unicef

# Trying To Engage Young People
# With your Brand?
# Don't look any further.
# Think
# **Online**
# **Community**

A report by Anne-Sophie Gaspersz

# Trying To
# Engage
# Young People
# With Your Brand?
# Don't look any further.
# Think
# **Online**
# **Community.**

**Prepared by**

**Anne-Sophie Gaspersz, 08072191**

**Prepared for**

**UNICEF Netherlands & The Hague University**
**International Business & Management Studies**

September 5, 2012

unite for
children

## Certification of Authorship

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this report. All assistance I have received from outside sources have been documented in the report, and are as well listed after the conclusion under "references". This report was created exclusively by me and specifically made for the course International Business and Management Studies at The Hague University, the Netherlands.

unite for children

**Date:**

**Signature:**

The bachelor thesis that is lying in front of you is the result of a six-week research that I did as a graduate student at The Hague University and has been prepared for UNICEF Netherlands.

I feel very honoured and grateful that I got the opportunity to achieve my final thesis for UNICEF, an organization that I whole-heartedly support. UNICEF strives for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. I could not think of any other mission that I would have rather wanted to support with my research. UNICEF has given me a wonderful learning experience with the internship that I did last year. It was very inspiring and enlightening to work for them and be surrounded by the organization's passionate and enthusiastic people. During my entire research I was driven by the knowledge that I was doing it for them and their mission. I am very excited to show them the results of my hard work.

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of the 163 people who contributed to my research project. Many community experts and community managers were willing to share their knowledge and thoughts. I realize that with their experience and expertise in this field they do not just give away advice for free. Therefore, I appreciate it even more that they donated their ideas to me, and in essence to UNICEF.

Writing this thesis has been a learning experience for me. It was quite a challenge to perform an extensive research in the short six weeks period that was available for writing this thesis. During the project, there was a point where I was overwhelmed by the enormous amount of empirical data that I had collected. At that moment I thought I would never be able to analyse all information obtained and to combine it into a practical and meaningful advice for UNICEF. Luckily, I managed to structure it well in the end. This project has made me very enthusiastic and passionate about the field of online communities. I am happy to have been able to develop some own new models and theories on this exciting topic. I am looking forward to the future developments concerning online communities.

I like to express sincere appreciation to my tutor Madeleine Royere for her meaningful support of this project. At the most crucial moments you were there to tap into wisdom and provide me with your supportive advice.

Last but not least, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents Jeff and Eveline, who helped me with their love and support during the journey of writing this thesis. I am grateful for their supportive words and their many gifts of wisdom. Last but not least, I like to thank my brother Daniel for his endless enthusiasm and optimism that he projected on me during this project.

## Introduction

This report is made in request of UNICEF Netherlands and will answer the following research question:

*What kind of online community can best serve UNICEF Netherlands' intention of engaging the young generation and what are the main considerations they have to take into account when developing one?*

I have carried out an extensive literature review and empirical research to get a valuable answer on this question. I have interviewed the best experts in the field of online communities and asked them to give their advice with regard to UNICEF. I also asked online community managers to share their knowledge and expertise. Besides, I surveyed people in the young generation (i.e. 18-30 years of age) to find out what their preference would be for a possible charity-focused online community.

## Conclusions

When considering investing an online community, it is important that UNICEF first gets a basic understanding of online communities, their role in business processes and the actual way they work:

### Understanding online communities

An online community is a group of people with a shared interest and/or goal who meet with a certain frequency on the Internet. Online communities can be categorized on basis of the following characteristics: company initiated or member initiated, internal or external, type of platform, type of focus and type of content. An online community initiated by a company is what we call a 'brand community'.

### What are companies doing with online communities today?

Branded online communities offer a new way for marketers to create significant business value. Increased word-of-mouth, higher brand awareness, customer loyalty and valuable customer insights are some of the common spin-offs. Online communities offer a great opportunity for non-profit organizations to reach (potential) donors and build long-term, meaningful relationships that are based on trust. It is also a powerful tool to build long-term engagement among the young generation.

### How do online communities work?

People join online communities to fulfil both social and psychological needs. Some of them include: relationship-building, social identity/self-expression, enjoyment, helping others and belongingness. Online communities evolve following five distinctive life-cycle stages: inception, establishment, maturity, death and mitosis. It is important that managers understand this life cycle and can adjust their strategies in each stage.

It is also important that managers understand what different roles people play in online communities. Understanding this will help them to make and maintain their online community a friendly place for both newcomers and old-timers.

There is a three-stage process that UNICEF can follow to foster and sustain engagement in their possible brand community. The first stage is about understanding consumer needs and motivations. In the second stage, UNICEF can start to promote participation by cultivating connections, creating enjoyable experiences and encouraging content creation among members. Stage three is about motivating cooperation by mobilizing member leaders and encouraging members to co-create.

So what kind of online community can best serve UNICEF Netherlands' intention? This report will provide a strategic perspective and a detailed answer concerning this question.

## A strategic perspective on the creation of a possible online community for UNICEF

UNICEF can use the decision matrix that I developed as a guideline in their decision-process of considering an online community.

According to the community experts and managers that were interviewed, a community strategy can be very beneficial for UNICEF and once executed and managed well, definitely would serve their intention.

When deciding on the best type of online community there are three main elements to consider: focus, platform and content.

- **Focus**: Based on the Shirt-matrix and the arguments given by the experts and managers, it can be concluded that UNICEF should focus their online community on their work, but in a subtle way. The main focus should be on areas that interest the young generation.
- **Platform**: Based on the views of the community managers and experts it can be concluded that the best option for UNICEF is to start small, with simple collaboration/engagement tools on existing social media platforms. If UNICEF succeeds on these platforms, they can decide to invest in their own hosted platform – either new or an integration with their current website.
- **Content**: Based on the survey that was conducted among UNICEF's target group it can be concluded that the following option is most popular: an online community on which young people can get inspired by reading about new fund raising actions undertaken by others, themselves or UNICEF.

Other important elements in the decision matrix are management and finance. An understanding of the 10 principles of good and professional community management will be very important for the success of the possible UNICEF community. To evaluate the success of the community, UNICEF can use two methods to obtain an indication of their return-on-investment of their efforts: *incremental value* (i.e. comparing a community member with a non-member) and *conversion rate* (i.e. number of specific actions undertaken by your target audience). It is important that UNICEF firsts defines what they exactly consider (in the sense of behaviour) as an "engaged" person in order to make the results of their efforts more quantifiable.

## Recommendations

*I recommend UNICEF to consider the following pieces of advice:*

- Give the young generation an online experience by means of an online community. It is a great way to reach your target group and give them the online experience they are looking for. You can give them a voice, perceive their conversations and inspire them. Once executed well, engagement and meaningful relationships will be main spin-offs.
- Carry out some more research on your target audience and the (online) environment you are in. Find out what (child-related) development issues your target group cares about and find out how they would see themselves engage. Examine if there already exist online communities talking about issues related to your work. Maybe you already have a base of brand advocates out there. It is a crucial first step that can give you fast and valuable new insights.
- Start with small, simple engagement tools using existing social media platforms and grow into larger more focused communities if you succeed in engaging your target group. Encourage your members to create content in your community and use brand advocacy as a tool to generate new traffic to your community.
- Avoid copying community models and concepts of others. Be unique and differentiate your community with: focus, specialization and a strong (brand) personality.
- Integrate your online communities with offline activities to get higher levels of engagement among your target group.
- Give online (community) efforts aimed at engaging the young generation a high priority in your marketing efforts.
- Be patient with the result of your online community efforts.  Treat it like a garden: give your community enough attention, love, and beautiful plants (interesting content) and your community will flourish and prosper, yet be patient.

## Table of Contents

## List of Figures

# Part A.

## Introduction And

## Methodology

unite for
children

# Chapter 1. Introduction:

## What Is This Research All About?

If I would randomly pick a young guy walking on the street and give him €50 euros and tell him to donate it to the charity organization of his choice, where will that money end up? Probably in the hands of the organization he has the "strongest and most meaningful relationship with - the one he trusts the most and that shares his passion and core beliefs" (Weisnewski, 2). Then, the guy goes home. He grabs his laptop and goes online. He opens up Facebook and gives his friends a status update: "Feeling good. Just donated €50. I hope it helps and makes a difference". One minute later, he got 12 'Likes'.

How could a non-profit organization like UNICEF have convinced this guy, who belongs to the young generation, to support their organization in an age of instant promises overloading him from everywhere he looks? What should they have done to reach this guy, engage him and build a lasting, meaningful relationship with him?

This research has focused on the opportunity for UNICEF to develop such a relationship by means of an online community. The Internet has grown into an important environment in our lives, where we meet, interact and share. What would happen if UNICEF would build a space where people can talk about child-related development issues in the world, their own good initiatives, and UNICEF's intentions and projects? Would that build the desired sustainable relationships with the young generation? To answer this question I have interviewed the best experts in the field of online communities and asked them to give their advice to UNICEF. I also asked online community managers to share their views and expertise. Besides, I surveyed people in this young generation to find out what their preferences regarding an UNICEF online community would be.

This research report contains my findings and the recommendations to UNICEF. I hope the readers will enjoy the journey I have undertaken into one of the most exciting subjects of this time. The Internet has reshaped our lives. We become more and more part of virtual communities. These groups can enrich our lives and help us sharing our dreams, passions and ambitions. How can UNICEF accomplish their meaningful mission by using these new environments and meet the people who might be willing to support them?

## 1.1 Research background

**UNICEF Netherlands**

UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) is a non-profit organization that is part of the United Nations – which works for world peace. The head office is located in New York, the European head office in Geneva. UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. UNICEF was created with this primary purpose in mind to work with others to overcome the obstacles that poverty, violence, disease and discrimination place on a child's path. UNICEF's mission is to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. UNICEF is guided in doing this by the provisions and principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

UNICEF Netherlands, which is located in Voorburg, is one of the 36 national committees that represent UNICEF International in rich countries. UNICEF Netherlands raises funds for aid programs that are carried out in 155 developing countries. Furthermore, they provide information about the work of UNICEF. In addition, the committee monitors whether the Dutch government respects the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in both its domestic and foreign policy.

