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Similarities, Differences and Implications for Practitioners

Laurence Dessart
PhD Candidate
University of Glasgow
United Kingdom

Cleopatra Veloutsou
Senior Lecturer
University of Glasgow
United Kingdom

Anna Morgan-Thomas
Lecturer
University of Glasgow
United Kingdom

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President
Athens Institute for Education and Research

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Laurence Dessart
PhD Candidate
University of Glasgow
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Cleopatra Veloutsou
Senior Lecturer
University of Glasgow
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Anna Morgan-Thomas
Lecturer
University of Glasgow
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Abstract

Brands are increasingly perceived as social entities that affect the ways in which consumers relate to each other, and there is a growing interest in consumer groups that support or oppose a given brand, referred to in marketing literature as brand or anti-brand communities. Although the concept of communities has been examined in the sociology literature for some time, there is very little integration of the sociology and the marketing literature when brand and anti-brand communities are examined. Furthermore, brand and anti-brand communities have largely been approached as different phenomena in the marketing literature. This paper is trying to re-define brand communities and to identify antecedents, internal functioning and consequences of these communities. Using knowledge from the sociology and marketing literature, it argues that brand and anti-brand communities are intrinsically more similar than different. Therefore, they can both be described with the term brand-related communities and they should be approached by researchers and practitioners as similar rather than different phenomena.

Key words: Community, brand community, anti-brand community, brand-related community

Contact Information of Corresponding author:

Introduction

Brands are increasingly perceived as social entities (O'Guinn and Muniz, 2009) that act as a social glue and affect the ways in which consumers relate to each other (Veloutsou, 2009). This collective aspect of consumption is becoming more prevalent as consumers find new ways to exchange consumption information, practices, and experiences (Schau, Muniz and O'Guinn, 2009). In this context, brand communities[1] (BC) are preferred outlets to support social consumption. Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009, p 316) define them as 'enduring, self selected groups of consumers, who accept and recognize bonds of membership with each other and the brand'. They allow consumers to develop networks of social interactions based on the common interest in a brand and what it represents.

So far, most of the BC literature has emphasized their positive implications (e.g. Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002; Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009). These include fostering consumer-brand relationships, increasing consumers' commitment and loyalty (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006), helping to build individual and collective identity (McAlexander, et al. 2002) and generating innovation and co-creation (Fournier and Lee, 2009).

Despite the enthusiasm for the benefits of brands and BC, there is now also a growing negativity surrounding brands and rejection of brand hegemony (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Cromie and Ewing, 2009). In this context, anti-brand communities (anti-BC) are groupings of consumer activists gathered around the common aversion for a brand (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009). Although research in this area is still scarce, anti-BC are increasingly attracting academic attention (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006; 2010; Cova and White, 2010) and their development in number and intensity is a concern for managers (Cromie and Ewing, 2009; Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009).

Sociological theory and its concepts underlie the marketing literature on brand and anti-BC. However, the treatment of sociology concepts in marketing is selective in two ways. Firstly, selected dimensions of sociology are discussed disparately throughout the marketing literature and secondly, this is done with a focus on supportive communities. There is little emphasis on community affiliation based on negativity, such as anti-BC. Social cognition theory and the theory of planned behavior have been used to understand the impact of consumers' attitudes on community behavior (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006), as well as social identity and social influence theories (e.g. McAlexander et al., 2002; Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann, 2005; Cova and Pace, 2006). In 2001, Muniz and O'Guinn identified three community markers present in BC: consciousness of kind, rituals and tradition, and sense of moral responsibility. Although these community markers have prevailed and been re-appropriated extensively in the marketing literature on BC (e.g.

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[1] Although different terms, such as brand communities and brand tribes, have been used to describe brand-related groups, in this paper the term brand communities is used to refer to all brand-related groups.

Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Dholakia and Vianello, 2011), further analysis of the sociology literature reveals the existence of a more complex typology of communities. Since the concept of community has been examined in the sociology literature for many years, it provides a relevant framework for the understanding of different kinds of communities.

A more comprehensive treatment of sociology is needed to account for the full spectrum of communities in the marketing literature, which has so far examined brand and anti-BC separately. However, Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2010) argue that the two phenomena are similar and suggest the need for an analysis of their similarities and differences. Therefore, finding a common way to approach BC and anti-BC can be of interest for researchers. The research question that this paper addresses is whether a common definition of BC and anti-BC is relevant and achievable in light of both marketing and sociology literature.

