
MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

Do Us a Favour:
An Exploration of Lay's Do Us a Flavour Contest through the lens of Social Media and
Brand Community Features

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Abstract

This study evaluated if and how the Lay's Do Us a Flavour campaign could be classified as a brand community and how the features of this concept in conjunction with the features of social media are reflected in the design and interactions of the site. This paper uses the theory of technological affordances and the social media features of Trust, Transparency, and Authenticity combined with the three markers of brand community as a framework to understand the user interactions and design of the site. The study found that the design of the Lay's site was limited in its design, especially in the presence of authenticity and transparency and therefore the brand community markers of moral responsibility and consciousness of kind did not have a strong presence within the site. Based on these findings, the study determined the contest, especially when considering its temporary nature, does not demonstrate the features of brand communities and cannot be considered one in its own right but could be effective as an incentive to participate in more permanent communities.

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Introduction

Social media's many platforms have impacted organizational communication and changed the way that organizations communicate with their publics. Social media has become a significant force in public conversation that has led to businesses taking note and strategically participating and using its many platforms. It has become necessary for organizations to follow, monitor and engage with their publics through social media. Indeed, not participating comes with a risk of missing valuable insight, sentiment, or in the worst case scenario, emerging scandal. Social media has become an important branding and public relations tool.

As organizations seek to differentiate themselves in crowded markets, branding has proven to be an effective tool to engage with and build value with customers and audiences. A brand community has been defined as a, "specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001, p.412). Brand communities were in existence before social media but have now found a new home online. As organizations have come to understand the power of branding and the potential of brand communities, more have sought to create or support these communities.

Research on organizational use of social media stresses the importance of concepts such as "trust" (Sashi, 2012, p.259; Baird & Parasnis, 2011, p. 33; Woodcock et al., 2001, p.51), "authenticity" (McCorkindale, 2012, p.71 & Baird & Parasnis, 2011,

p.33; Barwise & Meehan, 2010, p.84; Hanna et al., 2011, p. 272), and “transparency” (McCorkindale, 2012, p.69 & Baird & Parasnis, 2011, p.33 & DiStaso & Bortree, 2012, p.513); however very little research explores brand sponsored communities on social media sites. This paper seeks to add to the existing literature about temporary social media brand communities by exploring the design of the Lay’s Do Us a Flavour site and the interactions occurring within it to determine whether “brand community” (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412) markers are present. Using existing research and the theoretical perspective of technological affordances, a social media contest will be analyzed to discover whether its design and those interactions reflect identified markers of brand communities and social media best practices.

Research Context

The Lay’s brand of chips is part of Frito Lays Canada, which is owned and controlled by Pepsi Cola Canada. The Canadian brand of Lays has thirty-one flavours of chips on the market. Lays is available nationally with some flavours exclusive to particular regions in Canada (PepsiCo Canada, 2013a). In addition to the contest, Lays Canada is active on the social media platforms of Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/LaysCanada>) and Twitter (<https://twitter.com/LAYS>).

Promotion for the contest occurred on these channels as well as on traditional media channels in the form of television advertisements featuring Canadian spokesperson Martin Short. The Do Us a Flavour contest is not unique to the Canadian Lays brand and has occurred in the UK (Walkers Do Us a Flavour) in 2008 and the United States (Lays Do Us a Flavour) in 2012. As the Do Us a Flavour site is hosted on Facebook.com, a

discussion of social media and Web 2.0 is needed to construct a meaningful discussion of the contest.

Social media, a product of Web 2.0, has created a dynamic venue for organizations to communicate with their stakeholders or publics. Web 2.0 describes the current participatory and interactive nature of the internet, its platforms, and applications (O'Reilly, 2005). There is much excitement surrounding the promise of social media and its potential to connect, engage, and inform an organization's stakeholders in two-way communication or tap into them as sources or creators of knowledge. The term social media has been defined in terms of the creation and widespread adoption of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The main characteristics of social media are that it is publically and instantly available with an expectation of original content created by end-users due to the removal of many traditional gatekeepers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Announced in February 2013, The Lay's Do Us a Flavour contest is hosted on the social media site Facebook.com. Lay's invited the Canadian public to create and vote for new flavours of potato chips primarily using a significant monetary prize (\$50,000 cad) as an incentive to participate. Upon initial inspection, the design, corporate announcements and rules signaled that the site was intended as a place where Canadians could come together and celebrate Lay's while contributing to the value proposition of the brand by creating new flavours by engaging with the brand and other users.

This study seeks to understand if and how this community can be classified as a brand community and how the features of this concept are reflected in the design and usage of the site. In order to accomplish a better understanding of this case, a review of

the literature was conducted in order to classify social media best practices, markers of brand community, and value creating activities. In focusing on the Lay's Do Us a Flavour site and analyzing its design and the interactions of members based on social media and brand community literature combined with the theory of affordances, this study seeks to first explore the role of temporary brand communities and their use of communications strategy and second their "value creation" (Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009, p. 6) potential.

The existing research on social media use by organizations stresses the need for "honest, open communications" (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 361) and the need to engage with publics (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012; Stephens & Malone, 2010; Woodcock, Green, & Starkey, 2011). In order for social media use to be of benefit to organization a commitment must be made to make timely updates and respond to stakeholders comments and inquiries, even when negative, in order to build relations and gain valuable insights and stakeholder knowledge. The features of trust, authenticity, and transparency need to be present in social media strategy and are discussed in the literature pertaining to brand communities (Barwise & Meehan, 2010). Research (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001) on brand communities outlines three markers of brand communities and the benefits to be gained through participation and contribution by the organization. Little research exists around temporary sites that appear to exhibit features of brand communities, and the motivations behind these sites, and the level of interactions that occur within them.

Literature Review

Social Media

Research from the perspective of public relations indicates the importance of an organization's use of social media to "generate awareness, manage their client's reputation, promote products and services, and listen to publics" (McCorkindale, 2012, p. 67). As an extension of an organization's relationship with their stakeholders, social media provides the opportunity to connect to a huge audience with speed and convenience, while eradicating some constraints found in traditional communications, such as geographic boundaries (Akar & Topçu, 2011; McCorkindale, 2012; Men & Tsai, 2012; Sawhney, Verona, & Prandelli, 2005). Organizations use social media to "enhance interest in their organizations and build relationships with online publics" (Men & Tsai, 2012, p. 76).

From a marketing perspective, organizations use social media to engage with customers to gain social and competitor knowledge (Sawhney et al., 2005). Sawhney et al. argue that the knowledge gained through an organization's active participation in social media is better than traditional market research as they can act as a lower cost and timelier alternative to focus groups (2005). Social media platforms provide an opportunity for organizations to build relationships with their customers or stakeholders. An organization needs to be able to create "tangible value" (Baird & Parasnis, 2011, p. 31) such as incentives in order to get stakeholders actively interested and engaged with their social media platforms (Baird & Parasnis, 2011).

In fact, research by Baird & Parasnis indicates that social media has become an integral part of customer relationship management (2011). Customer relationship management can be defined as a "means for extracting the greatest value from customers over the lifetime of the relationship" (Baird & Parasnis, 2011, p.30). Organizations have

become focused on social media as it has become an ever-increasing popular platform where an organization's stakeholders congregate. Using social media as a customer relationship management tool drives the organizational need to engage thoughtfully and authentically in order to build positive consumer-brand relationships (Baird & Parasnis, 2011).

In order to build relationships with stakeholders, an organization's use of social media should be "interactive" (Men & Tsai, 2012, p. 78), personal, social, and communicative (McCorkindale, 2012; Men & Tsai, 2012). Furthermore, values like transparency, authenticity, and trust are part of the relationship building process between a brand and consumer. Brand identification has been shown to be the strongest aspect of a brand consumer relationship and is related to participation in brand communities (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). In other words, the more consumers participate the more they feel as if they are participating in the brand.

Even though social media and web 2.0 have created an arena where organizations may no longer be in control of the relationship, it has become necessary and prudent to be an active part in the platforms and the conversations that are occurring there (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). Failure to listen to what is being said about an organization can lead to negative press about a firm. For example, United Airlines found itself in a public relations crisis after initially ignoring a complaint from a passenger about broken luggage. A Youtube video was created by the unhappy passenger, which in turn went viral leading to the story being picked up by traditional media sites such as CNN (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Largely avoidable, this situation that could have been rectified had the organization engaged in the conversation

occurring on social media. Because they were not listening to the conversations about their brand occurring on social media, a relatively uninteresting and common story about their brand gained widespread media attention (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Transparency

Transparency and authenticity are discussed as key factors in positive associations from consumers towards brands (McCorkindale, 2012). For the purpose of social media organization-consumer communication, transparency is defined as the, “opposite of secrecy” (McCorkindale, 2012, p. 70). McCorkindale (2012) argues that transparency is an absolute concept and an organization’s use of social media as a tool to connect with publics is “transparent or it is not” (70). In order to be transparent, an organization must provide its stakeholders with the balanced and honest information they need to make educated decisions (McCorkindale, 2012).

In the context of a site’s design, transparency is created by promoting interaction and information exchange between users and a brand to develop clear expectations of roles and processes within the site (Nambisan, 2002). A study on the open-source marketing tactics of Camel Cigarettes found that when transparency was present, created by disclosing the company’s market research practices, a substantial increase in participant engagement occurred (30,000 actual participants compared to the 6,000 expected) (Freeman & Chapman, 2009).

