Chapter 1
Who’s Who: Setting a Standard Nomenclature Using a Fan Folksonomy

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ABSTRACT

Industry and academic circles continue to attempt to label brand community behaviours, borrowing analogies from subcultures such as religion (“evangelists”), slang (“geeks, mavens, haters”), science fiction (“fanboys”), and science (“alpha”). Although sometimes used as generic terms, upon examination, these and other such labels, can define the spectrum of brand attachment in a specific way—through narrative, metaphor, and cross-cultural labelling. Such labelling is happening already. This chapter parses the current meaning of one term from another into a folksonomy, or classification system developed by those steeped in the culture. This segmentation enables further research into specific fan types, along with industry recommendations for approaching each segment based on the behavioural characteristic inherent in both the historic and common usage of the word. It also moves toward the standardisation of these terms in industry and academic circles in order to further enable a lingua franca relating to this phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

Your job, if you want to explain a field, if you want to understand it, if you want to change it, is to begin with the taxonomy of how it’s explained and understood. Once you understand a taxonomy, you’ve got a chance to re-organize it in a way that is even more useful. Too often, we get lazy and put unrelated

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**Fan Communities**

More than ever today and increasingly so in the future, businesses and organisations expect marketing professionals to leverage fan communities to promote the brand and generate both word of mouth (WOM) and sales. The advent of the internet, and social media, has created a public marketplace of discourse about virtually every product and brand. The expectations on marketers to be able to craft messages for these groups, control as well as direct their behaviour, and use them to generate more sales assumes that somehow fans are in service to brands. Yet fans, like any groups of people, are a disparate group of individuals with their own motivations and reasons for everything they do.

In short, marketers are expected to be experts in the consumer communities, and of the fans who spread word of mouth about their product. Moreover, the marketers are expected to exert control and mobilise these fans and communities.

Yet in the same way that the Vatican cannot control the lives of everyone who identifies as Catholic, many fans do not follow a product’s doctrine. At least three decades of academic and industry research confirms this argument across fan communities, also known as brand communities (Casalo, Flavian, & Guinaliu, 2007; Cova, Pace, & Park, 2007; Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009; Zhou, Zhang, Su, & Zhou, 2012)Sánchez-Casado, Confente, I., Tomaseti-Solano, & Brunetti, 2018), brand cults (Nathalie Collins, Gläbe, Mizerski, & Murphy; Schlanger & Bhasin, 2013) and subcultures of consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Chalmers & Arthur, 2008; Lewin, 2013; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Ulusoy, 2016).

Businesses and researchers have more data than ever regarding who purchases a product, their product use, who is spreading WOM, and where. This surge in information, down to specific user behavior, is the basis for the belief that when one knows things about people, one can influence or control those same people. How can marketers, who work in such product and brand-specific contexts, better understand and therefore leverage their fan bases? Just as importantly, how can marketers communicate to their own organisations what a reasonable investment in fan communities constitutes, as well as a reasonable return on that investment? How can marketers manage their organisations’, and their own, expectations on what successful fan management looks like? Finally, is fan management even possible?

**Folksonomies**

This chapter proposes a segmented approach to fan behaviour, categorising personas using cultural language. Based on the concept of a taxonomy (Brent, Breedlove, & Raven, 1968), this segmentation uses a folksonomy in the traditional, rather than technological, sense. Since the advent of social media tagging, the word folksonomy relates to the organisation of tags, usually in a tag cloud, to help categorise OR visualise information (Wu, Zubair, & Maly, 2006). However, a folksonomy in in this book chapter refers to words used by the people involved in the culture to describe the phenomenon they encounter, rather than an outsider such as a scientist analysing the phenomena and naming them.

In the same way that a plant or a bug might have a scientific name and place in the animal or plant classification system, but also have a colloquial name, a folksonomy merges the two concepts. This folksonomy is typical in that it uses descriptive names derived from cultural milieus, which are often