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Antecedents and consequences of participation in brand communities: a literature review

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Abstract With hundreds of articles dedicated to investigating brand communities, there is now a need to consolidate the literature. This review addresses the need to reconcile the findings of brand community participation literature through undertaking a literature review. Over 1900 articles were examined, 41 in detail. Findings reveal that three forms of brand community participation have been studied: offline, online, and social-media-based, each uncovering the antecedents and consequences of brand community participation. Antecedents were grouped into five categories (self-related, social-related, information-related, entertainment-related and technology-related) and consequences into three categories (brand-related, brand community-related, and social-related). From the review, several future research directions are uncovered, including 16 specific research questions. By scrutinising the vast literature on brand community participation, and presenting multiple avenues for future research, this review presents findings useful for academics and practitioners alike.

Keywords Brand community participation · Literature review · Online brand communities · Offline brand communities · Social-media-based brand communities

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Introduction

The brands *Nutella*, *Jeep*, *Lego* and *Apple* may at first appear to have little in common; however, all use a brand community (or multiple) as part of their marketing strategy (Cova and Pace 2006; Lego 2016; McAlexander et al. 2002; Muñiz and Schau 2005). Numerous success stories show that a brand community can transform a brand. For example, *Harley-Davidson* used a brand community-centred marketing strategy to rescue their declining brand, which contributed to a brand value boasting $7.8 billion (Filipe Lages and Montgomery 2004). The French cosmetics brand *Sephora* demonstrated that brand community success is not only for motor vehicle brands, with one million viewers every month participating in the brand community (Thumm 2015), and members of the brand community spending 2.5 times more than non-members (Ungerleider 2014).

Claimed by some as 'the holy grail of brand loyalty' (McAlexander et al. 2002, p 38), brand communities can provide great value for a brand. With the potential to offer brand differentiation and a sustainable competitive advantage (Thompson and Sinha 2008), brand communities present the opportunity to develop and foster long-term relationships with customers by providing a platform through which loyal customers can participate in activities together (Carlson et al. 2008; Hur et al. 2011; Muniz et al. 2001; Stokburger-Sauer 2010). By definition, a brand community brings together brand devotees to participate in shared rituals and traditions (Muniz et al. 2001).

Since brand communities provide an avenue for sustaining relationships with customers, a large amount of research has been dedicated to investigating the characteristics of brand communities and member participation in these brand communities (e.g. Cova and Pace 2006; Schau

and Muñiz 2006; Sierra et al. 2016). In addition, the rapid emergence of brand communities developed by organisations, and communities developed by passionate brand advocates (for example see Cova and Pace 2006), has seen a rise in academic research into the area of brand communities (e.g. Annett-Hitchcock and Xu 2015; Baldus et al. 2015; Pahnila and Väyrynen 2015; Sierra et al. 2016; Syrjälä 2016). To date, several hundred articles have been published in the field of brand communities, with the number rapidly increasing in recent years (e.g. Sierra et al. 2016; Syrjälä 2016; Zheng et al. 2015). In particular, a key focus has been the investigation of antecedents and consequences of brand community participation. A review of the literature reveals that researchers are yet to consolidate this extensive body of knowledge. As a result, this paper seeks to encapsulate brand community participation by isolating the antecedents and consequences of participation identified in the extant literature.

The aim of the present study is to identify and compare the antecedents and consequences of brand community participation that have been examined in academic journals through an extensive literature review. From an academic point of view, consolidating the literature will be helpful in identifying areas of further significant research. In addition, the future research directions (including specific research questions) will help guide future studies in the field. From a practitioner's perspective, a comprehensive overview of the current knowledge on antecedents and consequences of brand community participation will help inform the creation and management of brand communities, and provide guidance on harnessing the full potential of brand communities for brands. The following sections define brand communities and discuss the method, findings, and future research directions arising from this comprehensive review.

Brand community definition

A brand community is defined as 'a specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a set of social relationships among admirers of a brand' (Muniz et al. 2001, p 412). This definition is widely acknowledged and accepted in the brand community literature (e.g. Carlson et al. 2008; Tsai et al. 2012; Zhou et al. 2012). Another term used to explain these groups of brand devotees is 'consumer tribes' (Canniford 2011). Consumer tribes are groups of consumers that centre around a specific interest, idea, or behaviour; and sometimes include brands (Cova and Cova 2002). However, a brand is not an essential component of a consumer tribe, unlike brand communities where the brand takes centre focus (Canniford 2011). Although there is a difference between consumer tribes and

brand communities, the literature crosses over substantially with many brand community studies integrating consumer tribe literature (e.g. Kuo and Feng 2013; Luo et al. 2015; Muniz et al. 2001). Due to this, consumer tribe literature incorporating a brand was included in the current review. For the purposes of this review, the term 'brand community' will be used to refer to both brand communities and consumer tribes (that focus on a brand).

All brand communities are said to display three characteristics: consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility (Muniz et al. 2001). Consciousness of kind refers to the connection an individual feels towards the brand and community members, and the level of legitimacy they associate with this connection (Muniz et al. 2001). Shared rituals and traditions represent the shared consumption experiences by brand community members, the history, and the stories that are told in the community (Muniz et al. 2001). Lastly, moral responsibility refers to the duty that community members feel to stay in the group, retain members, and introduce new members (Muniz et al. 2001). A range of terms have been applied to refer to different brand communities, these three characteristics, however, remain consistent (Casaló, Flavián, and Guinalíu, 2008; Madupu and Cooley, 2010a; Zhou and Amin, 2014). These brand community characteristics by Muniz et al. (2001) even provide three antecedents and consequences, depending upon the perspective viewed. Madupu and Cooley (2010b) viewed these characteristics as consequences, and contrastingly Zhou and Amin (2014) saw these as antecedents. This finding highlights the somewhat confusing nature of the antecedents and consequences of brand community participation, as many can have a dual role, that is, they may be viewed as either an antecedent or a consequence depending on the perspective taken.

Method

A systematic literature review entails an explicit and transparent review of published material, using a reproducible method, with set exclusion and inclusion criteria (Pluye et al. 2016; Tranfield et al. 2003). In order to ensure that the method was reproducible for this review, the following steps were undertaken. First, guidelines were established regarding the scope and boundaries of the study. Second, a plan was made as to where the literature would be sourced. Third, selection criteria were established, with specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. For the last step, the final sample of literature was synthesised and the results were examined.

