

Virtual Brand Communities and Brand Loyalty: A Case Study of MINDBODY Inc.'s Virtual
Brand Community

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Abstract

This case study explores how the fast-growing software company MINDBODY, Inc. utilizes their virtual brand community on Facebook in order to build brand loyalty. My research primarily explores how Communication Studies researchers have come to understand the effects of virtual communities on brand loyalty from the perspective of Social Capital, Attribution, and Social Identity theories. It discusses what virtual brand communities are, how they are formed, and how marketers and consumers utilize them. Furthermore, I discuss how virtual brand communities facilitate the growth of social capital among users and why this is a key step in their sustainability. I divulge into why people seek to create a social identity through the process of joining groups, and how Attribution Theory can help continue their seeking of social identity in a specific group or deter it. I also discuss what consumer participation is, the different types of consumer participation and how it is correlated to brand loyalty. Then I discuss the results of my case study on the MINDBODY Facebook page and whether I believe it is successful or not at increasing their brand loyalty. Lastly, I make suggestions and discuss implications for how MINDBODY can use their virtual brand community to more effectively increase their brand loyalty.

A Case Study of MINDBODY's Virtual Brand Community

Since the first World Wide Web server and browser opened for commercial use in 1991, consumer-marketer relations have never been the same. No longer did people have to go into stores to purchase an item; with the advent of Amazon and eBay in 1995, consumers could buy goods from the comfort of their own bedrooms. In the past decade, marketers have become increasingly interested in understanding how to use online shopping to their brand's advantage and increase the likelihood of retaining consumers and brand loyalty. One way marketers have found to make this work is through organizing and facilitating the development of virtual brand communities. With the focus of marketers in all different industries shifting towards how to capitalize on virtual brand communities, communication researchers have also sought to understand their effects and benefits on increasing brand loyalty. While there are many different theoretical perspectives that help explain this process, researchers have primarily focused on explaining these effects and benefits through theories such as Social Capital, Attribution, and Social Identity.

One company, MINDBODY, Inc., a web-based business management software company based out of San Luis Obispo, California, has seen great success through their use of a virtual brand community. MINDBODY was founded in 2001, and since then, it has gained over thirty-six thousand clients in eighty different countries around the world making it the twenty first fastest growing software company rated by Inc. 500 in 2009 (inc.com). MINDBODY's virtual brand community, created in 2010, is located on Facebook and currently has nearly one hundred thousand unique likes. Over the last thirteen years, MINDBODY has managed to retain more than 75% of their clientele all while growing their customer base by over 300% in the last three

years. Initially, MINDBODY paid for advertisements on Facebook in order to acquire more likes. After the MINDBODY Facebook page reached thirty thousand likes they stopped paying for advertisements on Facebook, and the page has generated nearly seventy thousand organic likes since then. Additionally, in an average week, the MINDBODY Facebook page is talked about by over eight hundred people on Facebook, and their posts reach over fourteen thousand different people. For this reason, I have decided to study MINDBODY's Facebook page in order to provide a real world example of the success of virtual brand communities and their positive effect on brand loyalty.

Literature Review

Virtual Brand Communities

Virtual communities are a part of every internet user's daily life. A virtual community is defined as, "the integration of a group of individuals using the internet to maintain social relations around a common interest" (Royo-Vela & Casamassima, 2011, p. 518). They help consumers satisfy needs such as establishing relationships and sharing resources which can be used to base decisions on future product purchases. Virtual communities are also hedonistic in nature, because they create a positive, coalescent experience through interaction (Royo-Vela & Casamassima, 2011, p.519). The largest virtual community on the World Wide Web is Facebook. With 1.1 billion users worldwide, users can interact with one another and share information with people that they may never have had the chance to. On Facebook, a user can join a network organized by workplace, city, or even school among many others and connect with other people. They also have the opportunity to join networks based on a broad range of

common social interests from music and sports to fashion and art. The latter are the type of networks that are most similar to virtual brand communities. A brand community is “a specialized non-geographical community based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Royo-Vela & Casamassima, 2011, p. 519). In essence, a virtual brand community is a brand community that has been developed online with the characteristics of a virtual community. The members of the virtual brand community may not personally know each other; however, they are typically willing to exchange information regarding a product and indulge in favor-for-favor interactions that characterize real-life social relations (Royo-Velta & Casamassima, 2011, p. 519). While there are many virtual brand communities that are created to discuss general topics, like fashion for example, located in these general virtual brand communities are narrower, brand-specific virtual brand communities that can be created by either a consumer or the brand company itself.

