ONLINE ANTI-BRAND COMMUNITIES AS A NEW FORM OF SOCIAL ACTION
IN ADULT EDUCATION

by

CANDICE R. HOLLENBECK

(Under the Direction of Sharan B. Merriam)

ABSTRACT

As a backlash against capitalism, there is a growing resistance to transnational brands and corporate globalization. One form of this resistance is the emergence of anti-brand communities on the Internet. The purpose of this study was to understand the nature of online anti-brand communities as a form of social action. The inquiry was guided by the following research questions: Why do online anti-brand communities form? What action strategies do online anti-brand communities engage in and how does the Internet shape those activities? How does learning occur in online anti-brand communities?

A comparative qualitative case study design was employed to address the purpose of the study. Three online anti-brand community cases were examined: anti-Starbuck's, anti-Wal-Mart, and anti-McDonald's. Data collection consisted of a total of 15 in-depth interviews, printouts of web-based discussions, and website documents (i.e., newsletters, updates, announcements). Using the constant comparative method of data analysis, individual case and cross-case analyses were conducted. Descriptive data were used to establish common traits or

themes within each case. For cross-case analysis, data from each individual case was compared with the other cases to identify common themes across cases.

Data analysis revealed four distinct reasons why anti-brand communities form: 1) in response to a common sense of moral responsibility, 2) to provide a support group to achieve common goals, 3) in response to workplace difficulties, and 4) to provide resources for taking action. Anti-brand communities engage in two types of action strategies: online (e.g., online petitions, coordinated email campaigns, monetary donations) and offline (e.g., resistance in the workplace, forming local groups, onsite protests, boycotting). Findings suggest the Internet radically affects social action strategies in five major ways: 1) speed, 2) convenience, 3) nature of community formation, 4) anonymity, and 5) widespread viewership. Learning occurs within these online communities through observations/exposure, story-telling, and dialogue and discussion.

Based on the findings of the study, three conclusions are presented. First, online anti-brand communities represent one form of social action for the 21st Century. Second, the online medium is able to maximize potential for social action strategies. Third, online anti-brand communities are important sites for learning.

INDEX WORDS: Adult Education, Adult Learning, Consumer Activism, Online

                 Communities, Social Action

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DEDICATION

This research study is dedicated to my husband, Dave Hollenbeck, for his patience and

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

No one eludes corporate branding and marketing strategies. Whether it is McDonald's golden arches in every area of the globe, Wal-Mart's promotion of low prices in rural towns across America, Starbuck's' coffee shops on every corner of every major city, or Microsoft's incessant upgrades to our technological infrastructure, marketing efforts of this magnitude are irrefutable and pervasive.

Consumer culture is the ideological framework that underpins what and how people consume and the activities that marketers' undertake to promote their brand. A brand is "a distinctive commercial term used by a firm to identify and/or promote itself or one or more of its consumer products or services" (Friedman, 1985, p. 929). Traditionally, the interactions between marketer and consumer are viewed as an exchange-based relationship ascribing mutual benefits to one another. The brand serves as a conduit for marketers to provide consumers with identities that satisfy their needs, wants, and desires. The consumer purchases the branded good and is fulfilled. These collective actions of both consumers and marketers are thought to bring about balance in the marketplace by producing a dynamic dialectical relationship (Holt, 2002).

One way in which this dialectical relationship is visible is with brand communities. Brand communities are networks of consumer relationships that coalesce around a commonly used brand. For some consumers, brand names identify, label or symbolize abstract values such as quality, status, or reputation, and are a means for creating a sense of belonging and uniqueness among consumers. Although scholars have identified brand communities as positive and

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mutually beneficial communities for the consumer and the firm, scholars have also found that consumers are not always mutually satisfied with brand-driven relationships.

Recently, scholars have questioned the mutual exchange theory by critically examining the imbalances of power in a profit-driven marketplace consisting of large, global corporations (Ozanne & Murray, 1995). Research has shown that many consumers view corporations as dominating and oppressive through imbalanced distribution of goods and services, deceitful marketing tactics, and unequal access to information (Dobscha, 1998). In an era marked by rapid globalization, corporations are using sophisticated marketing techniques to seduce consumers by ascribing worldwide meanings to their brands. Consumers who internalize these meanings implicitly grant corporations the cultural authority to dictate their values, tastes, and preferences.

As a result, some consumers are resisting current marketplace practices and corporate brand names. Realizing that the voices of many speak louder than the voice of one, these consumers formulate groups opposing corporations that exploit local, national and global agendas that aim to influence consumer attitudes, interests and identities (Held & McGrew, 2002). The most successful and lauded corporations studied in business courses for their revered branding tactics and admired by brand communities for their distinctive brand names, are the same corporations being attacked by consumers (Holt, 2002). "Anti-corporate critiques and practices are emerging from different classes, nations, social systems, ethnicities, and religions" (Starr, 2000, p. 161). According to Mayer (1989) "for nearly a century activists around the world have sought to improve consumer welfare by agitating business practices" (p. vii).

Since the late nineteenth century, consumer activism has continued to develop as changes occur in the environment. Kotler (1972) identified three distinct waves of U.S. consumerism movements. The first consumerism movement occurred during the turn-of-the-century as a

reactionary critique to the early stages of industrialization. World War I put an end to the first wave of American consumer activism. Soon after the war, the second wave occurred during the 1920s and 1930s in response to the Industrial Revolution's broadening impact. Like the first consumer movement, the second was also eclipsed by a world war. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that the third wave of consumerism movements occurred due to underlying economic, technological, and socially contentious conditions. After studying these three movements, Mayer (1989) extended Kotler's classification by predicting the next movement would occur when (1) a social climate is marked by progressive social behavior (i.e., a notable form of consumer rebellion), and (2) a set of consumer problems are connected to rapid change in the production and distribution of goods. Presently, these two conditions are evident with the rapid globalization of goods and services and a social climate marked by intense activism aimed at global corporate branding efforts (Ozanne & Murray, 1995). Mayer (1989) predicted consumer movements occur in thirty year spans, which indicates the U.S. is ripe for another major consumerism movement.

Scholars are already recognizing and labeling the present consumer movement. Holt (2002) refers to the movement as "a global anti-branding movement" distinguished by large numbers of consumers joining together to voice their disapproval of oppressive corporate actions (p. 70). In essence, the globalizing and branding of goods has contributed to a consumer rebellion which indicates some consumers no longer give credence to traditional mutual relationships once alleged between the marketer and consumer. On the contrary, a firm's actions are being interpreted as solely concerned about internal interests rather than seeking to meet the wants and needs of the consumer. In this anti-brand movement, consumers link environmental issues, human rights and cultural degradation to globalized corporate agendas (Klein, 1999).

Popular books such as Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* (2001), Kalle Lasn's *Culture Jam: The Uncooling of America*[TM] (2000) and Naomi Klein's *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (1999) give testament that anti-brand groups constitute a potent new global movement.

Anti-capitalism is a common underlying thread among these anti-brand critiques and practices (Barnet & Muller, 1974; Lukic & Brint, 2001; Nielsen, 2003; Starr, 2000; Waterman, 1998; Yates, 2003). Sklair (2003) states "major transnational corporations are the most important and most powerful globalizing institutions in the world today and by virtue of this fact they make capitalist globalization the dominant form of globalization" (p.16). Furthermore, globalization researchers are beginning to focus on the rise in transnational corporations and their domination of capital, production and marketing (Sklair, 2003). However, it is important to note that capitalist globalization is not the only form of globalization (see Sklair, 2002: chapters 10 - 11). For the purposes of this study, globalization will be confined to capitalistic socioeconomic structures in order to examine the power associated with large corporations and the voracity with which corporations have reacted to a competitive, high-tech world.

Barnet and Muller (1974) state "the global corporation is the most powerful human organization yet devised for colonizing the future" (p.363).   They suggest that corporations legitimize their capitalistic global operations as rational ways to distribute the resources of the world. Marxists scholars would concur indicating that corporate globalization extends the effects of capitalist development (Holst, 2002). Waterman (1998) suggests globalizing corporations give rise to authoritarian, militaristic and apocalyptical social movements.

Social movements are normal manifestations of democratic societies representing an important force for social change (Gamson, 1990). Bringing about change for the betterment of

society is the purpose of social movements. According to Mayer (1989), "the ultimate standard for a social movement is the extent to which it changes the world for the better" (p. vii).

Historically, social movements have mobilized support through the development of a clearly defined goal that attempts to deliver benefits to a narrow segment of society, or that addresses issues at the very core of a person's identity (Mayer, 1989). Old social movements occurred between the years 1945 and 1970 and were associated with economic growth, distribution, and security (e.g., workers rights, civil rights). Family, work, and consumption-centered social matters were disputed with clearly defined goals to enhance the political-economic system (e.g., justice, liberty, equality, emancipation). New social movements represent modern culture and are associated with peace, feminism, ecology, and personal autonomy (e.g., gay and lesbian movement, feminist movement, environmental protection movement).

In contrast to old social movements, new social movement actors are not seeking to transform entire productive systems. Rather, new social movements are more localized and individualized where the individual is the central focus and social transformations occur through the transformation of the individual person (Finger, 1989). The characteristics of new social movements involve advocacy for single causes, group identity, and individual survival (e.g., green movement, new peace movement). Personal transformations lead to local social, political, and cultural transformations.

These broad descriptions of new and old social movements are generalizations, and adult educators continue to debate and critique the specific and defining criteria of new and old movements (Finger, 1989; Holford, 1995; Spencer, 1995; Welton, 1993). However, there is

sound concurrence among these scholars that social movements are important learning sites capable of generating knowledge and action which leads to social change.

The anti-brand movement does not entirely appertain to either old or new movement catagorizations. Rather, it represents a new kind of movement utilizing different resources and taking on broader goals. If old social movements fought for the realization of the ideals of modernity and new social movements question modernity (Finger, 1989), the anti-brand movement is a fundamental postmodern rejection of modernity. Lyotard (1984) describes postmodernism as a rejection of grand narrative, metaphysical philosophies, and any other form of governing thought; meaning there is no longer one dominant philosophy or ideology. The anti-brand movement is the emergence of a society marked by complexity, fragmentation, unstableness, and resistance (Venkatesh, 1989). Although the global anti-brand consumer movement is in its nascent stages, the goals of this movement seem immense, the benefits are aimed at world-wide communities, and the issues are not directed specifically at personal identity. Rather, the anti-brand movement deals with a broad array of issues that affect most everyone in society. Anti-brand activists are concerned for both economic self-interests and the social consciousness of consumers.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the anti-brand social movement is that these groups are no longer restricted by space and time. The Internet provides communication methods for people around the globe irrespective of geographical space and/or time zones. Historically social movements have emerged in a geographical pattern, revolving around physical gathering spaces. Today social movements are transpiring in virtual space which sets the stage for new forms of protest, organization, cooperation, and coalition-building. For example, anti-corporate Web communities, such as Adbusters (http://www.adbusters.org/) the Baffler (http://thebaffler.com/),

the Center for a New American Dream (http://www.newdream.org/) and no logo (http://www.nologo.org/), are organizing via the Internet to oppose destructive marketplace activities.

In many cases, social action communities originate and communicate solely in cyberspace. This virtual community is built around common social and political interests. Communities form online because people are able to come together, regardless of geographical proximity, and identify with a common need, goal, or identity (Hung & Chen, 2001). In the case of online anti-brand communities, the community is situated around common detestations of corporate brand names. Various consumer groups have formed to support each other in their efforts to resist marketplace practices and globalized consumption patterns. According to Shepard and Hayduk (2002), "activists with computer access usually log on and contribute to a virtual radical community of independent media sites and listservs; this new generation of do-it-yourself organizers has created everything from news reports, video feeds, and photo documentation to online discussion and diaries" (p. 7).

Online anti-brand communities pursue their common interests in multifarious ways which include using the internet to communicate and organize demonstrations (e.g., sending emails to corporate leaders to advocate their cause, organizing marches to protest the opening of a new Wal-mart, or creating computer viruses as abhorrent messages for Microsoft). The revolutionary politics of such social movements are useful in our theoretical understanding of how social change takes place in the twenty-first century, how social change activists utilize Internet capabilities to pursue their common interests, and the nature of adult learning within social change. For adult educators, social movements represent important sites for collective learning and social enlightenment.

Welton (1993) suggests social movements "are particularly privileged sites for the organization of enlightenment and emancipatory praxis" (p. 152). Social movements are sites for generating knowledge and developing new understandings. Within social movement groups, activists serve as facilitators and providers of informal learning and education. According to Spencer (1995), "those who operate within these social movements learn together to identify the issues, to seek out the knowledge needed, and to develop a plan to bring about change" (p. 36). Likewise, Finger (1989) suggests "social movements must be considered as one of the best expressions of underlying social and cultural transformations" (p.17). In other words, social movements serve as predictors of future values that will eventually affect entire societies. Although adult educators have gained much insight by studying old and new social movements, little research has examined social movements of the twenty-first century.

Online anti-brand social action communities are informal learning loci, situating education in the context of everyday Internet activities. While learning embedded within these communities is often incidental and informal, it is also significant and empowering because it takes place within a struggle for change. In this struggle, community members integrate their physical, communal, and circumstantial experiences into the practice of learning. Thus, learning is rooted in everyday situational contexts (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Within anti-brand social action communities, informal learning goes on all the time and occurs both individually and in groups. Learning becomes "a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used" (Brown, Collins, and Duguid, 1989, p. 32). The processes of learning generate social action and "range across multidisciplinary areas, including developing people skills, processing information, and initiating and planning social action" (Spencer, 1995, p. 36).

Clearly, the anti-brand social movement offers a framework for studying the nature of present-day social changes. Understanding how community members learn together by sharing their needs, wants, and interests via the Internet will provide insights to future learning mechanisms. The Internet offers a new medium for understanding how social movements form, how social action community members communicate with one another and how they take broad-scale action. Online anti-brand social action communities represent an extraordinary new form of activism aimed at globalizing democracy, rather than corporate domination. A just and equitable democratic society may depend on such coalitions. By studying consumer activism that originates in a virtual context, new strategies of protest, ritual, and community building will be discovered and the learning dynamics that take place within these communities will be revealed.

Statement of the Problem

International resistance to transnational brands and corporate globalization has gained wide-spread attention. Consumers around the world are joining together to voice their opposition to corporate domination. Corporate hegemony has become evident to many consumers through imbalanced distribution of goods and services, deceitful marketing tactics, and unequal access to information. As a result, consumers are opposing global brands and linking environmental issues, human rights and cultural degradation to globalized corporate agendas.

Anti-branding demonstrations are emerging from different classes, nations, social systems, ethnicities, and religions. This wide-scale social movement opposes the fundamentals of market capitalism, challenging the practices and purposes of powerful corporations. The anti-brand movement has unique differentiations from historical social movements. First, it has

broader goals attempting to deliver benefits to worldwide communities. Second, it does not

strive to be a part of modernity as noted in old social movements, nor does it solely question

modernity as noted in new social movements. Rather, it fundamentally rejects the notions of

modernity. Third, with World Wide Web capabilities it is not restricted by space or time.

These unique characteristics position anti-brand social action communities as central sites

for understanding how social movements in the twenty-first century form and communicate via

the Internet, and how these groups take broad-scale action. Although there is some literature

exploring learning within old and new social movements (Finger, 1989; Holford, 1995; Spencer,

1995; Welton, 1993), little is known about learning that takes place in social movements of the

twenty-first century, especially ones that utilize the Internet. Online anti-brand social action

communities are novel sites generating knowledge and innovative action strategies for social

change. In studying online anti-brand communities within the realm of social movements, adult

educators will better understand how adults informally learn, form communities, and strategize

in virtual environments.

<div align="center">Purpose of the Study</div>

The purpose of this study was to understand the nature of online anti-brand communities

as a form of social action. The investigation was guided by three research questions.

1) Why do online anti-brand communities form?

2) What action strategies do online anti-brand communities engage in and how does the
   Internet shape those activities?

3) How does learning occur in online anti-brand communities?

Significance of the Study

Research indicates that cultural transformations taking place within social movements will make traditional forms of education increasingly obsolete (Finger, 1989). The informal and incidental learning processes that take place within social movements are notable forms of adult education (Foley, 1999, 2001; Holst, 2002; Youngman, 2000). By studying online anti-brand social action communities through the lens of an adult educator, there are theoretical and practical contributions.

Theoretically, studying the global anti-brand movement contributes to the literature exploring learning within old and new social movements. The anti-brand movement constitutes a new kind of movement, going outside the parameters of historically defined old and new social movements. At present there is a paucity of research examining social movements originating in the twenty-first century. With innovative World Wide Web capabilities, learning, instruction, and communication techniques are boundless. The anti-brand movement serves as a new medium for understanding informal and incidental learning and community formation within present-day struggles for social change. This study offers a greater understanding of how learning takes place within online social action groups and how online social action communities form and take broad-scale action.

Practically, educators gain a more comprehensive understanding of current societal changes. By studying online anti-brand social action communities, adult educators better understand the incidental and informal learning processes that are taking place with technological advances of the twenty-first century. Accordingly, adult educators broaden their conceptualization of societal factors that influence the nature of adult education policies and programs.

Furthermore, adult education is not limited to the confines of formal schooling (Cunningham & Curry, 1997; Hill, 1998). Adult education historically associates education with the radical democratic tradition, conceptualizing it in terms of ordinary, societal, everyday practices (Dykstra & Law, 1994; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Foley, 1999; Lovett, 1988; Youngman, 2000). By studying online anti-brand communities, adult educators gain a broader understanding of how informal learning takes place in the lives of common people in their everyday activities. These everyday societal practices encompass struggles for social justice and social change. Anti-brand communities are common society functions that serve as vehicles for interpreting the world and developing skills to live within the world or to change it.

<div align="center">Definition of Terms</div>

The following terms are defined to clarify discussion in this study:

<u>Anti-brand communities</u> – are networks of relationships that form around common detestations of corporate brand names.

<u>Brand</u> – a product name that identifies, labels, or symbolizes abstract values such as quality, status, or reputation and is a means for differentiating one product, service, manufacture or retailer from another.

<u>Brand communities</u> - are networks of consumer relationships that situate around a commonly used brand.

<u>Globalization</u> - "denotes the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of transcontinental flows and patterns of social interaction. It refers to a shift or transformation in the scale of human organization that links distant communities and expands the reach of power relations across the world's regions and continents" (Held & McGrew, 2002, p. 1).

<u>Online social action communities</u> - are communities that form or originate in cyberspace and situate around common social and political interests.

<u>Social movements</u> – are organized efforts concerned with bringing about social change.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to understand the nature of online anti-brand communities as a form of social action. The investigation was guided by three research questions. First, why do online anti-brand communities form? Second, what action strategies do online anti-brand communities engage in and how does the Internet shape those activities? Third, how does learning occur in online anti-brand communities?

The literature contributing to current knowledge regarding brand, anti-brand, and social action learning communities comes from many disciplines, including education, anthropology, consumer behavior, sociology, and psychology. Online searches via GALILEO at the University of Georgia were conducted. PsychInfo, IBInform, EBSCOhost, ERIC, Sociofile, and Dissertation Abstracts were the primary databases searched. Various descriptors and combinations of descriptors were used including brand community, learning community, social movements, social action communities, and online communities. This study relates to seven primary areas of literature: (1) brand communities, (2) consumer rebellion, (3) consumer movements, (4) social movements, (5) social and political aspects of social movements (6) social action communities as online learning communities.

Brand Communities

A brand refers to products, services, manufacturers, or retailers that may or may not be registered trademarks (Friedman, 1985). For Friedman (1985) a brand is "a distinctive commercial term used by a firm to identify and/or promote itself or one or more of its consumer

products or services" (p. 929). For Zinkhan and Martin (1987) "It is a complex symbol that has the potential to represent many ideas and attributes associated with the product it represents" (p.157). For Muniz (1997) "brands attach meaning to a good" (p. 308).

Brand names identify, label or symbolize abstract values such as quality, status, or reputation and are a means for differentiating one product, service, manufacture or retailer from another. Furthermore, "firms with extremely memorable brand names (e.g., Coca-Cola, McDonalds) often regard the names as their most valuable asset because these labels provide immediate recognition" (Meyers-Levy, 1989, p. 197). According to Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) "people buy products or brands for something other than their physical attributes and functions" (p. 110). Fournier (1998b) indicates people buy brands because they have established loyal, long-term, committed, affect-laden relationships with particular brands. Research suggests that people not only form relationships with their brands, people also form relationships with other consumers who have similar brand preferences. This network of consumer relationships is called a brand community or consumption community.

Brand communities are networks of consumer relationships that situate around a commonly used brand. These communities create a sense of belonging among consumers. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) define brand community as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand" (p. 412). According to McAlexander, Schouten, and Koening (2002) a brand community consists of "a fabric of relationships in which the customer is situated" (p. 38). In essence, people form bonding groups around their shared, symbolic brand. Community groups have been investigated in studies of Macintosh, Saab, and Bronco owners (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001); Harley and Jeep Brandfests participants (McAlexander et al., 2002); Harley-Davidson owners (Schouten &

McAlexander, 1995); fur-traders (Belk & Costa, 1998); river rafters (Arnould & Price, 1993); and Winnebago travelers (Peters, 1999).

Boorstin (1973) first identified consumption communities, stating that they were "created and preserved by how and what men [sic] consumed" (p. 89). At that time, Boorstin claimed that communities were changing from clearly defined bonds to easily influenced affiliations. He observed that after the Industrial Revolution in the United States, consumers began to form communities around brand use and these new communities were not bound by geography. The non-geographically bound communities are becoming increasingly popular on the Web. McWilliam (2000) suggests that more companies are creating online brand communities via the World Wide Web, and "they are building new relationships with their customers and enabling consumers to communicate with each other" (p. 43). Community members communicate with each other online through Web bulletin boards, virtual forums, and chat rooms (McWilliam, 2000).

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) first used the term brand community. They developed their idea of brand community around social relation networks, defined by Bender (1978) as "relations marked by mutuality and emotional bonds" (p. 145). Muniz and O'Guinn studied brand communities among Ford Bronco, Macintosh, and Saab owners. They identified three core commonalties associated with brand communities in general: 1) shared consciousness, 2) rituals and traditions, and 3) a sense of moral responsibility. They found that these commonalities were evident in both face-to-face and computer-mediated environments. They proposed that brand communities are imagined by consumers representing human interaction in a consumption setting and form around only one good or service, not several. Their findings suggest that this formation is not incidental, but is intentional and positive.

Muniz and O'Guinn indicate that brand communities are positive in three ways. First, brand communities serve as a consumer agency providing the consumers with greater voice. This is apparent in online discussions about products or services. Second, by sharing collective knowledge about common brands, brand communities serve as a rich information-resource for the consumer. Third, brand communities provide social benefits and emotional support. Some social critics believe that true, face-to-face communities are vanishing in today's modern, commercial-based society; however, Muniz and O'Guinn show that communities still exist as contemporary, non-geographically bound, groups of consumers.

McAlexander, Schouten, and Koening (2002) corroborated Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) work by studying a brand community among loyal Jeep owners. They examined factors that led to Jeep owners' loyalty and brand community involvement. Their findings suggest that networks of brand loyal relationships strengthen brand loyalty and increase the likelihood of brand community involvement. Relationships were found to be central to the construction of brand communities. Contrary to Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001, p. 426) proposition that "brand communities are largely imagined," McAlexander et al. (2002, p. 39) state that brand communities "suddenly become visible" when visiting a Jeep festival or Harley-Davidson rally. Their study showed that brand communities are animate groups of people actively involved with one another.

Schouten and McAlexander (1995) also studied a brand community, the Harley-Davidson biker community. They referred to this brand community as a subculture of consumption defining it as "a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity" (p. 43). They found that consumers generally enter at the bottom of a status hierarchy and undergo a process of

socialization before becoming a member of a subculture of consumption. Through socialization, new members commit to the group's ideology of consumption. The most committed members become opinion leaders, deciphering meaning for the group. Schouten and McAlexander indicate that the Harley-Davidson motorcycle symbol is so powerful that it is "a religious icon around which an entire ideology of consumption is articulated" (p. 50).

Belk and Costa (1998) studied a consumption community of modern mountain men and found that participation in this type of community offers opportunities for fantasy and dramatization. Mountain men participants create a fantasy world to reenact rituals of the past by fabricating authenticity. Belk and Costa found that being a part of this community is "an integral part of mythmaking and of identifying oneself as being marginal within the context of the larger society" (p. 236). By pretending to be authentic and of the noble savage, the marginal status with which members identified themselves is constructed to be more authoritative and influential. Belk and Costa refer to this community as "an elaborate case of pursing meaning and passion through leisure and fantasy' (p. 236).

Arnould and Price (1993) explored a community of river rafters and found that community members were involved for their own personal growth, self-renewal and self-satisfaction. They found that members felt transformed after going on river rafting trips, as if they were in harmony with nature. River rafting served to be an extraordinary experience for community members providing "absorption and integration, personal control, joy and valuing, a spontaneous letting-be of the process and a newness of perception and process" (p. 41). Arnould and Price suggest that the river rafting trip is a pilgrimage that emotionally links community members of diverse backgrounds producing intense feelings of affirmation and renewal.

Peters (1999) studied Winnebago Travelers and found that a community's vocabulary distinguishes one community from another and serves as a recruiting mechanism for new members. Common vocabulary ascribes group meaning and signifies friendship, fellowship and fun. Additionally, the community's instrumental vocabulary serves as a means for defining potential problems related to retirement, providing solutions for information, and recommending travel destinations. Peters found that the community's vocabulary was an appealing feature for new members and a motivational mechanism for existing members.

From this review of brand communities, ten traits of these communities can be discerned: (1) shared consciousness, (2) shared rituals and traditions, (3) sense of moral responsibility, (4) visible community characteristics, (5) a movement of community membership from peripheral to center, (6) community opinion leaders, (7) fantasy and dramatization motivations, (8) feelings of self-renewal and self-satisfaction, (9) feelings of control, and (10) bonding vocabulary. Brand community behaviors may yield some or all of these traits. Although this list is not exhaustive, it provides a starting point for understanding how and why communities form around recognized brand names and common consumption activities.

<div align="center">Consumer Rebellion</div>

Traditionally, the interactions between marketer and consumer are viewed as an exchange-based relationship ascribing mutual benefits to one another. The brand serves as a conduit for marketers to provide consumers with identities that satisfy their needs, wants, and desires. The consumer purchases the branded good and is fulfilled. These collective actions of both consumers and marketers are thought to bring about balance in the marketplace by producing a dynamic dialectical relationship (Holt, 2002). However, scholars have recently

questioned the mutual exchange theory by critically examining the imbalances of power in a profit-driven marketplace consisting of large, global corporations (Ozanne & Murray, 1995).

Research suggests many consumers view corporations as dominating and oppressive through imbalanced distribution of goods and services, deceitful marketing tactics, and unequal access to information (Dobscha, 1998). In an era marked by rapid globalization, corporations are using sophisticated marketing techniques to seduce consumers by ascribing world-wide meanings to their brands. Consumers who internalize these meanings implicitly grant corporations the cultural authority to dictate their values, tastes, and preferences.

As a result, various consumer groups have formed to support each other in their efforts to resist marketplace practices and globalized consumption patterns. In the same way that brand communities form around a common brand name or brand usage category, anti-brand communities form around common detestations of globalized brand names. Like brand communities, anti-brand communities are also specialized, typically opposing one brand or one corporation, and are non-geographically bound communities based on a structured set of social relationships. The following survey of literature reveals ubiquitous aspects of consumer rebellion.

Zavestoski (2002a) introduces an issue of *Psychology and Marketing* that addresses the increase in voluntarily reduced levels of consumption. This journal issue explores anti-consumption attitudes that correlate with resistance to, resentment of or rejection of consumption in general. Zavestoski (2002b) examines the current growth in the simplicity movement, a movement of consumers simplifying their lives to attain authenticity. It is indicated that this quest for simplicity is "motivated by underlying social-psychological stresses related to living in a consumer society" (p. 149). After interviewing people in the simplicity movement, Zavestoski

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suggests that anti-consumption behaviors result from a process of self-inquiry evincing desires to feel authentic through consumption activities.

Kozinets (2002) explored the emancipatory dynamics of Burning Man, a week-long anti-market festival that takes place in a remote desert location in Nevada. The anti-consumption community joins together annually to celebrate their escape from the marketplace by evading habits of efficiency and partaking in alternative exchange practices. The community bonds together through transforming consumption practices into art and self-expression, which is believed to be more genuine and communal than everyday market practices. The event is purposefully designed to shelter consumers from intrusive marketplace activities. Hence, no venders, marketers, or media are allowed on the premises.

Kozinets (2002) found that the Burning Man festival "provides people with the experience of living in a sharing, caring community, exemplifying the communal ethos said to be undermined by dominant market logics" (p. 28). In addition, his research implies that consumers are not necessarily opposed to capitalism. Rather, consumers are opposed to the marketing agendas of large corporations. Consumer groups in Kozinet's study reported that corporations possess conflicting interests with consumers because corporations aim to coerce consumers into purchasing commodities. Consumers rebel by creating an anti-consumption community. Kozinets' argument indicates that "sharing, caring consumer communities can counteract certain market influences, such as pitting consumers in competition with one another, or disabling their ability to share expensive products or services" (p. 29). Such activities are viewed by the anti-consumption community as common marketplace practices. Anti-consumption communities provide a liberating environment where consumers can create their own consumption meanings, practices, roles, and identities.

Firat and Venkatesh (1995) suggest that marketers dominate contemporary society, but that domination is threatened by rebellious consumers. They illustrate their libratory views of postmodernism, emphasizing a consumer emancipation movement. They posit that consumers will eventually be freed from the controlling efforts of marketers through the postmodern movement of anti-marketing practices. The anti-consumption behaviors that are currently transpiring will eventually fragment the market, preventing marketers from segmentation and other persuasive advertising efforts. According to Firat and Venkatesh, a diverse heterogeneous market would prevent corporations from controlling consumers through advertising and branding efforts. This will allow consumers to construct their own identities and create their own culture, apart from that which is imposed on them by large corporations.

