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Title:

Ideal participants in online market research: lessons from closed communities.

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Abstract:

Online market research communities are dependent upon their members' participation that in turn provides market intelligence for community operators. However, people join these communities for different reasons. The selection process for market research community members and the moderation process of these communities have a number of pitfalls, which can result in misleading interpretations of intelligence and flawed decisions based on their contributions.

Using social capital theory in conjunction with research on different motivational types of participants, this paper focuses on lessons from commercially operated, closed online market research communities; it provides us with insights on membership selection and community moderation methods.

The practical finding is that the ideal participant of such communities would be attracted by activities and rewards, which do not directly or obviously relate to the specific objective of an online market research community.

Keywords: online market research, online focus groups, social media market research, online market research communities, social capital theory

Introduction:

Online market research communities are increasingly becoming popular with organisations for harnessing intelligence and assisting them in making decisions about new product and services delivery (Oxley, 2006). This new method of market research adoption is fuelled by the growing penetration rates of Internet connectivity and the use of social media services (Aaker, Kumar, Day, & P., 2011). With the increasing acceptance of online market research communities, we have to question the validity of data and decisions generated through these communities (Comley & Beaumont, 2011a, 2011b). The challenges and gravity of the market research stage are well illustrated by the Coca Cola example (Imram, 1999). Although not conducted in online communities, where responses were surveyed about the New Coke, the question asked during the taste test influenced a major decision in the brand's strategy that turned out to be unpopular with consumers (Greenwald, Boyce, Kane, & Leavitt, 1985). This decision was ultimately adjusted by the re-introduction of "Coca Cola Classic" in response to consumer reaction.

The move to online market research using social media as a platform has multiple drivers for market researchers. These include the declining response rates to both online and offline surveys and polls, combined with the increased use of online reviews of products, companies and services and the potential cost savings as a result of the self documentation and analysis (estimated to be circa 40%) when compared to traditional survey research (Stafford & Gonier, 2007). Some authors go even further, suggesting that the market research environment is changing with users increasingly being empowered and able to take charge of the research process by posing their own questions and suggesting the agenda for innovation (Mathwick, 2001) as is evident by the "My Starbucks Idea" community. Comley (2008) adds that engagement with an online market research community provides the continuous market monitoring necessary to follow each development of the ever-changing business environment. This dialogue with prospects can have a positive impact on relationship building between consumer-consumer and consumer-provider (Mathwick, 2001). Others comment on the potential increased quality of responses where honest and spontaneous answers can be shared, regardless of whether the individuals are extraverted or introverted when compared to face-to-face settings (Aaker, et al., 2011). Therefore, the interactivity that is offered by social media platforms such as online forums, wikis and blogs can be used in market research environments to provide a better understanding of the prospects' needs (Austin, Jennings, Schlack, & Lerman, 2007).

Online market research communities (ORC) can be differentiated by their approach to membership - open and closed (Comley, 2008). The differentiating characteristics are the ease of becoming a member and the ability to read the content of community discussions. "My Starbucks Idea" is an example of an open community where anyone who wants to join this community can simply create an account and start participating. To view community discussions and content there is no need to create an account - anyone can browse ideas and discussions

by simply visiting the relevant web pages. On the other hand in closed communities membership is approved by moderators and is usually a result of an invitation by email or telephone call. These invitations to join a closed online market research community tend to be targeted at specific individuals and include prior brand associations or interest for a certain topic. To make sure that relevant members are recruited, some communities have a registration questionnaire, which determines the appropriateness of an individual to be part of an online community. Questions in these “membership suitability” questionnaires can help community moderators to establish the motivational factors which are likely to predict a participant’s engagement in a community. In closed communities the content is accessible to members.

The aim of this paper is to explore the types of questions that could be asked by “membership suitability” questionnaires and to answer the call for more research into understanding the various motivations of participants willing to engage in online market research as advocated by (Hardey, 2012) and others. This knowledge has implications for the selection and moderation methods of online market research communities. To accomplish this aim, first the authors explore the main motivational typologies for online market research communities; secondly, these typologies are combined with Social Capital theory in order to provide a dual theoretical lens for our case studies analysis.

