each other in many circumstances. In this context, consumers need other consumers to share their ideas and experiences so that they can feel self-fulfillment, validation, and in some cases security and a sense of belongingness. And this could only be happened thorough an organically and naturally developed ties.

With the increasing high connectivity in the digital markets, now consumers can connect with millions of like-minded individuals all around the world and form a community as long as they feel close to each other. Thus, the links and ties between community members should naturally be strong and hence they could be able to act like one entity and hence respond to various situations in a same way without existence of preplanned arrangements. Thus, community not only indicates homogenous existence of group of people but also ability to organize the same purpose and act together against threats and problems. In fact, community should be able to generate synergy effects when the members act beyond their sheer existence. Thus, there should be a feeling of unity among members. Such unity feeling eventually helps members to develop a deeper and strong relationship with each other, which in turn indicates the power of such community. Because of such unity feeling, consumers can easily share and like content, ideas, and reviews with other fellow community members in digital communities and social networks. By liking a content in the digital world, consumers are, in fact, tacitly sharing their self-identities, ideas, and in fact their secrets with other like-minded individuals. The unity feelings make sharing easier. As a result, every online community could be discussed with three major components in this sense:

- 1. common interests (commonality)**
- 2. desire to connect, share, and communicate**
- 3. feeling of unity (strength of psychological ties among community members)**

Life in each community could be different from other communities as each community gets around its own common interests and develops its own new norms and rules to reach its own common goals. This, eventually, enhances group members' welfare. Each member provides value for other like-minded member and works hard to develop solutions for common problems of the community by sharing their solutions to a problem. Such problems could be subjective and could only be understood by such community members as they share the same values and life views. Working toward solving common problems together to create benefits for all community members is easier than struggling such problems by yourself your own, hence majority prefer to be related to a community or at least touch base with them for potential benefits. In this context, community is a perfect place for members to get some insights about problem fixing not many understand outside the community

and to find an emotional support. From a marketer's point of view, this could be an opportunity to tap into consumers' world and understand consumers' problems and needs regarding their products and services. A community can help companies to reduce their segmentation costs as such communities form a segment and can easily be accessible as such group of consumers consisted of group of people with similar interests and passions, are already available and waiting to be discovered in the digital universe. Thus, companies don't need some sort of social engineering to discover potential segments in this sense. Furthermore, within such communities, members can also generate new ideas, content, and messages that can provide an economic value to the company and its brands if the brands are the subject of such conversations.

This, in turn, increases the importance of consumer-brand communities which is defined as a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. This new definition is slightly different than traditional community definition as follows: "people who live within a geographically defined area and who have social and psychological ties with each other and with the place where they live." As indicated in this definition, community members should be in close vicinity so that they can interact with each other regularly to reach community consciousness and unity. However, with the internet revolution, such being in a geographically close destination requirement lost its importance as community members can now meet virtually in anywhere at any time in digital gathering places such as social networking sites, chatrooms, etc. This, in turn, not only changed the definition of consumer online communities (e.g., brand communities) but also brand admirers' way of development of rituals, traditions, and morals just like any other communities. Such technologic advancement is now enabled to more people to get together and form a community more easily than in traditional online communities. Because physical connectedness or geographical closeness is not required on the digital platforms, community members' social and mental awareness and hence "sense" of connectedness gain more importance in the digital world than geographic or physical closeness. Once this connectedness and social unity feeling is established, members' shareability of their creations increases, and hence staggering amount of information can flow into markets through online communities and social networks. This, in turn, could be a great source of new marketing ideas for the company.

THE FUNCTION OF ONLINE COMMUNITY

In general media communication theory, there are two major nodes in a simple communication process: source or message creator and the receiver. This model reflects a major "audience" type communication in which message source sends the message to audience who are passively ready to receive such message and consume. This model is widely accepted by TV, newspaper, and magazine viewers as also indicated with "audience" model in Fig.1. As you can see from the "audience" model, there is no or very limited feedback from audience to sender and hence this indicates one-sided communication. This is not the case in "community" model as pictured on the left in Fig.1. In a community model, communications are very open, very interactive, and hence there is high-level of engagement and shareability among community members. Traditionally, the

company was the main source of the message creation process in the audience process. In a community model, the company loses its power over messaging as anybody can be a source and an audience at the same time while this is almost impossible in the “audience” model as depicted in Fig.1.

