Chapter 44
Building the Force:
Enacting Fan Brand Community Through the Star Wars BB-8 Droid Builders Club

William F. Humphrey Jr.
Florida International University, USA

Debra A. Laverie
Texas Tech University, USA

Alison B. Shields
Ithaca College, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the Star Wars fan community who creates screen accurate BB-8 replicas is explored in depth. Builders undertake the creation of characters through emergent technology such as 3-D printing. The members work together to create these replica characters and immerse completely in the process of the character's formation. We studied online fan community forums and social media groups where participants engage with and support one another as they build full-sized Star Wars characters. Second, this chapter applies the BB-8 builder community to an established framework for brand community, which is extended to include the passionate and committed communities formed by fans around entertainment franchises. Brand (or franchise) characteristics are related to community characteristics, which are then in turn related to fan brand community. Finally, conclusions for the academy and practitioners are discussed based on the examination of this community in relation to the theoretical framework.

INTRODUCTION

The creation of a customer-led brand community has been called the "holy grail" of marketing as consumers immerse themselves in the brand and form a self-regulating community to support their chosen brand (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). By definition, a brand community exists when consumers join together and share consumption experiences online and in person outside of the purview of the parent company (Cova, 1997; Dholakia & Herrmann, 2005). Harley Davidson is often held as the

classic example of a brand with a powerful brand fan community, as is the Jeep brand, yet this phenomenon exists across many product categories. Fans of *The X-Files*, a television show that ran from 1993 to 2002 and again in 2016, was another popular brand with a strong brand community (Kozinets, 1997). Members of the fan community engaged heavily with the brand, including creating a name for themselves (X-Philes), suggesting the creation of RPG (role-playing games), and finding ways to incorporate the themes and mythologies from the show into their own lives (Kozinets, 1997). Shortly after the release of the New Volkswagen Beetle in 1998, fans and critics alike turned to the Internet to discuss the merits and shortfalls of the new car (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003). Similar activities were also seen following the release of Star Wars: The Phantom Menace (Brown et al., 2003) where fans gathered online and analyzed the new movie in great detail, often comparing the newer film to the originals in the series in an attempt to "decode George Lucas's cosmology" (Brown et al., 2003).

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter consists of two principal areas of focus. First, the Star Wars fan community focused on creating screen accurate BB-8 replicas is explored in depth. This discussion includes insights from the online fan community forums and social media groups where participants engage with and support one another as they build full-sized Star Wars character. Builders undertake the creation of the character through emergent technology such as 3-D printing. Members work together to create these character replicas and immerse themselves completely in the process of the character's formation. This participation involves the commitment for many to purchase 3-D printers and learn how to use them to design and build the character for participation. This chapter also includes insights gathered from the annual official fan convention, Star Wars Celebration, where members meet in the real world and honor the franchise. The complexity of the tasks and the commitment required are described in detail. Second, this chapter applies the BB-8 builder community to an established framework for brand community (Humphrey Jr., Laverie, & Rinaldo, 2016), which is extended to include the passionate and committed communities formed by fans around entertainment franchises. Brand (or franchise) characteristics are related to community characteristics, which are, in turn, related to fan brand community. This type of self-organized community are arguably the most vocal and motivated ambassadors for an entertainment brand. Finally, conclusions for the academy and practitioners (namely franchise stewards) are provided based on the examination of this community in relation to the theoretical framework. The overall objective of these three chapter components is to apply this existing framework to a nascent fan brand community and provide a vibrant, real-world example of how franchise creators and stewards can coexist with fan communities that replicate screen accurate artifacts as part of a self-formed and self-regulated online and offline community.

Issues, Controversies, Problems

This article is relevant to the following issues and controversies that entertainment brand franchise owners may have with self-organized fan groups and fans replicating what is seen on screen (and owned as intellectual property by the franchise owners):

19 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/building-the-force/231824

Related Content

Building Academic Branding: The Digital Branding as Academic Footprint
Ruth Matovelle Villamar (2017). *Digital Tools for Academic Branding and Self-Promotion (pp. 31-51).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/building-academic-branding/170872

E-Satisfaction and E-Loyalty: Two Main Consequences of Online Buying Attributes
Gyaneshwar Singh Kushwahaand Mukesh Kaushal (2016). *International Journal of Online Marketing (pp. 36-53).*
www.irma-international.org/article/e-satisfaction-and-e-loyalty/165481

Fostering Students' 'Use My Own Device' Attitude: Developing All-in-one Mobile learning Application
Mireilla Bikanga Ada (2014). *International Journal of Technology and Educational Marketing (pp. 15-33).*
www.irma-international.org/article/fostering-students-use-my-own-device-attitude/106040

Ethics in Behavioural Targeting: Mapping Consumers Perceptions
Sonam Chauhanand Shubhangini Rathore (2014). *International Journal of Online Marketing (pp. 45-61).*
www.irma-international.org/article/ethics-in-behavioural-targeting/113957

TV Commercial Space in the UAE: A Regional Hub for Advertisement Production
Suzana Dzamtoska Zdravkovskaand Sabir Haque (2022). *Handbook of Research on Global Perspectives on International Advertising (pp. 179-206).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/tv-commercial-space-in-the-uae/307179