The Evolution of Tribal Marketing Within Social Networks: How the Community Marketing and Community Brands Have Evolved in Social Media?

Cane Olivier a,*, Bellag Nesrine b, Henderson Lee Fukada c

a Dr., President of Riviera University
b,c Riviera University

ARTICLE INFO

Article History
Submitted 21 Apr 2020
Accepted 26 Apr 2020
Available online 27 Apr 2020

JEL Classification
M31

Keywords
Tribal Market
Tribal and Digital Market
Brand Building
Social Network

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the latest literature on Tribal Marketing. The tribe has always been a mean of segmenting people for marketing purposes, and community marketing is recognized as an efficient way of narrowing the target population for a given brand. With the development of social networks, another step in tribal marketing has been achieved. The maturity of digital marketing techniques and the growing mastery by brands of the social networks have now brought tribal marketing to another level as it is detailed in the following literature review.

Journal of Marketing Management and Consumer Behavior
Introduction

Tribal marketing as a source of competitive advantage in marketing strategy tries to understand social groups or communities created around a service or product. Nowadays, satisfying the primary needs are no longer considered as a priority for new customer and they rather seek for consumption experiences that connect them to others or in other words to a tribe. (Gretzel et al. 2005).

The Community activity has been the biggest change in business in the past 100 years” (Ahonen & Moore, 2005), and was therefore the most discussed evolution at the turn of the century. “The social networking sites, have been really active players in the world since 2005, and have transformed consumers from silent, isolated and invisible individuals, into a noisy, public, and even more unmanageable than usual, collective” (Patterson, 2012). Therefore, in both research and practice, it is accepted that a successful brand strategy, has no choice but embrace social network environments and their communities.

Given the importance of tribal marketing, this paper aims to look at the latest literature regarding the problems for tribal marketing in recent years and especially social network image of the brand, online social responsibility and global communication.

A tribe, is different from a brand community in four different ways (Goulding and al, 2011): in the postmodern sense of the term, it is a group of individuals who are not necessarily homogenous (in terms of objective social characteristics), but are inter-linked by the same subjectivity, the same passion, and capable of taking collective action, short-lived but intense. These tribes are not dominating the person lives until the extend of a subculture, (Bennett 1999), secondly tribes are playful (Cova & all 2007) as these are people connected through shared passions, thirdly tribes are transient and unpredictable (Goulding and al, 2009) and fourth, they are entrepreneurial, as they can produce and customize market offering (Goulding and Sarret, 2007).
According to Cova & Cova 2002, each member in the tribe has a role which is explained as follows:

- **Sympathizers**: Individuals that are interested in specific domain, however, their knowledge about it is relatively small, for example, they may have interest in music, but their understanding is narrow.
- **Participants**: These categories represent people who are active and social with the tribe, they may have physical or virtual presence.
- **Devotees**: These are members who have a deep involvement in the tribe, they join with passion and knowledge.
- **Practitioners**: Members that are involved professionally or informally with other members of the tribe without being interested in generating profit.

Tribes are not necessarily easy to identify, as they are unclear and look more like societal sparkles than socioeconomic certainty. They are shifting aggregations of emotionally bonded people and open systems to which a person belongs and yet doesn't quite belong. (Cova and Cova, 2002; Goulding and al, 2011=

Their underlying logic is made up of shared experience, interpretations and representations.

We can say that is a group of like-minded people, with active members that do more than just show up. The Membership is voluntary and it is not created by converting people (Cova 2012). The members are not closed off or isolated, aren’t blind sheep but evangelists. They might evolve and be considered as a gang in some specific cases such as the Hells Angels, who are Harley Davidson motorbikes owners (Fombelle et al 2012), though it can also be a brand
consumption and identification closed to the religious values, like for the Ducati brand (Touchard 2001)

“Tribal marketing challenges creative individuals who are prepared to abandon traditional demographic or psychographic means of segmenting and targeting markets to think outside of the box and get closer to the “tribe” (Goulding, Shankar et al, 2011)

The aim of marketing teams, when they use a tribal marketing approach, is therefore to understand the tribe community, its rituals and habits, in order to adapt their communication.