In other words, corporations lose their powers in market communication to the increasing numbers of consumer communities in the digital world. Thus, consumer’s voice plays an impactful role in shaping market language and speech more than company-generated voice elements as a simple content developed in online community could easily get viral and change media rhetoric and influence other fellow consumers’ feelings and believes. Much of the work conducted by consumer members of online communities is voluntary and hence doesn’t cost a dime to company. Much of the work conducted in such digital online communities can simply be managed by well-trained paid employees. By creating an online community consisting of dedicated and well-trained members, today’s community can easily reduce their operational costs and reach break-even fast and easily. However, this raised the questions if the company’s taking advantage of such volunteers’ altruistic motives for their own profit- oriented goals by labor experts. The economic value created by such community members is now company’s and hence such economic value should be protected. Today, such online communities and

social network sites are embedded into our lives so much so that many online communities started to play a significant role in individual and communal consumption on the Internet. Even some are willing to pay extra money to companies to be able to be part of company-created online communities as the company may provide rich content and brand-friendly digital environment to its followers. Clearly, online communities provide many opportunities for both consumers and companies. The internet is technologically a distributed network system in which millions and billions of small or mega and/or company-initiated or consumer-initiated natural communities interact daily for different reasons and purposes. It won’t be wrong to say that the Internet, perhaps, has become the most powerful social medium to date humanity has ever known. It seems such communities or social networking sites are places where billions of people share stories, information, pictures, and videos (various forms of content) with their like-minded consumers, friends, and even public daily all around the world. The majority of users don’t want to be left behind of community events and feeds, and hence they want to stay continually in touch with others, which is also conceptualized as “FOMO” (Fear of Missing Out). The feeling of a constant desire to be

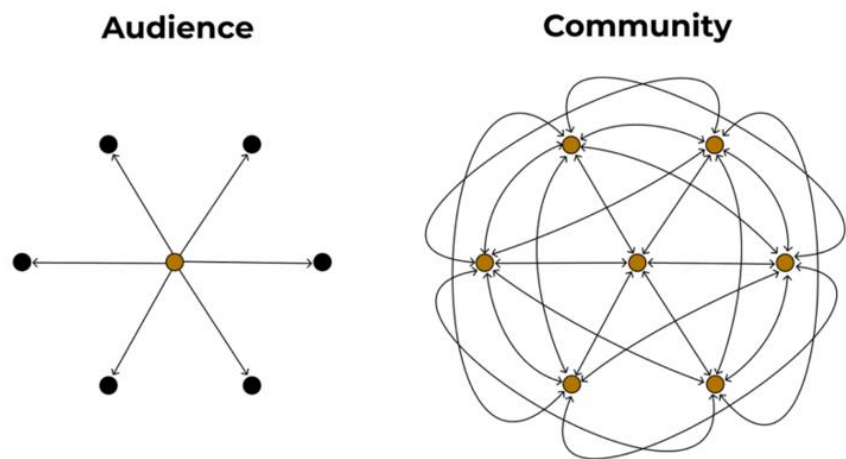


Fig.1 - What is community?

Source: <https://thestartup.substack.com/p/online-community>
(online-community by Richard Awoyemi - The Startup)

connected with our network and community eventually makes such digital destinations a prime place for companies who are begging for attention for their advertisement campaigns. We, human beings, always want to be a part of a group either a family, friends, or colleagues, and society at large to express and share our values and identities. This is our way of feeling secure since the beginning of the time. As Aristotle simply indicated; “we, by nature, are all social animals and hence social relationships are one of our major needs of our existence”. We had lost our ability to build a social relationship in the post-industrialization era and just started to re-discover such needs with the advent of the digital world, thanks to social networks. In other words, the social networking revolution reminded us, one more time, that we do not only need materials but also human touch as our happiness is also highly depended on such human connection. Our happiness depended on

