Chapter 19
Dynamic Narrative Alignment: Rhetoric in Community–Driven Social Media Management

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ABSTRACT
Effective social media presence is not determined by content creation, but rather by community creation. The trick to successful advertising presence, therefore, is to be able to lead a digital community. Drawing from phenomenology, sociomateriality, grounded theory, and practitioners’ experiences in community sensemaking, this chapter explains why community management is necessary for brand survival given the rising trend of online collaboration. It presents dynamic narrative alignment as a framework for developing effective community management strategy, and discusses how narrative patterns shape and are shaped by the community during the conception, technical platform selection, project management, member management, brand management, and monetization phases of community development. Finally, the chapter analyses how strategies based on this framework drive brand equity using successful rhetoric and engagement for select case studies across diverse industries, sectors, branches, and audience sizes.

INTRODUCTION
Social media has changed society significantly – both in terms of how we interact and in terms of what our expectations of each other, and of businesses, are. As Microsoft’s Chief Envisioning Officer, Michael Coplin (2013), explains, “when you use something like Facebook or Twitter – you have to be on those platforms – you are using a fundamentally different culture of collaboration ... [E]verything right there is open except for the bits that I choose to keep private. Contrast that to the culture of collaboration inside most organizations: it’s completely inverted. Everything I do is closed, unless I specifically say I’m going to share this. The changing (sic) is absolutely profound.”

Today’s digital audience expects transparency, individual service, and speedy reactions:
these are the consequences of this new paradigm of frictionless sharing and intense collaboration. Traditional customer touchpoints typically include marketing, sales, and support. These roles are typically separated. Yet collaboration calls for them to be more involved and integrated within customer-facing brands, so that the brand can respond to social media as a single organizational entity. Traditional marketing calls for effective design and good content. But effective marketing in social media begins much earlier than that, and is much more involved: it begins when the target community engages with the brand’s story through narrative discourse. Together, the community and the brand proceed to collectively “define the context, and enables organizing purposeful, concise, scannable content” (Langwasser, 2008), which in turn builds the necessary momentum to achieve social contagion and propagation.

Individuals in a community operate on personal contextual bases: they build their own personal stories through contextual interaction in social media. These interwoven snapshots interact with the broader marketing campaign sequence. As a result, effective social media engagement builds upon managing and nurturing an audience community by feeding the common contextual bases within the interwoven stories. Thus community management effectively involves the community in defining itself, its expectations and standards, as well as its content (Sergiovanni, 1994).

The introduction of social media as an expected customer touchpoint affects corporations as well as individuals: corporations need to respond to a changing audience which expects to interact with their brands on a multitude of matters in a meaningful level, and still receive a rapid response. These two requirements are difficult to meet given the current specialist, process-oriented approach that was introduced to streamline industrial efficiency over the last century and is still employed by most businesses today. The digital world serves as a new touchpoint between corporations and individuals, bringing them together in emerging online communities: managed digital spaces in which user stories, brand stories, and data interweave (Casaló et al., 2007).

A successful community is one with a managed direction and result, which allows a two-way conversation to take place between a brand and its customer. Ultimately, this conversation generates high advertisement reach and reaction with low resource input, as well as high customer brand loyalty and corresponding high conversion rates. According to the German BVCM (Bundesverband für Community Management), community management is the term for all methods and activities relating to the conception, creation, leadership, operation, maintenance and optimization of virtual communities as well as their expression outside of the virtual space (Langwasser, 2008). They are divided into: (a) operative areas, which involve direct contact to the members, and (b) strategic areas, which focus on the underlying framework, activities and questions.

Each underlying set of sequential activities forms a generative sequence: a morphological path from a source state to a destination state. Generative sequences have been optimized through business practice over the years through industrialization. Collaborative interaction through social media has created a contextualized subsequence within the generative sequence, in which the individual agency is a story within the larger narrative – and this is called the narrative sequence. For example, a generative sequence describes the story of a schoolboy who went to college, starts a career as a salesperson, and was promoted to a manager. A narrative sequence describes how Bill Smith, son of a white, liberal, affluent family went to Custard High School, got accepted into Sunset College, began his career at Saturn Ventures, and was promoted to a manager. Another narrative sequence may describe how Maria Gonzales, daughter of a Hispanic immigrant family, struggled through Yorktown High School,
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