Similarly, Ozanne and Murray (1995) deem that a firm's cultural authority is strengthened as it fashions a limited set of consumer identities. These identities can be accessed when the firm's commodities are purchased by consumers. Yet, Ozanne and Murray believe that consumers can achieve freedom from marketplace domination through reason and reflection. Through decoding marketing and branding messages, consumers are able to recognize that they are in control of their own identities, rather than capitulating to a firm's assigned identity. As consumers become more conscious of marketing tactics, decoding how marketers use branding for buyer persuasion, consumers will also become personally empowered and begin to ascribe their own benefits to marketplace commodities. According to Ozanne and Murray, once a consumer recognizes a firm's marketing and branding codes, it diminishes the firm's influential and persuasive powers over consumers.

Like, Ozanne and Murray (1995), Holt (2002) also addresses the ways in which brands are under attack in the anti-consumption countercultural movement. He describes the emergence

of this movement and its potential effects by explaining modern cultural branding techniques. Holt conveys that modern cultural branding techniques are based upon a consumer culture that granted marketers cultural authority. After these techniques proved to be ineffective, current postmodern branding techniques emerged as a result of the current consumer culture that bases branding efforts on the ability of consumers to achieve personal sovereignty through brands.

Contrary to Ozanne and Murray (1995) and Firat and Venkatesh (1995), Holt believes that the "market feeds off of the constant production of difference" (p. 88). Fundamentally, consumer rebellion enhances marketing practices by challenging firms to be creative in their branding techniques. Holt predicts that marketing tactics of the future will transform with postmodern culture, continually improving with the prompting of unorthodox consumer practices. Instead of being in opposition to capitalism, as suggested by Ozanne and Murray (1995) and Firat and Venkatesh (1995), Holt views consumer rebellion efforts as a "grist for the branding mill that is ever in search of new cultural materials" (p. 88).

Although consumer rebellion is historically viewed as natural occurrences in society which provide opportunities to improve business functions (Buskirk & Rothe, 1970; Herrmann, 1970; Kotler, 1972), Holt (2002) is one of the few authors who still perceives the new anti-brand social movement as a stimulating marketing practice. Other scholars view this movement as a roadblock for current marketing practices, meaning that firms must go back to the drawing board in order to figure out new ways of reaching and defining their customer base (Dobscha, 1998; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Kozinets, 2002; Ozanne & Murray, 1995; Zavestoski, 2002b). In addition, popular books such as Lasn (2000) and Klein (1999), advocate that branding efforts are destructive to society. Their books call on individuals to rise up and join the masses who want to stop branding efforts which are taking over the world and oppressing consumers.

Lasn (2000) urges her readers to fight back against corporate manipulation by expressing, "The only battle worth fighting and winning, the only one that can set us free, is The People versus The Corporate Cool Machine. We will strike by unswooshing America ™ by organizing resistance against the power trust that owns and manages the brand" (p. 16). Klein (1999) asserts that corporations will continue to have a grip on society without joining efforts to stop them; "the marketing world is always reaching a new zenith, breaking through last year's world record and planning to do it again next year with increasing numbers of ads and aggressive new formulae for reaching consumers" (p. 8). Klein compares consumers to roaches by depicting "if consumers are like roaches, then marketers must forever be dreaming up new concoctions for industrial-strength Raid" (p. 9).

When reviewing the literature on consumer rebellion, common characteristics are evident. Anti-brand/anticonsumption communities have mutual desires: (1) to escape from marketplace practices (e.g., unethical marketing tactics, unethical corporate actions), (2) to achieve a simplistic lifestyle, (3) to construct a new identity (e.g., one that opposes marketplace identities), and (4) to create a sense of freedom and liberation. This list of commonalities provides a basis for understanding why anti-brand communities form.

Consumer Movements

Since the late nineteenth century, American consumers have rebelled against marketplace practices. Some label this rebellion as consumerism. Ralph Nader (1968) defines consumerism as "a term given vogue recently by business spokesmen to describe what they believe is a concerted, disruptive ideology concocted by self-appointed bleeding hearts and politicians who find that it pays off to attack the corporations (p. 27). More conventionally, consumerism emphasizes a consumer's right for protection against adulterated, deficient, or unsafe products

and services. For Buskirk and Rothe (1970) "consumerism is attempting to tell industry

something their research has not found, or that management has rejected or ignored" (p. 64).

Kotler (1972) defines consumerism as "a social movement seeking to augment the rights and

powers of buyers in relation to sellers" (p. 49). According to Kotler, consumerism is enduring

and ultimately beneficial for both consumers and businesses; it mobilizes the energies of

consumers, businessmen and government leaders to seek solutions and advance society and

ensures short-term and long-term values for consumers.

Kotler (1972) identified three distinct waves of U.S. consumerism movements in the

early 1900's, the mid-1930's, and the mid-1960's. According to Herrmann (1970), these three

eras have important common characteristics. First, each movement occurred during economic

and social unrest where rising consumer prices accompanied declining incomes. With no

financial power, consumers where forced to protest by joining efforts to voice their rights.

Second, consumers began to fight for their own interests since they were hard-pressed by their

declining purchasing power. Here, I will discuss the characteristics of the three waves of

consumerism in the U.S.

First Wave

The first consumerism movement occurred during the turn-of-the-century as a reactionary

critique to the early stages of industrialization. The initial stages of industrialization revolved

around a few distinct industries such as petroleum, railroads, and banking. However, by the end

of the nineteenth century, there was mass production and mass distribution of everyday

household goods, such as foods, cleaning products, and textiles (Mayer, 1989). Consumers

began to purchase prepackaged meats instead of butchering their own meat in the backyard, buy

kerosene for lamps instead of using homemade candles, purchase coal instead of chopping wood,

buy clothing instead of making their own garments, and buy medicines instead of making their own remedies (Cowan, 1983). In addition, products developed recognized brand names such as Hires root beer, Henry Heinz's ketchup, Kellogg brothers' corn flakes, William Wrigley's chewing gum, and Milton Hershey's wrapped chocolate (Fox, 1984). Nationally branded items became widely advertised and more preferred by consumers.

New gold discoveries and refining methods led to rising prices and these price increases left fixed-income groups resentful and powerless (Herrmann, 1970). Regulating competition and products were additional problems which led to antitrust and food and drug regulations (Mayer, 1989). Consumers began to rebel against rising prices of goods and services and unethical food and drug scandals. As a result, the Pure Food and Drug Act (1906), the Meat Inspection Act (1906), and the Federal Trade Commission (1914) were formed (Kotler, 1972). World War I put an end to the first wave of American consumer activism, as the focus turned toward the struggle to win a war.

Second Wave

Soon after the war, the second wave of consumer activism occurred during the 1920s and 1930s in response to the Industrial Revolution's broadening impact. The rapid spread of electricity in the home marked the introduction and accelerated diffusion of electronic products such as irons, washing machines, refrigerators, sewing machines, and vacuum cleaners (Mayer, 1989). Educating consumers about coordinating and selecting the right styles, colors, and accessories became the focus of advertising. Rising incomes, technological improvements, and various choices heightened the need for consumer information (Fox, 1984). However, rather than being solely informative, advertising emphasized comfortable lifestyles, entertained the consumer, and accentuated artistic creativity (Marchand, 1985).

In 1935, prices began to move upward again and consumers protested against the increases in the cost of living (Herrmann, 1970). In Detroit, the well-known strike enacted by housewives refusing to buy meat spread to several other cities (Kotler, 1972). In response to such consumer actions, New Deal programs were created by the government to improve the economy and establish consumer representation. Advisory boards such as the Consumer Advisory Board with the National Recovery Administration (NRA) and the Consumers' Counsel within the Department of Agriculture were created to represent consumer needs (Mayer, 1989). Like the first consumer movement, the second was also eclipsed by a world war.

Third Wave

The 1960s and 1970s marked the third wave of consumerism movements which occurred in response to underlying economic, technological, and socially contentious conditions. In the 1960s, increases in prices coincided with a rising instability among consumers. With consumers experiencing gradual price increases of 1% a year in the 1960s, the distressing 5% increase in food prices in 1966 spurred a major consumer rebellion (Herrmann, 1970). Common items such as beef, pork, eggs, and lettuce increased in price and consumer groups were faced with a decline in purchasing power. Consumers began to openly express their discontentment and in 1966 a wave of supermarket picketing began in Denver (Herrmann, 1970).

"President Kennedy enunciated a Consumer Bill of Rights, including the rights to (1) safety, (2) information, (3) choice among a variety of products and services at competitive prices, and (4) a fair hearing by government in the formulation of consumer policy" (Mayer, 1989, p. 27). In the mid-1960s, Ralph Nader became a recognized leader in the American consumer movement. Nader established the Center for the Study of Responsive Law which investigated federal agencies such as the Federal Trade Commission, Interstate Commerce

Commission, and Food and Drug Administration to determine the extent to which they were fulfilling their duty of consumer protection. The third era of consumer activism reached a peak in 1972 when the Consumer Product Safety Commission was created to coordinate and strengthen efforts to protect consumers from product risks (Mayer, 1989). Other consumer protection acts that were passed in the 1970s included the Fair Credit Billing Act, the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, and the Toxic Substances Control Act.

In light of these three distinct consumer movements, Mayer (1989) predicted the next movement was most likely to occur when (1) a social climate is marked by consumer unrest, and (2) a set of consumer problems are connected to rapid change in the production and distribution of goods. Presently, these two conditions are evident with the rapid globalization of goods and services and a social climate marked by intense activism aimed at global corporate branding efforts (Ozanne & Murray, 1995). Mayer (1989) predicted consumer movements occur in thirty year spans, which indicates the U.S. is ripe for another major consumerism movement.

Some scholars are already recognizing and identifying a new consumer movement. Although the present movement has been labeled an "anti-brand movement" by Holt (2002), little research compares current consumer rebellious activity to historical consumer movements. Consumer rebellion is a timely topic which has received more attention in the past decade. However, Kotler and Mayer have yet to respond to present consumerism conditions.

Social Movements

Consumer activism has received more recognition in recent years as consumer rebellion is being increasingly viewed as a world-wide consumer initiated social movement (Bourdieu, 1998; Dobscha, 1998; Fournier, 1998a; Holt, 2002; Zavestoski, 2002b). The term social movement refers to "the coming together of relatively large numbers of people around a

commonly held set of values or notion of rights (human and/or social) in order to bring about social change" (Dykstra & Law, 1994, p. 122). Cohen defines social movements as "normatively oriented interactions between adversaries with conflicting interpretations and opposed societal models of a shared cultural field (Cohen, 1985, p. 695).

Finger (1989) suggests "social movements must be considered as one of the best expressions of underlying social and cultural transformations" (p. 17). For Tilly (1999), a social movement is recognizable when "it consists of a sustained challenge to power holders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those power holders by means of repeated public displays of that population's worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment" (p. 257). Accordingly, no social movement is self-contained because there is continuous interplay between challengers and power holders (Tilly, 1999).

Tilly (1999) suggests there are three distinguishable populations in social movements: power holders, participants, and subject populations. Power holders are "the objects of claims, with the minimum claim "to tolerate the movement's existence" (p. 257). For example, in the anti-brand movement, power holders include large corporations and the government. Participants "range from minor contributors to leaders and are often connected by social movement organizations" (p. 257). Subject populations are people "on whose behalf participants are making or supporting claims" (p. 257). These three populations can remain completely separated or overlap. For example, an activist may also be from the subject population or a power holder may become part of the subject population. In addition, social movements often involve additional parties such as countermovement activists, competing power holders, police, or sympathetic citizens (Tilly, 1999). For example, countermovement activists in a peace and freedom movement may include war and U.S. protection activists. Such groups counteract the

purposes of the peace and freedom movement. Likewise, competing power holders in the anti-

brand movement may include antithetical corporations such as McDonalds and Burger King.

Although there is a generally agreed upon sense of the term, contemporary social theory

differentiates between old and new social movements. After reviewing the literature on these

two movements, I concluded the anti-brand movement did not adequately fit into either category.

Instead, the anti-brand movement seems to represent a new emerging category. In the following

sections, I will discuss the characteristics of old and new social movements and then compare the

distinctiveness of each to the new anti-brand movement.

Old Social Movements

Old social movements fought for freedom, justice, and emancipation (Finger, 1989) and

occurred between the years 1945 and 1970. Organized labor which fought for freedom and

justice in the workplace and human rights which fought for equality are two of the most

recognizable movements that fall under this paradigm. Common characteristics associated with

old social movements include: (1) economic growth, (2) distribution and security, and (3) social

and political emancipation. The following describes these three areas.

First, economic emancipation and social mobility was a driving force for these

movements. Class became a dominant metaphor and values of private life, consumerism,

authority and order played important roles in determining class status. Participants strived for

opportunities that would enable them to dictate their own class and economic means.

Second, equal distribution and security was a concern for participants in old social

movements. According to Welton (1993) "too much democracy simply threatened the system.

"Rather than producing secure identities and fostering socially-attuned, active workers and

citizens, political parties, unions, parliaments and elections produced egoism, particularism, and

self-interest" (Welton, 1993, p. 154). It was common for public administration agencies to direct, regulate, and care for individuals because the emphasis was on ensuring a secure and equal society.

Third, social and political freedom through education was a goal for these social movements. According to Finger (1989), old social movements aimed to "mobilize mass movements in order to put political pressure on the State, on the political system, and on a variety of institutions. The better such mass movements are organized, the greater the chances of achieving their goals" (p. 17). By educating the masses, participants were able to attain social and political freedom.

New Social Movements

At the most fundamental level, new social movements are commonly associated with deprivation in the basic kinds of physical, personal, and social existence (Offe, 1985). New social movements are more localized and individualized where the individual is the central focus and social transformations occur through the transformation of the individual person (Finger, 1989). Movements that fall under this paradigm include feminist, environmental, and queer activism. After reviewing the literature, I summarize the characteristics associated with new social movements into four areas where the focus is on (1) fighting for an identity, (2) gaining autonomy, (3) radicalizing modern values, and (4) transforming the individual person. The following elaborates on each characteristic.

First, new social movements focus on identity and are generally associated with peace, feminist, ecological, and local and personal autonomy movements. According to Dykstra and Law (1994) new social movements emerged "as somewhat unconnected forces that focus on particular issues and/or the interests of identity groups: ethnicity, gender, sexuality, the

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environment, peace and so forth. Implicit in all of this is a rejection of the centrality of class" (p. 122). Rather than focusing on class, new social movements originate from political strategies, but with relatively little attachment to a specific political party. Each collective participant must have a clear self-image or identity and a collective identity within the movement itself (Welton, 1993).

Second, participants in the movement are struggling for an emphasis on autonomy, striving for greater control over the development of the soicocultural world (Cohen, 1985). The struggle is situated within relationships seeking power over a shared cultural orientation. According to Welton (1993), new social movements "are not attempting to seize the centralized state (the Leninist dream) or to transform the entire productive system (the Marxian dream)" (p. 153). Rather, new social movements consist of a social struggle which generally focuses on creating an "autonomous and exuberant civil society" (Welton, 1993, p. 153).

Third, participants in new social movements struggle for autonomy through radicalizing modern values. New social movements are guided by the notion that political and economic modernization yields true democracy (Welton, 1993). In other words, a liberal-democratic culture opens up possibilities for personal autonomy and individualization through collective action. Rather than rejecting institutions or modernization, participants in new social movements strive to overcome limitations, partial rigidities, and malfunctioning through collective action (Offe, 1985).

Fourth, as suggested by Offe (1985) and Welton (1993), another characteristic of new social movements is the quest for personal development among participants. This quest seeks to answer the question of where one's place is in the world. Many participants in new social

movements strive for spiritual harmony with a nonhierarchical world (Finger, 1989). In essence,

the participant attains personal autonomy through individual transformation.

Movement of Movements

Consumerism has become part of the fabric of everyday life. Cultures are now

interconnected through the selling, buying, and consumption of goods and services. In every

part of the world, we see the same brand names persuading buyers to conform to a prescribed

identity. Communities are no longer distinguished by their uniqueness, but are applauded for

their similarities and conformity to world-wide consumption centers. Miles (1998) found the

following:

> Our city centers are more remarkable as sites of consumption than they are as cultural
>
> centers; our homes might be described as temples to the religion of consumerism; our
>
> lives apparently amount to little more than a constant juxtaposition of diverse consumer
>
> styles and tastes. (p. 1)

Driven by a global economy, corporations are now entering new markets in every

country. These powerful, growing corporations are building their production on global

advertising campaigns. A corporation's brand is built around a certain image, providing unique

services that no other brand can provide. "Advertising and sponsorship have always been about

using imagery to equate products with positive cultural or social experiences" (Klein, 1999, p.

29). To feel a certain way, consumers should buy this brand. To look a certain way, consumers

should buy that brand. There is a brand for every personal goal, human emotion, or anticipated

behavior. Miles (1998) states:

> Mass consumption infiltrates everyday life not only at the levels of economic processes,
>
> social activities and household structures, but also at the level of meaningful

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psychological experience – affecting the construction of identities, the formation of

relationships, and the framing of events. (p. 9)

Corporations study their target markets and they offer brands to solve any problem,

dilemma, or conundrum. There are also brands that provide opportunities and offer a change of

status. Consumerism as a way of life provides an illusion of freedom and choice to consumers.

Are consumers really offered more choices or are they forced to adhere to preordained identities?

Miles (1998) addresses this issue by referring to this quandary as a paradox of consumerism:

The paradox of consumerism is that it offers a vision of personal freedom through

economic means – the opportunity for individuals to take advantage of their own means

for extravagant display – and yet maintains a dominant order that potentially constrains

personal liberty. (p.32)

Klein compares consumers to roaches, illustrating that after you spray them awhile they can

become immune to the potion. "If consumers are like roaches, then marketers must forever be

dreaming up new concoctions for industrial-strength Raid" (Klein, 1999, p. 9).

With this notion in mind, social activists are rebelling against prescribed identities,

corporate domination, and branding expansionism. Resistance to such marketplace activities is

becoming more evident in our societies. According to Stearns (2001), a range of anxieties about

the new global economy evolved in the late twentieth century:

Workers feared competition from low-wage areas; poor agricultural countries wanted

more help from the industrial powers...Many consumers worried about losing control

over the goods they purchased and the identities they maintained, to facelessinternational

corporations. They wanted some protection from the barrage of foreign, often American,

imports. (p. 132)

This international economic framework has set the stage for new forms of protest. Social action is represented by a convergence of issues including anti-globalization, anti-capitalism, anti-commercialization, anti-Americanization and anti-branding. Hill (2004) refers to this movement as a convergence movement "built on collective antioppression activism; it is a movement across differences. It represents the explosiveness of social tensions building over world capitalism, U.S. imperialism, and neoliberal market policies" (p. 89). This study focuses on one aspect of this international framework: the anti-brand movement. The anti-brand movement is a new emerging form of social action, but it is important to note that this phenomenon takes place amid a larger, more complex movement of movements.

The Anti-brand Movement

Scholars are already recognizing and labeling the present consumer movement. Holt (2002) refers to the movement as "a global anti-branding movement" distinguished by large numbers of consumers joining together to voice their disapproval of oppressive corporate actions (p. 70). Anti-brand consumers are actively rebelling against the marketplace by defining themselves in opposition to mainstream culture and by constructing community groups to support their endeavors (Dobscha, 1998). According to Shepard and Hayduk (2002), present-day activism "grows from and responds to four key factors – globalization, shifting boundaries between public and private space, demographic change, and income inequality" (p. 2). Anti-brand activists attribute these factors to powerful corporations which control much of the world's economic resources.

Some scholars suggest the anti-brand movement is a result of capitalism (Dobscha, 1998; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Ozanne & Murray, 1995) Foley (1999) states "capitalism is an inherently unstable system, involving constant growth, continual exploitation of labour, constant

technological change, and periodic crises. Capitalism is also a system of economic, political and cultural domination, which is continually contested by those it exploits" (p. 67). As capitalistic societies become more technologically complex and economically demanding, researchers are finding that consumers are forced to cope with diffusion of innovation nuances (Mick & Fournier, 1998; Rogers, 1995). Some consumers cope by avoiding the marketplace all together (Allison, 1978), others cope by actively voicing their views (Lang, 2003).

This emerging anti-brand social movement is quite different from the previously defined old and new social movements. Changes in the environment contribute to its uniqueness. For instance, "communications technologies and economic restructuring" have vastly increased the mobility of capital, goods, and services, "creating unprecedented impacts on local communities and whole nations" (Shepard & Hayduk, 2002, p. 2). With these environmental changes in mind, there are four distinct conditions which separate the anti-brand movement from both old and new social movements: (1) it has broader goals, (2) it fundamentally rejects modernity, and (3) it is not restricted by space or time.

Unlike the goals to attain equality and justice in old social movements or to attain personal autonomy and identity in new social movements, the goals of the anitbrand movement deal with a broad array of issues. Anti-brand activists are concerned for both economic self-interests and the social consciousness of consumers. The benefits are aimed at worldwide communities improving life for all. The issues are multifarious and include aspects of both old and new movements such as liberalization, peace, equal distribution of resources, environmentalism, workers' rights, and an overall quality of life improvement.

Second, the anti-brand movement does not seek to coexist with modernity as noted in old social movements, nor does simply question modernity as noted in new social movements.

Rather, it fundamentally rejects the notions of modernity. The anti-brand movement is a product of postmodernism (Holt, 1998). Lyotard (1984) describes postmodernism as a rejection of grand narrative, metaphysical philosophies, and any other form of governing thought; meaning there is no longer one dominant philosophy or ideology. The anti-brand movement is the emergence of a society marked by complexity, fragmentation, lack of stability, and resistance (Venkatesh, 1989).

Third, with World Wide Web capabilities the anti-brand movement is not restricted by space or time. The Internet provides communication methods for people around the globe irrespective of geographical space and/or time zones. The speed at which social issues are recognized and addressed are remarkable. For example, in January 1999, gay activists were offended by Merriam-Webster's online thesaurus which noted gay slurs as synonyms for homosexual. It took only two days of email for Merriam-Webster and AOL, which licensed the service, to respond by shutting down the thesaurus and running an apologetic message in The New York Times, the Associated Press, and The Wall Street Journal (Friess, 1999). With capabilities as such, the Internet provides unlimited methods for organizing and demonstrating social protests.

In summary, old social movements occurred between the years 1945 and 1970 and are associated with economic growth, distribution and security, and social and political emancipation. New social movements focus on fighting for an identity, gaining autonomy, radicalizing modern values, and transforming the individual person. The anti-brand movement does not entirely appertain to either old or new social movements. The anti-brand movement has broader goals, it fundamentally rejects modernity, and it is not restricted by space or time.

Social and Political Aspects of Social Movements

Youngman (2000) conveys that social and political interests within economic systems, such as social conflict, class conflict, or struggles for power, are major engines for social change. Adult educators generally agree that social movements are important sites for social change and there is an ongoing debate over the politics that take place within social movements (Finger, 1989; Holford, 1995; Kilgore, 1999; Spencer, 1995; Welton, 1993). In social action communities, members have similar social and political goals, values, and/or personal responsibilities. Community members learn together by sharing their needs, wants, and interests. The informal and incidental learning processes that takes place within these communities are notable forms of adult education (Foley, 1999, 2001; Holst, 2002; Youngman, 2000). In the next section, I will discuss the politics of social movements. Next, I will describe general characteristics of informal and incidental learning. Then, I will explain the informal and incidental learning processes that take place within social movements.

Politics of Social Movements

According to Holst (2002), "the politics of social movements refers to the perceived potential of social movements to be agents of significant social change" (p. 37). More specifically, social movement theory is the theoretical construct used in adult education to understand human behavior and social relations. Social movement theory is the idea that various types of behavioral learning takes place within the framework of a social movement. The sociological and political dimensions are the focus of adult education social movement research.

Holst (2002) organizes the literature on the politics of social movements under two broad categories: radical pluralists and socialists. These two categories are directly related to the relevance of Marxism and the nature of capitalist democracy in the wake of globalization. The

radical pluralist position refers to individuals who are post-Marxists and who fundamentally reject Marxist thought. Others also refer to this position as anti-Marxism (Boggs, 1976, 1986; Wood, 1998). The radical pluralist position is rooted in the work of Habermas (1979; 1981). For Habermas, social movements are key to the theory of communicative action because social conflict is a way individuals resist colonization. Habermas views social movements as defensive actions among citizens who reject notions of colonization. This resistance is "the consumerist redefinition of private life spheres and personal life styles" (Habermas, 1981, p. 34).

According to Laclau and Mouffe (1987), radical pluralists reject (1) the view that working class citizens are privileged agents of change (privileged meaning they have nothing to lose but their chains), (2) the view that bourgeois democracy (authoritative leadership) is undemocratic, and (3) the view that a revolution is necessary for ameliorating humanity. These three views are based on postmodernist thought, which rejects grand theories such as Marxism. Lyotard (1984) describes postmodernism as a rejection of grand narratives, metaphysical philosophies, and any other form of governing thought; meaning there is no longer one dominant philosophy or ideology. Postmodernism is the absence of authority, unanimity, continuity, and allegiance. Jameson (1988) suggests postmodernism represents the third stage of late capitalism by challenging the ways of any dominant thought through "cultural logic." For Starr (2000), postmodernists question cultural logics by making visible the shifting configurations of power and knowledge within capitalism's multinational global economy.

Firat and Venkatesh (1993) indicate "people have developed a distrust" for dominant cultural logics which are perceived to have "promised wonders but delivered disillusionment, disintegration and anxiety" (p. 228). Postmodernists question the basis of a society's history, evaluate a society's materializations, and assess a society's expressions of public life. Since

radical pluralists view social movements from a postmodernist viewpoint, they look to social movements as a means for democratizing postmodern civil society. Social movements are viewed as a method for redrawing and remaping the very nature of our social, political, and cultural society.

The radical pluralist postmodernist viewpoint has some weaknesses in its position. For example, the emphasis on capitalization and globalization is recursive. According to Holst (2002), "capitalism has always been global" (p.52) and this fact makes Marx's ideas more relevant to social movements today. Furthermore, some argue that the world economy was more globalized before World War I than today (Tabb, 1997). Thus, the idea of globalization is not a novelty. [see Holst 2002, p. 48-55 for more examples]

The second category is referred to as a socialist position and individuals in this category aim to revise Marxism rather than reject it. Socialists still agree with the ultimate goals of socialism and are primarily neo-Marxists rather than classical Marxists (neo-Marxists reject Marxism-Leninism but not the goal of socialism). According to Holst (2002), there are three positions among socialists: (1) social movement participants are working class, (2) social movements are important agents of social change that emerged alongside a changing working class, (3) social movements are largely middle-class and the definition of working class must be altered to fit the conditions of today. In general, socialists view social movements as a means for working through Marxist's views, reviewing and revising where necessary, to achieve the goals of socialism.

According to Holst (2002), socialists "continue to see the working class as important for social change but feel that Marxism must be revised in theory and practice to incorporate social movements either as equal partners located within the working class or as potential allies socially

situated in the middle class" (p.38). Socialists consider class as a primary means for social change and with this assumption, the socialist position has some weaknesses. For example, there is acceptance among socialists that participants in social movements of today are largely from the middle class (Navarro, 1988; Philion, 1998; Wilde, 1990); however, Holst (2002) suggests these socialists do not articulate how middle class participants will become revolutionary. In addition, there is a minority view within this category that is skeptical of the notion that social movements can bring lasting social change. This minority group views social movement change as temporary and "incapable of sustaining the long-term struggle necessary for fundamental social change" (Holst, 2002, p. 38).

Informal and Incidental Learning

Informal learning is inherently social and is comprised of groups of people learning through socially communicative means. Incidental learning is learning that occurs by chance and is usually a by-product of another activity. In both cases, learning is neither planned nor structured; learning occurs in a casual, everyday activities. To value informal and incidental learning, one must recognize that "the world in which people live and all the activities that take place within it are inherently educative" (Dykstra & Law, 1994, p. 121).

Through informal and incidental learning, people adopt patterns of behavior and ways of organizing in order to survive and prosper (Gilchrist, 2001). Informal learning sites are comprised of social networks and these social relationships are "neither random, nor unconditional, nor always positive" (Gilchrist, 2001, p. 107). The idea of social networks was first developed by Boissevain (1974) to analyze how societal advances are developed and proliferated among members in a community. Informal and incidental learning takes place

within a matrix of influences evolving from relationships within a social network. Ideas about the world are formed and re-formed through endless observation, reflection and conversation.

Early studies of informal learning networks tended to be geographical (Gilchrist, 2001, p. 108). Geographical studies examined the patterns of interaction between individuals in communities of particular regions (Crow & Allan, 1995). Early studies of informal learning examined family and kinship (Young & Willmott, 1957) and focused on social relationship patterns (Wellman, 1979). Early communal studies implied that people build personal networks constructed around where they happen to live; whereas, more recent studies examine how informal learning communities are more complex, forming around dimensions of their lives in a non-geographical sense.

Informal and incidental learning sites are venues for intellectual dialogue, and historical, cultural, and ethical discussions. Dumbar (1996) suggests that informal learning communities operate as living computers, comparing information and ideas, testing possible theories and discrepancies. These informal learning sites also provide a safe venue for sharing affective content. Pilisuk and Parks (1986) state that informal learning communities act as emotional insulation. This emotional insulation buffers and protects community members from hardship or trauma.

Although informal learning communities are typically safe, protective environments, they can also serve as venues for critical evaluation and debate. Ledwith (1997) conveys that critical friends may also be a part of informal dialogue to challenge or contradict ideas or viewpoints. Critical friends help develop alternative perspectives. These critical friends are essential for continuous individual growth and development.

For Gilchrist (2001), informal and incidental learning sites are regarded as "a kind of collective brain, processing information and organizing responses to events in the outside world on the basis of current input and memories of past experience" (p. 109). Gilchrist suggests people who are involved in informal learning communities are better able to adapt to changing circumstances by conversing with and finding support in their social network. Informal learning networks gain knowledge from each other by engaging in informal conversation, "such as gossip, rumor, story telling and hearsay" (Gilchrist, 2001, p. 109). According to Bellah, Madsen, Tipton, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1991) informal learning sites serve as a means for dialogue and decision making. Informal learning sites direct the future course of communities, societies, and ultimately world developments.