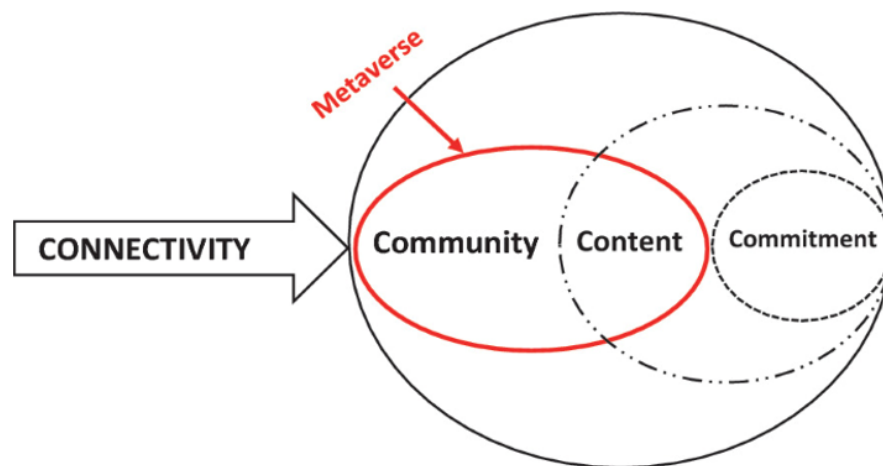


Fig. 2 - The role of community in 4Cs

Source: Kucuk, S.U. (2023). Community. In: Visualizing Marketing. Palgrave Studies in Marketing, Organizations and Society. Palgrave Macmillan

other's happiness as well. When we see something interesting in our social media feeds, we sometimes feel the urge to share such interesting content with our friends, peers, or colleagues who might like it. By simply putting our connections' names in our social networking comments to inform

them, we link related content to the people close to us in our community and network. Some community members are sure that if there is something important is happening regarding themselves and/or fits their interests, they would eventually hear the news from member friends in their social networks. Thus, the community can increase consumer connectivity with the related content, or can be called “content matching”. In this process, community or social networking site works as a major connector. Thus, there could be a direct link from connectivity to community as also conceptualized in Fig.2. Once users/consumers connect with their social networks, they consume the ideas and content used or shared by such network members as also pictured with the small circle withing the community circle in Fig.2. Content, in this context, helps community members to express them- selves and build group values, norms, and social identity. Content is the backbone of online communities as a major communication process and hence helps to strengthen the ties among community members as members communicate with each other through the content they genuinely develop within the community. In this context, an online brand community could

also alternatively be defined as a social gathering place where members negotiate company-created brand's cultural and social codes and hence re-conceptualize and re-define the brand meanings and identities through members' voluntary content development processes. Thus, community members are not only consuming other members' content but also developing their alternative realities and/or perceptions of events as the digital space by nature functions most like the substitution of our physical and/or tangible world. This is the point at which content turns into a social experience or the purpose of the community's existence. This could alternatively be interpreted as an escape from one reality to another with the content development processes with the help of the community. Such close integration between content and community, in turn, created a new and alternative form of live or simulation of live in our social universe, what we call these days: "Metaverse". In this context, Metaverse is a virtual environment as an alternative to our physical universe, especially within the computer-game industry. This alternative universe is where members disconnect with the reality and physical world and connect with their alternative identities in their imaginary world. With the advent of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), metaverse created a new world in which individuals discover new identities by developing various avatars of themselves and changing such identities like changing dress as you are only limited to your content choices.

