



Crowdsourcing and brand control

Anjali S. Bal^{a,*}, Kelly Weidner^b, Richard Hanna^a, Adam J. Mills^c

^a Babson College, Babson Park, MA 02457, U.S.A.

^b Saint Mary's College of California, Moraga, CA 94575, U.S.A.

^c College of Business, Loyola University New Orleans, New Orleans, LA 70118, U.S.A.

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Abstract Crowdsourcing is the deliberate use of crowds to solve problems, create new products, and improve consumer experiences. When used by brands, crowdsourcing engages consumers by asking them to be part of a deliberate call to action. Crowdsourcing provides interesting and dynamic marketing opportunities for brands, given the consumer engagement it entails. This conceptual study examines the literature on crowdsourcing and brand community, and makes a series of propositions regarding this rich marketing arena. Herein, we discuss managerial implications of the relationship between crowdsourcing and brand community dynamics and propose a typology for brands to better assess customer bases and market realities.

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1. Crowdsourcing: Gaining traction

A phenomenon relatively new to management and marketing, crowdsourcing is gaining increased attention in both the practitioner and academic communities (Boudreau & Lakhani, 2013; Hossain & Kauranen, 2015; PotatoPro, 2015). Although the concept of sourcing ideas and feedback from the public has been around for centuries (DesignCrowd, 2016), the term crowdsourcing has only existed for a decade. Introduced by Howe (2006, p. 1), *crowdsourcing* is defined as “the act of a company or institution taking a function once performed

by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined (and generally large) network of people in the form of an open call.” The strategic applications of crowdsourcing in recent years have been broad and varied, including idea generation, microtasking, open-source software, public participation, citizen science, citizen journalism, and wikis (Hossain & Kauranen, 2015).

There are many recent examples of firms employing crowdsourcing to generate user feedback and create marketing concepts. One such example is Frito-Lay's Do Us a Flavor campaign, designed to crowdsource new potato chip flavor ideas from customers. A number of top vote-getting concepts were put into trial production by Lay's for public testing and feedback. Launching the campaign as a contest with a \$1 million prize for the creator of the

* Corresponding author

E-mail address: abal@babson.edu (A.S. Bal)

winning flavor, Lay's has accumulated feedback via its online platform from over 14 million individual customers since 2013 (PotatoPro, 2015). By crowdsourcing product development, Lay's concurrently engaged customers in a normally secretive process and gathered critical market research at a fraction of the traditional cost. And by choosing the winning potato chip flavor based on public votes, Lay's not only gathered market data beyond what was generated through the original crowdsourcing project, but also essentially guaranteed a successful product launch.

Crowdsourcing can be a powerful tool for brands because of its ability to empower brand communities. Allowing brand communities to make decisions that influence image and product offerings in a controlled and planned way can have powerfully positive effects, as did the Do Us a Flavor campaign. Crowdsourcing is a fount of mutual benefit for firms and consumers: Users receive benefits in the form of economic reward, social recognition, self-esteem, and/or the development of a skill, and the crowdsourcing firm benefits from the advantage of what the user has brought to the table in terms of the activity initially proposed (Estellés-Arolas & González-Ladron-de-Guevara, 2012). And yet, by definition, the firm's ability to control crowdsourcing activities is limited. Once a crowdsourcing campaign has been released to the public, the firm has little ability to rein it back in should the project take a negative turn. This reality is magnified by information sharing on social media and online platforms, where even a small number of negative contributions can drastically alter the conversation about a brand. Consider the 2012 McDonald's Twitter hashtag campaign, #McDStories, designed to share information about the restaurant chain's suppliers and to allow customers to share their own McDonald's stories publically. Unfortunately, the hashtag was hijacked quickly via tongue-in-cheek messages about disease, food poisoning, weight gain, injuries, and questionable supply chains (Lubin, 2012). Having no control over the public domain of Twitter, all McDonald's brand managers could hope for was a quick end to the trending topic.