Informal and Incidental Learning within Social Movements

Informal and incidental learning within social movements is based on the understanding that participants serve as facilitators and providers of informal learning and education (Spencer, 1995). Those who participate in social movements learn together "to identify the issues, to seek out the knowledge needed, and to develop a plan to bring about change" (Spencer, 1995, p. 36). According to Kilgore (1999) "understanding learning in social movements requires not only a concept of the group as a learner and constructor of knowledge, but also an understanding of the centrality of the group's vision of social justice that drives it to action – mostly in conflict with other groups" (p. 191).

Participants in an online anti-brand social action group, for example, will teach themselves about corporation actions and the decisions corporations are making that affect community welfare. The online activist group would then try to educate others about the effects of certain corporate actions and corporate decision-making. Within social action groups,

informal learning is a continual practice, occurring everyday. Everyday learning processes occur "both individually and in groups" (Spencer, 1995, p. 36). For example, online social activist groups may learn how to develop educational websites, organize virtual meetings, type emails, and work in virtual teams to accomplish their goals. Within team structures, the learning process can include strengthening people skills such as learning how to manage diversity, listening and responding to others' requests, communicating to groups of people, and initiating team-based action.

Learning within social movements has its roots in social psychology and structural functionalism. Learning processes were studied to understand irrational group behavior (Holford, 1995). Studies were conducted to examine why people deviated from the norm and formed groups to protest against the norm. Collective behavior theory was developed to explain why individuals participated in social movements, subsuming the perspective that collective behavior was "nonrational" or an "irrational response to change" (Cohen, 1985, p. 672). Studies concluded that people deviate from the norm due to psychological divergences. This biased viewpoint precluded any understanding of learning processes taking place with participants.

Social movements first received positive perceptions in European social theory. Although Europeans valued democratic movements, the movements were often highly institutionalized with stable forms of organization. Once social movements were viewed as social, democratic labor movements, the field of adult education began to study these movements (Holford, 1995). British adult educators also contributed to these cultural studies (Thompson, 1963; Williams, 1961). The focus of early studies emphasized the tacit understanding of "why some movements are more successful than others" (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991, p. 24). Resource mobilization, the structure of organizations, and the costs and benefits of movement participation

were early areas of research (Holford, 1995). As social movements continue to become more innovative in their organization and action strategies, research interests have shifted from the resource mobilization paradigm to attitude, identity, relational, and consumption attitudes (Melucci, 1985).

The nature of learning amid innovative organization and action strategies has received much attention in the field of adult education. Several scholars have examined the learning processes that take place within old and new social movements (Finger, 1989; Holford, 1995; Kilgore, 1999; Spencer, 1995; Welton, 1993). Here, I will explore the major findings of these studies in relation to learning within social movements.

Finger (1989) presents four learning concepts that emerge from social movements: (1) experiential learning, (2) learning through consternation, (3) holistic learning, and (4) identity learning. Experiential learning is rooted in everyday activities and adult transformation comes from common, daily activities. Learning comes from experience and reflection on that experience. Learning through consternation refers to a person's transformative experience as a participant in social movements and focuses on the emotional aspects of learning. Holistic learning centers on self enlightenment and is associated with the New Age Movement. Identity learning refers to the ultimate goal of transformation and incorporates both individual and social characteristics. According to Finger (1989), all of these concepts share core characteristics of adult transformation; "adult learning has to do with the social life of the whole person and therefore with the person's life experiences" (p. 21). Finger suggests transformation must "be thought and practiced from the view of the person: in the crisis of modernity, the person rather than history becomes the subject of adult learning" (p. 21).

Holford (1995) examined the cognitive processes in social movements emphasizing organizational knowledge and movement intellectuals. Organizational knowledge refers to the "modes of communication" which are "central to the study of learning and education" (p. 105). These modes of communication may include the social movement's mission, commitment to change, organizational structures, and the internal knowledge these formations create. Movement intellectuals refer to the individual roles that serve as agents for social change. Holford provides a thought provoking discussion of the adult educator's role in social movements and suggests this role as well as other participant roles deserve study.

Kilgore (1999) presents a theory of collective learning and suggests this framework more accurately applies to the learning that takes place within group-based settings such as social movements. This framework is suggested as a better method for examining "how people construct shared visions of social justice, and learn and act together to promote these shared visions" (p. 201). According to Kilgore, "collective learning theory sharpens the lens by more clearly defining the interplay between individuals and groups, between groups and other groups within a sociocultural context" (p. 200). For Kilgore, collective learning explains the "dynamic interaction and mutual development of individual meanings and shared meanings" (p. 200).

Spencer (1995) concentrates on adult learning that takes place within labor unions. Spencer suggests "union education is a central part of union activity" (p. 37). According to Spencer, "it is imperative that workers develop their own voice in defense of their jobs and lifeworld" (p. 39). Informal learning opportunities within unions are critical learning sites for survival in the workplace. In brief, individual survival in the workplace depends on the collective actions of many, which posits informal learning as the central initiative.

Welton (1993) identifies four learning challenges within social movements: (1) the position of human beings in relation to nature, (2) defining the enemy, (3) the inferiorization of one class of human being by another, and (4) intruding state and corporate mechanisms. In response to degradation of the ecological system, human beings are now placed above nature and forced to find a new form of spirituality and harmony with a nonhierarchical world. Welton brings attention to the danger associated with this phenomenon suggesting social movement actors can become preoccupied with self. According to Welton, focus on the "isolated, egoic self" has potential to hinder learning (p. 157).

Likewise, it is becoming more difficult to define the enemy, thus having no target for social protest. Third, "inferiorized human beings struggle against the way their colonizers characterize them" (p. 159). This excludes equal partnership in social action groups. Fourth, governments and corporations threaten human capacity for "self-realization, autonomous learning and active participation in public life as citizens, clients, and consumers" (p. 160). Welton suggests "unblocking communicative learning processes is prerequisite for the accomplishment of each movement's particular goals" (p. 160).

In summary, the politics of social movements examines the perceived potential of social movements to transform societies. Within this political framework, there are two major viewpoints: the radical pluralist and the socialist. Radical pluralists take a postmodern stand by rejecting the ideas of Marxism. Socialists view social movements as opportunities to revise the ideas of Marxism. Both viewpoints grapple with the continued or diminished relevance and application of Marxism ideals.

Informal learning is a social activity comprised of groups of people learning through socially communicative means and incidental learning is learning that occurs by chance.

Informal and incidental learning are neither planned nor structured. Social movement participants informally and incidentally learn together by identifying issues, seeking out needed knowledge, and developing plans for social action. Social action was first viewed as irrational behavior. In time, Europe began to view social movements in a positive light. This positive orientation led to broader studies which gave rise to exploring the learning processes within social movements. Recent studies in adult education have identified and explained learning processes that takes place within old and new social movements (Finger, 1989; Holford, 1995; Kilgore, 1999; Spencer, 1995; Welton, 1993). The learning perspective of these studies will enlighten my research on learning within the anti-brand social movement.

Social Action Communities as Online Learning Communities

In order to establish an online learning community, one must begin by understanding the necessary foundation for building a community. The key to building a community involves two basic principles. First, all members are connected to the same ideas. Second, members become connected to each other through their common interests (Lock, 2002). For Anderson (1983), a community is imagined by its members. There are no clear boundaries or definitive barriers; hence, the notions of community are imagined. One of the most defining characteristics of a community is "the collective sense of difference from others not in the community" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 413). Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) reveal three core components of a community: a consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility.

The Internet provides an innovative medium for community building, which goes beyond historically designated geographic boundaries and extends Webster's dictionary definition of "groups living in the same area"(*Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus*, 1996). Palloff

and Pratt (1999) claim that geographical space is not a necessary component for building a learning community. In the twenty-first century, learning communities are increasingly virtual. To understand how learning communities are fostered in cyberspace, not geographical space, I will begin by discussing learning communities. Then, I will outline prevailing characteristics of successful learning communities. Finally, I will discuss online social action communities as learning communities.

Learning Communities

Historically, learning communities are informal and unstructured. LaBelle (1984) conveyed that informal learning is much different than institutionalized, highly structured, learning. Informal learning is learning that transpires from daily living. Howie (1988) suggests that "education at its best is always informal, largely unstructured and even an unsystematic process, characterized by spontaneity and closely related to the living experience and interests of both teacher and taught" (p. 9).

Informal learning communities predate formal classroom instruction. In fact, formal schooling only surpassed informal schooling in esteem and popularity during the last century (Gilchrist, 2001). Before that time, informal education was the norm for society, and formal education was the variant (Coleman, 1987). Traditionally, education was inspired by philosophers, teachers, and clerics who gathered in public forums to engage in dialogue and conversation about community topics (Jeffs, 2001). Those who planned to bring about change sought an audience in the street or in the community town square.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, members of various cultures began to settle in North America (Stubblefield & Partrick, 1989). At that time, formal and informal education was difficult to distinguish because people learned their professions, crafts, or skills in learning

communities. These learning communities consisted of apprenticeship or mentorship relations where the unskilled people learned from the skilled. This system of learning a trade was unregulated and the learning community informally decided when a person achieved mastery of a skill or trade. Consumers were advised about and protected from charlatans by word of mouth within the community (Ben-Amos, 1994).

By the mid seventeenth century, coffee-houses emerged as the center for learning in Europe and education in England developed further than most countries (Stubblefield & Partrick, 1989). Over 2,000 coffee-houses existed in London and the provinces and by 1700 these learning centers operated according to strict rules which ensured orderly and democratic behavior (Jeffs, 2001). Despite a person's rank or wealth, all who paid a set fee were admitted into coffee-houses and entitled to the first vacant seat on the condition that they engage in civil conversation and participate in discussions already underway. Coffee-houses acquired different reputations according to their specialized topics such as science, politics, or religion (Kelly, 1970). English was the dominate culture and prevailed throughout much of North America.

Additional learning communities began to emerge throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in North America in the form of churches, lyceums, and voluntary associations (Knowles, 1960). These learning communities provided social activities, shelter and welfare support. These early forms of community also served as a means for social communication and catered to all age groups (Jeffs, 2001). In brief, these learning communities as well as aforementioned groups historically served as means for training adults to be responsible and moral, for preparing people for employment, for making good citizens and for transmitting cultural values.

Today, similar informal learning communities still exist. Similar to historical learning communities, some present-day learning communities also seek an audience to hear their collaborated voices; engage in civil conversations to plan and bring about changes; discuss specialized topics and provide social activities and shelter from modern displeasures; foster apprenticeship or mentorship relations; and, internally decide when community members achieve mastery of a skill or trade. In the next section, common characteristics of present-day learning communities, as those stated above, are grouped into five broad categories.

Characteristics of Successful Learning Communities

Sergiovanni (1999) identifies five basic building blocks for successful learning communities: a community of relationships, a community of place, a community of mind, a community of memory, and a community of practice (p. 17). While not exhaustive, these five categories represent a good cross section of community characteristics identified over the past three decades.   Thus, I will use these five building blocks to categorize the extant literature on community building.

Community of relationships.   Community of relationships refers to the relationships among community members. Shared interests and problems require learners to develop interdependent relationships (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Sergiovanni (1999) suggests that within a learning community "connections among people are close and informal; individual circumstances count; acceptance is unconditional; relationships are cooperative; concerns of members are unbounded; subjectivity is okay; emotions are legitimate; sacrificing one's self-interest for the sake of the community is common; members associate with each other because doing so is valuable as an end in itself; knowledge is valued and learned for its own sake" (p. 17). These relational characteristics unite members together, emulating a close-knit family.

Lave (1996) emphasizes the importance of exploring the social rather than psychological theories of learning to enlighten those who blame individuals for the failure to learn. Lave suggests that theories focusing solely on an individual's mental capacity fail to encompass the full scope of learning. As a result, learners must develop relationships within their learning community in order to gain the full extent of knowledge available. According to Bandura (1986), people learn socially by imitating and observing others, which includes cognitive processes such as thinking, memory, language, and evaluating consequences.

Community of mind. Regarding community of mind, Sergiovanni (1999) suggests that there are unique ways a community thinks about "connections, human nature, and societal institutions" (p. 9). There must be an awareness of community and a common set of values among community members (Lock, 2002). Communities of mind are identifiable by their commonly used tools, everyday activities, and distinctive language (Peters, 1999). Learning communities often develop a consciousness of mind by creating their own conversational terms (Goffman, 1981, 1990; Smith, 1994; Wardhaugh, 1991). These commonalities unite community members together by creating a sense of belonging and purpose. This social mindset influences the learning to the extent that learners will participate in the learning process to advance in the sociocultural community values and ideals. In other words, community members are motivated to learn by becoming more recognized in the community.

In addition, learning communities impart meaning-making mechanisms, serving as instruments to invoke the mind. Typically there is at least one person in the community that challenges traditional thought. The community's response to this insider challenge determines future growth and resilience (Wells, 1999). Johnson (1999) states that community members must have a sense of productive challenge by balancing both the pressure to achieve and group

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member support. Thus, effective learning communities are open to challenges and adaptive to changes (Johnson, 1999).

Community of place. A community of place represents the location where community members can come together. This common place provides a venue for continuity and caring. Choi and Hannafin (1995) suggest that context, the general atmosphere, physical setting and concurrent background events, influence the learning process. The location is an essential component of community learning and development because it serves as a place where community members can come together and dialogue about their similar goals, values, and beliefs.

Extending the notion of place, this should also serve as a site for group reflection. Marsick (1988) emphasizes the importance of reflectivity, critical reflectivity and universal valuing in learning communities. Johnson (1999) also states that effective learning communities practice many forms of collaboration and reflection and this process is essential for continued growth and development. Likewise, Watkins and Marsick (1993) underscore the emancipatory effects of reflection and suggest promotion of inquiry, dialogue, collaboration, and cooperation are also important components of dynamic learning communities.

Community of memory. Community of memory refers to enduring customs, rituals, and traditions (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). These standards are taught to new members and endure within the community over the course of time. These continuing images reflect the communities' core values and beliefs about life. Memory sustains the community through difficult times and connects members, even when they cannot physically see each other. These shared memories form an identity among the community of learners. Johnson (1999) corroborates this notion of memory by suggesting that community customs, rituals, and traditions

should benefit all learners. In doing this, community members acquire a reason to learn and a purpose to engage in collaborative learning.

Brown and Duguid (2000) indicate that learning is a demand-driven, social identity formation. In other words, learning communities are formed because of a common need, goal, or identity. These commonalities sustain the community and enforce accepted patterns of behavior. Identity formations are then constructed among newcomers to the community as they follow accepted behaviors, beliefs, and values set forth by past or present skilled community members (Brown & Duguid, 1993). Common learning and work practices serve as bonding identity formations which create distinctive community memories.

Community of practice. Perhaps the most defining trait that differentiates one learning community from another is shared practice. Shared practice means that all members are voluntarily engaged in a common activity or endeavor. For Brown and Duguid (2000) "community of practice is an ideal learning environment" (p. 127). The culture and the context in which the learning takes place are central to the learning process. Learning communities socially construct meanings, uphold social cultural norms, and cultivate commonalities such as "routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts" (Wenger, 1998, p. 83).

Lave and Wenger (1991) studied learning within social networks and found that "learning in not merely situated in practice" but is part of a socially constructed world (p. 35). They developed this idea by proposing that participation in a community of practice is at first legitimately peripheral but increases gradually as one engages in the community. Eventually, novice learners become fully engaged in the learning process in order to reach learner maturity. This notion is analogous with Bateson's (1972; 1979) theory of learning. Bateson suggests that

learning is a series of interactional cycles where learners move from peripheral participation to central participation. Thus, community of practice differentiates one community from another, is a set of shared activities, and is the culture and social context in which learning takes place.

Online Social Action Communities as Learning Communities

Social action learning communities that situate in a virtual context are more flexible and durable than physically situated learning communities (Shumar & Renninger, 2002). In virtual social action communities, there is an ongoing availability of resources and a continuous process of multileveled communication. This virtual space allows for fusion of various conversations, the linking of conversations across Web sites, and the archiving of discussions and other types of information for future reference (Shumar & Renninger, 2002).

Virtual social action communities involve a combination of virtual interaction, social imagination, and identity. "They may be distinguished from physical communities in that virtual communities extend the range of community, and individuals can tailor their personal communities" (Shumar & Renninger, 2002, p. 2). Communities can be tailored because the Internet provides new resources that enhance a community's collective needs. In virtual learning communities, relationships are no longer defined by proximity or physical kinship but by individual interests. According to Rheingold (2000), "because we cannot see one another in cyberspace, gender, age, national origin, and physical appearance are not apparent unless a person wants to make such characteristics public" (p. 11). This new concept of community antiquates traditional definitions of community that focused primarily on geography and kinship. Global technologies are connecting people around the world. These changes inherently impact the way in which social movements organize and take action.

Chapter Summary

Brands identify, label or symbolize abstract values such as quality, status, or reputation and are a means for differentiating one product, service, manufacture or retailer from another. Brands were developed to satisfy consumers' needs. Traditionally, marketing is based on a mutual exchange relationship between the buyer and seller. Brand communities are evidence that the mutual exchange relationship still exists. However, there is a growing concern among scholars that the lack of mutual exchange benefits for some consumers is leading to an anti-brand movement.

Some consumers are rebelling against the marketplace by classifying corporations with global brand names as dominating and oppressive. Anti-brand activists believe corporations abuse economic power through imbalanced distribution of goods and services, deceitful marketing tactics, and unequal access to information. Although consumer rebellion is historically viewed as a natural occurrence in society, few authors still believe the new anti-brand social movement is stimulating to the practice of marketing. After reviewing the literature on anti-brand communities, it was evident that anti-brand participants had common desires to (1) escape from marketplace practices (e.g., unethical marketing tactics, unethical corporate actions), (2) achieve a simplistic lifestyle, (3) construct a new identity (e.g., one that opposes marketplace identities), and (4) create a sense of freedom and liberation. These four prominent traits provide insight into why anti-brand communities form.

Historically, consumer rebellion has been labeled consumerism. Consumerism is a consumer's right for protection against adulterated, deficient, or unsafe products and services. There were three distinct waves of consumer movements in the United States. These three movements occurred in the early 1900's, the mid-1930's, and the mid-1960's. Each movement

occurred during economic and social unrest where rising consumer prices meant declining incomes. Additionally, each movement occurred during a time when consumers fought for their own interests due to declines in purchasing power. Studies indicate the U.S. may be undergoing a present consumer movement: the anti-brand social movement.

Social movements consist of groups of people coming together around a commonly held set of values or notion of rights in order to bring about social change. There are three distinguishable stakeholders in social movements: power holders, participants, and subject populations. These three populations play distinct roles in bringing about change. The adult education literature classifies social movements into either old or new movements. After reviewing the literature on these two movements, I concluded the anti-brand movement did not adequately fit into either category. Instead, the anti-brand movement seems to represent a new emerging category.

Within the framework of social movements, various sociological and political changes are taking place. The political aspect of social movements refers to the perceived potential of social movements to be agents of social change. There are two major viewpoints examining the political activities within social movements: the radical pluralist and the socialist. Radical pluralists view social movements with a postmodern lens, rejecting the grand theories such as Marxism. Socialists, on the other hand, view social movements as opportunities to revise the ideas of Marxism. Both views probe the ideals of Marxism, debating whether Marxism principles should be continued, revised, or discarded.

Within social movements, significant learning opportunities abound. Recent studies in adult education have identified and explained learning processes that take place within old and new social movements; however little research examines the present anti-brand social

movement. Studying the informal and incidental learning processes that take place within this new social movement will supplement the current literature on learning within old and new social movements. Informal learning is a social activity comprised of groups of people learning through socially communicative means and incidental learning is learning that occurs by chance. Social movement participants informally and incidentally learn together by identifying issues, seeking out needed knowledge, and developing plans for social action.

When examining the anti-brand social movement as a learning community, a few criteria can be used to identify online social action groups as learning communities. Learning communities consist of a community of relationships, a community of place, a community of mind, a community of memory, and a community of practice. These characteristics are transferable to any learning community setting. For example, virtual learning communities are becoming more common, especially with respect to social action communities. Social action learning communities that situate in a virtual context can respond to change and adapt to environmental circumstances more quickly than traditional communities because the Internet provides flexibility, an ongoing availability of resources, and multileveled communication. In virtual communities conversations can be linked across websites, information can be archived, and people around the world can share ideas regardless of time zones. These Internet capabilities impact the way in which social movements organize and take action in the twenty-first century. Social movements incorporating such novel, technological capabilities deserve attention.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The United States has achieved rapid growth and global industrialization in the last decade. International resistance to the mass production of branded goods and services has gained wide-spread attention. Online anti-brand social action communities have formed to protest against social inequities, linking environmental issues, human rights and cultural degradation to globalized corporate agendas. This struggle for social change has generated an anti-brand social movement. Although there is some research investigating the learning within social movements, little research examines the present-day anti-brand social movement. The purpose of this study was to understand the nature of online anti-brand communities as a form of social action. The investigation was guided by three research questions. First, why do online anti-brand communities form? Second, what action strategies do online anti-brand communities engage in and how does the Internet shape those activities? Third, how does learning occur in online anti-brand communities? This chapter is a description of how I conducted my study in order to accomplish the purpose. Included are the following sections: design of the study, case study research, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, and researcher bias and assumptions.

Design of the Study

Qualitative research methods were used to examine, make sense of, and interpret the discourses and meaning associations that take place within online anti-brand social action communities. As conveyed by Denzin and Lincoln (1998) "qualitative researchers study things

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in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3).

Qualitative research is an inductive process whereby variables are not manipulated and no outcomes are predicted. Rather, research is an interpretive process seeking explanatory information. The inquirer often makes knowledge claims with the intent of developing a theory or pattern. Qualitative research employs inductive analysis techniques, deriving information-rich data from personal human experiences. Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p. 15). Qualitative research realizes that reality is not a fixed entity, but continuously changes.

The key to understanding qualitative research is to recognize and appreciate the notion that "meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world" (Merriam, 2002, p. 3). The strength of qualitative inquiry is that it allows the researcher to focus on specific situations or people, emphasizing words rather than numbers (Maxwell, 1996). As stated by Maxwell, "Qualitative and quantitative methods are not simply different ways of doing the same thing. Instead, they have different strengths and logics and are often best used to address different questions and purposes" (p. 17).

There are a number of characteristics associated with qualitative research designs in general: (1) the focus is on process rather than results (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003); (2) the method of analysis is inductive (Maxwell, 1996); (3) the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection (Merriam, 1998); and (4) the data consists of rich, thick descriptions typically derived

from some type of fieldwork (Merriam, 1998). Here, I will elaborate on the common attributes of qualitative research.

Rather than predicting an outcome as in quantitative research designs, qualitative studies seek deeper meanings behind the reasons why and how people behave or believe a particular way. The focus in qualitative research is on the process of gathering and interpreting data. Although the focus is on the process, it "does not mean that qualitative research is unconcerned with outcomes" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 20). According to Maxwell (1996), "a major strength of qualitative research is in getting at the processes that led to these outcomes" (p. 20). Experimental and survey research designs are often poor at identifying these processes (Patton, 1990). Identifying unanticipated phenomenon and influences and generating new theories are important attributes of qualitative research (Maxwell, 1996).

A second characteristic of qualitative research is the use of inductive analysis to understand how meanings are constructed from the perspective of participants. The researcher takes on the role of an interpreter by seeking to understand the context of events and actions taking place and the meanings participants have constructed within this context. More accurately, the researcher is trying to understand the reality in which the events and actions take place.

Third, the primary instrument for data collection in qualitative designs is the researcher. Rather than using inanimate objects to collect data (i.e., survey, questionnaire, computer), the researcher becomes an active, living instrument. Human instruments have several advantages. One of the most apparent advantages is the researcher's ability to be responsive to the environment in which the study is taking place (Merriam, 1998). For example, research questions can be augmented or altered to meet the situation at hand, becoming more detailed to

gather additional information or more sensitive to accommodate delicate subjects. Likewise, the human instrument is able to multitask, carrying out more than one form of data collection simultaneously. For example, the human researcher is able to make observations while interviewing participants, allowing the total context to play a role in the interpretation process. Another benefit is the researcher's ability to analyze data throughout the entire research process, as opposed to waiting to interpret results once all data are collected.

Fourth, in qualitative research, the data consists of rich, thick descriptions. According to Merriam (1998), "words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon" (p. 8). According to Patton (2002), rich qualitative findings grow out of three forms of data: interviews, observations, and documents. From interviews, researchers gather direct quotations from participants about their feelings, opinions, experiences, or knowledge. Observations stem from detailed descriptions of participant's activities, behaviors, and actions. Document analysis consists of studying excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from written materials such as open-ended questions on a questionnaire, personal diaries, official publications, or reports. Gathering these findings usually involves fieldwork (Merriam, 1998). The researcher must physically go to the natural setting in which the research takes place in order to interview participants, observe behavior, and learn about the setting.

In brief, a qualitative research method was best suited for my study which explored the anti-brand social movement. Qualitative research enabled me to understand how consumer activists make sense out of their lives and thereby make meaning of their lives. This inductive process helped me accomplish the purpose of my study.

Case Study Design

A case study design was used to explore the anti-brand social movement. According to Creswell (1998), a case study is a bounded system which is "bounded by time and place, and it is the case being studied – a program, an event, an activity, or individuals" (p. 61). For Yin (1994), "a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). For Merriam (1988), a case study is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 21). A case study design will provide the framework for a bounded method of data collection by gathering multiple sources of thick and rich information in the context of the anti-brand social movement.

The unit of analysis or bounded system characterizes a case study. In my study, the case is bounded by the context of online social action anti-brand communities. There are three dimensions of this bounded system. First, I am examining a social movement. Second, the social movement is an anti-brand movement. Third, the movement is taking place in an online context. These three criteria define the unit of analysis.

A case study design was chosen in order to take a snap shot in time of the anti-brand social movement. Multiple cases (i.e., three or four cases) during the same bounded time period will be studied to examine unique anti-brand online social action issues. Additionally, multiple cases will provide different perspectives on the problem, processes and social events being explored in this study. Anti-brand communities will be studied in their virtual settings, with the goal of attaining a better understanding of the subject matter at hand.

"Unquestionably, some case studies generate theory, some are simply descriptions of cases, and others are more analytical in nature and display cross-case or inter-site comparisons"

(Creswell, 1998, p. 186). In this study, a cross-case analysis was conducted. Each case was described individually, depicting unique characteristics about individual cases, and a comparison was made across cases, illustrating commonalities across cases. The unit of analysis within cases and across cases was the nature of online social action in anti-brand communities.

Sample Selection

Qualitative data describes someone else's experience of the world in his or her own words (Patton, 2002). These descriptions tell stories of events, places, or persons so that others know what it was like to experience such things. To the extent to which each story gives insight to the phenomenon under study is dependent on the sample selected by the researcher. In this section, I discuss the sample selection process for this study.

Patton (2002) states, "perhaps nowhere is the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods better captured than in the different strategies, logics, and purposes that distinguish statistical probability sampling from qualitative purposeful sampling" (p. 46). As suggested by Patton (2002) "the purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 46). In conducting a case study, case selection is done purposefully, not randomly. In view of that, a list of attributes or sample criteria are essential to selecting suitable, insightful cases (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Case Selection

Providing different perspectives on the problem, processes, and events at hand was the goal of my predetermined case selection criteria. My selection criteria were aimed at identifying accessible and ordinary cases, providing a realistic cultural portrait of the anti-brand social movement. More specifically, four criteria were used to select cases for my study. The first

criterion for case selection was to select communities *that oppose popular, multi-country brand names* such as Wal-Mart, McDonald's, Disney, Microsoft, Nike, or Coke.

Second, I aimed to maximize case differentiation through identifying samples *with diverse corporate product and service offerings*. For example, a varying product/service mix included a case of anti-McDonald's activists, from the fast-food industry; a case of anti-Wal-Mart activists, from the retail industry; and a case of anti-Starbuck's activists, from the beverage industry. Multiple cases of this kind provided a detailed in-depth picture of the anti-brand social movement.

Third, I identified anti-brand online social action communities that had been *in operation for more than one year*. This selection criterion minimized the possibility of future community extinction. Lastly, I targeted online communities that *are action-oriented* (e.g., sending emails to corporate leaders, organizing marches, or creating computer viruses). Identifying active communities ensured information-rich cases.

With this strategy, I identified three active online communities: anti-McDonald's, anti-Wal-Mart, and anti-Starbuck's. I identified these communities on the Internet and observed community dialogue over a six-month period. Once I gained the group's trust and approval, I asked for one-on-one interviews preferably in-person, or by phone, or via the Internet.

Sample Selection within Cases

Participants were located online within the chosen anti-brand community cases. In selecting individual participants within each case, I began by asking for volunteers. From those volunteers, three criteria were used for participant selection. First, in order to obtain in-person interviews, participants living in the Southeast were given preference. Second, a minimum age of twenty was set as a criterion for the purpose of gathering adult interviews.

Third, maximum variation was used in an effort to include men and women from different ethnic backgrounds, education levels, and work experiences.

According to Patton (2002), "sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources" (p. 244). With this in mind, a total of 15 participants were selected. My goal was to balance the number of participants from each case, ensuring a suitable representation across cases. A balance in number of participants from each case provided a thorough cross-case comparison.

Participant Protection

In the process of identifying online anti-brand social action participants, I took precautions to ensure that participants are treated in an ethical manner. Participants were selected based on their own willingness to participate in the study. Participants were fully informed of the purpose and audiences for my study. Agreements to participate in the study were obtained through a consent form. Withdraws from the study could have taken place at any time without any repercussions. The privacy of participants was protected by using pseudonyms to maintain confidential identities and/or community roles.