Although motivated by radically different goals, strong emotional relation to the brand lies at the heart of both brand and anti-BC. However, there is little consensus on what constitutes their essence. This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of BC and anti-BC. It argues that anti-BC and BC share important similarities, allowing for a common conceptualization of the two phenomena under the umbrella term 'brand-related communities'. The paper also provides a definition and conceptual framework of brand-related communities, looking at their antecedents, internal functioning and consequences.

The paper first presents the growing interest in brand-related communities in the sociology and marketing literatures and develops a conceptual framework of brand-related communities. The differences and similarities between BC and anti-BC are then explored, and a definition of brand-related communities is proposed, followed by a discussion.

Brand-related communities: a growing field of interest

BC and anti-BC are specific forms of communities with an explicit commercial nature and focus on a brand (Cova and Pace, 2006). Central to these phenomena are the concepts of community and brand, which are subject to examination in the sociology and marketing literature. This section focuses on the concept of community and examines its recurring characteristics in both marketing and sociology literature.

Central to the definition of community in marketing and sociology are the concepts of belonging and shared identity (Calhoun, 1983; Delanty, 2003). Members of a community are bound by a common sentiment (Tönnies, 1963), which derives from communal action and open discourses (Melluci, 1996; Delanty, 2003). This feeling of belonging is based on voluntarism and community affiliation, is now viewed as a conscious and reflexive process that members choose to engage in (Blanchot, 1988; Maffesoli, 1996; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009), whereas older perceptions of communities considered them as non-chosen entities that members were born into (Tönnies, 1963).

Community structure is constituted of a set of social relationships among members (König, 1968). These interpersonal relationships are increasingly communicative and based on information sharing (Habermas, 1984 and 1987; Castells, 1996, 1997 and 1998). They bring people together around a shared focus, concern or goal (Tönnies, 1963; Calhoun, 1983), which is the focal brand in brand-related communities. Brands are at the center of the community-based relationships. Relationships with like-minded consumers are influential on brand relationship and loyalty behavior (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006).

The symbolic and cultural aspect of communities is also well documented. Community members create and negotiate a common cultural and dynamic meaning through various forms of rituals, practices and symbols (Cohen, 1985; Melluci, 1996). These forms of collective action allow community members to achieve self-expression (Melluci, 1996) and gain control in the brand value creation process (O'Guinn and Muniz, 2009). In BC and anti-BC, collective action and meaning negotiation is related to brand ownership (Fournier and Avery, 2011). The community can be managed by the community members or by the company behind the brand, and the level of control the company exerts can vary. Dholakia and Vianello (2011) show that consumer-run communities are more effective. Marketers need to relinquish control and accept the fact that the community is the co-owner of the brand (Fournier and Lee, 2009; Fournier and Avery, 2011). In reality, consumers and companies exist in a situation that no one truly controls (Cova, Kozinets and Shankar, 2007) and the levels of freedom experienced in a brand community usually fall on a continuum rather than pure control or freedom dichotomy. The level of freedom of expression influences brand loyalty, equity and commitment (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Algesheimer et al., 2005; Fournier and Lee, 2009).

A major development in communities and brand-related communities pertaining to modernity concerns their deterritorialization. Mobility, technology and multiculturalism affects the way communities are positioned in space and time. Although they have long been considered as relying mainly on a common location and physical proximity (Tönnies, 1963; König, 1968) the rise of globalization and information technologies has introduced a new global and transnational dimension to communities (Delanty, 2003). They are freed from geographic boundaries, spatial structure and time constraints (Urban, 1996; Castells, 1996, 1997 and 1998). Communities based on physical proximity still exist, but it is no longer a requirement for their development.

In this context, virtual communities have developed as forms of communities where social relationships are mediated by highly personalized technology, such as social media (Castells, 1996; Fournier and Avery, 2011), increasing the speed, convenience, reach and transparency of communication (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010). Virtual environments provide an alternative to face-to-face interactions (Poster, 1995), allowing strangers or existing real-life friends to get together in another complementary form of reality (Rheingold, 1993). A vast amount of online (anti-) brand communities has emerged (e.g. Kim, Choi, Qualls and Han, 2008; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009). In essence, virtuality has not created new forms of communities but is rather a tool that has reshaped social interactions and communication among community members (Delanty,

2003). Virtual communities are based on communication and collective action as creators and expressions of belonging, rather than on locality.