Online market research communities

The online market research processes generally entails the following weekly routine (Ferneley, Heinze, & Child, 2009):

- a) A research problem is supplied by the client.
- b) This problem is converted into engagement activities - for example discussion topics or surveys and added to the online community. An email prompt is emailed to all users about this new topic.
- c) Moderators engage with community members in discussing the topic, steering to the research brief.
- d) A report is compiled by the community moderators, which summarises the community replies and is then supplied to the client.

The feedback loop is usually open for clients to provide comments back to the community (Comley, 2008).

The varieties of research problems that market researchers have to translate into engagement activities using a variety of methods such as games, wikis, images, video, audio etc within a single ORC highlights to us the importance of a diverse ORC membership composition (Frick, 2013; Parvanta, Roth, & Keller, 2013). A number of authors have studied online communities and propose different ways to view and analyse community composition.

Typologies of online market research community membership

Why do people participate in online market research communities? One pragmatic way to answer this question was devised by researchers who identified a number of motivational factors for individuals to take part in these ORCs by developing member typologies. There are a number of different ways to explain the motivational factors, which establish community membership types. One example of an open community based typology suggests four types of online relational norms and behaviour of community memberships: “lurkers”, “transactional community members”, “socialisers” and “personal connectors” (Mathwick, 2001). “Lurkers” are individuals who read but do not actively engage in online discussions; “transactional community members” are those who are looking to inform their purchasing decision; “socialisers” are looking for social interaction; and finally “personal connectors” are individuals who want to develop personal networks (Mathwick, 2001).

The type of user who exists in the majority of large online communities is the “lurker”, in fact the larger the group the higher is the percentage of these members (Muller, 2012). The majority of lurkers are not “selfish free-riders” and the top five reasons for lurking are:

“not needing to post; needing to find out more about the group before participating; thinking that they were being helpful by not posting; not being able to make the software work (i.e., poor usability); and not liking the group dynamics or finding that the community was a poor fit for them” (Preece, Nonnecke, & Andrews, 2004)

Lurking is therefore not always a negative aspect of a community, it is partially a trait but is mostly influenced by an individual’s disposition towards the topic, group or a task (Muller, 2012). General strategies for the engagement of lurkers in communities include better interface design of the community platform itself; active encouragement to introduce each member to the others, explicit expectations to post which could be made by moderators asking for a contribution from those less engaged members, essentially making the online market research community a welcoming place to share views (Muller, 2012; Preece, et al., 2004).

These four main types of motivational elements are further advanced in a more recent study that identified seven main motivational reasons for engaging in an online community. These findings are useful in understanding a general tendency of online communities and as with any other studies are limited to the sample of users, predominantly purchasers of fast moving consumer electronics such as CDs. The study, examining the motivational factors of a closed community’s participation in fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) such as biscuits community snacks (Ferneley, et al., 2009), proposed seven different categories of member motivation. These are not mutually exclusive; they provide market researchers with an understanding of different motivations. For example,

“freebies seekers” are looking for tangible material benefits such as free samples of biscuits to taste and “power seekers” want to make a difference to influence the next recipe of a biscuit.

=== Table 1 ideal position here ===

As table 1 Typology of motivational factors based on Snacks.com illustrates, there are several overlaps between the four types proposed by Mathwick, (2001) and Ferneley et al (2009). Unlike the work of Mathwick, (2001), this typology does not include “Lurkers” – individuals who don’t actively engage in community activities but do observe them, but breaks the types down based on their motivational factors such as “Geeks”, “Freebie Seekers” and “Information Hungry”. As illustrated in figure 2, the motivational factors also allow us to understand the likelihood of an individual exhibiting a community element such as joint identity. According to Wenger, a community consists of three basic elements: a) joint enterprise, that the participants shared identification and common goals; b) mutual engagement, that they learn and undertake activities together; and c) shared repertoire, a set of communal resources that have developed as part of their engagement (Wenger, 1998).