Rising interest in crowdsourcing among practitioners and academicians alike suggests a growing belief that crowdsourcing can be used as a strategic tool to extend and expand brand value. Crowdsourcing can strengthen or cultivate a brand community. The ability of a firm to engage consumers in activities previously reserved for the firm's internal marketing team has contributed to crowdsourcing's popularity among consumers; thus, its growing popularity in the business community. In this article, we elaborate on

the motivations of consumers who engage in crowdsourcing and, subsequently, the most effective means of employing crowdsourcing strategies vis-à-vis the strength of a firm's brand community and openness to ceding control of brand communications. This article's objective is to highlight the best conditions for firms to be successful when engaging in crowdsourcing activities.

We begin with a brief overview of the extant knowledge and theories about crowdsourcing, brand communities, and consumer involvement, with a particular focus on the role of social media. We present a theoretical model to highlight and offer managerial insights for four different possible conditions under which crowdsourcing may be utilized, factoring both brand community strength and the firm's desired degree of brand control. Finally, this model is extended to consider the creative abilities of crowds within brand communities.

2. Crowdsourcing and the crowd

Historically, a crowd has been described as a self-organized group of people who come together for a common purpose (Prpić, Shukla, Kietzmann, & McCarthy, 2015). This common purpose is often focused around a specific goal or event, after which the group disperses (Kozinets, Hemetsberger, & Schau, 2008). Crowds act as change agents that can be perceived as either positive or negative (Prpić et al., 2015). Often, the unifying purpose of the crowd determines the valence of that crowd's meaning. For example, group activities such as competing, creating a video collectively, organizing rallies, or petitioning or boycotting organizations would be seen as positive crowd manifestations (Kozinets et al., 2008; Prpić et al., 2015). Conversely, mobs and riots are crowds that can be seen in a negative light (Prpić et al., 2015). As crowdsourcing has gained traction in business, the power, influence, and impact of the crowd has been seen as a positive force for corporations (Kozinets et al., 2008; Prpić et al., 2015). The purpose of crowdsourcing is to harness the collective knowledge, value, and creativity of a group of people.

As stated, crowdsourcing was originally defined as "taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined (and generally large) network of people in the form of an open call" (Howe, 2006, p. 1). The idea behind the original definition of crowdsourcing was that organizations could learn a great deal from non-professionals and consumers in order to improve products and offerings. Ideally, the collective knowledge of the group

would be stronger than that of a few individuals within an organization. Today, crowdsourcing is defined more broadly (Xu, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Gonazalez-Garcia, 2015). Although many definitions exist, crowdsourcing typically is considered the act of using a group of people to make decisions, innovate, and solve problems (Boudreau & Lakhani, 2013; DesignCrowd, 2016; Howe, 2006).

Numerous categorization models are available to better understand crowdsourcing and its nuances. One method categorizes different types of crowdsourcing as either competitive or collaborative (Blohm, Leimeister, & Krcmar, 2013). Using this categorization, competitive crowdsourcing focuses on gathering and communicating solutions, while collaborative crowdsourcing centers on the group working together to generate a single solution (Blohm et al., 2013). Some have argued that firms will be more successful if they can adequately implement both of these types of crowdsourcing methods (Zhao & Zhu, 2014).

Boudreau and Lakhani (2013) contend that there are multiple methods of using crowds for innovation: contests, collaborations, complements, and labor. *Contests* are one of the more common methods of crowdsourcing; here, a corporation will create a contest and consumers have the ability to gain cash prizes if they win. Thus, contests use extrinsic motivators (e.g., cash prizes) to engage the public. One example of a contest is the aforementioned Lay's Do Us a Flavor campaign. Do Us a Flavor participants had the opportunity to not only win \$1 million, but also gain acclaim for inventing the best chip flavor. *Collaborations* are endeavors in which a host company invites consumers to work with the corporation to improve usage and function. These crowds are motivated intrinsically, since they are not compensated financially for their work. Wikipedia is the best example of a large-scale collaboration. *Complements* represent those crowds that work with technology in order to facilitate complementary function. Consider, for instance, apps that can be downloaded to smart devices. The smart device manufacturer does not create the apps, but the apps complement the smart device and, as such, increase the value of that device. *Labor* is the final highlighted method of engaging crowds. Organizations like Amazon (through its MTurk) have created crowdsourcing opportunities for individuals or corporations looking for labor. In a labor crowdsourcing scenario, individuals seeking employment are matched with companies or individuals who need labor. In the case of MTurk, researchers gain access to individuals to take surveys for a fee (Boudreau & Lakhani, 2013).