**Their intention: engaging the young generation**

UNICEF Netherlands has recently segmented the Dutch population into groups according to their life stage, age, education, income and their general attitude towards non-profits. They decided to do this segmentation in order to improve the effectiveness of their fundraising efforts. So far, they always targeted the entire Dutch population with the same message. Now, they want to target segments differently and adapt their marketing and communication efforts according to the specific characteristics and needs of these different segments. One group that they have distinguished in their segmentation is called: "Bereidwilligen" (i.e. "Attentives"). According to Jasper van Maarschalkerweerd (account manager of this segment at UNICEF Netherlands) this group consists of 3.3 million people in the Netherlands and can be described as follows:

*People in the age group 18-30 years old. They are high educated (HBO – higher professional education or WO – research oriented education) and have a below average or average income level. These people are currently in an important stage of their lives. They are on their way to become an adult. They seek for their identity: how they want to be, who they want to be and what they want to do in their life. In this stage they make important decisions: their partner, their first job, house, kid(s), a car etc. Self-realization is an important aspect in their life. They are on a search for a direction to choose in their life.*

*Everything they do must in some way contribute to this search. They are at the beginning of their career and constantly seeking for self-improvement and development. They are quite individualistic: very focused on their own. They have a very hedonistic attitude: they want enjoyment, experience, have fun and get the best out of their lives. At the same time they are very ambitious and career driven. Their digital media consumption is relatively high: they extensively use the Internet. The Internet often (partly) replaces their use of television. They use smartphones a lot. In their leisure time they seek for adventure: they like to travel, backpack and experience other cultures. They want to explore the world. This generation has an extensive social life. They enjoy having a broad network of people – not per se interpersonal/offline relationships. Relationships made online are just as satisfying for them. They are socially engaged through platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and blogs. Although there is slight scepticism among some people in this segment, in general they have a very positive attitude towards non-profit organizations. They are willing to support charities, as long as they get something in return: an experience. They seek recognition for their donations and support. These people support non-profits if it gives them a warm, good feeling. They want to acquire the feeling that they contribute to a better world. It is very important for these people that the organization shares the same values and beliefs as they do. They only support charities that they really trust. They seek transparency and want to perceive the effect of their support/donated money.*

UNICEF Netherlands is seeking ways to target this generation more effectively. They want to make these people more engaged with their organization and the work they are doing for children all over the world. The organization realizes that part of this group is not capable of financially supporting a charity. Therefore, they aim to focus on encouraging these people to support UNICEF in a non-financial way as well. UNICEF Netherlands is expecting the following spin-offs from investing in this generation:

- Higher brand awareness
- Growing brand preference for UNICEF
- Increased trust
- Stronger brand image
- Strong, meaningful, long-term relationships
- Higher awareness of child-related development issues and the work of UNICEF
- Increased one-time or periodically donations

What UNICEF Netherlands is hoping for is that these spin-offs will eventually lead to an increased base of supporters that will help them in their mission of creating a better world for children.

## 1.2 Finding a meaningful problem statement

UNICEF Netherlands has already taken several steps in reaching this relatively young generation. They are nowadays active on a lot of social media platforms. They currently have a web care team that regularly posts content on these platforms. Still, they have not yet succeeded in creating a compelling dialogue with this generation. They struggle in finding the right way to attract and hold the attention of this somewhat restless, individualistic, young generation. Not only UNICEF Netherlands is struggling with this aspect, but other UNICEF International Committees as well. It is of high importance for UNICEF to find a solution for this endeavour. UNICEF realizes that they are competing for donations made to other charity organizations or projects started by people themselves.

In one of the meetings I had with UNICEF Netherlands, I suggested to consider a quite new, developing marketing tool that more and more businesses are using nowadays to reach their targets and foster (online) engagement: online communities. UNICEF Netherlands was very curious and enthusiastic to learn more about this recent development in (online) marketing. Together we defined a ('SMART') central research question that could guide me in my research project.

**Central research question:**

What kind of online community can best serve UNICEF Netherlands' intention of engaging the young generation (18-30 years old) and what are the main considerations they have to take into account when developing one?

In the methodology chapter I will elaborate on this research question and on the chosen research strategies of the research in hand.

From now on, when I talk about UNICEF I mean UNICEF Netherlands.

## 1.3 The competencies developed during my research

This research is the Final Integrated Project (IP-8) in my study International Business & Management Studies (IBMS) at The Hague University, the Netherlands. As an IBMS graduate I should be able to execute and direct different integrated international business operations in the field of international marketing, finance and management. The curriculum of my study is based on 16 competences: nine professional competencies ('PC') and seven generic competencies. Of all these competencies, there are some that I had to use the most during my project. I will highlight these briefly below.

- **PC1: International Business Awareness.** This competency has become most apparent during this final project. I have shown that I have the ability to do an extensive research and make a transparent synopsis of an international study. In this report I will advise UNICEF management on the opportunities and threats in the international business environment they are in. I read much literature on the topic of brand communities. I will make clear that I am capable of attuning my own activities and those of the organization to international trends.

- **PC3: International Strategic Vision Development.** In this research I have shown that I am capable of translating trends (e.g. changing generation, cyber culture, the rise of brand communities etc.) in the environment to opportunities and threats for UNICEF. I have assessed an international strategic policy for UNICEF and clearly defined its strategic limits. I have shown that I can contribute to adjustment(s) of a vision and strategy.

- **PC5: Entrepreneurial Management.** During this research, it has also been shown that I am capable of contributing, in cooperation with others (UNICEF and the people I interviewed/surveyed), to an optimal exploration of the opportunities for UNICEF in their search for increased engagement among the young generation. I also highlighted the risks involved with brand communities. During my research I had a pro-active opportunity-seeking attitude. In this report UNICEF will be encouraged to make effective use of the opportunities presented in my findings.

- **PC6: International Marketing and Sales Management.** With the findings of my research, I have shown that I am capable of analysing the environment of UNICEF from an (international) marketing point of view. My report presents a marketing strategy that UNICEF can implement to market their services more effectively.

- **PC8: International Finance and Accounting.** In this report it has been shown that I am able to understand the consequences of the various (financial) risks inherent to brand communities. Brand communities have been analysed from a financial perspective and it was analysed how UNICEF can best measure the Return-on-Investment of a possible online community. With this, I will contribute to the management control of UNICEF by means of an integrated application of my knowledge of business accounting, management accounting, financial management, and other relevant topics.

- **Leadership:** During the research process I have learned to take on a leadership role: I was the leader of my own project and had to take the lead in everything I did in this research. I had to convince people to contribute to my research in the form of answering the interview questions. I had to make clear decisions, even when the outcome was unsure. I constantly had to motivate myself and others to contribute to my project by sharing their thoughts and views on my case.

- **Co-operation:** This is a very important competency.  I had to cooperate closely and effectively with my tutor and my sponsor company UNICEF. I had to take their needs and preferences into account. I had to cooperate effectively with other contributors (organizational experts, community managers) of my project as well.

- **Communication:** This was a competency I needed intensively during my research and I had to make clear that I have a good operational command of the English language in a wide range of real world situations. Most of the people I interviewed were either living in the U.S. or the U.K. I had to communicate effectively with them during the interviews that were conducted.  The intent of my communication was to persuade them to share their knowledge and insights.

- **Business Research Methods:** Spotting complex issues and searching information from a broad range of resources is a skill I definitely enhanced during my research. It was a challenge to create structure in a huge amount of unstructured data. Furthermore, I learned to integrate theory and practice with my desk and field research. I have shown to be able to indicate the information needed in complex situation and to draw conclusions from complex research data.

- **Planning and Organizing:** I learned to plan and organize my research in a very effective matter during the six weeks to conduct this research and to write my thesis. I had to make a good planning and set several personal deadlines. I also wanted to ensure that my tutor could keep up with my progress easily.

- **Learning and Self-development:** During this research I learned the limits of my competencies. Because I conducted this research entirely by my own, I also had the complete responsibility for it. I had to take the initiative and to work independently. This was definitely a challenge. I asked others for feedback during my research to ensure that I was on the right track. I tried to learn from the criticism that I got and continuously searched for improving both my work and myself. I learned to deal with setbacks and to trust in a positive outcome.

- **Ethical and Corporate Responsibility:** This competency has become apparent in several ways during the research. First of all, UNICEF Netherlands and UNICEF New York gave me confidential insights on how they would want to engage this young generation. It was my task to respect this and use this confidential information in a proper way. Also, it was my task to only refer to the people that contributed to my field research – if they gave me explicit permission. Some of the opinions reflected in my study are from consultants. They were willing to offer free-consultancy and advice UNICEF specifically. It would not be ethical if I would use their opinions/views for other purposes if they did not give me the permission to do so. Furthermore, it was my responsibility to make proper use of the MLA referencing method 7, when referring to what others said.

With this project, I was expected to show that I am capable of applying the theoretical knowledge and skills (expressed in the competencies mentioned above) that I acquired in the previous semesters of my study in a practical assignment directly significant to a sponsor company, i.e. UNICEF. The courses that I used the most in this project were: Strategic Management, Marketing (Social Media Marketing, Online Marketing), Customer Relationship Management (Social CRM) and Finance.

## 1.4 Objectives of my research

My research was guided by the following *objectives*:

**Main objective**

My aim is to provide UNICEF with a meaningful advice about the possibility of creating an online community to engage the young generation.

**Other objectives:**

- Study the existing theories and concepts about online communities and, if necessary, synthesize them into an own model that can be of value to UNICEF.
- Provide a report that contains practical steps and actions for UNICEF to take based on a solid theoretical background.
- Carry out an extensive field research by interviewing high-qualified, diverse experts in the field studied, in order to share their expertise and give UNICEF new insights that can serve their goal.
- Make my research credible, convincing and well-structured.

**Personal objectives:**

- Help UNICEF in their mission of creating a better world for children with my knowledge, effort, time and enthusiasm.
- Challenge and trump myself by delivering a high-quality report in the narrow time period of six weeks.
- Network and make new connections with people that can help me in my future career.
- Prove that I can put my professional and generic competencies acquired in previous semesters into practice coherently.
- Prove that I can apply the theoretical knowledge that I acquired in the previous semesters in a practical assignment.
- Gain insights into the field of online communities as a new way for businesses to target and reach their users.
- (Further) develop my passion for online marketing by making this report a solid base for an e-book or website about this timely topic.

## 1.5 Significance of this study

The topic of this study - online (brand) communities - is an area which has not yet been written much about in other studies. Therefore, this research was for me an opportunity to develop and introduce some new marketing models. After an extensive literature and field research, I was indeed able to develop new models on this topic. This is something that makes the current research significant and hopefully valuable for others. This study will be most relevant to UNICEF (Netherlands and other UNICEF committees around the world) as my advices are specifically addressed to this organization. However, I hope that my study will also be of value for other non-profit organizations that seek ways to engage the(ir) young generation. This study can help them to understand the possible business value of online communities for their own organization. It will provide them an understanding of how they can invest in their brand with these communities. This study

will preferably also guide them in their search for the right type of online community that serves their needs best. This study also reflects some elements that could be interesting for commercial organizations as well. The decision matrix that has been designed can be used for any type of business considering investing in an online community.

## 1.6 Research questions

In this report, first a basic understanding about online communities will be given to UNICEF. Then, it will be shown to them how companies nowadays use online communities as their online marketing strategy. Before even considering an online community, I think it is important that UNICEF first understands how online communities exactly work.  That is why chapter 5 focuses on that issue. Chapter 6 provides a strategic perspective on the creation of a possible online community for UNICEF.

With this report I aim to work towards answering the following research questions related to the problem stated before.

**Desk research** – theoretical research questions

### Understanding online communities (chapter 3)

- What is an online community?
- What different types of online communities are there?

### What are companies doing with online communities today? (chapter 4)

- How did the Web 2.0 revolution changed the way people communicate with others and businesses?
- How did Web 2.0 change the way organizations design, sell, market and communicate their brands, products and services towards its consumers?
- Why is it that more and more brands invest in brand communities?
- What is the business value of brand communities?
- What are disadvantages and possible risks of brand communities?
- Why is it important that non-profit organizations invest in their brand?
- Why is trust important in building relationships with potential donors and supporters?
- Why should non-profit organizations consider investing in brand communities?
- What are examples of brands (both commercial and non-commercial) that launched successful brand communities?