Trust between community members has been established as a key enabler of online community contributions (Ardichvili, Page, & Wentling, 2003)). For example, members may hesitate to contribute out of fear of criticism; they may also deliberately or subconsciously provide misleading contributions; they may doubt the importance of their contribution, provide inaccurate contributions or doubt that their potential contributions could be relevant to a specific discussion. Whether they are likely to trust other community members is also noted in the table below. The penultimate column examines whether motivational rewards have to be intrinsic such as verbal acknowledgement of a member’s participation or if the individual would prefer a tangible extrinsic reward such as financial or material advantage – for example a free sample of biscuits. The last column highlights the likelihood of the participant to be active or passive – or in other words which motivator is more likely to produce a lurker. According to Dwyer et al (2004) there are two distinct categories of online behaviour, firstly information seeking as illustrated by passive access and viewing and secondly social engagement as illustrated by participants who make active contribution (Dwyer, Zhang, & Hiltz, 2004).

=== Table 2 ideal position here ===

The above motivational factors are useful in identifying the types of different community members. As recommended by Mathwick, (2001), organisations are likely to encourage engagement in online market research communities by simply offering a forum which could be a place for community development for a certain brand. These open brand community forums are likely to attract “transactional community members” or “power seekers” using the Fernely et al

(2009) type. However, these individuals are highly driven because of their motivation and can potentially “scare” off others who might then become “lurkers” as a result of a hostile community environment offering poor group dynamics as (Preece, et al., 2004). These individuals can also be labelled as brand advocates or passionate people (Comley, 2008), and do tend to be the most active participants in communities.

All of the above theories have defects when it comes to offering theoretical insight into increasing participation in ORCs. We need to have a better understanding of the social dynamics driving these networks of individuals. These social networks are the foundation of the internet which is based on individuals’ social interactions and these in turn are based on reciprocity (Mathwick, 2001). This concept of reciprocity can be explained by the theory of Social Capital. Initially introduced in the 1980s as a means to understanding social organisational structures (Coleman, 1988), it is argued in this paper that social capital theory can be used to explain levels of engagement in an online market research context in particular when it comes to social media based communities. Many online tools such as Klout.com and PeerIndex.com attempt to quantify the individual’s Social Capital on social media by evaluating their “influence” on the community across several social networks. There are a number of limitations to these tools which produce a single number as an indicator of individual social capital, which is interesting in helping online market researchers to find influential individuals, but this does not help us to evaluate social capital in individual communities as a whole.

What is social capital?

Social capital theory has its roots in sociology and has been developed and advanced by Bourdieu, Loury, and Coleman (Portes, 2000). The basic foundation of this theory is that by involvement in a community an individual can reap positive benefits for both the community and themselves. There are a number of definitions for social capital and the one used in this work is that of Coleman (1988) – emphasis added:

*“Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: **they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors-whether persons or corporate actors-within the structure.** Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible. Like physical capital and human capital, social capital is not completely fungible but may be specific to certain activities.” (Coleman, 1988).*

Social capital is intangible, inside people’s heads and is inherent in the structure of their social networks, as opposed to financial capital, which tends to reside in bank accounts. Compared to physical capital, which is tangible and can be seen in tools and machinery, human capital is less tangible and is evident in a person’s skills and knowledge. Social capital is the least tangible of all and is only evident

in the relations amongst individuals. All three of these capitals can benefit an individual since they offer an increase in productive activity where for example social capital increases trust and hence efficiency of teamwork.

One of the examples illustrating social capital used by Coleman is the Jewish wholesale diamond traders' community in New York, who have a high degree of intermarriage, close geographic proximity and attend the same synagogues – in essence a closed community. These closed communities have a resemblance to closed online market research communities since their membership and interactions involve members only. This community facilitates transactions, which are remarkable for anyone unaware of the social capital bonding the community – namely bags of diamonds are handed over for approval and inspection without the need for formal insurance. This highly valuable goods exchange is only possible due to the high level of trust amongst the community members and facilitates an efficient market. This trust rests on that social capital, which has accrued within the community.

A form of social capital depends on two variables a) the trustworthiness of the social environment, which means that “debt” will be reimbursed, and b) the extent of obligations to be met (Coleman, 1988). If we apply this to online market research, the analogy would be that if person A trusts market researchers to reciprocate in the future, for example, by sharing the summary of the market research analysis with community members. Thus “information” is a form of social capital and there can be a reciprocal exchange of information amongst market research community members.

