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Tra impresa e consumatore: le dinamiche e le potenzialità delle comunità di marca

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Introduzione

Il sistema culturale dell'uomo moderno, specie nei paesi occidentali, appare frammentato in diverse micro culture tutte orientate al consumo con differenti sistemi valoriali e diverse pratiche di consumo (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Thompson and Troester, 2002). L' individuo non presenta un unico Io con un sistema predeterminato di scelte di consumo, ma piuttosto un collage di multiple rappresentazioni dell' Io con diverse preferenze secondo le circostanze e le categorie di prodotto (Firat and Shultz, 1997; p. 191). Nell'insieme delle sue scelte di prodotti e servizi non è tanto guidato dal rapporto costi/benefici, quanto dalla ricerca di un consumo esperienziale, dove acquisto, uso e consumo provvedono da un lato a soddisfare bisogni, dall' altro a ricreare sensazioni e rafforzare la propria identità. Da *Homo economicus* il consumatore si è evoluto in *Homo consumericus, identificato dalle proprie esperienze di consumo* (Firat and Shultz, 1997).

In tale contesto il marketing, come disciplina e come insieme di strategie, passa da un approccio basato sulla transazione (economica) ad uno basato sulla relazione (tra impresa e consumatore), dove il mercato di massa tradizionale, caratterizzato da produzioni omogenee e consumatori segmentati, è stato sostituito da un mercato dove la relazione è il nucleo di tutte le attività di impresa e dove il consumatore diviene parte attiva del rapporto con l'impresa in termini di informazioni scambiate e di preferenze evidenziate (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995).

Tale approccio olistico mira a creare valore per il consumatore al di là della semplice soddisfazione (Payne and Frow, 2005), catapultando la funzione marketing in una relazione dove l'impresa ha la capacità di prevedere, analizzare e provvedere ai bisogni dell'individuo *uti singulus e uti socius*, ossia come singola entità o dell' individuo come parte di una comunità di consumatori (Boulding et al. 2005; Cova, 1997).

Il marketing, dalla tradizionale diade marca-consumatore si sta sempre piu interessando nell'esplorare, identificare e approcciare il consumatore come espressione e parte delle comunità cui appartiene, siano esse formali, quale la famiglia, o informali quale gli amici.

Gli individui non sono isolati, ma interagiscono tra loro, scambiando opinioni, informazioni e in molti casi, l'attività stessa del consumare è una attività di gruppo (McAlexander et. al., 2002; Reingen et al., 1984; Algesheimer and Dholakia, 2008) dove l'aspetto relazionale influenza l'intera esperienza di consumo (Schmitt, 1999). Capire, indagare il ruolo delle comunità di consumatori diventa prioritario, specie nella realtà attuale dove internet incrementa quotidianamente ed esponenzialmente la nascita e la diffusione di differenti comunità' (Kozinets, 1999; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001).

Conseguentemente l'aspetto sociale del consumo (Bagozzi, 2000), le collettività sociali (Holt, 1997) così come la dimensione interpersonale del consumo (Holt, 1995) ed il nuovo paradigma relazionale tra impresa e consumatore (Grönroos, 2004; Iacobucci and Ostrom, 1996) sono oggi oggetto di approfondimento accademico e di nuove sperimentazioni all' interno delle imprese.

In una prospettiva squisitamente imprenditoriale, i manager sono oggi consci che comunità' di individui agiscono come co-creatori di valore in senso lato (Kay, 2006) e monitorare tali comunità assume una notevole valenza strategica (Dholakia et al. 2004). Dell Company ad esempio, ha lanciato un sito internet (www.dellideastorm.com) dove i consumatori, partecipi della comunità on line, interagiscono costantemente, scambiando opinioni, testando prodotti ed in molti casi, sviluppando componenti ed applicazioni come nuovi codici per il sistema Linux adottato da alcune sue macchine (Ricadela, 2007).

In una prospettiva accademica, ancora pochi sono gli studi volti ad indagare forme di consumo a livello di comunità, nonostante il Marketing

Science Institute ha sottolineato come priorità per il biennio 2008-2010 lo studio e l'analisi delle comunità di consumatori (MSI, 2008), approfondendo quali siano le motivazioni dei consumatori nel prendere parte a tali comunità, quali siano i costi ed i benefici attesi, nonché l'impatto che tali comunità hanno a livello di impresa.

Studi recenti in marketing hanno analizzato il ruolo delle comunità di consumatori (McAlexander et al., 2002; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001), sia nel mondo virtuale sia a livello di comunità reali. Una comunità di consumatori e' un insieme di individui che condividono una attività di consumo (e/o produzione) o una particolare attitudine verso una specifica categoria di prodotto o servizio. Esempi del primo tipo sono la Coop nel mondo reale o *e-bay* nel mondo virtuale o attività sportive o culturali nel campo dei servizi. Esempi del secondo tipo includono comunità create intorno a beni e servizi come le automobili (ad esempio i club) o gli hotel.

Il nucleo di tali comunità può essere essenzialmente a carattere utilitaristico, dove le attività predominanti sono la compravendita di beni e servizi e/o a carattere edonico, dove aspetti quali il coinvolgimento emotivo con l'attività e/o con la categoria di prodotto e le relazioni interpersonali sono predominanti (Arnould e Price, 1993). Un sottoinsieme di tali comunità sono le cosiddette comunità di marca, dove i consumatori, più che ad una categoria di prodotto sono devoti ad una specifica marca. In tali comunità la marca agisce come "pass" per essere parte delle comunità ed è funzionale alle relazioni tra i vari partecipanti (Fournier, Sele and Schögel, 2005; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995).

La marca non e' solo un nome, ma anche " *term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors*" (Kotler and Keller 2006; p.274). La marca, quindi, è un segnale di distizione che permette sia alle imprese sia ai consumatori di identificare e

differenziare prodotti e servizi, semplificando il processo di scelta, segnalando la qualità e riducendo il rischio percepito e reale connesso all'acquisto e all'uso dei prodotti e dei servizi (Keller and Lehmann, 2006). Oggi le marche assumono differenti ruoli, configurandosi come "*knowledge bridge*" attraverso il quale le imprese e i consumatori costruiscono relazioni stabili, producono e scambiano informazione, conoscenza e incrementano le relative capacita' di apprendimento e di elaborazione delle informazioni (Keller, Busacca and Ostillo, 2005: p.53).

Le marche, in una accezione più ampia sono "risorse culturali" che facilitano i consumatori a legittimare e sviluppare la propria identità (Holt 2002) sia in termini di auto definizione del proprio Io, sia di posizionamento del se all'interno del gruppo di riferimento e della società in genere:" *[le marche] ... are understood as legitimate entities co created between the marketer and the community*" (Kates, 2004; p. 463). Holt (2003) sottolinea che marche come Nike, Harley-Davidson, Apple, Absolut, and Volkswagen sono diventate oggigiorno icone che incapsulano e disseminano miti in forma tangibile influenzando la percezione del se e il modo di relazionarsi con gli altri. Le marche, quindi, diventano aggregatori sociali, capaci di creare network stabili tra consumatori, i quali condividono lo stesso sistema valoriale e le stesse preferenze di consumo (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001).

Le aggregazioni sociali prendono il nome di comunità di marca se caratterizzate da un sistema relazionale complesso che include: "*relationships between the customer and the brand, between the customer and the firm, between the customer and the product in use, and among fellow customers*" (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002; p. 38).

Le ragioni per cui le comunità di marca assumono una propria valenza strategica nelle attuali ricerche e applicazioni nei campi del marketing e del management risiedono nella possibilità per le imprese di stabilire, grazie ad esse, canali di interazione privilegiati con i consumatori, basati sulla fiducia e sui brand values ed al contempo di attivare strategie di marketing meno

convenzionali volte ad una maggiore partecipazione del consumatore nel processo di creazione di valore per l'impresa e per il consumatore stesso.

Dalla co-creation alla value creation, il consumatore, all'interno delle comunità di marca, potenzialmente e' partecipe della ideazione, definizione e sviluppo del prodotto-servizio e diviene parte attiva nelle politiche di promozione e distribuzione.

Oggetto di una comunità di marca possono essere beni durevoli, come automobili e computer (ad esempio marche come Harley Davidson, Apple e Mercedes), ma anche non durevoli, come alimenti ed accessori (ad esempio i Baci Perugina e le penne Bic). Allo stesso tempo, si riscontrano brand community anche nei servizi, come Costa Crociere o Hilton Hotel. In riferimento ai meccanismi di socializzazione, riscontriamo un continuum che va dalle comunità di marca on line, dove lo spazio di interazione e' essenzialmente il web, alle comunità di marca off-line, dove i membri interagiscono nel mondo reale attraverso eventi e meeting (brand fest).

Il presente lavoro di tesi individua e sviluppa tre temi specifici delle comunità di marca, articolati in singoli working paper.

Nel dettaglio, la prima parte del lavoro, dal titolo "Determinanti e conseguenze della partecipazione nelle comunità di marca off line" si centra sulla distinzione tra comunità di marca on line e off line. Sebbene similari nella sostanza, le due tipologie presentano delle peculiarità riconducibili alla loro differente struttura e alle differenti dinamiche di interazione tra partecipanti. Le comunità di marca off line evidenziano una spiccata connotazione geografica e annoverano un numero ridotto di partecipanti. Inoltre, presentano spesso una organizzazione gerarchica e dinamiche di interazione sociali più complesse: la partecipazione in tali comunità, infatti, prevede una interazione di tipo face to face, coinvolgendo gli individui a più livelli emotivi. Tali considerazioni hanno portato ad indagare la relazione e l'impatto sulla marca di due costrutti fondamentali delle comunità di marca: l' identificazione con la comunità e la partecipazione nella comunità. Il primo cattura il senso di appartenenza mentre

il secondo i comportamenti nella comunità. Oggetto di studio sono, quindi, identificare tali costrutti, verificarne le relazioni e analizzare l'impatto sulle dimensioni della marca quale la fiducia, la fedeltà, le attitudini e i comportamenti. A tale scopo e' stato realizzato un progetto di ricerca inerente una delle maggiori comunità di marca a livello mondiale, la Vespa brand community. Nel 2010, in occasione del Vespa World Days meeting in Portogallo, è stato progettato e realizzato un programma di rilevamento campionario sui partecipanti all'evento, volto a testare la natura, le determinanti e le conseguenze della partecipazione e i suoi effetti sulla marca.

La seconda parte, dal titolo "L'approccio manageriale alle comunità di marca e le dinamiche di controllo", ha come oggetto di studio l'analisi della percezione delle comunità di marca da parte del management e di come i managers supervisino le loro attività. Studi precedenti sulle comunità di marca, infatti, si sono focalizzati più sull'analisi della percezione e della partecipazione del consumatore in termini di determinanti psicologiche e sociali, che sull' indagare quale sia la vision delle comunità di marca a livello di impresa e quali siano le strategie di monitoraggio che le imprese attivano al fine di garantire un ambiente di fiducia tra i membri della comunità, promuovere la marca ed evitare percezioni distorte e attriti tra i partecipanti.

A tal fine sono state realizzate una serie di interviste con manager incaricati della gestione diretta e/o supervisione di comunità di marca, presenti in Italia. Tra le altre, il campione include imprese quali Nestlè, Fiat, Campari, Costa Crociere e Coca Cola. I dati sono stati analizzati alla luce della Grounded theory approach che ha permesso di realizzare un modello teorico di supervisone delle attività delle comunità di marca, basato sul monitoraggio delle relazioni verticali, tra impresa e comunità e delle relazioni orizzontali, tra i partecipanti della comunità.

La terza parte, infine, analizza le potenzialità della comunità di marca come fonte di innovazione di prodotto. Un filone molto prolifico dell'attuale ricerca in marketing e management è volto a verificare come le comunità di consumatori in genere contribuiscano a generare nuovi prodotti o ad

implementare la performance di quelli esistenti. Le ragioni del fenomeno vanno ricercate nella natura stessa della comunità, intesa come fonte di conoscenza e scambio di informazioni. La partecipazione nelle comunità di consumatori, infatti, incrementa sia le conoscenze relative all' "architettura" di un prodotto o servizio sia le conoscenze rispetto all'uso in diversi contesti. Diversi studi hanno dimostrato che tali conoscenze possono rappresentare lo stimolo ad introdurre innovazioni di prodotto o sviluppo di quelli esistenti. Esempio di innovazioni introdotte da comunità di consumatori spaziano da attrezzature sportive a strumenti medici, da software a componenti per il settore auto. La comunità agisce, quindi, come fonte di innovazione e come diffusore delle stesse: aspetto peculiare delle comunità infatti è la condivisione dell'innovazione tra i partecipanti, senza alcun meccanismo di protezione tipica dell'innovazione di impresa quali brevetti e licenze. Oggetto di indagine è dunque verificare come le comunità di marca si configurano come propulsori di innovazione e come le imprese debbano relazionarsi con tale forma di innovazione. In particolare, il lavoro, ha indagato quali siano le determinanti dell' intenzione di collaborare per l' innovazione di prodotto tra i partecipanti di una comunità di marca.

In riferimento alle metodologie ed ai risultati, nel primo lavoro, di carattere empirico, si è utilizzato lo structural equation modelling. Lo studio ha evidenziato come la relazione con la marca e l'identificazione con la comunità siano antecedenti della partecipazione e come livelli di partecipazione crescente nelle attività della comunità influenzino positivamente la fedeltà, la fiducia e la valutazione della marca stessa.

Nella seconda parte, per l'analisi di dati qualitativi si è seguito il Grounded Theory Approach. I risultati confermano come le comunità di marca siano un fenomeno ascrivibile in misura maggiore al consumatore, tuttavia, data la loro crescente importanza, è opportuno che i manager attivino meccanismi di monitoraggio non solo in senso di controllo e repressione di comportamenti negativi (come ad esempio l'appropriazione indebita di un marchio), ma soprattutto favoriscano comportamenti collaborativi, volti ad

incrementare la qualità della relazione tra impresa e partecipanti attraverso un processo virtuoso di scambio di informazioni ed esperienze.

Nella terza parte, attraverso l'applicazione di regressioni gerarchiche, si è evidenziato come, in riferimento alla intenzione di collaborare per introdurre innovazione di prodotto, le motivazioni intrinseche (quali curiosità, divertimento, altruismo e desiderio di acquisire conoscenze) siano nettamente superiori alle motivazioni estrinseche (quali una possibile compensazione monetaria, un incremento di reputazione tra i partecipanti della comunità e con l'impresa o la insoddisfazione relativa al prodotto stesso). Inoltre la relazione con la marca, quale componente caratterizzante la comunità, influisce positivamente sul processo di innovazione, in quanto maggiore e' il legame emotivo con la marca maggiori sono le probabilità che l'individuo sia coinvolto in attività creative quali, appunto, l'innovazione o lo sviluppo del prodotto. L'interazione tra partecipanti favorendo scambi di idee e conoscenze, infine, risulta come variabile moderatore dell'intero processo.

Alla luce del lavoro svolto e dei risultati conseguiti, le comunità di marca emergono come una delle forme più originali di relazione tra impresa e consumatore; la marca, come fattore aggregante, diviene il mezzo per creare relazioni stabili tra consumatori e tra questi e l'impresa, sulla base di comportamenti collaborativi attraverso cui le parti, in ultima analisi, disseminano ed acquisiscono conoscenza.

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PARTE TRE

L'innovazione di prodotto
nell'ambito delle comunità di marca

PARTE UNO

Determinanti e conseguenze della partecipazione nelle comunità di marca off line

Introduction

Brand communities as set of relationships among consumers, the brand and the related company represent a contemporary form of socialization, consumption and firm-consumer integration (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002). In a firm perspective brand community is part of marketing strategies representing a powerful and novel overture of the firm-consumer interaction (McAlexander et al., 2002).

Consumer's socialization, product consumption and consumer-firm dialogue take place via member participation to community life. Participation has the shape of brand experiences, related consumption activities, exchange of brand information and member interaction. Despite the increasing academic and managerial interest in brand community phenomenon (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006) existing literature shows several gaps: first, studies on on-line communities are prevalent, reserving little attention to off-line brand community. Although they share some similar characteristics, most off-line brand community shows distinctive traits such as reduced size, requirement of product ownership for joining, presence of members' hierarchy, stronger personal ties, low frequency of contacts and geographical connotation (McAlexander et al., 2002; Scarpi, 2001; Muniza and O'Ginn, 2001; Cova, 1997).

Second, participants in on line community can be reduced to the continuum from lurkers to contributors (Preece, 2000, Kozinets, 1999) or, in other words, participation range from the passive behavior of "taking a look" to active behavior of posting. Moreover, in on line community, identification, in the sense of membership, and participation are usually overlapping and collapsing in the same construct. In off-line brand community relationship with the brand, identification with the group and participation in activities are different stages of community dynamics (McAlexander et al. 2002) and very little is known about participation both in term of nature and actionable measurement. In off-

line brand community, participation takes the form of bran fests, meeting and reunions. Such events are a complex blend of consumer and firm planned activities, which require a high personal involvement, in terms of economic and psychological efforts, since it implies physical displacement, running specific tasks and face to face interaction (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). We can quote, for instance, the cases of Jeep and Haley-Davidson brand communities, where members cover long distances in order to participate to brand events and specific activities, such as ride shows, parades and competitions are scheduled in the event program (McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002)**.**

Third, studies on brand community focuses on the consumer side, analyzing the motivations and consequences of brand communities participation at social and psychological level (i.e. Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Dholakia, Bagozzi and Pearo, 2004) overlooking a more marketing approach. Participation, however, has a strong impact on the brand. From the one hand, participation could lead a more deep relationship between the product and the member, by new usage experiences, affecting the consumer attitude to the brand (McAlexander et al. 2002). Form the other hand, participation, leading to high member interaction, favors information and knowledge exchanging and sharing, increasing word of mouth and brand expertise (Algesheimer et al., 2005; McAlexander et al., 2002).

In the light of this, the paper explores the nature and role of participation within an off line brand community for luxury product. First, we propose a more actionable measure of off line brand community participation. Second, clarifying the differences among the two different constructs i.e. participation and identification, we analyze the antecedents of participation and, on the base of the ABC model, we argue that consumer' brand responses in his affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects are driven by participation.

We test our conceptual model by a survey of members belonging to different offline communities built around the Vespa motorcycle brand. The paper contributes to the existing stream of academia research by lighting empirically one central construct of brand community as participation and evidencing drivers and consequences at specific brand level. From the managerial standpoint, focusing, managing and levering participation allow managers to better understanding the dynamic of brand community, offering a strategic tool for segmenting and targeting community members.

The paper is organized as follows: first, we describe the brand community theoretical background and develop our hypothesis. Second, we describe the methodology, including the research plan and the research setting. Third, we test our model evidencing the main findings, and, last, we conclude underling implications for both academics and marketers, evidencing at the same time limitations and directions for further research.

1. Literature review and hypothesis development

Brand community emerges as "fabric" of relationships where the brand, its consumers and the company connect each other (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002).

Brand communities have been studied according to the different categories such as consumer (e.g. Szmigin and Reppel, 2004) vs. firm promoted brand community (e.g. Andersen, 2005) product (e.g. Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann, 2005) vs. service brand communities (e.g. Kozinets,1999),consumers good (e.g.. Cova and Pace, 2006) vs. luxury goods brand communities (e.g. Schouten and McAlexander, 1995).

Studies distinguish also from on line (i.e. Thompson and Sinha, 2008) vs. off-line brand communities (i.e. McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002). On line brand communities count a large numbers of customers, are geographically disperse and do not show formal hierarchy (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001, Algesheimer et al., 2005, Cova et al., 2007). Moreover, the access is

free and not bounded to product ownership and in many cases they allow to hidden the own identity (Hagel III and Armstrong, 1988; McAlexander et al. 2002). With respect to social interaction, real brand community show a low frequency of contact among members but stronger personals ties and low rate of abandonment (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Thompson and Sinha, 2008). In on line brand community participation takes place on the internet while in the off line case members meet in the real world, implying a face to face interaction.

Participation and its role have been originally studied in the field of sociology, psychology (Blumberg, 1968) and organization behaviour (Miller, 1986; Arnstein, 1969). In the field of marketing consumer participation comes into view in the stream of literature concerning co-creation (Wayne, 2010; Von Hippel, 2009), value creation (Füller, 2010; Ogawa and Piller2006, Nambisan and Nambisan, 2008) and service dominant logic (Vargo and Lush, 2008). In a brand community participation refers to taking part in events or contributing to activities, community planned and/or firm supported (Algesheimer et. Al 2005; McAlexander et al., 2002). In a virtual brand community participation is mostly time based, including activities with different level of involvement such as lurking, chatting as well posting comments on forums and uploading digital contents (Koziniets 1999; Nonnecke and Preece, 2000 Catterall and Maclaran, 2002.) Quantitative indicators of participation are the frequency and the intensity of the connections measured by the duration of connection, the overall time spent on the internet and the number of digital contents posted, (Dholakia, Bagozzi, Pearo, 2004; Thompson and Sinha, 2008).

In an off-line community differences in level of participation are more pronounced, implying a face-to-face interaction, with a set of activities involving spatial and physical movements (Algesheimer et al., 2005, Luedicke, 2006; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). In the Harley-Davidson community, riding a bike is just the first step; after come rallies, parades, travels till a full immersion in the community life-style (Shau and Muñiz, 2002).