Authenticity

Authenticity is defined as honest, original, and genuine use of the medium (McCorkindale, 2012). In other words, if a brand is willing to participate in social media, there is an expectation on the part of the user for original and entertaining content

(Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012). Past failures in social media use by organizations is exemplified by Sony's loss of consumer trust based on the inauthenticity of its blog and video content, which was promoted as original content but later proven to be created by an advertising agency (Barwise & Meehan, 2010). Communications that are perceived to be authentic have been shown to help an organization's communications strategy succeed on social media (Barwise & Meehan, 2010). If stakeholders perceive an organization's communication efforts to be authentic, it is argued that they are more likely to perceive the communications as transparent (McCorkindale, 2012).

Trust

There is a connection between transparency and authenticity and the development of trust (Hess & Story, 2005 & McCorkindale, 2012) in fostering positive brand consumer relationships. Not only is there a need for transparency and authenticity to develop trust, but these features must be present in the design of the site as well in order to foster positive relationships with a brand (Nambisan, 2002). As members in online communities are not just interacting with other members or the organization but with the site as well, (Nambisan, 2002) the design of the site needs to perform as it is expected too, transparently and authentically so that trust can develop. For instance, the online virtual cancer support community Hutchworld was evaluated in its development stage to determine design issues and concerns. The highest priority issues discovered involved user confusion due to buttons that did not consistently work and unclear labeling resulting in the site not being used by users as it was designed to be. By clearly labeling sections of the site and fixing buttons that did not work, the site's design reflected its

purpose leading to a clearer understanding of its functionality and intended use (Preece, Rogers, & Sharp, 2002).

Brand trust can be defined as the “willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function” (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p.82). A user’s trust in the brand is reflected in their participation in a site, as they must trust that the organization’s product will accomplish its marketed function and believe that the organization has their best interests in mind (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Thus it can be argued that without trust being present, a user’s involvement and interactions within a site will most likely be limited, guarded, and inconsequential in building consumer insights as the users are not assured or confident about the purpose or safety of the community (Nambisan, 2002).

Brand Community

To explore the role of social media use by organizations, the concepts of branding and brand communities are useful. To understand the concept of brand community, a definition of branding is needed. Wheeler (2009) defines branding as a “disciplined process used to build awareness and extend customer loyalty” (p. 6). Of particular note is the term “Digital Branding” (Wheeler, 2009, p. 6). Digital branding is defined as the process of building awareness and differentiating products or organization within the marketplace using tools such as social media, websites, and search engine optimization (Wheeler, 2009). Building a strong brand is now an essential part of building competitiveness for an organization and its products.

Brand communities can be separated into two streams: “commercial and non-commercial” (Shang, Chen, & Liao, 2006, p. 398). Kruckeberg and Strack (2004) define

consumer community as “a group of enthusiasts who believe in the superiority of a product or service whose members individually and as a group publicly identify with this product or service” (p.140). Non-commercial communities are developed independently from the product or brand of focus and have been found to be sites of “information exchange or relationship establishment” (Shang, Chen, & Liao, 2006, p. 398)

Participation in consumer communities is propelled by common interest in a brand which is a motivating factor in joining or creating the community (Fröhlich & Schöller, 2012). Alternatively, commercial brand communities have been created by an organization as a site for users to interact with the brand (Shang et al., 2006). Motivators to participate in commercial brand communities include benefits such as financial gains or the opportunity to create and sell customizable products (Bogers, Afuah, & Bastian, 2010; Nambisan, 2002).

The high cost of membership in non-virtual communities has led to the widespread creation and use of virtual brand and consumer communities (Shang et al., 2006). Identification as member leads to users accepting and striving to interact with the brand and other community members based on a prescribed set of rules and rituals (Algesheimer et al., 2005). For example, the shoe brand Stride Rite built and supported an online brand community on Facebook. Members not only shared stories and media about their experiences with the brand but also their own personal experiences with raising a family, and thus helped to create a site where members felt empowered and engaged leading to a strong increase in online sales (Kerpen, 2011). This is an example of one incentive to create and foster brand communities, as the richer the interaction in

the community, the more experiential and social knowledge the organization will be exposed to about their brand.

According to sociologists, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) communities are marked by three factors: “consciousness of kind”(p. 413), “rituals and traditions”(p. 413), and “moral responsibility” (p. 413). These components are found in brand communities as well (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009; Zaglia, 2013).

Consciousness of Kind

Consciousness of kind describes feelings of connection to the brand and to the other members of the community, often displayed through member interactions where reference is made to the specialness or superiority of the brand and its community members (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). This consciousness allows members to feel connected to others about a similar interest across geographic boundaries (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). Members of brand communities are sensitive to the commercial environment their community is based in (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001).

Rituals & Traditions

Rituals and traditions are formed through shared practices and are in direct relation to consciousness of kind. They help to develop the shared beliefs and behaviours of a community (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). For example, within the Saab brand community discussed by Muñiz and O’Guinn, members of the brand community shared the practice of acknowledging other Saab drivers by flashing their lights when passing them on the road. Shared storytelling traditions are also prominent within brand communities helping to shape a community’s consciousness of kind (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001).

Moral Responsibility

The third marker of brand community, moral responsibility, refers to “a sense of duty to the community as a whole, and to individual members of the community” (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001, p.424). Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001) found two main instances of moral responsibility present in brand communities: “integrating and retaining members” (p.424) and helping members of the community in “the proper use of the brand” (p.424). Brand communities are marked by a shared sense of right and wrong and an acknowledgement that a “social consciousness and contract exists” (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001, p.424). Furthermore, within these communities, members are seen to help other members in their use of the brand, usually by aiding in repairs or troubleshooting problems with a particular product (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). It is important to note, especially to promote such rich interactions within the community, that brand communities should be focused on creating value for the members and not solely concentrated on benefiting the organization (Fournier & Lee, 2009).

The implications of brand communities for an organization are two-fold: they increase brand equity, loyalty, and commitment and are a site around which brands can form relationships with their stakeholders (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). This is especially pertinent since more than ten years have passed since Muñiz and O’Guinn first developed their theory and more and more conversations, interactions, and possible innovations are occurring in a social media environment. A strong brand identity aids in managing an organization’s reputation, while helping to distinguish the organization and its products from its competitors (Wheeler, 2009). As Wheeler (2009) argues, “a strong brand identity

will help build brand equity through increased recognition, awareness, and customer loyalty, which in turn helps make a company more successful” (p.11).

Muñiz and O’Guinn’s original concept of brand communities has been expanded to include the concept of “embedded brand communities” (Zaglia, 2013, p. 217). The understanding of brand communities has now been extended to include communities or subgroups that appear on social networking sites (Zaglia, 2013). Although the degree of which they are present varies, Muniz and O’Guinn’s three markers of brand communities are present on Facebook pages and groups. While both pages and groups feature the markers of brand community, these markers are present in different degrees (Zaglia, 2013). The study finds that Facebook groups elicit more interaction and engagement when compared to brand communities on Facebook pages (Zaglia, 2013).

The value of brand communities

In order to gain insights from brand communities, there must be interested users willing to participate in such communities. Much of the past research focuses on communities that were started by individuals about a brand or communities started by organizations as part of a long-term customer service strategy (Fröhlich & Schöller, 2012; Sawhney et al., 2005). However, it is unclear from current research, how users react to short-term communities created by organizations for more overt marketing purposes. The potential to gain social and experiential knowledge is discussed by Sawhney et al. as one benefit for an organization participating in or creating brand communities. In order for this benefit to be realized, there must be a high level of interaction between community members (Sawhney et al., 2005). Trust, authenticity, and

transparency need to be present in order for the occurrence of rich interactions (Barwise & Meehan, 2010).

As stated by Muñiz and Schau (2011), “brand communities are the site of a variety of value-creating activities” (p.210). These activities can provide an enticing incentive for organizational participation. By engaging in conversations with consumers or monitoring consumer-to-consumer interaction, organizations can discover consumption patterns, consumer insights, test new products, and crowd source for innovation (Muñiz & Schau, 2011; Sawhney et al., 2005). This interaction is affected by the design of a site and can be influenced by constraints and limitations of the design (Fournier & Lee, 2009).

A brand community can become a site of collaboration between brands and consumers (Schau et al., 2009) by encouraging a set of practices. Practices are “linked and implicit ways of understanding, saying, and doing things” (Schau et al., 2009, p.31) and fall under the category of rituals and traditions, helping to foster a consciousness of kind. By creating a site where consumers can interact with a brand, the brand is actively encouraging the development and refinement of such practices, and through this process can create an environment of value creation (Schau et al., 2009). The authors identified four “value-creating”(32) categories of practices that were present in the nine brand communities they studied (Schau et al., 2009). These categories are “social networking, impression management, community engagement, and brand use” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 34).

Social networking practices include user behaviours such as “welcoming, empathizing, and governing” (Schau et al., 2009, p.34). The practice of welcoming is

described as helping new members use the brand and the community (Schau et al., 2009). Behaviours labeled as empathizing involved giving “emotional and/or physical support” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 43) when other members were in need. Finally, governing is described as informing other members of the proper use of the community and behaviours of its members (Schau et al., 2009). Schau et al. state that value can be derived from these practices and behaviours as there is evidence that they lead to sustained connection to the community. In the case of the Mini Cooper online community, members were found to remain involved in the community, due to strong relationship ties developed in part by social networking behaviours, even after they no longer owned the vehicle the community was formed around (Schau et al., 2009).