There are a number of reasons why individuals might want to share information such as maintaining the status of opinion leaders. However, from the market researchers' perspective, maintaining an online community feeds their need for information and can be explained through informational social capital.

The consequences of Coleman's theory is the distinction between three elements of a) those who have social capital and “cash it in” when they need to b) the sources of social capital – individuals who agree to honour these demands and c) the actual social capital resources themselves (Portes, 2000). These resources in the case of ORCs would be information. Information from market researchers could be stimuli for discussions, and summaries of members' replies and how these have been acted upon based on the members' comments. This information would increase social capital in particular for those members who could be associated with the types “social engagement seekers”, “power seekers”, “information hungry” and “information seekers”.

Negative effects of social capital

One area of social capital which seems to be ignored by many is the negative impact of activities and the social reimbursement of these (Portes, 2000). Negative social capital could be potentially damaging in recruiting the ideal participant in closed ORCs. Specifically, Portes highlights four areas of negative social capital: barring others from group access - since the same closed knit community would give advantage only to those who are colluding members and those who are not would therefore be disadvantaged. This could apply to ORCs, which don't actively “refresh” membership by introducing new participants.

Secondly, such networks can have a lesser degree of innovation, where for example, individuals who are most successful in the group, are burdened by others who can call in claims and assistance. This would apply in ORCs where for example members feel that they are the only ones contributing to the community discussions and others offer little or no informational social capital in return.

Thirdly, the tension of community solidarity and individual freedom can be a challenge, since communities try to enforce and maintain a “status quo”. The order, which exists in small village communities where everyone knows everyone else and there is inevitably strong trust amongst members is contrasted with metropolitan life and is often cited as a reason for younger people to choose city living with higher privacy and autonomy. The 2011 England riots that took place in large cities highlights the extreme case of a lack of community solidarity and a sub-culture of norms for extreme violence fuelled by information exchange through social media – or open online communities. In the same spirit online communities came together to facilitate the clean up in real life – showing solidarity – as exemplified by the “Riot Cleanup” campaigns. Social media facilitated open communities were again used for organising the Riot Cleanup on Twitter hash tag #riotcleanup and www.facebook.com/londoncleanup.

The fourth negative aspect of social capital can be said to describe the downward levelling norms. This means that if a community was established as a group of oppressed or in some way disadvantaged individuals, they are likely to keep this identity and anyone breaking this would undermine group cohesion. For example, in extreme cases, those wishing to leave a gang culture may be singled out for attack (Portes, 2000). The third and fourth negative issue of Social Capital would very much depend on the topic being discussed and the more controversial the topic the higher are the chances of these types of negative social capital developing in ORCs.

Primary data collection

Using the concept of social capital in relation to participant typology the current research aims to explore the motivations behind the development of contributor culture within online research communities. Closed online market research communities are used to gain better insight into social capital developed in these communities and how they facilitate trust building and reciprocity. To achieve this, an exploratory case study approach (Oates, 2006; Walsham, 2006; Yin, 1994) was adopted. This interpretive paradigm was selected due to the novelty of the research area and in order to develop a rich understanding of the context, which wouldn't be possible using a purely positivist approach. Data triangulation was used in this study, which was conducted from October 2008 to May 2009. This included combining: observations of two closed online market research communities, community members' e-surveys, three face-to-face focus groups with community moderators, semi structured telephone interviews with the community members and several face-to-face meetings with JTDL and finally

meetings with the two client organisations – easyJet and United Biscuits. The following discussion highlights only the key issues that we felt are of importance in influencing social capital.

The research team included management team members from a UK based market research agency – JTDL (formerly Virtual Surveys Ltd) and academics from UK based Universities. Members of JtDL management team who include individuals with over 25 years experience of running market research studies in commercial settings. The academic researchers are experienced in the field of information systems development, knowledge management, online community moderation and are from an Information Systems background.