Scope of study

Due to the popularity and success of brand communities (Belk and Tumbat 2005; Cova and Pace 2006; Sicilia and Palazón 2008), as well as the value that brand communities provide for brands (e.g. Hur et al. 2011; Thompson and Sinha 2008); many studies have been undertaken to identify the determinants of brand community participation (antecedents; Filipe Lages and Montgomery 2004), and what occurs as a result of participation (consequences). With regards to these antecedents, the terms 'antecedents' and 'drivers' are used synonymously in the brand community literature (e.g. Carlson et al. 2008; Hung 2014) to explain those variables that influence the dependent variable of study. In the current context the dependent variable is most commonly 'brand community participation'.

Search of articles

Searches were conducted in multiple journal databases to identify articles that included the term 'brand community/ies' in their abstract, title or keywords. In addition, due to the high level of similarity between 'consumer tribes' and 'brand community', the term 'consumer tribes' was also used as a search term. Some have used the term 'tribe' or 'consumer tribe' synonymously with 'brand communities' (Kozinets 1999), whereas others suggest key differences exist (Canniford 2011). Due to use of the term 'consumer tribes' appearing in, and the incorporation of consumer tribe literature in many brand community studies (e.g. Kuo and Feng 2013; Luo et al. 2015; Wang et al. 2015); the term 'consumer tribe/s' was also employed in the article search. For the remainder of this paper the term 'brand community' will be used to refer to both those termed 'brand community' and 'consumer tribe' by the original author.

Research into brand communities has been undertaken in various journals and disciplines. For example marketing (e.g. Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Bruhn et al. 2014); computer science (e.g. Habibi et al. 2014; Kang et al. 2007); management (e.g. Baldus et al. 2015; Carlson et al. 2008; Zaglia 2013), and psychology (e.g. Lin 2008; Stokburger-Sauer 2010). Care was taken to ensure articles in a variety of fields and disciplines were included by using a range of databases, specifically: Business Source Complete, ABI/Inform, Academic Source Complete, JSTOR, Proquest, Science Direct and WARC. Consistent with other systematic reviews in the area of marketing and management (Crawford and Gregory 2015; Snyder et al. 2016; Witell et al. 2015); only academic journals were studied. No books or other literature were included as not all these resources are readily available. Additional insights may be found upon examining other literature sources. This is a limitation of the current review.

Selection of articles

As the aim of this research is to identify all antecedents and consequences of brand community participation, inclusion and exclusion criteria were put in place during the literature searches, however, to ensure all relevant articles were included this criteria was broad. To be included in the first sample the following criteria had to be met: (1) the article was peer-reviewed, (2) published in English, (3) full text was available to download and (4) published in a scholarly journal (see Fig. 1).

After the initial search of articles was undertaken, a second process of analysis was undertaken to determine the final sample of articles to be included in the review. Although many of the articles initially mentioned the term 'brand community/ies', in their abstract, only 178 focussed specifically on defining, explaining or analysing brand communities. These 178 articles were further analysed, and those that did not examine antecedents or consequences of brand community participation were excluded from the sample ($n = 137$). The final sample examined consisted of 41 articles.

Coding and analysis

Information was extracted and compiled from each individual article chosen for the final sample. The information collected included, but was not limited to, the following: year of publication, type of article (quantitative, qualitative or conceptual), research design, brand community form of focus, geographical context, brand community participation definition used, antecedents studied, consequences examined, and major findings. This information was compiled in a spreadsheet to create a comprehensive summary of all information used for this study.

Analysis and results

The analysis and results have been categorised into five subsections. Specifically, these subsections discuss the (1) publication activity, (2) research design, (3) brand community forms, (4) brand community participation definitions, and (5) antecedents and consequences of brand community participation.

Publication activity

This subsection discusses the publication activity with regard to the 41 articles chosen for review. The final sample of articles emerged from over a decade of research (2006–2016, see Fig. 2, note the articles were complied in mid-2016). Whilst the literature on brand communities
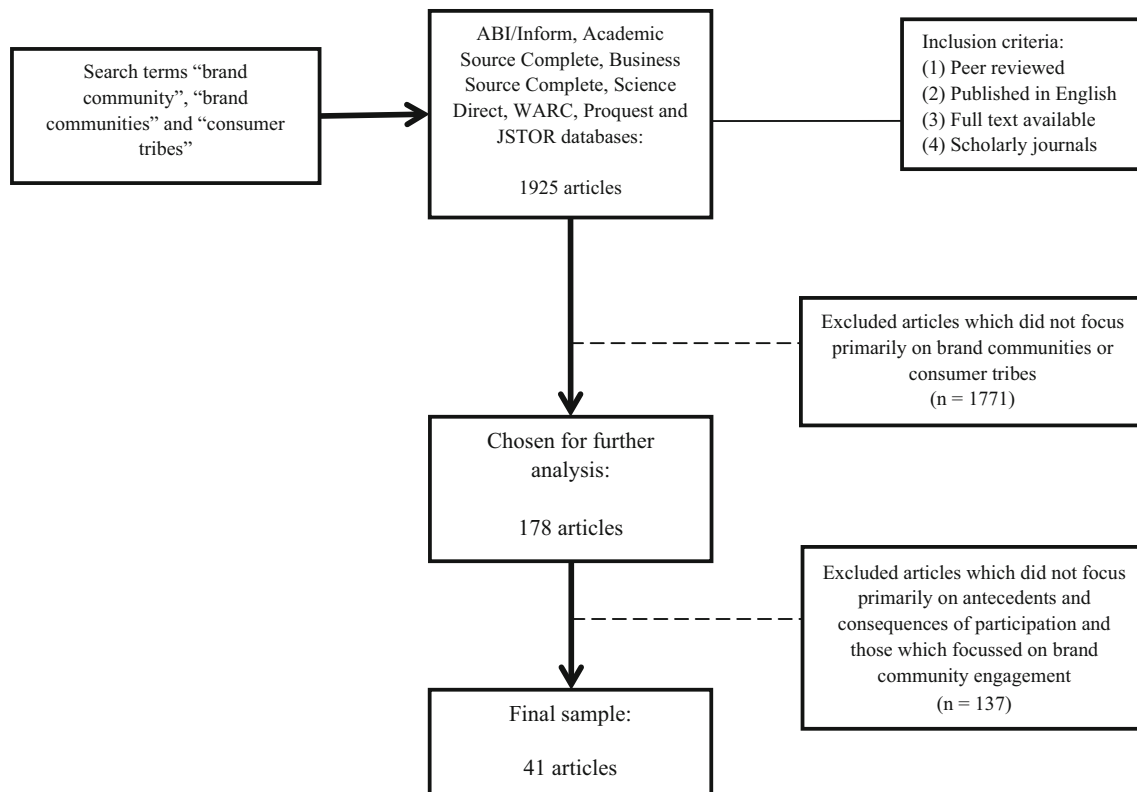
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┌─────────────────────┐       ┌─────────────────────┐       ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Search terms "brand │       │ ABI/Inform, Academic│       │ Inclusion criteria: │
│ community", "brand  │──────▶│ Source Complete,    │───────│ (1) Peer reviewed   │
│ communities" and    │       │ Business Source     │       │ (2) Published in    │
│ "consumer tribes"   │       │ Complete, Science   │       │     English         │
│                     │       │ Direct, WARC,       │       │ (3) Full text       │
│                     │       │ Proquest and JSTOR  │       │     available       │
│                     │       │ databases:          │       │ (4) Scholarly       │
│                     │       │ 1925 articles       │       │     journals        │
└─────────────────────┘       └─────────────────────┘       └─────────────────────┘
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Fig. 1 Selection of articles process