Data Collection

In addressing my research questions, I drew on three major methods of collecting data: website observations, interviews, and documents. Since my area of research involved sensitive subjects such as political viewpoints, equal rights issues, and even violent matters, I took safety measures to avoid backlash by gaining approval from the beginning. Thus, in the following sections I will discuss the three aforementioned data collection methods, emphasizing the

importance of gaining acceptance from the online community and individual interviewees from the onset of the data collection process.

Website Observations

As previously mentioned, my study began by identifying and observing anti-brand social action communities via the Internet. Observations were used to deliberately and systematically record anti-brand social action community behaviors. In doing this, my goal was identify natural, everyday behaviors. As an outsider, observations were a means for recording routines, discussions, and behaviors that lead to a broader understanding of the culture and context of that particular community.

When observing online anti-brand communities, I gave special attention to community dialogue, rituals, and traditions, making note of the following: (1) the content of conversation, (2) the promoted and dissuaded products/services, (3) discussion of consumption patterns, (4) how people view current events, (5) how people make buying decisions, (6) numbers of people discussing topics synchronously and asynchronously, (7) any website sounds or music, (8) activities/events that are being arranged or protested, (9) formal or informal patterns of communication, (10) how announcements are made, (11) any colors displayed on the website, (12) graphics or pictures on the website, and (13) symbolic or connotative meanings of words posted on the site or used in conversations.

While observing, my goal was to blend into the setting, becoming a natural part of the scene (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). In doing this in an online context, I became a silent participant in website discussions, web forums, and online chat sessions. Patton (2002) states that the researcher "has the opportunity to see things that may routinely escape awareness among the people in the setting" (p. 262). As an observational researcher, I was able to discover things that

no one else noticed. For example, patterns of discussion and website participant behaviors and reactions were the focus of my observations.

Interviews

My primary method of data collection was person-to-person interviews. This is the most common form of interview data, wherein I, the researcher, elicited information from participants (Merriam, 1998). Interviews were critical for my study, since I was limited in my observations of online interactions. Online observations lack the emotional, facial, and body language cues that a researcher obtains when conducting in-person observations. As stated by Merriam (1998), "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (p. 72).

According to Merriam (1998), there are three types of interviews: highly structured, questionnaire-driven interviews; semi-structured, more flexibly worded interviews; and unstructured with no predetermined questions. Highly structured interview questions are beneficial when gathering standardized sociodemographic information. Semi-structured interview questions are open-ended and useful when asking similar questions of all participants; however, semi-structured questions are different than highly structured questions because they enable the researcher to use flexible wording and ordering to meet the situation at hand. On the other hand, unstructured interview questions are not predetermined and are valuable for exploratory research. As stated by Merriam (1998), the unstructured interview is often used to learn enough about situations in order "to formulate questions for subsequent interviews" (p. 75). In my study, used a combination of all three types of interviewing so that some standardized information was obtained to gather sociodemographic information, some open-ended questions

were asked of all participants to compare experiences, and some time was spent in an unstructured mode to gain unique insights about online anti-brand social action communities.

My goal was to obtain as many in-person interviews as my physical location permitted. I began the interviewing process by asking for volunteers from the website community. From the volunteers, I contacted those who were physically situated in a drivable radius from Athens, Georgia (e.g., can be driven in one day). Of those volunteers who were not in driving range, I asked for phone interviews. When asking for volunteers, I began by getting approval from the website coordinator or community leader.

In gathering rich, in-depth information, the researcher must gain acceptance from the community and individual interviewees. A number of strategies facilitated acceptance during interviews. Honesty is one I believe is most important and should be made evident from the beginning. I presented myself as an adult education researcher trying to understand more about social action communities. It was important not to act secretive so I communicated my intentions upfront. Second, presentation of self is an important factor in gaining acceptance. According to Lofland and Lofland (1984) there are two complementary methods of self-presentation: absence of threat and acceptable incompetence.

Absence of threat means behaving in a nonthreatening way toward the people being researched by respecting their beliefs, self-confidence, or existing social arrangements. Lofland and Lofland (1984) suggest that "the investigator who is supportive, cordial, interested, nonargumentative, courteous, understanding, even sympathetic, will receive a good deal more information than one who acts in an opposite fashion" (p. 38). This required much listening and learning on behalf of the researcher.

Acceptable incompetence is seeking to understand while being viewed as someone with relatively little competence in the subject matter at hand. The researcher must take on the role of a student, being taught by the participant. With regard to socially acceptable incompetent researchers, Lofland and Lofland (1984) indicate "such persons have to be told and will not take offense at being instructed about 'obvious' things or at being 'lectured to'...such persons are in a good position to keep the flow of information coming smoothly" (p. 38). In doing this, I was likely to gain rich information during interviews.

Documents

Gathering documents is another form of data collection and included the compilation of public records, personal documents, physical materials, researcher-generated documents, and/or popular culture documents. Public documents are materials that are accessible to the public such as "actuarial records of births, deaths, and marriages, the U.S. census, police records, court transcripts, agency records, association manuals, program documents, mass media, government documents, and so on" (Merriam, 1998, p. 113). Likewise, popular culture documents represent how mass media influences people's meaning-making processes. Popular cultural documents, such as Adbusters magazine, was particularly useful in understanding how corporate marketing and advertising campaigns are interpreted by social action groups.

In my study, I collected a variety of documents. One primary method of collecting documentation was downloading or printing information found on the community websites. Any documents related to the communities produced and/or marketed online, was helpful in guiding my understanding. For example, I collected posted documents such as *online* community mission statements, memos, conversations, and pictures.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involves systematically reviewing and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other collected materials in such way that it adds to the researcher's own understanding of the phenomenon under study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The goal of data analysis is to enable the researcher to present insights to others. According to Patton (1990), "the challenge is to make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveals" (p. 372). For Merriam (1998), data analysis begins with data collection and intensifies throughout the collection process. "Hunches, working hypotheses, and educated guesses direct the investigator's attention to certain data and then to refining or verifying hunches. The process of data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic" (Merriam, 1998, p. 155).

A constant comparative method was used to conduct within case and cross case analysis. Constant comparative analysis is a systematic procedure for analyzing data. The researcher constantly moves back and forth comparing incidents to develop categories of information or themes (Creswell, 1998). Data are analyzed as they are received, allowing categories to emerge. As new data are collected, a constant comparison to existing categories informs future data collection and insures thorough examination of emerging theoretical ideas (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

After conducting interviews, the information was transcribed and organized by assigning written codes to concepts (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Written codes were used to identify similarities and differences appearing in informant narratives. Informant stories were compared to identify common themes. Data was analyzed and interpreted according to the protocol for

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transforming qualitative data as suggested by Wolcott (1994). Wolcott describes qualitative data interpretation as transcending mere facts by seeking deeper meanings from the data. In doing this, the researcher offers her own interpretations of the data.

I maintained a "codebook" to ensure consistency among code terms (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 781). After transcribing each interview, I organized the data by highlighting the quotes that seem to answer the research questions. LeCompte (2000, p. 148) suggests reviewing research questions and "comparing them against the data collected" as part of the first step of doing data analysis. The process of coding continued throughout data analysis until all data were assigned to a central category.

If central categories were packed with information, the categories were subdivided to facilitate additional analysis and allow for further comparison. "The task is to compare one unit of information with the next in looking for recurring regularities in the data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 180). This process was accomplished by breaking down information into units or bits then assigning these units to one category. Once a relationship was established among several categories, a thorough analysis of the phenomenon being investigated was completed. The data was then represented or reconstructed to explain the social phenomenon. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) state, as investigators "we do not merely report what we find; we create accounts of social life, and in doing so we construct versions of the social world and the social actors that we observe" (p. 108).

Individual case and cross-case analysis was conducted to present information in a wide variety of ways. For individual case analysis, a detailed account of each case was presented. Rich, thick descriptions were provided to illustrate or explain phenomenon within each case. According to Merriam (1998), "thick description is a term from anthropology and means the

complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated" (p. 30). Descriptions of interactions among social action participants as well as quotes, documents, and artifacts were presented to provide a holistic, lifelike description of each case. Such descriptive data were used to establish common traits or themes within each case.

For cross-case analysis, data and findings for each individual case were compared to each of the other cases to distinguish common themes across cases. By examining a range of similar cases, the researcher was able to better understand individual case findings. A study with multiple cases enhances the external validity or generalizability of findings (Merriam, 1998). Generalizations about online social action groups were presented based on cross-case analysis. Merriam (1998) suggests, "the greater the variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be" (p. 40). A thorough cross-case analysis revealed previously unknown case-to-case relationships and fostered a new understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Validity and Reliability

In order for research to maintain a high level of credibility and trustworthiness, the research must have validity and reliability. All research is concerned with valid and reliable findings (Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam (1998), "ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research involves conducting the investigation in an ethical manner (p.198). Hence, valid and reliable research must first begin with ethical conduct on behalf of the researcher (see Merriam, 1998). Here, I will discuss the importance of ensuring internal validity, reliability, and external validity when conducting qualitative research.

Internal validity ensures the research findings are congruent with participants' construction of reality. I ensured internal validity by (1) triangulating my methods of data

collection, (2) asking one of my peers to review my study, (3) conducting member checks, and (4) stating my assumptions and biases upfront so that other readers understand the manner in which the data were interpreted. In addition, providing detailed descriptions of how my data were gathered and analyzed aids the reader in determining the trustworthiness of my study.

In achieving triangulation, multiple sources of information were used to gain a cultural portrait of the cases being studied. By using a combination of observations, interviewing and document analysis, I was able to triangulate my findings by using different data sources to validate and crosscheck interpretations (Patton, 2002). Maxwell (1996) defines triangulation as "collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods" (p. 75).

Using a combination of data collection methods increases validity because "the strengths of one approach can compensate for the weaknesses of another approach" (Patton, 2002, p. 306). In addition, triangulation reduces the risk of making conclusions or interpretations that reflect only the systematic biases of a single method (Maxwell, 1996). By using a variety of sources and resources, the researcher can exploit the strengths of each type of data collection while minimizing the weaknesses of any single approach. This allows the reader or user of the research to accurately assess of the validity and generality of descriptive themes developed throughout the course of the study.

Second, peer examination was used to increase internal validity. This was accomplished with the guidance of my major professor and dissertation committee. I sought their views on the plausibility of my findings. Third, member checks were conducted by email or phone to confirm findings with participants. Member checks means "taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible"

(Merriam, 1998, p. 204). Finally, by stating my assumptions or biases upfront, readers or users of my research will be able to determine the trustworthiness or usability of the findings.

Reliability is referred to as "dependability" or "consistency" in obtained results (Merriam, 1998, p. 206). It is the extent to which the findings are consistent with the data collected. I ensured reliability by providing a clear representation of how the data were collected, how categories were developed, and how decisions were made during the course of the study. In doing this, I provided an audit trail, where readers or users of my research will be able to trace my steps in the research process and understand how I arrived at the findings.

External validity is concerned with the generalizability of the research. It is the extent to which the findings of my study can be applied to other situations. In qualitative research, the generalizability of a study is determined by the reader. Readers of my study must determine whether my research context is congruent with their area of interest. To enable readers to determine this, I provide detailed information about the phenomenon under study. Thoroughly describing the context of my study will allow other readers or users to determine if the findings can be applied to their situation or context (Merriam, 1998).

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

Qualitative research asserts reality is constructed by individuals, and is subjective in nature. The researcher aims to uncover participants' interpretation of their experiences and meaning schemas. As such, the researcher acknowledges any assumptions or biases that may influence the research process. The researcher's subjectivity has the potential to directly affect inquiries and interpretations. Thus, stating biases and assumptions upfront allows the researcher to be aware of his or her own predilections and allows other readers or users of the research to be aware of latent influences.

Although stating biases and assumptions upfront is an important part of the research process, "eliminating the actual influence of the researcher is impossible" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 91). The goal of this activity is to understand biases and assumptions and to use them productively in the research process. As stated by Maxwell (1996), "qualitative research is not primarily concerned with eliminating variance between researchers in the values and expectations they bring to the study, but with understanding how a particular researcher's values influence the conduct and conclusions of the study" (p. 91).

With that being said, my underlying reason for conducting this study rests in my genuine interest to find balance for a capitalistic society. On the one hand, as a consumer, I enjoy consumption activities made possible in a capitalistic society. For example, when I am looking for any product or service (e.g., clothes, food, electronics, upholsteries), competition among firms enables me to search out diverse features such as the lowest price, the right color, or the best quality, depending on my needs and wants as a consumer. Likewise, if I am not satisfied with a product or service, I can choose to do business with another firm. As a consumer, I am able to make choices about how I spend my money; what I buy, who I buy from, and how much I am willing to spend.

On the other hand, I have witnessed how consumers feel trapped in a materialistic world, measuring their value as a person against the "good life" portrayed by firms' marketing tactics. Consumers get caught in a cycle of unlimited consumption, buying more to feel more valuable. Likewise, I am concerned about environmental issues and the effects of mass production and globalization. Once ubiquitous natural resources, such as fresh air and clean water, are rapidly being depleted. Similarly, our society seems to move faster and faster every year, with more

production, technological innovation, and advanced transportation; matters such as valuing human rights, equality and justice have seemingly become less important.

My assumption is that our society can achieve balance, offering consumers choices but at the same time valuing environmental and human rights issues. Although I believe a balance is attainable, I am unclear of what the end-product looks like or how to get there. In brief, a corporation's primary role is to generate profits. Profit-oriented corporations have the potential to destroy the environment, devalue humans, and mistreat animals. I assume people involved in anti-brand social action communities have, at some point in their lives, experienced corporate hegemony first-hand. I believe social movements are natural forms of democratic societies with a common purpose to ameliorate humanity. By listening to anti-brand critiques and criticisms, I believe our society has potential to improve. I am genuinely interested in what anti-brand social activists have to say, how anti-brand social activists believe a democratic society should be governed, and how we as a society can use their perspectives to strive for balance.

Potential biases to my study may stem from my diverse positionalities. I am an adult educator with strong democratic values, seeking to liberate the oppressed and educate the uneducated. At the same time, I am a professor of business, teaching marketing and management concepts to future corporate leaders. With my desire to find a harmonious balance, I may be prone to seize quick fixes or idealistic solutions. However, overall I believe my diverse background will allow me to view my study from a broader perspective, taking into account the advantages and disadvantages of contrary positions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the investigation into the nature of online anti-brand communities as a form of social action. Three anti-brand communities were investigated: anti-Starbuck's, anti-Wal-Mart, and anti-McDonald's. Fifteen social activists within these groups were interviewed; interview data combined with documents and web-based data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. This chapter is divided into two parts: Part 1 presents the case descriptions and Part 2 reviews the findings in accordance with the research questions. Part 1 and 2 conclude with a summary.

Part 1: Case Descriptions

This section presents case descriptions of three online anti-brand communities. Each case begins with a general description of how the website originated and is followed by website features, website member traits, the shared goals of the community, and communication methods.

Anti-Starbuck's Community

The anti-Starbuck's community originated from one person's negative experience with the company. As a regular customer, the website founder was treated with disrespect after complaining about the doubling in price of his usual order. He made a conscious decision to stop going to Starbuck's and on a lark he decided to create a web page one day when he was bored. On this snowy, boring day, he sat down at his computer and within an hour he had created the ihatestarbucks.com website.

After setting up the site, more and more individuals began to participate in regular discussions. The participants soon created their own community and the community members educated the website originator, broadening his understanding of the pernicious practices of Starbuck's. Eleven years later, the site has approximately five thousand postings and ten thousand visitors per day. A core community group of approximately one-hundred people maintain a lively online discussion board. Core members give each other advice on how to cope with issues related to Starbuck's' practices. Core members do not contact each other directly; rather all communication takes place on the website. The website manager filters through messages, allowing only anti-Starbuck's messages to be posted.

The website founder manages and updates the website solely on his own time. He stated that "it takes me about three minutes per day to filter through messages and then post them to the site." Although he maintains the site, he considers himself a facilitator rather than an activist leader. He stated in his interview that "I feel like a mother duck because the people are like my children...I can't turn any of them away because I feel indebted to them. In many ways I am like their therapist...I am just am empty vessel in which a lot of these people have poured out their hearts." When asked to describe this community, he said "this community is like a support group, they lean on each other for encouragement."

Website Features

Visible community characteristics, such as an anti-Starbuck's symbol, are displayed on the homepage. When logging onto the ihatestarbucks.com website, a flashing symbol of Starbuck's Coffee is top-center screen encircled by a red slash through the middle. The homepage has a black background which emphasizes the anti-Starbuck's symbol. The color of words is white and corresponding links are either yellow or green. Scripted underneath the

flashing anti-Starbuck's symbol is the statement "I Hate Starbuck's." Below that reads "Mosey over and grab a double mint mocha decaf skim latte and leave your mark on the world...." By clicking on various links found on the homepage, the website visitor has options to sign the guest book, read entries, send constructive comments to the website manager, find non-Starbuck's coffee shops, view the website manager's reasons for hating Starbuck's as well as his rebuttals to pro-Starbuck's' advocates.

From clicking a link found on the homepage, a directory of coffee shops is provided for consumers who are seeking alternatives to Starbuck's. "Where else can I go? I don't want to go to Starbuck's" is stated at the top of the list followed by a note from the website manager: "I am proposing a directory to point people in the right direction. If you have coffee shop or know of one that should be listed, tell me." A list of coffee shops is organized by state, providing the street address, phone number and hours of operation of locally owned coffee shops.

Members' Traits

*C*ore community members consist of approximately one-hundred regular participants. These core members are generally college educated and younger adults between the ages of 18 and 27. Most of these participants are employees at Starbuck's who share personal stories about their work experiences. As stated by the website manager, "this site is employee driven." The few that are not employees are either considering becoming an employee, are ex-employees, customers, or competitors.

Potential employees visit the site to determine whether or not they want to work for the company. The employees and ex-employees generally converse about the struggles with difficult customers, callous managers, corporate demands, low pay, work schedules, or harsh labor conditions. Customers typically discuss a negative experience with Starbuck's, the high

cost of their products, and addictions to caffeine. Competitors convey their concerns with the unfair practices of Starbuck's and the company's efforts to monopolize the market.

Shared Goals

The goals of this community are to provide a venue for venting one's frustrations with Starbuck's, connecting others with similar needs, and providing information to those who need help coping or to those who are taking legal actions against Starbuck's. The website serves as a communication tool for those who wish to share information directly related to Starbuck's. The people participating in discussions generally agree with the following, as stated on the website:

1. The majority of the coffee is grown using underpaid third world labor.

2. Starbuck's is spreading in the world like a virus, infecting cultures with their formula of what a coffee shop should be.

3. They are everywhere.

4. They have predatory business practices. Doing things like paying landlords to not renew leases for coffee shops so that they can move in.

5. They sell fake corporate responsibility.

6. I think their coffee sucks. It is always bitter.

7. The gross profit margin per store is, on average, 59.1%, that is money that could easily be lost if they paid more than a dollar a pound for coffee.

8. Faux ecologic responsibility. (www.ihatestarbucks.com)

Content on the website makes it apparent to the curious website visitor that only anti-Starbuck's people are welcome to the site. Statements such as "Post your squishy ideas somewhere else...try to find an ilovestarbusks.com website, or get off your mocha decaf booty and make one" convey that only anti-Starbuck's messages are welcome

(www.ihatestarbucks.com).   The message "Don't go to a site with different opinions from yours and insult people" is visible from the homepage. Any pro-Starbuck's idea only unites the community providing them with more ammunition to stand behind each other in their cause to fight against Starbuck's.

Community members feel a strong commitment to one another to support each other in their fight together for a better workplace. They have a shared consciousness of how a workplace should be organized and managed. Their common goals in relation to work environments revolve around issues of corporate domination, higher wages and equal rights for all employees. Community members do not like the fact that Starbuck's is on every corner in every major city. Spreading throughout the world, Starbuck's has become a global corporation. Once a local coffee shop with a quaint atmosphere, loyal customers and content employees, Starbuck's has now become a coffee chain with no originality, disgruntled customers and rebellious employees.

Communication Methods

All communication within the community takes place on the website discussion board. When clicking on "read entries" from the homepage, a website participant is taken to a lengthy list of comments arranged by date, with the most recent entry first (www.ihatestarbucks.com). The website participant has options to simply read through the entries, respond to certain entries, or post a new entry. If the participant chooses to respond to or post a new entry, the message is sent first to the website manager, who monitors discussions. Anonymity is provided by the website manager. In essence, the website manager serves as a gatekeeper for the website community. This tradition has been strictly upheld by the website manager from the onset of community establishment eleven years ago.

The website manager is central to all communication on the site and community members rely on him for personal support and confidentiality. He provides personal support by developing a relationship with individual community members. He maintains confidentiality by monitoring all correspondence on the website. Participants do not share their real names or personal addresses with others on the site; only the website manager is privy to personal information. All communication takes place in a public virtual forum, which is accessible to anyone who visits the homepage. In order to respond to a message viewed in the public forum, the message must be sent to the website manager before being posted. Within this system of communication, the website manager can discard vulgar, threatening, offensive, disrespectful, or pro-Starbuck's messages, which maintains a safe environment for correspondence among true anti-Starbuck's community members.

Participants respond to one another by referring to each other by their web name. Some creative web names include: Java John, Escapist, Firebrat, Smarterthanmymanager, Competitor, The Siren's Enemy, and Ex-Bux. Most conversations take place between employees or ex-employees who share ways to deal with complaining or rude customers, inform each other about new corporate initiatives, impart short-cuts in job responsibilities, and teach each other strategies in coping with difficult managers.

Community members have their own terminology such as barista which is someone who works at the coffee bar. DM means District Manager and SM means Senior Manager. SB or SBUX is short for Starbuck's. LOL means lots of luck. Crap-o-chino is universal for crappy coffee. The 10 minute rule refers to closing down in 10 minutes or less. Schmucks refers to anyone who is a Starbuck's fan.

Anti-Wal-Mart Community

Living in a town that was threatened with being overrun by large, sprawling megastores, citizens began to talk about their concerns with loosing their small town appeal. One individual was asked to lead a local citizens effort to overturn a town vote, preventing land from being rezoned from industrial to commercial. As a result, a voluntary, grassroots group was formed as an unincorporated, citizens group called "We Are Against The Wal." For this group, the leader started a newsletter to keep community members informed about current events and in 1997 a website was consturcted. The website became a "clearing house" for citizens who wanted to challenge "spawl" development areas.

After creating sprawl-busters.com, the creator was surprised by the overwhelming response from people around the world. The newsletter which reached only a few hundred people was soon discontinued after realizing that the Internet could reach thousands of people across the country and around the world. The website acts as an instant connection for geographically proximate individuals who can support one-another in their efforts to keep out unwanted development. Conversations between participants on the website consist of certain rules or restrictions that are present in their communities. Sprawl-buster consultants work around these rules or ordinances to keep megastores or other undesirable large-scale developments out of their community.

Website Features

On the homepage, there is an inflated picture of the community leader. He is wearing a white t-shirt with black letters spelling Wal-Mart and a large red slash through the middle. The slogan "Home town America fights back!!" is at the top of his picture (www.sprawl-busters.com). At the bottom, a quote from Forbes Magazine says "Wal-Mart's #1 Enemy."

Links from the homepage provide visitors with information about books authored by the community leader, news updates, current cases against sprawl companies, a "best" reading list recommended by the community, movies for order, success stories, a discussion of current battles, and contact information for community members. Messages on the website encourage visitors to share their stories and get involved in the community so that they can get support. A message on the homepage states, "No matter what the logo on the building says – Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Target, Lowe's, Kohls, CVS – if its unwanted development, Sprawl-Busters can help you stop it" (www.sprawl-busters.com).

The community mindset is one of helping others, conveying messages such as "in hundreds of communities, we have helped citizens groups strategize and carry out a plan to stop the superstores" (www.sprawl-busters.com). This community reaches out to people who may need help saving their small towns and the community website is the central means of accomplishing this act. The website leader urges visitors to contact him by stating on the homepage "local visits can be arranged." At the bottom of the homepage, a quote from the website leader states "Your quality of life is worth more than a cheap pair of underwear."

Members' Traits

The creator of sprawl.busters.com is the distinguished leader of this community. He successfully stopped Wal-Mart from locating in his hometown of Greenfield, Massachusetts and since then, he has gained widespread media attention. *Forbes, Fortune, Wall Street Journal*, and 60 Minutes have all interviewed him and ran stories on his successes calling him "the guru of the anti-Wal-Mart movement" (www.sprawl-busters.com).

The community is structured with the leader at the center of all activities. From the center, there is a movement of active participation to an outer ring of spectators at the periphery.

Spectators typically visit the website to find out more information and then the spectator observes ongoing campaigns, visits special events, and/or reads books promoted on the website. At some point, the spectator contacts the group leader or a core community member to get assistance or get involved. Once participants at the periphery become engaged in campaign activities and meet other volunteers, the commitment to the community increases. This movement from periphery to the center is how the community gains new members and continues to grow in size.

Core community members consist of volunteers who organize in formalized small groups. These citizen groups design and implement campaigns, establishing the basic coalition infrastructure necessary to fight large-scale developers. There are 248 communities, all of which are listed on the website, that have successfully kept out sprawling megastores. In each of these communities, a citizen group was formed to pressure the developer to withdraw. These small groups continue to meet in-person and on the Internet to safeguard their communities. As stated by one community member, "we have become good friends because we continue to keep in touch with one another" (Marie, anti-Wal-Mart).

Shared Goals

The goals of this community originated from a common interest among citizens in protecting small town environments. This movement has developed into a national environmental, economic and social issue, uniting local citizens in fighting for communities across the nation. As stated on the website, "environmental and land use issues have moved to the forefront of this debate." According to the website, "in 1998, Home Depot and Wal-Mart alone built more than 250 stores, or more than 33 million new square feet of retail space in a nation that is already saturated." This community believes that destruction of precious resources,

such as trees, is taking place all across the country and much of this damage is due to large square footage amounts of retail space and asphalt parking lots.

Most core community members, including the community leader, consider themselves an "accidental activist." In other words, these volunteers never imagined being a part of an activist group fighting off multinational corporations; they simply could no longer ignore the problem. As stated on the website, the shared goals of this community consist of fighting against environmental and economic issues such as:

*the impact of traffic on air quality standards

*the threat to water quality and acquifers

*the mismanagement of stormwater and sewage

*the reduction of wildlife habitat

*the loss of open space and unique natural areas

*the homogenization of rural landscapes

*the expense of costly new infrastructure

*the deterioration of historic commercial centers

*the overdependence on the automobile and superhighways (www.sprawl-busters.com)

According to the community's website, the National Trust for Historic Preservation defines "sprawl" as "poorly planned, low-density, auto-oriented development that spreads out from the center of communities" (www.sprawl-busters.com). In essence, the center of towns, where most activity once resided, becomes neglected and dilapidated, while the outer rings of the center become overly concentrated with development of suburban shopping malls and megastores. In smaller towns there are less zoning restrictions and land is less costly, making rural America a prime target for corporations that want to avoid saturated markets and city

restrictions. Community members express their concerns with rural areas by stating, "sprawl is often mistaken for economic development, and the people it affects the most are least likely to understand it."

The goals within this community primarily focus on preserving small town America, with an emphasis on community and connectedness. The website lists "The 10 Sins of Retail Sprawl" as the following:

*It destroys the economic and environmental value of land.

*It encourages an inefficient land-use pattern that is very expensive to serve.

*It fosters redundant competition between local governments, an economic war of tax incentives.

*It forces costly infrastructure development at the edge of towns.

*It causes disinvestments from established core commercial areas.

*It requires the use of public tax support for revitalizing rundown core areas.

*It degrades the visual, aesthetic character of local communities.

*It lowers the value of other commercial and residential property, reducing public revenues.

*It weakens the sense of place and community cohesiveness.

*It masquerades as a form of economic development. (www.sprawl-busters.com)

In preserving small towns, community members convey their aims "to convince our friends and neighbors that there is a politics of shopping" (www.sprawl-busters.com). To be more precise, community members educate others that it matters where you shop and that consumers should support their local stores. As stated by the community leader, "When Wal-Mart says 'one stop shopping', you should read that statement very literally. These big

corporations want to be the ONLY place you and I shop." In addition, the website states "Wal-Mart now has more sales than the Gross Domestic Product of Israel, Greece, Ireland and Egypt." The goals of this community are aimed at equalizing the distribution of economic funds, which are now believed to be controlled by a few powerful retailers. According to the website, Wal-Mart is the "largest owner and manager of retail space in the country," which puts Wal-Mart at the forefront of this community's struggle.

Communication Methods

The sprawl-busters website acts as a central location for individuals to contact others for advice, assistance, or support. Communication on the website consists of updates, success stories, and contact information. The community formation is decentralized, meaning the website acts as a central meeting spot for large-scale communication; whereas, tailored action strategies for specific towns take place in smaller community groups. The action and strategy planning that originates in smaller community groups undergirds the website's purpose.

The website manager controls all communication on the site and is responsible for keeping all web pages updated with current information, active cases, and success stories. He provides personalized support by meeting in-person with individual community members and maintains an optimistic outlook by focusing on the community's successes. His optimism is shared by most website participants. They have had more successes than failures and this motivates them to accomplish more. Website communications convey a sense of like-mindedness and a commitment to small group accountability, which fosters an environment for true, lasting friendship and camaraderie among community members.

Mcspotlight.org is an outgrowth of the McLibel Trial which took place in the 1990s in Britain. In response to a defamatory leaflet, McDonald's took legal action against two individuals: a postman named Dave Morris and a gardener from London named Helen Steel. Helen and Dave were part of an activist group called London Greenpeace. Since this group was an unincorporated association, McDonald's took action against named individuals.

The case continued for two and a half years which became the longest English trial in history. In June 19, 1997, the Judge ruled that McDonald's exploits children with their advertising, produce misleading advertising, are culpably responsible for cruelty to animals, are antipathetic to unionization and pay their workers low wages. But Helen and Dave failed to prove all the points and so the Judge ruled that they HAD libeled McDonald's and should pay 60,000 pounds damages. (www.mcspotlight.org)

Helen and Dave refused to pay and McDonald's did not enforce payment; preferably McDonald's wanted the issue to be dropped.