Impression management involves practices that extend the confines of the brand community by “evangelizing and justifying” (Schau et al., 2009, p.34), behaviours that are seen to enhance the reputation of the brand for those who are members of the community but more importantly for those who are not (Schau et al., 2009). Evangelizing behaviours are described as promoting the brand or product by spreading positive information (Schau et al., 2009). Behaviours labeled as justifying seek to explain member’s motives for participating and supporting the brand, such as shared humour, poking fun at the level of commitment to the site (Schau et al., 2009).

Community engagement practices contribute to the different types of engagement that occur within the communities by their members. These practices include “staking, milestone, badging, and documenting” (Schau et al., 2009, p.34) and contribute to delineating and exposing the different roles and behaviours that evolve from membership in the community. Staking describes behaviours that delineate and recognize the variety

in both community members and community roles (Schau et al., 2009). Milestoning behaviours seek to share “seminal events in brand ownership” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 45) with other community members. Events that are considered milestones by the community can be turn into badges that celebrate and advertise the achievement within the community (Schau et al., 2009). Documenting is the act of turning brand history and important events into narratives shared across the community (Schau et al., 2009). These practices create value as they can lead to heightened cultural capital and pride leading to strong feelings of community engagement in members (Schau et al., 2009).

Lastly, brand use practices include, “grooming, customizing, and commoditizing” (Schau et al., 2009, p.35), which demonstrate themselves as behaviours that are linked to expanding or improving the use of the brand and its products. Grooming behaviours are described as those that discuss how to best care for the brand or product or those that present the best way to use the product (Schau et al., 2009). Customizing behaviours occur when members share solutions to brand problems or shortcomings to help members meet their product needs (Schau et al., 2009). Finally, behaviours labeled as commoditizing are those that are determined to be “distancing/approaching the market place” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 46). These behaviours occur between members or between members and the brand. Suggestions such as where to a sell a product or about complaints about competitor product availability fall under this category (Schau et al., 2009).

A brand community that exhibits the four value-creating categories of behaviours-- social networking, impression management, community engagement, and brand use-- can become a site of “value co-creation” (Saarijärvi, Kannan, & Kuusela, 2013, p. 11), as

it has already become a site that offers value to its members. Value co-creation is defined as “a concept that seeks to capture a current marketing phenomenon characterized by the evolving roles of customers and firms” (Saarijärvi, Kannan, & Kuusela, 2013, p.12). As technology advances, the traditional relationship between organizations and their customers is changing. Brand communities allow for customers to participate in the value creation of a firm by providing an environment where they can interact with one another and the brand and share in traditional business processes, such as research and development (Saarijärvi et al., 2013). Research has found that by allowing and encouraging value co-creation, especially within the confines of brand communities, organizations are able to enrich and support consumer engagement and brand equity (Muñiz & Schau, 2011; Schau et al., 2009).

Value co-creation and consumer generated content can be especially useful for marketing initiatives. Consumer generated content is an extremely important form of advertising that is somewhat controversial within organizations as it involves, the already stated, necessity of relinquishing control (Muñiz & Schau, 2011). However, it has become an increasingly popular aspect of an organization’s business strategy because of its unique ability to engage consumers and build brand equity. Incentives are an important part of fostering value co-creation activities and consumer generated content and can involve monetary compensation or the promise of elevated social status, among other incentives (Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Muñiz & Schau, 2011; Saarijärvi et al., 2013).

In order to understand the value co-creation process it is important to distinguish the roles of the customer and the firm and question what value is being created and for whom (Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Saarijärvi et al., 2013). In the case of Dell Ideastorm, the

shifting role of consumers and firms is illustrated by consumers' ability to suggest new product ideas allowing the consumer to be part of the firm's product development strategy (Saarijärvi et al., 2013).

If facilitating a true brand community is part of an organization's business strategy, then the organization needs to relinquish control in order to foster rich interactions that will aid in the value co-creation process (Fournier & Lee, 2009). Part of the process of encouraging rich interactions is the responsibility to build a site that "replaces control with a balance of structure and flexibility" (Fournier & Lee, 2009, p.111). This means that the design of the site allows users to feel like they have choice in how they participate while eradicating the sense that the brand is really in control (Fournier & Lee, 2009).

The best practices and benefits of an organization's engagement with stakeholders on social media platforms and specifically in brand communities are explored in the literature review section of this paper. The literature focuses on the strategic uses of social media to develop and foster relationships with consumers, build communities, and gain knowledge. However, there are limited studies in the current literature regarding the role of temporary communities that use monetary incentives to invite participation and how users react to and interact with these communities. Do these communities foster the same richness of interaction as longer-term brand communities? Furthermore, there is little mention in the literature about the user's agency or much acknowledgement or elaboration of the social and technological affordances of the sites design, such as in the case of the Lay's Do Us a Flavour contest.

The Technological Affordances of the Site's Design

The technological affordances of the site's design will be analyzed. Design affordances and constraints, in the context of website design, can promote some actions from the user while discouraging others. "Perceived affordances" (Norman, 1999, p. 39) are actions a user perceives to be possible, but are not necessarily the true affordances of the design and are most applicable to the case of website design (Norman, 1999). Norman argues that real affordances (physical affordances) are most applicable to physical objects and perceived affordances are best suited to web based design (Norman, 1999) as real affordances are what an object can actually afford the user physically, for example the ability to sit in a chair (Gibson, 1977).

"Physical constraints" (Norman, 1999, p. 40) are design constraints that are similar in nature to real affordances, for example, the ability to click on a button (Norman, 1999). In the case of web design, a button must be present on the site in order for it to afford an action to the user. A possible constraint in this scenario, according to Norman, would be if a cursor changes its appearance to signify to the user that that particular area of the site is clickable (Norman, 1999) thereby signaling to the user that the button allows the user to click it. "Cultural constraints are conventions shared by a cultural group" (Norman, 1999, p.41). In order to understand how a site is to be used, the user must understand what design affordances might be present and what actions they may allow. "Logical constraints use reasoning to determine the alternatives" (Norman, 1999, p.40). Norman explains that if there are five options on a screen but only four are visible, then the user can logically deduce that there is a fifth option somewhere off the screen (Norman, 1999).

Affordances and constraints allow designers to develop sites that users will understand how to use. Affordances, such as buttons and scroll bars, lead users to understand their function through consistent design and practice (Preece et al., 2002). Constraints are a tool used to restrict what users can do on a site (Preece et al., 2002). For example, by shading certain items in a menu, the user can only participate in “actions permissible at that stage of the activity” (Preece et al., 2002, p. 22).

The Lay’s *Do Us a Flavour* contest was selected as the site for data collection and analysis because it provides a good example of the variety of interactions taking place within a virtual community created largely for marketing purposes. This selection took into account the role of Facebook as a third party mediator for the communicative practices taking place between the brand and consumer. The study will be conducted on the recent contest created by the Lay’s brand, named “Do Us a Flavour”. The contest invites Canadians to sign up to a Facebook application and create the “next great Lay’s potato chip flavour” (PepsiCo Canada, 2013a, p. 1). The site is separate from Lay’s Facebook Fan Page, and, although previous studies have acknowledged the role of contests as a way to increase social media interaction, there are few studies about contests themselves and their ability to be categorized as brand communities and sites of value co-creation. I will employ the affordance perspective as a framework to explore the site according to the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the design features of the site and in what ways do they allow and constrain interaction?

Research Question 2: How do participant comments reflect the affordances of the Lay’s contest site?

Research Design and Methodology

Objectives

This study uses qualitative methods in order to explore the research questions and gain a better understanding of users participation and brand motivation in virtual brand communities in the case of the Lay's Do Us a Flavour contest. In collecting data on the site's design and 150 user's activity on the site a more complete understanding of the phenomenon of virtual communities used as marketing strategies will be developed.

The study will take the form of a qualitative case study. Qualitative research seeks to understand the complex relationships occurring between actors within a given site and will guide this study in better understanding the role of temporary brand communities. The site was created by an organization as a place where members could create new product ideas and interact with each other. A qualitative approach will help to uncover the nature of these interactions within the design of the site and how they are related to concept of brand communities.

Setting

The *Do Us a Flavour* Facebook page was released to the public on February 3rd 2013 and remained open until the contest ended on April 15, 2013. The website allowed Canadian Facebook users to create new flavours, interact with other Lay's fans and participate in the contest. The page is open to any Canadian with a Facebook account who agrees to the terms and conditions of participating on the page. A press release announcing the contest to the general public and media stated that people without a Facebook account could participate by text messaging a specific number, stating, "standard text messaging rates apply" (PepsiCo Canada, 2013a). There was a barrier to participation in that only those with access to a computer, a Facebook account, or a cell phone could enter into the contest.

According to the contest rules, when the Facebook contest closed, a panel of judges would select four finalists, and Canada would have the opportunity to vote on the four final flavours. Although the site was designed to elicit interaction in the form of users voting for their favourite entries, the amount of votes received on the site would not necessarily factor into the selection of the four finalists by the panel of judges (PepsiCo Canada, 2013b).