- ABI/Inform, Academic Source Complete, Business Source Complete, Science Direct, WARC, Proquest and JSTOR databases: 1925 articles
- Inclusion criteria: (1) Peer reviewed (2) Published in English (3) Full text available (4) Scholarly journals
- Excluded articles which did not focus primarily on brand communities or consumer tribes (n = 1771)
- Chosen for further analysis: 178 articles
- Excluded articles which did not focus primarily on antecedents and consequences of participation and those which focussed on brand community engagement (n = 137)
- Final sample: 41 articles

Fig. 1 Selection of articles process
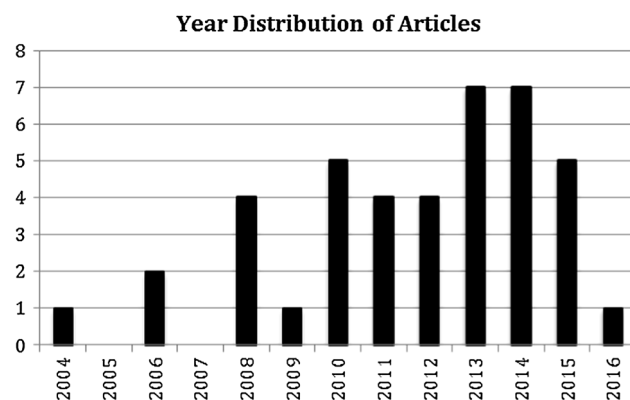
Year Distribution of Articles

Fig. 2 Year distribution of articles

began earlier with Muniz et al. (2001) seminal article introducing and defining brand communities, studies started investigating brand community participation more specifically in 2006 (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Shang et al. 2006). Brand community participation received low and uneven attention until 2010. Since 2010, there has been a steady publication of articles on brand community participation, with 24 of the 41 articles (59%) published since 2010.

Research design

This subsection provides an overview of the research methodology of the brand community literature analysed in this review. From the 41 articles, only two (2) were conceptual (Madupu and Cooley 2010a; Zhou and Amin 2014), with the rest taking an empirical approach (n = 39). Of these, four took a qualitative approach (Enginkaya and Yılmaz 2014; Goulding et al. 2013; Mitchell and Imrie 2011; Morandin et al. 2013), three used mixed methods (Taute and Sierra 2014; Royo-Vela and Casamassima 2011; Tsai et al. 2012), and 32 applied quantitative techniques only (e.g. Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Manthiou et al. 2014; Shang et al. 2006). Of those articles that took a quantitative or mixed method approach, all studies were cross-sectional in nature. The high number of empirical articles highlights researchers' preference for empirical evidence in brand community research, making greater theoretical and more generalisable findings.

High-involvement products were the most commonly studied, with a number examining technology brands, e.g. *Apple*, *Samsung* and *Sony* (Habibi et al. 2016; Shang et al. 2006; Wang et al. 2013, 2015), and car brands, e.g. *Harley-Davidson*, *Ford* and *Mazda* (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Marzocchi et al. 2013; Morandin et al. 2013; Zhou et al. 2013). At the other end of the scale, fast food brand

communities were also found in the final sample of articles (e.g. Habibi et al. 2016; Manthiou et al. 2014).

The majority of articles used a sample of respondents from Asian countries ($n = 19$), with China being the most common (e.g. Zhou and Amin 2014; Zhou et al. 2012), seven used an American sample (e.g. Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Carlson et al. 2008; Habibi et al. 2016; Manthiou et al. 2014), and five were based in European countries (e.g. Casaló et al. 2008; Sánchez-Franco et al. 2012). Interestingly, only one study employed a sample from the Pacific-region countries, specifically New Zealand (Mitchell and Imrie 2011), and only one from Africa (Mzoughi et al. 2010). Five studies investigated a range of countries in their sample (e.g. Dholakia et al. 2004; Morandin et al. 2013; Royo-Vela and Casamassima 2011), and the remaining three did not specify where their sample was geographically based (Habibi et al. 2016; Madupu and Cooley 2010a; Woisetschläger et al. 2008).

Observation of the sample demographics used throughout the entire final sample found that brand community participation has only been examined for adult community members. Brands and product categories that arguably appeal to children, in addition to adults, were studied such as *Nike* (Jung et al. 2014), football teams (Woisetschläger et al. 2008) and theme parks (Carlson et al. 2008). However, relationships for child-participants were not explored. Although two of the studies employed a student sample (Manthiou et al. 2014; Sánchez-Franco et al. 2012), the youngest age for these participants was 18.

