Measuring and Managing Consumer Sentiment in an Online Community Environment
MEASURING AND MANAGING CONSUMER SENTIMENT IN AN ONLINE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

The increasing popularity of social media has led firms to recognize the power of word of mouth in online settings, in which consumers use technologies to communicate with others about products and services (Godes and Mayzlin 2004). Within those settings, online communities play a prominent role. An online community comprises “an aggregation of individuals or business partners who interact based on a shared interest, where the interaction is at least partially supported or mediated by technology and guided by certain protocols and norms” (Porter and Donthu 2008, p. 115). In contrast to other online marketing instruments, such as viral marketing campaigns or advertising on social networking sites, online communities facilitate consumer-to-consumer online conversations and enable firms to interact with consumers directly and transparently (Dellarocas 2003, 2006).

A firm’s role in online community management can be either passive or active (Dholakia et al. 2009). Passive engagement involves offering a platform for online conversations in which, notably, the firm does not engage in conversations among consumers. In contrast, active engagement entails direct interactions with community members, such as replies to consumer postings or the opening of new discussion threads by a corporate employee. Companies following an active engagement strategy often employ a hybrid approach that comprises both active and passive elements of interaction with their customers (Dholakia et al. 2009; Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould 2009).
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