

Building City Brand through Social Media: The Effect of Social Media Brand Community on Brand Image

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ABSTRACT

The recent transition from city marketing to city branding heralds a new era of representation and signification of cities as brands where conscious and planned practices are used to promote them as any other economic commodity. Given the tremendous impact of social media on brand image, city branding has to embrace this new channel to promote their cities as brands. On social media platforms users forming a brand community can significantly influence the brand image by co-creating the user-generated contents. Today, users search for information online and their behaviors and responses are influenced by online social networks and community practices. In addition they perceive information from online social community highly credible and useful. As traditional firm generated information is losing its persuasive power to social media, it is never late for managers of city branding to embark on social media platforms to support online social media brand communities which in turn would influence city brand image positively by engaging users. Social media provides an excellent platform for users to form social media brand communities, where they can share inside knowledge and discuss about brands. The greater credibility of user generated contents on these platforms can significantly influence the user perception about the brands. The focus of this paper is to investigate challenges and opportunities of online social media brand communities in influencing brand image.

1. INTRODUCTION

The practice of place marketing and promotion is not new as since the nineteenth century urban places around the world are trying to sell themselves as ‘tourist attractions’, ‘cultural capitals’, and ‘world cities’ to vie for competitive place advantage where place acts as a marketable commodity of leisure, heritage, and culture (Ward, 1998). This practice led to city marketing which is defined as, “...to create strategies to promote an area or the entire city for certain activities and in some cases to ‘sell’ parts of the city for living, consuming, and productive activities,” (Smyth, 2005). Thus, marketing started to play a key role in intensifying the competition for inward investment, tourism revenues and residents at various spatial scales (Kotler, Asplund, Rein, & Heider, 1999). As a part of various marketing strategies city marketing used wide range of promotional campaigns such as logo, slogans, advertising, public relations, subsidies, tax breaks, ‘flagship development¹’ projects, architectural design, trade fairs, cultural and sporting events, heritage, public art, and culture to market their cities (Ward, 1998).

The deep penetration of marketing into the board room of cities’ policy makers started with the concept of ‘entrepreneurial city²’(Griffiths, 1998). It proposes to run the cities in more businesslike manner with distinctive characteristics of risk taking, inventiveness, promotion and profit motivation (Hubbard & Hall, 1998). Soon the use of marketing theories and practices in urban governance and urban administration led to treating our cities as brands. And subsequently, building their image (city brand or city image) to promote and market these cities became one of the agenda of the policy decisions leading to strategic transition from city marketing to city branding (Kavaratzis, 2004).

¹ Flagship developments are an expensive means to effectively promote urban regeneration i.e. economic growth and social well-being within an area (Smyth, 2005).

² Urban entrepreneurialism has three distinct characteristics: (1) the notion of a public-private partnership, (2) risk associated with speculative activities of this partnership is borne by public agencies, and (3) effects of these partnership projects are not restricted to territories in which the cities are located (Harvey, 1989).

The recent transition from city marketing to city branding heralds a new era of representation and signification of cities as brands where conscious and planned practices are used to promote them as any other economic commodity.³ Thus, building city image is at the core of city branding strategy, and the importance of city marketing mix that facilitate image formulation and image communication are crucial towards this (Kavaratzis, 2004). The changing environment around largely due to digital revolution has provided us with new mix of image formulation and image communication such as emails, blogs, online ads, online catalogs, social media, and many more. Among these emerging and new communication mix social media has profound effects on not only promotional activities but also on user behaviors. Therefore, the significance of social media as a communication mix towards building brand is paramount in this digital world.

Social media has transformed the relationship between users and brands (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012) and the way information is shared and consumed on digital platforms (Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). This new relationship has created online social media brand community which is redefining the brand image in this digital marketplace (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; *Forrester*, 2014; Zaglia, 2013). Thus, users of online social media brand communities are engaged in the co-creation of brand image through user-generated contents, firm-generated contents and various online social activities. Furthermore, consumer search in this online environment is influenced by social contagions. In addition, due to social contagion the perceived usefulness and trustworthiness of the information is valued more in such an online environment. Therefore, contents and online social activities together ultimately have a significant impact on the brand image. Implications from the online social media brand communities can be used effectively to manage and build city brands.

³ This notion is taken from Firat and Venkatesh (1993) who define marketing in postmodernity as follow: "...Marketing is the major practice in society that consciously resignifies words, terms, and (brand) names.... Marketing is the conscious and planned practice of signification and representation."

Thus, online as social media platforms have given rise to niche online brand communities where users join and co-create the contents relating to their experience about the products and services, and share common brand practices (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012). These social media brand communities hence provide users a unique opportunity to bond with and advocate about their preferred brands (Fournier & Lee, 2009). Since users of online social media put greater credibility and trustworthiness on co-created contents, social media has become an important source of information among them (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Kozinets, 2002; Mayzlin, 2006). Therefore, an active social media brand community thriving on users' online social activities can have a significant effect on the consumers' perceptions of brands.