Brand community forms

When observing the 41 articles studied, four forms of brand communities were found: offline, online, virtual, and social-media-based. An offline brand community constitutes the in-person face-to-face meetings of community members united around a focal brand, with infrequent interaction, and a high level of involvement required from the brand itself (e.g. *'Camp Jeep'* see McAlexander et al. 2002). Online brand communities, on the other hand, have no geographical limitations and are instead located in an online, or virtual environment where members share information about a common brand (Jang et al. 2008; Lee et al. 2011; Madupu and Cooley 2010b). Participation in online brand communities occurs in ways not possible for offline brand communities, with members able to participate via instant photo and video sharing at a global scale, as well as through discussions among members without talking face-to-face (Zaglia 2013). These online communities have also been termed virtual brand communities. A virtual brand community is a social group originating on the internet where information exchange occurs around one focal brand (Casaló et al. 2008). The definitions of both

online and virtual brand communities emphasise the importance of exchanging information about a focal brand (Jang et al. 2008; Lee et al. 2011; Wang et al. 2012). As the two terms refer to the same overarching concept, for this review only the term 'online brand community' will be used to refer to both online and virtual brand communities.

Lastly, social-media-based brand communities are formed on social media platforms such as '*Facebook*' (Habibi et al. 2016) and '*Weibo*' (Luo et al. 2015). Social media platforms are capable of hosting multiple branded communities simultaneously, unlike online brand communities where only one brand is the focus (Shang et al. 2006). For example, '*Facebook*' hosts millions of brand communities (De Vries et al. 2012). Across the three brand community forms, studies have been undertaken to investigate why individuals participate and how their participation impacts their behaviours.

Online brand communities ($n = 19$, e.g. Casaló et al. 2008; Chen and Ku 2013; Hur et al. 2011) were the most discussed in the sample, with less attention given to offline ($n = 13$, e.g. Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Carlson et al. 2008; Tsai et al. 2012), and social-media-based brand communities ($n = 9$, e.g. Sánchez-Franco et al. 2012; Sung et al. 2010; Zhang et al. 2015). Although social-media-based brand communities had only nine articles in the final sample, there appears to be a current trend towards research on this form of community. All the social-media-based brand community articles in the final sample were recently published (2010-present), compared with the other brand community forms (2006-present). Upon further examination of the publishing dates of the final sample, interest in online brand community research (online and social media) appears to be increasing, with 16 of the sample articles published since 2012.

Brand community participation definition

Various terms were used throughout the 41 articles to explain brand community participation. Although there was some variation in terms used, key features were evidenced. Firstly, social intention forms the basis of participation and therefore has been used to measure brand community participation (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Mzoughi et al. 2010; Zhou et al. 2013). In other words, the intention to participate provides evidence of participation occurring (e.g. Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Mzoughi et al. 2010). The notion that intention can be used as an indicator of participation is important as in some brand communities, such as those using online mediums, member participation can be hard to observe (Shang et al. 2006). Participation in online brand communities need not be visible, as participation can involve 'lurking' or browsing the brand community without visible interactions occurring (Madupu and

Cooley 2010a; Shang et al. 2006). Participation has also been measured based on observable behaviours, such as involvement in activities (Sánchez-Franco et al. 2012; Tsai et al. 2012; Wang et al. 2012), and providing help to other members (Casaló et al. 2008). By providing help to others (Casaló et al. 2008), and actively involving in the brand community (Sánchez-Franco et al. 2012; Tsai et al. 2012; Wang et al. 2012), members are not only participating, but it is suggested they are also committing to the community. Although the term 'brand community commitment' is consistently studied in isolation from brand community participation, there appears to be a conceptual and empirical overlap across these two concepts. Specifically, brand community commitment refers to a members desire to sustain relationships formed within the brand community (Zhou et al. 2012). This is achieved by revisiting the community and exchanging information among members (Munnukka et al. 2015; Zhou et al. 2012). These elements all involve continued brand community participation, and therefore it is argued that brand community participation and brand community commitment both are indicators of participation.

Evidence that brand community participation and brand community commitment have the same core components can be seen when examining the specific measures used in prior research (e.g. Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Mzoughi et al. 2010; Tsai et al. 2012). Item similarity is seen when examining the constructs used to measure brand community participation and brand community commitment. Brand community participation items include statements such as 'I intend to participate in activities…' (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Mzoughi et al. 2010) and 'I actively participate in brand community activities' (Tsai et al. 2012). In comparison, brand community commitment items include statements related to, or explicitly involving participation such as 'I will exchange information and opinions with brand community members' (Hur et al. 2011; Jang et al. 2008) and 'I am motivated to participate actively' (Hur et al. 2011; Munnukka et al. 2015). The overlapping nature of brand community participation and commitment constructs requires researchers to clearly distinguish the two constructs in order to establish construct validity. Based on these findings, the terms brand community participation and brand community commitment will be treated synonymously for this review, and will be hereafter only referred to as 'brand community participation'.

Antecedents and consequences

This final subsection discusses the antecedents and consequences of brand community participation identified in the 41 articles studied. A large range of antecedents and consequences were examined in detail. After examining all the articles, categories were developed with relation to the focal area of each respective antecedent and consequence of brand community participation studied. Five categories of antecedents were found, and three categories of consequences, these are discussed below. Table 1 presents a summary of all the review findings, in decending order of frequency for each element. The results are grouped by form of brand community (offline, online and social-media-based).

Antecedents

Five categories of antecedents were found and were termed, in order of overall prominence among the articles: self-related ($n = 44$), social-related ($n = 34$), information-related ($n = 24$), entertainment-related ($n = 8$) and technology-related ($n = 3$). These categories were decided upon based on the main focus of the construct in question, and as interpreted by the original author/s. These categories are discussed separately; however, they are, by nature, all interconnected. From simply looking at the prominence of the categories of antecedents found, it can be seen that self-related, social-related, and information-related have had the biggest impact and influence in brand community literature; however, each category of antecedents presents useful insights into brand community participation.

Interestingly, all but one of these categories (technology-related) take the perspective of the individual looking to participate in the community (consumer perspective). This shows that the main focus of the literature to date has been to study antecedents from the perspective of the consumer, rather than other viewpoints, such as the brand itself. One paper, however, uniquely addressed this brand-based perspective (Veloutsou and Moutinho 2009), investigating the impact of brand-related antecedents such as 'brand reputation' and 'social visibility of the brand'. Since this was the only paper found to take this perspective, more research should be done in this area, in particular looking at these brand-related antecedents for different forms of brand communities (online, offline, and social-media-based).