With the ever increasing development of social media and the subsequent advantages that come with it such as vast reach, low cost, and high communication efficiency, companies of all sizes have been hiring marketers that are very eager to learn about, create, and facilitate virtual brand communities. LaRoche, Habibi, Richard, and Sankaranarayanan (2012) list several other reasons behind such interest in virtual brand communities: the rapid dissemination of information, influencing customer evaluations, learning customer perception of new products, and most importantly gaining a “holy grail” of loyal customers (p. 1755). With people spending more than one third of their day on social media, properly taking advantage of virtual brand communities can lead to companies effectively learning about their consumers in a more thorough way and subsequently increase their brand loyalty with said consumers. While

consumers typically join virtual brand communities in order to share information about a product or take advantage of promotions, there are more theoretical explanations to what motivates consumers continued use.

Social Capital Theory

In research on the social implications of virtual brand communities, social capital theory has become a building block for understanding consumers' motivation. Social capital is the positive outcomes and resources which individuals derive from interpersonal contacts. Although social capital is a very broad subject, most researchers have decided to focus on three particular dimensions: structural, cognitive, and relational (Lin & Lu, 2011, p. 566). These three dimensions help us understand what specifically is behind the motivation of users to continue use. Lin & Lu (2011) define the structural dimension as "the network of interpersonal relationships formed by the ties or interactions of the members within a network" (p. 566). Virtual brand communities have become a channel for consumers to establish, maintain, and expand these interpersonal networks with others. By being able to share information (e.g. pictures, opinions, etc.) on these networks, ties are strengthened between users and a common sense of shared value (cognitive dimension) with the organization is created (Lin & Lu 2011, p. 567). Also, according to Lin & Lu (2011), trust (relational dimension) is based on the consistency of these shared values (p. 567). When trust in a virtual brand community is developed with the user, the likelihood of brand loyalty and continued use is also increased. Trust lowers any insecurity and uncertainty felt by consumers, and, therefore, consumers are

more inclined to share information with each other and continue making purchases from that brand.

Lin & Lu's (2011) report proves that social capital is an important resource in building a community; not only does it establish relationships between members, but it also "encourages communication, identification, and trust" (p. 565). Since virtual brand communities on social networking sites provide users with such ways to develop relationships and communities, they consequently have a stored social capital that motivates them to return and continue using which will benefit the consumers and businesses alike. If there is social capital gained from community belonging it will lead to higher levels of affective commitment, and, in turn, it would be sensible to assume the same for virtual brand communities; nonetheless, this is supported by Royo-Vela & Casamassima (2011) in their study (p. 533). Since social capital is created primarily through belonging and interaction, the main reason behind the rise of virtual brand communities on social networking sites is that these sites facilitate chain interactions. Although virtual brand communities on social networking sites have become a unique tool for businesses and consumers to accumulate and grow social capital (Lin & Lu, 2011, p. 569) as well as promote brand loyalty, it is also believed that consumers join brand communities for other social identity needs.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory is a large contributing factor to the motivation that drives individuals to join and identify themselves with online communities. Lee, Hyuk & Jung Kyu (2011) define social identity theory as, "that part of an individual's self-concept that is derived from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the emotional significance

attached to that membership” (p. 60). Furthermore, social identity is made up of two different aspects: personal identity and social identity. Personal identity is comprised of specific characteristics that a person has while social identity is “the perception of belonging to a group with the result that a person identifies with that group” (Bhattacharya, 1995, p. 47). When individuals looking to satisfy their social identity needs join online communities, they are joining in hopes of gaining a positive social identity from the emotional significance attached.