The issue was not abandoned; instead there was an increase in press coverage, a documentary was produced, and a mcspotlight.org website was constructed. The case is still alive and has been taken to the European Court of Human Rights in an effort "to defend the public's right to criticise multinationals, claiming UK libel laws are oppressive and unfair" (www.mcspotlight.org). In 1996, the McSpotlight website was constructed to provide a forum where activists could converse about issues evolving from the case such as nutrition, advertising, employment, environment, animals, free speech, expansion, and capitalism. Being accessible to people around the world, the website gets over a million hits a month and receives much media publicity. The website is managed by a group of volunteers working from approximately 22

countries on four continents. These volunteers form the McInformation Network and are

"dedicated to compiling and disseminating factual, accurate, up-to-date information – and

encouraging debate – about the workings, policies and practices of the McDonald's Corporation

and all they stand for."

Website Features

Since the Mclibel case, McSpotlight.org has become one of the largest anti-corporate

websites. The in-depth research conducted during the case has been posted to the website

creating approximately 120MB of information (www.mcspotlight.org). When viewing the

homepage, a list of recent press releases is in the middle of the page. On the right side are links

for Mclibel issues, campaign information, and debating rooms for discussion. On the left side is

a link for contacting the community, joining the mailing list, and navigation tools for first time

visitors. The first-time visitor can quickly become overwhelmed with the massive amount of

information. Thus, navigation instructions are provided which include navigation buttons, a site

map, a guided tour, search options, and a McSpotlight Kit (a downloadable version of the whole

site).

Sections of the site are separated into nine areas: the Mclibel trial (e.g., the official court

transcriptions, witness statements), issues examined in the media coverage of the McLibel trial

(e.g., newspaper and magazine articles), current campaigns (e.g., ready-to-print resources for

activists), information about McDonald's (e.g., company history, latest news about the

company), debating rooms (e.g., discussion forums for various topics), for sale items for

fundraising (e.g., t-shirts, pens, buttons), beyond McDonald's (e.g., information about other

damaging industries), and highlights (e.g., favorite pieces of the information from the website

managers).

Members' Traits

Core community members consist of activists who volunteer their time to keep the website updated. They are committed to educating those who visit the website and disseminating leaflets to increase the public's awareness of McDonald's practices. Volunteers also support the campaign through financial means, donating office equipment and supplies, and/or raising money for special events.

Being one of the largest anti-corporate groups, mcspotlight.org has approximately 500 core members and it continues to grow each year. On an annual basis, the web community conducts approximately 400 protests and 300 pickets in 23 different countries: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, England, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Romania, Scotland, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the United States (www.mcspotlight.org). Due to its size and its continuous activity, this web community consists of diverse ages, ethnicities, and nationalities.

Shared Goals

The goals of the community focus on educating the public about the oppressive tactics of the McDonald's Corporation. Through their campaign efforts, the community hopes the oppressive nature of corporations will backfire by hurting the corporation more than campaigners. As stated on the website, "by organizing and coordinating information and publicity, and strengthening networks of resistance, campaigners ensure that the tables are turned on those who try to shut them up." In essence, "McDonald's aim of suppressing activity has only served to further anger and strengthen the determination of their critics" (www.mcspotlight.org). The anti-McDonald's community continues to grow in publicity,

gaining new members every day. An increasing circulation of anti-McDonald's information through individual community members is the primary objective of this community.

The Internet provides "a space for the alternatives to multinational corporations (like McDonald's) to be heard" (www.mcspotlight.org). This community aims to take control of their environment by fighting back against powerful, influential corporations. As stated on the website:

> The food industry is dominated by multinational companies who for their own profits exploit consumers, workers, the world's natural resources and billions of farmed animals. The way we eat, and even the way we think about food is being manipulated by these powerful institutions and their sophisticated marketing campaigns.

In response, this community is committed to protesting against:

*the promotion of junk food,

*the unethical targeting of children,

*exploitation of workers,

*animal cruelty,

*damage to the environment, and

*the global domination of corporations over our lives. (www.mcspotlight.org)

As a community they work together to ensure that protests against McDonald's continue to increase in number reaching around the world. Referring to McDonald's, a community member states "for many years they have used their size and fiscal muscle to silence critics around the world" (www.mcspotlight.org). The McLibel case was "the result of a rare show of defiance," and McSpotlight.org was established to make ensure that "the McLibel evidence could never be suppressed."

Communication Methods

The primary method of communication is dialogue that takes place in online debating rooms. Debating rooms are separate chat rooms designed for discussing different topics. The debating rooms set the stage for small group dialogue where community members take on a personality and an identity. Similar to the anti-Starbuck's website, members of this community also have their own terminology. McD's is short for McDonald's and Ronald is also used to refer to McDonald's. Mc-workers is used in place of McDonald's employees and mc can be put in front of almost any word to represent a new meaning relevant to McDonald's such as mcshit, mcworld, and mcadvertising. Another similarity to the anti-Starbuck's website is that participants use pseudo names such as Slavetothewage, Macca, Mac Jack, Flip the Bird, Alice in Wonderland, Simon Soaper, Indygirl, Mister Jackass, and Punk.

There are 10 debating rooms set up for continuous discussion of various topics. The debating room labeled "McDonald's" is for general discussion about the company's business practices or philosophy. "McJobs and Workers" is a debating room for people who work at McDonald's. This debating room is also used for union meetings. "McLibel" is a discussion room for anything about the trial. "McSpotlight" is set up for people who want to give suggestions for the site, complaints, or flattery. "Campaigns" keeps the community updated with how others are taking action against McDonald's.

"Kids" is a debating room for people who would like to discuss how children are exploited through McDonald's advertising. "Creative Writing" is a place for community members to showcase their work (i.e., poems, songs). "Other Multinationals" is a debating room for discussion about other companies that are oppressive. "Capitalism and Alternatives" is a debating room about capitalism and its consequences. "Anything Else" is a place for people to

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discuss issues that are not covered in any of the other debating rooms. In addition to these debating rooms, community members can receive regular updates by email. Members can join an email distribution list which keeps individuals connected throughout the week.

Part 1 Summary

In summary, three online anti-brand communities were described: anti-Starbuck's, anti-Wal-Mart, and anti-McDonald's. The anti-Starbuck's community has a website leader who acts as a gatekeeper to the site. Features of the website include a public discussion board dedicated to anti-Starbuck's issues, links to non-Starbuck's coffee shops, and a list of reasons why the community hates Starbuck's. A majority of community members are Starbuck's employees and core members are generally college age. Goals of this community include hindering Starbuck's predatory business practices, getting better pay for the employees, and demonstrating how Starbuck's is not socially responsible.

The anti-Wal-Mart community has a website leader who is at the center of all action-oriented activities. Core community members consist of volunteers who organize coalitions in small towns across America. The website acts as an information source for the community and connects individuals in proximity to one another. This community reaches out to people who need help keeping large corporations out of small towns. The website is education-based and has features such as book lists, reports of success stories, contact information of community groups, and links to other websites. Website communication consists of 'how to' information, updates regarding current success stories, active cases and the needs of individuals in these active cases.

The anti-McDonald's community is the largest community and the most diverse in terms of member ages, ethnicities and nationalities. This community has volunteers in approximately 22 countries and on four continents. The website was constructed as a result of the McLibel

Trial, a court case where McDonald's took action against social activists for defaming the McDonald's name. Website features include nine debating rooms designated for discussing various topics, a list of recent press releases, campaign information, and links to McLibel issues. Community members are able to join mailing lists for receiving regular updates. The goals of the community include educating the public about the unhealthy effects of eating fast food, the unethical marketing practices of fast food chains, exploitation of workers, animal cruelty, environmental damage, and global domination of corporations.

Part 2: Findings

This section details the findings of the investigation into the nature of online anti-brand communities as a form of social action. Fifteen participants were interviewed between July and November of 2004. Interviews were conducted in-person, by phone and online, as indicated in Table 1. Participants ranged in age from twenty to sixty-seven and were engaged in a range of occupations including a computer programmer, a CEO and a Chairwoman of two different non-profit organizations, an environmentalist, an inn keeper, Starbuck's employees, McDonald's employees, graduate students, managers, and a freelance photographer. All participants have at least a college degree or plan to earn one in the future. Participants are from middle- and high-income families with at least one computer in the household. Twelve participants are from the United States. One participant is from China and currently living in the United States in order to complete graduate school and two participants are from the United Kingdom. Table 1, page 95, summarizes the demographic information of participants including their gender, age, occupation, and ethnicity.

Figure 1, page 96, outlines the findings of online anti-brand communities as social action groups. Findings answer the following research questions: Why do online anti-brand

communities form?, What action strategies do online anti-brand communities engage in and how

does the Internet shape those activities?, and How is knowledge generated in online anti-brand

communities?

Table 1

Participant's Demographics

Name	Interview	Protested Brand	Gndr	Age	Occupation	Ethnicity
Bob	phone	Starbuck's	M	30	Computer Programer	Caucasian
John	online	Starbuck's	M	21	Starbuck's employee	Caucasian
Lucy	online	Starbuck's	F	34	Starbuck's employee	Caucasian
Greg	online	Starbuck's	M	21	Starbuck's employee	Caucasian
Michelle	online	Starbuck's	F	23	Starbuck's employee	Caucasian
Amy	online	Starbuck's	F	22	Starbuck's employee	Caucasian
Al	phone	Wal-Mart	M	57	CEO of Nonprofit Organization	Caucasian
Tom	in-person	Wal-Mart	M	65	Manager of Local Store	Caucasian
Judy	in-person	Wal-Mart	F	67	Owner of an Inn	Caucasian
Marie	online	Wal-Mart	M	59	Chairwoman for Citizens for Smart Growth	Caucasian
James	online	McDonald's	M	30	Freelance Photographer	Caucasian
Betsy	phone	McDonald's	F	28	Environmentalist	Caucasian
Casey	online	McDonald's	M	31	Assistant Manager of small business	British Caucasian
Freda	online	McDonald's	F	24	Graduate Student	Chinese Malaysian
Dave	online	McDonald's	M	20	McDonald's Employee	Scottish Caucasian

Figure 1

Findings of Online Anti-brand Communities as Social Action Groups

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I.   Why do online anti-brand communities form?

A. In response to a common sense of moral responsibility

B. To provide a support network to achieve common goals

C. In response to workplace difficulties

D. To provide resources for taking action

II.   What action strategies do online anti-brand communities engage in and how does the Internet shape those activities?

A. Action Strategies

    1. Online Strategies

        I.   Coordinated email campaigns

        II.   Donating money

        III.   Strategizing

    2. Offline Action Strategies

        I.   Resistance in the workplace

        II.   Forming local groups

        III.   Word of mouth education

        IV.   Onsite protests

        V.   Boycotting

B. Internet Shapes Activities

    1. Speed

    2. Convenience

    3. Nature of Community Formation

    4. Anonymity

    5. Widespread Viewership

III.   How does learning occur in online anti-brand communities?

A. Through Observations / Exposure

B. Through Dialogue / Discussion

C. Through Story-telling

Why Do Online Anti-brand Communities Form?

Findings suggest that anti-brand communities form in response to four motivations. First, community members share a common sense of moral responsibility. Second, the community acts as a support group in achieving common goals. Third, the community helps employees cope with common difficulties at work. Fourth, community members share resources for taking action against a common entity. Here, these four concepts are elaborated more fully.

Moral responsibility

Anti-brand communities form in response to a common sense of moral responsibility. Moral responsibility is a sense of obligation to the betterment of society. Community members collectively articulate matters of right and wrong with regard to corporate actions. When a single entity violates the group's ideology of how a corporation should function, community members feel a sense of duty to protect society from the corporation's destructive ways.

Within each of the three anti-brand groups, a common entity (i.e., Starbuck's, Wal-Mart, McDonald's) challenged community members' worldview of how a corporation should function. In response, moral systems are challenged and community members feel a common call to action. During my interviews with anti-brand community members, words such as "oppressive," "exploiting," "destructive," "unethical" and "monopolizing" were used to describe the corporations they were fighting against.

All fifteen participants in this study talked about a personal commitment to fight against a corporation. At some point in time, they all made a conscious decision to play an active role in their anti-brand campaign. Each participant decided that it was his or her responsibility to make a change. Betsy's comment encapsulates this notion. As stated by Betsy (anti-McDonald's), "I cannot ignore what this corporation is doing to our environment, our children, and our future. I

have to be an activist because I would feel guilty otherwise." Al (anti-Wal-Mart) states, "It is up to us as citizens to join together to fight these bullies." Likewise, John (anti-Starbuck's) states "it is up to me to make a change. I know that my efforts are not in vain because every single thing I do will matter in the end. That is why we have to join together to become stronger." For Judy (anti-Wal-Mart), "I made the decision to give my time to this cause because I felt like it was important to me and my future. Joining with other people only makes it better." The presence of a social moral consciousness resides in each of the participants in the study. This moral consciousness compels them to bond with other community members in an effort to improve society.

In addition to this common sense of moral responsibility, there is a common sense of urgency. Community members feel the need to act now. Every day that passes is a day that more damage is done to the environment, more employees are exploited, and more communities are encroached upon. As stated by Judy (anti-Wal-Mart), "if we do not do something now, our children will have no future." Other community members convey similar concerns:

> We have to pull together to overcome these giants...it is like David and Goliath and you remember who won. David won because he had the right morals...Our morals will not allow us to wait. We have to do something today or it may be too late (Tom, anti-Wal-Mart).

Likewise, Marie (anti-Wal-Mart) states

> If we do not protect our communities today, we will have no community tomorrow. It is our responsibility as members of our community to take control. We can take control and make it what we want it to be or we can let the corporations take control and they will

turn our communities into mini-Vegases with lots of lights and buildings and no trees or grass.

The fight against large corporations has become a moral issue. Community members feel a common sense of moral obligation to society. This encourages them to join together in their efforts. In addition, there is a common sense of urgency. Community members feel a need to act now. Prolonging efforts to get involved would only stifle an individual's internal moral sense of duty. This common sense of moral responsibility unites members, producing cooperative action and contributing to the group's overall cohesion.

Support Networks

Anti-brand communities form to provide a support group to achieve common goals. It was evident, from the onset of this investigation, that a social support network existed within all three communities. Through nurturing social interactions via the Internet, each community resembled a support group, which also served to legitimize their fight for a common cause. These support networks have three common characteristics. They are based on a reciprocal exchange, they mimic a family structure, and they are purposive. The following outlines the three characteristics of anti-brand communities as support networks.

First, anti-brand members are involved in a reciprocal exchange partnership with other community members. Relationships are based on an exchange of ideas, advice, and support. Discussion boards, chat rooms, and blogs serve as a dynamic form of relationship building where the exchange of ideas mutually fulfills the social needs of community members. "We give advice and support to each other and that is the how we stay committed to our cause" (Freda, anti-McDonald's). Relationships within the community are interdependent, meaning community members depend on each other to accomplish tasks for their common cause. As stated by Betsy

(anti-McDonald's), "We rely on each other to get our message across. It is not just one person making a change, it is all of us working together to change our environment."

Second, when asked to describe their anti-brand community, participants used similar terms such as "family," "friends," and "support" when telling stories about their website communities. Anti-brand communities provide the supportive, family-like environment necessary to achieve common goals. "I would not know what to do if it were not for this website. It helps me to know that I am not the only one fighting for my rights" (Casey, anti-McDonald's). Community members teach, guide, and support one another in their common endeavors, developing relationships that resemble close friendships rather than mere acquaintances. Social networks originating in a virtual environment portray similar characteristics as those originating in face-to-face interactions. Judy (anti-Wal-Mart) conveys, "Even though I have not met some of my online friends in-person, I feel like I know them better than some of my friends that I have known all my life. You kinda become like family because you talk almost every day."

Third, the relationships cultivated among community members are purposive in that they stimulate confidence through camaraderie. The confidence it provides individual members with serves to be useful in accomplishing common goals; however, this camaraderie is not a result of planning. Camaraderie results from the group's coming together and uniting through their common needs, goals, and priorities. When two or more people are joined together, they have the ability to strengthen each other in their efforts. Michelle (anti-Starbuck's) conveyed this by saying, "This website gives me confidence to stand up for my beliefs. I know that I am supported by my online friends and that gives me the motivation I need to take a stand." The camaraderie among community members adds immeasurable value to the community's ability to

make changes. "I would not have the confidence to take on this multi-billion dollar company without the support from this website. They have become like part of my family" (Tom, anit-Wal-Mart). Through continuous interactions, community members begin to develop a supportive and purposive social network that provides a framework for better understanding the world in which they live.

Coping with Difficulties at Work

Online anti-brand communities form to provide a means for coping with difficulties at work. Through pep-talks, sympathy, and personal counsel, community members strategize together about how to overcome challenging workplace issues such as demanding schedules, unfair pay, unsympathetic managers, or rude customers. As stated by the anti-Starbuck's website manager (Bob), "I feel like I wear many different hats. Sometimes I'm a therapist, sometimes I'm a coach, and sometimes I am a cheerleader. I try to be whatever they need me to be to help them through their workday."

In addition, employees receive ad hoc solutions to problems at work. Amy (anti-Starbuck's) states, "Whenever I need something I just go to the website and ask somebody that has already been there and done that...there's always somebody that can give you advice for almost any situation that comes up." The web community provides a social structure that is not provided at work. Community members collectively create an environment where participants can be open and honest with one another. "Sometimes we need someone that is going to tell us the truth and someone that I can trust and that is what I find online" (Freda, anti-McDonald's).

Most Starbuck's employees stumble upon ihatestarbucks.com after becoming overwhelmed with workplace conditions. In an effort to gain insight, self-assurance, and

support, the employee searches for others on the Internet with similar conditions. As stated by

Greg (anti-Starbuck's),

> I thought that I would love working at SBUX, but then I realized that it was an awful
>
> place to work because all the managers seemed to only care about themselves...I found
>
> this website because I started looking for some answers. I knew I wasn't the only person
>
> out there that was experiencing these things.

For McDonald's employees, there is a debating room on the website that is designated for

discussions about workplace resistance. Employees join together to discuss how to deal with

problems at work. As stated by Dave "It is important to stand united in a battle for workers

rights and our dignity."   Employees share stories and recommend action to one another. James

gives advice to a current McDonald's employee by stating "Mcd's is not a happy family

environment, it is one of control and fear! I urge u to reconsider your position and get out of that

job as soon as possible!".

It is evident that the anti-brand communities in this study value equality, justice, and

fairness in the workplace. Below is an excerpt that illustrates the anti-McDonald's community's

fight for equal wages and equal rights in the workplace:

> McDonald's now employ more than a million mostly young people around the world:
>
> some say a million people who might otherwise be out of work, others however consider
>
> that they are in fact a net destroyer of jobs by using low wages and the huge size of their
>
> business to undercut local food outlets and thereby force them out of business. Is
>
> McDonald's a great job opportunity or are they taking advantage of high unemployment
>
> to exploit the most vulnerable people in society, working them very hard for very little
>
> money? Complaints from employees range   from discrimination and lack of rights, to

understaffing, few breaks and illegal hours, to poor safety conditions and kitchens flooded with sewage, and the sale of food that has been dropped on the floor. This type of low-paid work has even been termed 'McJobs'. (www.mcspotlight.org)

Likewise, the anti-Wal-Mart community engages in their fight for equal rights in the workplace. Wal-Mart employees participate on sprawl-busters.com in an effort to find solutions to difficulties at work. Al, the manager of the website, states:

> A lot of employees come to my website searching for help with their job. They want to know how they can get better pay and better benefits. And because I have had so many employees ask for help, I am working on setting up some type of blog or information source where they can find out how to make a difference from the inside out...I believe the employees can play a big part in our campaign.

On all three anti-brand websites, employees search for answers in how to alleviate the stress of workplace challenges. When employees do not receive support or guidance in the workplace, direction is sought from online community members. When one employee asked what to do with all of the left-over pastries on his first night closing Starbuck's, another employee responded by saying

> What happens to all the pastries? Well, the morning pastries are thrown out after 12pm. As for the afternoon and night pastries, we store them in a container so we can serve it the day after, and the day after, etc...We only throw out those pastries IF we discover that there is mold growing on them. And that's a big IF! (www.ihatestarbucks.com)

When employees lack support and direction on the job, important organizational constructs such as employee decision-making, behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions are shaped through online discussion. For example, in response to an employee at Starbuck's who was

frustrated with not receiving enough training for his job, another employee offers consolation via

the online discussion board. The consoling employee states,

> Henry, I know how you feel. I had less than a week training before I had my own shifts,
>
> 7th day on the job and I'm opener every day at 4:30, 5 days a week. I've only been
>
> working 3 weeks now and yesterday my manager 'talked' to me for 15 minutes about not
>
> following how things are done, messing up on the register, and he's concerned if he
>
> should put me at espresso bar because I'm 'slow'...You need to keep your chin up and
>
> don't get discouraged about these 'talks.' Most of the managers don't know what the hell
>
> their doing anyway. And if it doesn't get any better you can always get another job
>
> because you seem like you have a good head on your shoulders.
>
> (www.ihatestarbucks.com)

Online communities form as a result of difficulties at work. When corporations lack a

supportive environment, findings suggest that employees search for and find solace from website

communities. Employees with similar conditions confirm that the incident is not isolated,

reinforcing a negative attitude toward the workplace. Over time, perceptions of the workplace

environment are formed which in turn, shapes the employee's behavior on the job.

Resources for Taking Action

Anti-brand communities form to provide resources for taking action. Sharing resources

is an important means for creating and maintaining a community. Whether it is keeping a

company out of a community, coping with difficulties at work, or protecting society, the website

serves as a tool to equip people around the world in taking action against large corporations.

Regarding the anti-Starbuck's case, the website was created to provide others with information

about Starbuck's unethical practices. Soon the website transformed into a central location for

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information sharing. With the anti-Wal-Mart case, the Internet served as a more efficient and effective means for reaching people and providing them with the necessary information for fighting against sprawling companies. Over time, the website became a locus for the accumulation of knowledge and coalition building. The anti-McDonald's website was created to educate people around the world about the McLibel court case. In their efforts, the website became a globalized information resource. The fight against McDonald's was no longer localized in one or two countries, rather it took on the characteristics of a global resource center for action planning in numerous countries. In all three cases, the website was created to educate others by providing resources for getting involved and taking action. This investigation found three salient types of resources for taking action: general education, links to other websites, and contact information.

First, general education resources, such as books, magazines, or newspaper articles, are posted on all three community websites. General education resources focus on current events in the media, statistical relevance of the matter at hand, step-by-step processes of how to take action, and the urgency of certain issues. Betsy conveys (anti-McDonald's),

> We try to keep the website updated everyday with new press releases. I know that many people visit our website everyday just to stay current on the things happening around the world. It is important to provide these things so that everybody can take action right where they are. It also increases communication and it helps keep us united.

Al notes that "My books on the website give people the information they need to get started. It is a beginner's guide to fighting back against big corporations...we also have a best reading list of books that are helpful." General education represents a vital social process by which the importance of the community's cause and its relevance to society are portrayed.

Second, links to other websites serve as a means for keeping community members connected and up-to-date with anti-corporate matters. For example, the anti-McDonald's website has links to other anti-fast-food sites such as anti-Burger King and anti-Wendy's. During the month of August, the anti-McDonald's website posted links to success stories that related to Burger King and Wendy's. In addition, the anti-McDonald's community sent out emails to all members on the community's email distribution list updating a Starbuck's union crisis. An excerpt from the email follows:

> Despite all the efforts by Starbuck's to deny their poverty-wage workers the right to a union, the NLRB issued a decision in favor of the union on July 2nd. They were to be allowed their right to vote in a union certification election. The shady backhand maneuvers of Starbuck's and its lawyer goons, however, took much of the sweetness out of the victory. Various scare tactics have been deployed to intimidate the workers into submission: the threat of wage cuts and loss of benefits, bribes and promotions offered to those who betray the union cause, and a general hostile work atmosphere along with a dissemination of misinformation. The Starbuck's workers, rightly seeing all this as a broader drive to crush their unionization effort, filed an unfair practice charge against the company on July 22nd, accusing them of breaking the law and trying to impede the certification election. (www.mcspotlight.org)

Cross-sharing of information provides community members with a sense of global awareness. This convergence of information creates a global, team-oriented action strategy, which takes aim at corporations in various industries around the world. When success occurs in one online community, the news rapidly spreads throughout other anti-brand communities, motivating members to remain steadfast in their campaign.

Third, group leaders serve as resources for taking action. Each of the three anti-brand communities provided contact information for one or more group leaders. Al, the anti-Wal-Mart group leader, offers to provide one-on-one consulting for individuals who aim to keep giant corporations out of their community. "I'll take time out of my schedule anytime to talk with people when they need help. That's what I am here for" (Al, anti-Wal-Mart). Likewise, Bob, the anti-Starbuck's group leader, conveyed "I will do anything to help people that come to the site. I like to think of myself as a facilitator. I facilitate action by providing the resources people need."

Resources, as those mentioned above, reinforce community members' commitment to social action by boosting an individual's self-confidence and self-esteem. Community members are more confident in their personal, social-action undertakings when they feel educated. The sharing of resources educates members and reinforces their willingness to partake in anti-brand campaigns. For Tom (anti-Wal-Mart), he needed to know more about how others successfully stopped megastores before he gained the confidence to begin his own grass-roots campaign.

> I didn't know where to begin until I purchased the book on the website and that gave me a lot of ideas. All I needed was a little boost in my ego that I could do it. It is a pretty big task to take on a huge megastore. I needed to know that I could do it and that's what this book did for me. It showed me that I could succeed.

The sharing of resources is an important process as it reinforces commonalties among group members and it serves to raise community members' confidence. This process represents important social developments by which the community's cause and its relevance are introduced to new members and reemphasized to existing members. As new members join the community, the first act of involvement is becoming more aware of the community's cause through the

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resources available on the website. Michelle states "This site rocks so hard. I never knew there were people out there like me." Through this initial awareness, community members learn communal values and they begin to feel more secure in their understanding that there are like-minded others who believe in a common cause.

What action strategies do online anti-brand communities engage in and how does the Internet shape those activities?

This research question has two objectives: (1) to investigate the types of action strategies online anti-brand communities engage in, and (2) to understand how the Internet shapes the action strategies. Thus, this question will be answered in a two-part sequence. The first part will address action strategies and the second part will address how the Internet shapes those activities.

Action Strategies

There are two kinds of action strategies that online anti-brand communities engage in: online and offline. Online strategies consist of a virtual formation of action plans such as online petitions, coordinating email campaigns, donating money, and strategizing in a Web-based forum. Offline strategies take place in a face-to-face context and include various activities such as resistance in the workplace, forming local groups, word of mouth education, onsite protests, or boycotting. Here, I will outline the components of online and offline strategies.

Online action strategies. First, coordinated email campaigns are a prominent form of online action strategies within anti-brand communities. With this strategy, a community will decide upon a day and time where all members will send emails to a company representative (e.g., CEO, Human Resource Director, Marketing Director). John (anti-Starbuck's) states "Sometimes we'll send emails to the CEO telling him that we should be paid more. I don't know if it works, but at least it gets our point across." In this collaborative effort, community members aim to get the

attention of people in positions of power. In some cases, this collaborative effort has potential to cause computer complications or, at a minimum, aggravating hassles for the person receiving the emails.

Online petitions are another form of coordinated email campaigns, used in anti-brand communities to protest specific corporate actions. One member of an anti-brand community will start the petition, explaining the importance of participation, and then send it by email to other members. Receivers of the message will add their name on the petition and then forward it to other people. Petitions may also be posted on the website, allowing members to sign it as they log-on to the site. With petitions, there is often the cross-sharing of names from one community to another. In essence, anti-brand communities have a tendency to converge their campaign efforts, sharing timely social information and addressing multiple social action issues among larger groups of people. Judy (anti-Wal-Mart) states:

> I get emails from all kinds of organizations, but we're all sharing the same information. One email may be about the political campaign and another email may be about keeping a Wal-Mart out of a small town. In the end, we are all fighting for the same things. We all want to take care of our local communities...I sign petitions almost every week. If I feel like it is for a good cause, I'll sign it.

Second, donating money online is a strategy that communities use to gain funding for their campaigns as well as administrative expenses (i.e., phone bills, electricity bills). Donations may also be requested during times of need. For example, the group leader may announce that the community needs funding for printing more informational brochures. Community members can donate money online using PayPal or a credit card. In the anti-McDonald's community, members can send checks directly to the bank. The anti-McDonald's community has a bank

account with an account name (McSpotlight), account number, sort code, and identification number. The anti-McDonald's and anti-Wal-Mart sites also offer items for purchase online such as pens, shirts, or stickers with the community's logo (e.g., Wal-Mart with a red slash, Slam-Dunking Wal-Mart, McMurder, McGarbage). These items are used for fund raising and for paying daily administrative expenses.

Third, strategizing online is a tactic used within the community which simultaneously strengthens the group's cohesiveness. Online strategizing takes place on discussion boards, in chat rooms, or in blogs. Examples of strategizing online may include: planning a protest activity together by conversing online about where to meet and how to conduct the demonstration, deciding what actions should be taken by the community to stop corporate exploitation, or developing plans for future fund raising activities. Through virtual discourse, community members decipher specific plans for action. In the anti-McDonald's community, members encourage each other to download anti-McDonald's leaflets directly from the website for widespread distribution. The community has a campaign called "Adopt-A-Store" where the plan is "to have every store 'adopted' by a local person or group who will coordinate the leafleting" (www.mcspotlight.org). Members sign up for a store online and are able to click on a link to view the status of how many stores are adopted verses how many more need adopting.

The planning of action strategies engages all members of the community, incorporating the ideas and interests of everyone. Online strategizing inculcates communal norms and values, forming the distinctiveness of the community. Through online discussions, community members gain a well-developed sense of the vast unmet social needs, which in turn, compels members to be more fully engaged in the community. Al (anti-Wal-Mart) conveys that the Internet is the key to action-planning: "the Internet has radically changed the way we take action because so much

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of our planning is done online." Michelle (anti-Starbuck's) states, "when we all stick together, we can make things happen – and that is pretty easy to do when you have the Web. With a little bit of coordination, we can make changes that affect people around the world." For Dave (anti-McDonald's), "I like discussing current events because it keeps me aware of all the things going on around the world and it makes me feel closer to my online friends. We depend on each other for that kind of stuff."