The effects of brand community practices on brand image depend on various factors. In an online social media environment these factors may constitute various kinds of social activities.⁴ Even though firms cannot control these online social activities, they can have an understanding of them to position their brands favorably. After all, branding in a social media is a process of initiating a connection and conversation between firms and consumers (Edelman, 2010). User connection with the brand and conversion among other online users lead to creation of a new kind of brand image that is a result of mutual collaboration among these online social users.

Today, consumers spend increasing amount of time on social media platforms. One out of every seven people in the world is a Facebook user, and almost four out of five Internet users visit social networking sites (Nielsen, 2013). As a consequence, the time users spend on traditional media has reduced significantly, and therefore they are difficult to reach through using these traditional media such as television, press, magazines, radio, direct mail, telemarketing,

⁴ Godes et al. (2005) define such social activities as social interaction (SI) as follow: "Consumer choice is influenced in a direct and meaningful way by the actions taken by others. These 'actions' range from face-to-face recommendations from a friend to the passive observation of what a stranger is wearing. We refer to the set of such contexts as "social interactions" (SI)."

point-of-purchase, and others (Kayany & Yelsma, 2000). Furthermore, the production and dispersion of contents using these traditional media are expensive and time consuming. Hence the usage of social media is on top of the agenda for many companies today.

Social media platforms provide myriad of ways to build brand image as they have transformed the way consumers interact with brands. Among these the significance of brand communities over these platforms have increased considerably as more than 50% of the online users follow brand in social media and thus they belong to or follow a particular online brand community (Van Belleghem, 2010). Thus, social media has become not only a platform to bond with and advocate for brands but also it has become a main source for users to gather product or service related information and to learn about brand practices (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Schau, Muñoz Jr, & Arnould, 2009). Furthermore, they also have higher freedom of self-expression on these online social platforms where communication can take place in real time in various forms with wider audience base who are like minded (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Users in an online social brand community have adopted more active role where they would like to participate in the consumption process as much as they would like to leave their footprints on the firms' production process (Etgar, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Consequently, firms face daunting task of influencing brand image in an online social media brand communities as users take various roles and have an upper hand and their influence on shaping public opinions through user generated content and online social practices have significant effects. Furthermore, the feature of real time communication makes these opinions spread faster than ever (Sakaki, Okazaki, & Matsuo, 2010). The future of business practices will be driven by the consumer engagement, and the additional challenge will come from users' demand for co-creation but not to be liable for the consequences of their choices in the process (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

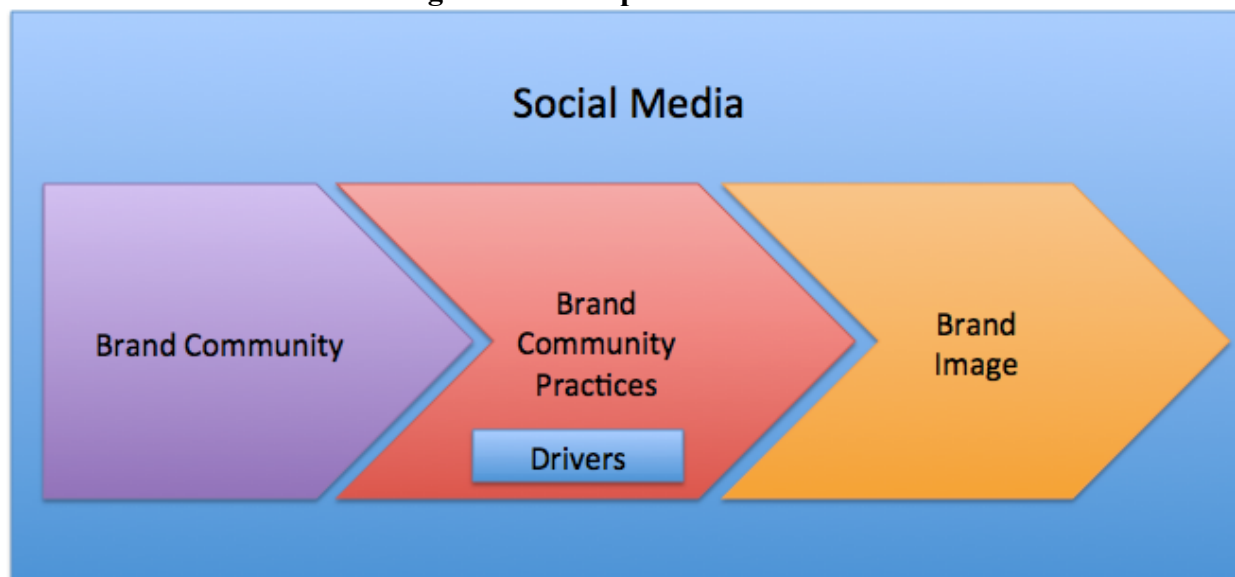
Thus, online social media brand communities have seen a departure of control from firms to users on influencing brand image as these communities continue to grow. This growing control of users through social media in shaping and reshaping the brand image means new opportunities as well as threats for the firms to exercise their control over formation of brand image (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the users' online social activities to formulate a successful strategy for co-creation of marketing practices as their online social activities, brand practices, and generated contents may have a significant effect on brand image. Understanding of factors that have positive or negative impact on brand image may leverage firms to come up with effective social media brand strategy that strengthens their brands by meeting precise consumers' needs and expectations. In this online marketing environment firms find it increasingly difficult to gain competitive advantage based solely on product differentiation as features across similar products have marginal differences (Porter & Millar, 1985). Therefore, the importance of building brand image becomes even more critical for firms where most of their consumers expect them to have social media presence that facilitate them in connecting and interacting with brands and brand communities.