United Biscuits and easyJet case study

The two closed online market research communities being studied are managed by Join the Dots (Research) Ltd (JtDL) on behalf of their clients - United Biscuits UK Ltd (UB) and easyJet plc. UB is a Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) manufacturer including a number of brands such as Jaffa Cakes; easyJet is a low cost airline. Guided by Myers' (1997) assertion that interpretive research should present multiple viewpoints of those involved and their different perspectives, the communities were observed over a six-week period and the observations and interpretations made by the academics were presented back to JTDL management for potential improvements to be discussed and incorporated back into subsequent data collection scenarios. In order to fully appreciate the experience of online research community members, the academics were actively involved in community membership for several months and were able to create their own posts and reply to other community members. This allowed first hand experience of interaction in the community and provided them with the same level of exposure to email prompts and alerts as any other community member would experience. It is our belief that the presence of the academics in these communities made no major impact on the community members, as members were already accustomed to being observed by a) the actual market research company and b) by the client company stakeholders such as UB and easyJet.

The easyJet ORC was established in April 2008 and consists of approximately 1800 (c.600 female, c.1200 male) members. The United Biscuits community – snackrs - is one year older and was established in July 2007. At the time of this study snackrs ORC membership was approximately 1000 (c.700 female, c.300 male) people. Each online research community employs a range of Research 2.0 functionalities including voting polls, discussion forums, virtual focus groups, blog environments and functionality to allow community members to upload personal details, photos, videos and create friendship networks.

Each community has a dedicated moderator who posts email requests to members to contribute to the ORC on a specific topic of interest to the client on approximately a twice-weekly basis. The participants are not offered monetary rewards for engaging with the online research communities; however, all respondents in the easyJet community are placed in a weekly free flights prize draw, 'quality' discussion forum contributions (as determined by the moderators) are also rewarded with free or discounted flights on easyJet. The

snackrs community members are occasionally offered free snacks and biscuits, which are typically sent for taste testing purposes.

Communities' observations

Since the communities are operated by a commercial market research organisation, this research is undertaken under their strict in-house ethical approval guidelines. Before the start of this research, approval was also gained from stakeholders within the two online research community client organisations. The reconciliation of commercial and academic interests has at times posed certain challenges that impact on the richness of the data reported, for example, we are not able to report exact community member numbers. However, collaboration with a market research company also has its benefits such as the ability to use cutting edge market research technology and being allowed access to professional market researchers; for example JTDL facilitated the online survey design and creation.

As is demonstrated by the speed of responses within these commercial ORCs, the volume of data generated within a short period of time means that a longitudinal study was not a prerequisite for gaining a meaningful dataset. While response rates within communities can vary widely depending upon the nature of the task at hand (survey versus discussion for example), the audience involved, the nature of reward, the age of the community, the topic in hand, when subsequent invites are issued to the next topic & even the time of year, the response rates in both communities during the observation were similar - on any given discursive topic an average of 2% of the total community membership (approximately 10 to 45 responses per request) contributed. (It is important to note that this variation is characteristic online communities generally. JTDL have run a variety of communities since 2006 with average activity levels across all tasks, from survey to collaboration to in-person activation, of anywhere between 10% & 35% with some smaller communities of 200 members enjoying response rates of 100%.)

However, for the purposes of this study we are only looking at the contributions as they were at the time of the primary data collection. One of the issues of community management is that the majority of community memberships are inactive, for example, in the easyJet ORC over 1300 users have not posted a single contribution and in the snackrs ORC it is over 500 users. It is also observed that the messages posted by the easyJet members tended to be more constructively critical in nature, for example members were questioning certain business processes adopted by the airline; whereas in UB the replies were predominantly positive with members commenting on their taste preferences and their views on the packaging and new tastes. UB community members tend not to provide such in-depth discussion as they are in the easyJet contributions.

There are some participants who are extremely active, for example the maximum number of posts by any one member in easyJet is 57 and in snackrs is 350. This significant difference between the two communities can be explained by the age difference of the two communities with snackrs being over a year older than easyJet. As a result of non-contribution, the community membership is continuously refreshed; the non-active members are emailed with the

reminder that a lack of participation results in removal from the community. Subsequently, new members are recruited using various methods including email and telephone invites (Comley, 2008). Once recruited, members go through a rigorous process of training which introduces them to the community and the social norms (Comley, 2008) expected of the members. The refresh adds a dynamic nature to the communities as membership is refreshed approximately every six months.