To our knowledge, many studies on off line brand community participation follow a qualitative approach (e.g. Muñiz and O Guinn, 2001; Cova, Pace and Park, 2007; Shau Muñiz and Arnold, 2009; Belk and Tumbat, 2005; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Shau and Muñiz, 2002)) and in the few quantitative, (see table 1), participation has been measured only by the frequency of taking part to activities (e.g. Bagozzi and Dholakia ,2006; Algesheimer et al, 2005).Thus, prior literature has systematically neglected a more comprehensive approach to participation in off-line communities, not analyzing, for instance, the intensity of participation in terms of efforts members do. Members are not homogenous in terms of frequency and intensity of participation. Physical displacement as well as playing different roles could represent a cost in economic terms. To our knowledge, in neither of the previous studies, participation measure has been able to capture both dimensions of intensity and frequency of participation as table 1 shows.

----------Insert table 1 here -------

1.2 Antecedents of participation

One of the earliest and influential papers on brand community by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) analyzes, by three years of ethnographic study, the participation within the Harley-Davidson community. Findings are more centred on the socio-psychological drivers of participation: the shared value system based on collective beliefs such as freedom, patriotism, American heritage, machismo as well as the desire of a different self-presentation are the drivers of participation. Cova, Pace and Park, (2007) in the analysis of the Games Workshop' Warhammer, a strategic battle game played with real miniatures, by interviewing members during the game playing, reported love for the game and friendship as drivers of participation. Algesheimer et al., (2005) in the empirical study of European car clubs, showed how participation

is driven directly by the participation intention, in turn affected by community engagement (e.g. personal motivation) and by the perceived constrains to follow community roles, namely the normative pressure.

Participation drivers range from functional to emotional factors both at individual level and community level. At individual level, the need of higher information about the brand, its usage as well as the closer and loving relationship with the brand, in term of brand personification (Fournier, 1998) and brand identification (Keller,1993) are the bases of brand community joining. Stronger is the link between the consumer and the brand in terms of personality, image and values, higher is the probability of participation in brand community (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001, McAlexander et al., 2002).

Brand relationship: Whit respect to individual level, the relationship with the brand, in an off-line community, is the main driver of participation (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Algesheimer et al. (2005). In the analysis of European Car Clubs Algesheimer et al. (2005), with respect to brand relationship retrieve the Fournier's approach (1998) considering the brand as partner in an ongoing relationship. In particular they include a identification facet, that is the degree of overlap between consumer self image and brand image, a cognitive component referring to the self-awareness of closeness of relationship and an evaluative component and the positive evaluation of self-worth that stems from a relationship with the brand (Algesheimer et al. 2005). The relationship with the brand precedes the participation in the community since the consumer relationship with the brand is previous to the one with the community: the Jeep ownership for instance, is compulsory to participate to brand events, as well as buying a Harley Davidson is required to be part of HOG Harley Owners Group (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). In the same line, participation in the Warhammer game is constrained to the ownership (Cova, Pace and Park, 2007).

H1: Greater brand relationship leads to higher BC participation

Identification: At community level, the social identification within the community, the self- awareness of being member of the community, the self-enhancement, and the emotional evolvement with the group emerge as drivers of participation. (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Schau and Muñiz, 2002; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). In off-line brand community first consumer's select, choose and value the brand, according to symbolic and functional elements (Fournier, 1988, Aaker, 1997); later on, on the basis of the shaped relationship with the brand, decide to join the community by first identifying him self with the community (membership) and later on participating in the brand community activities (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; Algesheimer et al., 2005; Cova, Pace and Park, 2007).

Identification in the off-line community constitutes a fundamental driver of community participation. Whether participation and identification could overlap they are not synonyms. Identification or social identity "is the perception of belonging to a group with the result that a person identifies with that group (i.e., I am a member)" (Bhattacharya et al., 1995, p. 47). In brand community literature, identification captures the community membership, the sense of belonging (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006), while participation captures the set of activities one member does within the community (Algeshemeir et.al, 2005; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Identification overlies on the Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) "Consciousness of kind" that is "the intrinsic connection that members feel towards one another and collective sense of difference from others not in the community" (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 413). In the same line, Dholakia, Bagozzi and Pearo, (2004: p 245) describe identification, namely social identity, as "psychological state", involving cognitive, affective and evaluative components, that say, the self-awareness of membership and the perception of similarity-dissimilarity with members-no members, the group attachment and the collective self/esteem.

Perceived membership, namely identification, leads also to behaviours consistent with the group identity (Shih, Pittinsky and Ambady 1999). As

Algesheimer et al. (2005) report in their study of European car clubs, identification, based on cognitive and emotional components such as the self-awareness of membership and the affective commitment, leads to major community engagement, that is participation (Algesheimer et al. 2005). Bagozzi, Dholakia and Pearo (2004) report how stronger social identification will affect the desire and the intention of participating. More the individual feels part of the group, and more he share the same goals, more he will actively participate. In the study of Harley Davidson brand community Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006), yet, reported how social identity impacts positively the desire to participate in community activities. Then, Identification of self conception in term of group's features is driver of participation. From the other side, the link between the brand relationship and the community participation might happen through community identification since the desire to be part of a community facilitate the integration with the brand community (Algesheimer et al. 2005). Thus, we hypothesize also that:

H2: Greater brand relationship leads to higher BC identification
H3: Greater BC identification leads to higher BC participation

Community size: Effects on participation and identification are influenced by club size. Size, in off-line brand community, can vary from few members, geographically concentrated such as the case of Saab and Ronco communities analyzed by Muñiz and O Guinn (2001) to high numbers of members spread all over the world, as the case of European Car clubs, Harley-Davidson clubs and Jeep clubs (Algesheimer et al. 2005, McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002). Small brand community are strongly sociocentric (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006: p. 47), where "the link is more important that the think" (Cova, 1997: p. 307): members know each other and friendship and socialization are predominant, (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo 2004). Interpersonal relationships among members are stronger, impacting positively identification and the group cohesion (Algesheimer et al. 2005). On the contrary, large brand community could be perceived as

ammoniums group, where participation is utilitarian driven (Algesheimer et al. 2005). Previous suggestions show how size affects negatively the identification with the group.   Thus,

H4:   Bigger the brand community, lower the brand community identification

We also hypothesize that huge communities, especially if company sponsored, can count on greater financial and organizational recourses (McAlexander et al., 2002), boosting member participation by more appealing events, incentives and rewards (e.g. new product test, discount). Thus,

H5:   Bigger the brand community greater the participation

1.3. Brand consequences of participation

Nowadays, many firms belonging to different sectors are promoting community programs and brand communities both on line and off line (McWilliam, 2000; Cova and Pace, 2006; Algesheimer et al., 2005; McAlexander et al., 2002). Within community, members show higher attachment to the brand and as a consequence, a positive brand loyalty and brand awareness, higher satisfaction and repurchase intention (Thompson and Sinha, 2008; McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002; Wang et. al. 2002). Participation impacts all the marketing mix (Schau, Muñiz and Arnould, 2009) and firms are engaged in consumption related activities such as the brand promotion during brand fests (Nambisan & Nambisan, 2008; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; McAlexander et al., 2002).

McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002) in their empirical study of Jeep and Harley Davison brand fests reported how members participation determines a positive relationships with their own vehicles, with the brand as

well as the with the whole company. Moreover, as reported by Rothaermel and Sugiyama (2001), members of a community of Wristwatch hobbyists and collectors show a very high repurchase behavior since the average TimeZone member buys between two and ten watches annually on this web site. Brand community helps firms to overcome resistance to direct marketing activities, reducing space and time constraints and increasing brand image and brand recognition (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006).

In brand perspective then, participation plays a key role en enforcing brand related feelings and response. Attitude is related to the emotional feelings link with the brand in terms of love, passionate attachment and trust in line with the study seminal study of Fournier (1997; 1998). Behavioural response deals with consumer brand related actions, such as positive (and negative) word of mouth and loyalty that is the action or the likelihood of buying in the future as well as of continuing the use of the product. Finally cognitive refers to the stock of brand related skills and competence consumers acquire and develop. Following the well-known brand evaluation framework based on the affective, behavioral and cognitive model of attitude to a brand (Park and Young, 1986; Czellar, 1986) hypothesis related to brand community participation in an off-line community are next described.

Affective responses towards the brand: McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) underline how participation in the Jeep car Brand events increases significantly consumers' emotional attachment to their vehicles and to brand. Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) evidence how, members, by exchanging information and support in the Macintosh computer community, increase the attachment and the involvement to the brand. Schouten, McAlexander and Koenig (2007) report that participation in brand fests such as Camp Jeep events, means to live a profound and enduring experience, named "transcendent customer experience" and how this experience affect relationships with the product and the brand. Participation then, impacts positively the affective dimension of brand relationship.

One of the pillars of brand communities proliferation is the exchanging information about the brand, its usage as well as receiving assistance and support, (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; Kozinets, 2002; Szmigin et al., 2003). Information exchanged in the brand community is considered more objective, since it is provided by other consumers (Kozinets, 2002) or experienced members (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al. 2002). Member gain security and experiment higher trust towards the brand.

According to previous assumptions then, we can hypothesize the effect of participation on the three components of affective dimensions. In the light of previous arguments, we hypothesize the following:

H6a: Greater BC participation leads to higher brand love than identification

H6b: Greater BC participation leads to higher brand trust than identification

Behavioral dimension: Participation in the brand event increases product usage brand loyalty and related intention to buy product and merchandising (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002). Schouten and McAlexander (1995) note that members of Harley Davidson clubs tend to buy upper models of bike in order to increase their status into the group, while Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann (2005) show that engagement in European car clubs affect positively loyalty towards those cars. Moreover, loyalty could go beyond a simple repurchase intention or behavior, reaching more enduring and deep meaning and action: Belk and Tumbat, (2005; p.205) by interviewing members of Apple community reported how they feel a "fierce loyalty" to its products. Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001), yet define loyalty in term of "oppositional loyalty", where members develop a strong opposition to competing brands. With respect to the main competitor of Macintosh and Saab, for instance, members pointed out respectively the poor performance of PCs or the dullness of Volvo cars.

Firms also have influence on brand loyalty by using the brand fests as promoting channel for new product lunch, like in the case described by Mcalexander et al., (2002) where, exposure to new Jeep models could increase the purchase intention. Thus:

H7a: Greater participation leads to higher loyalty than identification

Face to face interaction in off-line community leads an incredible amount of brand word of mouth. Members share consumption experiences with other members, as well as receive information and assistance on product use by other members, dealers and by the same companies (Schau, Albert M. Muñiz Jr., and Eric J. Arnould, 2009; Scott A. Thompson and Sinha, 2008; McAlexander, John W. Schouten, and Harold F. Koenig, 2002; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995).

Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) report how members of Harley-Davidson like to talk, during their meeting, about the latest model as well as related accessories. More, Muñiz and O'Guinn, (2001) reveal an intriguing aspect of word of mouth in the brand community: within participation rituals, members celebrate the story of the brand and share brand stories, becoming "brand advocate[s]" (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; p.423). Hence,

H7b: Greater brand participation leads to higher word of mouth than identification

Cognitive dimension: Part of word of mouth is related to acquiring and exchanging brand knowledge. In the European Car clubs members receive specific product usage support from other members and from companies also (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Increasing participation in brand events increase socialization and then the probability to interact with more experienced consumers, learning from them and acquiring new skills (McAlexander et al.,

2002). In the Jeep Camp events, for instance, participants learn and how to get better performances in different driving condition, gaining familiarity with their vehicles (McAlexander et al., 2002). Thought "the moral responsibility" (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; p. 425), that is the perceived obligation towards recent members, experienced members share their knowledge offering assistance and support. Firms also contribute to the process, providing during brand fests customer-services to the community members, as in the case of Harley-Davidson (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Thus,

H8: Greater BC participation leads to higher brand knowledge than identification

Presented hypothesis depicts a more comprehensive model of the antecedents and brand consequences of participation in off-line brand community. In our approach and in the same line of Algesheimer et al. (2005) Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schroder (2008), Schouten and McAlexander (1995), brand relationship precedes and leads the membership in the community and the participation in the community activities. Moreover, identification leads participation. Consequences at brand level imply member response on the affective, behavioural and cognitive attitude to a brand. Following picture describes our conceptual model, while the next paragraph illustrates the data collection.

-----Figure 1 ----

The data collection and analysis

Research setting: Vespa brand has been chosen for the high level of emotion and involvement it s known to elicit in many of its consumers (McAlexander and Schouten 1998). Born in 1946, has been produced continually to nowadays, becoming a worldwide brand. It is enough to underline that currently is the only motorcycle displayed at the Museum of

Modern Art in New York. As reported by Vespa managers, Vespa clubs were born almost contemporaneously with Vespa in the 50s and nowadays they represent a fact of tens of thousands of clubs, spread in all the countries with a size ranging from few members to thousands of members. Each local club belongs to a bigger geographical unit, such as regional club and so forth till the national unit. World Vespa days is an official brand event where clubs of over the world can participate. It is hold each year in different places: each club has the right to put oneself forward as a candidate for hosting and organizing the World Vespa Days (VWD). An appropriate committee, made up of all national club presidents and including also the Vespa brand community manager and the Vespa brand manager assign, by majority, the organization of the future event.

Our specific research settings has been the 44° Vespa World Days, hold on 2010 in Portugal and organized by the Vesting Club of Fatima. The program included a set of activities ranging from touristic rides to concerts, ride shows, fundraisings, gala dinner and awards ceremony. (The most nice or oldest Vespa, member from greater distance, senior or junior member, Vespa club more represented-national and international-). Participation to the event requires prior ownership of Vespa motorcycle.

Procedure and items generation: After securing permission from Vespa Company and from VWD 2010 Organizing Committee, questionnaires where distributed brevi manu to participants. In details, respondents have been selected in the main meeting point (named "Recinto", an arena of almost 1500 m2 including facilities and services) at the end of the daily activities. Decision of survey after event endues that participants are more relaxed and accommodating in their environment (Cova, Pace e Park, 2007). Responses have been obtained on voluntary basis, without any kind of compensation.

Questionnaire includes three sections: the first one is related to the Vespa, starting from the number of motorcycles owned/bought in life to the

different aspect of relationship with the brand; Most of constructs reported in the paper have been operazionalized by using existing scale from the brand community literature; the construct of brand relationship has been measured by the scale used in earlier research on brand communities of cars by Algesheimer et al. (2005). Respondents rated their agreement with 3 statements on a 7 point Likert Scales: 1-this brand say a lot about the kind of person I am 2-the Vespa's image and myself image are similar in many respect 3- Vespa plays an important role in my life. Brand expertise, reflecting the member's brand knowledge has been measured using a 3 items scale, with 7 Likert points, coming from Algesheimer et al.(2005) too. Items read "-When compared to other people, I know a lot about Vespa"; "I consider myself very experienced with Vespa"; "my friends consider me as an expert regarding Vespa". For loyalty intention we used a reduced seven point likert-scale scale of the brand loyalty intention scale as reported in Algesheimer et al. (2005) limited to only one item: "I will continue driving Vespa in the near future".

Brand trust (2 items): "Vespa is an honest brand"; "I trust Vespa"), brand love (2 items: "I have feelings for Vespa that I do not have for a lot of other brands"; "If it is about scooters, Vespa is my most favorite brand") have been adapted using the items reported in the study by Smit et al. (2007) on the brand relationship quality. All items were measured with a seven point Likert-type scale, anchored by (1) "strongly disagree" to (7) "strongly agree". Word of Mouth has been operationalized based on the paper of Carroll and Ahuvia (2007) by the 7 point Likert statement: "I have recommended Vespa to lots of people" anchored by 1= "strongly disagree" to 7= "strongly agree".

Second section deals with the community, including aspects of identification, dimension and community activities (i.e. participation).Community size reflects the number of members each club counts. The construct of brand community identification captures the relationship member has with his club in terms of sense of belonging as well as goal sharing. It has been operationalized by the seven-point scale of club identification as reported in Algesheimer et al.(2005). A sample item reads

"Other Vespa Club members and I share the same objectives" and another one "I see myself as a part of the Club" (all measurement items are listed in the table).

In order to defining brand community participation, we conducted in deep interview with 7 both brand managers and brand community managers belonging to Vespa, Motoguzzi, Ducati and Fiat. Second, we strengthen by interviewing several Italian (Vespa county of origin) and Portuguese (hosting event country) brand community members. Two are the main dimension emerging and defining participation: frequency of participation and intensity: the first defines how many times per year the member participates to events organized by his club such as excursions, regional meeting, national appointments or international events; intensity define the effort member does in order to participate in each club events as well as the official role the member cover within the club. Intensity could be measured by amount of money spent, time consumed, distances covered or to how many times member participates in event organized by other club, at national or international event. Roles evidence instead the consumer attitude to hold a formal position inside the club, covering, on voluntary base, different tasks needed for the management and the well being of the community. Reasonably all the mentioned roles imply a different level of participation in term of frequency of participation in the events, responsibility within the club and time-cost efforts. Roles include marketing, who care about communication of club events and activities, economic responsible for club budget and costs, vice-president, usually responsible for relationship with other club and institutions such as police, political authority, health assistance service, secretary who cares the administrative part and president who has the official club representation in the national and international meeting. The first set of items, based on the qualitative study, have been submitted to the Vespa Brand Community Manager, the World Vespa Club president and the president of the Club in charge of organizing the VWD 2010 - for final minor changes. We borrow 7 items in order to capture the frequency and the intensity of member

participation in his respective club activities. In details we asked the frequency (expressed by percentage of times) of participation in "daily", "weekend" and "more than 3 days club events" using a scale anchored by 1=0% 2=25% 3=50% 4=75% 5=100%). Measure of frequency has been also the number of times members participate in national or international events, such as the WVD 2010. With respect to intensity of participation, respondents were asked to indicate 1-the maximum distance they covered to participate in any event including the WVD 2010; 2-the role members have within the club, reflecting a increasing evolvement in the club activities (1=just member 2=secretary 3=public relations 4=marketing 5=finance 6=vice-president 7=president).

Finally, third part of the questionnaire includes demographics on the brand event participants. The total population of the participants, how reported by the organization committee, has been of 1650 members. Eliminating no complete questionnaires, our finals sample consists of 223 respondents, corresponding at the 13.5% of population. Participants' demographics report a male percentage of 89.2, with an average of 2.57 family components. Age range from 19 to 74 years with an average of 39.57; by nationality, among others, Italy, Portugal and Spain counted for 22%, 21% and 14% respectively: United Kingdom 6%, Belgium 5%, Germany 6%, France 7%, Norway 1.4% and Usa 0.8%. With respect to membership duration, participants show an average of 8.54 years with a range between 1 and 30. One average each participant owns an average of 3 Vespa and in all his life he has owned more or less 4 Vespa.

Measures: Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics and Cronbach's for the main constructs. Cronbach's alfa for the participation construct (.926) has been improved by eliminating two items that show low corrected item-to-total correlation (α=.945)

-------Insert table 2 here---------

Table 3 reports factors loadings, composite reliability scores ($\rho\varepsilon$) and AVE (average variances extracted, $\rho vc(\varepsilon)$) for all constructs in order to provide evidence of convergent validity, that is the degree to which the items load highly on the same construct they are suppose to measure. In details, the loadings are high, the AVEs are greater than 0.7 for all constructs and the composite reliability scores are greater than 0.7 and both statistically significant, indicating a good internal consistency (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

In order to provide evidence of discriminant validity, that is how well a measure measures the underlying constructs and does not correlate highly with the measure of other constructs, the square root of AVE for an individual construct must be higher than its correlations with other constructs (Fornell and Larker, 1981). Table 3 reports that the square root of AVE of each construct is greater than 0.8 and greater than the correlations with any other constructs; table 4 reports the correlation among construct.

-------Insert table 3 here---------

-------Insert table 4 here---------

Exploratory factor analysis has been employed to assess measurements quality and has shown a good overall fit. The goodness-of-fit statistics for the model are as follows: $\chi2(155) = 256.607$, p <0.0000, the root mean square error of approximation - RMSEA = .0543, standardized root mean square residual-SRMR = .0307, the normed and nonnormed fit indexes NFI= .984NNFI = . 992 respectively and the comparative Fit Index CFI = . 993.

Structural model estimation: As previously articulated we argue that higher relationship with the brand lead to join a brand community (through identification and participation) and, consequently, greater participation will lead to greater affective attitude toward the brand, greater wom and loyalty as

well as increasing brand knowledge (See figure 4). To test the hypothesized structural model the Maximum Likelihood (ML) method has been used by LISREL 8.54 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1999). According to the assumption of Structural Equation Model all the indicators must follow a multivariate normal distribution. For checking if this assumption was satisfied multivariate skewness and kurtosis have been calculated and the test of multivariate normality has been performed[1]. The test rejected the multivariate normal distribution of the data at 99.9% of confidence level. To obtain accurate estimation of goodness of fit statistics and standard errors of parameters in the presence of severe non normality robust ML estimator has been used (Bentler 1995; Satorra and Bentler 1994). The robust ML estimator provides ML parameter estimates with standard errors and mean adjusted χ^2 test statistic that are robust to non normality.

Goodness of fit has been assessed by chi-square test, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), the normed and nonnormed fit indexes (NFI, NNFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI). According to Bentler (1990) and Byrne (2009) adequate model fits are indicated by nonsignificant chi-square tests, SRMR (standardized root mean square residual) and RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) values ≤ .08; NFI (Normed Fit Index) NNFI (non normed fit index) and CFI (comparative fit index) values ≥ .90.

Statistics for the hypothesized model report good fit (Satorra-Bentler Scaled $\chi^2[217]$ =251.189, p =.0555, RMSEA = .0266, NFI=.980, NNFI = .990, CFI = .991 SRMR=.0380). See table 5 for the Lisrel standardized path diagram output.

With respect to hypotheses testing, hypotheses h1 and h2 that posited positive relations between brand relationship and both brand community identification and brand community participation were supported, with completely standardized coefficients γ =0.481 (s.e.=.0070) and γ = 0.85 (s.e.=.0047) respectively.