Sarason (1977) says a sense of community is developed through the perception of similarities with others, and “the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure” (p. 157). Identification with the community is an essential element of social identity (Obst, 2002, p.92), and is a driving force behind a successful virtual brand community.

According to LaRoche et al. (2012), “consumers join brand communities to identify themselves with brands so that their social needs of being identified as persons with appropriate self-identity are met” (p. 1757). Often times, individuals will participate in social behaviors that promote the brand of which they are trying to belong in order to sync their social identity with that of the brand. For example, when consumers buy certain car brands they assume the symbolic meaning as part of self (LaRoche et al., 2012, p. 1757). Furthermore, this assumption increases the likelihood of the consumer to continue the use of, and become more loyal to, that specific brand to ensure maximized social identity. Smart businesses have taken advantage of this need of social identity theory by creating virtual brand communities that increase the amount a consumer interacts with their brand and other consumers alike (e.g., posting photos, product reviews and comments, discussion forums) which creates a sort of shared identity. To some, a successful virtual brand community can be seen as a linking force between consumers with similar passion

(Woisetschlager et al., 2008, p.241), and this is often times recognized as a positive attribution in the eyes of the community's members.

Attribution Theory

Pei-Yu & Hsien-Tung (2011) state that a “consciousness of kind” is created in virtual brand communities when social mechanisms are in place. The members of a virtual brand community feel an intrinsic connection with other in-group members and a collective sense of separation from out-group members. This not only influences consumer attitudes towards products, but also creates a “direct, positive and long-term influence on store loyalty” (p. 603). With the creation of a social group identity through virtual brand communities, consumers want to make sure the brand's identity stays on-par with their own. Lee et al. (2011) reports that according to past consumer behavior research, consumers typically attribute business's marketing strategies to extrinsic motives of profit exploitation and neglect their intrinsic motives of altruism (p. 60). Communication researchers have come to understand this phenomenon by looking at it through the lens of attribution theory which suggests that individuals infer causality of why events occur by taking into consideration both intrinsic and extrinsic motives (Lee et al., 2011, p. 59). Unfortunately, since consumers tend to generalize across similar attribution situations, they often mistake intrinsic motives for extrinsic motives which they do not like associating their social identities with. This can become an issue for marketers who create virtual brand communities, because their efforts to maintain and manage this virtual brand community can be seen as profit exploitation through improving the image of the company instead of altruistically providing help to the consumers who are a part of them (Lee et al., 2011, p. 60). A

solution to this was proposed by Lee et al. (2011) that consumer-made virtual brand communities would remove the sense of profit exploitation and extrinsic motives and increase the attribution of altruism to the social group identity among consumers (p. 62). When it came to effectiveness of creating brand loyalty, consumer-made virtual brand communities more positively affected consumers' attribution processes and how they influenced their social identification with the brand.

Consumer Participation

While consumer-made virtual brand communities are an effective way to positively create social identification and loyalty to the company's brand, many companies still prefer to create their own. One way to ensure brand loyalty stays high, without having consumer-made virtual brand communities, is to encourage consumer participation. Casaló et al. (2008) suggests that participation in a virtual brand community increases consumer loyalty and affective commitment (p. 30). As a matter of fact, his research found that "greater participation in a virtual community is related directly and positively to greater affective commitment to the brand around which the community is developed" (p. 32). If marketers and virtual brand community managers can facilitate consumer participation, without hinting at profit exploitation, then brand loyalty should develop naturally. According to Gangadharbartla (2008), people join virtual brand communities to maintain relationships with others that match their social identity and engage in virtual brand community activities "only for the pleasure of participating" (p. 11). Intrinsically, people want to participate in communities they join so they can build social bonds with other in-group members. Consequently, this increases brand loyalty towards the brand around which the community is developed.