The ultimate goal of tribal marketing is having a group of people who not only adhere to the brand and company strategy but defend and identify themselves as part of the brand. (Chan, Kimmy et al 2010)

Cova, 2002 explains that in the case of products and services that hold a people together as a group of enthusiasts or devotees the key element is “linking value”.

**Going beyond brand community**

The community is built around a specific brand or product and the tribe, inside this community, focuses on the relationship between its members – the consumers. In similar vein, Canniford (2013) stated that the social links are formed between consumers, or consumer-to-consumer, within tribes.

Beyond brand communities, which describes a group of persons and a set of relationship focused on the consumption of the same brand (Mun˜iz and O’Guinn, 2001), marketers have also defined the emerging “Consumers Tribes”: these are groups of people emotionally connected by similar consumption values and usage, who use the social ‘linking value’ of products and service to create a community and express identity” (Cova and Cova, 2002). They share their interest and create a parallel social universe ripe with its own values, rituals, vocabulary and hierarchy. An example of this would be the “World Nutella Day”, created by a Nutella fan, Sara Rosso, in 2007. She was an American blogger who was fond of the Nut and chocolate product from the Italian company Ferrero. This idea immediately got a lot of followers, starting by her direct network, friends, school mates, family and various communities she belonged .(https://www.nutelladay.com)

Her online followers were also immediately involved, and soon it became a worldwide event. From this day, all members of the tribe are invited to celebrate their love and dedication to the brand together once a year (Vernuccio et al.2016). The brand “world Nutella day” has been
registered, and since 2015 Sara Rosso has transferred the management of this event and of its followers directly to Ferrero.

If we look at another detailed example, the Brand Harley Davidson has managed to build a very strong brand community: ownership of Harley Davidson motorcycles enables riders to identify with a brand community and to define themselves. Owners appropriate their motorcycles through customization. Harley Davidson motorcycles create emotional attachment. (Catulli, Maurizio; Cook, Matthew and Potter, Stephen, 2017).

Harley Davidson members easily connect and are organized around the same lifestyle, activities and the specific culture of the brand. Harley Davidson is more than a love mark and suggests strong brand associations such as ‘freedom’. Tribal marketing has here evolved to a more segmented form of interaction with the brand. There are find several groups within the brand community, such as the Hells Angels, the Latinos, Women Riders, Iron elite, etc.: they all share the same values about the brand but some have evolved to be independent tribes with complex and elaborated ritual for new members, as it is the tribe who chose you and not you who chose to adhere, even if your goals and brand love are shared by all. Tribes don’t do what the leader wants, they do what they want. Cova (2002 and 2012) also details that people belong to not just one but many tribes as every tribe is different.

From a marketing point of view, the segmentation of a tribe is very useful as it gives more focused content opportunities. Most segments will overlap with other tribes and it’s useful to pick out those who overlap with many tribes, thus increasing the potential of the content produced.

It is also a risky move, the example of Harley Davidson’s owners’ sub-tribe, the Hell’s angels prove that in the case of a tribe with bad behaviour and a gangster like reputation, the brand image can be damaged and it is hard to repair or fix it through communication.

**Brand and Ethno-centrism of the tribe**

Ethnocentrism tribe, such as rural consumers compared to urban consumers in India, (Das, Manish, 2017), is a segmentation that has not yet been explored by most of local brands, who are still using a traditional approach with a global and unique communication. The reference group here is the tribe taken as its original and etymology meaning. The tribe, located in rural area, behaves like one person, and is composed of a group of individuals with common goals and focus. Selling mobile phones in rural India through the marketing strategy of targeting the tribe is therefore used by companies (Vinod Kumar et al, 2015).
Another important element which carries an influence on the values, customs, habits and attitudes of people is the ethnicity. An important literature on tribal marketing is taking place in Malaysia, as it is a multi-cultural country with three main ethnies, Chinese, Malay and Indian. The term “Tribal ethny” refers to persons who perceive themselves as members of a community, with a common culture and language, but also in some cases people with the same history, religion or customs. (Algesheimer et al, 2010).