To sum up, communities, including BC and anti-BC are characterized by conscious and voluntary relationships among a group of a shared focus (Bruhn, 2005; Bazaki and Veloutsou, 2010). This voluntarism is enacted through mutual goals and values (Sarason, 1974) that generate commitment and responsibility toward the community. Community members share a purpose, an identity and a belief that the community unites them (Loewy, 1993), which is now increasingly supported by highly personalized and networked social communication (Castells, 1996). As communities become more and more imagined, mediated and dynamic (Poster, 1995), the role of belonging and shared characteristics that unite their members is becoming even more crucial.

Looking at communities through the lens of sociology and marketing allows therefore the creation of a conceptual framework for the understanding of BC and anti-BC. Certain critical themes emerge (table 1), showing that there is more in common between the different streams of literature than what seems to have been appreciated so far from the respective literatures.

Defining brand-related communities

Using the community themes previously identified, the following section discusses the similarities and differences between BC and anti-BC, as presented in the marketing literature (table 2).

Similarities

BC and anti-BC are both communities centered on a focal brand. They exhibit multiple similarities detailed in the marketing literature.

Shared focus on a brand

A shared concern characterizes both community types—in this instance, the focal brand (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006; Cova and Pace, 2006), which serves as the basis for collective action and co-creation behaviors (e.g. Schau, Muniz and Arnould, 2009; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2009; Kucuk, 2010). The focal brand also provides the community with a basis for common experiences, rituals and meaning, which is typically re-appropriated and re-negotiated among members. In both cases, members show engagement toward the brand and the community (Algesheimer et al., 2005).

Social relationships with and around a brand

Both BC and anti-BC rely heavily on social relationships among members (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006) who share a common feeling of belonging (McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010), which they acknowledge by joining the community on a voluntary and reflexive basis (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006). In addition to social relationships among community members, a committed relationship exists with the focal brand (Hollenbeck and Zikhan, 2006; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009).

Table 1: Communities and brand-related communities in the marketing and sociology literature

	Sociology literature	Marketing literature
Communities in general		
Social relationships among members	Tönnies, 1887; König, 1968; DiMaggio et al., 2001; Turner, 2001; Bruhn, 2005	Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Cova and Cova, 2002; Fournier and Lee, 2009; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006 and 2010
Belonging and shared identity	Tönnies, 1963; Calhoun, 1983; McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Melluci, 1996; Delanty, 2003	McAlexander et al., 2002; Algesheimer, et al., 2005; Baggozi and Dholakia, 2006; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010
Shared focus/concern	Tönnies, 1963; König, 1968; Calhoun, 1983	Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Cova and Pace, 2006; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006
Consciousness and voluntarism	Tönnies, 1963; König, 1968; Blanchot, 1988; Maffesoli, 1996; Bruhn, 2005	Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006 and 2010
Collective action and co-creation	Melluci, 1996; Lichterman, 1996; Giddens, 1990 and 1991; Calhoun, 1980, 1986, 1988, 1991, 1992, 1998	Schau et al., 2009; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2009; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006 and 2010; Kucuk, 2010
Symbolism, culture and meaning	Turner, 1969; Cohen, 1985; Delanty, 2003	Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Cova and Pace, 2006; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006
Communication	Habermas, 1984 and 1987; Castells, 1996, 1997 and 1998; Turner, 2001	Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002
Community commitment and engagement	Bellah, 1986; Delanty, 2003	Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann, 2005; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006; Schau et al., 2009; O'Guinn and Muniz, 2009
Space and virtuality	Urban, 1996; Castells, 1996, 1997 and 1998; Delanty, 2003	Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006; Cova et al., 2007; O'Guinn and Muniz, 2009
	Sociology literature	**Marketing literature**

Specificities in brand-related communities		
Consumer/brand relationship		Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann, 2005; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Hollenbeck and Zikhan, 2006; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009
Focus on a brand		Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006; Cova and Pace, 2006
Co-creation and negotiation of brand meaning	Not applicable	Cova and Pace, 2006; O'Guinn and Muniz, 2009; Kucuk, 2010
Brand commitment		Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; O'Guinn and Muniz, 2009
Brand ownership		Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006; Fournier and Lee, 2009; Dholakia and Vianello, 2011; Fournier and Avery, 2011
Impact on the brand		Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006 and Fournier and Lee, 2009; Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009; Kucuk, 2010