The real time production and dispersion of information in an online social media platform make it interesting to investigate how brand image is affected by brand communities created on these platforms. Do networked users and their online social practices pose more threats or opportunities in building and sustaining brand image? And, which factors are threats and which others are opportunities? Understanding of these social activities over online social brand community is crucial for brand managers to monitor the brand performance and create a sustainable brand image. In this article we investigate such issues and propose strategies for the use of social media brand communities in building city brands.

2. Conceptual Framework

Various facets of brands such as brand community and brand image have resurfaced in new forms and have been restructured nobly in the presence of social media (Coulter, Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012; Laroche et al., 2012). Therefore, the concepts of brand, brand community, and brand image need to be reexamined through the lens of social media. Specifically, we investigate questions such as: “How brand communities in social media environment work?”, “How practices of online social media brand communities affect brand image?”, and finally “What are the moderating factors that affect brand image through online social media brand communities?” Investigation of these questions will help our understanding of link between brand, brand image, brand community, and social media.

Figure-1: Conceptual Framework



We present our conceptual framework in Figure-1. The context of our study is online social media environment where we address the issue of how online social media brand communities affect brand image through the brand community practices. The framework proposes some drivers of brand community practices that firms can use to influence their brand images using social media. For example, firms can facilitate creation of brand communities on popular online

social networking site such as Facebook by setting up Facebook page where likeminded users join the page and become part of that brand community. Subsequently, the owner of the page can influence brand community practices through content creations (such as posts, events, promotions, questions and answer session, links etc.) which might have an influence on the meaning given to the brand by the community users.

Online social media can intensify the effects of brand community practices on brand image by facilitating real time communication and removing geographical boundary for users to connect with the community. As a result, these platforms have become a credible source of information (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Thus, we expect online social media to moderate the relationship between brand community and brand image. We believe this relationship to be stronger than that in traditional media environment. This stronger effect is partly based on greater credibility of information derived from online social media brand communities (Schau et al., 2009), and continuous real time interaction among the participants of the community (Schau et al., 2009). Thus these communities can have a greater influence on the brand image.

Brand. According to Seetharaman, Azlan Bin Mohd Nadzir, and Gunalan (2001) brand is “an asset that does not have physical existence and the value of which cannot be determined exactly unless it becomes the subject of specific business transaction of sale and acquisition.” Thus, brand is associated with tangible and emotional attributes that identify firms’ offerings and differentiate them from those of competitors. In an economic and social environment brand is one of the most important marketing instrument in and around which consumer society is created (Michael, Gary, & Soren, 1999; Solomon, 1999). Brands help in product differentiation and provide value proposition before the actual consumption (Kotler & Gertner, 2004). Brand refers to the strategic processes by which managers aim to create and sustain meanings attached to

products, services, and the organization (Michael et al., 1999; Solomon, 1999). Even though the meaning of brand has interested researchers and practitioners for a long time, its definition fails to capture the broad spectrum of tangible and intangible values it provides. Managers face these difficulties as primarily these meanings are associated by the consumers in their minds. Thus consumers, and not the brand managers, decide the ultimate meaning of a brand (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). In recent years the scope and definition of brand have been expanded and extended widely. Even a university, a school, a political party, a sport club, or a city can be thought of as a brand (Kavaratzis, 2004; Michael et al., 1999; Solomon, 1999). Consumers form various kinds of relationship with a brand. Solomon (1999) suggests four examples of such customer-brand relationships; (1) self-concept attachment which relates the products to help establish the users' identity, (2) nostalgic attachment which means that the product serves as a link for the past self, (3) interdependence which means that the product is a part of consumer's daily routine, and (4) love which means that the product elicits bonds of warmth, passion, or other strong emotion. Thus, brand identities are closely linked with user identities (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; G. D. McCracken, 1990). On one occasion consumer can have a very deep emotional engagement with a brand, and on another they can define themselves as an opposite of a brand (Solomon, 1999). Furthermore, brands can also be used in self-disclosure in social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). Consumers can follow a brand's Facebook page or post brand related messages to give certain image of self (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012; Gensler, Leeflang, & Skiera, 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social Media. Social media is defined as websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015). Social media websites and applications include discussion forums, blogs, social platforms, and video,