Yet another way to differentiate types of crowdsourcing has been theorized by Prpić et al. (2015), whose model outlines four types of crowdsourcing: crowd voting, idea, microtask, and solution. In this model, the type of crowdsourcing employed by a firm is determined based on two variables (Prpić et al., 2015, p. 78): "(1) what type of contributions are required from members of the crowd and (2) how these contributions will collectively help find a solution to [the] business problem." Prpić et al. (2015) suggested that the type of contributions could be either subjective or objective and used as either aggregated or filtered contributions. Crowd voting and idea crowdsourcing both involve the creation of subjective content, but crowd voting entails the aggregation of votes while idea crowdsourcing entails the filtration of contributions. Likewise, microtask and solution crowdsourcing both involve objective content, but microtask entails the aggregation of contributions while solution crowdsourcing entails the filtration of contributions.

Others have identified different types of crowdsourcing, while focusing on customer motivations for becoming involved in different types of crowdsourcing (Hossain & Kauranen, 2015). For example, many types of crowdsourcing—such as open-source software, public participation, citizen science, citizen journalism, and Wikipedia—are often motivated intrinsically. Alternatively, when the task is complex and involves financial compensation, such as in microtasks, motivations are more extrinsic. Therefore, Hossain and Kauranen (2015) argued that it is imperative to understand participant motivations when deciding which activities a firm is going to crowdsource.

3. Using crowdsourcing

Certain considerations must be taken into account before choosing whether or not to use crowdsourcing (Afuah & Tucci, 2012). First, for crowdsourcing to be effective, communication between the crowd and the corporation must be clear and easy to follow (Afuah & Tucci, 2012). Because crowds need to have a common purpose (Kozinets et al., 2008; Prpić et al., 2015), it follows that the purpose of a crowd must be clear in order to keep the community focused on one task. Second, the problem or task being given to the crowd must also be broken down easily into independent subtasks (Afuah & Tucci, 2012). Third, crowdsourcing is most effective when firms have an acknowledged knowledge gap and can benefit from the collective insight of the crowd.

For crowdsourcing to be beneficial, the firm must have access to the right crowd. The crowd should

include a significant number of people who are capable and motivated to solve the problem. This means that firms must accurately communicate the value of the crowd's involvement in order to motivate the group. Moreover, there need to be multiple entities that can evaluate the crowdsourced solutions. In other words, not only does the firm need to have a strong crowd, but also a means of effectively assessing the crowd's contributions. Finally, the technology available is critical when implementing crowdsourcing. For crowdsourcing to be most effective, the firm or brand must leverage technology that is widely used, accessible, and cost-effective; therefore, social media platforms can often be appealing for crowdsourcing (Afuah & Tucci, 2012).

When these criteria have been met, crowdsourcing has proven to be a useful tool for capturing value for both the firm/brand itself and its customers (Afuah & Tucci, 2013). Schweitzer, Buchinger, Gassmann, and Obrist (2012) proffered that crowdsourcing is exceptionally effective in the context of idea competitions. For example, the t-shirt company Threadless uses crowdsourcing to generate new t-shirt designs. Anyone can submit original t-shirt designs by simply uploading an image to the company's website. Designs are posted on the site for audience voting, and the top-voted designs are produced and made available for purchase on the company's website. This model has been successful because Threadless simultaneously outsources design to the customer and generates excitement/desire for the product, leaving the company to focus primarily on production and distribution (Kozinets et al., 2008).