This, in fact, creates a demographic-free individuality as you can be anybody at any time in any virtual event. This content-rich virtual environment hence opens the door to brands that want to be part of the metaverse through product placements or through creating direct consumer-brand contact within the metaverse. Consumers interact with brands like in the real world and hence consumer experience and engagement still play a significant role if companies can innovatively and successfully embed themselves into this new universe. Community members' commitment to the digital community also determines the members' satisfaction and hence interactions with the community (as pictured with "commitment" circle in Fig.2). Commitment, in this sense, indicates members' desire to maintain positive and satisfying relationship with the community. This, in turn, is reflected in the members' willingness to participate in the community and hence the length of engagement with the community. Each members' commitment to community activities and community can significantly vary. Some members engage with their community by only reading the posts to learn products/service and hence collect information while some others post their views and share their knowledge and emotions with others. Members' commitment to community also indicates the members' belief and trust in the company, its brand, and brand identity. Research showed that trust in brand community would lead to community commitment. Further, community commitment can have an impact on consumer-brand attitude, which in turn might to brand loyalty. Interestingly, consumer community commitment plays out differently depending on if the brand community is initiated by company or consumers by themselves.

Information quality, which indicates the credibility, newness, and excellence of information gained from the community discussions, is found more important in consumer-initiated brand communities rather than in company-initiated counterparts. This, one more time, emphasizes that community members are intended to trust their fellow community members than company-generated activities

and messages. Eventually, such commitment to community would encourage members to spread the word about the brand and the company. Finally, e-WOM (electronic Word-of-Mouth) research also indicated that consumers might perceive consumer-generated e-WOM messages as more credible than marketer-created information provided in the digital platforms. Thus, commitment to community members and their messages play a significant role in interacting with other “C” elements as also indicated in Fig.2. The interaction of “community” component with other 4C elements indicates that community is indispensable part of today’s digital marketing efforts as also conceptualized with Fig.2. **Online consumer communities built through social networking sites or other digital platforms provide efficiency and convenience for both companies and consumers in today’s modern marketing world. In this context, the overall benefits of these communities can also be summarized as follows:**

1. Online communities are places where companies can obtain valuable insights, new ideas, and genuine feedback (positive or negative) about their business, brands, and services from consumers. In fact, some consumers go beyond being idea sources; create value and voluntary work to produce the necessary services for the brand. Furthermore, online communities are perfect places where creation of user-generated content is freely shared with other members and public.

2. Because online communities consist of consumer members, such communities can provide effective communication platforms for companies with group of consumers and community members. Companies can easily access communities filled with similar consumers in terms of needs, values, and identities. The traffic generated by these communities can be staggering and hence it naturally attracts companies who are willing to communicate with such consumers through advertisements or other digital media tools. In other words, online communities are perfect places for advertisement targeting and hence revenue generation for a hosting company (such as Facebook and X). And hence, market growth can come from such communities.

3. Online communities and social networking sites are also places where consumer members generate positive and negative **e-WOM (electronic Word-of-Mouth)** for or against brands and companies. e-WOM is generated within such communities could be very effective as they can be spreader to the markets because of the network effects and like a bush fire and hence influence company brand identity, position, and hence revenues, especially negative e-WOM. This, in turn, accelerates the development of various “viral marketing” tools to benefit such consumer-generated e-WOM campaigns. Online communities, in this context, empower consumer’s voice and hence gave consumers a new platform where they can freely express their opinions without being caught by corporate media filtering systems on the same footing with companies. This, in turn, created voice equalization between consumers and companies and gave birth to a new type of consumers, called “voicsumers” who play a significant role in shaping the market speech with their voice. Although the first benefit mentioned above has some indirect, structural, and long-term effects on company operations and revenue, the last two benefits mentioned here, such as advertisement revenue and WOM generation, could have a direct and immediate impact on business operations.

ONLINE COMMUNITY DETECTION - Although some communities are naturally formed as everyone realizes the similarities with other like-minded individuals and form a community without even realizing it, some people need a push to discover the similarities and potentials with others on the same space or platform. Such discovery is generally difficult to be realized by the member themselves sometimes especially when you consider the staggering number of individuals and interactions happening within the digital platforms every day. Community detection reveals and proposes the potential communities by clustering intrinsic community structures based on individuals' demographics, views, interests, relationships, and personalities otherwise it is not realized or formed by such individuals by themselves. This might make some potential communities realize that they are more community than they even formally affiliated to. Detection of community is important as it also reveals hidden hierarchical and social structures that were out of company radar in a networked world. Overall, digital platforms develop better communities and make the communication more fluent and relevant for the members as well as advertisers who are trying to reach concentrated consumer communities. Overall, some of the online communities are naturally formed by themselves and some need a nudge to form a community that can work around a common goal and interest as explained in this section. Once a community or social network is naturally formed or detected by the company, it is easier for a market agent to approach such group of individuals to share what they like to satisfy their needs and hence create market value. Thus, likability would relatively be easier to reach. Yet, that doesn't guarantee that the content or information is shareable with the whole community. Many consumers are belonging to more than one online community or social network and involve and interact with them at different levels, from closely knitted versus loosely knitted. Thus, if a content liked in one community can also easily be transmitted to other communities, and hence ideas, content or product/service information can easily get viral. In short, if the content is likeable, then it is shareable within the community for everybody's benefits and pleasure.

