

Analysis on Difficulties, Reasons and Countermeasures of Community Marketing

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Keywords: Community Marketing, KOL, Operations Management

Abstract: Against the backdrop of the rapid development of e-commerce, Community Marketing has become an important part of business, which creates value and enhances user stickiness for. However, the immature marketing model in most communities hasn't produced optimal outcomes. Based on the existing common problems, this paper analyzes the difficulties of Community Marketing and the reasons behind in terms of psychology, society and economy. Research shows that difficulties lies in how to keep community enclosed, how to depend on KOL in an appropriate way and how to achieve initial goals of establishing the community. This paper makes suggestions based on these difficulties, providing theoretical support and reference for decision making in applying more exact Community Marketing and more efficient community operation.

1. Introduction

Along with the iteration of the e-commerce economy, the user profile have gradually developed from the simple consumption habit label to the fusion of emotional and social relation labels. As the main channel to meet comprehensive user demands, communities have become an important marketing channel for companies to activate existing users, create new ones and linking online and offline activities. Community Marketing is a new marketing mode, characterized by its focus on user demands and emotions so that value creation and user stickiness can be realized^[1].

Community Marketing is a new marketing model, which develops from social networks based on interactive links among users or between users and products. It still remains in the initial development phase. There are quite few successful leading communities whose strategies are often contingent and can't be replicated, so that operation of communities is in lack of common methods and most communities are trapped. Therefore, this paper explores the common difficulties of Community Marketing, analyzes the underlying reasons and puts forward corresponding suggestions to promote its healthy development.

2. Difficulties of Community Marketing

2.1. Maintenance of an enclosed community

Building a community is the foundation of Community Marketing. Communities are naturally closed and the more closed they are against the outside, the more united they are in the inside. First, there exists upper limit in terms of how many people chat through online platform, and individual energy and social circles in offline lives are contained, which naturally leads to a limited number of people in a community.

Second, an important guarantee to maintain vitality in communities is enclosed strong links, which is difficult to realize in building community barriers. Such enclosed links often depend on united values within the community and a strong sense of belonging and social identity. At the beginning, it is difficult for managers to accurately acquire user profile and analyze the psychological condition such as their values. Even if their common values are discovered, it is difficult to follow up and maintain. While in the later phase, most users don't respond actively because they fail to exchange information in a large scale when the information barrier is set up and

users won't have the sense of gain for lack of efficient communication and cooperation.

Therefore, during community construction, not only the scale of market should be taken into consideration, but also an adequately enclosed circle should be chosen. Bilibili video services initially chose to enter the "ACGN circle", a small circle consisting of animation and related contents, while limited registration, invitation system and questions for entrance are adopted to screen users, so that the quality of users and the inner consistency of the community can be ensured. This has brought Bilibili fruitful achievements with its effective marketing.

2.2. Appropriate dependence on KOL

To make sure appropriate dependence on KOL (Key Opinion Leader) and to achieve effective promotion with their strength is a difficulty in Community Marketing. KOL is one of the main supports of Community Marketing as guiding roles. However, some communities over-rely on KOL, causing the imbalance between the voice of KOL and that of ordinary users. User demands not taken seriously leads to the disruption of community ecosystem and thus the loss of users.

If managers rely too much on KOL, they may ignore user demands and the fact that ordinary users are the foundation of a long-running community. Increasing transparency of information enables ordinary users to differentiate the quality products and services more clearly, so it is difficult to attract them to purchase at no time after recommendations from KOL^[2]. Thus, community Marketing should be focused on matching products and services for user demands.

Besides, learning psychological demands of users is an important way to achieve healthy development of communities. Users' psychological needs for communities can be divided into three categories: resonance, accompany and interests in others' lives. KOL and users often have some basic features in common, with which users can put themselves into contents shared by KOL to find similar feelings, even treat KOL as their friends. By providing high-quality contents for long, KOL win and enhance users' trust to make them more willing to follow the guidance, which helps to maintain users' loyalty and participation.

However, over-reliance on KOL tends to bring damage to the community ecosystem. To choose KOL, managers should not only pay attention to their influence but also think over their comparability with the community. KOL should be chosen based on their fan portrait rather than how many followers they have. For online literary communities, popular novelists can be better KOL rather than stars. Also, staying in relationship with KOL only for interest and promoting inappropriate products will not only kill users' trust and lead to negative impacts on KOL, but also reduce users' loyalty. Managers need to build mutual-beneficial cooperation with KOL, as a result of which all sides can benefit from such cooperation and jointly maintain the long-term development of the community.