Data Collection

In order to conduct my research, it was necessary for me to sign up to the contest and add the Lays Do Us a Flavour application to my Facebook account. To record the sign up procedures, a new Facebook account was created in order to have a complete record of the site, its processes, and design affordances. For the most part my interactions on the site involved observing and recording data. However, in order to understand and record some of the site's design affordances it was necessary, in some instances, to participate in the contest. For the most part, any active participation in the site involved experimenting with the creation of flavours process.

Because the site is a time restricted Facebook contest page that allowed users to enter new flavours from February 3, 2013 to April 15, 2013, the size of my sample is limited to interactions that were available on that page during this time frame. As of June 27, 2013, the site was still available to anyone with a direct URL to a specific entry. Otherwise the site redirects users to a new homepage that informs them of the next stage of the contest, the judging period, which takes place offline by an external group.

There are three main types of interactions that users could engage in on the site. The first is clicking the "I'd Eat That" button, which is similar to the Facebook Like

button. The second form of interaction on the site is through users commenting on individual entries. The third type of interaction is through the Flavour Showdown page where users are presented with the choice of two flavours and must pick the one they preferred.

I will use these interactions as the basis for my analysis pertaining to the technological affordances of the site and the efficacy of the design of the site in eliciting the desired interactions of the consumers with the brand, as argued in marketing and public relations literature. Particular attention will be paid to the types of functions and interactions of brand communities that are discussed in brand literature and how the design of the site either affords or constrains these actions.

To track these functions and interactions, the site was recorded by a series of screen shots and video while the site was still active. The majority of the design data, as well as the comments, were collected between April 13 and April 15 2013. The comments were collected for each individual entry by scrolling down to the bottom of the section in order to copy all the comments to an external document, where they were organized into tables for coding purposes. The comments were recorded based on a participant inclusion criteria. This criteria included being one of the fifty most popular entries or being one of the one hundred random entries (as generated by the site) at the time of collection.

In order to study and understand the affordances of the site's design, data, including video, screen shots, and field notes, were collected to be analyzed, qualitatively. The sign up process was captured on video, as well as the different

interfaces of the site. Furthermore, screen captures were taken of all design features, concentrating on those that invited user interaction.

To study the types of interactions occurring on the site between participants, a qualitative open coding method of data collection and analysis will be used to explore the sites design and user interactions. The open coding method looks for themes and patterns within the data and groups them into categories in order to develop a thorough understanding of the processes occurring on the site. The top fifty most popular flavour suggestions, as determined by the amount of “I’d Eat That” votes, were selected to study the presence of key features of social media and brand community. The top fifty most popular flavour suggestions were selected because they received the highest number of votes and comments.

In addition, in order to collect a diverse data sample, 100 random participants’ flavours and comments were collected. Data from the random sample was collected using the random sort feature of the site under the assumption that Facebook or Lay’s did not filter or modify these results. The 100 random participants and their interactions within the site were recorded by collecting and transcribing all available user comments and using screen shots to capture the design of the different interfaces of the site.

As the site has over 500 entrants, a detailed analysis of every participant’s interactions was not possible because of practical and resource limitations. The logic behind selecting the top fifty most popular and 100 random participants to analyze user interactions was to ensure that the sample size allowed for in depth analysis of their interactions within the site. Furthermore, users within the site were afforded the ability to sort the entries by popularity or randomly and the sample chosen reflects and

acknowledges this choice and creates a sample where interactions can be analyzed based on the number of votes given to an entry but also to determine what level of interaction occurred when entries did not receive a significant amount of votes but appeared on the “randomize” page.

The site affords users the ability to comment in participant’s entries, and these comments were recorded by copying and pasting them into a separate document. All data were recorded on April 13, 2013. The default setting, as determined by the site’s design, for viewing the comments is by “social ranking”. Therefore as this is how users saw the comments (if they did not change the default), the comments were recorded and analyzed in this order.

Results

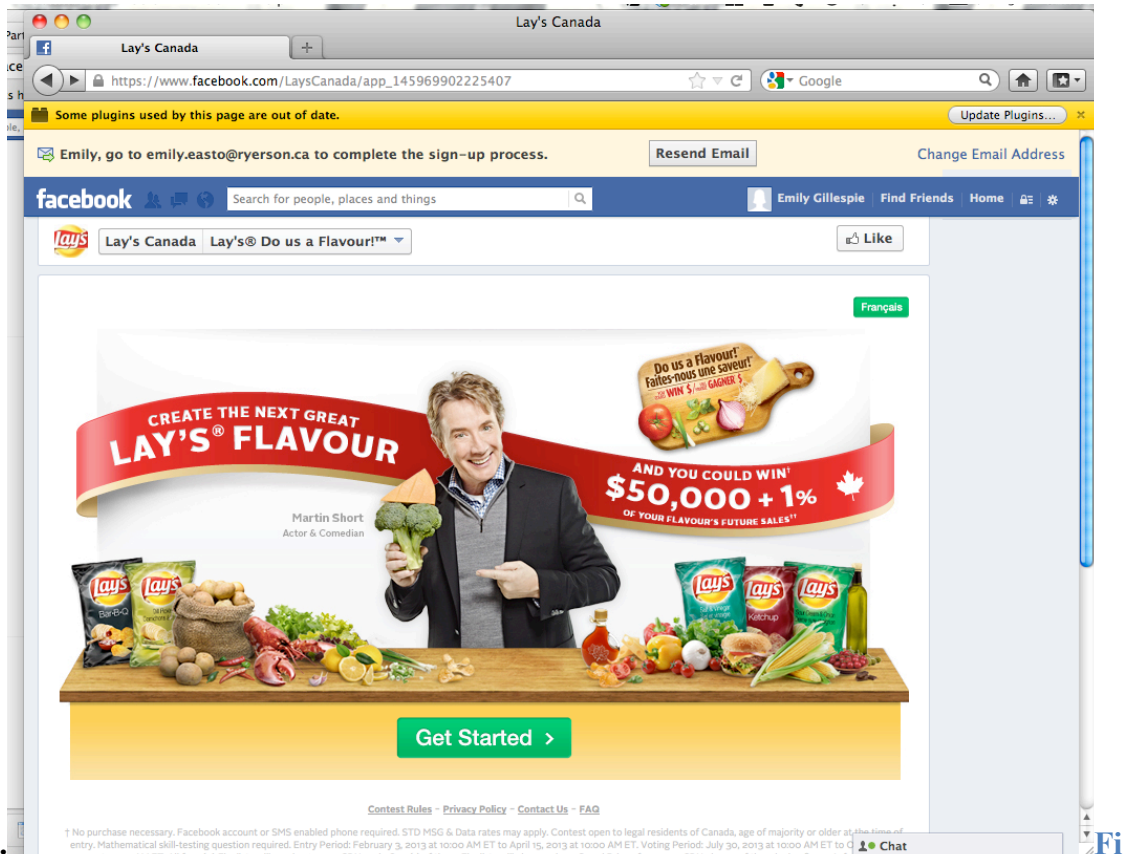
The theory of affordances was used to determine how the site’s design promotes or restricts these behaviours from occurring within the data. User comments were examined for instances of trust, authenticity, transparency, consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility to determine instances of value co-creation and relationship building behaviours on the part of the organization. Used together, these concepts and theories help to evaluate the site’s suitability to be labeled a brand community.

The design of the site

As discussed in the methods section, the site was broken down into eight sections and analyzed and coded according to the themes outlined above. To understand the allowances and constraints of the site’s design. The first section of the site that was analyzed and coded was the design interface based on a user’s first visit to the contest’s

home screen (only appears on the initial visit to the site). When users discover the contest and wish to go to the site, they must first sign into Facebook using their existing account. In the event they do not already have a Facebook account,, they must create one in order to participate in the voting and commenting functions of the site. This means that a potential user is able to “lurk” the site without signing into Facebook or signing up for the app, but they are limited in their use of the site and cannot perform any significant actions or interactions.

Once signed into Facebook, the first step in participating in the site is to go to <https://apps.facebook.com/dousaflavourcanada/en/>. This leads the user to the home screen of the site featuring a banner image with a green button that reads, “Get Started >”
(See Figure



1).

Figure 1

Five resources (features that allow the user to perform an action) and one constraint (features that restrict the user from performing an action) were identified. The least prominent resources of this page are the contest rules and frequently asked questions hyperlinks, which appear at the bottom of the page in light grey text and which allow users to access these documents. The most prominent design resource is the green “get started” button that allows users to begin the sign up process to use the site, which appears as a pop up window. The remaining resources on this page are two buttons and a drop down menu that allow users to switch the language of the site to French and access the other social media pages belonging to the band, respectively. The banner image is a

constraint that restricts the user from clicking anywhere but the get started button (the cursor changes when the mouse hovers over this box).

If the user is concerned with privacy settings, he or she can click on the button under the question, “Who can see posts this app makes for you on your Facebook timeline: [?]” and choose their privacy settings. By clicking on the green button, a window pops up that informs the user of the app’s permissions, allows the user to set privacy settings, and gives the user the option to click the buttons “Go to App” or “Close” (see Figure 2). By clicking the button, “Go to App”, the user is agreeing to the terms and conditions of the application, the contest, and Facebook.

The sign-up process pop up window is the second section of the site analyzed. The design of this window presents three resources to the user: the ability to complete the process and go to the contest site, alter privacy sections, and learn more about how Facebook applications work. Users are allowed to perform some actions within this window, whereas other actions are limited such as the ability to change privacy settings beyond those that are offered by Facebook. If the user does not agree, he or she is not able to use the site. This window is a required process for applications hosted on Facebook and the colour of its design reflects Facebook branding with its blue and grey colour scheme.