SHAREABILITY - Companies need to know whom and what content their consumers are actively involving in and interacting with so that they can understand their constantly changing interests and develop solutions accordingly. Many consumers' attention is influenced by how many likes and

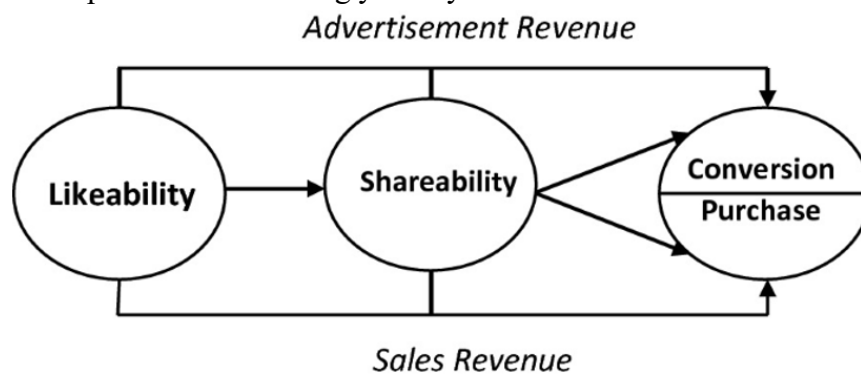


Fig. 3 The impact of likeability and shareability

Source: Kucuk, S.U. (2023). Community. In: Visualizing Marketing. Palgrave Studies in Marketing, Organizations and Society. Palgrave Macmillan

how many comments a social media post gets. In other words, every time a consumer likes a post in a social media environment, they unconsciously and intuitively promote such post. Thus, many consumers find their way by looking at other consumers or user's

likes and comments they have tied to in their social networks. In this context, engagement measures such as likes, comments, and clicks to a content, either they are company-generated or consumer-generated content, can be used leading indicators of consumers' attitudes. In fact, research revealed that the numbers of consumer "likes" or liking has a positive impact on other consumers' brand evaluations and can also lead to positive consumer offline behaviors. Hence, consumer likes can also be used as indicators of consumer spending and overall profitability as consumer could utilize such socially selling cues (likes) in their decisions. In other words, consumer likeability could be used as an early indicator of consumer purchase decisions since such indices directly influence consumers' purchase decisions and content consumption behaviors in social media as also pointed out with "Sales Revenue" line in Fig.3. One good example of this lien of revenue generation process is Tesla. Tesla does not use many of the traditional marketing tools but only uses social media for marketing. In other words, if a company can have a very innovative product/services gain some initial attention in the market, social media and online communities could accelerate diffusion of the product/services in the markets with increasing sales numbers. This is a very effective and less costly way of promoting products/services. As a result, many companies use social media and online communities to present and sale their products/services successfully on today's digital platforms. Similarly, likeable content can be shared among the social media or online community followers which can lead to more conversion. Although "conversion" as a concept could be used as synonym of purchase or indicate if consumers purchase something from your website; it can also mean that your content was able to convert such visitor to a follower. They register with company's website or some influential individual's blog or social networking site and hence willing to follow you to hear from you more often since you are producing likeable content and ideas. In this respect, the more follower a digital platform has the more likely that such followers will share the liked content with others within their social networks. The more eyeballs a digital platform, either company or consumer created, attract the more advertisement revenue can also a platform generate. Many individual consumers and users are creating their own digital platforms such as YouTube or Twitter to generate advertisement revenue as also indicated in the upper section of Fig.3. The amount of advertisement revenue generated is naturally determined by how many times an individual's or a company's content shared and/or mentioned within a post compared to the other alternatives in the market. This is also conceptualized as "Share of Voice" (SOV), which indicates how many individuals are talking about you, your brand, and/or company on the digital platforms compared to others. **Either generating conversion or purchase, shareability is at the heart of social networking and community management. Thus, why some content is shared more than others needs to be investigated. In other words, the question is why and how some content gets viral and spread easily all around the digital world while others don't.**