2.3. Implementation of community goals

The Community Marketing can't see effects because of the deviation from operational goals. Communities usually aim at sharing knowledge, promoting products or services, but problems in operation such as over-or-under social contact, inefficient information transmission and over commercialization, often detract from their goals. Therefore, retaining a correct direction to guide community operation and ensuring long-term growth are difficulties of Community Marketing.

First, it is hard to boost community dynamics. KOL stimulate users' enthusiasm within the community by activities such as sharing topics and inspiring thoughts. However, few active users in the community or excessive interaction among users will lead to poor results of Marketing. Therefore, maintaining community dynamics with the help of KOL is a task, and managers need to find the appropriate degree.

Furthermore, over-commercialization of the community reduces the effect of Community Marketing. Some companies only use the community for advertising and promotion, which causes side effects to its brand image and products. Basing marketing on providing products and services in user demands and sharing its value, companies meet users' needs of independence and self-worth realization. For example, in the community Luoji Thinking, its founder Luo Zhenyu made great

success by selling thousands of books above market price in over an hour. This Community Marketing worked effectively because in its user demands-oriented marketing, KOL distinguish good books and provide consumers respectively with reading lists, but also actively exchange ideas with users through diversified forms so that they can strengthen users' sense of belonging and trust. Thus emotional connections are one of the keys to long-term development of a community, and proper commercialization to effective marketing.

3. Reasons related to the difficulties of Community Marketing

3.1. Demands for social identity and sense of belonging

Modern communities are a response to the “identity crisis” in the process of globalization. Closure of community derives from people's instinctive desire for social identity and sense of belonging. With rapid population migration around the world, individuals' social identity and self-identity based on region, race or nationality has gradually faded^[3]. The development of mobile Internet speeds up dissolution of the solidified social structure, so people are then connected freely based on their own ideas, which also contributes to higher social mobility. In this situation, communities have become an important way for individuals to be reintegrated into society, characterized by free and ubiquitous communication.

Managers usually attract individuals on a certain joint and manifest their common characters to a largest extent to strengthen identity. However, it is difficult to accurately redefine individuals after excluding inherent labels like region and race while users have tendency to tear off labels and break constraints. Therefore, the joints connecting free willingness are not easy to find and connections based on purely voluntary actions are also highly uncertain and unstable. Only by transforming the initial identity into “collective identity” can we build community barriers and respond to individuals' needs for the sense of belonging and security, as well as making individuals and the group more cohesive while helping individuals set up self-cognition. So the foundation of community construction is to build walls, enhancing users' sense of belonging and social identity so that the practice of Community Marketing can eventually be optimized.

3.2. Unbalanced discourse right within the community

There is imbalance in discourse right within the community that a small number of people control most of resources, creating inequality among individuals. Indeed, people in higher position further strengthen their concentration of power and wealth and public opinions, while ordinary people can't fully express their ideas, causing inefficient social operations.

In the process of Community Marketing, the imbalanced discourse right between KOL and ordinary users makes managers to ignore user demands. KOL, as a dominant class of online information, tend to increase their control on others' right to speak by taking charge of the trend of content and put restrictions on ordinary users. Ordinary users can't attach themselves to positive information or deliver their true thoughts. Besides, discourse right is under the control of media and those with wealth or power, who give out information mostly in their own interest. After a time when values of users are subtly affected by media value and public opinion, the real needs of users are hidden. The consequence comes that companies can't meet the genuine needs of users so that the main purpose of the community is hard to achieve with low efficiency of Community Marketing.

3.3. Conflict of Interest among “Rational Man”

Managers and users in the community conform to the hypothesis of “rational man”, which assumes that every person who engages in economic activities has a tendency to be self interest-oriented and all economic behavior aims at obtaining the greatest economic benefits at the least economic costs. Community managers and users are all rational men.

Users want to obtain information in their preference, for which most managers are able to afford at low cost for information collection and classification. So in the early phase, they can

attract more people by setting a lower threshold, which brings them larger user traffic and greater profits. However, managers and users are eventually in pursuit of separate goals and interest. Managers seek for excellent marketing results and unique values, which requires users to help promote products, participate in discussions, or even complete fixed tasks. These requirements will consume users' time and energy. On the contrary, community users want preferential products, high-quality services and effective information. To fulfill these requests managers need to maintain high-quality content output, which will bring continuous cost burden.