While research shows that consumers join virtual brand communities with the intention of participating, not every member participates in the same way. McWilliams (2000) states that the participation process has two parts: mutual production and consumption (p. 46). Mutual production can vary from writing posts in the community to replying to other member's posts while consumption is considered "perusal of thoughts and opinions" (p. 46). Members of virtual brand communities are always engaged in some form of consumption; however, not all members are necessarily engaged in productive interaction. Furthermore, McWilliams (2000) states that the majority of members of virtual brand communities can be categorized as being engaged in minimal levels of production (i.e. not frequently posting comments) (p. 46). Therefore, McWilliams (2000) concludes that participation involves two dimensions: active participation and passive participation. Active participation is when a member both produces and consumes, and passive participation is when a member only consumes (p. 47). Since most members of virtual brand communities are either passive participators or minimal active participators, managers must make sure to influence certain variables to increase participation.

Managerial Implications

From a manager's point of view, virtual brand communities must be seen as a strategic long-term investment (Woisetschlager, et al., 2008, p.240). Several variables come into play that can be influenced by managers in order to establish an effective virtual brand community. The first is consumer identification (p. 243). According to Muniz & O'Guinn (2001), consciousness of kind is one of the most important elements of communities and consumer identification on participation. They define consciousness of kind as, "the intrinsic collective sense of difference from others not in the community" (p. 413). This is important for developing a psychological sense of brand community, because this self-categorization separates one community's values,

norms and behaviors from others (Woisetschlager et al., 2008, p.243). The separation results in increased self-esteem of group members which has a positive relation to community identification, and, therefore, community participation (p. 243). If managers can help facilitate a consciousness of kind, this will have a positive impact on community members' desire to participate. One suggestion would be for managers to write posts that identify shared values of the community such as pictures and quotes. Posts such as these easily communicate shared values of the community that may be unique to that community.

The second variable that managers should attempt to influence is community satisfaction. Woisetschlager et al. (2008) found a positive relationship between satisfaction and community members' participation. Since satisfaction is "an overall evaluation of performance based on prior experiences" (p. 244), managers must do their best to be attentive to community members and facilitate their needs when possible. Consumers are very unforgiving, and if managers allow consumers to have bad experiences then they may decide not to come back. Lastly, members are more inclined to participate if they feel that they have a perceived degree of influence. If managers listen to community members' posts and respond to them properly, community members will perceive that they have a high degree of influence, and they will participate more (p. 244). It is important that managers do their best to influence these variables so that they can stimulate active participation in their virtual brand communities. This is supported by Algesheimer & Hermann (2005) who found that encouraging community participation triggers certain consumers' citizenship behaviors (p. 23). As a result, community members are more likely to recruit other customers via positive word of mouth. In addition, active participation in the community increases consumers brand loyalty significantly (p. 24).

Managers must be careful, however, to employ a passive role when facilitating their virtual brand community so that their intentions aren't attributed negatively. In order to effectively execute virtual brand communities as a marketing strategy, marketers must be aware that consumers can easily attribute the marketers' efforts to build and manage the virtual brand community as extrinsic motives. Consequently, consumers will be less likely to engage in community behaviors and slowly lose loyalty to the brand since they do not want their social identity to match that of the group. To avoid this, Pei-Yu & Hsien-Tung (2011) have suggested that marketers ensure the presence of active and core participants, whether they represent the brand or not (p. 611). This is in line with Lee et al.'s (2011) suggestion of marketers encouraging, or even sponsoring, consumer made virtual brand communities. Both of these scenarios increase the attribution made of intrinsic motivation and altruism in the community which effectively engages users more in the brand and increases brand loyalty. While consumer made virtual brand communities may pose as a threat since they can harbor a place for complaints or protest forums, ultimately, they increase a consumers' resistance to leaving while also improving the company's knowledge about consumer preferences.