photo, and news sharing sites where the users can engage in networking, relationship building and interactions and where they can play an important role in co-creation (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Social media is also related with the concept of Web 2.0, which makes possible the creation of user-generated contents (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In addition, Web 2.0 principles require social media platforms to create trust and engage users. As a result, these platforms keep on improving and have become more influential as more and more users join and use them. The variation of these interactive, user-controlled applications can be described as social media (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). The primary purpose of these social media platforms is to facilitate users on these platforms to communicate and thereby self-present themselves. This is achieved through self-disclosure which is defined as conscious or unconscious expression of personal information such as thoughts, feelings, likes, and dislikes, aiming to give an image of self, which corresponds with one's ideal self-image (i.e. personal identity). Self-disclosure is important in creating relationships (e.g., accepting friend request or liking a brand's Facebook page or following a brand's Twitter account) that gives an impression of self to others (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This impression can be for both gaining rewards (e.g. making impression on someone) and creating an image that corresponds with one's personal identity (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Users of Social media have a need to engage, and be both producers and consumers of information, so-called "prosumers" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Toffler, 1980). Firms can integrate social media into their integrated marketing communication strategy by using it as a promotional tool for building brand communities and engaging users (Smith, 2009). The use of social media in marketing is a new practice and full of challenges as social media has fundamentally changed the way we communicate, collaborate, consume, and create (Aral, Dellarocas, & Godes, 2013).

Brand Community. According to Muniz Jr and O’guinn (2001) a brand community is, “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand.” Therefore, brand communities indicate three core components based on sociological premises: (1) shared consciousness, (2) rituals and traditions and (3) a sense of moral responsibility (Muniz Jr & O’guinn, 2001). Brand community can be different from social club or organization to the extent that sometimes it can manifest itself just as a felt memberships in some imagined community (Anderson, 1991; Muniz Jr & O’guinn, 2001; Solomon, 1999). In a social media context they can be for example a group of people who like Apple’s Facebook page, members of Nutella’s fan club, or people wearing Nike products in their social media posts. The participants of a brand community could be complete strangers to each other but common interests to a brand binds them together, and as a part of this special interest group it sets them apart from the rest of society (Muniz Jr & O’guinn, 2001). The motivation to participate in a social media brand community is based on need for fulfillment, expression of creativity, and socialization motive (Ind, Iglesias, & Schultz, 2013). Membership in a brand community conveys a sense of authenticity and confirms users’ identity as a member of some subculture practicing a specific style of consumption. Subculture refers to a group in a larger culture, which has different interests or beliefs with those of the larger culture (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Carlson, Suter, and Brown (2008) separate brand communities to psychological brand community and social brand community. A psychological brand community is a group of admirers of a brand who think that there are others just like them, but they are not socially engaged with each other at all. A social brand community is also a group of admirers of a brand, but they acknowledge the membership in a community and are connected with each other for example virtually through the Internet. This primary focus of the paper is on social

brand communities that are connected through social media. Many practices of social brand communities overlap with those of social media brand communities, but the latter have several unique features in addition. Since social media brand communities can be global without any physical boundaries, even very marginal brand communities can exist where members are placed on the different sides of the world (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). In addition increasingly people have access to the Internet now which provides very broad possibilities for social media brand community practices. Social media platforms also facilitate real-time communication (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) between the brand community members, which makes information sharing very effective.

Brand Image. Brand image refers to the perceptions of a brand in the minds of consumers (Meenaghan, 1995; Nandan, 2005). Kotler and Gertner (2004) define brand image as “the set of beliefs held about a particular brand”. The image of a brand constructs from associations, which users remember concerning the brand. Brand identity is an image that organizations desire consumers to adopt. It is created with product advertising, packaging and other marketing strategies, which aims to make the product or service unique. The aim of brand image is to get a certain groups of consumers adopting the product. Also, brand image adds value to both the users and to the organizations. This added value is defined as brand equity (Nandan, 2005). Consumers often choose a product because the image of the brand somehow corresponds to their own identity. Brand image can be very valuable and one of the key elements of decision-making, sometimes even surpassing the importance attached to the technical product details as competitors can easily and quickly copy technical details but not the brand image. Consequently brand image among other intangible details is the way to gain sustainable competitive advantage (Aaker, 2012).

3. Online Social Media Brand Community Practices

Organizations can use several ways to get involved in online social media brand community practices to promote their brands. For example, on Facebook firms can create page to facilitate likeminded consumers to join the brand community by liking the page. Once consumers become part of this brand community they start practicing certain customs or act in a certain way to conform to the brands. Consequently, their actions have same effect as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) strengthening the brand image (De Vries et al., 2012). Schau et al. (2009) describe brand community practices as process of collective value creation. The authors organize brand community practices into four thematic categories: social networking, impression management, community engagement, and brand use.