## How do online communities work? (chapter 5)

- What basic needs do people have to fulfil by participating in an online community?
- How can we apply Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs' to understand why people join communities?
- In what stages do online communities evolve during their life cycle?
- What different roles do individual members play in an online community?
- What can managers do to foster and sustain engagement among members in their online community?

**Field research** – empirical research questions

## A strategic perspective on the creation of a possible community for UNICEF (chapter 6)

- What steps and considerations will UNICEF need to make when considering investing in an online community?
- Is an online community strategy necessary and relevant for UNICEF?
- What would be the best focus for a possible community for UNICEF? Brand-focused or general-focused?
- What would be the best platform for UNICEF to build their online community on?
- What should UNICEF do before deciding about the content of their online community?
- What should be the content for a possible online community for UNICEF?
- How can UNICEF professionally manage their possible online community?
- How can UNICEF best measure the Return-on-Investment of their possible online community?

# Chapter 2. Methodology:

## How Will This Research Be Conducted?

As explained in the previous chapter, the central research question is as follows:

*What kind of online community can best serve UNICEF's intention to engage the young generation and what are the main considerations they have to take into account when developing it?*

In this chapter it will be explained what methodological choices I will have to make to answer this central question and its underlying research questions.

## 2.1 Description of research design

Interpretivism, the view that all knowledge is a matter of interpretation, will be used as my research philosophy. Therefore, the underlying assumptions in each of my research decisions will be explained. This will ensure that other researchers have a clear insight into what I have done, how I have interpreted the result obtained and how I have drawn my conclusions and came to the recommendations for UNICEF. This makes it possible to repeat and expand or further specify such research in the future. My research approach is a combination of both deductive and inductive explorations. Existing theories on online communities will be used in my desk research (deductive). Considering the lack of a strong theoretical background covering the issues related to online communities, it seems wise to follow the inductive approach as well. I will try to develop new models and theories suitable for answering my central research question.

This study will be categorized as cross-sectional, longitudinal, exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. The research is cross-sectional because the phenomenon 'online communities' will be studied at a particular time: the here and now. I will also look at how this phenomenon has changed/developed over time – and thus use a longitudinal approach as well. The study in hand is exploratory, because I will try to seek new insights about the phenomenon 'online communities' by the search of literature regarding the subject and interviewing community experts and managers in the field of online communities and social media. This study is also descriptive, because my purpose is to produce an accurate representation of the phenomenon studied and the underlying concepts of it, and causal relationships between variables will be established. Finally, this research will explain the relationship between certain variables and therefore be explanatory as well.

## 2.2 Research strategy  + research methods of desk research

This study is an academic assignment and, therefore, presenting issues in a theoretical context is a requirement. In my desk research only theories that are relevant to my research topic will be selected. Books of courses that I have done during my studies will be used. I will also perform an Internet research in which websites, blogs, and online articles that address current developments in the field of online communities will be studied. A combination of primary, secondary and tertiary data will be used. Finally, MLA edition 7 will be used as my referencing method for this research.

## 2.3 Research strategy  + research methods of field research

Theories and models will be applied that I will acquire during my desk research to a "real life" business problem by doing an extensive field research. This research project can be classified as a case study, because the research applies to a particular case: UNICEF.  Online communities are a "young" area of marketing with thus far only, from a theoretical point of view, rudimental insights. Theorizing has just started. Therefore, in the theoretical part I will present existing theories, but will also present new models and theories on basis of the current concepts and models. Because of the lack of a solid theory, it will be crucial to approach some of the best online community experts in the world and ask them to share their expertise.  Therefore, my research strategy will be based on collecting as much valid data as possible in the short 6-weeks period that is available for writing this thesis. I will have five research activities aimed at collecting the necessary empirical data:

- Interviewing experts in the field of online communities to gain insights on how UNICEF Netherlands can benefit from online communities.
- Interviewing online community managers to get relevant advice based on their experiences and expertise.
- Interviewing UNICEF staff to get insight into their objectives and their experience with regard to engaging the young generation.
- Surveying the young (18-30 years of age), high-educated generation to get more insight into what kind of online community this group would prefer.
- Observing already existing brand communities to ascertain what kind of concepts and tools they use to engage their community members.

In figure 1 on the next page, the research topic and how it is related to the larger field and area of marketing is depicted.

**Figure 1:** Theoretical framework



## 2.4 How will the data be analysed + instruments used to do so

The theoretical data to be collected will be analyzed extensively. I will compare several theories and models and next to that present my own models. The results of the field research will consist of both qualitative and quantitative data (survey). The qualitative data will be analyzed by finding relevant structures and overlaps in the data. Based on that, I will hopefully be able to draw conclusions from it. The qualitative data will be processed by presenting the discussions on my topic and synthesizing the results. The quantitative data will be analyzed by drawing relevant charts and figures (using Excel and Google Docs) from the results and my conclusions will be based on that. These research strategies will allow me to collect relevant data and generate an adequate recommendation that can support UNICEF in making the right decisions about their possible online community.

The environment of my field research is a combination of the online community environment, the corporate environment in which the community experts and managers work, UNICEF's working environment, and the environment of the young generation.

In chapter 6 I will elaborate more on the research strategy of the field research and explain in detail the interview, survey and observation methods that have been used. It will be explained which instruments were used to conduct the field research and besides

that, detailed information on my research populations and sampling methods will be given. Finally, an extensive analysis of the results of my field research will be given.

## 2.5 Limitations of the desk and field research strategies

I am aware that the research strategy used has its limitations, since I asked the experts for their subjective opinions. In science it is strived for objectivity, but when data is gathered from, in this case, experts and community managers, their views on the topic are usually accepted. Yet, often they have contrasting views, but nevertheless we might discover some similarities and patterns in their answers, which can point to a more universal truth about online communities.  But they just stay (less- or non-generalizable) opinions.

On the other hand, I have to be aware that my research is in essence exploratory. I am not testing hypotheses, I am generating them. This gives me more freedom for drawing conclusions on a limited set of data and interpreting it. Quoting the methodologists Glaser and Strauss, the founders of the 'grounded theory': "*Since accurate evidence is not so crucial for generating theory, the kind of evidence, as well as the number of cases, is also not crucial. A single case can indicate a general conceptual category or property; a few more cases can confirm the indication*" (364).

Yet, cautiousness in the interpretation of the data stays important. That also applies to the survey that was conducted. I got the answers of 80 respondents and of course their answers are not representative for the whole group.

A limitation of my desk research is that the literature used is not timeless and therefore not completely accurate. Online communities are still in a developmental process and the Internet and social media are constantly emerging. A book about online communities written today can be old tomorrow. Nevertheless, the theories that I obtained from blogs reflect opinions of experts as well.

# Part B.

## Exploring The Theory

unite for
children

# Chapter 3:

# Understanding Online Communities

In this chapter a brief overview will be given regarding the definitions of online communities and its major typologies. My conclusion is to prefer developing my own categorization of online communities, which will be presented in a model developed by myself (Figure 2).

## 3.1 What is an online community?

Defining online communities, also known as virtual communities, in an accurate and timeless manner is not easy. Although there is an enormous amount of literature about online communities, there is still no consensus among researchers regarding an appropriate definition of this term.

Howard Rheingold, one of the most cited authors in the online community literature, describes online communities from a social perspective. He defines virtual communities as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspaces" (5). Hagel and Armstrong take a business perspective and describe virtual communities as "computer-mediated spaces where there is a potential for an integration of content and communication with an emphasis on member-generated content" (11). Jenny Preece, researcher in this field, gives a more detailed, technical definition. She states that an online community consists of four underlying elements: "*People*, who interact socially as they strive to satisfy their own needs or perform special roles, such as leading or moderating. A *shared purpose*, such as an interest, need, information exchange, or service that provides a reason for the community. *Policies*, in the form of tacit assumptions, rituals, protocols, rules, and laws that guide people's interactions. And *computer systems*, to support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness" (18). Lee et al. decided to build consensus among researchers in the information systems field and compared nine of the most popular existing definitions. Based on this they came to the following definition of online communities: "cyberspaces supported by computer-based information technology, centred upon communication and interaction of participants to generate member-driven content, resulting in a relationship being built" (51).

More recently, there has been an interesting discussion going on among bloggers – people who regularly post their personal thoughts on weblogs - about the best way to define an online community. According to blogger and web strategist Jeremiah Owyang, online communities can be best described as "bodies of people joined together by a common interest". Jake McKee, blogger at Community Guy, came up with the following definition: "An online community is a group of people who form relationships over time by interacting regularly around shared experiences, which are of interest to all of them for varying individual reasons" (Mack).

Although Jake and Jeremiah's definitions both feature important components of an online community I think they are still not complete. In their definitions it is not clear that it is about an *online* community. Their definitions could also describe an *offline* community, for example a tennis association. Luckily, Dawn Foster refined their definitions and posted one on her blog, which is just Jeremiah's definition, but with a few tweaks based on elements of Jake's meaning. According to Dawn, an online community is: "Where a group of people with similar goals or interests share experiences and build relationships using web tools". Yet, I still do not entirely agree with her definition, because she basically states that relationships are a factor of online communities. Although it is very common that members of online communities form relationships over time, I think it is not a main component. Not all members of online communities have the intention or need for building relationships. Some members might regularly join without ever adding content or contribute to the community. They just listen without actively participating. More elaborations on these kinds of members and other roles that people play in online communities will be shown in section 5.3.

**An online community is a group of people with a shared interest and/or goal who meet with a certain frequency on the Internet.**

Hence, I decided to come up with my own definition: an online community is a group of people with a shared interest and/or goal who meet with a certain frequency on the Internet. I tried to keep it simple and broad in order to make it is as timeless and reliable as possible. Still, it can be concluded that there is no single accurate definition of this concept. I agree with Preece her opinion: "online community can mean different things to different people" (6).

## 3.2 What types of online communities are there?

The number of online communities continues to increase and millions of people around the world participate in them. To better study this phenomenon, researchers have therefore attempted to classify them. One of the most cited typologies is the one proposed by Armstrong and Hagel. They have made a distinction between four types of communities based on the needs they fulfil: "*communities of interests* (where people

interact extensively on a specific topic of their interest), *communities of relations* (through which members share life experiences and find social and emotional support), *communities of fantasy* (where visitors exercise their imagination and create new environments and personalities) and *communities of transactions* (which facilitate buying and selling transactions for consumers)" (16). A couple of years later, Porter came up with a typology that categorizes online communities on the basis of their purpose. She distinguished between "*commercial* and *non-commercial* company managed virtual communities" (6). Ben Yahia went a step further and created a typology that differentiates online communities on the basis of the specific focus or discourse among community members. She distinguished two types of communities: "those *focused on the brand* and its products and those centred on *other topics* that may or may not be related to the brand" (129). Blogger Richard Howard categorizes company-initiated communities (also called branded communities) into three distinct groups: "*direct communities* (owned and managed by a company), *managed communities* (started and managed by an organization but run on social media platforms) and *participating communities* (started and managed by individuals or groups of users who have an interest in the brand)".