Table 2: Similarities and differences between brand and anti-BC in the marketing literature

Characteristics	Brand communities	Anti-brand communities
Similarities		
Shared focus on a brand	Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Cova and Pace, 2006;	Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006
Social relationships with and around a brand	Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Algesheimer et al., 2005; Cova and Pace, 2006; Fournier and Lee, 2009; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009	Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006 and 2010
Brand ownership	Schau et al., 2009; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2009; Dholakia and Vianello, 2011	Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006 and 2010, Kucuk, 2010
Type of focal brand	Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Muniz and Schau, 2005	Kucuk, 2010
Virtual applications	Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Kozinets, 2002; Cova et al., 2007; O'Guinn and Muniz, 2009	Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006; Kucuk, 2010
Belonging and shared identity	McAlexander et al., 2002; Algesheimer et al., 2005; Baggozi and Dholakia, 2006	Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010
Consciousness and voluntarism	Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009	Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006 and 2010
Collective action and co-creation	Schau et al., 2009; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2009; Dholakia and Vianello, 2011	Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006 and 2010, Kucuk, 2010
Symbolism, culture and meaning	Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Cova and Pace, 2006; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009	Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006
Communication	Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002	Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010
Engagement toward the community/ brand	Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann, 2005; Schau et al., 2009; O'Guinn and Muniz, 2009	Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006
Differences		
Valence of emotions toward the brand – positive vs negative	Cova, 1997; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Pawle and Cooper, 2006; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Veloutsou, 2007	Holt, 2002; McGinnis and Gentry, 2009; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006 and 2010

Goals – support the brand vs oppose the brand	Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001	Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets and Handelman, 2004 ; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006; Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009
Different triggers for affiliation	Blackston 1992 and 1993; Fournier 1998	Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010
Impact on the brand – positive vs negative	Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander, Schouten and Köenig, 2002; Fournier and Lee, 2009	Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009; Kucuk, 2010

Co-creation and brand ownership

The question of brand ownership is at stake in both BC and anti-BC. Members play with the brand, its meaning and values, sliding out of control of corporations (Hollenbeck and Zinhkan, 2006; Fournier and Lee, 2009; Fournier and Avery, 2011). The impact of both communities on the brand has also been widely documented (e.g. Dholakia and Herrmann, 2005; Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009; Kucuk, 2010). By engaging in collective action, community members typically impact brand equity in a positive (e.g. Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) or negative way (Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009). The brand meaning and values are also altered as a consequence of community participation, to the extent that the question of 'who owns the brand' can be asked.

Type of focal brand

So far, brand community research has mainly focused on durable products as focal brands, such as cars, motorbikes or computers (e.g. McAlexander et al., 2002; Algesheimer et al., 2005; Muniz and Schau, 2005; Schouten and McAlexander, 2005). However, there is increasing evidence that convenience products such as chocolate spread or soft drinks can also trigger community affiliation (i.e. Cova and Pace, 2006; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009). Regardless the product category it belongs to, strong brands are most likely to attract both brand and anti-brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009). Balabanis (2012) points out that well-known multinationals that engage in harmful policies or unfair business practices are likely to be boycotted. However, the stigma attributed to a brand can also be event-based rather than pertaining to core values and practices (Hudson, 2008).

Virtual applications

Additionally, BC and anti-BC are equally influenced by technology, as the vast amount of online (anti-) brand communities shows (Kim et al., 2008; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009). Virtual platforms increase consumer empowerment by giving consumers tools to express their views, co-create at a low cost and spread ideas in a multi-directional fashion (Hagel and Armstrong, 1997; Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001).

It seems sensible to conclude that all sociology and marketing markers previously identified are found in both brand and anti-brand communities. The constructs involved in the definition of both kinds of communities are therefore identical and can be used as a basis for the conceptualization of brand-related communities.

Differences

Although the constructs used to define BC and anti-BC are the same, there are clear differences in the values they take in each kind of community. These differences materialize in members' emotions and in the way the brand is impacted. Triggers for participation and some goals related to community participation also take different values in BC and anti-BC.