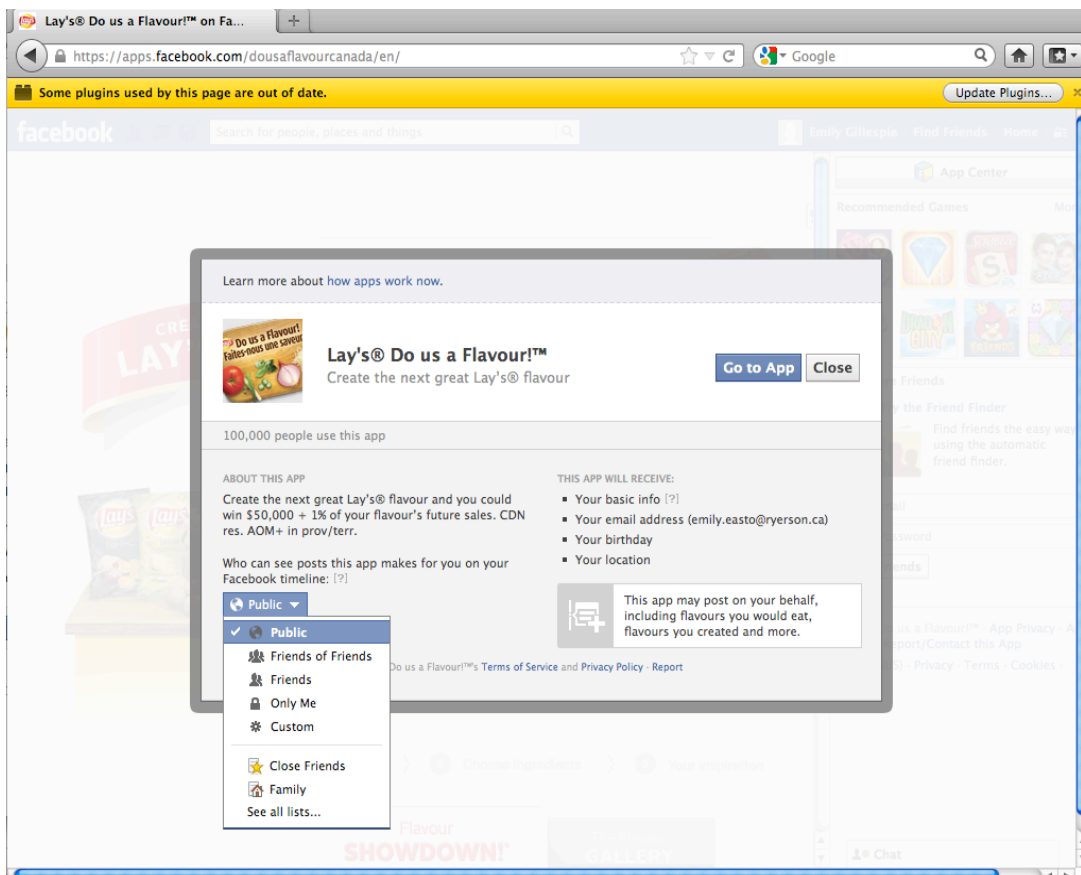


Figure 2

The site features two substantial components, the Flavour Gallery and the Flavour Showdown. These sections are available to the user from the home screen, where the user can navigate using the tabs directly below the banner. The active section (whichever section the user is using) is delineated by a tab that is highlighted and appears in front of the inactive section's tab. The site also allows users to enter their own flavour to be included in the Flavour Gallery and Flavour Showdown. The site is designed so that on every visit, the first screen the user sees is the interactive Flavour Showdown section. This is a design feature that promotes the use of this activity above the other features of the site.

The flavour showdown section of the site (see Figure 3) features two side—by—side images of flavours, separated by the word, “vs.”. The profile pictures of the creators are placed beside their respective flavours. The placement of the flavours coupled with the “I’d Eat That” button below them creates a competitive atmosphere, allowing the action of voting and supportive comments, if the user chooses to navigate to that section. The user is able to click a button with circular arrow to load two new flavours without having to participate in any showdown. If a user selects a flavour, using the “I’d Eat That” button, two new flavours are loaded. In this screen when new flavours are loaded, pop up animation is used and creates visual interest.

Four resources were found within the flavour showdown page of the site (section 4). Buttons, clickable images, badges, and animations all work together to inform the user of the intended activity of this page, voting. The user is able to click on different buttons that allow them to cast their vote, refresh new entries or gain information about a flavour. A loading circle animation occurs after a vote has been cast to inform the user that more entries will appear. A non-clickable badge appears after a vote has been cast informing the user of their flavour choice history within the flavour showdown. The flavour showdown is located within the home screen of the site. The user has the ability to navigate to the Flavour Gallery section by clicking on the tab labeled “Flavour Gallery”.

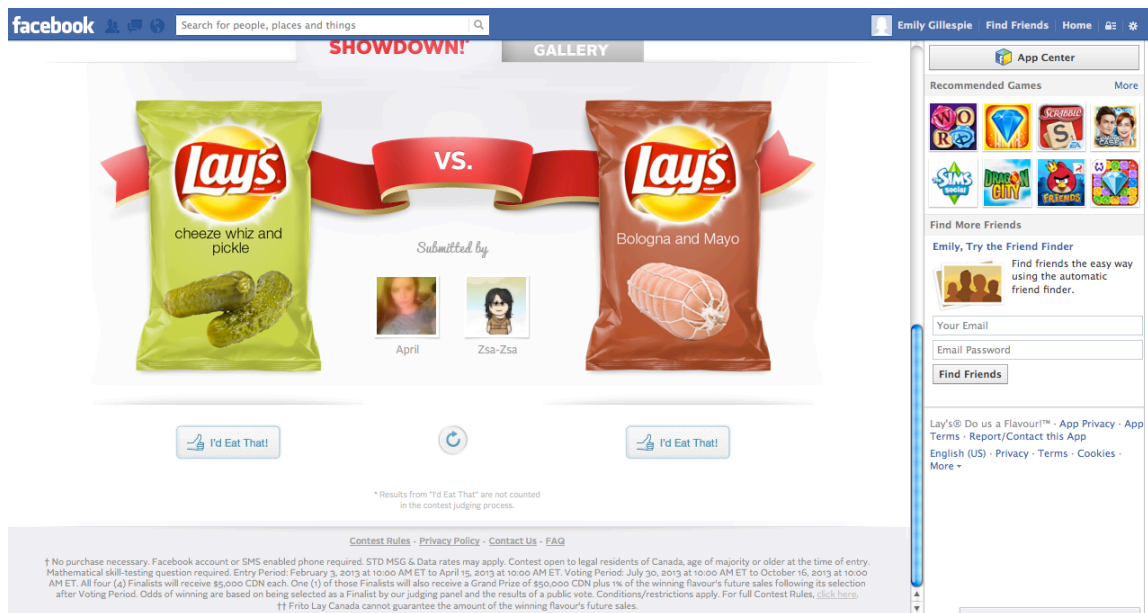


Figure 3

The Flavour gallery (see Figure 4 & Figure 5) consists of the site's banner, which is seen at the top of every page and is consistent in its design throughout the site, always featuring Martin Short, the contest's spokesperson, and a gallery of the flavours entered by the site's users. As stated previously, the user has the ability to sort how they view the flavours within the gallery. They are able to view the flavours either sorted according to most votes received or randomized. The site's design features a scroll bar at the right of the screen that is part of Facebook's interface. When the user scrolls to the bottom with the scroll bar, a throbber appears signalling to a computer literate user that more content will be loaded. The scroll bar is therefore no longer useful as the user must wait for the content to load as the throbber spins. Once additional flavours are loaded, the user can continue scrolling, although the scroll bar remains in place. In addition to the above resources, the "Flavour Gallery" has two other important resources within its design: the ability to scroll to load more entries and to click on an image of a flavour to navigate to its individual flavour profile.