Offline action strategies. First, the most salient form of offline action strategy among anti-brand communities is resistance in the workplace. This form of offline action is often seen in angry employees (i.e., Starbuck's employees, Wal-Mart employees, McDonald's employees). Examples of resistance in the workplace may include: avoiding extracurricular workplace activities (e.g., company picnics, holiday activities), not heeding a manager or supervisor's correction or advice, giving less effort to customer service, abusing breaks or lunch times, taking money and/or things from the company, and forming small rebellious groups inside the workplace. Michelle (anti-Starbuck's) provides an example of rebellious groups in the workplace when she describes how a group of co-workers decided to streamline closing duties:

> I took on the attitude of some of the other closers in our store. We have to mop the entire store, break down pumps, close the pantry case, etc. We have to abide by a '10 minute rule' (everything happens 10 mins after the posted closing sign). Believe me there are shortcuts we learned to take, my group kept them sanitary, unlike another store where the mochas are filled to the brim and are left out of the fridge overnight so they don't have to wash anything. The way we see is that Starbuck's likes to save money any way possible and that's what we're doing.

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Employees of the brand being objected to are often quick to point out their common

negative experiences with the company. Some McDonald's employees in the anti-McDonald's

community share stories about the worst things they ever did on the job. Excerpts from two

community members who share their stories are illustrated below:

Community Member 1:

Funny how my customers were never the happy sort depicted on television. Most were

drunk and obnoxious to boot. When a drunk is especially obnoxious, I'd load his meal

with a fistful of white onion. And I've got big hands, so a fistful is quite a load. The

effect is marvelous. Since drunks will eat practically anything, the onions go down

nicely. However, the onion juice mixes with the booze lingering in their stomachs,

resulting in a 'Chuncky Slurpee'. If they don't pass out, they might call to complain, but

I simply accuse them of drinking and hang up. If they feel litigious, I still win, as onions

will never turn up on a toxicology exam.

Community Member 2:

One time a woman came in and she was really bitchy to me because I messed up her

order. I accidentally charged her for an egg biscuit instead of a plain biscuit. I didn't do

it on purpose but she complained out loud to everyone even after I apologized several

times. So when she asked for a decaf coffee, I gave her a caffeinated instead but marked

it as a decaf just to get back at her. Who knows, maybe she also had a bad day from the

extra caffeine. (www.mcspotlight.org)

Resistance in the workplace is also evident through reading stories about employee

interactions with customers on the anti-Starbuck's website. As an observer of these discussions,

one is able to visualize the experiences of a Starbuck's employee. Community members enjoy

comparing similar encounters with Starbuck's customers. The following are excerpts from the

anti-Starbuck's discussion board, which illustrate the group's collective frustration with difficult

customers.

Community Member 1:

I swear if I hear "It doesn't cost that much at the other Starbuck's" one more time, I'm

gonna hurl. This isn't the other Starbuck's, get in your BMW and drive half a block to

the one where they charge you correctly if it bothers you so much.

Community Member 2:

Don't you just hate it when customers say, 'ooohhh, the new state quarter, can I have

that?' As they reach their fat grimy hands into the tip jar?

I'm just sick of all the impatient customers, its not our fault that they have to wait one

minute. And why can't people just be nice?!?! Its OK to take a break from your day and

wait a minute on your coffee, but nooooo, they have to get all impatient and pissed.

Geeze.

Community Member 3:

My favorite drink order: "Yeah, I'll have a large black coffee with cream and sugar" How

moronic is that! The illiterate customer: "Yeah, how much is your cappuccino?" DUH,

it's right in front of you, clear as day! Or this one "How much is it with sales tax?" Do I

look like your damn math teacher? Figure it out on your own!

(www.ihatestarbucks.com).

More subtle forms of resistance in the workplace are revealed through the employee's

attitude. Employees participating in all three anti-brand web communities discussed their

attitude toward the company and how they held a personal grudge against the brand name. Amy

(anti-Starbuck's) provides an example of workplace resistance by describing her attitude toward the company's culture.

> I came to hate the 'Starbuck's culture' that the store naturally promotes (yuppies who will pay 3-4 dollars a day for their latte but who can't be troubled to tip because it might dip into their Gucci fund, etc) and just how rude those start-up, self-proclaimed aristocratic types feel they have a right to be. Those who work/worked there know the stories...In addition, internally, management was just WRONG. I have no idea who decides to hire the morons, but damn.

Anti-brand communities represent a form of employee agency by virtue of their collective nature. The community provides an audience for the employee to voice his or his opposition to corporate conduct. In most cases the community is responsive to the employee's complaints, replicating the negative attitudes or behaviors throughout the community.

Second, forming local groups in geographical proximate communities is a form of offline action. This strategy avails those who are taking action in nearby regions. Small groups, consisting of members in the online community, get together in-person to plan local campaigns. On the anti-McDonald's website, members can locate other members to form local campaigns in an effort to keep out McDonald's stores. As stated on the website:

> These pages are provided as a means for local residents to work together to oppose individual McDonald's stores. Please keep the McInformation Network and the McLibel Support Campaign informed about any proposed developments, the progress of your own campaign and any planned protests etc.
>
> (www.mcspotlight.org/campaigns/current/residents/index.html)

The web community provides success stories of successful local campaigns:

Many proposed new stores are opposed and many local campaigns have been successful despite the fact that the planning laws are generally favourable to McDonald's and the company invariably tries to use their resources and influence to override the wishes of local people.

The web community also provides instructions for meetings at the local level:

The main issues to focus on when objecting to an application are the planning related issues of traffic (congestion, parking, pollution and safety) and environment (litter, noise and smells)….We encourage and back these local campaigns, and believe that such campaigns can provoke a wider debate in local communities about some of the fundamental issues – diet and nutrition, casualisation of labour, environmental damage, misleading advertising, animal welfare and the need to question the power of multinationals.

Meeting in person adds another element of personalization to the community. Community members are able to associate a person's face with his or her name. Once that personalization element is added to the community, the community bond is taken to a higher level. More trust, more information sharing, and more commitments are cultivated during in-person meetings. Marie (anti-Wal-Mart) conveys this sense of higher-level bonding when she talks about a person's willingness to meet in a face-to-face context rather than conversing solely online:

When I meet with people in-person, we develop a special friendship. For one, that person has already put trust in me by being willing to meet in-person. When people are willing to take that step, they are usually willing to take a stand to help fight for their community. When people are not willing to meet in-person, I believe they're not quite ready to put in

the work necessary to fight back because the in-person meetings require a higher level of commitment.

Third, word of mouth education is an offline action strategy in which one person educates another person about the community's cause in the course of everyday conversation. Word of mouth education takes place on a daily basis and much of it is unconscious. Sharing information about their cause comes natural for most community members because it is something they feel passionate about. One community member on the anti-Starbuck's website states:

It's important for us to share our concerns about this company with other people. Simply taking the time to talk with your friends about your personal experiences with Starbuck's will make a difference in the long run. Just think of the impact we'll make if we all share our concerns with a few friends. Maybe Starbuck's would realize that people do care about unethical actions. (www.ihatestarbucks.com)

Another anti-Starbuck's community member encourages other members to join with her in raising awareness through word of mouth education:

I'm in high school and it sickens me to see everyone at my school drinking Starbuck's coffee. My belief on the food industry is to keep it in one area (to preserve its authenticity) and to keep prices cheap. I admit that I used to drink Starbuck's until it hit me - I've become everything I hate! But once I saw not one, not two, but THREE Starbuck's in one shopping area (two being right next to each other) that is when I needed to say something about it. My best friend and I have anti-Starbuck's logos on our folders and people seem to hate us for that. We are spreading the word that Starbuck's is an imperialistic, overpriced, awfully tasting DRUG! People say that we are doing this for attention and we are! We are trying to grab the attention of many people to support our

cause. Why can't people see that there are millions of coffee shops that taste better than Starbuck's and can get it at a way cheaper price. Let's stick together and spread the word about the evils of Starbuck's.

Word of mouth education raises the public's awareness of the community's cause and is a mechanism for recruiting new members. Judy (anti-Wal-Mart), the owner of an inn, shares how she educates her guests about the online community throughout everyday conversations. She simply directs people to the website and that is the first step in getting new members involved.

> I love my job because I get to talk with people everyday. Usually my involvement online comes up during my conversations with my guests. Several people that I meet want to find out more about certain issues or things that I am involved in and I just send them to the website. It is a great way to get the word out about all the things that are offered online. I meet so many people that want to get involved but didn't know how or where to begin.

Fourth, protests are forms of offline action strategy. Protests take place at prearranged destinations and consist of organized public demonstrations of disapproval. Online community members plan to join together in-person to protest against a certain company. Several examples of protests (by country) are illustrated on the anti-McDonald's website (www.mcspotlight.org/campaigns/countries). One such example in the United States is as follows:

> On the day of the Great American Meatout, animal rights activists blocked the entrance of a drive-thru in California with the corpse of a cow. Signs held next to the body said, 'Here's your lunch' and 'Still hungry'.

Fifth, boycotting is an offline action strategy where members deliberately refrain from having any dealing with a particular company. This includes avoiding any products, services, or events that may be manufactured, sponsored, or sold by the company. Community members urge the public and their local communities to join with them in boycotting certain brands and/or products. For example, anti-McDonald's community members pass out leaflets advising others to avoid McDonald's foods. Leaflets such as one labeled "What's Wrong With McDonald's" are passed out in Canada and can be downloaded from the community's website. An excerpt from this leaflet follows:

> McDonald's promote their food as "nutritious", but the reality is that it is junk food – high in fat, sugar, and salt, and low in fibre and vitamins. A diet of this type is linked with a greater risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes and other diseases. Their food also contains many chemical additives, some of which may cause ill-health, and hyperactivity in children. Don't forget too that meat is the cause of the majority of food poisoning incidents. In 1991 McDonald's was responsible for an outbreak of food poisoning in the UK, in which people suffered serious kidney failure. With modern intensive farming methods, other diseases – linked to chemical residues or unnatural practices – have become a danger to people too.

Other examples of boycotting can be found on the community's website at www.mcspotlight.org/campaigns/translations.

Internet Shapes Activities

There are five ways in which the Internet shapes action strategies within online anti-brand communities: (1) speed, (2) convenience, (3) nature of community formation, (4) anonymity, and (5) widespread viewership. These five categories are used to aid in

understanding the extent to which the Internet influences and advances the capabilities of social action groups.

Speed. The Internet shapes action strategies by expediting social action activities. Speed significantly advances the abilities of online anti-brand groups in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. For example, the anti-Wal-Mart community once relied on communication via a community newsletter which was sent out monthly. Now, the Internet provides a more efficient and effective means for information sharing. When events occur, community members can be updated instantly. As stated by Al (anti-Wal-Mart), "Once we have a victory in keeping a megastore out, I can immediately post it on our website for everyone all over the world to see." Community members no longer need to rely on the media to communicate to large numbers of people or to gather current information. Instead, members are able to log on to the community website any time of day to get updates. Thus, other media sources, such as the TV and newspaper, act as a secondary source of information rather than a primary source. In addition, the Internet reaches people around the world, whereas the radio or newspaper reaches only a limited number of people.

In addition to instant information sharing, the Internet also serves as a swift reminder, calling community members to action. For example, the anti-McDonald's community is able to continually remind members of ongoing events around the world. Posted on the community website are reminders of upcoming events. The anti-McDonald's community also sends out email reminders to members on the community distribution list. The following is an email reminder sent out on the 15th of October, reminding members of an event the next day:

> Saturday Oct 16th - Central London, UK Leicester Square, 12-1pm. Worldwide Anti-
>
> McDonalds Day - mass leafleting event. A celebration on the 20th annual international

anti-McDonald's day of action, and marking a year of weekly leafleting sessions at this central London branch. In solidarity with all exploited workers and customers, brainwashed children and their harassed parents - all subjected to corporate propaganda - and with the millions of suffering animals, and all those who care about the environment. Also, a celebration of the ever-growing international grass-roots campaign against McWorld which has defeated the corporation's efforts to silence public criticism.

Convenience. The Internet shapes social action strategies by making participation, information-sharing, and identification of social groups more convenient. Participation in social action activities is made more convenient through the ubiquitous aspects of the Internet. Anti-brand members with busy lives are now able to participate on a regular basis because they can contribute to the community at any location - work, home, or vacation. Loyalty with regard to participation is an important aspect of group cohesion. Online communities are able to remain loyal to the group by participating in variety of virtual ways: online discussions, donating money online, helping keep the website updated, signing online petitions, or recruiting new members. These acts of participation provide community members the flexibility to be involved without ever leaving their home.

Likewise, the ability to share information has become more convenient in online communities. Referring back to the anti-Wal-Mart community newsletter, the group leader's time in preparing and sending out the newsletter has been greatly reduced since he transferred all communication to the Web. Instead of hassling with maintaining a current address list, printing copies of the newsletter, folding the newsletters and stuffing envelops, sticking postage on the envelops, and then mailing off the growing number of letters, the group leader is now able to keep members updated on the community website. This conversion to Web-based

communication has significantly minimized the time, money, and effort expended to maintain communications within the community.

In addition, the Internet makes it more convenient for people to locate certain interest groups. Online community groups can be easily located through typing in key terms in Web-based search engines. The confluence of new members as well as funding for the community is more convenient and more successful because the Internet provides a larger pool for recruitment.

Nature of Community Formation. The Internet shapes social action strategies by influencing community formation. Community formation has changed by means of connecting diverse people groups around the world, keeping members in constant proximity, and providing superintendence for website managers. Historically communities centered around geographical locations; however, communities that are sustained online have the ability to connect people irrespective of their geographical place. It is common interests that bring community members together. These worldwide communities are rich with diversity. Group members consist of various ages, races, genders, and nationalities. Since participation is virtual, community members are not judged on the basis of certain characteristics (e.g., age, race). Rather, members are valued on the basis of their contribution to the community.

Furthermore, since the website serves as a gathering place, the Internet enables group members to invariably stay connected. For example, if a group member moves to a new location, there is no need to change an address on the community address list or look for a new group in another location. The community member can stay in touch with members throughout a re-location and continue to participate. Staying in touch and being involved is made easier through virtual participation.

The website manager also has the ability to monitor the community's formation. In all three online communities, web postings must first be approved by a web manager before being posted on the website. Therefore, the website manager(s) acts as a gatekeeper for information sharing. For example, on the anti-McDonald's website the moderation policy is explained with regard to debating rooms. Similar to the anti-Starbuck's and anti-Wal-Mart websites, unwanted postings are discarded by a moderator or website manager. The following is an excerpt from the anti-McDonald's website regarding guidelines for debating rooms:

> This is a debating room – a room for constructive dialogue and argument. It is not a forum for users to abuse or threaten other users. Neither is it a board for people to spam with obscene or illegal junk posts. To maintain some control over the tone of the debate, we are a moderated forum. When you have finished your message and sent it to the Debating Rooms, it will be dropped into a holding pen to await the moderator's attention. The moderator will look at it and either approve it (it well be posted onto one of the rooms) or reject it (if it is too obscene, objectionable or illegal). The moderators do their best to check the holding pens a number of times every day. On receiving a message, they will read through it. Providing it doesn't fall foul of moderation guidelines, they will then approve it and forward it to the appropriate room. Apart from abusive and irrelevant messages, the moderators will also reject spam messages and duplicated postings. If you have posted a message in error, send another message to the same room requesting that the first message be deleted. The moderators will be happy to oblige. (www.mcspotlight.org)

Anonymity. The Internet shapes social action strategies by providing anonymity for community members. Anonymity, in web-based communities, is made possible by the

intangible aspects of the Internet. Most participants in the anti-Starbuck's and anti-McDonald's

communities concealed their identity in community activities and during their interviews for this

study. In several cases, identities are hidden because the community member is a current

employee for the company being opposed.   For all three communities, sharing personal

identities were optional. Even the group leader for the anti-Starbuck's community did not feel

comfortable sharing his true identity. Evincing one's identity is a risky feat, since these

communities are taking action against powerful, large corporations.

As displayed in the anti-McDonald's community, "The McLibel Defendants, Helen Steel

and Dave Morris, have been fighting the $30 billion-a-year McDonald's Corporation funded

entirely by donations from members of the public and other well-wishers. McDonald's was

spending about £6,500 on the trial EVERY DAY, whereas Helen and Dave have spent approx

£35,000 since the writs were issued in 1990" ([www.mcspotlight.org)](www.mcspotlight.org). Taking on powerful

corporations such as McDonald's is a perilous project. These corporations do not sit idle while

social activists make their case. "McDonald's was busily suing (or threatening to sue) almost

everyone who criticised them."

These corporations fight back with superior finances and numerous, skilled lawyers. In

addition, many of these corporations have a large, loyal consumer-base. According to

www.sprawl-busters.com,

> Wal-Mart claims that more than 93 million Americans shop at Wal-Mart every week.
>
> Sales at Wal-Mart for the year ending February, 1999 totaled $137 billion. According to
>
> economist Tom Muller, "the average American household spends around $1,100 a year at
>
> a Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart says in 1996 that the average American spent $360 at their
>
> stores." This kind of power and influence is difficult to battle against and many anti-

brand community members prefer to remain anonymous. The Internet provides this anonymity and gives members the flexibility to decide their level of involvement.

Widespread Viewership. The Internet shapes social action strategies by achieving instant widespread viewership. Widespread viewership means that people from around the world, from different backgrounds and different countries can view the website. This is a major advantage for web-based social action campaigns. Anti-brand campaigns no longer need to expend the financial resources necessary for television, radio, or newspaper messages. The Internet provides an effective medium for free communication to a greater number of people. As stated by Al (anti-Wal-Mart), "I am able to reach a greater number of people on the Internet, so why not invest all of my time and resources into keeping the website updated."

Widespread viewership also means that the website can be viewed by pro-brand as well as anti-brand advocates. This works in favor of the anti-brand community since the community has the potential to educate and reform pro-brand people into anti-brand people. However, on the other hand, widespread viewership has the ability to inform pro-brand advocates of action strategies which they can fight against. In a sense, it is like sharing your plan of attack with the enemy.

By the same token, corporations are paying more attention to these anti-brand websites. In an effort to convince their consumers they care, corporations are trying to implement positive campaigns that contradict the anti-brand communities' negative messages. For example, in Wal-Mart's grand opening ceremonies for its new stores, the company showcases retirees' testimonies proclaiming how happy they are to work at Wal-Mart. Also, during the grand opening, small business owners are recruited to give their personal testimonies of how much they enjoy working with Wal-Mart. In fact, the small business owner emphasizes how Wal-Mart will

actually help him grow his business instead of hinder it. In addition, free gifts are given to grand opening participants, expressing how much Wal-Mart is committed to the community.

Likewise, these corporations are taking specific action steps to counter the anti-community criticism, proving their commitment to customers. For example, after receiving ridicule about unhealthy foods, McDonald's began to offer more healthy meals on its menu. The anti-McDonald's community claimed victory when McDonald's avowed to eliminate trans fat from its cooking oil. Although McDonald's made this claim, the anti-McDonald's group says the company did not follow through:

"America's favorite French fries are about to get even better," claimed McDonald's in a 2002 press release announcing that the company would reformulate its cooking oil with less trans fat. McDonald's received tremendous favorable publicity for the move, which the company said was a step toward eliminating trans fat from its cooking oil altogether. But in 2003, the company backtracked with significantly less fanfare. A terse press release stated cryptically that McDonald's would "extend the timeframe" for the change, which still has not occurred. McDonald's is now being sued in California by BanTransFat.com, Inc. for misleading the public about the abandoned switch. (www.mcspotlight.com)

Governments and court systems are also giving attention to the voices of campaigners. The morning of February 15, 2005, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the two Britons who libeled McDonald's did not have a fair trial, indicating that the trial breached the European Convention on Human Rights Article 6 (right to a fair trial) and Article 10 (right to freedom of expression). The court ordered Britain to pay the pair $45,400 in compensation and

offer a retrial. After 20 years of campaigning, the anti-McDonald's community celebrates in its victory.

The McLibel 2 commented on February 15, 2005:

Having largely beaten McDonald's, and won some damning judgments against them in our trial, we have now exposed the notoriously oppressive and unfair UK laws. As a result of the European Court ruling today, the government may be forced to amend or scrap some of the existing UK laws. We hope that this will result in greater public scrutiny and criticism of powerful organisations whose practices have a detrimental effect on society and the environment.

The McLibel campaign has already proved that determined and widespread grass roots protests and defiance can undermine those who try to silence their critics, and also render oppressive laws unworkable. The continually growing opposition to McDonald's and all it stands for is a vindication of all the efforts of those around the world who have been exposing and challenging the corporation's business practices.'

(Helen Steel, 39 & Dave Morris, 50) the McLibel applicants (www.mcspotlight.org)

Although corporations, governments, and court systems are paying more attention to these anti-brand community campaigns, corporate efforts to improve their brand image are not always ethical. Anti-brand communities have taken on the roles of conveying important and timely information, but at the same time they act as moral regulators, pointing out unethical corporate actions. Since anti-brand communities have widespread viewership, unethical or false claims by corporations can be proclaimed instantaneously to people around the world.

How does learning occur in online anti-brand communities?

Learning takes place in online anti-brand communities through a combination of three knowledge-building vehicles: observations, dialogue and/or discussion, and storytelling. Through observations, community members learn by reading postings of other members without necessarily posting a reply. In web-based dialogue and discussion, community members learn together by conversing about various issues, using technology to send messages back and forth. Through storytelling community members generate knowledge by sharing meaningful stories based on personal experiences. The following illustrates these three aspects of informal learning within anti-brand communities.

Observations / Exposure

Observations/exposure is defined as the event that takes place when a silent bystander reads community emails and other information on the website without making his or her presence known. The bystander learns about the community's goals, values, and strategies through exposure to website interactions and members' virtual behaviors. The bystander is able to observe how the web community forms, interacts, and functions, gaining a holistic view of the group's virtual interplay. Online observations/exposure play several roles in the unification of anti-brand communities. First, the culture of the community is learned. Second, the core values of the anti-brand community are conveyed to others. Third, website visitors make decisions about whether to join a community based on observations/exposure. Fourth, members learn vicariously through observing other members' conversations. Fifth, common vocabulary terms are learned. Sixth, inside political information is learned about the anti-brand corporation. These six aspects of online observations/exposure are discussed here.

The culture of the community is central to learning because the culture influences how learning takes place. Members become aware of the community's culture through observations. For example, certain ways of communicating and behaving are encouraged while others are discouraged. For the anti-brand communities examined in this study, the culture of each community is manifested through cultural characteristics such as common vocabulary terms, patterns of discourse, joint sense-making, and socialization patterns. These communicative styles are learned through observations. "If I have a problem at work, I like to go online and get other opinions about it. That is what I have learned to do and other people in my same position do the same thing. We have learned to depend on each other" (Michelle, anti-Starbuck's). Online observations provide insight into the culture of the community and the culture is revealed through the collective practices of community members.

In addition, the core values of an online anti-brand community are learned through observations. Website visitors observe online discussions, read about success stories, and become familiar with the community's social actions. Observations are critical in the visitor's decision to become part of the community. During this observation time, a visitor is either convinced or unconvinced about the importance of the community's goals. If the observer is convinced, s/he will become more engaged in the community. If the observer is unconvinced, s/he will become disinterested in the community. "When I found this site I was like 'WOW' I'm not alone, people really care about the same important issues" (Lucy, anti-Starbuck's).

When inquiring about how members found their online community, it became evident that most members stumbled across the website after doing some kind of web search. After finding the website, members typically observed for some time period before joining in conversations and becoming part of the community. This observation time period can range

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anywhere from five minutes to several days. During observations, members learn about the relevance of topics being discussed, the importance of timely actions, and the rewards of group efforts. "I just went online and found the site and after reading all the stuff about McLibel, I knew that I wanted to be a part of this group…everything just made sense to me" (Casey, anti-McDonald's).

In addition, members also learn through observing other members' discussions. By reading through the various discussion topics, members learn by being a silent third party in conversations among other members. From this vantage point, members are able to survey problems or scenarios through the eyes of two or more people. Members learn through role-playing problems or scenarios. They are able to see the viewpoints of those conversing by putting themselves in the position of another person. As one person from the Starbuck's community states: "Well I'm new to the Starbuck's family but I have already learned so much by reading through the stories on this site. Thanks for giving me a heads up on what to expect on the job" (Lucy, anti-Starbuck's).

From observations, common vocabulary terms are learned. As a researcher, I was able to gain an understanding of common terms used through observing online conversations. For example, I learned what it means to be a barista at Starbuck's. I also learned about how difficult the job is and how community members equate the responsibilities of a barista to that of a bartender. Community members also learn new vocabulary terms from each other. One member of the anti-Starbuck's community states to another member: "Just wanted to say, Siren, you cracked me up with that ghetto latte. I'm gonna have to steal that term from you" (www.ihatestarbucks.com). Anti-brand communities provide a liberating environment where members are able to create their own vocabulary by appointing special meanings.

Political information occurring within anti-brand corporations was also learned through observations. New processes or evaluation procedures were learned online first by some Starbuck's employees before they heard about the changes in the workplace. "The website keeps me updated on new things coming down the pipes at work. I learned about the new closing procedures online before my manager ever mentioned it to me" (Michelle, anti-Starbuck's). In the anti-McDonald's community, employees of McDonald's are encouraged to participate in the World Day of Action Against McDonald's in order to exercise their rights. Members learn about their rights through observing the experiences of other workers. Following is an excerpt from a posting on the website regarding employees participating in the World Day of Action Against McDonald's:

> We've just received this information from a concerned employee at a drive thru store in the north of England [We are withholding the store details to protect our source]. The store has posted this official notice on the crew notice boards: "No employee will demonstrate or associate with the media against McDonalds on October 16th whether scheduled to work or not. Those who are caught doing so will be liable for immediate dismissal." This outrageous threat shows the panic the company gets in when workers want to think for themselves or exercise their rights. It is thought to be illegal, in contravention of the European Convention on Human Rights. We in the McLibel Support Campaign call for solidarity with McDonald's workers, for support for their efforts to improve their wages, conditions and rights to work, and for support for their human rights to freedom of expression. (www.mcspotlight.org)

Another member in the anti-McDonald's community shares insider-knowledge about internal company reports:

On October 12th 1992 Mark Hopkins, a worker at a McDonald's store in Manchester, was electrocuted by a faulty fat filtering machine. A secret internal company report into the incident concluded: "Safety is not being seen as important at store level." The same year, a confidential investigation into McDonald's UK by the UK Health and Safety Executive concluded: "The application of McDonald's hustle policy [i.e., getting staff to work at speed] in many restaurants was, in effect, putting the service of the customer before the safety of employees." A McDonald's Crew Training Programme at the time stated: "Q. When do you hustle? A. All the time."

Through observations, community members gather information to aid in their own personal situations. Gaining insiders-knowledge about political information on-the-job keeps community members informed. As a result, community members feel a sense of freedom from the controlling efforts of oppressive corporations.

Dialogue and Discussion

Personal growth is a core construct in the notions of informal learning. The lifelong process of learning serves as a liberating and satisfying activity for the individual. Discussion venues within online anti-brand communities act as a support system for this personal venture. As stated by John (anti-Starbuck's) "I learn a lot from being part of online discussions. I feel like it makes me a better individual and that is satisfying." Involvement of two or more members in the discussion of timely issues creates an environment for stimulating intellectual growth. Community members are connected to the same ideas and as a result they become connected to each other. Judy (anti-Wal-Mart) conveys, "Online discussions are where people really learn from each another. You can't always rely on the local news to inform you of all that is going on, so we rely on each other."

Dialogue and discussion for all three communities examined in this research study take place in organized online discussion formats. The anti-McDonald's community uses debating rooms that are designated for discussing certain topics. The anti-Wal-Mart and anti-Starbuck's communities use discussion boards to facilitate conversation. These discussion areas maintain safe environments for core community members to grow and develop intellectually. Judy (anti-Wal-Mart) states, "When things happen and I don't understand why, it helps me to go online and find out what others think. It just helps to process the information with a group. We can feed off each other and come up with a logical explanation."

Whether it is getting advice about job-related problems or sharing thoughts about the company as a whole, the online community environment provides a sense of self-worth to individual members. In essence, community members feel that they have a great deal to contribute to discussions. Lucy (anti-Starbuck's) expresses this idea of self-worth by stating:

> When I first went to work for Starbuck's I was so excited and dedicated to my job. I understood I was going to make crap for pay and that the shifts were demanding hours. Then I got promoted to Shift Supervisor. Yay me I thought. Then I realized that no matter what I did my manager would never ever be happy because she's a ruthless witch with no home life and nothing better to do than spend all her time at a lousy freaking store where everyone 'partner' there hates her except for the ones stuck so far up her hiney they can't see the light of day. The only sense of self-worth that I get from my job is going online and talking with my fellow i-hate-starbuckians. That is the only reason I know that I am normal and most of the people I work with are not. I am far too smart to stay in this crap hole of a company. I plan to get out soon. For now I will keep on

helping other Starbuck's captives. I can help them not to feel so confined just like other people on this site did for me.

In online anti-brand communities, members are of equal status. Although some community members may put more effort toward keeping the community active, all are working toward the same endeavor. The community represents a working team rather than a hierarchy of defined roles. This democratic structure is very effective in generating knowledge. It creates a social participation structure that builds upon prior knowledge.

Because discourse patterns are continuous, online communications facilitate continuous learning and knowledge. Members are able to scroll back to view narratives from days, weeks, months or even years prior. Members respond back and forth to one another about specific topics following a cyclical pattern. As an observer of online discussions, I was able to track communications about certain topics between two or more individuals. Through tracking this continuous dialogue, individual learning is made more evident. The exchanging of ideas through the use of discussion boards, chat rooms, or other online discussion hosts, creates a virtual learning environment where individual ideologies are challenged and general knowledge of the group is expanded.