While Threadless has built its entire structure around the concept of crowdsourcing, other well-known companies have also successfully implemented crowdsourced idea competitions. For example, Dell's ideastorm.com allows consumers to make suggestions for improvements to current products, submit ideas for new products, and evaluate others' submissions. To date, Dell has received more than 10,000 submissions, which are prioritized based on consumer evaluations (Hammon & Hippner, 2012; Xu et al., 2015). In 2007, Frito-Lay introduced its Crash the Super Bowl campaign, which invited customers to design ads for Doritos. The top three concepts were shot and then posted online so that the public could vote for one to be shown during the Super Bowl (Kozinets et al., 2008). The campaign was so successful that Frito-Lay continued the event for 10 years.

4. Brand communities and brands

Brand communities are groups of individuals who come together over their admiration for a brand and

develop a structured sense of social roles and behavior (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Brand communities demonstrate the existence of a shared consciousness, shared traditions/rituals, and a shared sense of moral responsibility. Often virtual rather than physical, brand communities are not defined in geographic terms. Research has shown that brand community association is a strong predictor of consumer behavior (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). While brand communities can form around any brand, they are most likely to form around brands "with a strong image, a rich and lengthy history, and threatening competition" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 415).

Since the concept of brand communities was introduced, it has been the subject of extensive academic research (Cova & Pace, 2006; Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). Brand communities exert significant power over brands, and this power shift is accelerated by the increasing use of the internet (Cova & Pace, 2006; Pires, Stanton, & Rita, 2006). Brand communities that are unhappy with the behavior of a company can drastically impact the value of the brand by using the internet and social media to air grievances. Consider, for example, the case of Michigan State University. In 2009, Michigan State worked with Nike to change the school's brand logo (Rittenberg, 2010). Fans immediately took to social media to protest the change, creating Facebook pages such as The Old Spartan Logo and Just Don't – No New Nike Influenced Spartan Helmet. These communities amassed thousands of voices collectively against implementation of the new logo (Beyond the Paid, 2010). Ultimately, MSU gave in and agreed to maintain its original logo—which, coincidentally, was created through a crowdsourced competition in 1975 (Bao, 2012).

Since brand communities control so much of the meaning and impact of the brand, it is important to examine consumer and brand community dynamics (Cova & Pace, 2006). Dessart et al. (2015) found that consumers who are members of brand communities engage with the brand and other community members along three dimensions: affect, cognition, and behaviors. *Affective engagement* occurs via excitement about the community and brand, and enjoyment in interactions with both. Typically, affective engagement with the brand community is emotional in nature and marked by strong positive feelings. *Cognitive engagement* occurs when a consumer is involved in a brand community and is aware of his/her time and effort devoted, which otherwise could have been expended on other activities. *Behavioral engagement* refers to actions and behaviors enacted by the member within the brand community; these may include information sharing, learning from other members, and/or actively endorsing behavior

within the group. Crowdsourcing is a method of engaging consumers along all three of these dimensions.

5. Consumer empowerment

Given the influence of brand communities, it is important that companies understand how to encourage positive associations with their brands. Consumers want to feel empowered, and brands that allow consumers to feel this way typically experience positive perceptions in the market (Füller, Mühlbacher, Matzler, & Jawecki, 2009). In other words, brands that encourage consumer power are perceived as superior. Perceived empowerment is also associated with higher levels of trust toward the brand (Füller et al., 2009). Trust is a strong determinant of both loyalty and word of mouth (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). One method used by companies to engage and empower consumers involves allowing them to create advertising messaging. Specifically, companies can encourage consumers to make ads, either via co-creation or independently. The latter are known as consumer-generated ads (CGAs). CGAs can be considered a means of crowdsourcing as the ads are generated by groups of people outside the firm, and often for financial gain. Füller et al. (2009) found that the more empowered consumers felt during the co-creation process, the more positively they perceived the brand and the more likely they would be to participate in future co-creation projects. It is a logical extension to assume that brand engagement will increase in situations in which consumers feel empowered and that positive perception will transfer to engagement. This enthusiasm and engagement, in turn, can lead to customers sharing their ideas with others by word of mouth.