Communication Studies researchers have come to understand the effects of virtual brand communities through several different theoretical lenses; consequently, there have been several managerial implications that have come up as well. Along with encouraging participation, it is recommended that companies create and maintain virtual brand communities whether they are on social media platforms or not. They enhance the consumers' levels of satisfaction and affective commitment just by merely registering (Royo-Vela & Casamassima, 2011, p. 538), and they positively create brand loyalty through the development of social capital. These virtual brand

communities are cost effective as well as provide a platform for marketers to facilitate mass communication with a vast range of loyal consumers. By instituting a virtual online community, companies can identify the needs and desires of consumers almost instantaneously. The social interactions, shared values, and trust created by effective virtual brand communities facilitate continued intention to use them. Lin & Lu (2011) believe that virtual brand communities facilitate easy interpersonal contact and networking, which encourage consumers to communicate with others as well as share their thoughts and opinions (p. 568) and facilitate an increased social capital. Businesses should, therefore, take advantage of this and closely observe the ways in which consumers interact so that they can further learn what the consumer wants. LaRoche et al. (2012) insists that if marketers wish to continue brand loyalty, they must promote brand use as well as impressions management. While brand use refers to providing information that helps consumers use products, impression management involves managing the external impressions and images of the brand (p. 1764). This can become a difficult situation for marketers, however, when consumers start attributing these aspects negatively. The better marketers come to understand how to use social capital, social identity, and attribution theory in their favor, the better they will be able to use and maintain virtual brand communities in order to increase brand loyalty as positive effects have been recorded thus far.

Method

I conducted an interview with MINDBODY's social media strategist Meredith Simmons. Meredith Simmons began working at MINDBODY in early 2013 in the marketing department. She is in charge of managing the MINDBODY Facebook page which includes posts, responses,

and what is displayed or not displayed on the Facebook page. The interview was eighteen questions long, and it was aimed towards uncovering how well the MINDBODY Facebook page utilized social capital, social identity and attribution theories as well as consumer participation to build brand loyalty. Eight of the questions in the interview addressed how social capital theory is utilized on the MINDBODY Facebook page in order to build brand loyalty (questions: 2, 5a, 5b, 6, 9, 10, 14, 17). These questions were intended to uncover topics such as shared values, follower engagement and interaction, and trust. Ten of the questions addressed attribution theory (questions: 1, 5a, 5d, 5e, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18), and were intended to address topics such as intrinsic/extrinsic attributions, customer loyalty, and consumer participation. Five questions addressed social identity theory (questions: 5b, 5c, 10, 11, 17), and were intended to address topics such as group belonging and identification. Five questions were geared towards general company information and goals (questions: 1, 3, 4, 7, 8), and four questions (6, 11, 17, 18) addressed consumer participation and consumer activity/interaction. The questions ranged in format and included free response, Likert scale, and multiple choice. The survey took about 20 minutes, and no incentives were offered to Meredith besides possible insight on how to improve MINDBODY's brand loyalty through their virtual brand community.

Results

The interview was very insightful and revealed many reasons as to why the MINDBODY Facebook page is so successful at building brand loyalty. Meredith answered all the questions in the interview as well as offered additional information that she thought was useful.

