Chapter 9
Advertising in the World of Social Media–Based Brand Communities

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ABSTRACT
Social media has revolutionized marketing practices and created many opportunities for smart marketers to take advantage of its unique characteristics. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the concept of Social Media-Based Brand Communities to advertisers and show how they can use these communities to work for them in creating and distributing favorable communication messages to masses of consumers. The authors underscore that consumers in a brand community can be employed as unpaid volunteer ambassadors of the brand who diligently try to create favorable impressions about the brand in the external world. Social media has also empowered them to do so through participating in brand communities based in social media. These communities, however, are different from conventional brand communities on at least five dimensions: social context, structure, scale, storytelling, and myriad affiliated communities. Therefore, marketers should treat such communities differently. This chapter provides the essentials all marketers should know before facilitating brand communities in social media.

INTRODUCTION
It was not long ago when Muniz and Schau (2007) applied and studied the concept of “vigilant marketing” in the brand community context. Observing the power of user generated content technologies in enabling consumers to have a stronger and more creative voice as well as the power of brand communities to gather thousands of brand devotees together, they stated that brand communities could be a holy grail for advertisers. Members of a brand community resemble unpaid
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Evangelists that spread marketing communication messages with high levels of creativity on behalf of the brand.

Borrowing the term “vigilante marketing” from Ives (2004), Muniz and Schau (2007, p. 35) defined it as “unpaid advertising and marketing efforts, including one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many commercially oriented communications, undertaken by brand loyalists on behalf of the brand.” They conducted a qualitative study on an Apple’s web-based (web 1.0) community and showed that consumers (members of the community) collectively create, disseminate, and absorb effective communication messages within a brand community context, which is strictly controlled by volunteer members. They also showed that consumers are highly sophisticated in and adept at mimicking advertising messages and creating symbolic meanings for the brand.

Based on their findings and in line with other advertising gurus (Garfield, 2005; Shultz, 2005), they predicted that the future of advertising will be dramatically different and will face substantial challenges: “Meeting these challenges will require a major shift in the way advertising is defined and practiced.” (Muniz & Schau 2007, p. 36). Although they were right in their prediction about the challenges of advertising and the necessity of shift in advertising practices, what perhaps they did not expect at that moment was the enormous explosion of social media as the platform on which billions of consumers can easily access content creation capabilities, keep in touch with each other, and easily communicate with a strong voice (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This explosion gave consumers a great power as brand messengers not seen in the history of consumer research. As a result the power of advertising has become limited recently in the age of social media (Kohli, Suri, & Kapoor, 2015).

The purpose of this chapter is to show a way that can be helpful to advertisers in order to harness the enormous power of social media in favor of their advertising and communication goals. Therefore, the chapter introduces the concept of Social Media Based Brand Community (SMBBC) to advertisers and shows how they can use these communities to play an important role, on their behalf, in creating and distributing favorable communication messages to masses of consumers. Using the latest research and empirical findings, the chapter elaborates on essential characteristics of such communities that marketers and advertisers should know while facilitating brand community practices. We also elaborate on future research implications.

**WHAT IS A BRAND COMMUNITY?**

Initially, brand communities were recognized as a proper alternative for performing relationship marketing (Berry, 1995). The main idea behind relationship marketing was keeping one-on-one relationships with customers to enhance their loyalty and satisfaction; however, developing such relationships was not cost efficient (Iaccobucci, 1994). It would be more difficult for a firm to keep a distinct relationship with each one of its customers than having agents who would do so on the behalf of the firm. Therefore, brand communities, in which consumers perform many tasks on a brand’s behalf, can efficiently actualize relationship marketing (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001).

In a brand community each customer has a set of relationships with the brand and other customers. A brand community is defined as a “specialized, non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412). It is essentially a place (physical or virtual) in which brand aficionados and devotees gather together. The first reason that these people gather together is perhaps similar to liking a topic but it is definitely not the only one. Members gain a lot of other benefits from participating in such communities. Mainly they somehow fulfill the social need to be identified with symbols of and
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