Richard Millington posted an article on his blog where he states that there are broadly speaking five different types of communities based on their content: "*interest* (communities of people who share the same interest or passion), *action* (communities of people trying to bring about change), *place* (communities of people brought together by geographic boundaries), *practice* (communities of people in the same profession or undertaking the same activities), and *circumstance* (communities of people brought together by external events/situations)". Lee et al. reviewed several proposed typologies and concluded that "none of the classifications of virtual community covers every aspect, or fits under every circumstance" (52).

**Developing my own typology**

I think that is it almost impossible to create a complete typology that represents the enormous amount of different types of communities. Besides that, existing communities evolve constantly and new types of communities continue to arise. Categorizing online communities will be an on-going process. For the purpose of this research, it is therefore decided to develop an own model (see figure 2) that categorizes online communities. My goal was to build some kind of consensus among existing typologies. Besides, it is important to note that an online community can have several elements of other types of communities. There is, just as with the definition of online communities, no single correct classification for this concept.

My model/typology is inspired by some of the elements of existing typologies that I described already. To be precise (see Figure 2): *1) in the figure by Porter's typology, *2) by Richard Howard's typology, *3) by Ben Yahia's Typology and *4) by Richard Millington and Armstrong & Hagel. As one can see in the model, a distinction between external and internal company-initiated communities is included as well. I believe this is an important classification. The primary purpose of an internal company-initiated community is to improve knowledge sharing, cross-departmental collaboration and corporation communication.

Internal communities are typically used within "large organisations where there may be a significant proportion of knowledge workers who are distributed across multiple locations" (Ashenden 11). The community tool "Yammer" is a widely used example of a platform that is used by companies for this purpose.  For the aim of my research, I will from now on only focus on external company-initiated communities the light-blue highlighted parts in the figure), also known as 'brand communities'.

**Explanation of the model**

I decided to classify the member-initiated communities into six types: *community of interes*t (example: *MyGarden.com*, an online community for passionate gardeners), *community of relations* (example: *PrisonerLife.com,* a community where prisoners get an opportunity to communicate with the world and their families and friends), *community of practice* (example: *TeachersConnecting.com,* a vibrant and successful community for teachers), *community of transaction* (example: *Amazon.com,* which has a recommendation centre completely built upon customer profiles*), community of action (example*: GamersVoice.com, an active community where anti-video games policies and media is tackled) and a *community of circumstance* (example: *Mumsnet*.com, an online community where parents can  pool knowledge, advice and support). It is important to note that an online community can be a combination of several elements of the different above-mentioned types.

I believe that any online community can be classified based on the different sections in my model and classifying your online community in just one type (for example by saying "our community is a community of interest") will not give an accurate and comprehensive view. When describing Dell's online community *Ideastorm* (for a complete case study on this online community see section 3.1.3) based on my model, it can be seen is a commercial, external, direct, branded community. It would be classified as a community that is focused on the brand and its products, in specific, on ideation and innovation.  Organizations that decide to build an online community that is not focused on their brand and products but on other topics, often decide to create a community that is focused on one of the other community types (e.g. interest, relations, practice, action etc.) An example of this is Harper Collins' *Inkpop* community, which will be described in more detail in section 3.1.3.

My typology can help UNICEF in their process of deciding what kind of online community would best serve their intention.

In the next chapter it will be discussed what companies are doing today with online communities.

**Figure 2:** **Own model: Typology of online communities**
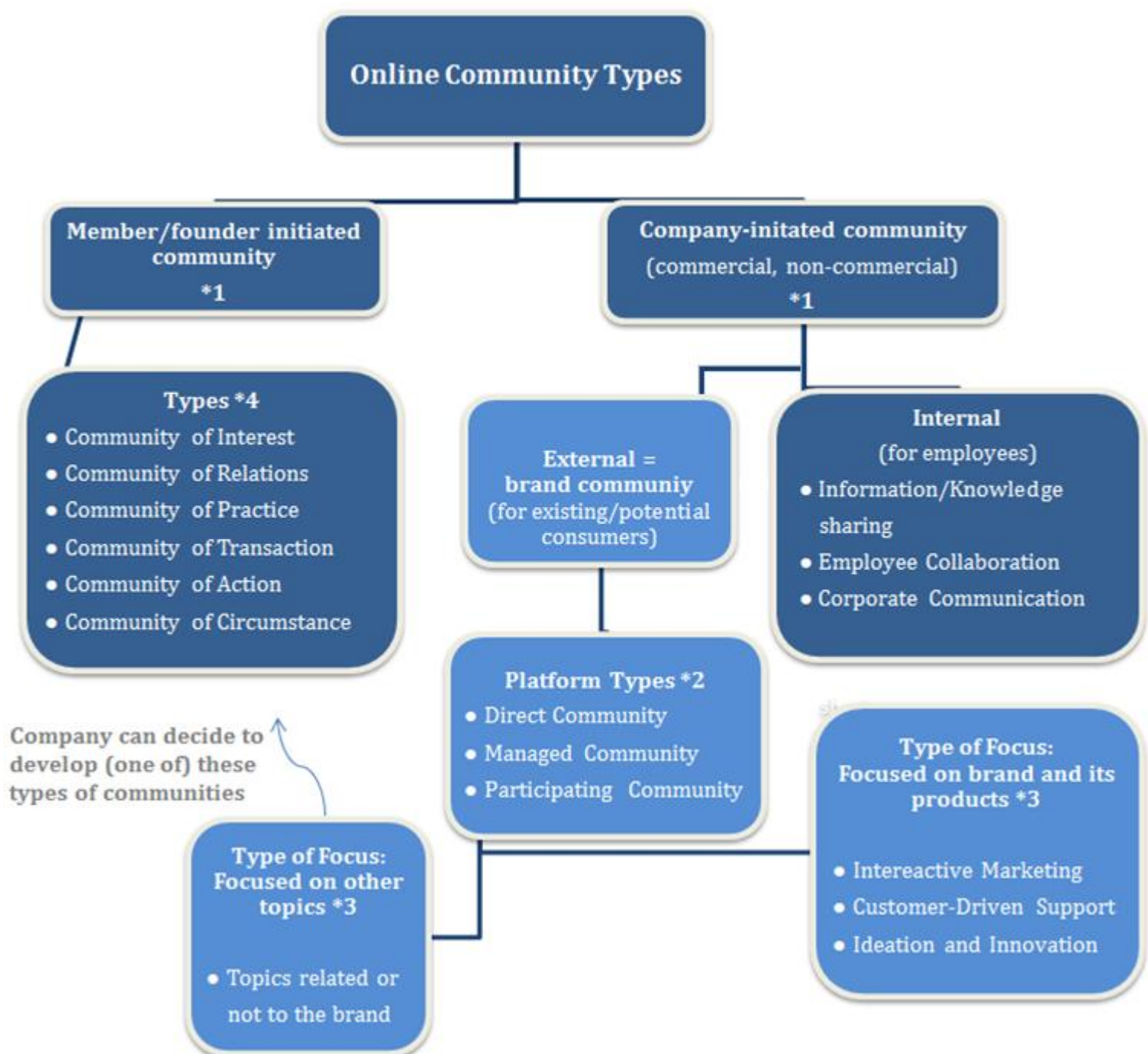
# Chapter 4:

## What Are Companies Doing With Online Communities Today?

### 4.1 A Changing generation

Everywhere, anytime, right now, as you read this, people are engaged in conversations with countless others. Through blogs, message boards or sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or Tumblr, people share photos, videos, ideas and opinions. The so-called Web 2.0 revolution has allowed Internet users to collaborate, share and contribute to the process of website development. This ease of access to web content has altered the way people interact with the world. There are billions of web sites currently in existence, and this number is growing at an accelerating rate. The Internet has become an important "tool that facilitates the most basic of human needs: a tool for conversation" (Smack 6). These people, especially the young generation, is "marked by an instant awareness of what is new, what is hot, what is desirable – and what is not" (Brown 30). Pollster John Zogby has extensively studied this changing young generation and wrote his finding in the book 'The Way We'll Be'', in which he explains that the expectations of products and services of this generation will be extremely different from that before. This will force organizations to "redefine their offerings and change the way they reach this generation. The new youth "cyber culture" will continue to find ways to adapt technology and Internet to their needs and desires" (23).

For these young people, relationships made and maintained through the Internet can be just as meaningful and powerful as those formed in real life. They "now have networks of friends they have never physically met and a network that surpass international boundaries" (Smack 7). More and more young people are using technology and Internet to find others with whom they share "important affinities, ranging from experiences to interests to beliefs to lifestyle choices" (Brown 35). Social critic Christine Rosen observed this digital form of tribalism (having a strong feeling of identity loyalty to a tribe/group) as an unexpectedly strong trend. Information (such as product and service information), experiences, and opinions spread with an enormous speed and power. She states: "Effectively getting a positive message on a tribal network could well be tomorrow's best marketing strategy" (Brown 36). In his book "Tribes", Seth Godin states the following: "Tribes matter. They always have. Now though, they matter even more. This is a primal human need but the Internet has joined together previously fragmented groups. We need to start embracing this phenomenon and start deciding whether it's worth the effort. I think it is" (14).

## 4.2 An adaptable marketer

These kinds of trends have affected and will continue to affect how organizations will design, sell, market and communicate their brands, products and services toward its consumers. In today's highly competitive and dynamic global economy, companies need to continuously seek for ways to adopt and innovate if they want to prosper and survive. They need to learn faster than ever (at least faster than their competitors) how the needs of this generation are changing. Marketing authors Sean Moffitt and Alex Marshall claim that there are dramatic shifts occurring in how business creates value through brands. "The currency at play is no longer passive consumption and mass communication but customer participation and genuine brand engagement" (8). More and more businesses use Web 2.0 services as platforms where they can reach their target audiences and connect with consumers on a much more intimate level. Web 2.0 enabled companies to harness and scale the concept of online communities. For consumers, it has become part of the consumer experience. Large consumer brands like Starbucks, LEGO and Dell are already enjoying "the benefits of strong consumer engagement as a result of their early experiments with community building" (Moffitt and Marshall 8).

The community that arises from the consistent conversation and interaction between consumers and companies is what we call a brand community. The rise of branded online communities offers a great opportunity for companies to create significant brand and business value through powerful member participation. Reaching your target through the use of an online community has become a significant source of competitive advantage. Although brand communities can emerge around "any brand, new or mature, they are more likely to succeed around mature brands that have built a strong image over time" (Porter et al. 17). That is good news for UNICEF, because this organization is an example of a mature brand that has already built a strong image over time. In the recommendations part of this report I will elaborate more on this topic. Let us now continue with how brands can create value through online communities.

## 4.3 The real business value of brand communities:
## A beautiful blend of benefits

Blogger Ken Thompson reveals that "a recent survey that was conducted in 2011 revealed that 50% of the top 100 global brands have hosted some kind of branded community". Why is it that more and more brands invest in online communities? How exactly do they create value? I will introduce you to some of the main spin-offs that can be of great value to firms.