As mentioned, one popular method of engaging consumers is through consumer-generated advertisements (CGAs). Berthon, Pitt, and Campbell (2008) conducted an extensive study of CGAs and discovered three major drivers of consumer participation: intrinsic enjoyment, self-promotion, and change perception. While some consumers participated simply because they enjoyed it (intrinsic enjoyment) or to bring attention to their own work or skills (self-promotion), others engaged in the project to challenge the view of the brand (change perception). Berthon et al. (2008) also identified four types of consumer-generated ads, sorted by positivity or negativity of the underlying message and degree of harmony between the ad and the brand message. When sanctioned by a brand, CGAs are a means of giving message control to the

consumer and lessening the amount of control held by the brand itself.

Thompson and Malaviya (2013) studied the persuasiveness of consumer co-created advertisements. The findings of their research suggested that when individuals know an ad is co-created with other consumers, persuasiveness of the ad increases under specific situations. Because these types of ads can be so persuasive it is important to understand how consumers typically react to them. Campbell, Pitt, Parent, and Berthon (2011) examined how consumers talk about consumer-generated ads. The authors proposed that managers should note a few important things regarding CGAs. First, they observed that the brand is not always at the center of the discussion; in other words, it is often the creator of the ad and/or the ad itself that is discussed. This poses an issue to brands that would choose to engage in CGAs as a means of crowdsourcing. Second, the authors proposed that CGAs can be seen as a modern form of word of mouth. This is because the consumers themselves are generating the ads, sharing them with their friends, and trying to generate buzz around the brand. Oftentimes, this is done via social media and other modern forms of communication.

6. Negative consumer-generated messaging

Although positive consumer-generated ads can be an asset to the brand, the persuasiveness of this type of advertising can alternatively make negative content much more dangerous. There have been several instances in which consumers have actively punished a brand through user-generated content. These examples are typically related to negative personal experiences consumers have had interacting with the brand. However, research has shown that brand characteristics (e.g., social irresponsibility) can also influence customers' willingness to punish the brand (Sweetin, Knowles, Summey, & McQueen, 2013).

An example of how consumer-generated ads can hurt a brand involves Chevy, which created a campaign allowing consumers to design their own advertisements for the Chevrolet Tahoe by adding text to company-provided video clips (Bosman, 2006). The campaign was somewhat controlled insofar as consumers could only create the messaging on pre-cut video imaging. Engagement increased through the campaign, but it was not positive. Instead of creating good buzz for the newest Tahoe, the campaign generated hundreds of videos attacking the SUV (Bosman, 2006; Huba, 2006). In this case, Chevy

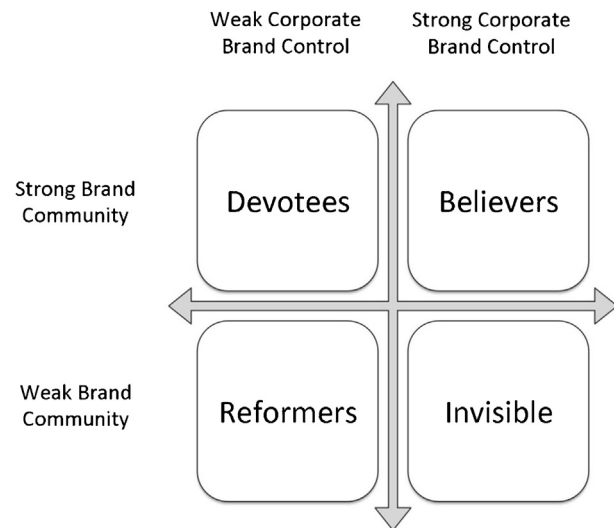
inadvertently lost control of its ad messaging and essentially was punished for not having a strong brand community. Some academicians call for marketers to take back control in response to this type of threat posed by crowdsourcing and consumer-generated advertisements (Hammon & Hippner, 2012; Pires et al., 2006). However, it was Chevy's attempt to maintain some control over the content that facilitated the magnitude of negative content and imagery. Since Chevy provided the video clips, creators did not need to own or have access to Chevy's product or imagery. Although this strategy opened up the competition to more participants, it did not engage loyal members of the Chevy or Tahoe brand communities (Huba, 2006). In this case, perhaps giving more power to consumers and asking for original videos showing how much consumers liked their Tahoes would have engaged a much smaller crowd of brand enthusiasts, but also curbed negative ad creation, messaging, and imagery (Huba, 2006).