e-WOM AND VIRAL MARKETING - WOM (word-of-mouth) is perhaps the oldest form of consumer marketing communication tool and in fact existed much before the invention of advertising and other promotional tools. Pre-internet age, WOM was face-to-face and predominantly shared among very close group of people such as family and close friends. Sharing such product, brand information and complaints, and feedback with only closely related individuals

is an alternative tool and form of rejecting company's advertisement messages. Hence consumers who want to share their own messages through their own communication tools and channels can develop a WOM away from corporate eyes. This, eventually, created WOM conceptualization in traditional marketing theory. However, in pre-internet era, WOM was mostly in a form of spoken words. Thus, sometimes the meaning created in this traditional WOM format could be changed over time by the time a WOM reaches other members. Each receiver could change the meaning of WOM a little bit in the process. Thus, a message could lose its meaning and originality in the process in traditional WOM format as happens in childhood "tele- phone game". What you said in the beginning could always get another meaning at the end of the telephone game. Each participant changes the words depending on their perception and at the end the message mostly changed and out of message. However, in today's digital age, WOM can be shared with great numbers of online community members as well as anybody in public through digital media not only a few close group members, and originality of message content cannot be changed unintentionally as what is shared is in a digital format can't easily be changed in the process.

One other difference is WOM developed within online societies is not face-to-face anymore as it could be various digital content formats such as text, pictures, or even videos. This is a new form of WOM is called "e-WOM". And, it can have more impact on consumers than traditional advertisements since e-WOMs can spread alarmingly fast within markets. Most of the time, companies have a hard time keeping up with such e-WOM spread to markets without their control as e-WOM could be alarmingly harmful to the company and its brands. Viral marketing, in this context, studies the process of developing techniques to create visible and influential WOM inside and outside the online community to shape and influence market voice for your benefit. Or how a simple idea or a post within a social network or community is developed, grown, and spread to the whole market so that detecting and predicting a simple community member's post's future behavior could be possible and manageable. Every post or event has some lifecycle in the social media. From the beginning to developing to teaching climax and then descending and disappearing, such events go through various stages. The event or idea could be posted on a microblogging platform and starts its voyager, and in the developing stage, the hotness of the event could increase and attract more attention to an event/post. Once it reaches climax, it can stay there for a while depending on hotness of the event and subject, and then slowly descend with reducing posts, likes, and shares and then disappears from the community's or market's view. Although some could be short-lived and dies right after beginning without getting any traction within the social network, so others could go live through each stage during the time of its lifecycle. Some also reveal multi-climax lifecycles as the event can rejuvenate some other members or perhaps even can be realized by other communities in the same sphere. Number of members' likes, shares, and posts about the event eventually determine how long this process will continue to impact the community as well as markets. But not every attempt at viral marketing or e-WOM can achieve success, or even appear successful if it does. However, if a message receiver feels the message is appropriate, and then s/he passes it to others, the message can travel significant distances in the network. In other words, community members can work as a filtering mechanism within the community and affect the message dissemination

process. Overall, the more the message passes among the community members, the more powerful and impactful the message or e-WOM can get as this indicates that the message has a capacity to reach the far corners of your and even other online communities. This can be defined as “shareability” of message. **But the question is what makes such messages reach the far corners of the community or all the community members and hence reaches high shareability while others can't? Or, why some events and posts go multi-climax lifecycles and stays in members' agenda for a long time while others disappear without even getting any traction within community circles? The answer to these questions is multifaceted as shareability could be influenced by many factors as explained below:**