First, social networking practices are creating, enhancing and sustaining relationships between brand community members. These social networking practices consist of: welcoming, emphasizing, and governing. These practices emphasize similarities, social and moral bonds, and normative and behavioral expectations between the participants of a brand community. Second, impression management practices are focused on creating external favorable impressions of a brand, brand enthusiast, and brand community. These impression management practices consist of: evangelizing, and justifying. Evangelizing is based on members' good will as they act as ambassadors of goodwill by sharing favorable content concerning the brand. Third, community engagement practices are those that strengthen members' to increasingly engagement with the brand community. These community engagement practices consist of staking, milestoneing, badging, and documenting. These practices emphasize and retain the similarities between the members of a brand community. Fourth, brand use practices are discussion between brand community members about how to improve or enhance use of a particular brand. These brand

use practices consist of grooming, customizing, and commoditizing. These practices are about giving tips and advices to other consumers regarding use of particular products or services. Overall the importance of these practices emphasizes the value creation through the brand community practices. Therefore, organizations should give their consumers the opportunity to construct brand communities. Sustained and stronger practices lead to stronger brand communities that cultivate new kind of mini market within them strengthening the brand image.

4. Link between Brand Community Practices and Brand Image

Practices followed within a brand community usually have a coherent theme to conform to the brand personality creating a solid brand image. Furthermore, the spillover effects of these practices outside the brand community either through word-of-mouth or social influence affect brand awareness. Thus, brand community practices can influence the brand image in multiple ways. Some of these factors are: by inside information sharing of products, by creating consumer behavior patterns, and by indicating brand community vitality (Schau et al., 2009).

Inside Information of Products. The information propagated from brand communities about the products they endorse are useful and it contains meaningful narrative (Schau et al., 2009). Brand community members carry some sense of moral responsibility to seek out and help others “without thinking”, if they have problems in their consumption/usage of the brand (Muniz Jr & O’guinn, 2001). This shared mutual moral responsibility emanating from brand community is not just a trait; but it is an essential factor that makes a community (Ind et al., 2013).

The information contents (such as blogs, wikis, posts, chats, podcasting, images, video, audio etc.) co-created among the users of any online platforms (such as social media, blog etc.) are termed as user-generated contents (UGC). On the same platforms when the contents are created by the publisher or the manufactures or the firms they are termed as firm generated content

(FGC) or market generated content (MGC). Whereas the purpose of MGC/FGC is to create persuasive and informative content, the purpose of UGC is just to create informative content (Goh et al., 2013; Muniz Jr & O’guinn, 2001). According to Goh et al. (2013) the persuasive effect of UGC is more than 22 times that of FGC. Somehow, the information provided by a co-user, is more useful than information provided by the market, because brand communities are not motivated by the commercial self-interest to create contents. Additionally, the platform that online social media provides, has positive effect on information sharing, because seeking and sharing information are main reasons for users’ social media participation (De Vries et al., 2012; Kumar & Bezawada, 2014). Thus, social networking sites can become the main source of information for many users, and even though sometimes the sought information may be incorrect, but it is still taken by users at their face value (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Naturally, information sharing has positive effect on the value perception of a product when the comments are positive, at the same time negative comments influence this perception negatively (Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2006). Therefore, building brand communities around creation and sharing of contents that carry the goodwill of the products is very important.

User Behavioral Pattern. Brand community practices create, reify and perpetuate different consumer behavior patterns (Schau et al., 2009). In other words, these pockets of varied consumption patterns give rise to subculture of consumption i.e. subgroup of society with shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Naturally, there are as many ways to use a product, as there are users. By sharing these behavioral patterns, consumers might give valuable information, inspiration and tips for co-users. The narratives emerging from brand community practices tell the story about brand usage and consumption in a unique way that ads can never achieve.

Narratives or stories can be used as an important tool in sharing consumer behavior patterns. These can provide a consolidated and veracious theme to conversations among users and thus create or enhance customer-brand relationship by building awareness, comprehension, empathy, recognition, recall, and thereby providing holistic meaning to the brand (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Traditionally in a storytelling a narrator and a listener are involved. However, in a social media setting both firms and users can act in both the roles, and this means that the story can precede in an unpredictable direction. If these stories are harnessed carefully taking care of both the narrator and the listener it can have tremendous impact on the brand image.

Consumers choose brands that they perceive congruent to their own personality (Solomon, 1999). And, subsequently they construct their personalities by assigning brand meaning with telling brand stories in their own way (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Different consumption patterns emerge out of these narratives which subsequently bring new users for a brand or lead current users to use the brand in new situations by broadening or changing the personality of a brand in the minds of consumers. Thus more and more users could perceive that brand image corresponds to their own. For example, a brand community member can demonstrate how one pair of shoes can fit to different kind of styles, or share new recipes in which a certain product is used. The user association of personality congruence with the brand may lead to new usage and consumption patterns for the brand creating a favorable brand image.