Self-related antecedents

The most commonly examined antecedent category was the self-related antecedents, referring to those aspects that are to do with the individuals themselves. These antecedents looked at either how the individual (the consumer looking to participate in the community) perceives they relate to the brand community, or the personal benefits they will gain from participation. The importance of identity,

Table 1 Summary of findings

Offline brand community (n = 13)	Frequency	Online brand community (n = 19)	Frequency	Social-media-based brand community (n = 9)	Frequency
Antecedents					
Self-related	20	Information-related	17	Self-related	8
Social-related	12	Social-related	16	Social-related	6
Information-related	2	Self-related	16	Information-related	5
Entertainment-related	1	Entertainment-related	5	Entertainment-related	2
Technology-related	0	Technology-related	2	Technology-related	1
Consequences					
Brand-related	8	Brand Community-related	17	Brand-related	6
Brand community-related	4	Brand-related	11	Brand Community-related	2
Social-related	4	Social-related	6	Social-related	2
Geographical context					
Americas	4	Asia	11	Asia	5
Asia	3	Multiple	3	Europe	2
Europe	2	Americas	2	Americas	1
Multiple	2	Not Specified	2	Not Specified	1
Africa	1	Europe	1	Africa	0
Australia/Pacific	1	Australia/Pacific	0	Australia/Pacific	0
Not specified	0	Africa	0	Multiple	0
Research method					
Quantitative	8	Quantitative	16	Quantitative	8
Qualitative	3	Conceptual	2	Qualitative	1
Mixed	2	Mixed	1	Mixed	0
Conceptual	0	Qualitative	0	Conceptual	0
Sample demographics					
Adult	8	Adult	17	Adult	6
Student	0	Student	0	Student	3
Children	0	Children	0	Children	0

and the formation of an individual's social identity within the brand community context was found throughout the brand community literature sample (e.g. Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Morandin et al. 2013; Mzoughi et al. 2010) and was the most common self-related antecedent of brand community participation found. Social identity refers to when an individual sees themselves as part of the group (brand community) and feels an emotional significance by being part of that group (Tajfel 1978). Social identity is strongly connected to the social-related category of antecedents; however, since identification is primarily about how the individual sees themselves in relation to the community group, this was seen as a self-related antecedent rather than a social-related antecedent.

Zhang et al.'s (2015) study identified a unique self-related antecedent to participation, in the context of social-media-based brand communities: 'information technology habit', referring to an individual's use of certain information technology based on prior behaviours. When an

individual uses a social media platform (e.g. 'Facebook') on a daily basis, and has done so for some time, this habit will influence their participation in a social-media-based brand community. The individual would be more likely to participate in a social-media-based brand community on 'Facebook' if there is already an established behaviour of using the 'Facebook' platform (Zhang et al. 2015).

Other self-related antecedents found included attitude (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006), and self-related motives for participating in the brand community, such as self-discovery (Dholakia et al. 2004; Madupu and Cooley 2010b, 2010b), and rewards (Jang et al. 2008; Sung et al. 2010; Zhou and Amin 2014). These rewards refer to incentives offered to consumers to encourage participation, such as coupons and special offers (Sung et al. 2010), termed by some as 'opportunity seeking' (Enginkaya and Yılmaz 2014), and present an interesting dilemma. Although rewards and incentives were found to have a strong positive impact on participation, when looking at the overall

effect on participation outcomes, incentive seeking displayed the weakest relationship to loyalty (Sung et al. 2010). This suggesting the inclusion of incentives to members is not enough for an effective brand community, and other factors, perhaps social-related antecedents, are also needed.

Social-related antecedents

The second most common category of antecedents examined was social-related. The main focus of these antecedents is on the interpersonal relationships formed within a brand community, termed 'social benefits' that a member will desire from the brand community (Jung et al. 2014; Kuo and Feng 2013), or 'social needs' (Wang et al. 2012). The ability to form relationships and connect with other individuals who are devoted to the brand is a key antecedent to brand community participation. Related to this notion is the culture that is shared between members (Zhou and Amin 2014), and the support given by community members (Sánchez-Franco et al. 2012); with these also acting as antecedents to participation.

The impact of trust on brand community participation was first identified in the online brand community sample, the need to establish a trust in the community and its current members (Casaló et al. 2008). With the brand community residing in the online environment, the issue of trust arises as it is harder for the member to establish trust, due to a lack of face-to-face interactions (Shang et al. 2006). Many studies in the online contexts (online and social-media-based) have acknowledged that consumers need to establish trust prior to participation (Casaló et al. 2008; Chen and Ku 2013; Hur et al. 2011; Shang et al. 2006; Tsai et al. 2012); however, no offline brand community studies have noted this.

The approval of others is also highlighted as an antecedent, for all forms of brand communities, through the term 'subjective norms' (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Mzoughi et al. 2010). If important others of the individual, such as friends and family, approve of the brand community and its members there is a stronger likelihood of participation occurring. This is drawn from the theory of reasoned action that has been applied in the brand community literature (e.g. Mzoughi et al. 2010).

Information-related antecedents

The third category of antecedents was concerned with the information members could gain from the brand community (information-related). Members seek a brand community with the expectation of receiving information about the products or services of the brand in return (e.g. Jung et al. 2014; Kuo and Feng 2013; Madupu and Cooley 2010a, 2010b). Studies identified simply the 'informational benefit' (Jung et al. 2014) or 'information need' (Madupu and Cooley 2010a; Wang et al. 2012) that individuals desire from the community. A related aspect identified was the quality of information given (Chen and Ku 2013; Jang et al. 2008; Zhang et al. 2015; Zhou and Amin 2014) whereby a higher perceived quality leads to greater participation.

Interestingly, the information-related antecedents appear to be less important for offline brand communities, with only two studies identifying information-related antecedents. In contrast, a large number of information-related antecedents were discovered for online brand communities, with this being the largest category of antecedent for this form of brand community. Social-media-based brand communities also had a fairly high number, taking into account the sample size, compared to offline. This could signify that participants in offline community contexts are seeking more social and self-related benefits rather than informational and that participants in online community contexts demand more informational benefits from the community. This finding highlights that consumers desire different things, depending on the form of community in question.