Survey results of snackrs and easyJet

Using the lens of motivational typologies and social capital theory, two identical questions were asked in these closed ORCs. As we can see from Table: Community survey – why joined? each of the motivational types is differently represented amongst the community memberships. This supports the view that each community's composition is unique (Mathwick, 2001). Therefore, generalisations on community behaviours are not very helpful unless a clear indication of online market research community composition is made, as is the case through this survey. There is a complex mix of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors that contribute to individuals engaging in online research communities. The typology does not suggest that one member will fit neatly into a single one of the motivational types, for example some statements of members included several reasons that they felt were their motivators to participate in the online community activities. Yet there were also some individuals who only identified one reason for participation. It is therefore argued that a question such as this could be a useful indicator of whether an individual would be an active member or a lurker at the stage of joining the community.

Since these types are based on individual member's contributions, it is not possible for them to place the entire community into one type. However, the more members of a community that subscribe to one particular motivator, the more this motivator could be used as the main source of activities generation and community management. For example, the survey that was administered to the entire community suggested that the majority of snackrs identify with "Freebie seekers"; this would mean that the product samples are important to them and that stopping this activity could reduce their engagement in the community; on the other hand, if samples were sent more frequently, they might be tempted to participate more. The costs of sample sending would have to be balanced with the benefits. The easyJet community on the other hand is predominantly influenced by "Power Seekers" (59%) who want to influence easyJet through their contributions.

=== Table 3 ideal position here ===

The survey question inspired by the motivational typologies helps us to filter participants joining a closed community. However, to get a deeper understanding of a community in operation motivational typologies are limited in offering insight. The Social Capital theory lens inspired another set of questions – see table: Social Capital in the community. The following online survey responses offer to us a deep understanding of the positive social capital in the

form of the first four statements “I was pleasantly surprised by the experience of taking part”, “My contributions have been useful to Client”, “I have learnt something being a member of the community” and “The community gave me what I wanted from joining up”. The negative aspects of social capital such as “I’m a bit afraid of contributing for fear of criticism”, “My initial concerns have been allayed” and “I’m not sure I totally trust this research community” also try to gauge the fear of the member in their community engagement.

The responses indicate that there is a good spread of feelings amongst the easyJet members with the majority exhibiting high indications of positive social capital. For example, members feel that they have helped the community owners through their contributions and at the same time were able to learn something from being part of these communities – so they have received social capital in return.

The importance of client feedback to the community can be explained by the expected reciprocity of community members. The attitude of “you said – we did” (Comley, 2008) makes sure that the social capital exchange is taking place and the participants can see how their thoughts have contributed to the development of ideas. This feedback loop is most important to keep members who are “power seeker” in motivational typology and who do tend to be the most vocal and active. This supports the observation that number of responses can increase if there is a human face or an individual who represents the client brand and the members feel that the client is one of the community members (Comley, 2008).

The negative social capital is evident in the fear of criticism based on their contribution. Surprisingly, it is the snackrs community, which has 9% of respondents expressing these thoughts and on the other hand only 1% of these members do not trust this community. Whereas, in the case of the easyJet community, only 4% fear criticism and 6% don’t trust the community. The trust issue could be explained by the age of these communities, since snackrs is over a year older than easyJet, there is a higher chance that these elements settle with time and the longer time members of these communities have a chance to build up positive social capital.

Nevertheless, both of these closed communities are “healthy” in the sense that the majority of members feel comfortable sharing their thoughts with community moderators and the very negative social capital aspects which would prevent them from doing so and keeping the community in a state of “status quo” are not present. This means that there are members who are not satisfied and would like to actively make it better instead of simply retiring to become a lurker and subsequently being removed from the community.

=== Table 4 ideal position here ===

Lessons from closed communities to open communities

Lessons learned from the two closed online market research communities are helpful in understanding the recruitment and moderation of general market research communities.