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[1] Performing this test, all the variables were assumed to be continues as for each of them Likert scale has more than 5 points.

Tests of h3 confirmed also the positive relationship between the brand community identification and the brand community participation (β=.416, se=.080).

Table 5 reports the coefficients measuring the influence of participation and identification on the brand dimensions.

-------Insert table 5 here---------

Hypotheses h6a, h6b are not confirmed. Identification has a bigger impact on the attitude through the brand in terms of love and trust.

With respect to behavioral dimension of brand attitude our results support our propositions. Brand community participation is significantly and positively related to Word of mouth (β =.409, se=.154) and brand loyalty (β =.443, s.e.=.158)

Hypothesis h8 that predicted the positive relationships between brand community participation and brand knowledge (β =.524, s.e.=.179) was supported as well. On the contrary, tests of h4 and h5 show that the effects of brand community size on participation and identification are not significant.

-------Insert table 6 here---------

-------Insert figure 2 here---------

Whit respect to R2, Brand relationship and brand identification explain the 74,3% of variance of brand community participation. The percentages of variance in brand love, and trust, as explained by brand community participation and identification are 67%, 59% respectively. Participation and identification explain also the 58,8% of variance in loyalty and the 57,2% in word of mouth. Finally, the 72,1% of variance in brand knowledge is explained by brand community participation and identification.

Discussion and conclusion

Our findings provide empirical evidence of prior qualitative research on brand community where the relation with the brand is the "first driver" of every decision concerning the identification and participation in the community (e.g. Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002). Following a temporal sequence, consumer first frames a strong relationship with the brand, second decides to join a brand community and, consequently chooses to participate in the community life. Opposite to virtual brand community, in off-line brand community, identification and participation constitute two separate steps of brand community dynamics: by identification the consumer enters the community, accepting role and code of conducts, by participation the member actively lives the community, its meetings, events and activities. Effects of participation are relevant at brand level: though participation, members reinforce their relationship with brand especially in terms of in behaviors and knowledge. Consumer might initiate related behaviors including positive word of mouth and loyalty, thanking to the high interaction among members and between members and the brand.

Participation also increase the brand knowledge since members are more exposed, through socialization, to brand related information and new application areas coming both from other members and from the same company. Identification on the contrary, has a bigger impact on the attitudinal dimension of the brand. Reasons can be refer to the similar psychological dimension of identification and attitude. Community size seems not impact identification and has a minor impact on participation: the issue remain controversial and need a specific in depth examination; from one side, the small positive coefficient let us suppose that bigger club, due to bigger financial and organizational resource, can force participation and organize more frequently meetings and brand related events, from the other hand, smaller clubs, configuring as big families with strong social tie could also impact positively the level of participation and the community identification.

By the analysis of drivers and brand consequences of participation, the paper has provided valuable insights into the dynamics of off-line brand community that lead the improvement of consumer-brand relationship. Our findings contribute to research on brand communities by providing a comprehensive model of participation in off-line brand community.

Managerial implication: By lighting the role of participation within off-line community the paper suggests that managers should, firstly, distinguish between on-line and off line brand communities. Although they share common elements they can not be comprehended as equivalent: differences in size, membership, geographical location and participation emerge. Off line community are smaller, geographically positioned and with specific patterns for membership. Participation deals with member physical interaction and place displacement, requiring specific skills and resource. Second managers might clearly distinguish between two different facets of off-line brand community: the identification with the community and the participation within the community: two phases require different strategies and consequently, identification and participation might be leveraged differently, according to company' goals. Levering identification companies could manage the brand community membership and the access; modeling brand community size and structure. Managers might persuade consumers to join a brand community, levering on the love for the brand, with the goal of increasing community size, community sense of belonging and customer retention; on the contrary, in order to reduce community size, a monetary membership fee can be required. Identification could be encouraged by communication programs focusing on the authenticity of the brand community and its values.

Levering participation might increase the quality of relationship with the brand, the socialization among customers and reinforce the loyalty both for the brand and the company.

Companies can foster participation by increasing brand communities events and meeting, by actively participate in brand community life (i.e. organizational and financial support) and by active dialogue with community member in term of information and experience exchanged. Increasing member participation with a hoc program (fidelity programs, prizes) has the potential to generate stronger affective, cognitive and behavioral response in the members' attitude to the brand.

Managers might consider that there is no heterogeneity among communities member. By distinguishing among different level of participation and identification managers can easily segment and profile members, according to their level of involvement (from the case of the member who just join the community to the case of the member who participate to all community events). By segmenting, managers can identify and target opinion leaders, early adopters, lead users as well as recruiting potential brand testimonials and collaborative consumers for marketing and co-creation activities. Differentiation among passive vs. active members might suggest to marketers the consumer profiles to be involved in promoting or test new products or new versions as well as in new product development.

Limitation and further research: the paper is not weak points. From methodological point of view we should consider that data have been collected by survey only once and the absence of control group, as in similar studies (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002), implies many different biases. Results have to be interpreted with caution. Measure of participation might appear to mach case sensitive, i.e. luxury brand community. There is the necessity to refine the participation measure and to apply in different brand community contests (e.g. consumer good brand community and so on vs. luxury goods and service vs. product). Future researches might direct on effect of participation at both company as well as consumer level, providing evidence, i.e., of effect of participation on companies' profits and sales. At consumer level, researchers should consider the meaning and the role of iper -

participation and the effect on both community dynamics and firms strategies. Iper participation we refer to member who is hot-headed about brand and brand community, causing conflicts within the community, between community and the brand and social tensions.

Notwithstanding the above limitations, the paper has shown how participation plays a core role within off-line brand community especially in terms of brand consequences. In a more broad vision, and in lines with existing literature, companies might constantly integrate brand community management in their marketing strategies, participating as member in the community life, in order to support and exchange information with consumers, promote brand and company values and increase the longevity of customer-brand relationship. Nowadays brand community represents the missing link in the dialogue between companies and consumers.

TABLEs

Table 1: Empirical studies on participation

Authors (year) * Brand community	Definition /Measure	Drivers and consequences of participation
Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann (2005) European Car club	How often did you participate in activities of this brand community within the last ten weeks? Likert Scale 1-7	Participation intention, community engagement and normative pressure are the drivers of participation
McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002) Jeep and Harley Davidson	Indirect measure. Effect of participation are deduced analysing 4 relationship pre and post brand event: 1-owner-product relationship 2-qwner-brand relationship 3-owner-company relationship 4-owner-owmers relationship	participation in the event increase the general relationship with the brand the brand loyalty and merchandising intention to buy and product usage
Bagozzi, and Dholakia (2006) Harley Davidson	õAbout how many outings do you think you will participate in with the group of club friends you mentioned above in the next month?ö (Open end response scale) About how many outings do you think you will participate in next year in a typical month?ö (Open-ended response scale)	Group behaviour (participation) has a moderate effect on brand behaviour such as purchasing accessories, visiting dealer and money spent.
Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schroder, (2008) Settlers of Catan games Swatch community	Customer-customer relationship (1) I have met wonderful people because of my [brand] [product]. (2) I feel a sense of kinship with other [brand] owners. (3) I have an interest in more interpersonal contact with other members of the [brand] Community. 7 point Likert scale	Drivers: (1) Reassurance of quality for products with significant credence attributes (2) high involvement with the branded product category (3) opportunity for joint consumption; (4) brand symbolic function.

Table 2: descriptive statistic for the main constructs

Construct	Items	Mean	s.d.	C.Alfa
Brand relationship	3			**.945**
Br 1 (alternatively we can put the entire item verbatim)		4.91	1.419	
Br 2		4.97	1.579	
Br 3		4.89	1.482	
Brand community identification	5			**.920**
Bci1		4.84	1.344	
Bci2		4.57	1.181	
Bci3		4.64	1.246	
Bci4		4.43	1.183	
Bci5		4.73	1.316	
Brand participation *	5			**.915**
Bcp1		3,22	1,308	
Bcp2		2,91	1,483	
Bcp3		2,98	1,135	
Bcp4		10,45	9,283	
Bcp5		5,75	4,881	
Brand love	2			**.817**
Bl 1		4.00	1.463	
Bl 2		3.87	1.425	
Brand trust	2			**.837**
Bt 1		4.59	1.387	
Bt 2		4.67	1.250	
Brand loyalty	1			
Word of mouth	1			
Expertise	3			**.927**
Bk1		4.42	1.609	
Bk2		4.29	1.588	
Bk3		4.48	1.734	

*the items have been standardized for structural analysis

Table 3: standardized factor loading, composite reliability and Square root of AVE.

Construct-item	Loading (standardized loading)	t-value	composite reliability (ρ_ε)	Square root of AVE ($\rho_{vc(\varepsilon)}$)
Brand relationship (br)			85.60%	0.93
Br 1	0,90			
Br 2	0,95	23.612		
Br 3	0,93	21.938		
Brand community Identification (bci)			69.69%	0.84
Bci1	0,86			
Bci2	0,79	15.754		
Bci3	0,82	15.920		
Bci4	0,84	16.854		
Bci5	0,86	17.928		
Bran community participation (bcp)			77.17%	0.88
Bcp1	0,88			
Bcp2	0,87	20.660		
Bcp3	0,91	18.627		
Bcp4	0,83	16.623		
Bcp5	0,90	19.644		
Brand love(bl)			69.81%	0.84
Bl 1	0,84			
Bl 2	0,83	16.718		
Brand trust(bt)	0,83		72.30%	0.85
Bt 1	0,87	13.438		
Bt 2				
Brand loyalty (bl)				
Word of mouth (wom)				
Brand knowledge (bk)			81.03%	0.93
Bk1	0,89			
Bk2	0,92	21999		
Bk3	0,89	19.315		

Table 4: Correlation among Constructs

	BCI	BCP	BL	BT	BK	BR
BCI	1					
BCP	.816	1				
BL	.767	.752	1			
BT	.701	.708	.696	1		
BK	.771	.809	.750	.744	1	
BR	.819	.821	.746	.713	.758	1

Significant at ⟨ = .05; all correlations are significantly less than 1.00.

Notes: BCI= brand community identification; BCP=brand community participation; BL=brand love; BT=brand trust; BA=brand attachment BK=brand knowledge BR=Brand relationship

able 5: resumes the hypothesis testing.

Path	Hypothesis	Coefficients	Sign. level
brand relationship → brand community participation	h₁ - supported	0.48	<0.001*
brand relationship → brand community identification	h₂ - supported	0.85	<0.001*
brand community identification → brand community participation	h₃ - supported	0.41	<0.01**
brand community size → brand community participation	h₄ . not supported	-	
brand community size → brand community identification	h₅-not supported	-	
brand community participation → brand love	h₆ₐ h₆ᵦ - not supported	0.37	<0.001*
brand community identification → brand love		0.49	
brand community participation → brand trust		0.39	<0.001*
brand community identification → brand trust		0.42	
brand community participation → brand loyalty	h₇ₐ - supported	0.41	<0.001*
brand community identification → brand loyalty		0.40	
brand community participation → word of mouth	h₇ᵦ - supported	0.44	<0.001*
brand community identification → word of mouth		0.35	
brand community participation → brand knowledge	h₈ - supported	0.52	<0.001*
brand community identification → brand knowled		0.6	

* Significant at 99.9% level

** Significant at 99% level

*** Significant at 90% level

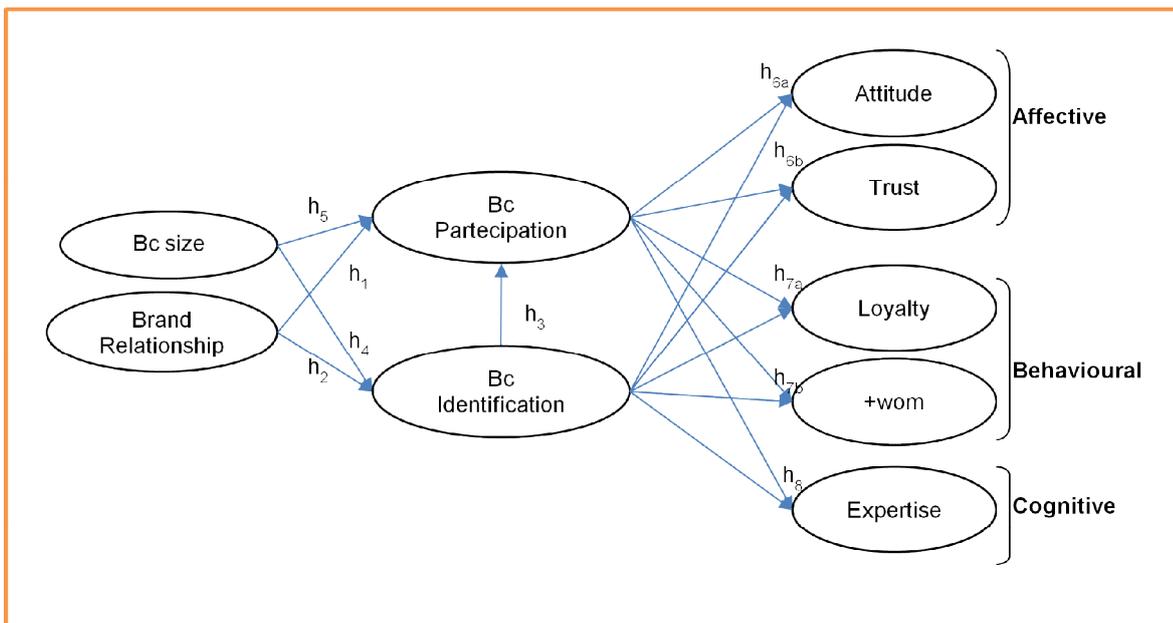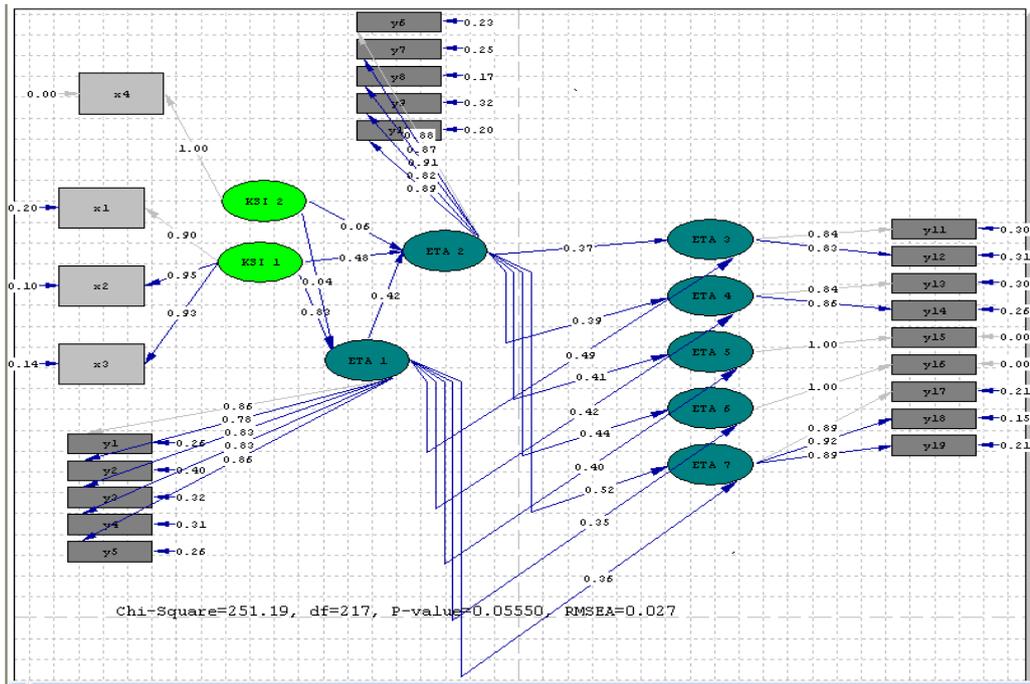Figure 1: conceptual model of participation in off-line brand community

Figure 2: Lisrel output

Chi-Square=251.19, df=217, P-value=0.05550, RMSEA=0.027

Appendix

Construct	Measures *
Brand relationship	1-this brand say a lot about the kind of person I am 2-the Vespaøs image and myself image are similar in many respect 3- Vespa plays an important role in my life.
Brand community Identification	1. I am very attached to the community. 2. Other brand community members and I share the same objectives. 3. The friendships I have with other brand community members mean a lot to me. 4. If brand community members planned something, Iød think of it as something õweö would do rather than something õtheyö would do. 5. I see myself as a part of the brand community.
Brand Community participation	1. Frequency of participation in daily event (1=0% 2=25% 3=50% 4=75% 5=100%) 2. Frequency of participation in weekend event (1=0% 2=25% 3=50% 4=75% 5=100%) 3. Frequency of participation in weekend event (1=0% 2=25% 3=50% 4=75% 5=100%) 4. Role (1=just member 2=secretary 3=public relations 4=marketing 5=finance 6=vice-president 7=president). 5.Number o times of national event participation: open 6.Number o times of international event participation: open 7.maximum distance in km to reach the event: open
Community size	Number of members of each club
Love	I have feelings for Vespa that I do not have for a lot of other brands; If it is about scooters, Vespa is my most favorite brand.
Trust	1. Vespa is an honest brand; 2. I trust Vespa;
Loyalty	I will drive Vespa in the future
Positive wom	I have recommended Vespa to lots of people
Knowledge	1. When compared to other people, I know a lot about this brand 2. My friends consider me an expert regarding this brand. 3. I consider myself very experienced with this brand.

*Unless indicated otherwise, we obtained responses using seven-point Likert scales, anchored by 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree

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PARTE DUE

L'approccio manageriale
alle comunità di marca
e le dinamiche di controllo

1. Introduction

Padua, besides its illustrious history, is also famous in Italy for being the motherland, together with Venice, Trieste and Treviso, of the "Spritz", an aperitif made with "Prosecco" (dry white wine), "selz" (soda) and liquor, usually Campari or Aperol brands. From 6 p.m. on most days, northern Italian people like to meet in bars, cafés or in the main squares carrying on the aperitif ritual by drinking the Spritz. At the end of October 2000, Mr. Enrico Breda surprisingly discovered that the "Spritz" internet domain was still free and immediately registered it, founding the "Spritz.it" community: "*The idea was not to launch a web site on the Spritz cocktail, but on the concept of Spritz, as aggregating element and enjoying moment of the community*" he explained in our interview in July 2008 in Padua, Italy. Nowadays the "Spritz.it" community counts more than 50,000 online members. On average, more than 150 members connect daily for about 40 minutes, while in the real world "Spritz.it" events and meetings take place periodically in a friendly and youthful atmosphere. Subsequently, Campari Group, the owner of the Aperol and Campari brands, started to collaborate with the community founder by sponsoring and supporting the community and some events, running advertising and merchandising. The Marketing Director of Campari Group explained in our interview carried out in July 2008 in Milano, Italy, that "*Nowadays our company with our brand Aperol is sponsoring some community events and it is possible to access our official brand site from the community web site.*"

In line with Campari Group, many other firms are currently shaping ex novo brand communities (McWilliam, 2000) or supporting existing ones by sponsoring and promoting events and brand related activities on line or off line (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005).

In the last decades, the meaning of brand and the role of consumer dramatically changed (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Brands, nowadays, do not just identify products and services but configure themselves as *knowledge bridges*

by which consumers and firms build stable interactions, produce, and exchange knowledge, increasing their learning capabilities (Keller, Busacca, & Ostillio, 2005). In addition, consumers are not isolated and passive, but rather they interact and influence each other within communities (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Reingen, Foster, Brown, & Seidman, 1984). Recent studies report that over 90 million people worldwide belong to a brand community (Scarpi, 2008). This phenomenon has been dramatically increased by the use of the Internet which is encouraging communities and interaction between individuals (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). In this context, approaching and monitoring brand communities is increasingly relevant for firms, supervising what members do and say in order to implement relevant marketing strategies.

Despite this, the literature lacks a comprehensive approach to brand community from the manager standpoint. Most of the research in brand community has focused on the social phenomenon, underlying consumers' motivation to join the community (Thompson & Sinha, 2008; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006) and paying little attention to the firms' orientation (Cova & Pace, 2006). Studies from the firm perspective have only addressed "why" brand communities are relevant, without addressing "how" firms perceive them and "how" managers monitor them.

It is important to note that firms can easily create and monitor their own brand communities, but in most cases, brand communities are consumer worlds where entering and monitoring could be very difficult (Dholakia & Vianello, 2009).

Monitoring brand communities created by firms or by consumers is crucial regarding their potential to increase sales by enhancing loyalty and spreading electronic word of mouth, functioning as self-selected well-specialized target markets and a rich source of information regarding preferences and new product ideas (Thompson & Sinha, 2008; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Cova & Pace, 2006). In this paper we investigate the phenomenon of brand

communities from the firm's side, focusing on the monitoring strategies managers enforce. Monitoring brand community offers a novel approach to Customer Relationship Management (CRM) practices, allowing a constant and vivid dialogue between firm and consumer (Thompson & Sinha, 2008; Cova & Pace, 2006).

To accomplish this explorative purpose, we conducted 19 semi-structured interviews following a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Our research is central for several reasons. First, it is fundamental to understand how managers approach brand communities, who is in charge of the monitoring process, what aspects are monitored and when they are monitored. Second, we propose to examine the commonalities and differences among monitoring processes according to the origin of the brand community (i.e., promoted by firm or by consumer) and the interaction with members (i.e., face to face or web mediated). As findings, we propose a comprehensive and interpretative model of brand community linking the origin of brand community, the managers' approaches and the monitoring strategies, identifying best practices for managers and new directions of research for academics.