Entertainment-related antecedents

Entertainment-related antecedents were also found, across all types of brand communities. Individuals expect a level of entertainment, and entertainment-related benefits, from the brand community (Madupu and Cooley 2010a). Although these antecedents were not as commonly found as the previous three categories (self-, social- and information-related), these antecedents provide interesting insights into brand community participation.

Termed simply entertainment value (Dholakia et al. 2004) or hedonic benefits (Kuo and Feng 2013), the level of enjoyment or fun that a member can have in the brand community has been evidenced as an antecedent to participation across all community forms. These entertainment-related motives, however, are more prevalent in online brand communities, rather than offline or social-media-based. This could either imply that entertainment is not a key antecedent or that more research on entertainment-related antecedents is needed in these contexts (offline and social-media-based). Since the information-related category presents a much larger percentage of the antecedents across all types of communities, there is evidence to suggest that the need for consumers to gain information rather than entertainment is more important.

Technology-related antecedents

A category unique to the online-oriented brand communities (online and social-media-based) was the technology-related category. This category, in contrast to the other four, is concerned with the design and features of the community itself, rather than the individual members or benefits the brand community provides. These technology-related features of a brand community, even though they may be uncontrollable by the brand itself (e.g. social media platforms for social-media-based brand communities), can act as antecedents to brand community participation. In addition, the quality of the system used to run the brand community can also be an antecedent to participation (Jang et al. 2008; Zhou and Amin 2014). This category is the least frequently used throughout the sample, implying that these technology-related features are not as important as the other categories of antecedents. However, these features can still influence brand community participation and should not be ignored.

Consequences

In relation to the consequences of brand community participation, three categories were discovered. These were, in order of prominence: brand-related ($n = 25$), brand community-related ($n = 23$) and social-related ($n = 12$). Although each category is distinct, they are all interconnected. Most studies viewed consequences in terms of positive implications towards the brand (i.e. consequences from the perspective of the company). The only study in the current sample found to take a different view was Wang et al. (2013), who studied consequences from the view of the customer, or members of the brand community. Interestingly, these consequences (cognitive, social-integrative, personal-integrative and affective) can fit into the antecedent categories developed by this study (cognitive—information-related, social-integrative—social-related, personal-integrative—self-related, affective—entertainment-related). This was the only study that explored this context of consequences, emphasising more research is needed on member-related consequences.

Brand-related consequences

Brand-related consequences were the most prominent consequences throughout the sample analysed, and more especially for offline and social-media-based brand communities. A popular perspective many brand community studies have taken is concerned with the influence participation has on the brand as a whole (brand-related consequences).

With a very high interest in the marketing field generally, it is unsurprising that the subject of brand loyalty is of much interest in brand community literature and was the most studied brand-related consequence (e.g. Habibi et al. 2016; Jang et al. 2008; Luo et al. 2015; Madupu and Cooley 2010a; Munnukka et al. 2015; Scarpi 2010). Brand community participation was consistently found to positively influence brand loyalty (e.g. Munnukka et al. 2015; Scarpi 2010). This area has even been extended to investigate 'oppositional brand loyalty', that suggests brand community members have such a high loyalty to the brand that they will strongly oppose competing brands (Madupu and Cooley 2010a). Purchase and repurchase intentions were other brand-related consequences found, with participation having a strong positive effect on both (e.g. Ho 2015; Lee et al. 2011; Munnukka et al. 2015).

Brand Community-related consequences

With the highest frequency of consequences for online brand communities, brand community-related consequences have received a lot of attention in the literature. These consequences are concerned with the influence that member participation has on the brand community itself, rather than the brand more generally. Interestingly, all brand community-related consequences were seen from the perspective of positive influences, with a clear avoidance of potential negative effects that could occur. This category of consequences included factors such as commitment to the community (Casaló et al. 2008; Hedlund 2014; Kuo and Feng 2013; Munnukka et al. 2015; Royo-Vela and Casamassima 2011; Zhou and Amin 2014), integrating into the community (Sánchez-Franco et al. 2012), and a loyalty to the brand community (Chen and Ku 2013; Woisetschläger et al. 2008). These brand community-related consequences were found for all forms of brand communities; however, significantly more attention has been given in this category to online brand communities. This implies that a key outcome of online brand communities is to create a loyalty to the community itself, as well as the brand, whereas for offline and social-media-based brand communities the emphasis is more directed towards brand-related consequences, such as brand loyalty and purchase intentions. However, this is only one interpretation and more research into this finding is needed.

Social-related consequences

The last category of consequences found was social-related, referring to the actions of brand community members to talk to others about the brand and the brand community, after participating in the community themselves. These social-related consequences focused on the notion of word-of-mouth and recommendation to others, terms used synonymously in the brand community literature (e.g. Hedlund 2014; Hur et al. 2011). Unique terms employed by Scarpi (2010), 'brand evangelism' and 'community evangelism', also refer to these concepts. These social-related consequences, by nature, directly link to the other two categories, as they are concerned with informing others about both the brand and the brand community.

Although these social-related consequences appear to have a positive impact on the brand, there is the possibility that social activities of members can be negative in nature, rather than positive (Luo et al. 2015). Word-of-mouth is difficult to control, and there is the high possibility that negative, as well as positive, word-of-mouth can occur as a consequence of brand community participation, especially in the context of social-media-based brand communities (Luo et al. 2015). Interestingly, the majority of studies avoided this issue with attention focussed on the positive implications word-of-mouth can have for a brand and its brand community (e.g. Hedlund 2014; Munnukka et al. 2015; Woisetschläger et al. 2008).

Hur et al. (2011) focussed on a somewhat negative social-related consequence, 'constructive complaints'. These 'constructive complaints' refer to members complaining about the brand as a consequence of participation (a seemingly negative perspective), however, in a form that brands can then use to improve the product or service in question (turning the negative reaction into a positive outcome). So, although in some forms this is a negative consequence of participation, this was viewed from a positive perspective for the brand, rather than negative (Hur et al. 2011).