1. Source Credibility: of e-WOM can directly influence the effectiveness of communication between the message creator and receiver. Further, the impact of e-WOM could be higher when the message or e-WOM creator can be perceived as trustworthy and credible. An e-WOM message or a post can come from a trustworthy and knowledgeable people could have a longer lifecycle as their views and expertise touch the fundamentals and the purpose of the community. Many members of such communities give such leadership roles naturally to these people who they respect and hence connect to them by following their messages and posts. Some community members don't even argue the credibility or correctness of the message created by such a source and pass it to others within the community because of their admiration and trust in the source. In online communities, consumer members of the community could be weighted more on their fellow members' messages than marketer-generated messages. In other words, community members could perceive e-WOM message positively and be adopted easily if the source of e-WOM is seen as credible. Furthermore, the higher the credibility of e-WOM message source, the more positive attitude could members have about the brand used in e-WOM. This, in turn, could affect members' purchase intentions of the brand. Overall, if the source is perceived as credible, trustworthy, and knowledgeable, e-WOM message could travel to far corners of the community circles and even spread to other communities and hence all around the digital world.

2. Strength of Ties: In the past, WOM mostly circulated among family and close friends which indicates strong ties among community members as well as acquaintances and strangers which points out weak ties among members. WOM was more “gossip” like features as people mostly share their experiences and complaints with their strong ties with details as face-to-face sharing of traditional WOM format provided some privacy between spreader and receiver. Some of such personal ties are defined as strong and some others are weak ties. The strength of personal ties is a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy, and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie. In this context, “strong ties” are generally referred to close-knitted ties among community members, and hence, the trust between members is higher and paramount rather than weak ties. On the other hand, “weak ties” indicates loosely connected group such as acquaintances, or some cases even strangers. The stronger the ties between community members, the higher possibility that WOM could pass through others and hence the message spread all the sections of the community quickly as there is a less emotional barrier between these members.

However, with the advent of social media technology, weak ties also became almost as important as strong ties in terms of shareability performance of WOM. Weak ties can work like a bridge that connects different communities and networks while strong ties have less bridging function, meaning that no strong tie is bridge; hence, they connect major networks to each other. In other words, weak ties take a major role in the diffusion of the information in the form of e-WOM in the digital markets as also pictured in Fig.4. As indicated by the color codes in Fig.4, hot colors such as red and its tones indicate strong ties, while cold colors such as blue indicate weaker ties within the online community. Each community has both strong and weak ties.

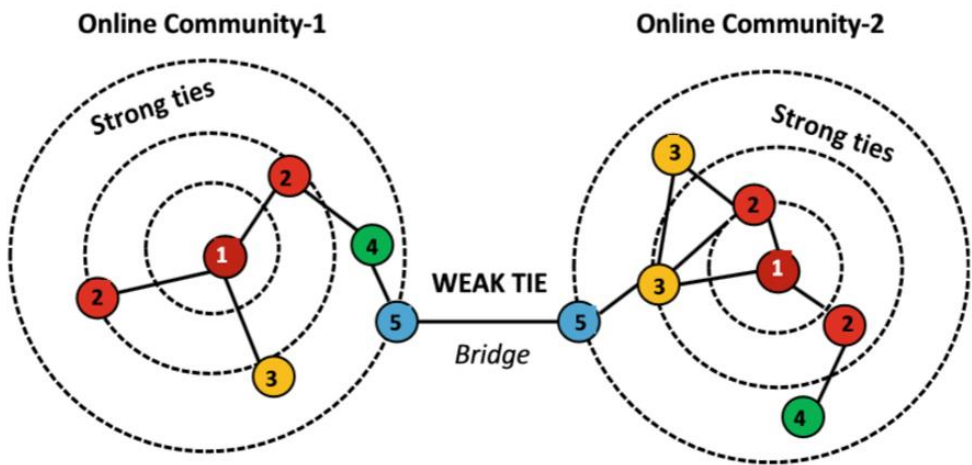


Fig. 4 - Strong and weak ties

Source: Kucuk, S.U. (2023). Community. In: Visualizing Marketing. Palgrave Studies in Marketing, Organizations and Society. Palgrave Macmillan