Social Capital Theory

In regards to Social Capital Theory, the MINDBODY Facebook page fulfills the basic need of interpersonal interactions in several different ways. Meredith stated that the MINDBODY Facebook page encourages followers to share information regarding their experience with MINDBODY on the Facebook page at least one to two times per week. Furthermore, Meredith reported that clients actively engage in discussion with one another regarding MINDBODY at least one to two times per month on their own. Beyond satisfying the structural dimension of Social Capital Theory, the MINDBODY Facebook page aims to satisfy the cognitive dimension as well. Meredith reported that the MINDBODY Facebook page exemplifies several values: MINDBODY's core values (Purpose Driven, Humble & Helpful, Caring & Happy, Committed to Wellness: Mind, Body & Spirit, Environmentally Conscious, Committed to "Four C" Leadership, Continuously Evolving), honesty, and transparency. All of these values are values that MINDBODY clearly identifies on their website. When consumers purchase MINDBODY's software, they are typically made aware of these values, and are, thereby, agreeing to a social contract to encompass these values. One way Meredith reported that MINDBODY engages these shared values on their Facebook page is through posts that contain inspirational quotes, pictures, or stories. For example, every day, there is a "daily inspiration" quote that is posted by the MINDBODY Facebook page. These quotes range in origin, however, each and every one of them expresses one of MINDBODY's shared values. One that stood out to me was a quote from Guillaume Apollinaire, a French poet/playwright, which was posted on June 5, 2014 that read, "Now and then it's good to pause in our pursuit of happiness and just be happy." This post exemplifies MINDBODY's core value of "Caring & Happy" as well as "Committed to Wellness". Meredith also stated that "MINDBODY exemplifies their shared values of honesty and transparency through their replies to consumers' posts". Meredith ensures

that MINDBODY's responses are helpful and that they provide solutions for MINDBODY's clients. When something has gone wrong with MINDBODY on the consumers' side, Meredith ensures that MINDBODY admits its faults and takes responsibility for them. Exuding these shared values creates a sense of trust, fulfilling the relational dimension of Social Capital Theory. Meredith reported, "I have even given my personal email and work phone number in order to help clients solve their problems". This added human element is a great contributor to trust building as well.

Social Identity

Often times, members of a virtual brand community never physically come into contact with those who run the virtual brand community. It is also rare that those members ever have the opportunity to experience what the brand's corporate culture or physical community is like in person. Since members of a virtual brand community want to identify with the group, posts that contain pictures of the physical business or even industry news help increase social identification with the brand. Meredith reported that posts and pictures of MINDBODY HQ and posts that contained industry news were actually the least common type of post made on the MINDBODY Facebook page. However, Meredith reported that she does like to share MINDBODY's clients' stories and Facebook posts about their business on the MINDBODY Facebook page to increase social identification. About once a month, Meredith will share milestones that MINDBODY's clients have reached which helps promote their business. This is a great way to increase the social identity of in-group users. If other clients notice that their story is similar, or that other in-group users are going through the same experiences with MINDBODY and their business, then their social identity with the group grows thus growing their loyalty to the Facebook page and brand.

Attribution Theory

Since a consumer can attribute a business's marketing strategy, or post on a virtual brand community, as extrinsic motives towards profit exploitation and ignore their intrinsic motives of altruism (Lee et al., 2011, p. 60), virtual brand community managers must be careful when planning strategies to reach their goals. Meredith reported that the five most important goals of the MINDBODY Facebook page are to decrease attrition, get new leads, express MINDBODY's values, engage lost consumers, and provide a place for consumer interaction. These goals are accomplished by responding to concerns and complaints, posting marketing forms, making posts that show that MINDBODY cares and listens, posting about company updates, and making posts that ask questions that encourage client interaction. For example, many times a week Meredith posts questions asking members about how their businesses are running, what business strategies are working for them, and if they need help with any facet of their business. This is intended to be displayed as an intrinsic motive of altruism since MINDBODY is offering help; however, it also helps MINDBODY's extrinsic motives by giving the company an understanding of what clients want more of. As long as clients do not attribute this as an extrinsic motive then they will continue to stay loyal to MINDBODY.

Meredith ranked "marketing/product/promotion post" as the third highest type of post made on the MINDBODY Facebook page. Furthermore, the MINDBODY Facebook page posts roughly two times per month about new software updates and products. Once again, since many of these posts can be attributed as extrinsic motives on behalf of MINDBODY, Meredith ensures that the consumer is benefitting as well so that the posts aren't attributed negatively. Typically, when seeking feedback regarding MINDBODY's software and hardware, the posts indirectly suggest for clients to give feedback. Also, MINDBODY attempts to decrease attrition by

listening to their clients and directing them to a source that can help them immediately. For example, when MINDBODY's software calendar went down for an hour, posts were made with contact information of software engineers to each and every individual that complained. Often times, when posts are related to helping MINDBODY benefit extrinsically, or increase profit, they are presented in ways that are altruistic and benefiting the client as well. MINDBODY seeks to bring in new clients by offering current clients referral rewards which can help significantly reduce monthly costs.