Valence of emotions toward the brand

Brand community members come together on the basis of emotional attachment to a product or brand (Muniz and O'Guinn, 1995, 2001). Strong and sometimes irrational emotional bonds are central in communities of consumers (Cova, 1997). Veloutsou (2007) conceptualizes consumer-brand relationships as having two main components: two-way communication and emotional exchange. When consuming a brand, people expect emotional benefits from it (Pawle and Cooper, 2006) and brand relationship can grow into passionate emotional attachment as strong as brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Anti-BC, on the other hand, come together based on anti-brand sentiment (Holt, 2002) and a common detestation or aversion for a brand (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006 and 2010). It can be concluded that a strong emotional bond is present in anti-BC as well (McGinnis and Gentry, 2009) but that its valence is negative, in opposition to positive as in BC.

Goals

BC and anti-BC have both similar and opposing goals that members wish to achieve. Essentially, whereas BC members typically wish the brand's welfare, anti-BC members wish to avoid the brand or oppose what it stands for (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009). Although there is often a desire for empowerment in both kinds of communities, in anti-BC, it is aimed at liberating the self from market dominance (Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2002) and reaching autonomy and freedom through social change, as explained by the new social movement theory (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006). New social movements are individuals' responses to the totalizing and hegemonic cultural landscapes created by capitalist markets (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004), in which individuals rise collectively against an adversary (Touraine, 1981) — in this case, brands and the oppressive culture they impose on society.

Triggers for affiliation

Lee, Motion and Conroy (2009) identify three types of brand avoidance that trigger affiliation to an anti-BC: experiential, identity and moral. Experiential avoidance stems from unmet expectations in product consumption and negative product experience. Identity avoidance happens when consumers do not wish for themselves to be associated with what they perceive as negative brand meaning or values, leading to symbolic incongruence. Moral avoidance is an ideological incompatibility and extends beyond the needs of the individual to a societal scope. The "we" in anti-brand movements is adversarial to mainstream consumption, and the goals that bring anti-brand activists together are to change consumer culture (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010).

This categorization of anti-BC affiliation can be extended to BC members using different valences. BC members can decide to join it because of a positive consumption experience, a similarity of personality traits with the brand (Blackston 1992 and 1993; Fournier, 1998) and moral compatibility. Other similarities are found in community members' goals. They can in both cases be looking for identity building (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010), recognition and support (Cova and Pace,

2006), as well as emancipation and individual empowerment (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010).

Impact on the brand

The goals pursued by community members have a direct impact on the brand itself. The positive impact that BC can have on brand equity, brand commitment and loyalty has been the subject of much research (e.g. Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander, Schouten and Köenig, 2002) and more recently, the impact of anti-brand communities on the same constructs has also been identified. Anti-BC impact on brand eauity and brand value is, however, negative and dependent on the number of anti-BC (Kucuk, 2010), leading in some instances to brand stigma (Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009).
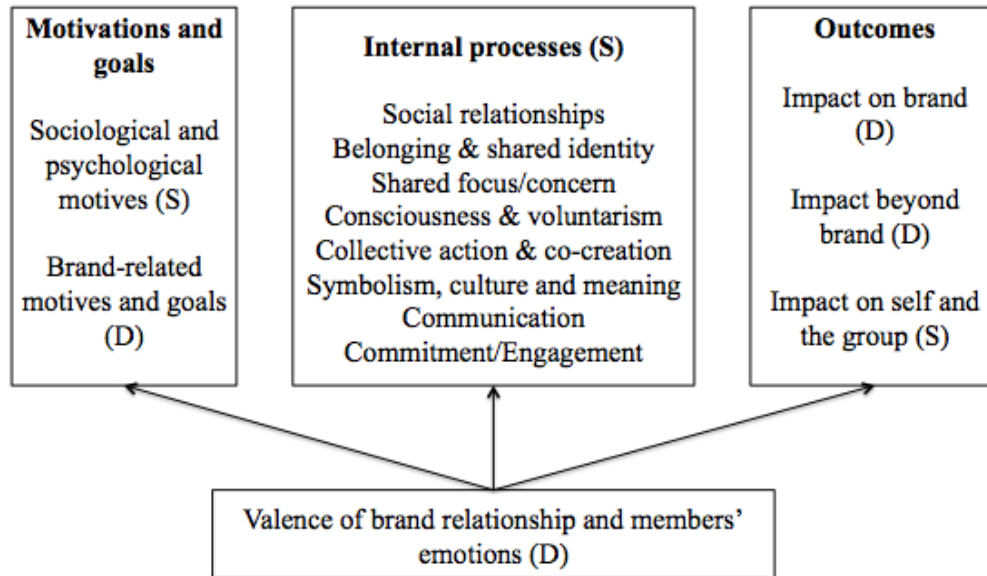
Toward a definition of brand-related communities