The paper is organized as follows: first, we describe the brand community theoretical background from firms' viewpoint and the research design. Second, we show the main findings according to managers' perceptions of brand community and its monitoring strategies. Third, we conclude with a discussion regarding the implications for scholars and brand community managers.

2. Theoretical background

The earliest and most quoted paper on brand communities by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 412) defines brand community as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand." Brand community is specialized since it is centered on one specific brand, it lacks geographic connotation and hierarchical organization and usually it is open, in the sense that it does not reject potential members.

Many branded products or firms have been considered to be part of a brand community. For instance, researchers have explored brand communities related to non-durable goods such as Nutella hazelnut spread (Cova & Pace, 2006), Guinness beer (Flavian & Guinaliù, 2005), magazines (Davidson, McNeill, & Ferguson, 2007), flowers (Scarpi, 2008) and to durable goods such as Mercedes and Ford cars (Algesheimer et al., 2005, Luedicke, 2006), Harley-Davidson motorcycles (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), Apple computers (Belk & Tumbat, 2005), and the video game Warhammer (Cova, Pace, & Park, 2007). In contrast, fewer branded service communities have been studied, probably because with respect to services, consumers show a lower commitment to one single brand but instead choose among different acceptable brands within the same category (McWilliam, 2000). Nevertheless, we can quote the studies applied to entertainment parks (McAlexander, Kim, & Roberts, 2003; Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008), free software (Casalò, Flavian, & Guinaliù, 2007; Lakhani & Von Hippel, 2003) or television series (Kozinets, 2001).

Brand community members may never physically meet, or may meet with varying frequencies at specified places or events (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Thus, brand communities are commonly classified according to the structure of the interaction, that is, distinguishing between real brand communities (face-to-face interaction) and

virtual brand communities (interaction mediated by electronic technologies such as the web) (Algesheimer et al., 2005). This classification needs to be understood as a continuum in which the pure forms of the two extremes are quite unusual. Members of real brand communities sometimes use the internet and members of virtual communities sometimes meet (Cova & Pace, 2006; Algesheimer et al., 2005), or in other cases, the brand community changes from one status to another, such as the Mac users quoted by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) where the community switches from real to virtual.

Some brand communities show a formal or informal hierarchy, based on member status or according to member seniority, degree of participation in group activities and product knowledge (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995, Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Algesheimer et al., 2005; Cova et al., 2007). In the Harley Owners Group community, for example, the clubs' presidents act as ecclesiastical authorities, basing their hierarchical status on their riding expertise and experience, motorcycle specific knowledge and the degree of involvement in group activities (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Managers have to be aware of this hierarchy among the brand community members in order to efficiently distribute their monitoring effort. This may be particularly important when managers want to collaborate with an existing brand community and need to reach its founder and associates. Although it is not quoted in the definition given by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001), brand community origin is another key aspect. Previous studies have classified brand community according to its origin: promoted by firm or promoted by consumer (Porter & Donthu, 2008; Muñiz & Schau, 2005; Algesheimer et al., 2005).

2.1. Benefits of brand community

Nowadays, the marketing focus is moving from the traditional "brand-consumer" dyad to a social approach, emphasizing and exploring the influence of relationships on consumer behaviors (McAlexander et. al., 2002). Brand communities especially enhance consumers' interaction with other admirers of the brand and provide firms with a valuable source of information in order to improve their marketing decisions. Brand community members have a strong interest in the product and the brand.

They usually have extensive product knowledge, they engage in discussions about the brand or the product and they support each other in solving problems and generating new ideas. Therefore, brand community members act as opinion leaders, outlining new trends and application areas, or giving consumption feedback (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; McWilliam, 2000; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Through brand community monitoring, managers can identify and segment devoted users and potential targets, and engage in consumption related activities such as the brand promotion in the case of Harley-Davidson's "brand fests" (Nambisan & Nambisan, 2008; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; McAlexander et al., 2002).

Brand community helps firms to overcome resistance to direct marketing activities, reducing space and time constraints and increasing brand image and brand recognition (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). Considering the community as a group of consumers which could act as co-creators and co-producers of the brand (Kay, 2006), managers can improve their decisions related to innovation (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004). We can quote, for instance, the successful experience of Dell who built a web site (www.dellideastorm.com) in blog form, allowing consumer interactions in testing and developing the open source Linux software on its laptops (Ricadela, 2007). Many other firms such as Microsoft, Nokia, Volvo and Nike create links with customers in the areas of innovation

and value creation by establishing virtual communities (Nambisan & Nambisan, 2008; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006).

Members within the community also experience higher attachment to the brand, which in turn leads to higher brand loyalty and brand awareness, higher satisfaction and greater purchase or repurchase intention (Thompson & Sinha, 2008; McAlexander, et al., 2002; Wang, Yu, & Fesenmaier, 2002). For instance, as studied by Rothaermel and Sugiyama (2001), members of a community of wristwatch hobbyists and collectors show a very high repurchase behaviour, since the average TimeZone member buys between two and ten watches annually on this web site. In an online community of microprocessors and 3D video cards, Thompson & Sinha (2008) reported how brand community participation and membership duration increase the likelihood of new product adoption and accelerate the time to adoption. Within real brand communities, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) note that members of Harley-Davidson clubs tend to buy upper models of bike in order to increase their status within the group, while Algesheimer et al. (2005) show that engagement in European car clubs positively affects loyalty towards those cars.

To go further, Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) evidenced two interesting concerns about brand loyalty: constructive loyalty and oppositional loyalty. They pointed out how community members, although remaining loyal, are critical of some aspect of the brand and its management (constructive loyalty), underlining undesirable or unattractive managers' strategies and decisions, such as co-branding or companies merging. They also develop an opposition to competing brands (oppositional brand loyalty). With respect to the main competitor of Macintosh and Saab, for instance, members pointed out respectively the poor performance of PCs or the dullness of Volvo cars. In order to differentiate themselves from others, members can develop "dark" behaviours such as finding fault with other brands or members of competing brand communities (Hickman & Ward, 2007; Muñiz & Schau, 2005). As Kozinets (2001) highlights, different brand meanings across groups within the

same brand community exist, and sometimes conflicts could arise, according to the different degree of involvement and commitment to the community and to the brand: *trekkers*, members of the Star Trek community, perceive the other members, the *trekkies*, as consumption fanatics, immature and passive.

2.2. Risks associated with brand community

Consumers are not passive targets of marketing strategies (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998) but rather they are re-interpreting and co-creating marketing messages, discovering and adding different meanings to brands, interacting with the management and with other consumers (Holt, 2002). Cova and Pace (2006) refer to "serendipitous hijack" when consumers add, change or re-interpret the brand meaning independently of marketing (Cova & Pace, 2006), and **"**creative hijack", the co-creation process of brand meaning between consumer and firm. In the same line but in the context of positioning and segmentation, Kates and Goh (2003) address the concept of brand morphing, that is, how the brand meaning changes among different group of consumers. Managers therefore have to monitor how brand messages and contents are delivered to and interpreted by consumers, in which contexts and by which modalities in order to improve the positive and limit the negative effects on brand image and meaning.

Brand communities, as social entities, interact constantly with the social environment, receiving positive and negative inputs or, in other words, acceptance or opposition (Luedicke, 2006). Harley-Davidson meetings, for instance, originate conflicts with hosting people who could develop negative brand perceptions and negative attitudes towards the brand and the brand community (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). In the same line, Luedicke (2006) analyzed how the Hummer brand and its community create admiration and opposition at the same time among the North American public: Members promote the brand and its use while non-members underline the negative impact of the cars on the environment as well as the selfish vanity of their

owners. Consequently, those negative behaviors take the form of protests such as sit in and strikes during brand community events, living out an anti-brand community building process. In the virtual space, brand communities could be targets of "trolls" (Donath, 1999): anonymous people who post off-topic messages with the intention of disturbing and provoking. Thus, firms have to be aware of their community frontiers in order to avoid negative behaviors and attitudes such as negative word-of-mouth (WOM).

Traditionally, researchers refer to WOM as brand or product denigration, dissatisfaction, complaints or unfulfilled expectations (Luo, 2009). Negative WOM could negatively impact brand image (Richins, 1983), repurchase intention (East, Hammond, & Lomax, 2008) and cash flow (Gruca & Rego, 2005). Due to its rarity, it could be even more useful for marketers and consumers than positive word of mouth (Luo, 2007; Feldman and Lynch, 1988) but it could be allayed by brand commitment (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, & Unnava, 2000), by the consumers' familiarity with the brand (Ahluwalia, 2002), by satisfaction (Anderson, 1998) or by marketing strategies such as sponsorships and communications (Khare, Labrecque, & Asare, 2011).

3. Research Methodology

This paper has a subjective, interpretive underpinning and is driven by an inductive approach to the generation of theory (Bryman, 2008). Our intention was not to highlight an objective truth, rather we aimed at understanding actors' interpretation of brand community and its monitoring strategies. We chose a multiple case design as it enabled us to consider more than one company, putting us in a better position to establish the circumstances in which the theory would or would not hold (Bryman, 2008; Eisendhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003). By semi-structured interviews we collected data within ten companies operating in sectors such as automotive, food and drink, leisure and tourism. Interviews were carried out in Italy and in Italian by the first author,

fully recorded and transcribed verbatim. The relevant interview extracts were translated into English. We drew on the contributions of Halai (2007) and Hernandez (2010) to carry out the translation and transliteration of the interviews in an accurate, rigorous and meaningful way.

Most of the interviews took place within the companies; one was conducted outside the company premises, and three were carried out during a brand community event, allowing the researcher to collect nontechnical data (e.g. photos, merchandising and advertising materials) through non-participant observation (Strauss & Corbin, p. 90). A total of 19 interviews were conducted, of which 17 were with managers or brand community managers, and two with product/brand communities founders.

The sample comprised two females (Nestlé's marketing director and product manager) and 17 males. The sampling was based on non-probabilistic methods (Bryman, 2008). The process was carried out as follows.

We initially listed the brands that, to our knowledge, could have probably developed a brand community. In this respect we looked at brands with a well-defined image, a rich lengthy history and which are publicly consumed (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001), expressing hedonic quality and implying high involvement (McAlexander et al., 2002). For instance, brands such as Fiat 500 and Ducati (automotive) were selected especially for their well-defined image and long history whereas brands such as MSC (cruises) and Perugina (chocolate cakes) were considered to be particularly hedonic. The list of those brands has been contrasted, by specialized newspapers and internet screening, with the existence on the web and/or in the real world, of related brand communities, either promoted by consumer or by the corresponding firm. Results show that among more than 150 brands and corporate brands, almost 35% were associated with a brand community either firm promoted or consumer promoted.

Secondly, from October 2008 to July 2009, either by mails, e-mails and telephone, we contacted the firms behind these brands and 10 of them agreed to participate in the research project. These firms currently manage 33 brand communities, this number being larger than the number of firms because each firm can manage several brand communities on its own or collaborate with consumers' brand communities. For instance, the Piaggio Company has developed brand communities for each of its corporate brands such as Aprilia and Motoguzzi, and it is also monitoring different consumers' communities related more to single brands such as Ape or Vespa.

Finally, since the typology of interviews was theme oriented and not personal oriented (Kvale, 1983) we let the firms direct us to the managers in charge of brand community management. By contacting those managers, we consequently moved to a "discriminate sampling" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), selecting other relevant interviewee and brand communities in order to maximize the data and to fill in poorly developed categories. For instance, after the interview with the marketing manager of MSC Cruises, where some degree of relationship with a corresponding consumer brand community emerged, researchers attempted to contact the community founder, in order to corroborate and enhance the manager's vision.

Table 1 shows the sample indicating firms, participants and their roles, according to the main categories previously identified: brand community promoted by firms or by consumers. It is important to note that all firms but one gave the authors consent for the treatment of their information. The company that opted for anonymity was assigned a pseudonym.

-- Insert Table 1 around here --

We analysed our qualitative data on the basis of a grounded theory approach because it enabled us to deeply focus on the comparative analysis of managers' approach and experiences with brand community by "investigating

the role of persons in shaping the worlds they live in and the interrelationships among conditions, meaning and actions" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 25). This strategy for analysing qualitative data has become more popular in marketing research only recently (Goulding, 2005). In particular data analysis was supported by the software NVivo which was used for the "open, axial and selective" coding procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Through the on-going processes of cycling iterations from the single interview part to the whole set of interviews, it was possible to detect codes, while through axial coding it was possible to group the codes in more abstract levels. Selecting coding allows to link themes to core categories, evidencing relationships.

Interviews and coding procedures continued on the basis of representativeness and consistency of events, incidents and happenings, thus allowing the authors to highlight differences and similarities, make comparisons and identify categories. The process stopped once saturation was achieved, such as when redundancy emerged (Strauss and Corbin, 1990): for instance, the last interviews conducted in early 2010 did not evidence more categories but only confirmed the previous ones.
Figure 1 reports the graphic representations of main codes and relationships to core categories.

-- Insert Figure 1 around here --

4. Findings

By interviewing 17 managers and 2 community founders about their approaches to brand community and their management experiences, two main core categories were identified: the brand community vision and the monitoring strategies. The first one is related to "how" managers perceive

brand communities, the differences according to the origin (consumer or firm promoted) and how members differ from (normal or usual) consumers. The second core category is related to the monitoring process, that is to say what is the object of monitoring, who is in charge of the process and finally the strategies managers enforce. Consequently, we propose
a paradigm model (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), showing the set of relationships among categories and explaining the phenomenon under study (Figure 2).

-- Insert Figure 2 around here --

Based on this model, we discuss below the managerial approach of brand community (consumer or firm promoted) and its corresponding monitoring process. Analyzing the intervening condition, that is, "the broader structural context pertaining to a phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 103) two main elements currently positively impact the success and the spread of brand communities: the diffusion of new communication technologies such as the internet (Porter & Donthu, 2008) and the emerging pattern of consumption as experience as well as group phenomenon (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Holt, 1995).

The role of the internet, in particular, is twofold: from the one side, the internet, as a virtual world, is highly increasing the birth of virtual brand communities. From the other side, as a communication technology, it is offering a better and faster means of contact for members of real brand communities.

4.1. **Manager's vision of brand community**
4.1.1. A variety of relationships

A manager's vision of brand community deals with the eanings and the structure they perceive of the phenomenon. Figure 3 depicts relationships between firm, consumer and brand.

-- Insert Figure 3 around here --

Figure 3.a represents the conventional scheme of brand community (McAlexander et al., 2002), where members and firms interact with each other. It is typical of real brand communities both created by consumers or promoted by firms (e.g. Ducati, Fiat, and Vespa).

> *Our brand communities are like big families, where members, single brands*
> *and the entire company interact constantly. Each one contributes according to*
> *their competencies (Ducati). Our brand communities are sets of interactions*
> *between dealers and consumers (Fiat).*

Figure 3.b characterizes virtual brand communities (e.g., Campari) where interaction among members does not exist; interaction is one-to-one, from the brand to the consumer and *vice versa*, by e-mails and newsletters. The absence of horizontal communication among members is the main difference between these kinds of virtual brand communities and virtual social networks, such as Facebook, where interactions are the main goal of membership.

> *In developing our brand community we decided to not allow consumersø*
> *interaction. Our project is relatively new and we prefer to directly manage the*
> *brand community contents (Campari).*

Figure 3.c shows the most common structure for virtual brand communities where the community is a virtual space for members' interaction. More than focusing on the architecture of brand community, managers consider them as universes, where interactions are multidirectional without space and time constraints. Most of the managers refer to these brand community by underlining that:

> *Brand community is a brand territory available for interested consumers*
> *(Aperol), a space where the brand is the link among consumers (Nestlé), a box*
> *with flexible walls (Pernod Ricard).*

Finally, Figure 3.d, more than a brand community structure, refers to managers' perceptions about the possibility that the same consumer belongs to different brand communities. The same consumer could be a member of different brand communities within the same product categories, i.e. automotive, or a member of different ones, food and fashion for instance.

> *We often follow co-branding strategies since our communities, that is the brand meanings and values are really close. There is a kind of overlap between what consumers feel about our products (Nestlé and Vespa).*

4.1.2. Member's specificities among consumers

Managers perceived high differences between conventional consumers, fans and members of brand communities. They emphasize the importance of a clear distinction between community members and brand sympathizers, identifying the frontiers of each brand community. Confusing different targets, equalizing community members and simple followers, could be unproductive from a marketing point of view.

> *Being a fan of Ferrari is not the same as being a member of the Ferrari Club. We care about both for sure, but the level of brand involvement is different (Fiat).* Ferrari is a brand of Fiat Group (N/A).

> *During our marketing campaigns we know that members require different approaches. They need different appeals; they do not need explanation about the product performance. It is strategic for us to distinguish community members from other consumers (Motoguzzi).*

Differences among consumers and members are summarized in Table 2.

--Insert Table 2 around here –

Members' brand choices are not only need driven. The brand satisfies an *ego* need related to the community soul. Members within the brand community share the same value system.

> *Our community is built around a chocolate cake: a consumer good! What really is important is the sharing of the same approach to life, by simplicity, sincerity, love and kindness. Our community orbits around this value system, corresponding to the brand values (Nestlé).*

In those contexts, consumption is not "individual" but collective, ritual and symbolic, within social links not only represented by classical reference groups (e.g., family) but within bigger networks, like the brand community.

> *The guy who buys the Monster needs to show off to the community. Applying the club's logo to his motorcycle or his leather jacket is the next step (Ducati).*

Proactiveness is one of the most interesting traits of community members. Members are and feel themselves as an active part of many firm processes: they appreciate being involved in product development or being part of new product testing. Members like to give suggestions for marketing campaigns as well as for suitable testimonials. Managers do not refer to sporadic collaboration, but to a constant and productive dialogue.

> *We receive feedback not only on the service quality as a normal consumer gives. Members suggest how we can improve the service, which part to implement, why and how, what are the expected resultsí sometimes they are so involved in this process that they forget the limits they have, pretending to participate in all strategic firm decisions (MSC).*

> *Many ideas on how to promote our brand and brand events come from community members. They are more involved in product use. The brand is part of their life (X).*

Managers also observe that members develop a high commitment and perceive each other as part of a different culture or sub-culture, as the literature has also indicated. Within Harley-Davidson brand communities, for instance, we observe "*a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity*" with a unique ethos and modes of symbolic expression (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995, p. 43). Similarly, within the brand communities of our study, managers are able to identify different cultures or subcultures, self-selected by different systems of values and behaviors. The following excerpts clarify the point:

> *Not all Vespa¢s communities are similar. The one where the nostalgia is the driver of participation is completely different from the one where the adventure is the focus. In the first case members like the 70s way of living, its clothes, while in the second the idea of freedom, the open and unexplored space. (Vespa).*

Members of a brand community evidence a different kind of loyalty, less connected with the brand experience and more with the commitment to the brand. They are loyal to the brand itself, regardless of its current owner or new portfolio.

> *The glorious pastime of Motoguzzi has been perceived as an õobsessionö by community members, a reason for their loyalty. They always find an occasion to celebrate it and, moreover, they wish that the brand would be able to translate into the new models the spirit and the legend of the 60s and 70s (Motoguzzi).*

Members take care of the brand, its development and its value. Changes and expectations are balanced by a constant dialogue among members and with the brand. The members are never completely unsatisfied but in a

constructive approach point out what they like or not, what has to be changed or transformed.

Oppositional loyalty, although noted in the literature, did not emerge in interviews, either spontaneously or induced by direct questions. Answers were evasive, due to the "politeness of not speaking about competitors," as many stated; above all they emphasized how among members of different brand communities gossips and jokes emerge rather than conflicts: consumers of competing brand communities share the same passion and respect each other.

Fans of Ducati and fans of Motoguzzi share the same passion for motorcycles (Motoguzzi).

Oppositional loyalty, then, has a light form, concerning negative word of mouth and preference, always in an ironic context.

õVespistiö riders call Japanøs scooters õplasticoniö, made of plastic! (Piaggio).

In light of previous results, substantial differences emerge between general consumers and members of brand communities. Managers have shown how different values, attitudes and relationships emerge in brand communities which require a specific management according to the brand community origin.

4.2. Managers' building of brand communities

Managers' views of brand communities depend, to a large extent, on the manner in which the brand community has emerged and is promoted. Brand community is first of all a consumer spontaneous phenomenon and only in recent times have firms shown concrete interest in them (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). Thus, building and managing a community is an effective but

complicated marketing program, especially when the brand community has been created and is currently promoted by consumers.

Managers argue that brand communities promoted by consumers range from a quite small number of members to a huge one, and are most often geographically dispersed. Those brand communities are strongly sociocentric (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006), lacking a formal hierarchy with regular or frequent face to face interaction. In addition to the feeling toward the brand, managers consider that those communities show a range of recreational purposes and social activities, letting somebody see that "the link is more important than the think" (Cova, 1997: p. 307).

Following figure 2, with respect to consumer initiated brand community, firms choose among a continuum going from totally merging strategies (such as the case of Vespa) to neutral orientation.

In particular, managers refer to three main strategies regarding the approach to consumer brand community: merging, supporting or being neutral. In the first case, such as Piaggio with Vespa and Nestlé with Perugina, the firm, by the consensus of community members, decides to merge and coordinate the one or most of the existing brand communities under one single brand community: Vespa World Club and bacio.it respectively. The reason is that some brands are global icons, involving millions of fans all over the world. Official and formal brand communities are then mandatory in order to coordinate brand related activities and preserve the original brand value.

In the case of Vespa, due to the high numbers of fans, it was necessary to coordinate their activities and support their events. The creation of the World Vespa Club was the natural consequence of an ancient and never stopping phenomenon, the Vespa clubs (Piaggio).