At the same time on the other hand, brand community can have different levels of tension for “the right” way to use a brand, which in turn define whether a consumer is “a true” member of a brand community or not. This could be a problem for a low-share brand, because the small but loyal brand community desires to keep “faux” members out, and thus resist growth of the brand. In this case, the brand community and the organization might face quite different opinions of

success. This situation is good neither for the brand community nor for the company, because this tension of desired brand image (brand identity) between the firm and the brand community may pose problems (Muniz Jr & O'guinn, 2001). Therefore, harmony between brand identity and brand image is essential in the meanings/narratives that create and sustain brand loyalty (Nandan, 2005). Nevertheless, social media brand communities seem to be more democratic and inclusive compared to traditional face-to-face communities. All that matters is that a member appreciates particular brand and participates in the brand community (Muniz Jr & O'guinn, 2001).

Brand Community Vitality. Practices of brand community indicate brand community vitality which shows the members' interest in the community. The stronger the brand community is, the more it indicates vitality, and vice versa (Schau et al., 2009). As a result, strong inside information sharing and creation of different consumer behavior patterns lead to stronger brand community vitality and recreation of the brand on a stronger foundation of loyalty (Muniz Jr & O'guinn, 2001). Stronger brand communities are consequently more complex as more inside information is required from brand community members. Therefore, to build strong vitality for brand community it is essential that members are highly engaged. Social media platforms help towards this by engaging members through wide spectrum of online social activities. However, sometimes oppositional brand loyalty drives brand community stronger as it re-creates the alternate meaning of the brand. It is about defining what the brand is not and what the brand community members are not (Muniz Jr & O'guinn, 2001). Consumers' choice is based on both inclusion and exclusion of certain groups (Hogg & Savolainen, 1997). At times, exclusion of a certain group seems to have even bigger role than inclusion on consumer choice. For example, Macintosh brand community strongly defines themselves as an opposite to Microsoft users (Muniz Jr & O'guinn, 2001).

Even though a strong brand community may consequence risks for a brand, it as well tends to protect brand from risks. When a brand is threatened, many brand communities pull together and become even stronger to show solidarity (Muniz Jr & O'guinn, 2001). Additionally, brand community reinforces publicly the reasons to stay connected, and why not to defect to the competitive brands. For example Mac brand community shares horror stories about using PCs (Muniz Jr & O'guinn, 2001). This clearly has positive effect on the image of the focal brand.

A loyal brand community often feel that the brand belongs to the members as well as to the marketer, and as a result they express certain expectations towards the firms (Ind et al., 2013; Muniz Jr & O'guinn, 2001). For example, Mac brand community expects faithfulness from Apple by hoping that they constantly improve their products (Muniz Jr & O'guinn, 2001). Harley managers have noticed the importance of this aspect of perceived ownership by brand community, and they are in close two-way contact with the brand community, which has turned out as a successful idea (Fournier & Lee, 2009; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

5. Drivers of Brand Image on Social Media Brand Communities

Various factors can influence the re-creation of brand image on social media brand communities. The nature of this influence could be positive or negative depending on the tension in the narratives, and firms' active engagement in the narratives.

5.1. Tension

The main driver of emotional component of consumers engagement in brand narratives is tension (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry Jr, 2003; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Tension encourages customers to participate and engage with the narrative. The intensity and level of tension determines the extent of consumer engagement. For example, a user could engage only as a listener when level of tension is low, whereas on higher level of tension same user could be

interested enough to engage in the conversation. There are three basic kinds of tension: internal, personal and external tension. Internal tension is described as tension-filled conversation with oneself. For example, in Dove's real beauty campaign Dove encourage women to shift their concept from physical beauty to inner beauty (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Second, personal tension occurs from the diversity between people and their attitudes. For example, Harley Davidson uses personal tension by highlighting fragmented demographic of their customers who are connected by common passionate interest for riding motorcycles (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Third, external tension is defined as a tension between an individual or a group, and nature, society, or the supernatural. For example, in Dove's real beauty campaign the existing idea of beauty is challenged (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). A captivating brand narrative makes use of several types of tension concurrently (McKee, 1997); otherwise, attempts to use only one type successfully evoking user emotions at the highest level.

5.2. Engagement

People are more likely to communicate if they are engaged. Consumer can engage voluntarily, or at times firm can promote customer engagement (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Authenticity, real need, knowledge sharing, and evoking real passion drive user engagement (Aaker, 2012). The most creative and engaged members are intrinsically motivated and provided with control free environment, commitment, and trust between the participants (Ind et al., 2013). We discuss few ways suggested by Mangold and Faulds (2009) to successfully engage customers.

Providing Networking Platforms. This is the first essential tool for engagement. Often it is a good choice to make use of some existing social networking platform with significantly larger user base (e.g., Facebook) or application (e.g., mobile apps), but in some cases it might be necessary to create a new platform (e.g., firm initiated social networking) that meets the needs

better. A critical feature of a successful brand community environment is that it encourages users to open communication in order to create a sense of community belonging and trust, which in turn develops higher level of brand attachment, identification and commitment (Ind et al., 2013).