Therefore, the tribe defined from an ethnicity point of view provides a powerful target for marketers, as it is the foundation of tribal marketing. Approaching systematically a specific group such as the Chinese community in various countries around the world, and focusing on the same communication, using the same language will improve the brand perception among this tribe. (Pires, Guilherme, and J. P. Stanton. 2014.)

The word of mouth behaviour occurs more often among the members of a same tribe, speaking the same language; Tribal marketing appears here as a performant marketing tool.

In another study in Malaysia, among young Malay teenagers, “the results of hypothesis testing indicate that the targeted Malay group had more favourable attitudes toward advertisements and brands and greater purchase intent compared with the non-targeted Malay group”. (Butt, Muhammad Mohsin, and Ernest Cyril de Run 2012) and the research demonstrate that tribal segmentation through ethnicity is a useful tool in a multi-ethnic society.

One of the domains where tribal marketing is the most active is also one of the oldest: politic. Indeed, to gather voters the marketing team of political parties are using the latest trends and techniques at their disposal on the market, and lately targeting tribes through social network is key to their success. Tribal marketing is at its best, as marketing professionals consider electors as consumers of political content. There are many facts that are needed to understand the political behaviour of the electors (Stadelmann and Torgler, 2013), and as a matter of fact, the tribe is more than useful for the brand (the party) which wants to be elected.

The political tribe is the perfect example of the behaviour of a group of people within the same tribe: they have identical objectives which are to get their party elected, they worship the same “deities” who are the tenors of the political party, they gather in meeting with the same colors and uniform, defend the same ideas and will fight for the brand they have chosen (Alkhawaldeh, Abdelbaset and Md. Salleh, Salniza and Halim, Fairol 2016).

In terms of brand loyalty, these political tribes are the most engaged and loyal to their choice, and often commit to convince people and to bring in more members in their tribe.
Implications for building loyalty with the tribe

The Brand becomes the ultimate expression of self; the philosophy of the brand becomes the philosophy of the member of the tribe. A tribe can be global, without geographic limitation. It creates one self-identity across different countries, cultures.

It also creates loyalty. It is cheaper for a brand to retain its consumers rather than acquire new ones.

It carries also the largest potential in terms of brand extensions. The member of the tribe will always be willing to buy the new product from the Brand, like in the Apple watch example.

This strong sense of belonging comes with an opposition to the other brands considered as “the enemy” such as Linux against Windows, Apple against Microsoft… (Consoli, Domenico and al. 2010).

The tribe is a great communication opportunity. Tribe members are not like normal customers, they are at a stage which is beyond being loyal to a brand, and they live for the brand, they care for the brand, and they support the brand as tribe members. Where else than in the tribe of Apple lovers you find people able to sleep in front of the Apple Store in order to make sure they will be the first one in town to get the latest IPhone once the shop opens on the official launch of the product? Tribe member also communicate and are always connected with their peers on the social networks about the brand and become self-appointed ambassadors of this brand (Cova & White, 2010)

It appears that such communities may constitute a significant risk for companies who have thus far based their offering on a ‘market with’ approach. The case detailed in Cova & White (2010) clearly shows that groupings of consumers are capable of developing potentially dangerous opposition and/or competitive offerings with little or no assistance from companies. These online groupings generate alter brands and counter brands that present opportunities and threats for existing brand managers.

Fallon (2009) proves through a simple case study of Cadbury, the power of Tribal marketing:

In 2001, Cadbury withdrew its product Wispa (launched in 1981) from the market because of declining sales and replaced it with Dairy Milk Bubbles. Members of the Cadbury community were really unhappy over this decision and decided to take online action. They created online petitions and campaigns on social media platforms calling for Cadbury to rethink their decision.
The role of communication in the tribe

Elmer Diaz, in his online book “Tribal Marketing E-Book” (2012) gives a few advices to a brand on how to communicate with its tribe. First they have to understand how they want to communicate with the company, then how they want to communicate with Each Other. The objective here is to give them what they want!

The next step, according to Diaz (2012) is to getting the tribe to notice the brand through its online content, talking the its tribes using the same language in order to build trust. And to keep in mind the ultimate goal: to monetize from the tribe.