My field notes on August 20th noted "there is often a challenger of ideas who poses questions to the group." The individual who poses questions is integral to knowledge creation within the group. Community members who respond to the questions posed are in a sense defending their positions or viewpoints, confirming and ameliorating the morals, values, and goals of the community. Observers of such dialogue filter through the narratives to decipher their own points of view, becoming a more devoted group member or remaining at the periphery.

The following is an excerpt from the anti-McDonald's community, which reveals this method of learning. Four community members exchange ideas in a debating room reserved for discussions about capitalism. The culture of anti-brand communities is one that values equality, honesty, and freedom. The culture clearly influences the way informal learning is carried out, as members are assertive and ardent in sharing their ideas. As demonstrated below, community member A challenges the worldview of community member B. When reading through the dialogue between these two individuals, it becomes evident that community member A asks questions while community member B responds to questions. Community members C and D are observers of the conversation, joining in at the end to state their own beliefs.

Community Member A:

The capitalist system encompasses pretty much everything you can get in a shop around the world; and the major transnationals have an almost unimaginable amount of power over what you buy. Merely boycotting one chain is like trying to kill an octopus by cutting off one tentacle. Do you think your efforts are really paying off? For 3rd world countries, capitalism is our best hope of material improvement. You do have a point in that it has to be regulated, but not obliterated like you seem to recommend. One more thing for you to remember: What to you in your comfort seems like wretched misery, is often actually an improvement!

Community Member B:

Have you ever seen the conditions children in third world countries work under as a result of capitalism. Or does your own pampered position as an economics student at a Western university grant you a magical insight into the minds of the half-starved workers in places like Keyhinge Toys? Let's think again why working conditions are so bad. It's

because the Far East is used as a giant production line for cheap goods. Western policy in this region has been geared to producing this situation for much of the last 50 years; see http://.cia-on-campus.org/internet/indo.html for an example.

Community Member A:

What has this to do with Western Capitalism? It's got more to do with corrupt local regimes formenting local wars and local corruption. Sure, it's your mantra that capitalism is the root of all evil, but that doesn't explain why countries like Syria and Vietnam manage to be relatively successful without toeing the western line. Yours is also something of a condescending view: apparently all those poor third world people are completely helpless and completely pliable, they have to do exactly what the West says.

Community Member B:

Because the world trade system is set up to favour the rich countries at the expense of everyone else, it does make people in third World counties helpless. Check on UN Development Project figures; over the last 40 years of free-market policies, the gap between rich and poor has increased in real terms.

Community Member A:

What does it matter if the gap between rich and poor is widening, when these statistics also show that things are steadily improving for the poor? Take a look at the trend in life expectancies if you disagree.

Community Member B:

The quality of life is more important than the quantity of life. These giant food chains are ultimately focused on profits, and the profits will go into the pockets of shareholders; little if any will go into the community.

Community Member C:

Perhaps we cannot prevent this world from being a world in which there is suffering. But

we can lessen the number of those suffering (and the degree of their suffering). And if

you do not help us do this, who will?

Community Member D:

I really envy you Westerners. You people have the luxury to debate and fight over

sparing the lives of those suffering and even the lives of cows and chickens.

(www.mcspotlight.org)

Anti-brand community websites provide an informal setting where informal teaching and

learning takes place. Social networks within theses communities consist of multitudinous

relationships where people learn from not just one member, but several community members.

Discourse between group members is a knowledge-generating activity where members with

different frames of reference come together to build one congruent community mindset.

Differences between community members are debated in online discussions, coalescing core

community members and fundamentally making the community as a whole more unified.

Storytelling

Storytelling within online anti-brand communies is a medium for learning by means of

sharing common experiences. The like-mindedness of the community is conveyed through the

portrayal of meaningful stories. Storytelling brings authenticity to the discourse that takes place

within online anti-brand communities and is typically based on real world experiences.

Artistically, the storyteller takes his/her reader on a journey where the reader is able to visualize

the experiences of the storyteller. As stated by an anti-Starbuck's community member after

reading other members' stories:

Well, I've been working at a SB in Seattle for almost 3 months now, and I'm starting to see how truly candid the people on the site are. What you all are saying are very true and I've experienced them as well, so I sympathize with all of you poor college kids working in this crappy job. (www.ihatestarbucks.com)

Storytelling is an important process as it reinforces the morals, values and goals of the community. It also assists new members in learning the communal ethics of the group. In other words, ethical values are depicted such as the kind of stories that are accepted and not accepted within the group. For example, the anti-brand communities examined in this study do not allow offensive or vulgar language; thus, this type of language is not used in storytelling.

In addition, anti-brand members share interpretive strategies, which serve to explain the meaning of events or occurrences. As a result, the community develops a method of decoding societal trends. The following is a story from a member who decodes the false advertising of McDonald's. He feels that he lives in a society where people are brainwashed by McDonald's. His story reminisces about a time when he was on a bus that stopped at the fast-food restaurant for a meal. He refused to partake in the gluttony. The disgusted traveler shares his story, with the expectation that fellow members will understand, sympathize, and learn from his experience.

On our way back from a school excursion, we approach the big yellow M towering, for thousands of motorists to see. "Macca's!" "Yeah, let's get McDonald's" scream my fellow peers. It soon becomes a chant. "Macca's! Macca's! Macca's!" Our teacher hastily agrees. His bulging gut, hungry too. Everyone cheers. Except me. They all pile out of the bus and run towards the putrid smell of poisoned food, into the greed that is this fast food chain. I sit and watch from the bus. Those poor fools, I bitterly think. Contributing to the destruction of our planet, filling themselves with heart disease, stroke and cancer.

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Supporting the inhumane slaughter of billions of animals, the destruction of nature. Also feeding the greed of the multi-billion dollar franchise. Many people have admitted to me that they don't actually really enjoy the food, many find it putrid. Then why eat it? Kids at school often break into a Macdonald's advertising jingle. Anyone would think it was a hymn from the bible. How ironic. I remember in primary school, famous football players visiting our school to sign autographs and kick novelty footballs with the McDonald's logo on them. The popularity a child would receive after announcing his birthday celebrations at McDonald's, while they choke down their 'happy meals'. The praise parents would place upon McDonald's for their 'selfless contribution to charity'. I see that clown with the fiery red hair, his mad grin beckoning the ignorant. Turning away in disgust I now realize why they all run to the 'golden arches'. Years of being drilled, brain washed with the clean, healthy image of Mc D's has made them ignorant fools. Oblivious to the harm done by those seemingly innocent arches of gold. If this is gold, I prefer dirt! I'm sure some of you understand my disgust. I hope others will learn from our efforts and avoid getting sucked into the madness. (www.mcspotlight.org)

Following is a reply to the previous story. This member responds by sharing her common experience. Through her story, she encourages other members to think for themselves, make their own choices and avoid following the crowd:

It looks like many Australian school students have shared the experience of being forcibly delivered to McDonald's on the way home from long school excursions. I too have sat outside various highway McDonalds while my classmates (or worse, extended family) ate burgers inside. McDonalds does not exist in my world. I completely ignore it and have not eaten there or been inside one for nine years (I'm 23 now). If you feel that

teachers are going to "force" you to go to McDonalds, Hungry Jacks and other fast food chains, you CAN ask them to provide an alternative. If you don't want to go there you don't have to and it's their responsibility to help you find somewhere else to eat. I congratulate the younger people (particularly the folks between 13 and 16) who have posted opinions in this thread for their independent thought and their courage in subverting the dominant paradigm. Most of all, I encourage everyone who reads this to demonstrate (with their own behavior) the alternatives to blind adherence to the mob. People generally are not forced to eat at McDonalds. A lot of people like it and choose to go there. A lot more, however, never decide. They just go. The same way they consume so many other products simply because they are there, and they are slickly marketed. Question Things, Think, Choose.

Personal experiences are shared and retold over and over again. Common stories shared among members create a sense of fellowship and camaraderie within the community. This, in turn, creates a feeling of trust among members. When that trust is cultivated, members begin to open their minds, and learning begins to take place. For example, members on the anti-Starbuck's website share stories about high prices and bad coffee. Following is an excerpt from members' storytelling. Community members A and B share their personal stories about purchasing coffee at Starbuck's and community member C learns from the storytelling:

Community Member A:

Went to Starbuck's today. The latte was 3 dollars and I actually found that the cup was half empty because of all the milk foam. What a ripoff! Don't the regulars realize there is actually about 20 cents of product in that cup? What a joke.

(www.ihatestarbucks.com)

Community Member B:

Hi, I understand what you are talking about. I love eggnog and noticed that Starbuck's had an eggnog latte, so I tried one, and it was good, because you can't taste the pigswill coffee. So, like an idiot, a few days later I decided to try another, but asked for it nice and hot this time (big mistake) because the first one was lukewarm at best. Dude behind the counter, a person (with 6 people in line and counting) gives me a holier-than-thou lecture about how it will "scramble" the eggs in the cup if they make it hot. Huh? So next day I go to Peet's (what I drink at home, and love), see that they have the eggnog latte, order it and ask for it hot, and guess what? I got a hot eggnog latte! Imagine that! Starbuck's gags me and every time I go in one of them out of desperation, I mutter "landfill, landfill, landfill" like a homeless person. I just can't stand the place, and now that Peet's has eggnog latte, I ain't going back!

Community Member C:

I am a recovering Starbuck's addict. I used to drink their coffee everyday until I came to this website. Reading your stories made me realize that their coffee is not that great and their prices are way too high! I can't believe that I gave my money to that place for so long. They have invaded/infested my hometown and I'm pissed off about it. We already have great coffee houses (like Carpe Diem), and they sell coffee that is cheaper and better-quality coffee than anything Starbuck's sells. I agree with you – I ain't going back either!

Personal stories are symbols of the group's values. Members learn about the importance of certain issues through storytelling. For example, on the anti-Wal-Mart website, members share their personal interests in preserving the environment. When reading stories posted on the

site, the group's values and goals are palpable. Following is an example of this type of value-led storytelling:

If you phone City Hall in Toldeo, Ohio, they answer by saying: "Toledo, Ohio, An All-American City." The effects of suburban sprawl in Toledo are certainly all-American. When I went for a walk in downtown Toledo, I passed the old Lamson dry goods store: 9 stores of empty retail space. Each floor is the size of a football field. The building served as the home of a Macy's Department store from 1924 to 1984. For the past fourteen years, the store has been empty. The City now owns it, which means the taxpayers of Toledo are paying the freight for its upkeep. Meanwhile, on the edge of the city, Home Depot is building its second huge warehouse store, each only five miles apart. The city actually let Home Depot demolish dozens of apartments to make way for the second Home Depot. A stone's throw away from the Home Depot construction site sits an empty Builder's Square, and across the road, an empty Handy Andy. These are all monuments to the inefficiency of retail sprawl. The strip malls of Toledo have literally stripped downtown Toledo of its people, and its character – at the expense of the all-American taxpayers. (www.sprawl-busters.com)

Below is a story from the anti-McDonald's website. One member shares his frustration with unpaid overtime. He suggests that his treatment at work is unfair and seeks for others to join him in forming a union:

I used to have a real job, but was laid off last year. I had been consulting as an engineer and a programmer for McDonald's, but I went to work there full time after the layoff. I had hoped it would be brief, but with a Bush in the White House, escape won't be easy. If one can cook a hamburger, one can do about 80   percent of my duties. My boss is a

micromanager and a tyrant. Whether I'm being berated for using an unauthorized scrap

of cardboard for packaging material or shoveling mud from a sump while being told this

job is for people who can think, I can tolerate it. What I CANNOT tolerate is the time

shortages and abuses of labor laws. I'm generally stuck working unpaid overtime at the

end of the day. My boss conveniently ignores the Federally mandated overtime wage.

Adding insult to injury, I was made to sign a document forfeiting my final paycheck

unless I give notice of my intention to quit. This kind of treatment is unfair. I've been

keeping all of my pay stubs as evidence of the overtime I'm owed. Anyone interested in

starting a union? Anyone else my boss has attempted to hire has just run away screaming

within a week. Maybe I am just better off turning him in to the authorities after I quit?

(www.mcspotlight.org)

The following is another story from the anti-McDonald's website illustrating one

member's idea of capitalism and how it unconsciously controls people's life. Without taking

time to examine worldly influences, the storyteller suggests that consumers are sucked into an

endless and meaningless cycle of unhealthy consumption.

I lost 20 pounds by giving up all fast food, soda and candy. Do I regret it? Not one bit!

The USA is the largest fat country in the world. Gee, I wonder why? McDonald's food

is not only fattening, but the burgers have no doubt been frozen in the back of the store

for a long time, and the only thing they do to the fries is take them out of the freezer and

oil them. Tempting right? Well, I believe if we had healthier options maybe America

would be thinner. I mean I was just following the crowd and doing whatever the media

told me to do. Every time I turned on the television or radio I was bombarded with

another fast food commercial. When I got hungry, the first thing I would think about

eating is some fast food burger that I saw on a commercial. I was in this never ending

cycle of consuming food that was giving me heart disease, high cholesterol, and obesity.

I was being controlled by the mass media and told what I should and should not eat.

Finally, I decided that I was not going to be controlled anymore. We're told everyday

that fast food tastes better than healthier foods, and in reality healthy foods taste better

and make us feel better. Such is the reality of capitalism! Big companies don't really

care about its customers - they are just concerned about making profits!

(www.mcspotlight.org)

Through storytelling, community members feel reassured that there are others who are

like-minded about the issues being discussed. Sharing stories is also a form of socialization

where members enjoy companionship with one another. Sharing experiences builds rapport

among members and stories generally center around commonalities. Members often feel that

they have a better understanding of society when other community members confirm their

beliefs. Finally, storytelling is a community ritual where members learn from others' stories.

This learning experience coalesces members and unifies the group.

Part 2 Summary

In summary, Part 2 of this chapter presents the findings. Findings answer the following

research questions: (1) Why do online anti-brand communities form?, (2) What action strategies

do online anti-brand communities engage in and how does the Internet shape those activities?,

and (3) How is knowledge generated in online anti-brand communities?

Data analysis revealed four motivations as to why anti-brand communities form. First,

community members share a common sense of moral responsibility. Moral responsibility is a

sense of obligation to the betterment of society. Community members feel a common call to

action to ameliorate society. Second, the community acts as a support group in achieving

common goals. A social support network serves as a nurturing and motivating resource for

social activists. In online anti-brand communities, social interactions are cultivated via the

Internet. Third, the community helps employees cope with common difficulties at work.

Community members strategize together about how to overcome challenging workplace issues

such as demanding schedules, unfair pay, unsympathetic managers, or rude customers. Fourth,

community members share resources for taking action against a common entity. Sharing

resources, such as book references, Web links, media reports, and personal contacts, is an

important community-building activity.

Regarding the second research question, data analysis revealed two types of action

strategies: online and offline. Online strategies consist of a virtual formation of social action

activities such as online petitions, coordinating email campaigns, donating money, and

strategizing in a Web-based forum. Offline strategies take place in a face-to-face context and

include activities such as resistance in the workplace, forming local groups, word of mouth

education, onsite protests, and boycotting. In addition, there are five ways in which the Internet

shapes these action strategies: (1) speed, (2) convenience, (3) nature of community formation, (4)

anonymity, and (5) widespread viewership.

For the third research question, data analysis revealed that learning takes place in online

anti-brand communities through a combination of three knowledge-building vehicles:

observations/exposure, dialogue and/or discussion, and storytelling. Through

observations/exposure, community members learn through reading other members' postings

without necessarily posting a reply. As a silent bystander, the community member observes the

community's virtual functioning. In web-based dialogue and discussion, community members

learn together by conversing about various issues, using technology to send messages back and

forth. Through storytelling, community members generate knowledge based on personal

experiences.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative case study was designed to understand the nature of anti-brand communities as a form of social action. The investigation was guided by three research questions. First, why do online anti-brand communities form? Second, what action strategies do online anti-brand communities engage in and how does the Internet shape those activities? Third, how does learning occur in online anti-brand communities? In addressing these questions, 15 community members were interviewed from three web-based communities: anti-Starbuck's, anti-Wal-Mart, and anti-McDonald's. In response to these questions, three sets of interrelated findings were inductively derived from the data using the constant comparative method of analysis.

Chapter four presents an overview of the findings. Data analysis revealed four distinct reasons why anti-brand communities form: 1) in response to a common sense of moral responsibility, 2) to provide a support network to achieve common goals, 3) in response to workplace difficulties, and 4) to provide resources for taking action. Anti-brand communities employ two types of action strategies: online and offline. Findings suggest the Internet radically affects these social action strategies in five major ways: 1) speed, 2) convenience, 3) nature of community formation, 4) anonymity and 5) widespread viewership. Learning occurs within online anti-brand communities through story-telling, dialogue, and web-based resources.

Conclusions and Discussion

This chapter presents three conclusions based on the findings identified in Chapter Four. The three conclusions are first, online anti-brand communities represent one form of social action for the 21st Century; second, the online medium is able to maximize potential for social action strategies; and third, online anti-brand communities are important sites for learning. Here, these conclusions are presented in relation to the current literature, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research.

Conclusion one: Online anti-brand communities represent one form of social action for the 21st Century.

Dykstra and Law (1994) define social movements as "the coming together of relatively large numbers of people around a commonly held set of values or notion of rights (human and/or social) in order to bring about social change" (p.122). The anti-brand movement meets these criteria and is an important form of social action. However, as noted in Chapter Two, the anti-brand movement is one aspect of a larger movement of movements. This complex movement of movements is situated around globalization, growing income disparity, reactions to an American empire, and emerging technologies (Hill 2004). "It contests empire building, the so-called war on terrorism, racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, bigotry, and discrimination based on age, ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation and gender identity, creed, native language, and other forms of oppression" (Hill, 2004, p. 89).

This study solely focused on the anti-brand segment of this movement of movements and found that it has three distinct characteristics of social movements as defined by Dykstra and Law (1994). First, community building takes on a new definition by extending the boundaries of communication, strategizing, and coalition building. Second, the study of anti-brand

communities has revealed a new form of consumer activism and is a means for achieving

individual freedom and justice. Third, the anti-brand movement represents an emerging social

movement and when juxtaposed with old and new social movements, it has similarities and

differences. Here, these three aspects will be discussed and they will illustrate how online anti-

brand communities represent one form of social action in the 21st Century.

Community Building

The three anti-brand communities in this study represent a new way of understanding

community and how communities are formed. Although the communities in this study are

initiated and sustained online, they resemble the characteristics of everyday communities

discussed in previous studies. For example, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) found three traditional

markers of community: shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral

responsibility. Likewise, this study found that anti-brand communities have similar markers of

community. Analogous to Muniz and O'Guinn's study of brand communities, anti-brand

communities also have a shared consciousness and a common sense of moral responsibility.

Anti-brand members collectively believe that it is their duty to better society. This belief is a

shared awareness of a common duty to society as a whole and is based upon the notion that "if I

do not act who will" (Judy, anti-Wal-Mart). Bender (1978) describes this connection as "we-

ness." Members feel an important obligation to fight against the brand, but they feel an even

stronger connection to one another (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

In addition, anti-brand communities partake in community rituals and traditions such as

exchanging ideas online through the use of discussion boards, chat rooms, and email distribution

lists. In these discussion forums, community members exchange ideas about how to cope with

workplace difficulties, share resources for taking action, and encourage one other to uphold their

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responsibility to society. Action strategies also constitute a ritualistic form of community behavior. Rituals bind community members together and stabilize the community environment (Bell & Newby, 1972; Reiss, 1977). Anti-brand communities partake in ritualistic actions in both online and offline environments. Online rituals consist of coordinated email campaigns, donating money, and strategizing. Offline rituals consist of workplace resistance, forming local groups, word of mouth education, onsite protests, and boycotting.

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) suggest "rituals and traditions represent vital social processes by which the meaning of the community is reproduced and transmitted within and beyond the community" (p. 422). Likewise, this study found that traditional forms of behavior, such as online communication and community action strategies, are social processes which maintain the culture of the community. In agreement with Johnson (1999), this study found that community customs, rituals, and traditions benefited all learners. These communal processes play an important role in the construction of the meaning and purpose of the community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Historically, community has been a core construct in social, political, religious and scholarly discourse (Dewey, 1933; Freud, 1928; Kant, [1781] 1996; Marx, 1907; Nietzsche, [1886] 1990; Weber, 1924). Community is generally defined as a united group having social relations marked by mutuality and emotional bonds with shared activities, beliefs, interests, and commitments (Sanders, 1975; Selznick, 1992; Shaffer & Anundsen, 1993). The idea of a community has evolved from a "geographically situated" to a "non-geographically situated" united group. For example, early studies described community in terms of a population, geographical territory, common culture, common areas, social interactions, and shared social systems. (Bell & Newby, 1972; Bender, 1978; Boorstin, 1973; Jonassen, 1959; Reiss, 1977;

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Tonnies, 1887). More recent descriptions emphasize a non-geographically bound community where individuals are unified through Web-based resources (Howard, 1997; McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Rheingold, 2000). Other studies, examining the learning that takes place in communities, emphasize the importance of social and political conflicts and how community members learn through negotiating interests (Cervero &Wilson 1994; Sergiovanni, 1999; Tilly, 1999).

This study corroborates recent studies and provides evidence that the Internet extends the definition of community. Online anti-brand communities represent a new community model which is central to our understanding of social interaction in the 21st Century. Online anti-brand communities are built upon virtual social interaction and even though they are not geographically united, these groups still manifest common characteristics of community such as reliance upon one another, joint decision making, social identification, standardized procedures for socializing and communication, and commitments to each other and the group. Although this study did not find evidence for the negotiation of interests, it may be due to the limited sample size and/or the movement's nascent stage. With further investigation, this community characteristic is likely to be found. In sum, online anti-brand communities are prime examples of a new, evolving community model.

Consumer Activism

Anti-brand communities represent a new form of consumer activism situated within a virtual context. In agreement with recent scholarly work, anti-brand communities constitute an emergent social movement (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Holt, 2002; Ozanne & Murray, 1995). According to Holt (2002), "the most puzzling aspect of the anti-branding movement...is that it takes aim at the most successful and lauded companies" (p. 70). Within anti-brand communities,

socialization is situated around common detestations of a brand (Dobscha, 1998). As seen in the anti-Starbuck's, anti-Wal-mart, anti-McDonald's communities, the fight against large corporations unities individuals together.

Firat and Venkatesh (1995) and Ozanne and Murray (1995) discuss the present consumption culture and provide methods for consumer liberation through reflectivity and resistance. These studies suggest that by reflecting on the nature of our consumption-oriented society, consumers can combat the pressures to consume. This study corroborates their suggestions by illustrating that consumers are able to resist marketing practices imposed by major corporations. Through online discussion and reflection, the anti-brand community members in this study were able to escape potential controlling mechanisms of the marketplace. For example, these online communities provide an environment where employees reflect on and discuss workplace oppression, consumers encourage one another to avoid fast-food conveniences, and shoppers are motivated to support locally owned businesses. Community members free themselves from culturally accepted practices (i.e., submissive employees, reliant consumers) and feel a common obligation to help others find freedom.

Moreover, these communities have experienced successes in the fight for their cause. For example, the anti-McDonald's community celebrates when McDonald's is required to provide their employees with longer break times, to provide healthier options on fast food menus, and to stop advertising to children. The anti-Starbuck's community shares successes of local coffee shops winning legal battles against Starbuck's for trying to monopolize the coffee industry. The anti-Wal-Mart community finds success in keeping mega-stores, such as Wal-Mart and Home Depot, out of small town America. These anti-brand communities are making an impact on

society and much of their success is due to the speed, convenience, and widespread viewership of the Internet.

Compared to Old and New Movements

Mayer (1989) states "the ultimate standard for a social movement is the extent to which it changes the world for the better" (p. vii). The current movement upholds this standard due to the recognition anti-brand communities are gaining through their successes. The accomplishments of anti-consumption groups are gaining increasing attention from scholars (Dobscha, 1998; Holt, 2002; Zavestoski, 2002b). Tilly (1999) states that a social movement is recognizable when "it consists of a sustained challenge to power holders." The anti-brand movement is a sustained challenge to powerful corporations. It is sustained in the sense that online anti-brand communities have been in existence for the past decade and the number of communities continue to grow. For example, the three anti-brand communities in this study have all been in existence for more than 10 years; the anti-Starbuck's community is in its most nascent stage, initiated 11 years ago. In addition, each anti-brand community in this study has grown three-fold in size from the time of its inception.

The anti-brand movement also represents a new categorization of social movements in the adult education literature. Currently there are two categorizations of social movements: old social movements and new social movements. Old social movements fought for freedom, justice and emancipation (Finger, 1989) and occurred between the years 1945 and 1970. Old movements are associated with the labor movement, the human rights movement, and farmers' movements (Finger, 1989). New social movements are more recent movements commonly associated with deprivation in the basic kinds of physical, personal, and social existence (Offe, 1985). New movements include "the green movement, the new peace movement and all kinds of

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religious and spiritual movements" (Finger, 1989, p. 17). Both new and old categorizations are broadly defined, involving a range of characteristics. However, neither of the two categorizations fully encompass the characteristics associated with the online anti-brand movement. This study found that the online anti-brand movement represents a convergence of old and new social movement issues.

The issues discussed in anti-brand communities range from workplace equality and corporate domination to environmentalism and marketing propaganda. Furthermore, anti-brand communities do not solely target just one company. Although the communities examined in this study focused most of their resources toward one particular company, none of these anti-brand communities excluded other companies from their debates, discussions or actions. As demonstrated in the excerpt below, the anti-brand movement takes aim at all powerful and oppressive corporations:

> We are not for one moment saying that McDonald's is the only corporation in need of public scrutiny and debate. Due to its massive public prominence and indisputable arrogance it has simply been used as a symbol of all corporations pursuing their profits at any price. Many of the issues raised on McSpotlight can therefore equally be applied to any of the other big corporations, or even to entire industries. (www.mcspotlight.org)

In sum, historical social movements tended to focus on one or a limited number of issues such as women's rights, gay rights, or environmental protection. As demonstrated in the findings of this study, the anti-brand movement has a number of intermixed goals ranging from environmental protection, small town preservation, animal rights, and employee rights. This integration of issues is a prominent characteristic of the anti-brand movement that provides a new approach to understanding modern social movements.

Although this characteristic sets the anti-brand movement apart, there are similarities between the anti-brand movement and old and new movements. "In the old movements the status, role, and function of the individual is defined in relation to the development of modern society" (Finger, 1989, p. 15). The emphasis in old movements is how individuals change in relation to societal changes. According to Finger (1989), in new movements "the individual becomes increasingly a central focus" and "social transformation will occur through the transformation of the person" (p.15). Holst (2002) states that new social movements center on "personal transformation rather than simply using education to transform society" (p. 81). The emphasis in new movements is how the individual views himself/herself in relation to society. The anti-brand movement bridges the ideals of old and new movements and is similar to these historical movements in three visible ways.

First, in relation to old movements, the anti-brand movement also aims to protect social and political freedoms, equal economic distribution and fairness in the workplace. For example, the findings of this study illustrate how anti-brand communities fight for the same issues discussed in old social movements. Equality, justice, and fairness in the workplace played a major role in the construction of the community. For all three communities, the anti-Starbuck's, anti-Wal-Mart, and anti-McDonald's, there were employees of that corporation who took part in regular discussion and action planning.

Like old movements, the anti-brand movement also aims to protect social and political freedoms, and promote equal economic distribution and fairness in the workplace. For example, the findings of this study illustrate how anti-brand communities provide a support network to achieve common goals. Equality, justice, and fairness in the workplace were common goals among community members and workplace difficulties were found to be a major reason why

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anti-brand communities form. For all three communities, the anti-Starbuck's, anti-Wal-Mart, and anti-McDonald's, there were employees of that corporation who took part in regular discussion and action planning.

Second, in relation to new movements, the anti-brand movement also aims to protect personal identities and provide personal autonomy. Regarding personal identities, anti-brand communities provide a support network for emancipation from burdensome marketplace influences. Baudrillard (1989) describes a system of cultural meanings that are associated with marketplace commodities. When consumers purchase a commodity they are ascribing to their "cultural code." The anti-brand movement is a backlash against these predetermined societal structures. In anti-brand communities, members are able to escape encoded cultural schemes and repressive social meanings. In agreement with Ozanne and Murray (1995), anti-brand members emancipate themselves by engaging in reflection and reason with other community members. Marsick (1988) also emphasizes the importance of reflectivity and critical reflectivity in communities.

In addition, anti-brand communities provide personal autonomy for its members by providing resources for taking action. For example, the anti-Starbuck's community website has a link called "Latté Litigation." Here, individuals are able to talk about their legal struggles in keeping unique local coffee shops in business and/or their personal struggles against Starbuck's exploitation of workers. This discussion link gives individual community members personal autonomy by providing the confidence and knowledge to stand up to corporate giants and follow through with legal actions. Following is an introduction to this discussion area illustrating the need for personal autonomy:

It has been brought to my attention that there are a lot of people who are involved in legal

actions regarding Starbuck's. So, I am starting another section of the site to list contact

information for these people. If you want to be, should be, or already are involved in

litigation, please send me your email address so that I can put you all in touch with each

other…You all need to stay strong and united to win your personal battles. This is a way

you all can tell your stories and boost other's confidence. (www.ihatestarbucks.com)

Third, similar to old social movements, the anti-brand movement also strives for equal

economic distribution. Finger states that old movements "mainly fight for a more equal

distribution of the fruits of modernization and development...and they seek to establish new,

sometimes simply inverse power relations" (p. 17). Likewise, the anti-brand movement fights

for economic change. The following illustrates the need for social reform through economic

transformation. The anti-Wal-Mart community proposes that mega stores use a type of "sprawl-

math" that will eventually lead to a loss of jobs, a collapse of small town communities, and

environmental degradation. This example and others are available on the anti-Wal-Mart website:

Companies like Wal-Mart and Home Depot utilize a form of "sprawl-math", which only

looks at gross impacts on a community--never of the net effect of their stores. Sprawl-

Math is not taught in local school systems. It's a form of developer's calculator that had

no minus pad to subtract out jobs lost, or revenues diverted. The real truth about Wal-

Mart and Home Depot, and the rest of the sprawl-mathematicians, is that they represent a

form of economic displacement, not economic development. I know that Wal-Mart

understands their fiscal impact claims are one-dimensional. The best proof I have of that I

found in a most unlikely place: Volume 26, Issue 10 of Wal-Mart Today, from October

of 1996. This is an internal "associate" newsletter that Wal-Mart says is "your window

into our Wal-Mart world". There, in a column called "Wal-Mart Culture", is a quote that should be written on the side of every Wal-Mart superstore in the nation: "At Wal-Mart, we make dust. Our competitors eat dust." --Tom Coughlin, Executive Vice President, Operations Wal-Mart Stores Division. (www.sprawl-busters.com)

Equal distribution is an integral part of the anti-brand movement. Similar to old social movements, this movement also considers the "problems of modern society as stemming from unjust and unequal power relationships among people" (Finger, 1989, p. 17). In response to this crisis, the anti-brand movement seeks to establish new societal standards for economic development.