Meredith reported that there is currently no consumer-made MINDBODY Facebook page or virtual brand community. She explains, "MINDBODY has to be very protective of its brand, but this option has been considered before" (personal communication, May 25, 2014). One reason Meredith reported that opinions are mixed regarding this idea is because she has seen MINDBODY's competitors do this before, and it led to those competitors' clients being stolen by other competitors. MINDBODY simply wants more privacy and control over what posts are being made and who sees them. While "mad posts" are hidden every now and then, Meredith has the ability to respond to them while they are still hidden them from the public; with a consumer made virtual brand community, Meredith would not have this option.

Consumer Participation

Meredith reported that clients only actively engage in discussion with one another regarding MINDBODY on the MINDBODY Facebook page about one to two times per week. MINDBODY ensures active participants by asking engagement questions once a week that are indirectly related to MINDBODY (i.e. shared values). For example, one post asked business owners how many vacations they take each year and where. This post was intended to express

the shared value of “Committed to Wellness”. The follow up to this post were comments by members of the Facebook page that suggested where they went and how MINDBODY helped them find the time to do so. Posts such as these that simultaneously engage members, promote interaction between members, and promote MINDBODY are the ideal outcome that marketers should be looking for. Meredith stated that there are a few members of the MINDBODY Facebook page that she calls “champions”. These “champions” are one or two core participants that actively like posts and respond to posts made by MINDBODY. While most of the MINDBODY Facebook page members are passive participants, these “champions” are most definitely active participants. Meredith stated that new “champions” will cycle in and out every few months, and she will email them to ask if they would like to be featured on one of MINDBODY’s blogs to encourage them to keep being active participants.

Discussion

Overall, I believe that the MINDBODY Facebook page does an exceptional job at facilitating ways to increase brand loyalty. Meredith and the MINDBODY marketing team help develop social capital among members of the MINDBODY Facebook page through several avenues. All three dimensions of Social Capital Theory are fulfilled as well. The structural dimension, or interpersonal connections made in a network, is fulfilled by simply having the MINDBODY Facebook page which allows members to interact. The cognitive dimension, or shared values, seems to be a priority when it comes to the type of posts that are made on the MINDBODY Facebook page. I believe that this is one of the reasons it has done so well at developing and maintaining brand loyalty. Since members of the MINDBODY Facebook page recognize that there is a sense of shared value among members and with the community itself, trust is developed and this fulfills the relational dimension. Beyond that, trust is satisfied through

MINDBODY's values of honesty and transparency. I believe that by having these as shared values apparent to the consumers, they are more likely to trust MINDBODY, and, therefore, increase their brand loyalty.

The MINDBODY Facebook page also does a very good job at fulfilling the social identity needs of their members. By sharing client's Facebook posts, statuses, and stories, other clients recognize how similar they are to one another and they become more inclined to stay loyal to the brand. In essence, the MINDBODY Facebook page is a great tool to connect people with similar passions, and member's social needs of being identified as persons with appropriate self-identity are met. It is interesting that three out of the five most important goals listed behind having the MINDBODY Facebook page seem to be geared toward increasing the company's profit. Decreasing attrition, acquiring new leads, and engaging lost followers/consumers should all be attributed negatively as profit exploitation according to Lee et al. (2011). However, MINDBODY seems to mask this by targeting each of these goals in an altruistic way. Since the MINDBODY Facebook page does not sway away from their shared values, it is able to make efforts towards increasing profit all while helping the consumer out as well which further increases consumers' brand loyalty. While MINDBODY does not have a consumer made virtual brand community, I do not believe this harms their attempts towards increasing brand loyalty. MINDBODY is very protective of their brand, and rightfully so. The MINDBODY Facebook page has continued to grow in likes and followers, and there is a direct correlation to their actual client numbers. If there hasn't been a demand for a consumer made virtual brand community, then I do not believe they should push for one especially if there are active participants on their current virtual brand community.