In 2009, musician Dave Carroll took a flight on United Airlines during which his guitar was broken. United refused to pay the cost of the damaged guitar and, in response, Carroll made a video condemning United's customer service. To date, *United Breaks Guitars* has generated more than 15 million views on YouTube and is widely considered the anthem of growing public disgust with the airline industry. Following the debut and viral popularity of *United Breaks Guitars*, United Airlines stock lost \$180 million in value and the company garnered countless negative consumer impressions (Huffington Post, 2009). Because United did not technically invite the ad, it did not purposely give up control of its messaging. However, because United's brand community was so weak, no customers rushed to its defense to counteract the bad press. Similar to the Chevy Tahoe example, United did not have a strong brand community to defend the company in the public arena. Therefore, the fact that consumers had control over the message meant that the United Airlines brand was vulnerable to the whims and beliefs of an empowered consumer.

7. A typology of crowdsourcing and brand

The literature reviewed thus far provides the starting point for a typology to help brand managers better understand crowdsourcing toward improving brand messaging, assuming that crowdsourcing opens the door to consumer engagement. Typologies are a means of classifying findings and have previously been utilized in marketing and advertising research (Campbell et al., 2011). In this typology,

Figure 1. A typology of crowdsourcing and brand



we juxtapose the role of the brand community (weak versus strong) with brand control (weak versus strong). *Brand control* is a measure of how much a corporation cedes control of the brand to consumers (Berthon et al., 2008; Parent, Plangger, & Bal, 2011).

Four categories are identified in the theoretical typology: devotees, believers, reformers, and invisibles. These categories were developed when examining the interaction between brand community strength and brand control. Recommendations regarding Figure 1 are presented next, along with definitions and information about each of the quadrants.

7.1. Devotees

Devotees are those consumers who are members of a strong brand community where the company exhibits weak brand control and cedes that power to the consumer. Under this scenario, companies encourage consumers to invest in brand messaging and product creation, and members of the brand community do so out of love for the brand. One myth of brand communities is that they exist to serve the business (Fournier & Lee, 2009). Strong business leaders realize that brand communities exist to serve the people within the community. Devotees are interested in their gain from the brand community (Fournier & Lee, 2009). They strive for engagement, not only with the brand but also with other members. Because brands in this quadrant have conceded power to the consumer, the consumer has a direct impact on the meaning and success of the brand. Consumers are likely to defend the brand if they are given the freedom to shape the meaning

of the brand, and that freedom is sanctioned by the brand itself (Nobel, 2014).

Crowdsourcing is highly effective in this quadrant. Because devotee brand communities love their brands, it is highly unlikely that they would do anything to hurt the brand. Devotees want to have a say in their brand communities and often demand freedom of voice. Wikipedia is a prime example. The open-access, online encyclopedia that anyone can edit enjoys a strong brand community and exhibits weak brand control. Wikipedia's strength is that millions of articles on various topics are edited through a collaborative process. Because the process is anonymous, users can contribute data that is inaccurate with no consequence. However, due to the substantial size of Wikipedia's user base, this process is believed to eliminate false or defamatory information soon after it is published as the community self-regulates and self-monitors.