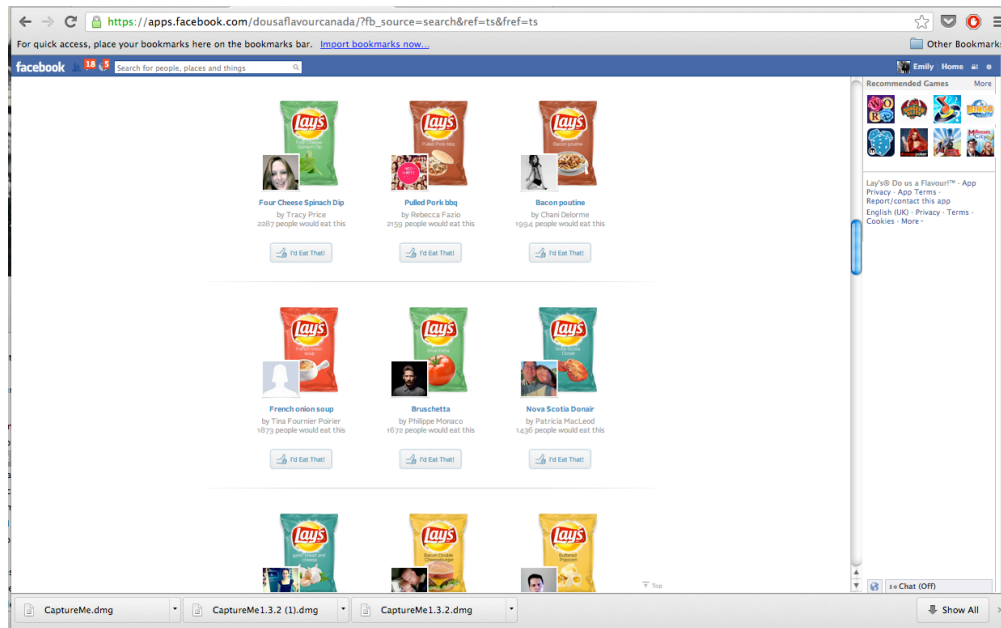


Figure 4

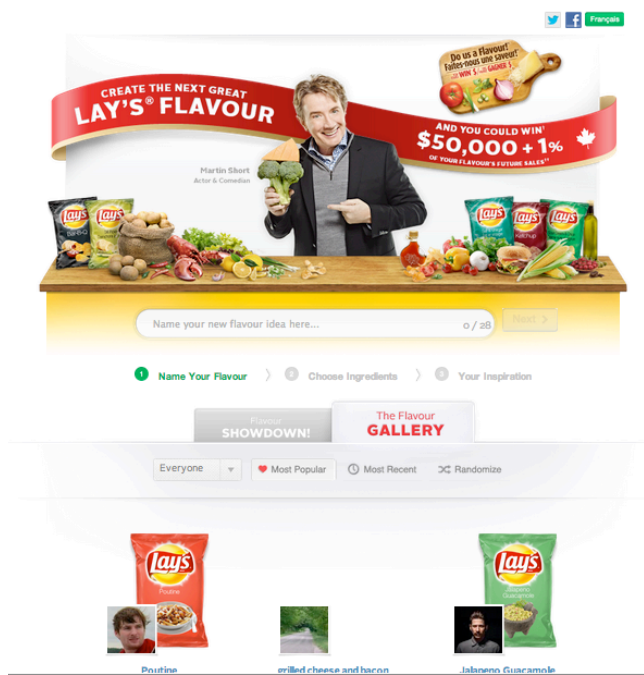


Figure 5

Within the Flavour Gallery each flavour is interactive. When a user clicks on the flavour additional content pops up on the screen. This content pops up in front of the

flavours, hiding a majority of the screen but not all, and offers users the ability to comment on the flavour and view a breakdown of the flavour's popularity presented on an interactive map. Within a flavour's profile (see Figure 6) there are five design resources that give users the option of interacting with other members by contributing comments and/or voting.

The user is able to click on the flavour creator's username or picture to navigate to their Facebook Profile. The user is given the ability to leave a comment because the text box allows them to type in it. The user submits their comment by clicking the button that reads "post". It is also possible to interact with other members by "liking" their comment using the like button. The user can click on the "I'd Eat That!" button that allows them to vote for the flavour. Additional resources on the page include: the button "Flavour Popularity Map" that allows users to navigate to more content and hyperlinked text that allows users to navigate back to the "Flavour Showdown" section of the site.

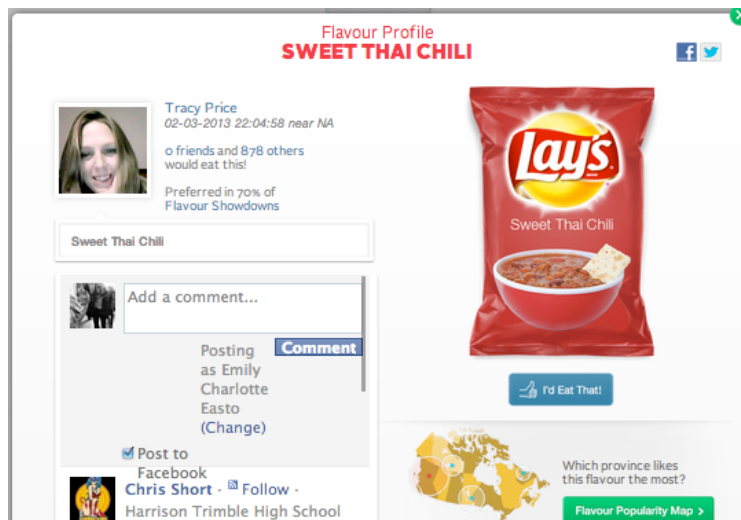


Figure 6

The resources and constraints of the design of the site

The effective design features of the site are those that help users navigate between sections, buttons that allow users to vote, and buttons that allow users to view more entries. The navigation features are effective because they are prominently displayed and predominantly use the same colour, text, and design to ensure their presence is obvious and clear to the user. The use of arrows and highlighted buttons make their purpose known to the user and creates a site that is easily navigable.

Design features that allow users to vote for their preferred flavour are consistently designed and labelled (“I’d Eat That”), thereby making the voting process extremely obvious and easy to use. As the main feature of the contest is the ability of a user to vote for flavours they want to see produced, this feature and its prominent and ubiquitous design effectively address this activity.

Finally, the buttons that allow users to view additional entries are also an effective example of the design features of the site. These buttons are essential to the site functioning as it should and their presence allows users to view additional entries in order to vote for their preferred flavour. Without their existence or ease of use, the primary activity of the site would be negatively affected, as the user would not be able to view all the entries he or she desired to.

However, the ability to comment and see other comments is constricted by the design of the comment function within the page, limiting the number of comments that are immediately visible to the user without having to scroll to see additional comments. The user can write a comment within the text box that allows this function and click on

the comment button to post it. The comment function is constricted by its size and functionality.

A user must use the scroll bar to view all the comments, which can take a significant amount of time, thereby limiting the possibility of dialogue. Furthermore, the user cannot immediately add their own comment to the section, but must first click on the blue text (no visible button is present) “Add a comment” in order to be given the ability to add text and share it with the other users of the site. Fröhlich and Schöller argue that in order to build a successful brand community, the design of the site must “provide the space and possibilities to develop rituals and traditions, and encourage the formation of a sense of community by enabling its members to communicate directly (and on various levels) to get to know each other” (Fröhlich & Schöller, 2012, p. 90).

The design of the site does not provide significant support for members to communicate with each other as it is difficult to find the comment section and view the comments. Furthermore, no central message board feature was developed greatly reducing the ability for continued and sustained communication practices across the site. In creating comment sections for each flavour members have little opportunity to develop lasting relationships. This reflects the lack of meaningful interaction found in the comments collected.

A user can respond directly to a commenter by clicking the blue text “reply” under the comment. The ability to directly respond to a user’s comment is also a design affordance of the site and Facebook, allowing users to engage in a more personal form interaction with one another. The reply feature is important because it helps to produce rich interaction between users and ideally promote the development of the brand

community markers: consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility.

The reply feature and use of blue text is significant here because it is consistent with the host Facebook's design and allowances. A green button, with the text "Flavour Popularity Map >" informs users of yet another screen and provides the ability to navigate to a screen that is revealed by a flip animation.

A green button is located in the bottom right corner of the flavour profile with the text, "Flavour Popularity Map >", signalling to the user that clicking the button reveals additional content. When the button is clicked, the pop up window uses a flip transition to switch between the content of the Flavour Profile and Flavour Popularity Map (see Figure 7). The flavour popularity map has three design resources that allow users to navigate away from the screen, interact with an infographic map, and vote for other flavours based on geographic preferences. The final section of the site that was analyzed according to its design was the process that allows users to enter a flavour (section 8).

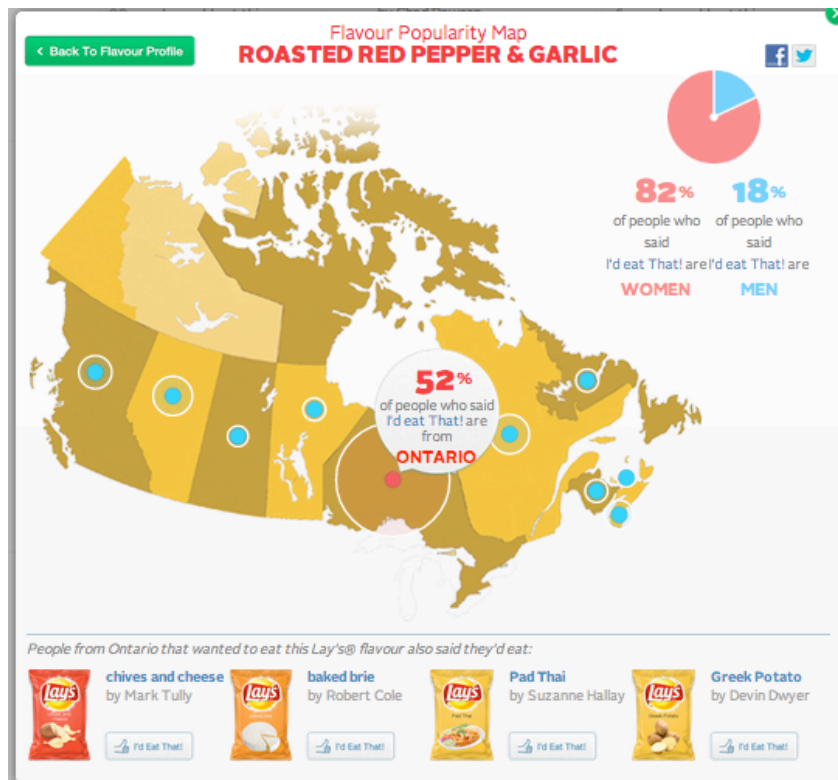


Figure 7

The ability to enter a new flavour onto the site is located within the banner image of the site (see Figure 8). There were three constraints and two resources present within the process, which allowed for users to enter a flavour only if it met predetermined eligibility criteria set out by the contest organizers. The design resource is the ability to enter text into the “name your flavour idea here...” box. The next design resource is the three separate boxes appear when entering ingredients, allowing users to enter ingredients.. The first design constraint restricted a user’s ability to enter flavour names with more than twenty-eight characters. A second constraint restricted how many ingredients they could use in their flavour. A third constraint limited their ingredient ideas to those deemed appropriate by Lay’s.