These lessons suggest to us how companies who need accurate market research responses can harness the theory of social capital in order to attract the best kind of participant in their online research communities. Namely, through the development of positive social capital – since this is what attracts an ideal participant into a closed online market research community. Equally, the danger of negative fall-out could keep potentially valuable contributors away, or keep them silent – in other words transfer them to become lurkers. These lessons are transferrable to closed market research communities such as a closed Facebook group or a closed LinkedIn group. Following social capital theory, closed online market research groups would increase the social capital in the relationships between a brand and the prospects. We have also noted that time can have a positive effect on trust development – the longer participants stay engaged in an ORC the more trust and social capital they develop.

The argument further develops that many online tools such as Klout.com and PeerIndex.com attempt to quantify the individual's Social Capital online by evaluating their “influence” on a community across several social networks. There are a number of limitations to these tools, which suggest social capital number, but they are useful indicators of online capital performance. The survey question used in this study attempts to quantify the collective social capital of a community by measuring the feelings of individuals in respect to the positive and negative social capital.

Conclusions

Social Capital theory in conjunction with research on different motivational types of participants has been used in this paper to explain the information needs of both community members as well as market researchers. In order to develop the reciprocal information sharing ‘or social capital’ between online market researchers and community members the community norms have to be established prior to community set-up and developed throughout the lifespan of a community.

This paper proposes the use of community survey questions on “Why Joined?” as a helpful base for other community membership studies. This question can be used in future studies to filter community membership or to establish the composition of users and the healthy balance of different motivational factors in existence. In particular, communities that are dominated by “freebie seekers” should ideally be re-balanced towards the “power seekers”, “information hungry” and “hobbyists”. Social engagement seekers based community motivators also play an important role in a community's composition as do “freebie seekers”, “information seekers” and “geeks”, but these tend to encourage lurking behaviour or passive membership and are not helpful for market researchers, this supports the views held in previous studies (Comley, 2008).

The question on “Social Capital in the community” also gives us a base indication of two closed communities that have existed for a while and have a number of members who have developed positive social capital. It is recommended that future studies in online market research communities use the same questions to compare and contrast their community membership composition on a regular, for example, annual basis as a “health check” of community based social capital. Social capital cannot be quantified, but this is an attempt at informing online market research community moderators on the areas that need to be focussed on. In particular, moderation activities should be targeted towards achieving higher scores on participation experience. For example, through acknowledgement from market researchers and or the client of the members’ contributions, the community is increasing its social capital and therefore developing trust amongst the members and encouraging reciprocation of information.

In practice, to encourage ‘Social Engagement Seeker’ type of behaviour, more ‘fun’ activities could perhaps be introduced to facilitate community building not necessarily just focussing on the core community purpose. This would allow members to get to know each other and allow those who entered the community at a later stage to catch up and see the “human side of interaction”.

This suggests a profile of an ‘idealised’ mix for developing engagement in online market communities. Building on the theory of social capital, the participants would: exhibit community elements, trust the community, have intrinsic motivators and be active participants.

However, more research is needed to explore such idealised participants in other communities. On the premise that market researchers have no benefit from lurkers, any community norms and moderation activities have to address this point at the time of recruitment and during the lifetime of a community. It is acknowledged that one individual can be motivated by several engagement types of activities (Ferneley, et al., 2009), therefore a balance between “on-topic” conversation aiming to address “power seekers” needs; for example, discussion on how to improve a certain aspect of a product can be balanced by social engagement types of interactions. These interactions amongst community members are helpful in reducing the fear of participation for those less confident members.

For example, the ‘Social Engagement Seeker’ type is motivated by interactions with others, hence they could potentially contribute to off-topic conversations that may not necessarily be of interest to the market researchers. However, these contributions allow participants to get used to the technology and get to know each other better, thus developing trust in the community.

On the other hand, those participants who are less engaged in online research communities are those that exhibit no community membership, have no trust in the community, are motivated by extrinsic rewards and are passive, for example the ‘Freebie Seeker’. A community needs only active members, who contribute to

the discussions and the method established by the company in this case illustrates a good practice of regular lurker removal and refreshing of members which has the potential to also manage the negative aspects of social capital.

Finally, to find the ideal participant for online community members,, the market researchers needs to strengthen the community attributes, whereby participants can be enticed by the social capital that members accrue. This entails initiating activities and rewards, which do not directly or obviously relate to the narrow task at hand.