Providing Information. Access to relevant and timely information to community members is essential in encouraging users to communicate about better knowledge of products or services. In addition, when customers have access to more information about the brand, they feel more positive and knowledgeable about it (Ind et al., 2013). In this regard, Adjei, Noble, and Noble (2012) suggest providing expert help with questions regarding products and services in social media brand communities, and providing rewards to brand community members who answer to other members' questions. They also suggest enhancing the relevance of information in social media brand communities by moderating, dividing forums into categories and by encouraging users to select categories that meet their interests. Thus, consumer engagement is also affected by organizations' initiative of usage of tools that provide relevant information to the community.

Being Outrageous. Outrage provokes consumers to communicate. For example, when Burger King told a trick that they are going to stop selling their bestseller products whoppers, they created a buzz among their brand community forcing them to talk. Ryanair's marketing campaign provoked users by announcing that they would start charging of access to the toilets during the flight, remove two toilets of each plane, create a standing-room-only section, and starting to charge "a fat tax" on overweight passengers. The only change they made was removing some of the toilets, but all the provocative announcements went to the headlines and endorsed Ryanair's reputation as offering rock-bottom fares (Luo, Wiles, & Raithel, 2013).

Providing exclusivity. When users feel special and exclusive, the very sense of being unique or treated uniquely prompts them to talk. One way to achieve this is by providing products or

information that are available exclusively. Also, companies can make consumers feel important and reward them intrinsically by clearly showing that their opinions are important and are taken under consideration. This can additionally make consumers feel closer to the brand. Furthermore, strategies pertaining to exclusivity may help firms to avoid facing irritated consumers due to insufficient and improper communication (Ind et al., 2013).

Evoking Users' Self-image through Product Design. When brand personality confirms with the user personality then it stimulates favorable communication about the focal brand. Products and services that are unique, fun, intriguing, highly visible, easy to use, and that evoke emotions are more likely to bring discussion (Glynn Mangold, Miller, & Brockway, 1999; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). In addition, consumers are more likely to discuss products that they can clearly see as better than other products. Price, quality and value propositions are often used as main criteria for product differentiation. And finally, people are more likely to discuss about products that support their ideal self-image (self-identity) (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Supporting Causes. Special causes stir emotions and encourage people to talk. Therefore, firms can leverage emotional connection with users by being part of special causes that their users care about. These in turn will possibly encourage users to talk about the firm and its brand. Because people tend to talk about things they are emotionally connected with, associating with such causes may help strengthening customer-firm relationship. For example, Dove has used this kind of strategy in their campaign for “real beauty”, which was for supporting girls' self-esteem and embracing their inner beauty (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012).

Utilizing the Power of Stories. Narratives are important for long lasting impression and therefore story telling helps consumer recall brands for long. The more the memorable a story is the more the people tend to share it. Since brand image is perceived associations that users

remember about a brand (Meenaghan, 1995; Nandan, 2005), stories play a big role in the brand image by being strongly memorable. Stories also help building awareness, comprehension, empathy, recognition, recall, and provide meaning to the brand. In social media context stories are continuous, on-going and collaborative process, which are constructed of interlinked contents. Thus, in social media, the process of co-creating interrelated stories of brand narratives, lead to the co-creation of the meaning of a brand (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). The narratives told on social media brand communities by the users are interactive and social. These narratives often become the testimonials for the narrated events. Storytelling on social media therefore can be used as a tool for user engagement. It is not just the story but the whole process of storytelling beginning from its creation to its propagation that become part of bigger storytelling on social media platforms. Thus, these stories really matter to the brand community users and their level of engagement increases as the audience and the creator become one. Therefore, organizations should utilize the power of storytelling in building brand image.

6. Credibility of Social Media Brand Community: A Double Edged Sword

Brand community members are often the current users of an organization. Current customers are prone to bigger improvement in brand value perceptions. Especially customers who participate in firm's social media initiative are often heavy users, visit the store frequently, and bring higher profits to the firm (Rishika, Kumar, Janakiraman, & Bezawada, 2013). Thus, brand communities provide profitable base for enhancing brand image, and may often be the best way to increase customer and firm value (Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Thomas, Blattberg, & Fox, 2004).