In the second case, the strategy of supporting, the consumers' brand community remains independent of the firm and the company supports the

community just by sponsoring some events, giving financial aid or managing some aspects such as the promotional campaign and the merchandising. This is the case of Fiat with its many brand communities or the case of the Campari Group with the Spritz.it virtual community.

It is impossible to monitor and coordinate each community. We support them directly only when they ask some kind of aid, financial or co-related marketing activities (Fiat).

Spritz is a consumer brand community and it is not our strategy to merge with it. We limit our actions just to giving them some merchandise or the authorization to use our logos during their meeting or promotional event

In the last case of neutral orientation, consumers and firms act in completely autonomous ways and interaction does not exist, such in the case of MSC Cruises and the Crocieristi.it consumer community.
Independence, freedom and refusal of any commercial purpose are the reasons behind this choice.

Our marketing department has reported the existence of several brand communities, blogs, chat rooms and forums linked directly or indirectly with the world of Cruises. One of the most interesting was Crocieristi.it. We tried to contact them, without result (MSC).

Several cruise companies sent me a lot of mails and invitations and advertising materials, but I simply did not reply. I and all members should feel free to say everything, to choose any company without any kind of suggestions or pressures (Crocieristi.it).

Firms can also opt to build their own brand community. Managers however underline how difficult and risky the process could be. Brand community is a consumer phenomenon and all attempts to replicate them could fail quickly.

It is not enough to launch a web site and call it a community. You can end up with a huge mailing list without meaning (RCS). You can build a beautiful house -community-It is not true members will enter (Coca-Cola).

In building brand communities managers first make decisions about membership. Different tools ensure true affiliation to the community: in almost all luxury brand communities the service's fruition or product's property are the minimum requisites or, in managerial terms, "the pass" for community access. In consumer good brand communities, the level of expertise more than the property could represent the filter for community membership.

In order to participate in some brand related activities such as competition, we clearly demand a high knowledge of our brand, its history, its recent or past packaging, its testimonials and so on (Nestlé).

The second step focuses on the relationship among brand and consumer that managers decide to develop. As previously described in figure 1, managers can promote a vertical relationship, where contents are delivered from brand to consumer, or a horizontal approach, where the firm builds a brand territory where contents are spread and consumers interact with each other. Differences in the structures of the brand community seem to be related to the age of the brand community and to the communication strategies firms choose.

Our community is relatively new for both consumers and our company. We needed to develop the concept of brand community step by step, deciding at first to not allow consumer interaction. Moreover in this way we are absolutely sure of the brand contents and meaning within the brand community (Campari).

4.3. Object of Monitoring

Monitoring is a set of strategies in order to manage the potential benefits but also avoid critical situations such as brand image distortion, conflicts among members and negative word of mouth.

As mentioned before, firms focus on vertical relationships, where contents are delivered from brand to consumer and vice versa, or a horizontal approach, where a brand community is the space of consumer interaction. Both related structures have to be monitored. In the latter horizontal approach, two monitoring areas emerged: member-generated content and the members' interaction in both real and virtual oriented brand communities.

4.3.1.   Horizontal interaction among members

Members of brand communities meet and interact by exchanging information, judgments, opinions, photos and videos, and by sharing impressions, perceptions, feelings, attitudes and actions both in the real world and in virtual space. As members are active and generate content regarding the brand, it leads to brand appropriation and/or brand distortion. Managers recognize the need to monitor user generated content to forecast brand appropriation and to be sure that messages are not misunderstood or bent, preventing negative brand perception. The interview with the marketing director of Campari illustrates this issue:

> *The consumer does not passively receive our messages; neither does he do what*
> *we sometimes õdesire.ö A consumer always õpersonalizesö the brand; his*
> *actions are free, but always within the border space we designed for him. We*
> *can not allow the brand meaning to be õmisreadö (Campari).*

In addition, managers are aware of the need to monitor members' relationships to control the community frontiers in order to avoid conflict

among members and negative word of mouth. Due to easy access and guarantee of anonymity, any kind of people with potential negative and illegal aims could join a virtual brand community. Obviously such people are not brand lovers. Managers refer to sporadic cases such as the trolls.

> *When I speak about our community, I refer to thousand of membersí it is natural that the bad egg always exists. The administrator and the moderator are here to detect and stop them (RCS).*

Negative word of mouth is a matter of great consideration as an object of monitoring. By monitoring negative word of mouth, managers receive insight into critical brand experience problems with product use, related service and negative perceived brand image. The value of this information, when they are able to capture it, is essential. But again the whole process, from initial word of mouth to diffusion, is done in a constructive way. Managers pointed out how most claims and complaints are directed to customer care centres or to protest websites (Ward & Ostrom, 2006), while inside the brand community claims and complaints take the form of hints, advice and suggestions as the sentence underlines:

> *What they suggest is told by a friendly customer, an apostle, the one who chose you by emotional loyalty and not only because he is your client. They actively participate in the service improvement and design (MSC).*

Finally, in a real brand community, where member interaction is of the face to face type, social brand events, member meetings, conventions and conferences also constitute matters of monitoring.
All stages of brand events are monitored including locations, staff, volunteers and merchandising. Managers also monitor the social approval of other communities (i.e. residents of neighbourhoods or cities) where events take place: this could take the form of official authorizations, formal and informal

residents' acceptance and also it can refer to the degree of logistic support and approval. Many brand events, as a matter of fact, due to their magnitude, frequently require volunteers and collaborators.

4.3.2. Vertical interaction between members and firm

Inside the set of brand community links, managers show a high interest in the vertical dimension, that is, the bi-directional relationship between the brand and the community's members.

Two main roles emerge: brand community as target and brand community as partner. First, brand community members constitute a specific group of consumers inside the more general target of the brand. For this specific target, managers activate specific strategies of customer relationship management, design advertising campaigns, and promote sales; brand community also serves as a test for the more general market of the brand.

> *In launching the red version of our cake, the community was invited to give us opinions and feedback. Their opinion and their level of acceptance were very important for us. Moreover, we reserve particular sales strategies just for our community, offering travels and gadget for their loyalty (Nestlé).*

A brand community could act also as a partner for the brand. Due to the high brand knowledge and expertise of its members, a brand community could be directly involved in new product design and testing, actively collaborating in product development and improvement as well as in the design of the promotion campaign. Monitoring the brand community response is then strategic for the brand. Depending on the brand community typologies (virtual or real) and origin (firm or consumer initiated) different monitoring strategies emerge.

In the case of a firm initiated brand community, either real or virtual, it is the firm who is in charge of monitoring the established communication channels where members report their impressions, opinions and beliefs. Through an interactive dialogue, the brand and the community members collaborate in the creation of new advertising campaigns as well as in product design. Thanks to the power of the internet, this dialogue is more frequent, productive and profitable than the past. The internet offers the possibility of communication with thousands of members without space and time constraints.

> *For the launch of the Fiat 500 model we built a web platform where members of our community could test their innovation capabilities and suggest their ideas. Specifically, each member could participate in the design of the 500 model, accessories and so on. Our design department took member suggestions into serious consideration. The advertising campaign also was designed with the active support of members (Fiat).*

In the case of a consumer initiated brand community, either real or virtual, monitoring is translated into observation activities in order to capture consumer impressions and opinions and analyze insights. Marketing intelligence monitors consumer activities such as brand fests and meetings, as well as web surfing to monitor blogs, forums and community web sites. Once the firm is interested in concerns emerging from those consumer brand communities, it could contact the brand community offering its support or asking for collaboration.

> *It is the Spritz community (consumer community) who contacted us asking for support. We organize common activities especially linked with the promotion of our Aperol brand. During some specific appointments, we gave them a lot of merchandise (Campari).*

To review, according to the typologies of brand communities, i.e., promoted by the firm or by consumers, and structures, i.e. virtual or real, different communication channels are activated between the brand and the community. In a brand community promoted by the firm, the flow of

information and opinion is constantly monitored and planned. In the case of a brand community promoted by consumers, the vertical monitoring is quite different, due to access difficulties. Nevertheless, managers, by supervising and observing members' activities, have the possibility of activating formal or informal communication channels, by sending emails and advertising material or inviting community founders to firm conventions.

4.4. Conditions for monitoring

Monitoring strategies are translated into a set of procedures and managerial activities, involving the firm at different levels. In the last decades, the monitoring procedures have become more formal and great financial and human resources are dedicated to the aim. Due to the increasing importance of brand communities for brand management (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry Jr., 2003) and due to the role of brand community for understanding consumers' behaviours (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) interactive approaches are required. The following paragraphs detail the entire process of monitoring, discussing who is in charge of the process, how and under which conditions.

4.4.1. Who is in charge of monitoring?

When analysing who is in charge of monitoring, managers point out how in the in past the task marginally gravitated within the marketing department, while at present, brand community managers, brand community departments and event managers are increasing, as in the cases of Piaggio, Ducati, Fiat, and Pernod Ricard. Firms are currently demanding specific roles and structures in order to manage and monitor brand communities. New figures are emerging, with the goals of planning and managing community events as well as administering virtual communities, acting in a complex environment. To give an illustration, managers' narratives show that:

> *A new kind of manager is emerging, a manager without an office, always in the place where events happenö (Pernod Ricard). It is not a case of training door-to-door salesmen, but managers with high brand love and relationship sensibility (Piaggio). The community moderator monitors what happens in the community like a mayor in a city (Nestlé).*

This new figure of the brand community manager continuously monitoring real events and virtual content is especially true for brand communities promoted by firms. Due to the complexity of the task, brand community managers recognize that they also work with event managers or brand community administrators (also called moderators) dedicated respectively to real events or to web related monitoring. Alternatively, managers who only monitor brand communities created and promoted by consumers do rely on the common figure of the brand manager and its related marketing intelligence activities, including web surfing.

As all managers strongly underlined, inside monitoring processes, members play fundamental and priceless roles. In particular, brand community members show a sense of moral responsibility to the brand and the owners, protecting the brand, community as a whole and individual members from internal and external threats. As indicated by Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006),

brand communities are a shared values system and a tool for identity projection, so each threat is considered like a threat to the ego and the member's own world. Managers observe that community members monitor each other, reporting to the community or to the firms abuses, bad behaviours or violations of netiquette or codes of conduct. In line with Muñiz and Schau (2005), the narratives of the managers show that community members develop a cult like devotion towards the brand and display supernatural and religious roles. As a matter of fact, they refer to brand community members as:

> *Brand ambassadors (Piaggio), brand apostles (Nestlé) brand evangelists (MSC), and also in a positive manner Taliban of the brand (Vespa).*

In this regard, negative behaviour and actions against the brand never arise within brand communities. Members share the same passion and love for the brand and threats always come from outside the community. The brand community is not only a place that allows relationships among its members and the brand, but a space that members belong to and protect. Managers underlined how brand community reinforces, protects and promotes the brand. Consider the following statement:

> *Consumers who decide to join a brand community are brand lovers; there is no reason to boycott the brand or the company. Also in the case of virtual community members have a clear idea of what they can do and what they can say. The brand community is their home (Piaggio).*

4.4.2. When do they monitor brand community?

Brand communities created and promoted by firms are directly and continuously monitored. Managers' attendance during real brand community events is constant and mandatory, especially when the size of the event is notable or when the event is crucial for the companies, such as launching a new product. For instance, managers report that:

Usually the marketing director and the brand community managers follow the
event directly as well as the product managers (Piaggio).

Even a small aperitif in a small bar has to be planned and I [event manager]
always supervise the whole event (Pernod Ricard).

Member-generated content on the web is monitored by two main modalities: ex ante and ex post supervising, that is, they either analyze and verify content before it appears on the community web site or control it after the content has been published. Ex ante monitoring emerges in most cases; the reason is that brand communities are part of effective marketing programs and all communication strategies should appear consistent. To illustrate this issue, we can quote the following narratives from managers:

The community is, in the last analysis, the official mirror of the firm and the aim
is to reduce at minimum each potential threatö (Campari). In gazzaspace.it -
virtual brand communities of 350,000 members- all posted comments are
reviewed before publishing (RCS).

Brand communities created and promoted by consumers are monitored periodically and indirectly. Due to the small size or to the high geographical dispersion, firms are not always able to detect and monitor consumer brand communities. The web nowadays is making this task easier, but again, not all brand communities appear on the internet or have an official status including a registered office, statute and rules for joining. In order to identify brand communities firms look also to indirect sources such as specialized newspapers, television shows, news or in the case of virtual community, firms

are hiring specialized operators for the task of constantly scanning and surfing the web.

When the firm detects a real brand community, its monitoring process is activated when the size of the brand community reaches a critical mass point, representing a potential problem for the related firms. In such cases a firm's presence is recommended when the size of events increases or when a direct sponsoring request emerges. For instance, in small local meetings like in the cases of Vespa and 500 clubs, managers never attend, since the event size is small and the monitoring cost is high. When the event has national or international features, with thousands of members, managers strongly recommend indirect monitoring and supervising. Indeed, the brand community manager of Vespa and Fiat underlined that:

> *Brands such as 500 or Vespa have many brand communities of 10 members who, in our last analysis, are friends living in the same little town, meeting on Sunday to ride a touristic trip and having lunch somewhere (Piaggio).*

In addition, the monitoring of user content in a consumer brand community is logically of the ex post type. Managers can not intervene directly in these communities but they could contact the administrator or enter as members without hiding their status. To cover up the real intention of membership within a virtual community could be very risky, implying the loss of trust between consumer and brand, as the brand manager of Fiat points out:

> *It is not a good idea to create a false account and add contentí they are people who are able to recognize who you are and what you are doing. You take a high riskí May completely lose consumersø trust. You could appear ridiculous (Fiat).*

4.5. Strategies in monitoring

As depicted in figure 2, monitoring strategies depend mostly on brand community origin (consumer or firm). On the one hand, monitoring a brand community promoted by a firm is a constant and direct process: first, firms have free access to the community and second, since the community is the official mirror of the brand, the monitoring is constant in order to avoid risks and problems. As stated, "Everything should always be perfect and harmonic with brand strategies (Coca-Cola)". On the other hand, consumers' brand communities are monitored periodically since they are dispersed, not easily approachable and the process is costly. As external entities to the firms, the monitoring process is indirect, limited to what is visible to the management: public events and meetings in the case of real brand communities or displayed contents in the case of virtual communities. Managers have no access to community plans, and they have neither decisional power nor influence on brand community activities and actions. Monitoring is based on the public behaviour with the brand during events, the brand meanings they publicly spread and the visible brand contextualization within the community.

Sometimes managers are unaware of a consumer brand community's existence or they ignore what is going on in the community. It is not rare that they underestimate the power of consumer brand communities and the effect on brand.
Monitoring both firm and consumer initiated brand communities then becomes essential. In the long term, managers should reserve more attention for consumer initiated brand communities: it becomes strategic and profitable to discover and explore what happens in the consumer's world through a systematic and constant researching and monitoring of brand communities promoted by consumers.

Sales and profit gave me just a single perspective on the firm and its consumers. If I really want to approach and understand consumer world I need a constant approach, a constant dialogue and brand community is the tool (Campari).

Developing trust emerges as the primary target of monitoring and as the starting condition for entering the consumer world through an interactive dialogue. Managers do not refer to trust as a feeling toward a firm, person or the whole organization, but rather they consider trust as general context in which consumers act.

According to a manager's view, trust is the basis of a relationship for expanding, promoting and cultivating brand values and corporate culture. Trust is the positive commitment to the brand, to the managers' decisions about the brand, to the sense of belonging within the community.

I am able to dialogue with members because they trust me. They know how important our relationship is and we respect each other (X).

Trust is the leitmotif of our actions and consumersø behaviours within the community. It is first of all a sense of respect, it is a desire to reduce conflicts and understand each other. We share the same passion (Motoguzzi)

In monitoring managers face various threats: in the case of real brand community events potential threats could arise from deficiencies in the planning and realization of the events as well as the social refuse, in the absence or insufficiency of security systems, including sanitary assistance and emergency plans. Event management is a complex task requiring specialized resources and the risk for a firm is high since each brand community event is unique in time and space. If something goes wrong there are few possibilities to act and avoid negative impact on brand image and firm reputation. A high degree of coordination among firms' departments, continuous vigilance and

detailed programming are the keys for managing and monitoring brand community events.

> *Organizing the World Ducati Weekend with thousands of riders coming from all around the world is an activity that requires one year of planning. Let's say that from the end of the current event we are working on the next. Every detail should be planned (Ducati).*

Within huge community events, such as World Vespa Days and Ducati World Days, managers also face situations of ambush marketing, where unauthorized firms or autonomous consumers use the event to sponsor their activities or promote unauthorized merchandise (Crow & Hoek, 2003). In such cases, the legal department is in charge of acting against those violations. Clear netiquette also helps managers to define the roles and the behaviours of members within virtual brand communities.

Similarly, most of the virtual brand communities avoid open chat and forums, limiting the conversation to private one-to-one. Inappropriate content can be revoked before or after publishing. However, removing user-generated content is a defeat for the company since it shows that there is no overlap between consumer perception and brand strategies. Negative brand perception, negative word of mouth, and action against the brand are rare in brand communities, but if they emerge, they represent signals of the marketing strategy's failure rather than brand community problems, as this excerpt underlines:

> *The community, due to its interactivity, could first warn about a clash (on brand perception) but if it happens, it is not a problem of brand community. It is a global problem of brand communication (Campari).*

In the case of serious conflicts among members or between the brand and one member, managers could decide on their or his/her expulsion or, in extreme cases, disconnect the brand community. In the rare case of permanent and damaging conflict between managers and consumers' brand

communities, firms could publicly dissociate by press releases, public relations actions or taking legal action if they believe that what emerges within the brand community is false or offensive. Cova and Pace (2006) report that the firm Ferrero S.p.A., producer of the internationally known product Nutella, sues many websites and unofficial brand communities for using its logo, brand name and so on without authorization. In consequence, several virtual communities such as Nutella Fans, Nutell@ Chat Club and nutellamania.com had to change their name. Nevertheless, managers argue that those strategies are highly discouraged since they are ineffective in the long term.

> *You can retire the brand, close the community, but brand community will live (Vespa); in the case of virtual communities, members could enter with another nickname (MSC). õIf you retire a brand or close a brand community you do not close the brains of peopleö (Campari), õWith or without Piaggio, Vespa clubs will always existö(Piaggio).*

5. Conclusion

This paper has explored monitoring strategies to manage brand communities. Firms are conscious that the "power" is going from marketers to consumers and by monitoring communities, marketers focus not only on uni-dimensional information (such as sales or demographics) but on cultural consumer profiles (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Kozinets, 1999). Brand communities allow managers to enter and observe the consumer world from a privileged position, increasing constructive relationships.

Brand community is part of a system linking product, firm, consumer and brand and monitoring procedures help managers to keep this system coherent and consistent.

Firms have to cultivate trust with the members of a community (Porter & Donthu, 2008) and act in such a way that "people must care about the issue, have opinions about it and be enthusiastic enough to share their view" (McWilliam, 2000, p. 48). In the case of brand communities derived from subcultures, the management has to show a high capability to understand the existence of different ethos and identify a way to let consumers express themselves. They also should control the size and composition of brand communities according to consumers' needs. In trying to expand brand communities, marketers risk homogenizing different subcultures existing in the brand community. Increasing marketing activities could negatively affect the authenticity and the underlying culture of a brand community (Cova et al.,

2007), destroying the atmosphere of "an exclusive club" (Andersen, 2005: p. 49).

Although monitoring a brand community depends on its structure (real vs. virtual), origin (firms or consumers) and population (small vs. big), both firm managers and community founders coincide in describing some common aspects of brand management practices and monitoring strategies:

- Brand communities include enthusiastic consumers who love, promote and dispense the brand and its meaning by interacting constantly across vertical and horizontal dimensions; by monitoring consumers, managers actively acquire strategic knowledge on brand, consumer behaviours and trends.

- Brand communities represent a powerful tool for increasing brand loyalty and a specific target for innovative and interactive marketing strategies.

- Firms and managers should never act as hidden members; on the web, in particular, such behaviours are highly condemned. Frankness, sincerity, and firm explicit goals in general and in the web world are highly valued.

- Firms' invasive strategies such as closing brand communities or expelling members are unfruitful, with catastrophic effects on brand image and firm reputation.

- In the monitoring process community members play crucial and active roles, such as brand sentinels, integrating and enlarging firm procedures and warning firms about violations of community codes and rules.

- Monitoring is mandatory for firms and always has to be framed in a constructive approach, creating and maintaining strong relationships with consumers and members.

- Managers have to monitor brand communities, promoting trust based not only on a vertical dimension, from the brand to members, but also on a horizontal dimension, concerning the relationships among members.

Limitations and future research: Our study is not without limitations: the small sample as well as the unique geographic location of the interviewers could affect the generalization of the results. Moreover, our interviews do not cover all the aspects of monitoring, especially those concerning the economic aspect of brand community monitoring in terms of costs and impact on sales and profit. In our study we do not consider a further dimension of brand community: consumer goods vs. luxury goods. We suspect that differences emerge according to the nature of the brand, that is, it may be that brand communities for luxury goods require a different monitoring approach. Future research should verify different brand communities in different sectors including empirical aspects of monitoring strategies and impact on profit and sales. Moreover, consumer perception of and reaction to monitoring strategies should be analyzed.