Figure 8

The design resources and constrictions mentioned above were analyzed in order to determine the site's ability to be classified as a brand community. The restrictions and barriers placed on member communication through comments limits the ability for rituals and traditions and moral responsibility to develop. Furthermore, the social media concepts of transparency and authenticity need to be present in order for trust to develop between members and members and the brand. Transparency requires users to have enough information to make educated decisions about the site and the brand.

User interactions

Further analysis of how users used and interacted with one another was primarily drawn from the comment section of the site's design to develop a fuller understanding of the site. As outlined in table 1, themes that emerged in the data were grouped into two categories: social media and brand community. The category social media has three subgroups: trust, authenticity, and transparency. The category brand community also has three subgroups: consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions and moral responsibility. To study the types of interactions occurring on the site between participants, a qualitative

method of data collection and modified grounded theory analysis was used to explore the sites design and user interactions. Drawing on key concepts from the literature, the data was coded according to themes and patterns and grouped into categories. The categories that emerged from the data reflected the key features of social media (trust, transparency and authenticity) and the features of brand communities (consciousness of kind, moral responsibility and rituals and traditions). The following chart outlines the categories and subcategories found in the data (see Table 1). To best demonstrate the categories found within the data the examples below show both positive and negative instances (when available).

Table 1: Codes and Categories

Category 1: Social Media	Description	Example	Explanation
<i>Trust</i>	Comments that reflect confidence in the site and brand's ability to perform their function (creating and voting for new flavours in accordance with contest rules). Developed through a combination of transparency and authenticity.	+ "The competition is for new flavours, I guess he likes getting his hopes up for nada."	The user "trusts" that the site will perform the stated function of only accepting an original flavour as the winner
		- "hmm showed up I voted on this chip but I never did...himmm wonder what's up with that, maybe its already pre-determined which chip is winning, so maybe I should say congrats early Kim. Good luck but I'm not sure you need it. LOL"	The user does not "trust" that the site is a fair contest
<i>Authenticity</i>	Comments that reflect user acceptance (or not) of the site's and other	+ "you better beat this poutine guy."	The comment reflects the competitive nature of the contest, a

	member's authenticity. For example, the comments state that users accept the site as original and genuine. Alternatively, comments the qualities of honest dialogue.		belief that it is authentic
		- "If you love the spicy sensation that Frank's Red Hot Original Sauce brings to your taste buds, then you'll love this flavour: https://apps.facebook.com/dousaflavoucanada/en/?fid=386649&utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=actions&utm_content=app&utm_campaign=duaf ."	An inauthentic use of social media as the user does not seek to add to the existing conversation but to only promote his own entry
<i>Transparency</i>	Comments that reflect the user's belief in the site's credibility and that the organization is providing the information they need to successfully participate and make decisions.	+ "we have it alot also. if you win a year supply of this you better send me a bag lol"	Reflects the need for transparency in order to make educated statements
		- "Assuming if many people create the same flavor, the first one posted so get the prize. Does not really matter, pountine is not going to win."	Demonstrates a lack of awareness of the contest rules as the user does not have enough information to make an educated comment.
Category 2: Brand Community	Description	Example	
<i>Consciousness of Kind</i>	Comments that reflect a shared connection around a perceived superiority of the brand and community members	+ "Here's another flavour concocted by my awesome sister!"	Demonstrates the superiority of a member by stating that she is "awesome".
		- "good idea from Orillia..im from there too..lol."	Negative because the comment does not reference the superiority of the site in question, but

			states the superiority of an external community
<i>Rituals and Traditions</i>	Comments that reflect the development of shared and repeated communication practices developed to celebrate the community (sharing opinions on the validity of the entry, referencing voting, suggestions, and support)	+ Love this flavour, add a splash of balsamic vinegar.....heaven.	An example of the repeated communication practice where members offer suggestions for improvement
		- “Lame, that's not creative at all.”	The repeated communication practice of arguing about an entries validity.
<i>Moral Responsibility</i>	Comments that either seek to assimilate new members into the group or attempt to help users use the site correctly	+ “If poutine flavoured chips already exist that's one thing but to say that poutine flavour is the same as fries and gravy is perhaps not recognizing that the difference of one ingredient could be significant. If a minor change was not enough to justify a new flavour then we wouldn't have creamy dill (vs. plain dill), sour cream & bacon (vs. bacon), or sour cream & cheddar flavours.”	Seeks to help another members use the site correctly by justifying the validity of an entry.
		-	

The following section will discuss the results of each category and subcategory in more detail. The table below (Table 2) shows a detailed breakdown of codes and categories found in the data set. They have been broken down to illustrate the number of instances of each category and code according to number of flavour profiles they

appeared in and the total comments with instances. Table 3 outlines the total comments found within the dataset and the number of profiles that received comments. As previously stated, there were a total of 150 flavour profiles analyzed in this study.

Table 2: Findings

Category 1: Social Media	Total Comments with Instances	Total Flavour Profiles with Instances
Transparency	22	9
Authenticity	25	9
Trust	10	3
<i>Category totals:</i>	57	21
Category 2: Brand Community		
Consciousness of Kind	4	4
Rituals & Traditions	60	19
Moral Responsibility	14	1
<i>Category totals:</i>	78	24

Table 3: Total Comments

	Total comments in sample	Flavour profiles that received comments
<i>Total Comments (including 50 most popular and 100 random)</i>	122	25

Category 1: Social Media

In total, 57 instances of this category were found within the comments and they were present within 21 different flavour profiles. Within the total 57 instances, 22 were labelled as related to the concept of transparency, 25 were labelled as related to the concept of authenticity, and 10 were labelled as related to the concept of trust.

Transparency

The subcategory transparency revealed two trends within the site. First, there is evidence within this subcategory that participants were aware of some contest rules. Several commenters referenced originality and creativity as necessary features of the winning flavour, which reflects the rule that only original flavours will be considered.

This is evident in comments such as, “be creative! this is the same as fries and gravey”, which argues that the flavour should not be considered because of its similarity to an existing flavour.

Second, interactions within the site demonstrate a lack of understanding about how winning flavours are chosen. No explicit reference is present that demonstrates an awareness that an external panel of judges will choose finalists and the amount of votes received does not have bearing on the selection process. Comments such as, “Assuming if many people create the same flavor, the first one posted so get the prize. Does not really matter, pountine is not going to win” show that the user is not aware of how the contest works and therefore his comments demonstrate the lack of transparency in the site because the information needed to make informed decisions and comments is hidden within the site’s design.

Authenticity

The subcategory authenticity revealed that there are both positive and negative instances of authenticity related to the use of the site and user comments. As the concept of authenticity is concerned with open and honest use of the site, user comments should reflect this. Comments were found that demonstrated both authentic and inauthentic use of the site. First, comments identified as spam such as,

“If you love the spicy sensation that Frank's Red Hot Original Sauce brings to your taste buds, then you'll love this flavour:
https://apps.facebook.com/dousaflavourcanada/en/?fid=386649&utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=actions&utm_content=app&utm_campaign=duaf.”

were categorized as inauthentic because they were purely promotional and did not include any reference to the flavour they were commenting under or to the conversation present within the comment section of that flavour. Comments such as,

“mm showed up I voted on this chip but I never did...himmm wonder what's up with that, maybe its already pre-determined which chip is winning, so maybe I should say congrats early Kim. Good luck but I'm not sure you need it. LOL”

demonstrate that some users found the site and contest to be inauthentic. This is reflected in the assertion that the winners are pre-determined and chosen by the brand, not by other users.

Second, comments were found that demonstrated both positive and negative authenticity in user interactions. Authentic interactions occurred when commenters used the medium to engage in dialogue with one another. For example, if a commenter asked a question and another user responded openly. There were few instances of dialogue within the comments, but the following exchange exemplifies an authentic social media interaction. Question: “What three ingredients?” and answer: “Turkey, gravey, stuffing”. A user asked a question to clarify an issue and the creator of the flavour gave a direct response. Negative examples of authenticity between users were demonstrated most clearly in comments making fun of the contest and other members. For example, comments such as “How about Double HeadCheeze abd Anchovies. LOL” demonstrate that the commenter is not using the comment section to interact with other members but rather to poke fun at the contest and the other entries by suggesting unpleasant flavour combinations.