Conclusion two: The online medium is able to maximize potential for social action strategies.

The Internet is a new innovation that has changed the way people communicate, interact, and function (Levin & Cervantes, 2002; Rheingold, 2000; Shumar & Renninger, 2002; Sierra, 2003). Inherently, the Internet has also changed the way people participate in social action. Instead of meeting in-person, the Internet enables virtual meetings. Instead of sending updates by mail, the Internet offers a faster more efficient way of communicating. Rather than educating others about a cause in face-to-face contexts, the Internet provides a creative, effective means for educating others through web-based resources. Instead of groups forming around geographic conveniences or likenesses, the Internet enables groups of people from around the world to form on the basis of common values.

The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of social action in the 21st Century and illustrate how the Internet provides a novel learning environment. More specifically, this study's findings reveal unconventional methods for taking action and propose that these new actions are flourishing. Online anti-brand communities are an important form of

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social action and these virtual communities demonstrate the recent changes in social action. This study illustrates current societal changes affecting social change and is a harbinger of future social movement proceedings.

Since the anti-brand movement has been sustained and in most cases initiated via the Internet, this virtual nature alone separates the anti-brand movement from preceding movements. Historically, social movements originated in a geographical pattern where the focus is on local activism (Finger, 1989). The Internet provides tools for expanding social movement endeavors by going beyond local formation. Social movements originating online have great potential because greater numbers of people are able to get involved irrespective of the place, time zone, or funding (Rheingold, 2000).

When compared to old and new movements, the anti-brand movement is distinguished by the range of community. The Internet provides the virtual capability of involving people from around the world with little funding necessary. Likewise, the availability of resources for the anti-brand movement is far greater than geographically situated movements. Scholars suggest that the Internet will profoundly change the way communities form, the way people communicate, and the way people learn (Levin & Cervantes, 2002; Rheingold, 2000; Shumar & Renninger, 2002; Sierra, 2003).

Spencer (1995) examines learning within unions and suggests that individual survival in the workplace depends on the collective actions of many. Similarly, the anti-brand movement depends on the collective actions of website community members. Social action campaigns are able to take place solely online and through these virtual tactics, social change takes place around the world. Thus the anti-brand movement is distinguished for its immense capabilities.

The Web facilitates the coming together of large numbers of people by gathering together an unlimited amount of people from diverse areas around the globe. The boundaries of social change are dramatically extended when examining the global effects of modern social movements sustained through online strategies. This study found that the Internet dramatically shapes modern social movements through speed, convenience, the nature of community formation, anonymity, and widespread viewership.

Dykstra and Law (1994) offer a formative analytical framework that describes the educative nature of social movements in terms of vision, critical pedagogy and pedagogy of mobilization. Using Dykstra and Law's framework, this study corroborates their findings and demonstrates how the Internet maximizes social consciousness, organizing and building, continuing participation and coalition and network building. Here, the findings of this study will be interwoven and discussed within Dykstra and Law's framework.

Social Consciousness

Social movements engage people in "purposive activities that try to influence the way other people learn to interpret the world" (Dykstra & Law, 1994, 122). The Internet enhances the way people learn and communicate in social movements. Anti-brand community websites serve as a creation and recreation of knowledge. Knowledge is shared liberally and copiously with the assurance of anonymity. Outsiders are able to visit the website and learn about the social causes of the community. On the anti-Starbuck's, anti-Wal-Mart, and anti-McDonald's websites, various links guide visitors in their understanding of the importance and timeliness of their cause. The Internet also serves as a speedy catalyst for knowledge sharing. Visitors gain a new understanding of the cause at hand by reading through the most recent and up-to-date news releases, literature, discussion, and personal stories posted on the site. This form of outreach and

education ultimately reaches large numbers of people and attracts new community members. The widespread viewership offered via the Web poses as an innovative method for community recruitment by reaching new members through technological capabilities.

Through online discussions, community members engage in questioning every day occurrences, "stripping the realm of the routine from its habitual foundation" (Dykstra & Law, 1994, p. 123). Web communities have the ability to unmask the relations of power and control by dialoguing with one another about how society unconsciously gives power to those in authority. Critical thinking skills are being strengthened in these web communities through online discussions about political, economic, and social forces influencing daily routines. A compelling aspect of online social action is the fact that these discussions are endless. Dialogue about certain issues can go on for days, months, or even years. With technological abilities, discussions can be tracked over time, compiling mounds of information and involving input from a number of different people.

Organizing and building. Dykstra and Law (1994) state, "social movements are more than organization with structures, however loose, and a membership, however loosely defined" (p. 124). The virtualness of the Internet provides even more looseness to the definition and organization of social movements. The convenient aspects of community involvement transcend geographically bound communities. This study found that in Web-based social action communities, there exists a core group of community members. These members volunteer the most time and typically maintain the website and lead or monitor discussions. From this core, the next level of involvement is among regular members who participate on a weekly or monthly basis. Then, the outer core includes people who are interested in the cause and participate on occasion. This series of interactional cycles where learners move from peripheral participation

to central participation is consistent with prior research (Bateson, 1972, 1979; Lave & Wenger, 1991). The Internet enhances participation because it provides individual members with the flexibility to be in control of their involvement and be able to participate at any location.

Members can participate in online social action as much or as little as their time permits. Online participation can be as simple as signing an online petition and sending it on to the next person and/or donating money online. On the other hand, members can be more immersed in participation through ongoing dialogue and discussion and/or volunteerism in managing the website. For example, some individuals in online anti-brand communities participate very little in ongoing discussions but play an important role in donating money. Others participate in online discussions because it is convenient to join in dialogue at work, home, or while traveling. Participation from diverse regions is one of the most salient contributions the Internet provides for modern social movements. The Internet has the ability to connect people from various geographic regions with common values. These common values hold the community together with loosely defined memberships and loose organizational structures, making participation in social action more convenient.

Continuing Participation

Shumar and Renninger (2002) suggest that virtual learning communities are more flexible and durable than physically situated learning communities. This study corroborated this notion by finding that speed and convenience provide more adaptable and enduring advantages. Unique to the literature discussing online learning communities is the nature of community formation, anonymity, and widespread viewership. These aspects have been given little attention because virtual learning communities have not been studied within the context of social movements. In the social movement literature, little attention is given to the fact that virtual

social action communities are likely to be more diverse on the basis of age, race, gender, and nationality.

This distinction, when compared to historical social action communities, has potential to enhance action strategies because members with diverse backgrounds will provide diverse viewpoints. Rheingold (2000) suggests that relationships within virtual learning communities are no longer defined by gender, age, national origin, and physical appearance . Diversity significantly shapes the nature of community formation because groups no longer unite around visible commonalities or likenesses. Rather, individual interests and values are the bonding criteria for virtual communities.

Furthermore, diversity is an advantage to modern social movements because it stimulates "thinking outside the box." Diverse viewpoints in social action planning facilitate more creative, unique, and comprehensive action strategies. According to Kilgore (2001) "the most significant contribution to our understanding of adult learning...is the recognition and theoretical inclusion of the diversity of learners" (p. 60).

Likewise, aspects of anonymity and widespread viewership are novel factors to consider when examining virtual social action communities. Historically, it was much more difficult for social activists to remain anonymous. Anonymity in social action communities means that more people can participate without the threat of losing one's job or endangering one's family. Widespread viewership is a factor that Shepard and Hayduk allude to as being a method for proselytizing other social action members (Shepard & Hayduk, 2002). Widespread viewership can also be used as a tool for gaining corporate attention.

Coalition and Network Building

The online medium maximizes the potential for social action because it is conducive to the world in which people live. Anti-brand members in this study participated in community activities on the job, on vacation, at home, or on the road. One member in the anti-McDonald's community participated in online discussions while commuting back and forth to work on the train. This was the only free-time available to participate in community discussions. The activities of everyday life in the 21st Century are inherently dependent upon technology.

For most of the community members in this study, communication between community members took place solely online. In other words, there is rarely an exchange of phone numbers or street addresses. This virtual relationship building and community bonding phenomenon is ultramodern, especially for those who still remember the days before the life-altering induction of the Internet. Online social action communities are outgrowths of a society intertwined with technology. These new forms of social action are capable of influencing large numbers of people, developing skills to bring about social change, and making changes fast.

Conclusion three: Online anti-brand communities are important sites for learning.

The theoretical framework providing organization to this study is that of social movements in adult education. This literature is based upon the notion that social movements are important learning sites (Finger, 1989; Foley, 1999; Holford, 1995; Holst, 2002; Kilgore, 1999; Spencer, 1995; Welton, 1993; Youngman, 2000). According to Holford (1995), social movements "make profound contributions to knowledge" (p. 105). Holst (2002) suggests that the literature has a tendency to dismiss the importance and nature of learning in social movements. "This reluctance stems from (a) viewing social movement practice as political and not educative; (b) the tendency in adult education to dismiss informal education in everyday life;

and (c) the increasing professionalization of the field" (Holst, 2002, p. 81). This study

demonstrates that learning is an important integral part of the anti-brand social movement.

For example, various methods of online learning were revealed. Finger (1989) suggests

that learning occurs within social movements through: (1) experiential learning, (2)

consternation, (3) holistic learning, and (4) identity learning. This study found that these four

learning concepts also take place in online anti-brand communities, using the Internet as the

primary conduit for learning. In this study, learning occurred through observation/exposure,

dialogue and discussion, and storytelling, all of which took place in a virtual context. Here, the

findings of this study will be compared to Finger's analysis of learning within social movements.

Experiential learning is pragmatic; learning comes from experience and actually means

"learning through life's experiences" (Finger, 1989, p. 21). Anti-brand communities learn from

experience though online encounters. As a group, anti-brand communities engage in action-

planning strategies and learning occurs through discussion and dialogue. This type of learning

experience is grounded in everyday activities. Learning through consternation signifies learning

experiences that occur as a result of feelings of distress. The findings of this study suggest that

anti-brand communities form to provide a social support network. Though sharing grievances in

a virtual context, identities are protected. This provides an environment conducive to sharing

personal stories and experiences that in a face-to-face context may be withheld.

Holistic learning refers to learning in everyday life that integrates 'whole' societal

aspects. The idea is that we are all interconnected and we all share the same world. Within anti-

brand communities this type of ecological learning occurs due to the pervasiveness of corporate

chains. Since corporate chains have become such an omnipotent part of society, people cannot

ignore their existence. Thus, learning together about how to overcome these powerful entities

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becomes a holistic venture, incorporating ecological aspects of society such as environmentalism.

Identity learning is an extension of holistic and consternation learning and is an "elaboration of a personal identity" (Finger, 1989, p. 21). In social action communities, members begin to form a new personal identity that coincides with the group's identity. Brown and Duguid (2000) indicate that learning is a demand-driven, social identity process. Overtime anti-brand community members began to see themselves as social activists. For example, the website originator for the anti-Starbuck's community did not create the website with the intentions of being a social activist. However, eleven years later he acknowledges that the site is purposeful for social action and social justice and he asserts that he is a "wholehearted social activist" (Bob, anti-Starbuck's).

Kilgore (1999) presents a theory of collective learning, discussing how learning takes place within group-based settings such as social movements. Kilgore (1999) conveys, "understanding learning in social movements requires not only a concept of the group as a learner and constructor of knowledge, but also an understanding of the centrality of the group's vision of social justice that drives it to act" (p. 191). Similarly, this study found that online anti-brand communities are social networks bonding people with common goals. The online community serves as the constructor of knowledge and the community's vision drives social action strategies.

This study found that anti-brand communities form in response to a common sense of moral responsibility, to provide a support network to achieve common goals, in response to workplace difficulties, and to provide resources for taking action. In all four instances, group-centered attributes are rooted in the motives of anti-brand community formation. The group then

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becomes a catalyst for individual and societal transformation. As a group, more tasks can be accomplished, more voices gain greater attention, and more like-minded individuals create camaraderie and group cohesiveness. These factors produce a fertile environment for learning.

This study corroborates and extends Kilgore's collective learning theory by demonstrating how collective learning takes place on the Internet. As suggested by Kilgore (1999), to solely examine individualized learning would "not adequately explain a group as a learning system" (p. 191). Collective learning is a group-driven process that "occurs among two or more diverse people" in which shared meanings are constructed (p. 191). By examining the group as a learning system, a deeper understanding of learning can be conceptualized. Lave and Wenger (1991) found that learning is a socially constructed phenomenon. Wenger (1998) suggests that learning is socially constructed through "routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts" (p. 83).

Choi and Hannafin (1995) convey that the context, the general atmosphere, physical setting and concurrent background events, influence the learning process. To solely examine one anti-brand community member's learning experience would exclude the learning environment provided by the group as well as the technology that sustains the community. The group creates the learning environment and acts as the provider or stimulator of knowledge. For example, in a situation with a pupil and tutor, to examine the pupil's learning without taking into consideration the tutor would be the same as examining the learner within a social movement without considering the other members of the movement. Thus, online social action communities learn and act together to promote their shared ambitions and the group provides the framework for studying this phenomenon.

According to Holford (1995), movement intellectuals are "key in an adult educational analysis of social movements" (p. 106). Movement intellectuals are individuals who see their role as "working with (or even initiating) a movement" or those who are "seeking to play a part in formulating and structuring its organizational knowledge" (p. 106). Movement intellectuals "articulate, interpret and lead" the social movement and therefore, these individuals play an important role in the learning process (Holford, 1995, p. 106).

Movement intellectuals have a lot of control over community members and much of the time this control is not fully realized. These leaders "may indeed lack reflexivity about their role, but they are often highly conscious of the political significance of knowledge" (Holford, 1995, p. 108). In the anti-Starbuck's and anti-Wal-Mart communities, there was a clear, observable community leader. This leader distributed knowledge and initiated the sharing of knowledge among members. In both cases, the leader saw himself as an agent of change and was aware of the political significance of knowledge. As suggested by Holford, a leader's "primary concern is with strategy rather than the legitimacy of program aims" (p. 107).

Nevertheless, it is not only community initiators or website originators who are movement intellectuals. In the anti-McDonald's community, there were several movement intellectuals and it was difficult to identify one leader who was more influential than others. This community had a group of movement intellectuals who worked collectively as an informal team to lead, interpret, and act as a resource for other members. So there are movement intellectuals at both the individual and group level. In both cases "their existence involves constructing and asserting views of aims, methods, and rationales; they will have specific communicative cultures, certain forms of knowledge and reasoning" (Holford, 1995, p. 107).

Implications for Practice

As stated by Welton (1993), social movements are "particularly privileged sites for emancipatory praxis" (p. 152). Social movements are central to both adult education and its role in cultural transformations, social learning, and cognitive processes (Finger, 1989; Holford, 1995; Welton, 1993). Thus, this study has important implications for adult educators. One of the most salient contributions of this study is the notion of group-driven learning within social movements.

Educators in various positions (i.e., college professors, program planners) can benefit from learning to plan for the group. Focusing solely on individualized learning will inadequately meet the needs of group learning that takes place in settings such as seminars, workshops, or classrooms. As stated by Kilgore, "group distinctions include collective identity, group consciousness, solidarity, and organization" (p. 191). Practitioners can plan better for groups of learners by understanding the collective nature of the group.

In addition, the Internet influences learning and this has important implications for practitioners. Adult education has long been associated with "the radical democratic tradition" and this tradition conceptualizes "education as something that is ordinary" (Dykstra & Law, 1994, p. 121). In other words, learning occurs in the context of everyday life. By understanding how the Internet has transformed society, practitioners can adapt instruction techniques to current technological innovations.

Dykstra and Law convey that "the world in which people live and all the activities that take place within it are inherently educative; thus the terrain of education encompasses all sites of formative influences" (p. 121). Practitioners are in positions to study these emerging social transformations and analyze the education occurring within everyday contexts. Finger (1989)

suggests that cultural transformation taking place within social movements will make traditional forms of education increasingly obsolete. Anti-brand communities provide a basis for examining modern Web-oriented social movements and their potential to bring about change. According to Dykstra and Law (1994), "social movements are shaped by specific national or regional cultures and politics and thus must be analyzed in their specific historical, cultural, and political-economic context" (p. 124). Thus, social movements provide educators and practitioners with a better understanding of transformations taking place in historical societies, diverse cultures, and political and economic contexts.

Implications for social activists can be gathered from this study as well. The Internet provides a new medium for taking action and conducting coordinated campaigns. This study illustrates how social activists learn and the importance of group-driven learning processes. As Lave suggests (1996), community building must focus on the social rather than psychological theories of learning. Activists are not only in a position of understanding their own social action endeavors, but others as well. By acknowledging the group as a central aspect of social movements, activists can improve social action strategies and contribute to shaping our culture by becoming movement intellectuals. According to Holford (1995), the movement intellectual is key in creating social change.

As social activists, it is particularly important to understand the effects of the Internet in modern social movements in order to be able to effectively organize coalition infrastructure. This study provides an examination of how the Internet shapes movements through speed, convenience, community formation, anonymity, and widespread viewership. It also provides specific tools for communication and awareness such as the use of listservs, blogs, discussion boards, or chat rooms. By understanding the advantages of the Internet, social activists can

respond to change and adapt to environmental circumstances more quickly. Social action strategies that incorporate innovative technologies have more flexibility and an ongoing availability of resources.

Community organizers and policy makers will also benefit from this study. For example, if a community would like to limit or restrict large corporations from entering into their area, this study provides basic coalition ideologies necessary for initiating social action (i.e., understanding why social action groups form, how they take action, and how learning takes place). Understanding foundational principles of social action will provide strategic planners, community organizers, and policy makers with the structure needed to design and implement successful campaigns.

<center>Recommendations for Future Research</center>

The purpose of this study was to understand the nature of online anti-brand communities as new forms of social action. Based on the research findings, this study identifies several issues that merit further research. First, it would be valuable to examine opposition against corporations originating in other countries such as Britain, France, Germany, or Canada. Replicating this study with a sample that opposes companies based in countries other than the U.S. could present a way of exploring similarities or differences in cultural, political, and economic forces. All of the brands in this study were Americanized brands (brands that represent an American, capitalistic society). Future research could further examine the anti-brand movement to clearly define the parameters. For example, is the anti-brand movement specific to American brands? Or, does the anti-brand movement include brands that originate in other countries? If the anti-brand movement is specific to American brands, could this movement be a portent of an anti-American world movement?

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Second, future research could examine pro-brand sites. Are there groups that organize to resist anti-brand notions? As a counter movement, pro-brand groups may rise up to support corporations by demonstrating their loyalty to the brand. These groups may form to disclaim anti-brand notions.

Third, future research could explore how anti-brand participants learn through conflict by negotiating interests. With the vast number of participants involved in the anti-brand movement, there are inevitable sources of conflicting personal, social, and political interests. This study did not find conspicuous sources of conflict. However, this may be due to the nascent stages of the movement. Along those same lines, future research could examine class differences. All the participants in this study were educated, having computer skills and some form of higher education. In addition, most of the participants were Caucasian. Future studies could examine class and racial differences to determine if these same issues exist among various classes and races.

Fourth, little research is available that compares social action groups from around the world. How do social action and coalition strategies differ in other countries such as Ireland, New Zealand, Sweden, Finland, Japan, or South Korea, where the majority of activists are from that specific country? The sample from this study consisted of 15 people and of those, only three were not Caucasian-Americans. To date, social movement research has focused on social action within specific geographic regions. Thus, it would be interesting to explore the cultural differences in the way social movements form and take action. Or, does the Internet obfuscate the lines of cultural differences, making social action strategies more similar than different? Habermas (1989) suggests individual autonomy is imagined, and so is the autonomy of a particular culture.

Fifth, future research might consider exploring learning and group identity formation. Since this study found that the group plays an important role in the structure, communication, and organization of social action, future research could use Kilgore's (1999) collective learning theory to explore the interplay between individuals and groups, and between groups and other groups within a sociocultural context. Kilgore suggests, "collective identity is frequently different from any particular individual meaning" (p. 200). Thus, future research might explore the collective learning process of developing a collective identity and "the nature of that identity – shared goals, meanings, strategies" (p. 200). In addition, as adult educators, it is critical to examine movement intellectuals, how they perceive their role and how they use their positions to fully understand the group-learning processes that take place within social movements.

Sixth, developing individual identities presents a relatively unexplored area of research in online social action. Since the Web offers the capability of masking identities, the ability of such behavior unequivocally affects social action participation. When reviewing the findings of this study, predictions can be made that suggest an increase in social action participation as a result of anonymity. Future research might examine how anonymity affects one's decision to participate and the extent of involvement in social action. For example, will individuals partake in immoral or unethical actions (that are not typical of their behavior) as a result of their anonymity? How does anonymity influence relationship building, trust, and group member support? Future studies could explore how individuals are able to keep their social interactions within the community liberating, rewarding, and beneficial, despite the unknown identities of other group members.

Seventh, future studies could compare the effectiveness of online verses non-online social action groups. This comparison could include outcome measures, types of strategies used,

communication methods, and/or methods of learning and information sharing. As such, a list of effective strategies could be developed for educators as well as social activists.

Eighth, methodological recommendations for future research would include examining the vastness of this topic by confirming this study's contention that online anti-brand communities represent a new form of social action. In the onset of this study, a brief exploration on the Web revealed a large number of action and education oriented sites that focused on some form of social action. Before narrowing to three case studies, an overwhelming number of websites were identified as potential sites for in-depth examination. In order to understand the ubiquitous nature of the movement, quantitative measures could be used to capture the parameters of online social action. These measures could be administered on the Internet. By posting surveys on the Web, data could be gathered from around the world. In addition, a study assessing the number of websites and the features of those websites would be useful for adult educators in knowing how swiftly this new form of social action is taking place and the various methods each site uses to take action. A compilation of the methods used in online social action groups would reveal the most popular forms of communication and coalition building and possibly the most effective forms.

Chapter Summary

Based on the case analysis of three online anti-brand communities, three conclusions were presented. First, online anti-brand communities represent one form of social action for the 21st Century. Second, the online medium is able to maximize potential for social action strategies. Third, online anti-brand communities are important sites for learning.

Community building takes on a new definition by bringing together large numbers of people. Individuals unite around common goals. This represents a new type of community by

extending the boundaries of communication, strategizing, and coalition building. In addition, anti-brand communities represent a new form of consumer activism. This type of activism takes place on the Internet and it is a means for achieving individual freedom and justice. In addition, the anti-brand movement is an emerging social movement, converging several issues under one umbrella. This convergence of ideas separates the anti-brand movement from both old and new movements.

The Internet is another criterion that separates the anti-brand movement from both old and new movements and it plays an important role due to its innovative abilities to join large numbers of people. Using Dykstra and Law's (1994) framework, this study corroborates their findings and demonstrates how the Internet maximizes social consciousness, organizing and building, continuing participation and coalition and network building. These issues extend the traditional boundaries of social change and influence the way people communicate, interact, and function.

Finally, this study identified a number of ways in which learning takes place within social movements and how the Internet facilitates these learning processes. This study corroborated Finger's (1989) suggestions that learning occurs within social movements. In addition, Holford's (1995) notion of movement intellectuals was substantiated, providing evidence that they play an important role in the learning process. This study also illustrates how learning occurs in groups (Kilgore, 1999). As Kilgore notes, understanding learning in social movements is to understand "the centrality of the group's vision of social justice that drives it to act – mostly in conflict with other groups – in the larger social, economic, and political fields of meaning making" (p. 191). In online anti-brand communities, the group constructed a vision of social justice and this vision drove the community to action.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participant _____

Date: Place: Start Time: End Time:

Demographic Questions:

Real Name: _____

Selected Name: _____

Age: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Occupation: _____

Interview Guide

1. How did you find out about this group?

2. What made you want to join this group?

3. What commonalties do group members share?

4. Tell me the story behind your decision to fight for your cause. What specific event or circumstance influenced you to give your time to this cause?

5. Tell me about the things your group is trying to accomplish.

6. Tell me about a time when your group did something and was successful at accomplishing your goal.

7. Tell me about a time when your group was faced with a specific challenge. How did you overcome this challenge?

8. What action strategies have you found to be most successful?

9. What is an example of how the Internet helps you accomplish your goals?

10. Tell me about how you learn information about your cause. How do you keep yourself aware of current trends?

11. How do you educate other group members about new information or upcoming events?

12. How do you educate outsiders about your cause?

13. How do you recruit new members?

APPENDIX B

VERBAL CONSENT FORM

Verbal consent script:

I'm Candice Hollenbeck from the University of Georgia-Athens, from the Department of Adult Education. I am conducting research <u>Consumer Activism on the Internet: The Role of Anti-brand Communities</u> and would like to know more about online social action groups. This interview should only take <u>60 – 120 minutes.</u>

The purpose of this study is to understand the nature of online communities as a form of social action. You will not benefit directly from this research. However, your participation in this research may lead to information that could improve an educator's understanding of how informal learning takes place within online social action groups.

- Your part in this study will last for approximately 60 - 120 minutes.

- You will be asked open-ended questions posed by the researcher.

- The interview process will be audio tape recorded.

- The audiotapes will be erased or destroyed by June 2006.

- No discomforts or stresses are expected.

- No risks are expected.

- You may be contacted again in order to test the plausibility of the findings.

- All information concerning you will be kept confidential. If information about you is published, it will be written in a way that you cannot be recognized. However, research records may be obtained by court order.

Do you have any questions?

Let me assure you that any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. In final research products I will disguise your identity by utilizing a fake name. I will be audio taping our conversation. Your participation in providing me with information on consumerism activism is completely voluntary and you may discontinue our interaction at any time or skip any question you don't want to answer.

Do you agree to participate?

[If yes, continue]

[If not, say "Thank you for your time, good bye]

If you have any other questions you may contact me at 706-308-0143. My mailing address is

Candice Hollenbeck

Department of Adult Education

University of Georgia

850 College Station Road

Athens, Georgia 30602

My email address is Hollenbe@uga.edu

APPENDIX C

IN-PERSON CONSENT FORM

I agree to take part in a research study titled "Consumer Activism on the Internet: The Role of

Anti-brand Communities", which is being conducted by Candice Hollenbeck, Department of

Adult Education at the University of Georgia, 850 College Station Road, Athens, Georgia, 30602

(706) 308-0143 under the direction of Dr. Sharan B. Merriam, Department of Adult Education

(706) 542-4018. I do not have to take part in this study. I can stop taking part at any time

without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me

returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to understand the nature of online communities as a form of social

action. I will not benefit directly from this research. However, my participation in this research

may lead to information that could improve an educator's understanding of how informal

learning takes place within online social action groups. If I volunteer to take part in this study,

the following outlines my part in the research process:

- My part in this study will last for approximately 60 - 120 minutes.

- I will be asked open-ended questions posed by the researcher.

- The interview process will be audio tape recorded.

- The audiotapes will be erased or destroyed by June 2006.

- No discomforts or stresses are expected.

- No risks are expected.

- I may be contacted again in order to test the plausibility of the findings.

- All information concerning me will be kept confidential. If information about me is published, it will be written in a way that I cannot be recognized. However, research records may be obtained by court order.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (706) 308-0143.

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____   _____

Signature of Researcher   Date

706-308-0143; hollenbe@uga.edu

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX D

INTERNET CONSENT FORM

Dear Colleague:

You are invited to participate in a research study titled "Consumer Activism on the Internet: The Role of Anti-Brand Communities" conducted by Candice Hollenbeck, Department of Adult Education, University of Georgia, 706-308-0143 under the direction of Dr. Sharan B. Merriam, Department of Adult Education, University of Georgia, 850 College Station Road, Athens, Georgia 30602.

The purpose of this research study is to understand the nature of online communities as a form of social action. You will not benefit directly from this research. However, your participation in this research may lead to information that could improve an educator's understanding of how informal learning takes place within online social action groups.

If you should choose to participate in this study, your participation will involve the following:

- Completing an online interview which includes basic demographic questions and asks whether you might participate in consumer activism in different situations.

- If you would be willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview on this topic, there is space at the end of the interview to include your name and contact information.

Completion of the Internet interview is expected to take a maximum of 30 minutes. Internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However, once I receive the completed interviews, I will store them in a locked cabinet in my office and will destroy them and any names and contact information that I have by June 2006. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential unless required by law. If you are not comfortable with the level of confidentiality provided by the Internet, please feel free to print out a copy of the interview, fill it out by hand, and mail it to me at the address given below, with no return address on the envelope.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without penalty, or skip any questions you feel uncomfortable answering. By returning the interview questions with your answers, you are agreeing to participate in this study. If you do not wish to participate in this study, you may discard of the interview questions and you will not be contacted again.

If you have any questions do not hesitate to ask now or at a later date. You may contact Candice Hollenbeck at 706-308-0143 and hollenbe@uga.edu.

Thank you for the invaluable help that you are providing by participating in this research study.

Sincerely,

Candice Hollenbeck

Department of Adult Education

University of Georgia

850 College Station Road

Athens, Georgia 30602

Hollenbe@uga.edu

706-308-0143

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be

addressed to Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd

Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-

Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.