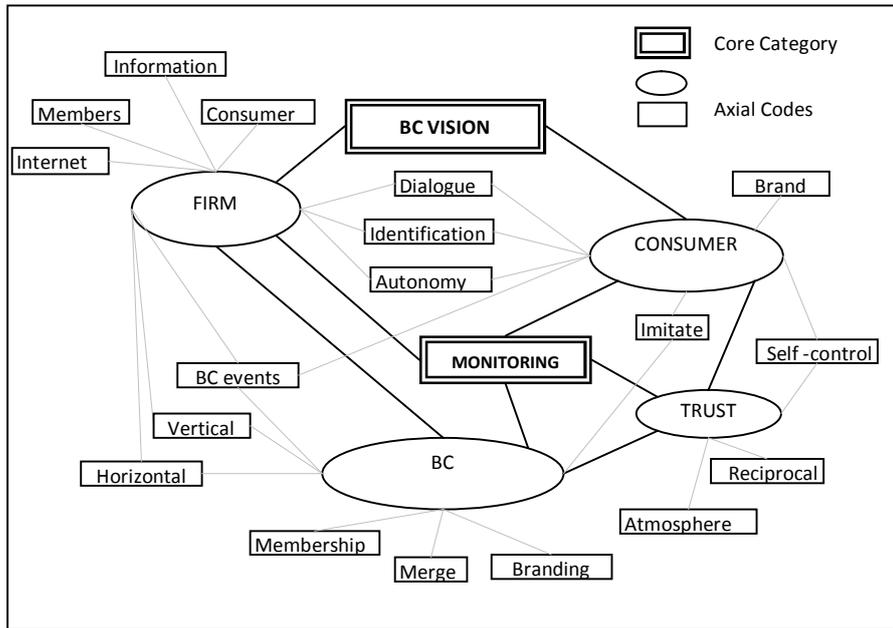Figure 1: Graphic representation of Codes and Relationships (BC stands for brand community)

Figure 2. The interpretative model of Brand community vision and monitoring process (BC stands for Brand Community)
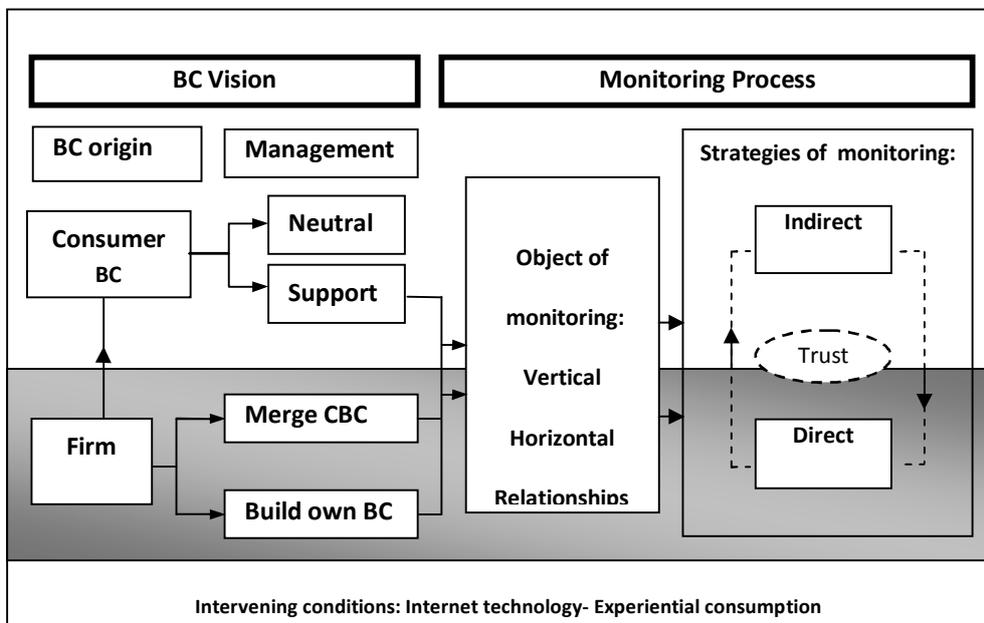
Figure 3. Brand community meanings for firms
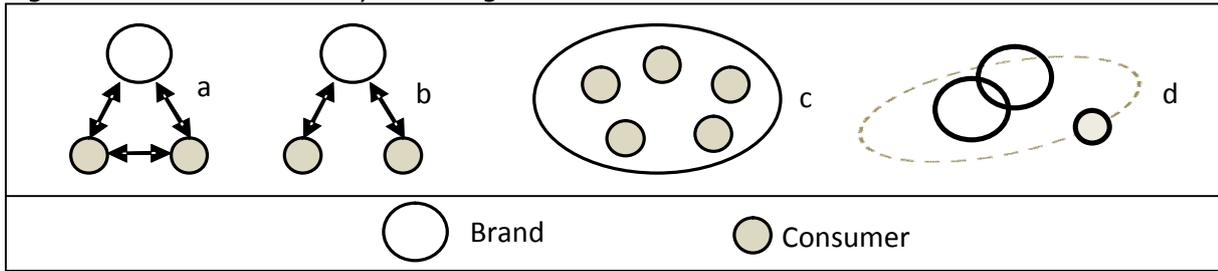
table 1. Sample description

Firm	Product/ Service	Brand and corporate brands	Brand community	Origin		Interviewee
				Firm	Consumers	
RCS	Newspaper	Gazzetta	Gazzaspace.it	✓		Marketing Director
Campari	Spirits	Campari Sky vodka Aperol	Campariclub.com Skyvodka.it Aperol.it	✓ ✓		Marketing Director
-		Aperol	Spritz.it		✓	Community founder
Pernod Ricard	Spirits	Absolut Havana club Wyborowa Malibu	Absolut.it Havana-club.it wodka.com Malibu	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓		Marketing Director Event Manager
Piaggio	Motorcycle	Vespa Motoguzzi Aprilia Gilera Scarabeo Derbi	vespaworldclub.com clubaprilia.net scarabeoclub.it motoguzziworldclub.it Gilera Derbi apevintage.com	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	Marketing Director Piaggio Brand Manager Vespa Manager Motoguzzi Vespa Community Manager
X	Firearms	-	-	✓		Marketing manager
MSC	Cruises	MSC Cruises	Msccrociere.it	✓		Marketing Director Brand Manager
-		-	Crocieristi.it		✓	Community founder
Nestle	Chocolate Pasta	Baci Perugina Buitoni	Baciperugina.it buitoni.it	✓ ✓		Marketing Director Brand Manager
Fiat	Automotive	Fiat	a112abarthclub.org fiatbarchetta.com club500.it utenti.multimania.it/top olino_autoclub_it clubdelcoupefiat.com fiat850spider.it stiloclub.it cinquecentisti.com clubnuovafiat500.it fiatontheweb.fiat.it	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	Digital Manager
Coca-Cola	Drink	Coca-Cola	cocacola.it	✓		Marketing Director
Ducati	Motorcycle	Ducati	Ducaticlubs.com Ducatimonsterclub.it multistrada.net.streetfig hterclub.it	✓	✓ ✓	Marketing Manager Community Manager

õXö is a firm which requested anonymity.

Table 2. Differences among community members and consumers.

	Consumer	Members
Orientation	Need driven	Value driven
Consumption	Neutral	Ritual
Attitude	Passive	Proactive
Social link	Small	Network
Group reference	Family, friends	Community
Loyalty	Low loyalty	High constructive loyalty and low oppositional loyalty
Word of mouth	According to experience	Positive-constructive
Culture	Dominant	Subculture

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PARTE TRE

L'innovazione di prodotto
nell'ambito delle comunità di marca

1. Introduction

Consumer innovation is not a new phenomenon and it has been studied from almost 30 years (Von Hippel, 2009). From ages, consumers act as a generator of ideas, projects and product concepts as well as testers and promoters (Füller, 2006; Franke and VonHippel, 2003). Examples of user innovations range from consumer goods such as the mountain bike (Schreier and Oberhauser, 2007) the skate (Davidson, 1995) and musical instruments (Jeppesen and Frederiksen, 2006) up to industrial product such as medical equipments (Lüthje, 2003; Shaw, 1985) and software (Morrison et al., 2000).

Consumers involved in innovation process could act as single inventor, such as in the cases of Jeff Bezos with Amazon.com (Cassidy, 2002) and Walter Morrison with the frisbee (Morrison and Kennedy, 2006) as well as member of consumer community, such as the case of sport shoes (Füller, 2006) or Linux software (Hertel et al., 2003). However, among consumers, single isolate innovator is rare, rather cooperation, in many forms, is common (Füller et al.2007, Jeppesen and Frederiksen, 2006; Von Hippel, 2005, Franke and Shah, 2003). From on line communities for services and product development such as computer games (Jeppesen and Molin, 2003; Prügl and Schreier, 2004) and open source software (Von Hippel, metere Lakhani and Wolf, 2003; Von Krogh, 2003) to offline community for physical product such as mountain bike (Lüthje, 2004) snowboard (Shah, 2000) and kayak (Hienerth, 2004) several studies demonstrate that innovators act via communities. Reasons can be found in the constant process of knowledge and experience exchanging, as well as on the degree of support members receive (Morrison et al., 2004; Verona et al., 2004; Franke and Shah, 2003; Von Hippel, 2005). Moreover, communities play a strategic role in the adoption and diffusion of innovations (Schreier and Oberhauser, 2007).

Determinants of innovations range from functional to hedonic basis embracing needs satisfaction (Franke and Von Hippel, 2003), problem solving and economic profit (Shah, 2000) as well as curiosity, learning and enjoyment

(Fuller, Jawecki and Muhlbacher, 2007). Current eempirical evidences point out how functional and utilitarian motivation prevail: economic profit and product performance improvement have been shown to drive the innovation process within on line communities related to B2B markets such as OPAC software (Morrison et al., 2000) Pc-Cad (Urban and Von Hippel, 1998) and building materials (Herstatt and Von Hippel, 1991). In communities for consumer goods the few existing studies, all related to outdoor industry, show how problem solving is the main determinant of innovation (Luthje, 2004; Franke and Shah, 2003; Shah 2000).

To our knowledge what literature is neglecting is the brand community approach to innovation and specifically, a more focus on off-line brand community. Just few years ago, Hern and Rindfleisch (2007, p. 35) state that "the role of brand communities as a catalyst for co-creation [] is an intriguing topic for future research".

Brand community constitutes a sub set (or a "special case") of consumer community where members, more than a product category, focus on a single brand (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Links and relationships among the company, the brand and the members, especially in the off line cases, are longer and stronger compared to other consumer community (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koening, 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Cova, 1997). With those foundations, matters of study might investigate whether innovation process shows similarities or differences with respect to others consumer communities. The present paper attempts then (1) to explore determinants of consumer participation in the innovation process within the brand community and (2) how brand communities specificities such as the relationship with the brand and the strong interaction among members affect the process. To the aim, members of the Vespa motorcycle off-line brand community have been surveyed in 2010.

The study contributes to the existing stream of innovation literature by evidencing empirically how and how much, among members, intrinsic motivations (curiosity, enjoyment, learning, and altruism) prevail on extrinsic ones (reputation, monetary compensation and dissatisfaction) and how the closer relationship with the brand and the members interaction foster positively the innovation process. At managerial level, the study indicates that brand community are exceptional source of innovation for companies, due to the members high skills and attitude to the brand and that members, potentially, might be involved from new product development to any co-creation programs.

The paper is organized as follows: first, we review the consumer innovation literature pointing out who are the innovators and what are the determinants of the innovation process. Second, by introducing the brand community perspective, we formulate our hypothesis and describe the research setting. Third, we test our model evidencing the main findings, and, last, we conclude underling implications for both academics and marketers, evidencing at the same time limitations and directions for further research.

Consumer innovation and innovators

Consumers and users, among others, are sources of innovation (Rothwell, 1994). Already in the 70s, Jewkes et al. (1969) were reporting that almost half of the innovation occurred by single individuals, working on their own and independently from companies. In the same line the seminal paper of Von Hippel (1976) and the following studies provided evidence that consumers, individually o collectively, are able, from the one hand to first develop new consumer and industrial products and from the other hand, implement and improve existing products and services (Von Hippel, 2009). Processes not only refer to the emerging markets and new technologies, but also in mature markets where more than 30% of innovation has a user origin (Franke and Shah, 2003).

(Who are the innovators?) Reasonably, not all individuals and consumers are potential inventors or innovators and several studies have attempted to identify and profiling them. In one of the first and most quoted categorization, Von Hippel (1986: p.796) include innovators in the set of "lead users", as individuals who "face needs that will be general in a marketplace-but face them months or years before the bulk of that marketplace encounters them", and "positioned to benefit significantly by obtaining a solution to those needs". According to the author, lead users are typical of high technological industries, where changes are radical and fast and are involved directly in the product/service usage.

Lüthie (2004) distinguishes between active and passive consumer, according to a set of consumer characteristics such as the commitment to the product field and the innovation related benefit and/or the financial reward. Jeppesen and Frederiksen (2006) and (Smith, 2009), report the categories of "hobbyists" and "outsiders" respectively,   as individuals who are not part nor of the community where innovation took place neither of the company for whom they were working and that the development of the product is not their main source of income. Examples, over the most famous cases of B. Gates and S. Jobs, refer to Mr C. Carlson and his invention of electro-photocopier, developed while he was working for one not related company (Van Dulken, 2000).

Innovators could be also final users who, contracted or invited by the company for product/service testing, design and project proposals come up with new product or improvements; patterns include the experience of Procter and Gamble and its P&G Advisor program (Sawhney et. al, 2005), the case of watch market analyzed by Franke and Pillar (2004) and the Audi Virtual Lab in the automotive sector (Füller et al., 2006). From a merely customerization such as the case of Ikea (Wikstrom, 1996) to a completely consumer integration in the product development (Von Hippel, 2009), companies foster consumer participation by the use of toolkits for innovation: companies'

specific resources as well as financial supports and technological platforms are guarantied to consumers creativity and innovation potential (Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli, 2005; Franke Von Hippel, 2003).

The community approach to innovation

Within the innovation process, consumers in order to leverage their efforts, cooperate either by informal or formal community, both in the real or virtual world and both for tangible or intangible products (Von Hippel, 2009; Hienerth, 2006). Already in the 70s communities of youngsters introduced the look like moto model bike, transforming their bikes in the chopper and motocross style. By 1974 the motorcycle-style units accounted for 8 percent of all 20-inch bicycles shipped and in 1978 already 3.7 million of new juvenile bikes sold were of the motocross model (Von Hippel, 1986). Seminal study of Rogers (1983) has shown how pre-existing communication networks boost the diffusion of the innovation, while Midgley et al. (1992) have evidenced how different network structures affect the shape of the diffusion curve of an innovation. Von Hippel (2002) refers to horizontal networks, where stages of innovation, development, distribution and consumption occur only among members of communities: OSSs (open sources software) are typical examples of such networks.

Nowadays in many fields, a shifting from a private model of innovation to a-collective one is emerging (von Hippel and von Krogh, 2003). In the private model, innovation is supported by private investment and returns will cover that investment generating private profits. Mechanisms of innovation protection include patents, copyright and trade secrets: in the collective action model community contribute to the introduction of new product or its improvement by free sharing knowledge; individuals meet exactly what they need and by networks they can benefit by free sharing information and know-how (Hertel, Niedner and Herrmann, 2003). Innovation process is therefore

supported, stimulated and overdraw since communities are basically sources of knowledge and information exchanging (Lee and Cole 2003).

Communities innovate in the field of physical (tangible) products or services (intangible) by on line and off line interaction. Examples include the niketalk.com on line community, where shoes (tangible product) are developed by on line community (Füller, 2006), Linux software where intangible product (service) is developed within on lines communities (Hertel et al. 2003) and consumer goods where off-line communities introduce new products or effort to improve performances of tangible products such as sport equipments (Frank and Shah, 2003).

Community, could be formally part of the company structure, such as the case of Ducati brand community (Sawhney et al.2005), be external and receive financial and organizational supports, such as the case of outdoor sport companies (Shah, 2000), or be completely independent such as the case of the communities of cross bikes (Von Hippel, 1986).

Figure 1 schematizes the main paths of the innovation process within consumer communities.

--Insert figure 1----

The community approach to innovation emerges clearly in the study of Franke and Shah (2003), where unit of analysis is the community rather than the individual. Analyzing communities for sailplane, canyoning, boardercross and cycling for people with disability impairments, they show how, by "community based innovation system" (Franke and Shah 2003: p. 172), more than 1/3 of members, within the sample, has introduced new products or improved existing ones (41.1% in the sailplaning, 30.2% in canyoning, 18.2% in boardercross and 16.3% in handicap cycling, respectively). Luthje (2004), in a sample of 153 consumers belonging to outdoor sport activities reports that the 37,3% comes up with at least one idea of innovation and among them the 70.2% improved existing products (e.g. small mirror for helmets,

ventilation systems of backpack) and the 29,8% introduced new products (e.g. new disc brake design for mountain bike). Morrison et al. (2000) empirically show how almost the 26% of the sample modified the OPAC software for library, By on line survey of durable and no durable good (e.g. mobile phone, towels, model railroads) Fuller et al. 2006 report that 4% of the sample has at least one idea for modifying the existing product or service and 5.6% realized the innovation.

Belonging to the community helps member to receive innovation support, by the directly assistance of qualified and creative members and by linking innovators to other individuals outside the community: Franke and Shah (2003) reported how 11.4% of innovators sample within the community receive assistance from non-members in order to develop their projects.

Analyzing how the community based system of innovation works, free revealing of innovation emerges as the most salient facet. Reasons can be found in the sense of reciprocity and "giving back" action (Harhoff et al., 2003), in the search of community benefits (Morrison et al., 2000) as well as, in the member increased reputation (Lakhani and Wolf, 2002).

In the case of Apache software, for instance, users communicate their innovation contribution (i.e. new codes) without any compensation to the Apache Software Foundation which distributes to all users free of charge (Franke and Von Hippel, 2003). Free revealing is sometimes linked to the object and field of innovation. According to Harhoff et al.(2003) free revealing is typical of open source software development projects while it is not common in pharmaceutical and chemical processes.

As Harhoff et al. (2003) underline, free revealing is surprising for economists since violate one of the central assumption of theory of innovation: in order to return appropriation, innovation should be secretly protected i.e. by patents. From the other hand, free revealing could be profitable in the economic sense since can guarantee to the innovator better value in the job market by increased reputation (Lerner and Tirole, 2002) credentials with their

social group and access to privileged social relation (Von Hippel and Von Krogh, 2003). Free revealing could also ensure to the innovator future advantage because, by other think equal, free revealed innovation easily diffuse compared with fee or patents, becoming the standard, and by networking effect, induces related innovation (Harhoff et al 2003).

In the light of previous discussion, communities appear as the necessary condition for innovation, the helping desk for translating ideas into products. In the study of sport activities yet, the most frequent number of members involved in assisting the innovators is between 3 and 5 and no one innovators (0%) does receive assistance from other member. The innovation process emerges as a collective process where the result is greater than the sum of individuals' contribution (Franke and Shah, 2003).

Determinants of innovations

Determinants of innovation, both for consumer community and brand community, can be viewed as a continuum from utilitarian to hedonic stimuli, where different drivers are not mutually exclusive, but often coexisting within the same consumer and the same community. The Linux architect L. Torvalds, for instance, was motivated by a mixture of dissatisfaction with existing software and, contemporaneously, enjoyment in writing a new operating system (Hertel, Niedner and Herrmann, 2003). Following the pioneering work of Amabile (1996), determinants of innovation could be framed into the two main patterns of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. The firs one states that individuals are "intrinsically motivated when they seek enjoinment, interest, satisfaction of curiosity, self-expression, or personal challenge in the work" while they are "extrinsically motivated when they engage in the work on order to obtain some goal that is apart from the work it self" (Amabile, 1996; p. 188).

Table 1 resumes the determinants of innovation behavior within communities of consumers and brand communities. Studies refer mainly to on line communities for open-source software (Von Hippel, 2001; Franke and von Hippel, Hertel, Niedner and Herrmann, 2003; von Hippel and von Krogh, 2003; Morrison et al. 2000; Jeppesen and Frederiksen, 2006) and on line community for durable goods such as shoes and mobile telephone (Fuller, Jawecki and Muhlbacher, 2007).

Just a handful of qualitative papers deals with brand communities of motorcycle and car (Sawhney et al., 2005; Füller, Bartl, Holger and Mühlbacher, 2006), analyzed in the on line environment.

As the table shows, extrinsic motivations, in terms of need satisfaction, problem solving, economic profits and reputation recur in most of all communities both for on line and off line type and both for tangible and intangible products.

In a function viewpoint, consumers innovate in order to answer to unsatisfied needs. Morrison et al. (2000) identify communities as basis of innovation when they express a unique need. Authors analyse innovation process in the OPAC software used by Australian libraries for searching information and organizing catalogue. They empirically show how almost the 26% of the sample modified the software and 54% would like to make improvement in order to increase its performance.

Consumers innovate because they do not find in the marked what they want, perhaps because markets are designed for masses or are at the embryonic stage and producing for small target could be very costly (Von Hippel, 2009: Franke and Reisinger 2003; Franke and Von Hippel, 2003). Consumers that innovate can target accurately their needs and benefit by freely revealing their innovation (Von Hippel, 2009). Companies are not able to satisfy those needs not only for economic reasons (i.e. scale economy) but also for the presence of information asymmetry. Consumers know better their needs and use contexts, while companies provide generic solutions; the

information exchange is not easy and it is costly since information is sticky; companies prefer to use information they have in stock (Von Hippel, 2009; Hienerth, 2006). Consumer, on the contrary, operate in a "low cost zone of information" (Luthje, Herstatt and Von Hippel , 2002), developing innovation for problems they have during the product usage and by recurring to information they already have. In the study of outdoor industry, Franke and shah (2003) reported that more than 40% of innovations have been developed to solve problems community members have with materials in term of security and performance increments and that 14.5% if innovation were completely new products. In the field of windsurfing, skateboarding and snowboarding, Shah (2000) show how companies are not able to predict the trend and consider the potential market very risky. The cost of innovating is lower for user than manufacturing and the user benefit from directly testing their innovation. In each of the three sports studied, users developed the 100% of the first of type innovations (Shah, 2000).