From the center (indicated with node #1), which could be anybody else who starts the e-WOM, to outskirts of the online community (node #5), the e-WOM might lose its strength as the source first shares the message with the one close to him/herself. Each community (community 1 and 2) has weak ties at the outskirts of the community (#5) and those ties work like a bridge. And hence, e-WOM transfers from one online community to another one through such a weak tie function as a bridge. As also indicated in Fig.4, some consumers are more connected with online communities (such as fans, loyal consumers) than some others (such as followers or daily readers). Fans, who could be considered as weak ties, are able, even delighted, to pass on information to large audiences. Thus, fans have a higher shareability capabilities while they are not stronger ties in the community.

3. Content: Some e-WOM messages are passed to the community members because of the power of the content no matter who sent the message or whether the source of the message is credible or not. In other words, a powerful story and content might generate a high-level of exposure to consumers, no matter who first initiated the e-WOM (whether consumer or company). If the story has a lot to say, and the story is told through a right picture or a video, e-WOM message could spread fairly quickly and can even reach a bigger sector of the market. In this context, the tone of the message content influences the community members' perception of e-WOM. Although e-WOM content that carries upbeat positive stories can have higher shareability, the research showed that both positive and negative e-WOM content can evoke high-arousal emotions and hence they could easily be passed to other members. This, in turn, makes fake news and content easily leak into community information-sharing circles because of the power of the content they carry. Furthermore, research also revealed that e-WOM supported with visual content and alliteration and repetitive

rhetical style has higher shareability among consumers. Social networks in which image and visual sharing is dominant such as Instagram and YouTube, visual content plays a significant role in consumer's shareability decisions as social media users want to see more entertaining videos. Many online social networking sites provide technological conveniences on creating and sharing various types of content. Although such flexibility triggers easy creation and sharing of e-WOM message content in a faster way, it can also create content complexity which eventually reduces consumer liking and message shareability.

CONCLUSIONS

Today's online communities are where consumers share their ideas and feelings to satisfy their social needs. This, in fact, makes many of community members happy as this is a way to nourish our relationships and define our identity. Thus, online communities are an indispensable part of any digital marketing efforts that focus on consumers. In online communities and social networks, companies and consumers can always engage any conversations anytime (24/7) and follow each other to changes and trends in the markets. People fearlessly share their ideas and opinions, and hence such communities empowered consumer or perhaps any individual's voice in an unprecedented way. **In this context, it won't be wrong to say that companies are losing their voice power to consumers in social networks and online communities as a cold commercialization mentality in traditional marketing cannot survive in today's digital world.**

As the speed of information spreading is much faster than any other marketing tools as we know it negative e-WOM created in such communities can cause destructive results for companies whose brands and brand identities are struggling in the markets. Companies learn to listen and engage in online communities and act in a timely manner to go ahead of some misrepresented stories and negative e-WOM. Companies should understand that brands are formed with consumers in today's social media environments. Although initially created by companies, it is highly likely that companies would lose the control of their branding and business messages in the digital world as a consumer have to power to control WOM. **Thus, companies need to develop some sort of control mechanism to monitor such online communities and to develop a balanced approach with consumers. In other words, instead of fighting with some online communities, companies need to learn how to use what such communities offer to improve their business to next level.** Finally, companies can also generate their own e-WOM campaign in the digital world. Detecting potential communities early on and/or develop new communities with consumers that can fit company's goals and plans could be key to reach a marketing success. In such cases, companies should also target their e-WOM to the people with high levels of both connectivity and credibility in order to influence the crowds. Those consumers can eventually open the door to new and valuable consumers as well. Companies should also understand the meaning of weak and strong ties and how they interact to develop a smooth roadmap for a e-WOM to travel the digital universe for maximum impact. In addition, companies should work on their messages carefully as the power of the message is as important as the source or the person who spreads the message. As a result, it would be fair to

say that companies need to learn to share their brands and contents with consumers as online consumer communities are gaining more control in market speech.

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