- **Social CRM tool.** According to Baird, social CRM - "the integration of social media with customer relationship management (CRM) strategies – is the next frontier for organizations that want to optimize the power of social interactions to get closer to customers. With the worldwide explosion of social media usage, businesses are feeling extreme pressure to be where their customers are". "Social CRM combines the power of online communities, social media and traditional CRM systems to offer a better way of building and managing customer relationships" (Lam). Brand communities allow companies to listen, engage, and act on customer's conversations, which can lead to meaningful relationships between the consumers (existing or new/potential) and the firm.

- **Customer insights.** A well-executed online community can be a rich source of valuable insights that companies can use to improve their products and services. As stated before, people online talk about you (and your brand) with an enormous speed and power. Companies that best take advantage of the valuable customer feedback and insights provided to them can have a significant competitive advantage. In BusinessWeek, Michael Dell - founder of computer corporation Dell - said: "These conversations are going to occur whether you like it or not… do you want to be part of that? My argument is you absolutely do… and you can be a better company by listening and being involved in that conversation" (Jarvis).

  **"It takes a community, not a campaign to raise a brand"** (Marshall and Moffit 3)

- **Customer satisfaction.** Brand communities allow customers to directly interact with firms and give them instant feedback. Brand communities give consumers a voice; they can directly express their thoughts, experiences and opinions. They get the feeling that they are more intimate with the brand and its products. This often leads to higher levels of customer satisfaction.

- **Brand advocacy.** Brand advocates can be seen as one of the most valuable assets an organization can have. These are people who not only buy your products or services but also actively spread the word and express their satisfaction about your brand toward others. This is why many businesses nowadays are trying to create brand advocates through their online communities. A well-developed brand community can be a great tool for brand advocacy. A community allows the organization to build closer and stronger bonds with consumers. Community members can start to feel "a strongly affiliation with the brand and the community" (Marshall and Moffit 9).

- **Increased sales.** A study recently published in the Harvard Business Review revealed "consumers participating in brand communities spent up to 54% more on average than non-community users" (Algesheimer and Dholakia).

- **Avoided costs.** For a lot of companies, brand communities can save costs in many ways. It is way cheaper to support a customer or answer their question using an online community than it costs to handle a customer service phone-call. Brands that hosted an online community have "reported savings of more than $500,000 annually from their online community efforts" (Guidry 17).

In 2008, Deloitte, Beenie Labs and the Society of New Communications conducted a research aimed at "learning from the early experiences of more than 140 organizations that have hosted and managed a brand community" (McClure). They examined a variety of brand community initiatives (commercial as well as non-commercial).

Their study revealed that the greatest value of online communities is that they:

- Increase word-of-mouth (35%)
- Increase brand awareness (28%)
- Bring new ideas into the organization faster (24%)
- Increase customer loyalty (24%)

Besides, there are many other benefits of brand communities. In most cases, factors like community type, focus or platform will highly influence the specific benefits that you will get from your (community) marketing efforts.

Of course it is important to also realize that an online community will require investments. It will require continuous time, money, effort and great community management to create and maintain a lively community that serves your goals. Some managers are still reluctant to invest in brand communities; they sense risk and see disadvantages. It is a long-term investment that will maybe not directly pay off. Besides that, there are some other downsides to online communities that managers should be aware of upfront.

A community is a platform where you consumers come and get a voice: opinions, experiences and stories can quickly spread throughout your brand community. It is important to realize that these stories can also be negative and influence others. Often, negative news travels faster than positive – and is likely to stick longer. I think this is one of the main risks of hosting a brand community. Although I understand that brands might see this as a significant risk (they might fear a damaged brand image), it is a huge opportunity as well. I agree with the quote of Michael Dell mentioned earlier: "these (negative) conversations are going to occur anyway, whether you like it or not. I think it is better to join the conversations and respond so that you can quickly deal with dissatisfaction to avoid negative-word-of mouth".

There is another main downside to brand communities that can be quite time-difficult to deal with. Because your brand hosted a platform – consumers will expect that you will

instantly do something with their dissatisfaction. Richard Millington calls it the 24-hour response rule. He states that managers should try to ensure that "every post in your community gets a response within 24 hours. If your community members do not get a response to their posts within 24 hours, especially if it is their first post, they will not return". If you do not respond to feedback fast enough, or deal with in a wrong way, it can harm your entire community and the relationships with your consumers. I think that good, professional community management is the key to avoid this. Still, companies should realize that building and managing an online community is time-consuming and will require continuous investment of resources (effort, management, effective leadership etc.)

Schau et al. have given some interesting perspectives on the value of online brand communities and the possible negative events that can occur. In their study they explain that specific behaviour or your community members can have negative effects. "Practices such as discouragement of participation in the community, lending support when it is in relation to conflicts within the group or extreme and annoying evangelizing can lead to harmful surroundings in the community" (133). He notes that it is fascinating to see that "positive behaviour leading to a cohesive and healthy, vibrant community can also turn into negativity and harm the community instead" (134).

In the next section, the different roles that members can take in online communities will be introduced. It is possible that highly engaged and fully committed members can take on a leadership role. They can become dominant and harm the needs fulfilment and joy of other members. Algesheimers et al. stated: "a community's positive influence is also what gives birth to its negative influences" (69).

I think that managers can overcome these risks by being aware at an early stage that people will take on different roles in your community and that conflicts can easily arise. Therefore, a brand (the organization) should not be too dominant in the community and join every conversation – but do respond properly when there is a negative atmosphere. Richard Millington has listed an important competency that professional community managers should have: "they should excel at conflict resolution and work from proven techniques to resolve potentially detrimental disputes". I agree and think it is a crucial competency that community managers should have.

## 4.4 A call for action: Why non-profits should invest in brand communities

Many non-profit organizations have already cottoned on to social media as tools for reaching and engaging potential and existing donors/supporters. Still, many charitable organizations hesitate to

"**Investing in brand development is increasingly important to build credibility and differentiate in this competitive giving environment**"
(Weisnewski 3)

fully integrate social media platforms, such as online communities, into their overall corporate strategies. They maybe do realize that engaging (potential) donors via online communities can create powerful value, but it is also clear that they sense financial risk. Logically, at charity organizations there is no room for error. Nevertheless, I am convinced that non-profits can heavily benefit from hosting a brand community. Especially now, "in times were people are overwhelmed with hundreds of philanthropic endeavours vying for individual and corporate donations and attention" (Weisnewski 2). According to non-profit community specialist Weisnewski, "doing good" has become a "shop-and-compare commodity, with an onslaught of images and messages bombarding people just like for consumer goods" (2). I believe that investing in your brand by hosting a brand community (on a new platform or using existing social media platforms) can be the golden differentiator. The end result? "You will attract like-minded donors and provide the foundation for the long-term meaningful relationships that will lead to consistent support, funding and growth" (Weisnewski 4). Building relationships is about trust. According to Cynthia Round, "people are making purchasing decisions based on how closely aligned their values are with an organization and how much they trust what that organization is providing. This is as true when it comes to making donations to non-profits as it is for buying consumer products" (Weisnewski 4). Brand manager Cynthia Round continues: "people make purchase decisions for a variety of reasons, but the decision to donate your money is made 100% on faith and how much they trust the charity organization" (Weisnewski 4). "The confidence one has in the brand has a lot to do with the choices people make about donating their time and money" (Weisnewski 5). Round works for United Way America – a non-profit organization in the U.S. "Our brand is not just our logo or tagline, it's everything we do," she says (Weisnewski 5). In 2003 the organization redesigned their website with an integrated online community. The website now contains sections where people from all walks in life share personal stories on how they are involved with the organization and see themselves part of the change. Other sections are devoted to advocacy and volunteer possibilities. "We are creating a total experience around our brand because that is what a successful brand is: a total experience," Round explains (Weisnewski 7). United Way discovered that after their efforts of investing in their brand through their online community, that "their strong brand was 67% of the reason why people chose to invest in their charity. That is a clear and powerful return-on-investment" (Weisnewski 8).

Katya Andresen, vice president of the charitable giving site 'Marketing for Network for Good' explains: "Companies are under increasing pressure from board members, shareholders, employees, customers and the community to be positive contributors to society - and this is good news for non-profits. They are looking to co-brand with charitable organizations that share their core values. That is why it is more important than ever for non-profits to be able to communicate their brand easily and succinctly in everything that they do" (Weisnewski 9).

Brand communities are an opportunity for non-profits to create transparency and start a dialogue with existing and potential donors. "Non-profits get mission myopia, because we care so much about what we are doing that we forget to find out what our potential donors' interests and concerns are", Katya Andresen explains. "A brand community is a way to find out these interests and concerns. You can ask people to donate their time, ideas or opinions. It is a way to make people feel part of the change that your charity is aiming to bring in the world" (Weisnewski 9).

**"If you want people to align with your cause, you have to show you care about their concerns, especially when it comes to how you carry out the mission you are asking them to support"** (Weisnewski 10)

**Developing a new visual model**

I think it is important for UNICEF to understand that when you aim to build strong, lasting relationships – everything matters. "Every interaction at every touch point is an opportunity to strengthen or dilute the experience and therefore the level of trust and loyalty" says Weisnewski (9). As I described at the beginning of this chapter, people are constantly engaged in countless online conversations with others. Hence, there is a changing generation. The 'online experience' is playing a vital role for people making purchase decisions. The same counts for donation decisions. A strong brand image is vital in getting a loyal base of supporters towards your charity. Therefore, I expect that in the nearby future, more and more non-profits will invest in their brand through the use of brand communities.

Weisnewski described some of the main elements that will affect brand images. I added some more factors and have visualized them into figure 3 (see next page). This model visualizes the importance of the online experience for customers today. I believe that the online experience you give your customers will highly affect your brand image. Luckily, today there are billions of online possibilities to give your customers an experience. The following part on best practices will show how large brands (both commercial and non-commercial) are using online communities to provide their target an experience.

**Figure 3:** **Factors Influencing Brand Image**

## 4.5 The power of online community: Best practices

I will now show six success examples of commercial and non-commercial brand communities. I have observed these communities: I analysed their content and looked at their underlying community concept. Of course, there are many other examples of successful communities. I chose these specific ones because they all have some interesting elements that I think UNICEF can learn a lot from. I will elaborate more on this topic in the upcoming chapters.

**Best practice 1: Dell's *Ideastorm* community (commercial)**

In 2007, Dell introduced 'Ideastorm' with the statement that it was the place "Where your ideas reign". They started the community to stimulate their consumers to co-create and post ideas about new innovations. Using the community, members can submit, vote, and comment on ideas. In its 5-year-lifetime, the community has received nearly 18,000 ideas and suggestions. Dell has made around 500 refinements based on them. "We are at our best when we are hearing directly from our customers. We listen, learn, and then improve and innovate based on what our customers want," says Michael Dell, CEO of Dell Inc. (Rock). Just recently, Dell has released a significantly updated version of its ground breaking Ideastorm: http://www.ideastorm.com/.