Drivers of innovation behaviours can be also merely economic reasons or in another perspective "there is a positive association between profit expectation and innovative activity" (Morrison et al. 2000 p. 1519). Quite a lot of studies see in the innovation process an economically motivated activity (Toubia, 2005; Morrison et al. 2000, Von Hippel 1988; Riggs and Von Hippel, 1994). Innovators are driven by financial reward and personal business from their innovation process (Luthje 2004; Von Hippel and Von Krogh, 2003) both in the industrial field, (Foxall and Johnoston, 1987) and consumer goods (Shah, 2000). In the Threadless.com service, consumer designs his t-shirt and once the design is approved for production and sale, the consumer receive monetary compensation and design rights (Hoyer et al. 2011).

.Innovation can became part of a business where innovators own or co-own production companies. In the analysis of rodeo kayak industry, for instance, commercialization of innovation is due to the needs of financial support to follow the innovation development, to reduce the production costs

or innovators need to introduce the standard in order to foster the diffusion of their innovation (Hienerth, 2006). In the same vain, consumers could create "lifestyle" firm (Shah, 2000) or approach producing companies Luthije (2004) and even patenting Shah (2002) in order to promote and commercialize their innovations.

Economic benefits, finally, could take the form of increased reputation within the community and outside, as signal for job position in the company to which the innovation is related or proposed (Jeppesen et al., 2006; Shah 2000; Hienerth 2006). By analysing the on line community for musical instruments, Jeppesen and Frederiksen (2006) empirically show that firm recognition is the main driver for innovation project.

Innovation process could be based on strong intrinsic determinants, where "the process is the goal than the solution" (Von Hippel, 2009). At individual level, consumers innovate for enjoinment, fun, intellectual stimulation and learning (Lakhani and Wolf 2001, Hermann et al. 2000).Hienarth, 2006). At community level, intrinsic determinants of innovation can be based on altruistic reasons, in the stream of social exchange theory, where the interaction among members contribute equally to the wellbeing of both part and no monetary compensation is required (Füller et al. (2006); Intrinsic motivations can be seen as drivers of innovation, where consumers act in order to increase the general welfare of the society or community experimenting altruism, fairness and solidarity (Von Hippel, 2009; Von Hippel and Von Krogh, 2003).

Whether extrinsic motivations especially in terms of problem solving and need satisfaction seem to prevail, other cases do not show an emerging pattern: both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations coexist with the same community.

Hienarth (2006) links the predominance of one typology over the other according to the stage of the industry. In the first stage motivation are related to the individual needs as well as enjoinment and the basis of innovation is then the benefit members receive by in house use. In the community stage, free revealing and members support characterize the innovation process. In the last two stages, commercialization and industry respectively, economic motives prevail due to the need of financial support for innovation development, reduction of production cost and introduction of the standard in order to foster the diffusion of their innovation.

On the contrary, in the case of Audi car (Füller, et al, 2006) motorcycle (Sawhney et al., 2005) intrinsic motivation prevails.

Fuller et al. (2007) report that among members of community of sport shoes, "need driven" and "excitement driven" innovators coexist at the same time, the fist more interested in problem solving while the second, more numerous, motivated by fun, pursuing new ideas and enjoinment.

The brand community perspective and the hypothesis development

The Brand community phenomenon could be imbedded in the broad flow of consumers communities and consumption communities, where, formally or informally, consumers express devotion to a product category or engage consumption activities (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koening, 2002; Arnould and Price, 1993).

The brand community with respect to the previous categorization stresses specific features, such as the consumer's both rational-emotional involvement with a unique brand and a closer relationship among members (McAlexander et al., 2002; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). The brand and its ownership act as "pass" for entering the community, (Fournier, Sele and Schögel, 2005; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) and it is functional to the relationship with the members, the company and the whole community (McAlexander et al., 2002; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001).

Member interaction within off line brand community is stronger since participation implies a face-to-face interaction, within a set shared values and consumption experiences (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Thompson and Sinha, 2008; Algesheimer et al., 2005; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) and it is very rare to hidden the member identity (Hagel III and Armstrong, 1988; McAlexander et al. 2002). Moreover, off line brand communities count a low numbers of members and are geographically concentrated (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001, Algesheimer et al., 2005, Cova et al., 2007).

Brand communities, similarly to other consumer communities, are sources of innovation (Fuller et al, 2006; Sawhney et al. 2005; Fuller, 2006) and ccompanies as Microsoft, Nokia, Volvo and Nike create links with customers in the areas of innovation and value creation by establishing brand communities (Nambisan & Nambisan, 2008; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006).

Brand communities are characterized by playful activities, where members enjoy the brand and the related experiences. Off line brand community members meet in brand fests where socialization and friendship constitute the bases of the community (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo 2004). Socialization and participation take the form of rituals and modes of symbolic expression in order to facilitate shared meanings in consumer goods and activities (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; p. 43). Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001; p. 425), refer to "the moral responsibility" as the perceived obligation of experienced members in sharing their brand knowledge with and offering assistance to the new members, Fuller et al. (2007) report free revealing as a community norm.

In this context, altruism and free revealing in terms of community support to potential innovation behavior should appear as higher determinant compared to economic compensation or recognition by the company. Luthie, (2004), in the study of outdoor sport community found that the financial benefits were not the main factor to explain innovation process and yet, in the

cases of kayak industry, innovations, at the early stage of industry are introduced without any intention of commercialization (Hienerth, 2006).

Potential innovators within brand community are more similar to the hobbyists of Jeppesen and Frederiksen (2006) and Smith (2009), where innovators are not related with companies and curiosity and enjoinment prevails on financial reward. Members of brand community do not show opportunistic behaviours, do not hire members and have not commercial goals (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). In contrast to lead users innovations (Urban and Von Hippel, 1988; Von Hippel, 1986) excitement and curiosity rather than needs and problem solving drive the innovations behaviours. Dissatisfaction can not also considered as driver of innovation behaviours since members are brand enthusiast and show an high attachment to the related products, such as the case of Ducati motorcycles (Sawheney et al., 2006). The share passion for brand is translated, by collective learning system into expertise and competence (O'Guinn and Muiniz, 2005), basis for potential innovation behaviours.

In the light of this, any potential innovation activities might deal with intrinsic motivation more than commercial purpose, reputation and dissatisfaction with existing product. Considering the upper arguments we state the following hypothesis:

h_1: intrinsic motivations have a stronger influence than extrinsic motivation in the willingness of innovation.

Off line brand community specificities such as the relationship with the brand and the socialization among members, could operate as determinants of the innovation process (Sawhney et al.2005) First, within the brand community, members are self selected on the basis of a strong positive attitude to the brand; they experience higher attachment, which in turn leads to higher brand loyalty and brand awareness, higher satisfaction and greater repurchase intention (Thompson & Sinha, 2008; McAlexander, et al., 2002).

The brand is perceived as a religious icon, such as the case of The Mac community (Belk, and Tumbat, 2005). By community rituals members celebrate the history of the brad, sharing brand stories and becoming "brand advocate[s]" (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; p.423).

Algesheimer et al. (2005), in the analysis of European Car Clubs brand relationship show three main components: the identification as the overlap between the member self image and in the brand image, the cognitive component referring to the self-awareness of closeness of relationship and an evaluative component as the positive evaluation of self-worth that stems from the relationship with the brand. Especially for hedonic brands, where levels of cognitive and affective involvements are high, potential related innovation behaviours can be triggered by a desire of cognitive engagement in creative tasks and induce member to play an active part in new product development (Amabile, 1996; Block, 1986). In the exploratory analysis of Ducati brand community, Sawheney et. al (2005) observed how members innovate on the basis of an unconditioned love and passion for the brand. Thus, it is licit to suppose that:

h_2: Brand relationship is positively related with the willingness of innovation

Second, face to face interaction is a distinguishing facet of off-line community. It leads a high level of socialization and relationship among members, in term of personal tie and shared value system (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). With respect to the brand, members share consumption experiences, receive assistance, discuss new models and accessories such as the cases of Harley Davidson and Jeep brand communities (McAlexander, John W. Schouten, and Harold F. Koenig, 2002; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Members of communities carry the product related activities more often with respect to user community and therefore they have a high level of use experience (Luthje, 2004). By constant interaction members increase brand related information (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006) as well as they increase skills and capabilities in the product usage

(McAlexander et al., 2005). Potential innovation behaviours could benefit by member interaction. Franke and Shah (2003) reported how the time spent in the community and the member roles are positively related with the innovation behaviour. Community participation, as in the case of sport activities, increases the personal experience with the product and the use context becoming a strong trigger for innovation (Luthje, 2004; Franke and Shah, 2003). Anderson (2005) underlines how brand community participation helps to overcome the "odd-man-out–effect", by establishing peer relationship. Thus, based to the upper arguments we consider that

h_3: Brand community interaction is a predictor of the willingness of innovation

Finally, we controlled community size. Large brand communities, especially if company sponsored, can count on greater financial and organizational recourses (McAlexander et al., 2002), boosting member information and brand knowledge exchange and, consequently, stimulate innovation behaviors.

The Vespa and the brand community

Vespa has been selected since is one of the most structured and well known brand; it has been continually produces since 1946 to nowadays becoming a world icon. The brand covers all preconditions for consumer high involvement such as (1) perceived importance of the product; (2) hedonic value of the product class; (3) perceived sign value of the product class (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985).

Vespa brand communities born already in the end of the 60s and they are actually worldwide extended. They range from few members such as the Vespa community of to thousands of members, such as the case of Vespa Club Torino (Source: Vespa Club museum). They show a hierarchical structure and

are organized on geographical basis: each brand community flows into a bigger geographical unit (i.e. city or region) till the national and international levels. Members use to meet in during events, meetings and brand fests, organized at local as well as upper level, with a formal or and informal program, depending on the number of participants, the typology of activities (i.e. ride show, race, tourism, culture, parade) and according to the presence of the brand owner company, namely Piaggio S.p.a.

Research setting: Setting of the survey has been the 44° Vespa World Days, hold on 2010 in Portugal. The event is an annual brand fest where members of different brand community meet each other for 4 days of competitions, parades, tourism rides and gals. The VWD have provided the opportunity to survey members in its natural setting, combining members of different brand community different activities. We had the opportunity observe moreover different innovations in use by talking with several members interested in show product improvement and introduce new ideas.

Questionnaires were distributed *brevi manu* to participants in the main meeting point (named "Recinto", an arena of almost 1500 m^2 including facilities and services) at the end of the third day. Decision of survey after activities endues that participants are more relaxed and accommodating in their environment (Cova, Pace e Park, 2007). Responses have been obtained on voluntary basis, without any kind of compensation.

The first section of the questionnaire is related to the Vespa brand, including the number of motorcycles owned/bought in life and the aspects of relationship with the brand; Second section deals with the community, including its size, the length of membership and the frequency of participation in the community activities. The third part refers to the member innovation behavior and its determinants. Finally, the last part third part of the questionnaire includes members' demographics.

The total participants to the event has been of 1650 members. Eliminating no complete questionnaires, our finals sample consists of 223

respondents, corresponding at the 13.5% of population. Participants' demographics report a male percentage of 89.2, with an average of 2.57 family components. Age range from 19 to 74 years with an average of 39.57; by nationality, among others, Italy, Portugal and Spain counted for 22%, 21% and 14% respectively: United Kingdom 6% , Belgium 5%, Germany 6%, France 7%, Norway 1.4% and USA 0.8%. With respect to membership duration, participants show an average of years with a range between 1 and 35. One average each participant owns an average of 3 motorcycles and in all the life he has owned 4 and with a membership of 8.54 years.

the items generation: Constructs reported in the study have been operazionalized by using and adapting existing scales from the brand community and community innovation literature; Our dependent variable was adapted by Fuller, measuring the willingness of participation in NPD within Vespa Brand, by a scale of 1= to 10. Independent variables instead include innovation determinants, brand relationship and brand community participation.

Items for determinants of innovation are borrowed from Fuller (2006), where he analysed the intrinsic and extrinsic motives for what people participate in new product development within on line communities of durable and no durable goods. Out of 12 items resulted of Fuller's EFA, we adopt, according to suggestion of Vespa Managers and Vespa brand community managers interviews, a 7 items scale, eliminating items perceived high similar (e.g. with respect to compensation we delete "because I want to get paid" and "because I expect a compensation in return", retaining only "because I want I hope to get a monetary compensation"; see Appendix for the complete scales).

Brand relationship has been measured by the scale used in the study of cars communities by Algesheimer et al. (2005). It captures the relationship the consumer has with the brand, based on identification.

Brand community interaction has been measured using the proxy of events participation. In particular members were asked to report the frequency and how many times they participate at any event at national and international event. In details, we asked first the frequency (expressed by percentage of times) of participation in "daily", "weekend" and "more than 3 days club" events using a scale anchored by 1=0% 2=25% 3=50% 4=75% 5=100%), second we asked the number of times members participate in national or international events, such as the WVD 2010. The reason for what we consider just those levels is because at local level number and typology of events differ very much among clubs, while at national and international level events are more structured with standard calendars and more fixed activities.

With respect to control variables, brand community size report for the number of members for the community the participants belong, similarly to the studies of Shah (2003) Frank and Pillar, 2004), while membership measures in year from how much time the participant joined the club.

Data analysis and Results

Exploratory factor analysis has been used to investigate and to reduce a number of correlated variables to a smaller number of the independent factors. In those cases where factor analysis was valid, i.e., in cases where a component is represented by two or more constituents, each of which was represented by a single item, principle component analysis was used to extract components.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and the Bartlett test of sphericity were employed. KMO is an index for comparing the magnitudes of the observed correlations to the magnitudes of the partial correlations. If this sum of the squared partial correlation coefficients between all pairs of variables is small when compared to the sum of the squared correlations, the KMO measure of 0,91 has been which has been considered as acceptable and meritorious respectively (Kaiser, 1974). The Bartlett test of

sphericity determines further the appropriateness of factor analysis by testing for the presence of correlations among the variables (Norusis, 2005). The null hypothesis of the Bartlett test (The correlation matrix of items is an identity matrix) has been refused that has supported the adequacy of the principal component analysis. The results of the test are presented in the following table 2:

---------insert table 2------------

Conducting the Principle component analysis (table 3) with an orthogonal Varimax rotation the independence of the factors has been confirmed: in all cases they load cleanly on to a single factor and are thereby considered suitable for subsequent regression analyses. The results of the four factors structure that explain 82.7% (see Appendix) of the variability of the data are presented below.

---Insert table 3-----

The first component (namely INT) captures the intrinsic motivations to participate in New Product Development, the second one the community member interaction (MI), the third the brand relationship (BR) and the four the extrinsic motivations (EXT). With respect to the reliability analysis, the first construct show a Cronbach's α= 9,49, the second α=7.35, the third α=9.45 and the last α=8.04. Following tables report the means, the standard deviation and the item to total statistics for each constructs. It could be noted that all the items add additional value for the internal reliability (Cronback's alpha when item deleted measure). Table 4 report the main statistics.

---Insert table 4-----

The item 7 "'I d like to participate since I am dissatisfied with existing Vespa" has been deleted in order to increase the reliability of the extrinsic construct from α=.806 to α=840. The four factors structure explains 82.7% of the variability of the data.

Hypothesis Testing: In order to test our hypothesis we use a hierarchical regression model (HR) as described:

$$Y(INN) = {}_0 + {}_1(INT) + {}_2(EXT) + {}_3(BR) + {}_4(MI) + u$$

The goal is to compare successive regression models and to establish the significance that each one has above the others. Table 5 shows the hierarchical model summary.

----Insert table 5----

It can be observed that all the models of interests are statistically significant, except the 1st one related to the control variable of community size. Each model explains more of the overall variance than the previous model. We can also observe the significance of the 5models or, in other words of each individual predictor to each equation by considering the Anova function and the table of coefficients as reported in the following tables (6-7):

---Insert table 6 and 7----

By comparing successive models (Anova table) we can observe that each successive model is significant above the previous one, suggesting that each predictor contributes to the overall model.

Just in the first model where as predictor enter just the control variable s is not significant. The R^2 square increases a lot (from 0% to 58.3 %) when in the model enter Intrinsic IV (Independent variable), while when in the model enter the extrinsic component the change in R^2 goes from 58.6% to 61 %. When adding the Brand Relationship as an IV the R^2 square increases lightly from 61 % to 61.9%. The increase of R^2 square when adding member interaction is higher, from 61.9% to 70.6%. The highest increase of R^2 square is observed when adding the intrinsic component, thus, it can be concluded that this variable explains the most variation in the dependent variable.

By observing the last model in the coefficient table, all standardized beta are significant: intrinsic component shows β=0.766, extrinsic β =0. 168, brand relationship β= 0.104 and participation of $\beta=0.296$ with a level of significance of 99%. Thus, the hypotheses H1, H2 y H3 are confirmed. Finally, no collinearity problems have been notices (The VIF coefficients are very low, VIF values plus orthogonal factors). Moreover, when in the model extrinsic component enters the regression coefficient of the intrinsic component remains almost the same, thus, this is the evidence that no colinearity problem exists.

Previous research has provided several empirical studies of how intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are predictors of the willingness of participation in new product development. Less empirical research has been done to assess the impact of the brand relationship and member interaction in the off line brand community as predictors of innovation behaviour. Just few qualitative studies such as (Sawhney et al., 2005; Fuller et al., 2006) pointed out how the brand relationship and the member interaction, especially off-line type, impact the member innovation behaviour.

To go further in our analysis we explore the nature of the two variables, by analysing whether they are direct predictors or moderators of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Firstly we have to report that brand relationship and member interaction can not be mediators of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, since by construction, the components are orthogonal. With respect to the moderator hypothesis both for brand relationship and participation we follow the well know moderator test by Baron and Kelly (1986). First we check if brand relationship is a moderator, according to the model depicted in the figure 2.

----insert figure 2-----

We consider the impact of the moderator factors (IntrxBr) and (ExtxBr) in predicting the willingness of innovation. Results are reported in the following tables (8-9) concerning the model summary, the Anova and the table of coefficient.

---Insert table 8 and 9-----

It can be observed that the two moderator factors are not significant and it can be concluded that brand relationship is not a moderator. As literature pointed out, brand relationship has to be considered as a direct predictor of the willingness of   participation in new product development.

Finally, according to the model presented on figure 4, we analyse the role of member participation as moderator of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Tables (10-11-12) report the result of the analysis.

----Insert figure 4 and table 10-11-12-----

Results show as participation has to be considered moderating the effect of intrinsic motivations on the willingness of participation in new product development while has no effect of extrinsic motivations.

Discussions

Our findings show that community members have a high potential to participate in NPD, confirming that the "community based innovation system" (Franke and Shah 2003: p. 172) hold also for brand communities. Determinants of participation lay both at intrinsic and extrinsic levels. To our knowledge the work is the first to provide empirical evidence of how intrinsic motivations such as curiosity, altruism, desire of learning and enjoinment are stronger than extrinsic ones within a special case of consumer community: the brand community. Member innovation behaviour, within brand community is strongly excitement driven and the peculiar facets of brand community, the relationship with brand and the member interaction contribute to the innovation process too.

Reasons can be found in the structure and into the dynamics of the community: first, members are self selected on voluntary bases and on the commitment and attachment to the brand (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) and the relationship with the brand plays an important role by influencing directly the innovation behaviour; second members' interaction contributes and fosters information exchange related to brand and consequently moderate positively the innovation behaviour. (McAlexander et al.2005). Brand community then, as unit of analysis, should be consider as another form of the community based innovation system where single contribution becomes community contribution; ideas and projects are developed by mutual assistance and by knowledge dissemination in a free revealing mode. Frontiers of communities are not slicker, but by a sort of spillover effect, innovation is taken out and improved apart from the community. As Franke and Shah (2003) noted, the 63% of

innovators find people outside the community (either strangers of close friends) who contribute to their innovation.

From firm point of view, managers can not avoid the consumer contribution to innovation. Contribution has to be remarked, in contrast with substitution: consumers and producer develop different types of innovations (Urban and Von Hippel, 1998) and the community based system of innovation can not substitute the company one, based on R&D, patents and licensing markets. Community innovation has to be considered complementary to the company one, due to the different perspective member have: a high involvement and engagement with the brand and a high usage experiences.

Companies are conscious of the innovation power of consumer in general and brand community in particular and they are starting to directly demand for consumer participation such as the case of LEGO company with its brand Mindstorms and Threadless Corp with its t-shirt (Shau et al. 2009). Yet, starting from new product development, consumer can be partner of a bigger engagement concerning the value creation (Shau et al.2009). Communities are source of innovation and by selecting and monitoring, "some innovative user-communities may be an efficient method for identifying commercially appealing innovations made by users" (Franke and Shah, 2003 p. 175).

We move and suggest one step more: in our perspective, companies already should know where to search and what kind of community select: its brand communities. In our case for instance, Piaggio company deals with several brand communities related to its brands (e.g. Ape, Motoguzzi, Aprilia, Scarabeo) and it considers them as first step for consumer engagement, avoiding cost of searching and contacting general consumer. Brand communities "may be good places to look for lead users of the the brand" (Muniz and O'Guinn,2001 p.427). What companies might to analyze is the way brand community innovation system works: member are high attached to the brand and are not interested in economic compensation, opportunistic

behaviour and commercial goals. Any intention of consumer engagement should be done in the direction of intrinsic motivation stimuli, such as creative tasks, intellectual stimulation, knowledge contribution and free information sharing. More than profit and reputation, member of brand community ask for enjoinment, curiosity and sharing experiences.