According to source credibility theory when the source presents itself as credible, people are more likely to be persuaded (Chu & Kamal, 2008; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Ohanian, 1990; Petty & Cacioppo, 1996; Sternthal, Dholakia, & Leavitt, 1978). It is indicated that more

credible sources evoke more positive attitudes and more behavioral compliance than less credible sources do (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Credibility of a source is based on a variety of attributes. Two such common attributes are: expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland et al., 1953). Expertise is defined as: “the perceived ability of the source to make valid assertions,” and trustworthiness is defined as: “the perceived willingness of the source to make valid assertions” (G. McCracken, 1989). Credibility is also affected by the attractiveness (Baker & Churchill Jr, 1977; Choi, Lee, & Kim, 2005; McGuire, 1969), which means that receiver perceives own and source’s social values similar to each other (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). Social media brand communities tend to have greater level of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Fussell Sisco & McCorkindale, 2013; Kang, 2010). Previous research has shown that product related information from discussion forums has greater credibility, relevance and are more likely to evoke empathy with consumers than information on marketer-designed websites (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Gruen et al., 2006). Consumers perceive social media as a more trustworthy source of product and service information than corporate-sponsored contents via traditional media (Chu & Kamal, 2008; Cosenza, Solomon, & Kwon, 2015; Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

However, high credibility of brand community is a double-edged sword. That can cause significant rumor control problems in social media environment, because anyone is free to join including competitors and brand terrorists (Muniz Jr & O’guinn, 2001), and no one can be sure of other brand community members’ interests in social media environment. Thus consumers can mark not just inclusion to a particular lifestyle, but also exclusion of a particular lifestyle by showing their negative opinions of a certain brand (Hogg & Savolainen, 1997). Oppositional brand loyalty is manifested for example in Macintosh brand community as they strongly derive themselves from PC users (Muniz Jr & O’guinn, 2001).

7. Conclusion

Social media brand communities co-create the meaning of a brand through engaging in different kinds of online brand community practices. This has tremendous effect on brand image by providing inside information, affecting consumer behavior patterns, and by enhancing brand community vitality (Schau et al., 2009). These practices on social media brand communities generate “buzz” bringing users closer to the brand and enhancing the brand loyalty. The more relevant, frequent, lengthy, and timely communication, the closer consumers feel to the brand due to reduced uncertainty toward the brand (Adjei et al., 2012).

The practices on social media brand communities are primarily driven by the community members. However, organization can help in shaping some of these brand practices that have an influence on brand image. They can navigate through the process of co-creation of the brand image. For example, favorable tension can be used as a tool to influence brand image positively, however at the same time uncompromising tension may harm the brand. Understanding the new co-creative role of consumers is also vital in order to navigate the brand (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Companies can encourage users to engage in social media brand community practices by providing networking platforms, relevant information, exclusivity, self-image support, and interesting products; by being outrageous; by supporting causes that are important for customers; and by utilizing the power of stories (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Active role of social media brand communities lead to plethora of brand practices that may in turn co-create the meaning of brand among the community members. This has potential to change radically the nature of branding, and the relationship between company, brand, and consumers. Building brand image is no longer completely in the hands of brand managers, instead it is a result of combined co-creation from both: the firm and the consumers (Phan,

Thomas, & Heine, 2011). This reflects the remarkable change in marketing thinking from ‘one-to-many’ to ‘democratized and interactive media’ which makes the traditional military inspired marketing language (e.g. target group, campaign, positioning, strategy, tactic and planning) incompatible with this changed online social environment (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012).

Although, the increasing control of users means brand image can shape and reshape in unpredictable ways due to social media brand community practices; it does not necessarily mean negative effects on brand image. Singh and Sonnenburg (2012) suggest looking this from different perspective and drawing contrast from what it is in traditional media, since social media is saliently different. The authors argue that the *process* is more important than the *output* in social media, and highlight the importance of constantly doing things right rather than doing one thing right. This practice fits better in social media environment, because it gives more space for flexibility. Furthermore, it is not even possible to completely control brand image in social media environment, because it changes constantly through co-creation. Thus, building brand image is supposed to be about constructing and managing the brand image rather than controlling it in social media environment. Even though, there are a lot of threats in social media, it is not good to completely concentrate in preventing crises; it is vital to take advantage of opportunities in order to successfully manage the brand image.

It might be difficult to completely prevent the crises on online social media platforms. Therefore, organizations should focus on facing them in a right way, because facing a crisis wrong way can saliently harm the brand image, while facing a crisis right way can result even better brand image (Johar, Birk, & Einwiller, 2012). After all, the overall opportunity to utilize the learning and closeness between firm and its customers is inhibited in traditional organizations (Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar, 2007). Co-creation is a way to utilize this opportunity by bringing

consumers, managers, and employees together in brand co-creation. A well-managed co-creation process can have significant benefits for organization in the form of successful innovations and new business opportunities (Ind et al., 2013).

We note that many of the social media concepts discussed in the paper are very general in nature. Therefore, strategies discussed in the paper have to be customized for destination marketing in order to promote city as a brand. Due to newness of city branding as a concept and use of social media in destination marketing there is very limited research in this field. Therefore, city brand managers need to be innovative in their approach to utilize these in the context of city branding by being proactive in their approach to embrace social media as new hybrid of promotional mix for destination marketing. In conclusion, this potential opportunity of cooperation and co-creation within social media brand communities should be nurtured rather than neglected. Some of the strategies presented in the paper could be successfully implemented in city branding to promote and support city as a brand in an online social media channel.

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