**Best practice 2: *OnePercentClub* community (non-commercial)**

Onepercentclub.com is a very vibrant and active online community initiated by the 1%CLUB Foundation. 1%CLUB is the platform that connects smart development projects with people, money and knowledge around the world. According to Anna Chojnacka, the 1%CLUB is the "online market place for small-scale development projects, where individuals and businesses can directly offer 1% of their time, knowledge and income to a project of their choice. At the 1%CLUB you can decide by yourself to which project you want to give 1% of your time, knowledge or money. The 1% directly goes to the project you have chosen. Every project has its own page with information about it, a weblog, photos and videos, so that you can keep exact track of what is happening with your 1%". This concept is also introduced in the Netherlands: 1procentclub.nl, with success as well. Currently, the community has 10.740 members,
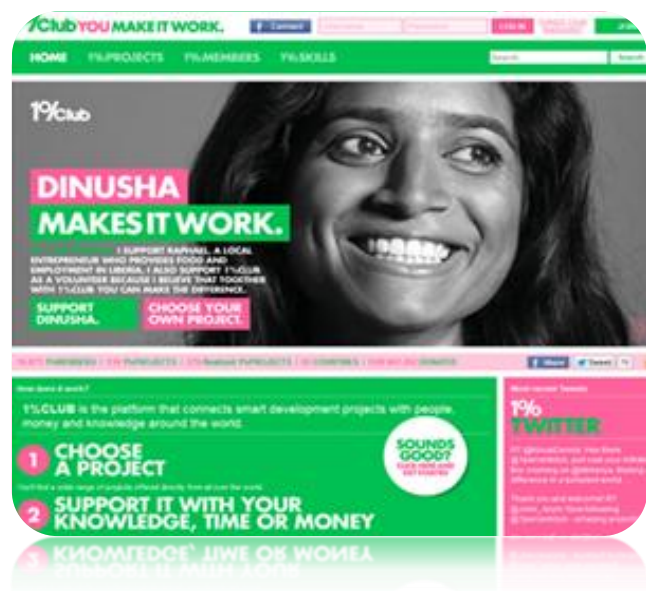
139 projects going on, 279 projects realized in 65 countries and 667.293 euro is donated: http://onepercentclub.com/.

**Best practice 3: LEGO's *Click* community (commercial)**

In 2010, LEGO launched the LEGO CLICK community that "brings together innovators, designers, artists and creative thinkers to develop new ideas related to toys. Unlike other idea communities, LEGO CLICK does not allow users to rank and rate the ideas. It merely allows you to suggest your idea or to share ideas that you see and like or are interested in. Though, what makes this site particularly interesting is its use of Twitter, Facebook and Flickr as a way of generating content for the site and promoting participation. Users can contribute their ideas by tweeting with the hash tag #legoclick. They can contribute images by tagging their Flickr contributions with the same tag. Furthermore, they can suggest ideas by video by tagging on YouTube in the same manner. This is an interesting use of social networks to drive content to a community" (Matt Rhodes). LEGO also launched a new LEGO-social network designed especially for "children (with a high level of safety and parental controls). Members can create their own personal pages, win rewards, meet other LEGO fans and battle them in game modules, and watch LEGO TV" (Mc Dermott): http://legoclick.com/.
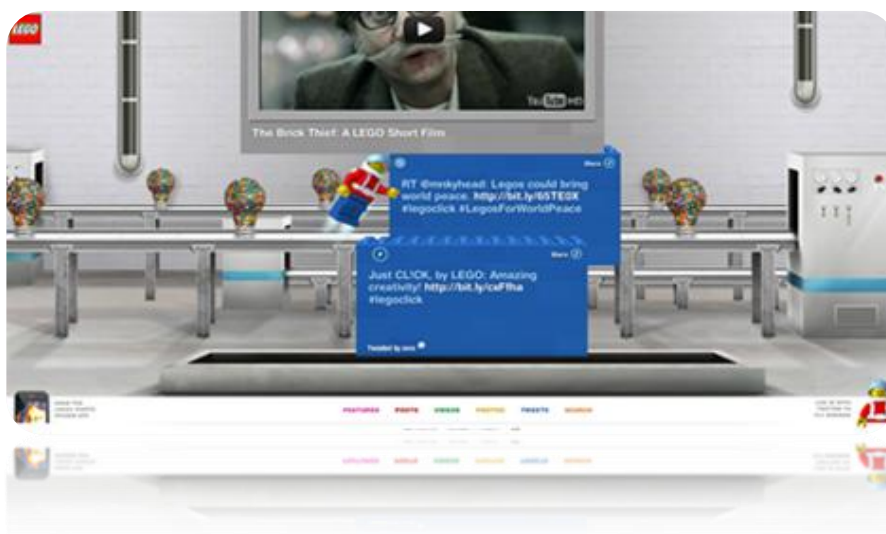


**Best practice 4: WNF's communities (non-commercial)**

WNF (World Wide Fund for Nature) Netherlands is very active when it comes to building online communities. In 2009, the organization found out that amateur photographers on the community zoom.nl (a photography community) were actively posting and sharing animal photos. WNF decided to create an own group within this community. The group is targeted at photographers who

feel passionate about photographing nature and wild animals in specific. Currently, this group consists of 1200 highly active and enthusiastic members. Besides high levels of engagement among its members, WNF has without any costs a unique offer of high quality animal pictures. WNF also built a community on the existing travellers community: waarbenjij.nu. WNF thought it would be a great opportunity to create a WNF group on this community. The group currently consists of over 3000 members who all share their worldwide experience of nature in their blogs, with pictures and videos. On the website you can read authentic stories from workers and volunteers working in the WNF field. You can also meet the raw reality in video and image: http://zoom.nl/groep/223/wereld-natuur-fonds-groep.html.

**Best practice 5: Oxfam Novib's Doenersnet community (non-commercial)**

Doenersnet is a very lively, successful Dutch online community initiated by Oxfam Novib. With the ideas and input of existing volunteers/brand advocates, the website was

launched in 2008. At the moment (September, 2012) it has 1883 highly active and engaged community members. The community targets do-it-your-selfers who want to help creating a fair world without poverty. On the community, campaigns and actions are initiated by the organization that members can support. You can sign up for volunteer work or start a Doenersnet pitch: you can win 5000 euro for your world-improving idea. Members can think of campaigns, start make a a shout, donate or share knowledge. http://www.doenersnet.nl/

**Best practice 6: HarperCollins' Inkpop community (commercial)**

Inkpop is one of the first interactive writing platforms for teens. It was launched in 2009 by HarperCollins - one of the world's leading English-language publishers. Inkpop combines community publishing, user-generated content and social networking to connect aspiring writers of teen literature with talent-spotting readers and publishing professionals. Funny Garbage likes to call it: "crowd-sourced publishing". Writers can post their books, short stories, book ideas, letters and poetry. From the pick list, the Inkpop community chooses their favourite pieces

and has the option to give constructive criticism in the comments area". Susan Katz, president and publisher of HarperCollins Children's Books, says: "The opinions of our readers matter to us. Inkpop is HarperCollins Children's Books' first site (and not the last) to really put the users' voice and ideas in the forefront. Social media   is incredibly empowering if used correctly, and HarperCollins recognizes this and is gearing up to make social media the cornerstone of all its digital endeavours" (Abrams, 2011): http://www.inkpop.com/.

Other amazing examples of very successful brand communities include:

- Starbuck's *MyStarbucksIdea* community - similar concept as Dell's Ideastorm. Members are encouraged to share their ideas, vote and join the discussion: http://www.mystarbucksidea.com/.
- Harley-Davidson launched a successful online brand community to give their fans a great online experience. Their online community efforts make it easy for fans to connect with other members and talk about their shared passion for motorcycles: http://www.hdtalking.com/.
- *Tudiabetes* - an online community of people touched by diabetes, run by the Diabetes Hands Foundation. The community currently has 13,000 highly active and passionate members: http://www.tudiabetes.org/.
- *Gezondelongen.nl* (meaning: healthy lungs) – a platform initiated by the Dutch Asthma Foundation. On this website you can sign up, think of your action/campaign and ask your family, friends and/or colleagues to support you: http://gezondelongen.nl/.

It is always good to study best practices and see what lessons can be drawn from it. Although the best practices that mentioned here are not all non-commercial oriented, UNICEF can still learn from them. Most of the examples given (commercial and non-commercial) are communities targeted at young people. These communities have quite a similar target group, probably a similar goal (engagement), but just a different mission. Therefore, studying existing success examples is always insightful. But of course, it is also important to study (and learn from) examples that failed.

I will elaborate more on what can be learned from best practices, like the ones in this chapter, in the upcoming parts. In the next chapter I will answer the question: How do online communities actually work?

# Chapter 5: How Do Online Communities Work?

So far, I have provided a basic understanding on the concept of online communities and how brands are using them to create significant business value. I also stressed the importance for non-profit organizations to invest in their brand by means of online (community) efforts. Before UNICEF starts to seriously consider investing in an online community, it is important that they first clearly understand how these communities work.

If UNICEF understands why people join online communities, it will be easier for them to decide upon important elements like the content or platform choice. Understanding how online communities evolve in stages and what roles people play in them, will allow UNICEF to manage their possible community more effectively.

This chapter will also focus on how UNICEF can foster and sustain engagement in an online community. Understanding this issue can help them in the creation process of the online community. All these items will be discussed in this chapter.

## 5.1 Why do people join online communities?

For brands that consider investing in online communities, it is very important to first understand the basic needs that people fulfil by participating in an online community. "Identifying the needs of community members that create their intrinsic motivation for contributing to the community is crucial", says Porter (113). Satisfying social and psychological needs motivates people to engage in a variety of social media platforms and online communities. Both the "social and psychological aspects of community members' needs and their motivations to satisfy those needs are consistent with the notion that community members are trying to achieve both communal (for example helping/supporting other people) and functional (for example information seeking, contributing information) goals" (Jawecki and Muhlbacher 60).

> **"The desire to be part of a group that shares, cooperates or acts in concert is a basic human instinct" (Shirky 94)**

Companies seeking for consumer engagement should understand that engagement is motivated intrinsically, based on the value created when companies help community members fulfil their needs with their online communities. However, they should realize that different community members will try to fulfil different needs at different times. Value-based motivations for participation, as a core foundation for customer engagement, are "idiosyncratic, experiential, contextual, and meaning-laden, depending on an individual member's need" (Vargo and Lusch 23). This means that organizations should target their community efforts properly according to the different needs of the

community members at different times. This will help them to accelerate and intensify customer engagement with their online community. In section 3.3 the extrinsic factors that companies should consider to motivate consumers to participate and engage in their communities will be discussed. I will describe how organizations can foster and sustain engagement regarding their online community.

Porter et al. listed "several needs (social and psychological) that community members fulfil via online communities" (8). I decided to put them into a visual model (see figure 4). I think that this model captures the essence of the needs that members fulfil via online communities.