Dual nature variables

An important note to make is that this review has discussed the antecedents and consequences in terms of how the original authors viewed them; however, there are multiple ways to view each respective antecedent and consequence. For example, Kuo and Feng (2013) investigated certain benefits that a brand community can provide for its members. These benefits are identified by Kuo and Feng (2013) as antecedents in the context of the study, that is, consumers are more likely to participate in a brand community

if they perceive that the brand community would provide certain benefits to them. However, these could also be viewed as a consequence of participation, i.e. an individual will gain benefits from participation in the community (Wang et al. 2013). This is just one example of a dual nature variable (can be both an antecedent and a consequence), and there are many variables in the brand community literature that could fit into this criterion. 'Community integration', studied as a consequence (Sánchez-Franco et al. 2012), is similar to such concepts as identification with the community, commonly seen as an antecedent, not a consequence (Carlson et al. 2008; Madupu and Cooley 2010a; Marzocchi et al. 2013).

This presents an issue of much confusion when examining the brand community literature, as variables can be both antecedents and consequences, depending upon the perspective taken. These dual nature variables present a challenge to both practitioners and academics alike, and warrant further investigation.

Future research directions

The findings of this review highlight multiple avenues for future research. The following sections discuss suggested future research in the area of brand community participation, with specific research questions proposed.

Arising from the overlap found between the terms 'brand community participation' and 'brand community commitment', there is a need to better define these constructs. As identified from this review, an examination of the measures used for each term reveals that the two terms have been measured similarly (e.g. Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Mzoughi et al. 2010; Tsai et al. 2012). The similarity in terms raises the issue of construct validity, which needs to be addressed. Future research needs to analyse the terms 'brand community participation' and 'brand community commitment' together, rather than in isolation as evidenced by the articles studied in this review. To address this need, the following research question is proposed:

RQ1 What are the conceptual and empirical differences between 'brand community participation' and 'brand community commitment'?

As identified in the results, none of the final sample employed child-age participants. Children, as young as five, are participating in brand communities when talking with peers about brands at school (Chaplin and John 2005). Some brands are also employing online brand communities targeted specifically for children including: *Lego* (Lego 2016), *Moshi Monsters* (Mind Candy 2016), and *Mattel's Barbie* (Mattel 2016). Children participate in brand communities, based on exploratory studies (Flurry et al. 2014);

however, their behaviour and the impact of the factors that influence their participation remain unknown, with no research investigating the antecedents and consequences, as evidenced by this review. Studies have investigated child-brand relationships (e.g. Chaplin and John 2005; Chaplin and Lowrey 2010; Ji 2002, 2008); however, these also did not specifically examine the area of brand communities, or antecedents and consequences of brand community participation.

Whilst adult-orientated research may guide the understanding of brand community participation, it is argued that differences in socio-emotional (Cicchetti and Cohen 2006), and cognitive skills (Piaget 1972) could impact a child's brand community participation. Children participate in brand communities and have a substantial impact in the marketplace (Gorn and Florsheim 1985), however, have cognitive and socio-emotional differences to that of adults and therefore should be studied in a brand community context. To address this need, three separate, yet related, research questions are proposed as a starting point to understand child-participants in brand communities:

RQ2 What are the antecedents to children participating in brand communities?
RQ3 What are the consequences of children participating in brand communities?
RQ4 Do the antecedents and consequences of brand community participation differ between adult- and child-participants?

The findings of this review show that a majority of brand community studies focussed on an Asian context, with limited attention on other geographical contexts, especially Pacific regions (such as Australia and New Zealand), and African regions. Due to this, a need arises for future research to investigate whether or not these Asian context findings can be applied to other geographical contexts. One study has already provided evidence that these contexts are more dissimilar than similar (Madupu and Cooley 2010b). This study compared the contexts of India and America, finding that cultural differences significantly affected antecedents and consequences of brand community participation (Madupu and Cooley 2010b). However, this is the only study to be undertaken that compares geographical contexts found by the current review, signifying more research can, and should be done in this area. To address this, the following research question is proposed:

RQ5 Do the antecedents and consequences of brand community participation differ across cultural contexts?

The majority of studies examined by this review focussed on antecedents taken from the perspective of the customer, that is, what does the customer want or desire from the brand community. Although this is important for both practitioners and academics to understand, there are other perspectives that should be taken into account. Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) were the only authors to look at the antecedents of brand community participation from a brand-related perspective, in an offline community only. Due to the limited research conducted thus far on perspectives other than the customer, it is suggested that future studies examine this further, through the following research question:

RQ6 What roles do other perspectives (e.g. brand, company, lurker customer, active customer) play on antecedents to brand community participation, across all forms of brand communities?

Even though the self-related antecedents of incentives and rewards were highlighted in this review, there is evidence to suggest these antecedents do not have as strong of an influence on brand community participation as other antecedents identified. This finding warrants an investigation into whether or not incentives and rewards alone are enough to influence participation, or, as this review suggests, other self-related and social-related antecedents are needed for participation to occur. To address this, the following research question is advised:

RQ7 How effective are incentives and rewards (self-related antecedents) as antecedents to brand community participation?

The finding of this review suggests that the categories of antecedents were not found to be consistently prominent across all forms of brand communities, highlighting that consumers may desire different benefits and features depending upon the form of brand community they are interested in participating in. A study comparing the desires of consumers across all three forms of brand communities (offline, online, and social-media-based) would shed light on this issue. These findings would especially help practitioners when developing a brand community. If certain benefits are more important for online than offline for example, such as information-related as this review suggests, developers should emphasise and feature these information-related benefits.

In addition, the entertainment-related antecedents were found to be more prominent in online brand communities, which could suggest these benefits are also highly valued by members. However, due to the small amount of antecedents found in the entertainment-related antecedents for offline and social-media-based contexts, more research should be done before confirming this proposition. Future studies should examine entertainment-related antecedents in offline and social-media-based brand communities. To aid future studies in on this issue, two research questions are suggested:

RQ8 How do the desires of brand community members differ between forms of brand communities (offline, online, and social-media-based)?

RQ9 How do entertainment-related antecedents influence brand community participation in offline and social-media-based brand communities?