Trust

The low number of instances that demonstrate trust within the comments reflects the necessity for transparency and authenticity be present in order for trust to form. First, there were instances where users made comments that demonstrated that there was trust

present within the site, even if the trust was formed on perceived authenticity and transparency rather than actual transparency and authenticity. Comments that discussed the creativity or lack thereof present within entries demonstrate trust in the contest and the brand to exclude flavours according to the contest rule that flavours cannot already exist. This trust is reflected in the following comment: “The competition is for new flavours, I guess he likes getting his hopes up for nada”, which asserts that even though the flavour in question received a high number of votes, they cannot win the contest due to the flavour already existing.

Second, comments were found that demonstrated trust in the site to perform its stated function. The comments that reflect user trust in the site were those that invited non-members to sign-up and participate within the site. The comment, “Please sign up and vote” shows that the user trusts that the voting process will have an effect on the winning flavour because this call to action reflects an attempt to receive more votes. By extending invitations to those not already participating, the commenter is displaying trust in the site that it will not negatively affect others who join.

Category 2: Brand Community Markers

In total, 78 instances of this category were found within the comments and they were present within 24 different flavour profiles. Within the total 78 instances, 4 were labelled as related to the marker of consciousness of kind, 60 were labelled as related to the marker rituals and traditions, and 14 were labelled as related to the marker of moral responsibility.

Consciousness of Kind

The subcategory consciousness of kind revealed that this marker of brand community did not have a strong presence within the site. Instances of consciousness of kind were found that highlighted member superiority or referenced external communities.

Two instances of members referring to another member's superiority exist within the data set: "Here's another flavour concocted by my awesome sister!" and "I've tried to think of everything I can, but if this comes out, YOU DESERVE A MEDAL". These comments reflect the concept of consciousness of kind by explicitly stating that the members who created these flavours deserve to be recognized for their contributions. The comment, "We made the same flavor but mine was extra cheese :P - Guess we all want a Poutine flavored chip :p (Even if it was already done, means we want it back)" can be considered to be an instance of consciousness of kind as the comment refers to a collective "we", which may be a reference to the superiority of the community and its members because it implies that the members' desire for a poutine inspired chip deserves to be recognized. However, there were no instances where users commented on the superiority of the brand.

One comment referred to an external community by stating, "good idea from Orillia..im from there too..lol". This comment does not mark a consciousness of kind in the site but rather a member connection built on the member's being from the same community.

Rituals & Traditions

With the subcategory, four themes developed from repeated communication practices. First, there were repeated instances of members offering other members support and encouragement. These instances include the repeated use of the word and

derivatives of the word “yummy” to express support for a flavour idea. Negative instances of this subcategory found within the comments are exemplified by the following comment, “Nope, that does NOT appeal to me at ALL.”

Second, a communication pattern was found where there were repeated instances of members offering suggestions for improvement. This practice demonstrates members attempting to help other members improve their flavour ideas by suggesting modifications to the ingredients. For example the comment, “Love this flavour, add a splash of balsamic vinegar.....heaven”. Comments such as this reflect a commitment to help make flavour entries the best they can be and therefore express a desire to make the community a success based on high quality flavours.

Third, there were repeated instances of members discussing the validity of entries based on knowledge of the contest rules. A communication practice emerged where members discussed whether an entry was original enough to be considered a valid contribution eligible for the prize. The following instance demonstrates this ritual, “not original, not going to win” by stating that the flavour cannot be eligible for the prize based on the argument that it already exists. Although this practice does not explicitly celebrate the community or its members, it can be seen as an example of members working together to ensure that the entries are creative and original. This implicitly demonstrates a commitment to help create a site that can be celebrated based on originality and creativity.

Fourth, there were repeated instances where members referred to voting. The ritual includes instances where users ask for others to vote for their flavour or where users state that they will vote for a particular flavour. Instances of the practice of voting

mentioned in comments include “yum! poutine! you have my vote!” and “vote for my taco supreme flavor!”. These instances demonstrate the ritual of promoting the practice of voting within the site and contribute to the overall purpose of the site, which is a competition to find the next potato chip flavour.

Moral Responsibility

The subcategory moral responsibility has one trend, helping other users in their use of the site. No instances of welcoming members into the site were found. Furthermore, aside from comments already mentioned that discuss the validity of entries, no other instances of governing behaviours were found. Spam comments were ignored and no effort was made to inform the poster that this was not an appropriate use of the site.

Instances that demonstrate a commitment to helping other users include the following comments: “this has already been tried at one point in time not a new favr” and

“If poutine flavoured chips already exist that's one thing but to say that poutine flavour is the same as fries and gravy is perhaps not recognizing that the difference of one ingredient could be significant. If a minor change was not enough to justify a new flavour then we wouldn't have creamy dill (vs. plain dill), sour cream & bacon (vs. bacon), or sour cream & cheddar flavours”.

The former instance refers to the entries validity and the later seeks to explain why a user entered a particular flavour by trying to justify its inclusion within the site. As no different instances of moral responsibility exist, interactions between users are limited and relatively scattered in purpose. It is difficult to know how to use a site's function, such as the comment feature, if no explicit purpose is promoted. Comments also demonstrate a general lack of awareness of the contest rules, perhaps due to the relatively obscured location and gray colour of the hyperlink to this section.

Discussion

The above analysis of the site's design and user interactions demonstrates that although some of the features of social media (transparency, authenticity, and trust) and brand community (consciousness of kind, moral responsibility, and rituals & traditions) are present it is not possible to consider the contest a brand community or a strong example of organizational social media. The following section will discuss the results of the findings according to the study's research questions.

RQ₁: What are the design features of the site and in what way do they allow and constrain interaction?

The study of the site's design features suggests both positive and negative results, which are reflected in the user's comments. The resources and constraints of the site have been shown to contribute to the types of interactions that users will participate in. Voting interactions far out numbered the amount of comments, which is unsurprising given the prominence and prevalence of the voting button throughout the site. This finding suggests that if a priority for the brand community managers is to promote user interactions in more ways than just voting, an easy to find and use central comment section is needed.

The study found that the design of the site is very functional and generally well laid out. However, several resources such as contest rules or the above-mentioned comment section were obscured within its design. If user trust in the site is a goal, any information relevant to decision making or contribution must be made present and obvious. Although the contest rules are present within the site, the location, size, and colouring of their hyperlink may have negatively affected users' reading them. This is reflected in the comment section where there were no instances of users acknowledging

that the winner would be chosen by a panel of judges not by the amount of votes received.

In their study on brand communities hosted online, Fröhlich and Schöller argued that designing a site where the development of brand community markers is supported is an essential part of both gaining value from the community and building value for its members. As the design of the Lay's site was found to be limited in its design, especially in the presence of authenticity and transparency, the brand community markers of moral responsibility and consciousness of kind did not have a strong presence within the site. It is therefore probable that this impeded the ability for value creating practices to form.

RQ2: How do participant comments reflect the affordances of the Lay's contest site?

While my findings suggest that some features of brand communities and social media were present within the comment sections, there were many features that did not have the opportunity to develop. It is possible that if the site were not time limited, brand community features such as consciousness of kind and moral responsibility would have a stronger presence due to continual development and modification of these practices.

Furthermore, the brand community literature stresses the need for transparency in the site such as clearly identified roles to help with the development of communication practices and norms (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). As clearly defined roles did not exist within the community, this may have impacted the level of interactions within the site.

It is essential within social media to provide transparent communications to publics and respond to user questions, comments, or complaints promptly and to do so honesty is required. From the analysis of my data set, I determined that Lay's never

answered any questions or comments posted. This may have negatively impact the amount and content of user comments.

It is difficult to ascertain how the resources and constraints of the site's design affected the concept of authenticity but the study found both inauthentic and authentic comments. The commenting design resource allowed for inauthentic comments such as spam to be submitted; however even though these comments were not demonstrating a genuine use of the function, their content was still related to the contest. No troll comments were found within the dataset, suggesting that although the comment feature allowed for some mild spam comments, there were not any overly negative or inflammatory comments present. Perhaps this is due to the design of the flavour profile's comment section or it could suggest that they were being monitored by Lay's.

The presence of authenticity and transparency is necessary for trust to develop (Hess & Story, 2005). This is reflected in the low number of comments that reflected the concept of trust. As suggested above, this could be due to problems with transparency in the sites design, the short time period of the contest, or a feeling that the contest was an inauthentic use of social media and brand communities.

Implications

Based on the findings, best practices have been developed for creating and hosting a brand community on social media. In order to have a brand community that has a high level of member interaction and engagement the features of social media must be present in the design of the site and the communications from the organization supporting the site. If these features are present within a design that also supports the development of

brand community markers, both members and brand can gain value from their sustained participation in the community.

Conclusion

From the features of social media to the markers of brand community, this study suggests that the design of a site needs to both support and encourage their development in order for brand community to exist. The findings reveal that if the design of a site obscures important information, however minimally, user interactions will reveal of a lack of transparency, authenticity, and trust in the site and the development of consciousness of kind, moral responsibility, and rituals & traditions will be hindered.

However, as it is impossible to know what effect the contest's time restriction had on the presence (or lack there of) of brand community markers, it is entirely possible that their development was thwarted from the start. However, if a brand community where both members and brand are to see value is a goal behind creating the site, attention must be paid to creating and design an open and collaborative space where members have some flexibility in how they participate and interact with other members and the brand.

Overall, this study on the Lay's Do Us a Flavour contest found that a temporary contest designed to mimic some features of brand communities did not fully support the development of the three markers of brand communities. A temporary contest could be a strong incentive for new users to join an established or new community but was not found to be a successful or effective community on its own.

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