The core active participants, or champions, of the MINDBODY Facebook page are a key ingredient to creating brand loyalty for MINDBODY. Meredith does an excellent job of fulfilling the consciousness of kind, member satisfaction, and members' perceived degree of influence. By listening and responding to consumers' posts as well as encouraging active participation, the MINDBODY Facebook page has created a space for consumers' to be intrinsically loyal to. I believe that if the MINDBODY Facebook page continues to fulfill the needs of their members then brand loyalty will continue to increase. One thing they must make sure to avoid is allowing their goals to be seen as extrinsic motives. If the MINDBODY Facebook page sways away from its values and attempts to openly exploit consumers to increase profit then they will lose brand loyalty.

Conclusion

This case study has given insight into a real-world example of a successful virtual brand community. It identified several ways which a company can utilize Social Capital, Social Identity and Attribution Theories as well as consumer participation to increase brand loyalty. Overall, the MINDBODY Facebook page does an excellent job at going above and beyond the basic needs of a virtual brand community in order to develop and maintain brand loyalty among its members. Meredith and the MINDBODY marketing team have thought of very good methods to simultaneously express shared value, create a space for interpersonal interaction and social bonds, and, simultaneously, increase MINDBODY's profit and brand loyalty. MINDBODY is already ahead of their competition just by having a virtual brand community, and I believe that they will continue to find success as well as increase their brand loyalty as time goes on.

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Appendix

Mindbody Virtual Brand Community Survey

1. Please list the five most important goals behind the Mindbody Facebook page?

2. Please list five values Mindbody hopes to exemplify through posts via the Mindbody Facebook page?

3. When was the Mindbody Facebook page created?

4. How many people manage the responses to posts made by others on the Mindbody Facebook page?

5. Please order 1-5 (1 being the least, 5 being the most) which of the following types of post are made the most by the Mindbody Facebook page?
 - a. Follower engagement _____
 - b. Inspirational quote _____
 - c. Post/picture of Mindbody HQ _____
 - d. Marketing/product/promotion post _____
 - e. Industry news/other _____

6. How many people per week “talk about” the Mindbody Facebook page?

7. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the most important, 5 being the least important), where does the Mindbody Facebook page rank in regards to Mindbody’s efforts to engage current clients?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

8. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the most important, 5 being the least important), where does the Mindbody Facebook page rank in regards to Mindbody’s efforts to attract new clients?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

9. In regards to Facebook posts, how many times per week does the Mindbody Facebook page encourage followers to share information regarding their experience with Mindbody?
 - a. 1-2
 - b. 3-4
 - c. 5-6
 - d. 7+

10. How many times per week do clients actively engage in discussion with one another regarding Mindbody on the Mindbody Facebook page?
 - a. 1-2
 - b. 3-4
 - c. 5-6
 - d. 7+

11. How many times per week do clients review Mindbody's products on the Mindbody Facebook page?
 - a. 1-2
 - b. 3-4
 - c. 5-6
 - d. 7+

12. Is there a consumer made Mindbody Facebook page that is used to engage clients and facilitate questions/concerns they may have?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

13. If not, has a consumer made Mindbody Facebook page ever been considered?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

14. How does the Mindbody Facebook page attempt to develop trust with current followers?

15. How does the Mindbody Facebook page attempt to maintain customer loyalty?

16. How many posts per week on the Mindbody Facebook page are about new products?

- a. 1-2
 - b. 3-4
 - c. 5-6
 - d. 7+
17. How many posts per week on the Mindbody Facebook page ask for feedback regarding Mindbody's products?
- a. 1-2
 - b. 3-4
 - c. 5-6
 - d. 7+
18. Does Mindbody, in anyway, ensure the presence of active and core participants on the Mindbody Facebook page? If so, who and how?