**Figure 4: Needs that members fulfil in an online community**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Information** | Virtual community members find value in a community that provides access to information that helps them learn, solve problems, and make decisions |
| **Relationship-Building** | Virtual community members seek to build productive relationships through interaction with others within a community |
| **Social Identity/Self-Expression** | Virtual community members want to achieve self-awareness that they are a member of the community and are gratified by the emotional and cognitive connection with the community, as a whole, as well as their ability to express such connection |
| **Helping Others** | Virtual community members are gratified by helping others within a community, especially those with whom they have developed a personal connection |
| **Enjoyment** | Virtual community members are grafitied by achieving flow states while interacting with others by having control over their experience with a community |
| **Belongingness** | Virtual community members desire a sense of attachment to a community, as a whole, and are gratified by having their contributions to the community respected by others. |
| **Status/Influence** | Virtual community members seek status and influence among others within a community |

Although this figure gives a clear view on what members needs fulfil, it does not indicate which needs first should be satisfied. Which needs are more important than others? We know that members will try to fulfil different needs at different times. But is there a model that will help understand what needs people first trying to satisfy in an online community?

**How can we apply Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' to online communities?**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory in psychology, introduced by humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow. He believed that people are motivated by the urge to satisfy needs ranging from very basic to more advanced needs. His theory suggests that people do not fulfil the higher-level needs until the lower-level needs are met. The hierarchy of needs is often illustrated in the shape of a pyramid, with the most fundamental needs at the bottom and the high-level needs at the top. Amy Jo Kim, writer of the book 'Community Building on the Web', used Maslow's hierarchy of needs to create a better understanding of the needs that community members fulfil via an online community. She linked Maslow's theory to the needs that can be fulfilled through virtual communities.

**Creating a visual model**

Inspired by the theory of Amy Jo Kim, I designed a model (figure 5) in which it can clearly be seen how Maslow's needs correspond with online communities. I added some elements to her theory.  Just as the hierarchy of needs, an online community must first satisfy the member's lower-level needs before fulfilling higher-level ones. By looking at the model in figure 3 we can see that community members are motivated to participate in order to achieve a sense of belonging to a group, to build self-esteem and garner recognition by contributing to the community. "New skills can be developed that can boost members' ego and lead to self-actualization" (We Media). In an article in Cap & Design it is stated that: "today's online communities can satisfy the three top levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs; self-actualization, esteem and love/belonging". This is because: "you can easily meet people from all around the world, people with the same interests and you can interact with them. You can be an expert on your special topic in the community and maybe become famous in your community" (2). If you make your community "members responsible for the content of an online community, the three top levels in the hierarchy can be fulfilled to an even higher degree" (We Media). According to Amy Jo Kim, those who "participate online usually create content to inform and entertain others. But creating also builds self-esteem and, in Maslow's view, it's an act of self-actualization. We derive fulfilment from the act of creation" (22). I will elaborate more on the importance of encouraging content creation among community members in paragraph 5.4

*"Online communities allow people to build a personal reputation and blossom in a virtual space"*
*(We Media).*

## Figure 5: Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' applied on online communities



**Corresponding Online Communities Needs**

- **Self-Actualization:** The ability to take on a community role that develops skills and opens up new opportunities Challenging one's self
- **Esteem:** The ability to contribute to the community and be recognized and respected for those contributions.
- **Love & Belonging:** Belonging to the community as a whole, and to subgroups within the community
- **Security & Safety:** Protection from hacking and personal attacks; the sense of having a "level playing field"; ability to maintain varying levels of privacy
- **Physiological:** System/Internet access; the ability to own and maintain one's identity while participating in an online community

**Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

- **Self-Actualization:** Morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, acceptance of facts. The ability to develop skills and fulfill one's potential
- **Esteem:** Self-respect/esteem and confidence; the ability to earn the respect of others and contribute to society
- **Love & Belonging:** Friendship, family, sexual intimacy. The ability to give and receive love; the feeling of belonging to a group
- **Security & Safety:** Security, stability, structure, order. Protection from crimes and war; the sense of living in a fair and just society
- **Physiological:** Food, water, clothing, shelther, health, sleep, oxygen

## 5.2 How do online communities evolve?

Over the past few decades, the community life cycle has been developed by many academics. According to them, online communities evolve following distinctive life cycle stages. The main idea is that any online community system "must evolve through the same consistent and logical process without ignoring any step" (Ahituv and Neumann 254). The latter authors emphasize that the nature of the community life cycle is "not linear but in practice an iterative process" (255). In online communities, the needs of members will evolve along the way throughout the life cycle stages. Therefore, it is "crucial that management clearly understand this life cycle and adjust their strategies in each stage" (Kling Courthright 221). By fulfilling these changing needs in each stage, long-term participation and engagement among community members will be encouraged.

**"Understanding the life cycle is key to building a comprehensive community strategy, specifically when it comes to moderation and management"** (Howard).

According to Andrews, online communities evolve by following three stages: "starting the online community, encouraging early online interaction, and moving to a self-sustained interactive environment" (60). Alicia Iriberri carried out an extensive research on this topic and came up with the following five stages: "inception, creation, growth, maturity, and death" (7). Rob Howard, dedicated an article on the website Mashable about understanding the community life cycle. He described the following four stages: "on-board, established, mature, mitosis". More recently, Richard Millington wrote on his blog that he has refined Howard's life cycle with his one, consisting of the following four stages: "inception, establishment, maturity and mitosis".

**Creating my own 'community life cycle model'**

After comparing the life cycles described above and some others, I came to the conclusion that they are all quite similar. Therefore, it is interesting to observe that the more recent studies on this topic introduced a new stage, called mitosis, in which an online community breaks into smaller, focused communities. I found it strange that the stage "death" was only mentioned in a couple of studies on this issue. In my opinion, this stage should definitely be included in the community life cycle, since there are quite some examples of communities that "died": failed miserably, because of a lack of community member engagement.

I designed a model (see figure 6) that clearly illustrates the community life cycle according to my theory. This figure will hopefully help UNICEF in getting a better understanding about how their possible online community will evolve over the years.  In my opinion, online communities evolve following the distinctive life cycle stages below:

### Stage 1: Inception

The community life cycle starts at inception. In this stage, the idea of an online community has emerged because people (members or organizations) have a certain need. Depending on this type of need, these interested individuals or the organization begins to form a "vision for a community where people can disperse information, communicate and interact" (Wegner et al. 22).  Once the vision is clear, the technological elements (the platform, the tools, the format, the design etc.) are selected and gradually incorporated.

These elements are dependent on the needs and preferences of both the creators and the potential community members. In this stage, community members do not really participate yet and rely mostly on the input of the founders.

### Stage 2: Establishment

In this stage, the technological components are in place and "community members begin to interact and spread the word for other members to join" (Malhotra et al. 88). Gradually, when enough members join the community, a culture and identity starts to develop. Sometimes it happens that common vocabulary is used and that members take on different roles in the community. Some members actively lead discussions provide support and add content. Others "just seek support, read messages but do not actively contribute. Some offer information while others just use this information" (Nonnecke and Preece 17). The different roles that people play in online communities will be discussed in more detail in the next paragraph. Although members start to create and maintain value within the community at this stage, some still rely on the input of the founders. The elements mentioned above are common in both online and offline (physical) communities and often initiate the growth of the online community.

### Stage 3: Maturity

In this stage, the community has strengthened and stronger relationships among members begin to emerge. Members have clear roles and take full ownerships and responsibility for content. The community has become "self-sustaining and there will be little to no supervision needed by the founders" (Howard). A lot of communities thrive in this stage for a long time. Others change direction or add new tools and features to keep members interested and encourage them to keep participating/engaging.

### Stage 4: Death (optional)

In this stage, the community slowly but surely dies. The good news is that only few communities will reach this stage.  As said before, many online communities stay in the maturity phase for a long period. In this stage, momentum and member interest are lost completely. There is "no or very little participation of members, no sense of community, a lack of quality content, unorganized contributions and transient membership" (Jarvenpaa and Knoll 29).

Although I placed the death stage in between the maturity and mitosis phase in my figure, death can also be reached during the establishment phase. Although community initiators can have a great vision for a community, in the end the members will influence whether the community will be a successful, vibrant one. It would be a waste of resources to reach this stage. Therefore, I want to stress the importance of understanding the phases in the community life cycle and the different tasks that it will require from community managers in each stage. In section 5.4 it will be explained how to foster and sustain engagement in an online community, in other words: how to avoid reaching this stage.

## Mitosis

According to Millington, "the mitosis phase begins when the community is almost entirely self-sustaining and ends when it has broken into smaller, more focused, online communities. Not all communities progress to this phase. Many online communities are fine in the maturity stage". Still, it is a very important phase, as many community managers let their community grow too active and big.  At the mitosis phase, the amount of participating members begins to decrease. Most activity in the community will be initiated by a small number of ever-more dedicated members, which have over time already developed relationships with each other. Core community participants can become disenfranchised with new members who do not share the same values as them. "For newcomers, it will be difficult to find their place within the online community" (Millington). Core community members will start to "seek more focus as they gravitate towards specific topics and relationships" (Howard). Over the long-term, this could cause drastic participation inequality ratios. Subtly breaking of the community into smaller, groups can be the solution. The initial community can be broken down according to demographical, habitual and/or psychographical factors. Note that "each new group will start at the establishment stage again and will require promotion and support to become self-sustaining" (Millington).

**Figure 6: Own Model: The online community life-cycle**

**Return to Establishment stage**

Small, Focused OLC

Small, Focused OLC

Small, Focused OLC

Small, Focused OLC

**Mitosis**
- Community splits /grows into more focused groups
- Repeats from establishment for each unique group

Only some

Some

**Death**
- No engagement
- No sense of community
- No participation
- Unorganized contributions

**Clearly established ROI metrics**

**Maturity**
- Referral growth/Promo growth
- High levels of engagement
- Strong sense of community
- 90-99 % activity initiated by community

**ROI analysis possible**

**Establishment**
- Referral/direct growth
- Medium levels of engagement
- Limited sense of community
- 50-90 % activity initiated by community

**Difficult to measure and determine ROI**

**Inception**
- Slow, direct, growth
- Limited levels of engagement
- No sense of community
- 0-50% activity initiated by community

## 5.3 What roles do members play in an online community?

According to Amy Jo Kim, "online communities are held together by a web of social roles. Understanding these different roles can help brands managing their online community by providing features and programs that support these roles". Kim described some archetypal roles in her book that make up the so-called 'Membership Life Cycle'. This model outlines the progressive stages of community involvement.

I decided to put the roles in a model inspired by Kim in order to visualize these different roles (see figure 7). Just as with the community life cycle, these roles will evolve over time in the online community. However, it is also possible that people maintain their role in the community and do not change their behaviour and/or participation over time.