In some cases, a devoted brand community will exercise its freedom to control or alter a brand's message. Recently, Beyoncé's strong brand community—lovingly referred to as 'The Beyhive'—went to Wikipedia to change the content of Rachel Roy's page. A perceived foe, Roy was rumored to have had an affair with Beyoncé's husband, Jay-Z, as detailed in the song "Lemonade" (Thompson, 2016). Among other things, The Beyhive changed Roy's Wikipedia profile to reflect that she had died under a lemonade stand (Thompson, 2016). This case shows that even though Beyoncé herself never sanctioned the crowdsourcing, the community leveraged its freedom to mobilize and modify the source in question.

Another example in which devotees took matters into their own hands is the aforementioned Michigan State logo debacle. Sports brand communities are often especially powerful and exhibit high levels of control over the brand and brand meaning. When Michigan State failed to ask the brand community for its opinions, fans took matters into their own hands and flexed their power against the decision to change the logo. In this case, MSU fans self-organized and crowdsourced to demand a change. As a result, MSU wasted significant time and money 'improving' its logo without asking the brand community if it wanted the logo improved. Had the brand community been engaged through crowdsourcing earlier in the process, buy in to the changed logo probably would have been higher.

7.2. Believers

Believers are members of a strong brand community where the company exhibits strong brand control and cedes little power to the consumer. Under this

scenario, companies encourage consumers to invest in brand communities but concurrently try to maintain maximum control over the brand. It is important to note that because of the internet, no brand has 100% control; however, certain companies give up less control than others. Because brands in this quadrant have not ceded power completely to the consumer, believers—as compared to devotees—have a lower impact on the brand and brand meaning. This is somewhat of a dangerous position for companies in that if believers become disenfranchised, they are less likely to defend the brand with vigor. Granting consumers control of the brand actually increases their devotion (Nobel, 2014). Controlled crowdsourcing tends to be effective in this quadrant.

Monopoly is one of the most popular board games in history and certainly has a strong brand community. In recent years, however, Monopoly has experienced a decline in sales as the popularity of smartphones and tablets has risen (Crowdsourcing "Monopoly," 2014). Hasbro, the owner/maker of Monopoly, decided to cede a small portion of messaging control to the brand community by allowing consumers to vote on which playing piece tokens they wanted to keep in the game. Hasbro turned to crowdsourcing to do this. Consumers voted to get rid of the iron and in its place add a cat to the extant classic tokens of dog, shoe, thimble, top hat, racecar, wheelbarrow, and battleship (Crowdsourcing "Monopoly," 2014). By handing over a minor decision to the brand community, Hasbro increased engagement and made the game more enjoyable for consumers. It is important to note that while the nature of Monopoly and its messaging/brand meaning were not changed through this crowdsourcing contest, consumers nonetheless felt they were engaged in influencing the game without Hasbro conceding any real control. In the end, Hasbro—thus eliminating any real risk associated with a loss of brand control—chose the pieces voted on by the community.

7.3. Reformers

Reformers are members of a weak brand community where the company exhibits weak brand control and cedes that power to the consumer. Under this scenario, consumers have power sanctioned by the brand itself but do not really love the brand. This is a dangerous quadrant for corporations considering investing in crowdsourcing. We call occupants of this quadrant reformers because they are often interested in change.

One example is the aforementioned Chevy Tahoe crowdsourcing campaign. Without a strong brand

community to defend Chevy, consumers were able to run amok with negative brand messaging and imagery. It is important to note that the vast majority of negative ads attacked Chevy for its poor environmental performance. Reformers utilize their voices to try to improve or reform brands that are not trusted by the general public. In sum, these consumers take advantage of poorly informed corporate decisions to alter brand messaging to suit their beliefs and potentially convince others to believe the same.

7.4. Invisibles

Invisibles are members of a weak brand community where the company exhibits strong brand control and cedes little power to the consumer. Under this scenario, consumers have neither power nor love for the brand. We call occupants of this quadrant invisibles because they often remain anonymous.