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Nr	Type	Quote examples
1	Social engagement seekers	<p>“Seeing other people’s opinions and being able to view your own”</p> <p>“getting involved in discussions - being able to see what other peoples' opinions are and giving my own”</p> <p>“feeling like we have some input”</p> <p>“It’s great to share the experience with other snackrs”</p>
2	Power seekers	<p>“Being part of a community that is influential”</p> <p>“you feel your opinion counts for something”</p> <p>“knowing my comments are read by someone who actually wants to know”</p>
3	Freebie seekers	<p>“you get to know about great biscuits and treats”</p> <p>“receiving the snacks!”</p> <p>“the free samples are nice”</p>
4	Information seekers	<p>“The chance to hear of new snacks and being chosen to try them”</p> <p>“Finding out about new products and sampling them”</p> <p>“receiving e-mails about new products, keep being informed, so I can purchase items that I know are nice and have tried them first”</p>
5	Hobbyists	<p>“The site is fun to visit and about my favourite subject - food!”</p> <p>“thinking about food and whetting my appetite - time to reflect”</p>
6	Information hungry	<p>“Finding out about the new snacks being developed first, and of course getting the chance to try them out! I also enjoyed choosing the packaging and name for the Christmas biscuits”</p> <p>“Getting insider information on new products, the chance to give some feedback and, of course, the free trials!”</p>
7	Geeks	<p>“The layout of the website”</p> <p>“The polls, the surveys & the opportunities to test new products”</p> <p>“This is the most interesting website I am a member of”</p>

Table 1: Typology of motivational factors based on Snacks.com; reproduced with permission from (Ferneley, et al., 2009)

Nr	Type Ferneley et al (2009)	Mathwick, (2001)	Community elements (Wenger, 1998)	Trust between community membership (Ardichvili, et al., 2003)	Motivators (Osterloh & Frey, 2000)	Participation (Dwyer, et al., 2004)
1	Social engagement seekers	Socialisers	Yes	Yes	Intrinsic	Active
2	Power seekers	Transactional Community members	No	No	Intrinsic	Active

3	Freebie seekers	Lurker	No	No	Extrinsic	Passive
4	Information seekers	Lurker	No	Yes	Intrinsic	Passive
5	Hobbyists	Socialisers	Yes	Yes	Intrinsic	Active
6	Information hungry	Personal Connectors	No	Yes	Intrinsic	Active
7	Geeks	Lurker	No	Yes	Intrinsic	Passive

Table 2: Comparison of motivational factors

	Why joined?	snackrs	easyJet
	Base (rounded up)	200	150
Information seekers	Wanted to find out about new developments/products/ideas from (client)	69%	49%
Power seekers	Wanted to influence (client)	41%	59%
Freebie seekers	Wanted to win prizes/get products etc	64%	15%
Information seekers	Genuinely interested in this topic	60%	30%
Hobbyists	Wanted to see what it was all about/try something new	57%	26%
Information hungry	Wanted to express my views	39%	48%
Social engagement seekers	Wanted to take part in discussions/debates with others	20%	13%
Social engagement seekers	Wanted to be part of a community	24%	4%
Geeks / Social engagement seekers	Wanted to have fun	27%	3%
Power seekers	Had a particular issue I wanted to feedback	1%	16%
	Other	0%	2%
	Don't know	1%	0%
	Average Number of Answers	4.0	2.6

Table 3: Community survey - why joined?

Your thoughts about this community	snackrs	EasyJet
Base (rounded up)	200	150
Base	100%	100%
1. I was pleasantly surprised by the experience of taking part	55%	19%
2. My contributions have been useful to Client	26%	19%

3. I have learnt something being a member of the community	21%	22%
4. The community gave me what I wanted from joining up	19%	9%
5. <i>I'm a bit afraid of contributing for fear of criticism</i>	9%	4%
6. <i>My initial concerns have been allayed</i>	7%	4%
7. <i>I'm not sure I totally trust this research community</i>	1%	6%
8. Other	4%	4%
9. None	4%	26%
10. Don't know	10%	13%
Average Number of Answers	1.6	1.4
Table 4: Social Capital in the community		