Conclusion

This study explored which are the determinants of community members in participating in new product development within the off line brand community. Results show how intrinsic motivations and the brand relationship prevail compared to extrinsic motivations and how, members' interaction, distinguishing facet of off line brand community, moderates positively the innovation behaviour.

Limitations of this study should be noted. From methodological point of view one spot survey without control group make results no easily extending. The definition of the dependent variable, i.e. the member innovation, has been the main critical aspect. Several studies use, instead of the willingness of innovation, a self reported measure based on how much individuals make product innovation (Fuller, 2007; Jeppesen and Frederiksen, 2006) or if they made innovation or not (Morrison et al., 2000; Luthje, 2002; Luthje 2004)) In a first draft of the questionnaire we were thinking to structure the variable in a similar way, but informal interviews with Vespa members show how they have an extensive concept of innovation, including personalization and customerization: answers could be affected by this idea or in another words, members can over estimate their contributions. Another approach deals with asking directly the type of innovation introduced and submit to experts or other consumers' evaluation (Hienarth, 2006; Morrison et al, 2000). In our study, authors have not enough technical skills to evaluate the innovation, differentiating among simple personalization and innovation and yet, Vespa managers were not available to rank and weigh up them. Extend to which member is willing to innovate, instead, matches better our investigation,

reporting the overall intention more than the output of innovation behaviour. Further research might analyse the quality of consumer innovation in the light, also, of company interest for producing and commercialization[2]. Moreover, future studies might investigate different brand community contest, as the virtual world and different brands as service and no durable goods. Despite we analyze off line brand community we can not evade the role of internet. Concepts of on line and off line community are day by day more close and polarization (off line *vs* on-line) in members' interaction is not so marked: currently, members of on line community sometimes meet in the real world and members of off line communities use the internet as an extension of their community or as a tool for a better communication; several Vespa brand communities under study show a corresponding community on the web, where by forums, blogs and chats members constantly interact. Internet plays a key role in the general innovation process as Von Hippel (2009) underlines: "due to the spread of new technologies, i.e. the internet, innovation potential is increasing day by day within an overall process of "democratizing innovation", where consumers are more and more capable to innovate for themselves.

Finally, as the moderator test has suggested, the theoretical model should be reviewed and more empirical evidence has to be found in order to verify the moderator role of participation.

Concluding, the main contribution at academic level is the analysis of determinants of innovation behaviour within off line brand community, with particular focus to the role of brand relationship and member interaction. At managerial level, companies, in order to benefit of brand community innovation system have to re plan their business model, implementing the brand community (i.e. size, activities) and according space and resource to members innovation behaviours. If companies are not able to understand and capture consumer innovation potential, will lose competitive advantages (Luthie, 2004).

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[2] Only the study of Morrison et al. (2000) reported how member innovation was novel for the company and exploitable for commercial purpose based on the company managers' judgments.

Firm and consumer are not two isolated planets since consumer is active part of the firm strategies, and they might cooperate by co-producing innovation but also co-directing marketing campaigns, and co-creating value (Edgard, 2008; Franke, and Piller 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2004): "the community members develop a pool of collective knowledge which transcends any individual's knowledge and which is open accessible for all members"(Füller et. al., 2007 p. 62). Brand community such as the case of vespa can be seen as high quality interaction, where members/consumers co-create unique experiences and participation on innovation is just a part of a greater process know as co-creation of value (Lush and Vargo, 2006).

Companies have not to randomly search within any consumer community, but it is strategically beneficial to look firstly to their brand community, where relationship and cooperation are free of charge! As Shau et al. (2009: p. 41) underlined whether "firms give consumers the opportunity to construct brand communities and the freedom to modify their products, they will".

Table and Figures
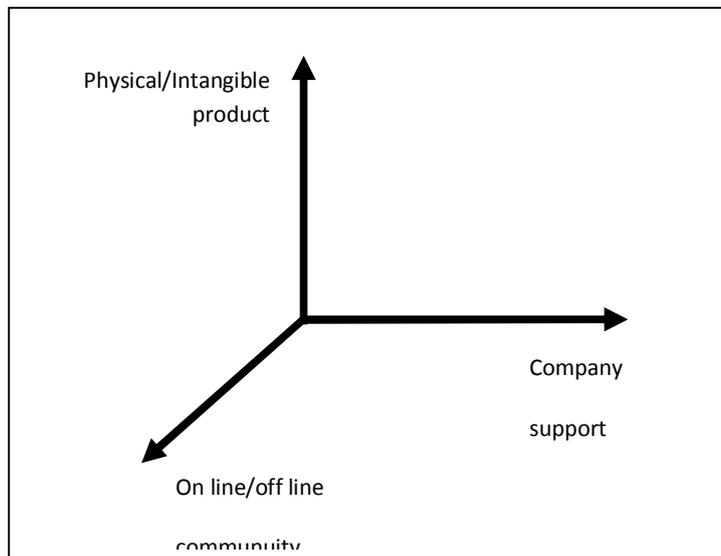
Figure 1: the current paths in community innovation research
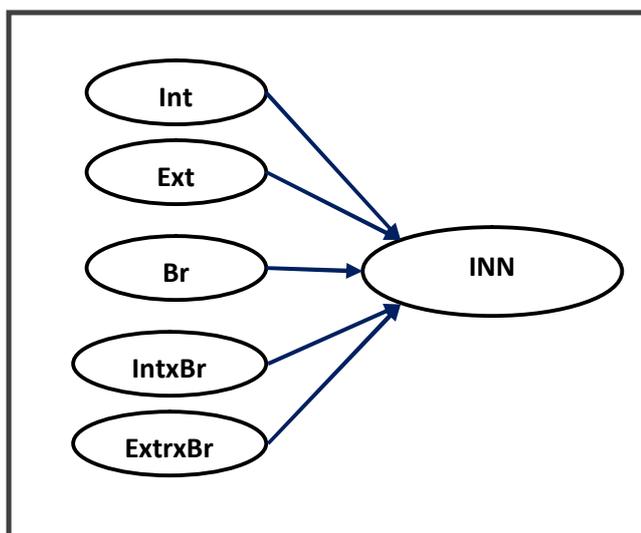
Figure 2: Moderator test for brand relationship component.
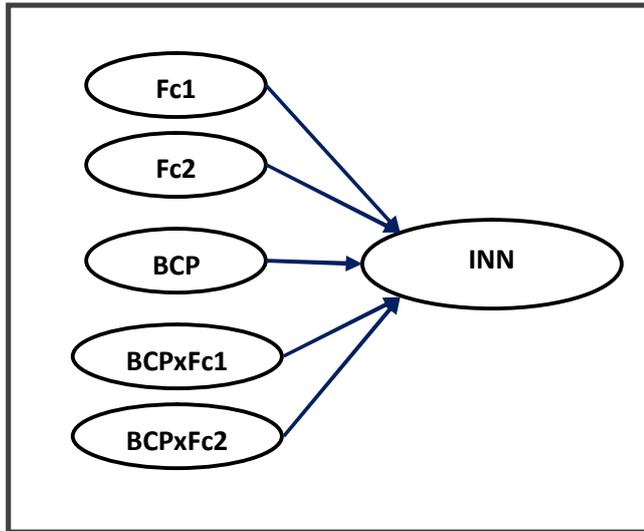
Figure 3: mediator test for member interaction component

Authors	Type of community Online	Off line	Type of study	Product and Service	Drivers of innovation Intrinsic Motivations	Extrinsic motivations	Other determinants
Füller (2006)	x		Online surve n=727	Durable and no durable goods	Interest, curiosity, Showing ideas	Dissatisfaction, reputation, link with producers	
Franke and Shah (2003)		x	Survey n=521	Sport activities	enjoinment	Problem solving Commercializat.	Community membership: time role, norms Personal experience
Hertel, Niedner Herrmann (2003)	x		Oline survey n=141	Linux	Fun	Reputation as developer, career, need	
Jeppesen Frederiksen (2006)	x		On line survery n=345	Musical instr.		Firm recognition	
luthje (2004)		x	Survey n=153	Sport equip.		Need dissatisfaction	Commitment to the product/activity
Luthje, et al. (2002)	x		On line survey n=287	Moun. bike	Enjoinment	Personal need	Commitment to the activities, use experience, technical knowledge
Morrison et al. (2000)	x		On line survey n=102	OPAC library Software		Need, product improvement	Technical Skills capabilities
Von Hippel and Von Krogh (2003)			Cs	Apache Server Softw.Fetc hmail,		Needs, problem solving	
Füller, et al, (2006)			Cs	Audi car	Fun , task complexity,	needs	
Fuller, et al (2007)			Cs	Basketball Shoes	Fun enjoyment	Un satisfaction Reputation for job	
Hienerth (2006)			Cs	kayak	fun,	needs Economy motives	Stage of the industry
Sawhney et al., (2005)			Cs	Ducati Eli-illi	Sense of belonging Creativity		Brand love, Virtual environment
Shah (2000) (wp)			Cs	Sport equip.(e.g. Windserf)		Personal use, reputation, monetary, profits	Passion for activity; Sticky information.

Table 1: determinant of innovation

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,908
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3772,973
	df	153
	Sig.	,000

Table 2: the KMO and the Bartlett's tests.

Rotated Component Matrix[a]

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
this brand say a lot about the kind of person I am	,105	,397	,834	-,008
this brand image and myself are similar in many respect	,085	,389	,863	-,024
this brand plays an important role in my life	,118	,438	,824	-,027
I d like to participate because I am curious	,868	,068	,122	,186
I d like to participate because I feel excitement in doing this work	,886	,105	,082	,212
I d like to participate to keep up with new ideas and innovations	,859	,133	,072	,198
I d like to participate I like to share my experience with others	,828	,191	,121	,165
I d like to participate to test my capabilities	,782	,351	,012	,232
I d like to participate to improve my skills	,858	,223	,080	,232
I d like to participate because I am dissatisfied with existing Vespa	,204	-,061	,190	,630
I d like to participate because I hope to get a monetary compensation	,133	-,099	-,063	,806
I d like to participate because I have ideas I want to introduce to producers	,434	,205	-,106	,720
I d like to participate to be know as inventor	,474	,207	-,202	,718
Frequency of participation in daily event	,218	,810	,313	,001
Frequency of participation in weekend event	,171	,824	,376	-,030
Frequency of participation in week event	,189	,842	,260	,005
Number o times of national event participation	,143	,864	,144	,094
-Number o times of international event participation	,208	,851	,261	,032

Table 3: Principal component analysis

Item Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Devi.	N
I d like to participate because I am curious	4.03	1.781	223
because I feel excitement in doing this work	3.97	1.823	223
to keep up with new ideas and innovations	4.00	1.816	223
I like to share my experience with others	3.98	1.930	223
to test my capabilities	3.30	1.521	223
To improve my skills	3.56	1.784	223

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.949	6

Item-Total Statistics			
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correl.	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I d like to participate because I am curious	18.82	63.817	.838	.940
because I feel excitement in doing this work	18.87	62.276	.877	.935
to keep up with new ideas and innovations	18.84	63.088	.847	.939
I like to share my experience with others	18.87	62.288	.815	.943
to test my capabilities	19.54	68.060	.815	.943
to improve my skills	19.28	62.789	.879	.935

Tables 4a: Item statistics and item total statistics for intrinsic construct

Item Statistics			
	Mean	St. dev	N
I d like to participate could be dissatisfied with existing Vespa	2,47	1,365	223
because I hope to get a monetary compensation	2,38	1,653	223
because I have ideas I want to introduce to producers	2,80	1,755	223
to be know as inventor	2,64	1,673	223

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.804	4

Item-Total Statistics				
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correl.	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I d like to participate because I m dissatisfied with existing Vespa	7.82	19.574	.416	.840
because I hope to get a monetary compensation	7.90	16.260	.560	.786
because I have ideas I want to introduce to producers	7.48	13.737	.741	.693
To be know as inventor	7.65	13.833	.790	.668

Table 4b: Item statistics and item total statistics for intrinsic construct

Item Statistics			
	Mean	St. dev.	N
this brand say a lot about the kind of person I am	4,91	1,419	223
this brand image and myself are similar in many respect	4,97	1,579	223
this brand plays an important role in my life	4,89	1,482	223

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.945	3

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correl.	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
this brand says a lot about the kind of person I am	9,87	8,820	,864	,936
this brand image and myself are similar in many respect	9,80	7,648	,912	,899
this brand plays an important role in my life	9,88	8,350	,884	,920

Table 4c: Item statistics and item total statistics for brand relationship construct

Item Statistics	Mean	Std. Devi.	N
Frequency of participation in daily event	3,22	1,308	223
Frequency of participation in weekend event	2,91	1,483	223
Frequency of participation in more than 3 days event	2,98	1,135	223
Number o times of national event participation	10,45	9,283	223
-Number o times of international event participation	5,75	4,881	223

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,945	5

Item-Total Statistics	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correl.	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Frequency of participation in daily event	22,09	245,244	,720	,716
Frequency of participation in weekend event	22,39	239,150	,762	,703
Frequency of participation in more than 3 days event	22,32	249,427	,730	,724
Number o times of national event participation	14,86	67,250	,691	,758
-Number o times of international event participation	19,56	152,861	,770	,536

Tables 4d: Item statistics and item total statistics for member interaction construct

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	,010[a]	,000	-,004	2,943	,000	,023	1	221	,880
2	,766[b]	,586	,583	1,897	,586	311,974	1	220	,000
3	,784[c]	,615	,610	1,834	,029	16,362	1	219	,000
4	,791[d]	,626	,619	1,812	,011	6,456	1	218	,012
5	,844[e]	,713	,706	1,592	,087	65,458	1	217	,000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Number of club members

b. Predictors: (Constant), Number of club members, Intr

c. Predictors: (Constant), Number of club members, Intr, Ext

d. Predictors: (Constant), Number of club members, Intr, Ext, Br

e. Predictors: (Constant), Number of club members, Intr, Ext, Br, Mint

Table 5: Hierarchical model summary

ANOVA[f]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	,197	1	,197	,023	,880[a]
	Residual	1914,592	221	8,663		
	Total	1914,789	222			
2	Regression	1123,002	2	561,501	156,015	,000[b]
	Residual	791,787	220	3,599		
	Total	1914,789	222			
3	Regression	1178,045	3	392,682	116,726	,000[c]
	Residual	736,744	219	3,364		
	Total	1914,789	222			
4	Regression	1199,238	4	299,809	91,340	,000[d]
	Residual	715,552	218	3,282		
	Total	1914,789	222			
5	Regression	1365,062	5	273,012	107,769	,000[e]
	Residual	549,727	217	2,533		
	Total	1914,789	222			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Number of club members

b. Predictors: (Constant), Number of club members, Intr_comp. 1 for analysis 1

c. Predictors: (Constant), Number of club members, Intr_comp, Extr_comp for analysis 1

d. Predictors: (Constant), Number of club members, Intr_comp, Extr_comp, Br_comp for analysis 1

e. Predictors: (Constant), Number of club members, Intr_comp, Extr_comp, Br_comp , Mi_comp for analysis 1

f. Dependent Variable: extend to which you are willing to participate in new Vespa development

Table 6: Anova table for hierarchical models

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	5,192	,289		17,961	,000		
	Number of club members	,000	,002	,010	,151	,880	1,000	1,000
2	(Constant)	5,198	,186		27,900	,000		
	Number of club members	,000	,001	,008	,189	,850	1,000	1,000
	Intr_comp	2,249	,127	,766	17,663	,000	1,000	1,000
3	(Constant)	5,161	,180		28,610	,000		
	Number of club members	,001	,001	,020	,479	,632	,995	1,005
	Intr_comp	2,249	,123	,766	18,268	,000	1,000	1,000
	Ext_comp	,499	,123	,170	4,045	,000	,995	1,005
4	(Constant)	5,147	,178		28,875	,000		
	Number of club members	,001	,001	,024	,589	,556	,993	1,007
	Intr_comp	2,249	,122	,766	18,494	,000	1,000	1,000
	Extr_comp	,500	,122	,170	4,102	,000	,995	1,005
	Br_comp	,309	,122	,105	2,541	,012	,998	1,002
5	(Constant)	5,241	,157		33,374	,000		
	Number of club members	,000	,001	-,005	-,142	,887	,983	1,017
	Intr_comp	2,249	,107	,766	21,054	,000	1,000	1,000
	Extr_comp	,494	,107	,168	4,612	,000	,995	1,005
	Br_comp	,306	,107	,104	2,859	,005	,998	1,002
	Mi_comp	,869	,107	,296	8,091	,000	,990	1,010

a. Dependent Variable: extend you are willing to participate in new Vespa development

Table 7: Coefficients for hierarchical models

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,791[a]	,626	,621	1,809
2	,792[b]	,628	,619	1,812

a. Predictors: (Constant), Br, Ext, Intr

b. Predictors: (Constant), Br, Ext, Intr, IntxBr, ExtxBr

Table 8: model summary for moderator test

ANOVA[c]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1198,099	3	399,366	122,035	,000[a]
	Residual	716,691	219	3,273		
	Total	1914,789	222			
2	Regression	1202,264	5	240,453	73,230	,000[b]
	Residual	712,525	217	3,284		
	Total	1914,789	222			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Br, Ext, Intr

b. Predictors: (Constant), Br, Ext, Intr, IntxBr, ExtxBr

c. Dependent Variable: extend you are willing to participate in new Vespa development

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	5,224	,121		43,125	,000		
	Intr	2,249	,121	,766	18,523	,000	1,000	1,000
	Ext	,495	,121	,169	4,077	,000	1,000	1,000
	Br	,306	,121	,104	2,523	,012	1,000	1,000
2	(Constant)	5,224	,121		43,053	,000		
	Intr	2,242	,122	,763	18,386	,000	,995	1,005
	Ext	,503	,122	,171	4,126	,000	,996	1,004
	Br	,303	,122	,103	2,483	,014	,996	1,004
	IntxBr	,085	,117	,030	,726	,469	,978	1,022
	ExtxBr	-,097	,127	-,032	-,759	,449	,974	1,026

a. Dependent Variable: extend you are willing to participate in new Vespa development

Table 9: Coefficient for moderator test

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,844[a]	,713	,708	1,588
2	,849[b]	,721	,713	1,573

a. Predictors: (Constant), Br, Mint, Ext, Intr

b. Predictors: (Constant), Br, Mint, Ext, Intr, IntxMi, ExtxMi

Table 10: Model summary for moderator test

ANOVA[c]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1365,011	4	341,253	135,315	,000[a]
	Residual	549,778	218	2,522		
	Total	1914,789	222			
2	Regression	1380,168	6	230,028	92,937	,000[b]
	Residual	534,622	216	2,475		
	Total	1914,789	222			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Br, Mint, Ext, Intr

b. Predictors: (Constant), Br, Mint, Ext, Intr, IntxMi, ExtxMi

c. Dependent Variable: extend you are willing to participate in new Vespa development

Table 11: Anova for moderator test

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	5,224	,106		49,126	,000		
	Intr	2,249	,107	,766	21,101	,000	1,000	1,000
	Ext	,495	,107	,169	4,644	,000	1,000	1,000
	Mint	,867	,107	,295	8,135	,000	1,000	1,000
	Br	,306	,107	,104	2,874	,004	1,000	1,000
2	(Constant)	5,224	,105		49,588	,000		
	Intr	2,230	,106	,759	21,056	,000	,994	1,006
	Ext	,513	,106	,175	4,843	,000	,992	1,008
	Mint	,893	,107	,304	8,366	,000	,980	1,021
	Br	,294	,106	,100	2,778	,006	,995	1,005
	IntxMi	,215	,099	,079	2,175	,031	,988	1,012
	ExtxMi	-,108	,097	-,041	-1,115	,266	,972	1,029

a. Dependent Variable: extend you are willing to participate in new Vespa development

Table 12: coefficent for moderator test

Appendix:

Construct	items
Innovation behaviour (Fuller, 2007)	extend you are willing to participate in new Vespa development 10 points Likert scale from 1=completely disagree to 10=completely agree
Determinant of innovation ((Fuller, 2007)	1-I would like to participate in NPD because I am curious 2í because I feel excitement in doing this work 3í .because to keep up with new ideas and innovations 4í because I like to share my experience with others 5í because to test my capabilities 6í because I want improve my skills 7í because I am dissatisfied with existing Vespa 8í I hope to get a monetary compensation 9í I have ideas I want to introduce to producers 10í to be know as inventor
Brand relationship (Algesheimer et al., 2005)	1-this brand say a lot about the kind of person I am 2-the Vespaøs image and myself image are similar in many respect 3- Vespa plays an important role in my life.
Brand Community participation	Number o times of national event participation: open Number o times of international event participation: open frequency of participation in daily club event 1=0% 2=25% 3=50% 4=75% 5=100% frequency of participation weekend 1=0% 2=25% 3=50% 4=75% 5=100% frequency of participation in more than 3 days event 1=0% 2=25% 3=50% 4=75% 5=100%
Community size	Number of members of each club

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	7,872	46,308	46,308	7,872	46,308	46,308	5,002	29,421	29,421
2	3,967	23,336	69,644	3,967	23,336	69,644	4,238	24,932	54,353
3	1,217	7,160	76,804	1,217	7,160	76,804	2,724	16,025	70,378
4	1,007	5,925	82,730	1,007	5,925	82,730	2,100	12,351	82,730
5	,515	3,030	85,759						
6	,377	2,215	87,974						
7	,300	1,762	89,737						
8	,273	1,608	91,345						
9	,240	1,412	92,757						
10	,233	1,373	94,130						
11	,217	1,274	95,404						
12	,172	1,010	96,414						
13	,156	,916	97,330						
14	,129	,759	98,090						
15	,119	,701	98,791						
16	,116	,680	99,470						
17	,090	,530	100,000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

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