Both managers and users hope to satisfy their own interest and demands at the lowest cost, between which there usually comes with a conflict. Moreover, development of the community drives up operating costs, credit costs and sales costs of community^[4]. To obtain greater profits, managers may choose to transfer costs to users or place more advertisement while ignoring high-quality sharing. This may lead to over-commercialization of the community. When costs paid are higher than benefits received, users will leave. The identity of "rational man" makes both parties easily to only focus on their own interest and can't collaborate to maintain the sustainable operation of the community. The ensuing conflicts of interest will lead to failure in Community Marketing.

4. Advice on Community Marketing

4.1. Screening target users

Community managers should analyze user profile in the early phase to ensure internal consistency of the community and fully realize marketing effects. Managers should establish a screening mechanism to filter off-target users by designing a common vision and setting barriers. Also, they can express the common vision through specific forms such as iconic symbols, slogans and activities to enable users to adapt to community values and strengthen consensus. During community expansion and fission, managers can slightly dilute values and reduce barriers to attract more new users. At the same time, they must also pay adequate attention to the demands of current users, avoiding the phenomenon of "bad money driving out good", and thus they can maintain good community atmosphere, thereby ensuring the internal consistency of the community as well.

4.2. Taking exact management on KOL

Community managers should reckon with frequency and type of KOL to bring into the community, including introducing appropriate KOL based on fundamental demands of users and increasing KOL in different fields during the rapid-growth phase. The community also needs to find KOL in vertical fields according to initial goals, build communication passages between users and KOL and maintain long-term cooperation, hence to obtain stable marketing channels.

Then, managers should pay attention to empowering users, offering diversified incentives and conserving results. In the early phase, managers should combine KOL with community goals to help them produce high-quality contents, activating and empowering the community. In the midterm operation period, as the influence of KOL increases, managers can provide them with user traffic, funds and other resources and adopt multilevel incentive measures that line up with their influence. In the later phase, managers should select and retain suitable KOL and reinforce cooperation to achieve exact marketing and beneficial transformation of marketing.

4.3. Establishing a management mechanism

Managers should basically establish rules within the community. Negative remarks should be strictly banned to maintain purity of the community; irrelevant contents should be reduced to retain unity. Managers can guide users to form good communication habits through activities, incentives, but also need to promptly correct or clean up non-compliant users to make certain a stable community ecosystem.

Managers can organize activities to create positive atmosphere. Activities in the community can not only enhance user stickiness and increase their enthusiasm, but also effectively guide community topics. Managers can focus on relevant topics to carry out discussions and improve

users' experience. In terms of boosting users' activity, managers can use material and spiritual incentives, which brings them a feeling of being valued and rewarded and also inspires more users to participate and share. Managers can also organize offline activities to make the community more like a circle of friends and family, which enhances users' sense of belonging and intimacy.

5. Conclusion

E-commerce industry has prospered in recent years, providing good conditions for companies to develop a new marketing channel in communities for the new era featuring lack of sense of belonging and social identity. Community Marketing thus is created, through which companies can easily have access to large numbers of target consumers.

To enable managers to have better command of how to put Community Marketing into practice, in this paper, we analyze difficulties of Community Marketing. First, it's difficult to maintain an enclosed community for people don't expose themselves to strangers and are hard to be identified in the existing society. Second, appropriate dependence on KOL should be applied with proper attention falling on ordinary users while on top-level users. Third, unbiased implementation of community goals is hard to realize with concerns on community dynamics and commercialization.

Reasons behind are concluded into three categories of psychological, social and economic aspects. Users' demands for social identity and sense of belonging arouse the necessity to build community barriers for users to be reintegrated into certain communities and for companies to keep the stability of links among users and between users and the community. Besides, unbalanced discourse right within the community make ordinary users unable to express ideas or have their demand satisfied. Also, everyone in the community are under the "rational man" hypothesis, who require most while paying the least, causing burden transferred to each other and incompatibility.

Therefore, we raise countermeasures for better applying Community Marketing — screening target users, taking exact management on KOL and establishing a management mechanism will contribute. Although this study supplies detailed explanations, in future research, more perspectives will be considered for developing valid Community Marketing.

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