Communicating with the tribe can be through the channels of unconventional marketing, such as viral marketing, stealth marketing, ambush marketing or ambient marketing, as the efficiency of this “guerilla techniques” have been proven. (Cova & Saucet, 2014).

If we take the example of banks through this study made in Bosnia and Herzegovinia on the use of social network (Gašpar, Dražena and Mabić, Mirela and Lucović, Damir, 2016), it shows that usually banks use social networks to reduce their costs and conduct a target marketing approach. “they get more detailed information on their customers, foster commitment and loyalty of their customers, get feedback on their products and services, build and strengthen their brand, act proactively to prevent negative connotations associated with the bank” (Chanda, Zaorski, 2013; Eldridge, 2016).

Still, it seems that banks do not understand how to deal with their customers on social network, and lack of customer relation management skills, as they often listen but are not willing to implement some of customers’ suggestions. (Veenswyk, M. 2013).
For a brand to become a loyal friend of the tribe and of the online tribe, proving that the issues and questions raised by the tribe are taken care of is a key marketing point.

The paper explores the current engagement of banks in Bosnia and Herzegovina on social networks. (Gaspar et al. 2016) and it seems, based on the results, that not a single bank carries an active digital strategy towards its customers, and by extension do not have any feedback from these tribes (what customers want, don’t want and what they don’t like with the bank).

“However, despite these results, management structures in banks should realize as soon as possible that social networks are today very popular and actively used among different age groups not only as a means of communication but also as a means of primary information.” (Gaspar et al. 2016)

Virtual Brand community need also to create momentum with their customers to build a strong relationship with the clients. Lazada has now a group of fans and followers thanks to their promotion strategy “11.11” and is now getting a fan base which can be called a Tribe (Reza, Faisal.2016).

A virtual brand will encounter and face the same issues with their followers than a brick and mortar brand, only in a faster development: an unhappy customer in brick and mortar world was said to talk about her bad experience to 10 persons in a matter of days. In the digital world, the same customer will share her experience online to all her virtual friends on her Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and other social networks account. Since the average number of friends on a platform such as Facebook is 338, (https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/facebook-statistics/), in a matter of seconds, with the sharing facilities given by the platform, a few thousands potential consumers of the brand will be informed of the whereabouts and brand experience of this person. (Sung, Yongjun et al.2010)

Interaction and fast reaction to any negative comment or experience of a consumer, especially if he or she is part of a more global tribe and carries an influence over other persons (blogger, community leader, opinion leader…) is therefore a key element of achievement for the brand, which needs to always take care of the trends and opinion of its followers. An online permanent watch team is essential to the success of the company’s brand (Chan, Kimmy et al. 2010)

Conclusion

Tribal marketing today faces its biggest challenge as communities and tribes are evolving towards a single and unique channel of communication, through Social networks and online media.
Communities and global tribes are now groups of people who are independent and cannot be controlled by the brand. Tribes such as Harley Davidson owners are entities on their own, with their own rules and rites, that are hard to control.

The power has shifted from the brand to the brand’s customer tribe. In some cases, it can come back to the brand, like the Nutella day, but in other cases, any decision of the brand can backfire (Cadbury is one of the examples)

In 2019, there are still some industries that are lagging behind in terms of digital marketing skills, and still have difficulties in understanding and mastering the social network, which implies that the communication with their customers is not yet at a stage of exchange of information nor in a full digital communication mode.

It is believed that the virtual brands will take the lead in how to manage their tribes through the social networks and only later the brick and mortar businesses with a virtual presence will be able to follow the trend by learning to understand and manage their own customer tribes.

For future investigation researcher should study the relationship between the loyalty and the commercial support of tribes among different brands. Indeed, besides the assumed differences in background and demographic’s characteristics, each member of the tribe shares the same motivations, consumption behavior and social interaction.

References

Belk, R. (2014). You are what you can access: Sharing and collaborative consumption online. Journal of business research, 67(8), 1595-1600.


World Nutella days  https://www.nutelladay.com
Cadbury case study : https://youtu.be/qNDNFoJmzUU