Based on the findings of the self-related antecedent category, trust was only identified as an antecedent for online brand community participation. Due to the fact the brand community is located online and not face-to-face, it is suggested trust is difficult to establish in the online environment (Casaló et al. 2008). In an offline brand community, members meet face-to-face and can even interact directly with the brand (Marzocchi et al. 2013). Trust is built on interactions between individuals and can be developed more quickly when interactions are face-to-face, rather than online (Gefen and Straub 2004). When the community is online, individuals have less information about other members (Casaló et al. 2008) and, therefore, it is suggested trust needs to be established prior to participation, based on prior brand experiences outside of the brand community context. In offline brand communities, it is proposed that trust is assumed, or quick to develop due to face-to-face interactions (McAlexander et al. 2002), and therefore not an antecedent. Future research will need to investigate the antecedent of trust in terms of offline brand communities to confirm or disprove these propositions. The following research question is offered for future studies:

RQ10 How does trust impact offline, online, and social-media-based brand community participation, respectively?

A category of antecedents discovered by this review was technology-related antecedents. These were aspects such as the design and layout of online and social-media-based brand communities. These technology-related antecedents were only found for online and social-media-based communities, which is understandable as only these forms are dependent upon technology to operate. However, what is more interesting is that no design-related antecedents were found for offline brand communities. There are arguably design-related features that could act as antecedents for offline brand communities, for example the format of gatherings, and the systems in place to communicate with members during and outside of meetings. Future research should explore what design-related antecedents there are for offline brand communities and how much they ultimately influence participation, with the following research question provided as a starting point:

RQ11 How do design-related antecedents influence offline brand community participation?

The majority of consequences found by this review related to the brand (brand-, brand community-, and social-related). Only one study was found to look at consequences from the perspective of the members of the brand community (Wang et al. 2013). Even the antecedents found by the current study suggest there are a number of member-related consequences that could occur from participation. Factors like social identity, entertainment, and information benefits could all arguably be viewed from a member's perspective as consequences. For example, a social identity can be formed due to participating in the brand community, and benefits can be gained from participation. These were reinforced by the member-related consequences found by Wang (2013) as they could be grouped into the five antecedent categories developed by this review. To aid future studies on this issue, the following research question is proposed:

RQ12 What are the member-related consequences of brand community participation, across all forms of brand communities (offline, online, and social-media-based)?

Based on this review, there is a suggestion that to achieve brand community-related consequences, online brand communities are the most appropriate form to take, and for brand-related consequences the best choice is a social-media-based or offline brand community. However, due to the lack of studies comparing different forms of brand communities it is hard to determine whether or not this assumption, that certain consequences are more likely depending upon the type of community, is correct. Drawing from this, the following research question is proposed for future studies:

RQ13 How does the form of community (offline, online, or social-media-based) influence the consequences of brand community participation?

All articles studied were cross-sectional in nature, with none employing a longitudinal research design. This highlights that the long-term consequences of brand community participation are yet to be accurately captured. A comparative study, with a longitudinal research design, would be helpful to practitioners planning to develop a brand community, yet unsure as to which form (offline, online, or social-media-based) provides stronger positive brand-related consequences in the long-term. Future research should investigate the following research question:

RQ14 What are the long-term consequences of brand community participation?

As evidenced by this review, there has been very little attention given to examine whether brand communities can have negative consequences, as well as positive. Of all the

articles studied, none looked at the negative consequences of brand community participation. Although this is understandable, as practitioners are arguably more interested in positive consequences, rather than negative, research into this area could provide very valuable information. An exploratory study should explore the extent to which brand community participation can lead to negative consequences for a brand; for example, when word-of-mouth is used in a negative manner, which has already been evidenced in offline brand communities (Hickman and Ward 2007; Luo et al. 2015; Phillips-Melancon and Dalakas 2014). It is likely that there are more negative consequences than just social-related and hence more research should be done in this area, specifically addressing the following:

> RQ15 What are the negative consequences (for all brand community stakeholders, e.g. community participants, the company) of brand community participation, across all forms of brand communities?

One issue highlighted by this review was dual nature variables, which are those variables that can act as both antecedents to participation and consequences from participation, depending upon the perspective taken. These variables present an issue of confusion currently in the literature, as each author usually takes only a one-sided view of the variable, without acknowledgment of the other views that can be taken. This makes a comparison of findings across brand community studies very difficult. The development of a new term to describe these dual nature variables could help aid this confusion and current difficulty, helping practitioners and academics alike. Future research should look into these dual nature variables and provide better definitions for these variables in terms of brand communities, with the following research question suggested as a starting point for future studies:

> RQ16 What role do dual nature variables play in brand communities?

Limitations

Although a thorough literature review has been undertaken, the nature of a literature review presents an overarching limitation to the current, and all, literature reviews. A review entails an examination and consolidation of only the findings that have been published. Hence if a specific issue is less discussed in the reviewed literature, it is difficult to establish whether this issue is less relevant or, alternatively, whether there has been a lack of empirical focus. For example, in the current review some antecedents and consequences were less prevalent than others (e.g.

entertainment-related antecedents). There is not enough evidence to conclude that these entertainment-related antecedents are less important for brand community participation, or whether there is a lack of research on entertainment-related antecedents. All reviews cannot conclusively determine whether the findings uncovered are due to an empirical or researcher-based explanation.

Conclusion

A total of 1925 articles were analysed as part of a literature review on brand community participation. The examined final sample consisted of 41 articles examining three forms: offline, online, and social-media-based brand communities. Multiple insights were found with regards to the antecedents and consequences of brand community participation. Firstly, five categories of antecedents were developed, based on an analysis of all 41 articles, these categories were: self-related, social-related, information-related, entertainment-related and technology-related. Secondly, three categories of consequences were developed, which were: brand-related, brand community-related, and social-related. From an analysis of these categories of antecedents and consequences, future research avenues were highlighted, through the formation of research questions. These research questions can act as a guide for future studies in the field of brand communities.

This review has consolidated the findings of brand community participation literature, presenting findings useful for both academics and practitioners. The findings of this study will be helpful to academics as antecedents and consequences of brand community participation have been summarised and many future research directions have been identified to aid studies in the field. The findings will also be useful to practitioners when developing brand communities as the findings provide a better understanding of why consumers participate in brand communities and what this participation can result in for brands.

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