The analysis of the similarities (S) and differences (D) between BC and anti-BC are summarized in figure 1. It highlights three steps relevant to the understanding of brand-related community: the antecedents, or motivations to join the community and goals as community members, the internal processes, which are mainly related to the sociology of community, and the outcomes of the existence of the community.

Motivations to join the community can be related to the self and the collective, as well as to the brand, and they only vary from BC to anti-BC when they regard the brand. Internal processes extracted from the sociology literature are identical in both types of communities. The outcomes are the same when it comes to the individual and are directly related to the sociological and psychological motives pursued, such as identity creation. The main concept that lies at the heart of brand and anti-BC differentiation is the valence of brand relationship and community members' emotions. It is argued that whether members experience positive or negative emotions and brand relationship is impactful on the whole process of community affiliation, from its antecedents to its outcomes.

The following definition of brand-related communities is therefore proposed: "Brand-related communities are social entities composed of consumers gathering consciously around a common brand-oriented focus. They engage in context-dependent collective action and communication processes, which have an impact on the brand, the self, the group and society at large. The whole spectrum of brand-related community motives, goals, processes and outcomes is dependent on members' varying valence of emotions toward and relationships with the brand".

Figure 1. *Similarities and differences between brand and anti-BC*

Motivations and goals	Internal processes (S)	Outcomes
Sociological and psychological motives (S) Brand-related motives and goals (D)	Social relationships Belonging & shared identity Shared focus/concern Consciousness & voluntarism Collective action & co-creation Symbolism, culture and meaning Communication Commitment/Engagement	Impact on brand (D) Impact beyond brand (D) Impact on self and the group (S)

Valence of brand relationship and members' emotions (D)

Discussion

Brand-related communities support the open-source branding phenomenon characterized by participatory and collaborative behaviors whereby consumers create and share branded content (Fournier and Avery, 2011). Understanding brand-related communities' functioning and the impact of collective actions on the brand itself is a managerial concern, as it can influence brand equity (positively or negatively), brand value or consumer loyalty. Brand-related communities increasingly support consumer emancipation and empowerment (Kozinets, 2002), whether this is driven by brand support or boycott. In this process of empowerment, community members re-negotiate the brand meaning, play with it and become co-creators of value (Schau, Muniz and Arnould, 2009). For these reasons, managers need to acknowledge the existence and power of all kinds of brand-related communities.

By developing an exhaustive framework of the themes associated with brand-related communities and mapping their similarities and differences, this article provides a basis for the understanding of the interplay among different groups of consumer activists. Anti-BC and BC do not exist independently of each other. Rather, they interact in the same social and technological sphere and influence each other. One group fuels the other group's cause and online forums in particular serve as venues for communication between brand proponents and opponents. Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2010) show that both Wal-Mart brand and anti-BC members engage in counterfactual thinking, which represents the act of comparing one's own situation with better or worse conditions (Markman et al, 1993). Through this process, brand-related community members construct an idea of a better world, fuelled by the opposing group's actions, which in turn drives their own actions. In certain

situations, the best option for the company is to step aside and let the communities respond to each other.

Moreover, brand-related communities of both kinds constitute a wealth of resources. Consumer criticism can be turned into learning opportunities that help strengthen brand equity (Fournier and Avery, 2011). Anti-branding can be considered as beneficial for brands as it forces companies to question their business practices and values, helps the market rejuvenate and tears down old branding paradigms (Holt, 2002). Fighting back is not necessarily the right answer and negativity around a brand can be unavoidable (Hudson, 2008). In conclusion, brand-related community activity needs to be monitored and engaged with as a whole, and negativity should not be suppressed but embraced.

By introducing the concept of brand-related communities, the paper contributes to the current knowledge of brand and anti-brand communities. This common approach should help practitioners understand the role that these communities play for their members and for the brand and shed light on whether and to which extent to engage with them in their branding efforts.

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