In 2015, an organization (literally) called Anonymous declared war on ISIS ([Mosbergen, 2015](#)). Through a series of messages, Anonymous asked people to aid in its attack. Anonymous published a guide to help novices seek out ISIS members through online platforms such as Twitter ([Gorton, 2015](#)). Because Anonymous members themselves could not do all the legwork, they crowdsourced the work to individuals and simply gave them the tools to carry out the war. The expressed message was to take down ISIS, but individuals who helped Anonymous were not given a path to the Anonymous community. Instead, they remained independent.

8. Managerial implications

Crowdsourcing can be an effective means for brands to engage with their customers and solve a variety of problems. However, it is not appropriate for every brand in any situation. There are several key implications of this research that managers should consider before attempting to tap into crowdsourcing.

- Managers must continually assess and evaluate the strength of their brand communities before engaging in any crowdsourcing activity. Brands that enjoy strong brand communities have the flexibility to leverage crowdsourcing for a variety of tasks without fear of damaging the brand. However, brands with weaker brand communities should be cautious regarding attempted crowdsourcing activities or risk having the crowd turn on them, thus generating more negative activity than positive. Rather than try to gain value from
- a specific crowdsourcing task, brands with weaker brand communities should instead focus on limited activities that emphasize strengthening the bond between the customer and the brand and/or help establish a stronger community.
- Brands with devotee brand communities should continue to (1) leverage and strengthen relationships with the brand communities and (2) gather valuable knowledge/ideas by involving them in crowdsourcing activities. These brands in particular can confidently assign a variety of tasks to their crowds, knowing that strength of the community will protect the brand from harm.
- Brands with believer communities should, for certain tasks and in order to gain greater engagement and insight, experiment with ceding brand messaging power to the crowd. Having learned from listening to the crowd regarding its selection of the new Monopoly game piece, Hasbro allowed even greater crowd control when developing the Monopoly Here & Now Edition. In 2015, Hasbro ran a crowdsourcing campaign on Buzzfeed to pick the cities that would be featured on the new game board. While this event did not cede complete control to customers, it generated strong input for an old brand that found a way to stay relevant by engaging its customers.
- Brands with reformer brand communities should consider giving the crowd less control while focusing on strengthening community bonds. In essence, the goal should be to cultivate reformers into believers. This can be done by creating simple and succinct activities that empower the crowd to improve specific aspects of the brand, rather than giving over full control as in the Chevy Tahoe case. For example, instead of tasking the community with generating ideas to solve a marketing problem, give the group an assignment that allows further identification with the brand. Crowdfunding can be one means of building a brand community that does not already exist.
- Brands with invisible brand communities should not risk ceding more brand control to the crowd and should be extremely cautious in using any form of crowdsourcing. Instead, like brands dealing with reformer communities, companies with invisible brand communities should focus on strengthening community bonds first and foremost, and limit the use of crowds.
- Managers of newer brands without established brand communities should evaluate the strength

and unity of preexisting communities in the marketplace and target these communities for support. However, the extent to which brands cede control will need to be based on how much of a fit the brand is with the community. For example, the small open-source gaming system Ouya got its start through crowdfunding (Schroter, 2014) and is considered one of the most successful crowdfunding examples. Ouya entered a highly saturated gaming market with no brand recognition and depended on the gaming community, which is especially strong and devoted, for its start. Through Kickstarter, Ouya was able to raise \$8.5 million in just 27 days (Schroter, 2014). The brand community of Ouya exploded after launch.

9. Leveraging brand community typology going forward

This research offers a starting point for firms looking to utilize crowdsourcing as a means of gaining consumer input, feedback, and/or participation in marketing activities. A few limitations of this proposal should be noted. First, as today's business environment is rapidly evolving, we expect there to be many and often rapid changes. In the future, the relationships between brand community strength and brand controls may be further explored. Additionally, while we offer general guidelines in terms of firms working with crowds, the brand community typology is a multi-dimensional, complex tool that should be used by firms accordingly. In sum, this article has offered ideas for managers who want to use crowdsourcing to engage consumers, solve problems, create new products, generate brand communications, and improve customer experiences. Used correctly, we believe that this powerful tool can improve the value of a brand significantly.

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