**Figure 7:** **The Membership Life Cycle**
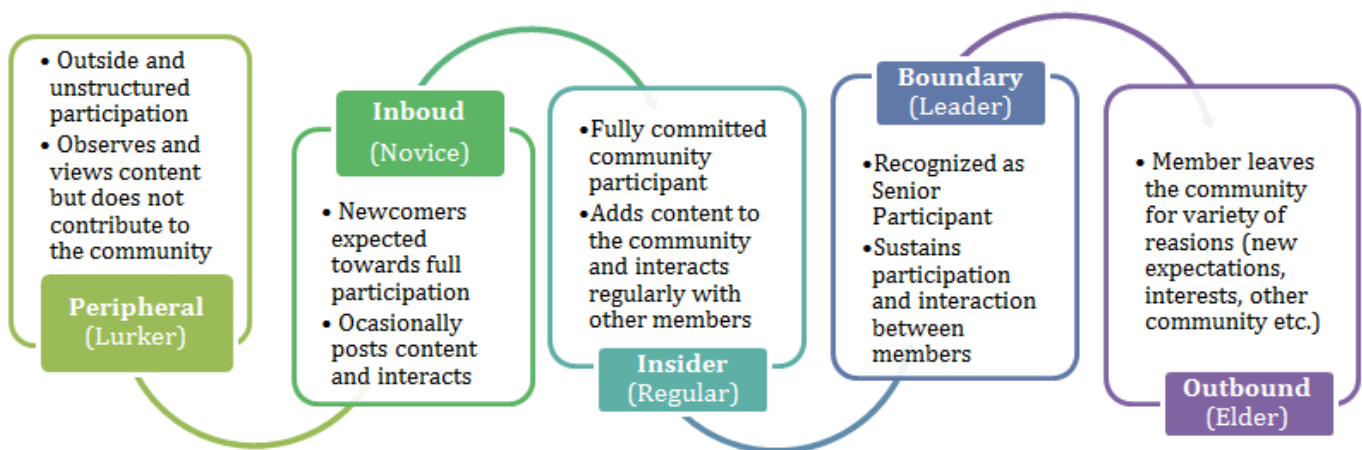


Why is it important to understand these roles? Why should you worry about insiders or lurkers if you have not even build your community yet? It is important to understand that time passes very quickly on the Internet. Social dynamics that takes months or even years to evolve in the offline, real world, can emerge in a matter of days on the Internet – especially when a community becomes popular. In a blink of an eye, your community can be full of regulars who think they own the place and complain about the clueless newcomers bumbling around and ruining their culture. If you want to ensure that your online community becomes a friendly place for both newcomers and old-timers it is important to understand the different roles early.  "Initial conditions matter; and the rules, programs and features that you put into place at the start will profoundly affect how your community will develop over time" (Amy Jo Kim).

## 5.4 Fostering and sustaining engagement in online communities

How do you foster and sustain engagement among members in your online community? This is a question a lot of managers struggle with. A decreased commitment is the main reason why a lot of online communities fail after a couple of months.  It is an enormous challenge to keep members engaged for the long run. Branded communities will have to compete with hundreds of other websites and social media platforms that people can spend their time on. Besides, people (especially the young generation) like to hang out where their friends are, for example on Facebook or Twitter. What can managers do to ensure that their online community becomes and maintains vibrant, lively and successful?

Before I continue, it might be relevant to answer the question: what exactly is consumer engagement? When looking at it from a cognitive perspective, it is a "positive state of mind that is characterized by high energy, strong commitment, and loyalty towards a brand. From a behavioural perspective, engagement refers to a set of behaviours that reflects community member's willingness to participate and cooperate with others in a way that creates value for themselves, other members and the brand" (Porter et al. 22).

**Creating a visual model**

Porter et al. have done extensive research on consumer engagement in brand communities. I read through their findings and decided to visualize some of their main findings into a model. Figure 8 (see next page) shows a three-stage process that managers can follow to foster and sustain engagement regarding their brand communities.

### Stage 1: Understand consumer needs and motivations

At the beginning of this chapter it was extensively explained which needs community members fulfil via online communities. I also linked them to Maslow's hierarchy of needs.  Understanding these needs and motivations is the first and most important step for managers to take when building an online community. Members will behave accordingly to their needs.  If you 'as a brand' understand these needs and accordingly feature the right tools and add the right content in your community, you have already made the first step towards meaningful, long-term customer engagement.

**Figure 8:** Three stage process in fostering and sustaining engagement in online communities
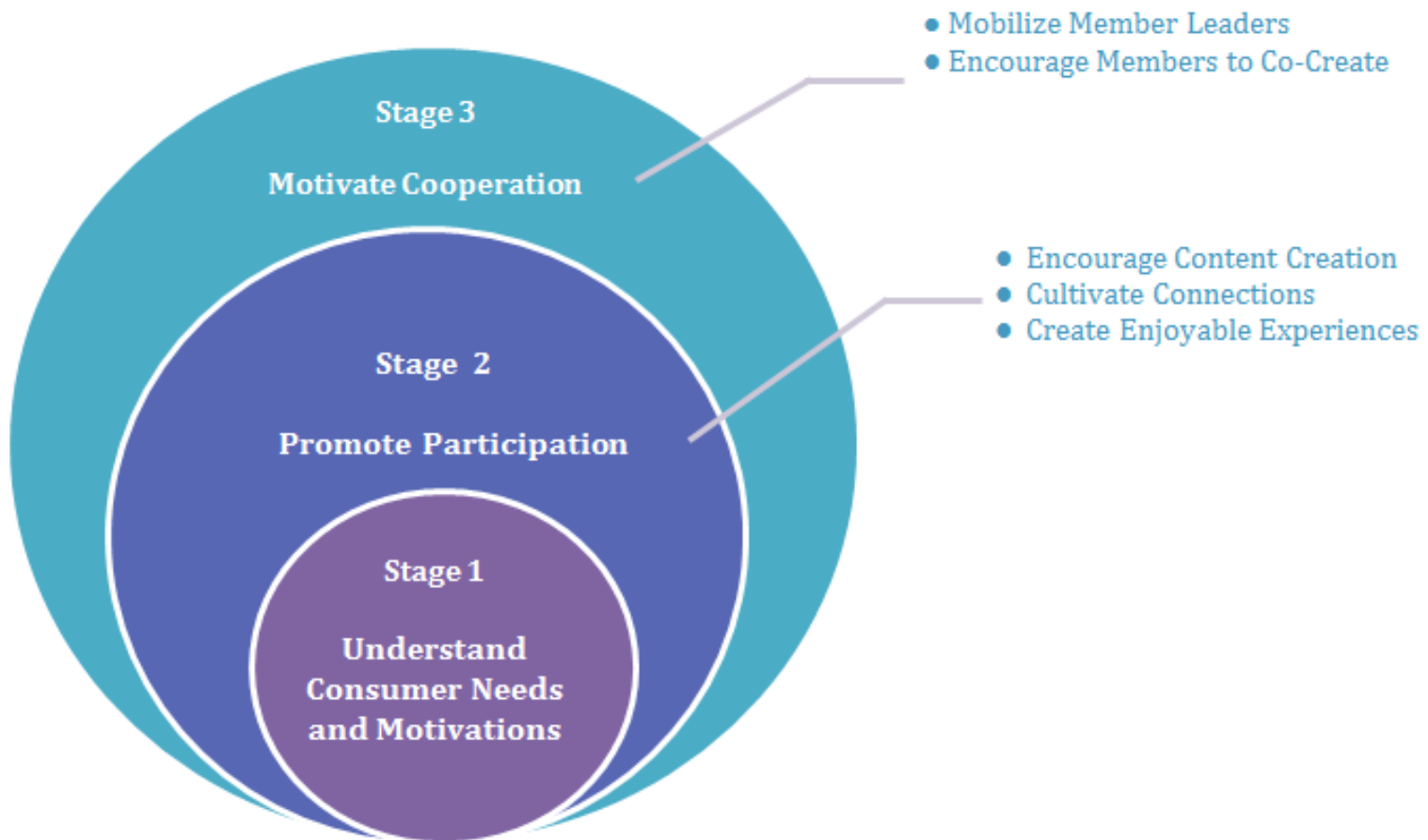


## Stage 2: Promote participation

Now that the intrinsic needs of community members are fulfilled it is important to understand what extrinsic factors might do. In this stage, members should focus on promoting participation in their brand community. According to Porter et al. there are "three main sponsor efforts effective in promoting participation among community members: encouraging content creation, cultivating connections and creating enjoyable experiences. These three efforts are in line with the social and psychological needs of members" (23).

- **Encourage content creation**

  I already explained that making your community members responsible for the content in your brand community will lead to a fulfilment of higher-level needs in the hierarchy of Maslow. In the best practice examples that were described earlier, some brands (e.g. Ideastorm, Inkpop, Starbucks) could already be seen that are encouraging content creation on their community. I think it is one of the main reasons for their success. Allowing your members to be partly responsible for the content of your community – and giving them the confidence to do so – will already lead to higher levels of engagement.

- **Cultivate connections**

  Interaction is the heart of every online community. Social capital becomes the glue that connects community members and makes them participate. Research suggests that community members can "feel a sense of a shared purpose and strong ties with other members, even in the absence of (offline) personal relationships with those members" (Porter et al. 17). In this scenario, members can feel a sense of duty to contribute to the community and sustain the relationships. Managers should enable members to express their personal identities, which will facilitate individual relationship building. The number of people using social networking sites to create and share personal profiles, is rapidly growing. With this knowledge in mind, it can be concluded that there is a "unique and significant opportunity for brands to cultivate connections among members by using similar profiling features" (Dholokia et al. 208).

- **Create enjoyable experiences for members**

  Research has shown that when community members "experience flow (a psychological state of having fun as well as feeling absorbed, gratified, and in control over one's experience) they develop favourable attitudes toward the firm that provides such an experience.  This is something especially true when the experience is in line and relevant to the member's interest" (Mathwick and Rigdon 324). What exact experiences you should create for your members will heavily depend on the focus and underlying objectives of your community. But I am sure that if you can create enjoyable experiences for your community members, they will come back, actively participate and maybe even invite others to join (y)our online community.

### Stage 3: Motivate cooperation

In stage 1 and stage 2, the intrinsic and extrinsic factors were discussed that will motivate consumers to participate in an online community to meet their own needs. In stage 3, firms can start to "extrinsically motivate consumers to meet their needs while, at

the same time, intertwine these needs with their desire to create value for themselves and for the community sponsor" (Porter et al. 28). The study of Porter et al. suggests that community members will be willing to cooperate with a brand when they "believe that the firm has attempted to embed and empower them via the online community" (29). In "an embedded community members feel a high sense of attachment with the community and that the idea of leaving the group will trigger negative emotions" (Crossley et al. 89).

How can you embed members? You could give members certain privileges (such as access to specific information) that non-members cannot enjoy. This could lead to "members exhibiting engagement behaviours, such as willingness to cooperate with the firm and stay loyal to the community" (Crossley et al. 103). This example will not only help members fulfil their need for status, but also higher their perceived emotional risk of leaving the community. In some cases, "embedded members can even start to consider themselves organization insiders (also called 'quasi employees') of the firm" (Porter et al. 30). How do you transform embedded members into empowered members? Embedded members feel obliged to support the brand that provides them value, but "empowered members believe that their acts of support have actual influence on the company" (30). Dell has succeeded in embedding *and* empowering their community members. They have given their members the ability to actively influence the firm by participating in their innovation process. Their community members believe they have a voice and chance to see their idea actually implemented. By sharing ideas, views, and opinions with the firm, empowered "members are motivated to co-create value with the firm" (Ahearne et al. 945). The research conducted by Porter et al. suggest that there are two efforts effective in motivating cooperation that will eventually embed and empower community members:

- **Mobilizing member leaders**
  Mobilizing member leaders is about "giving certain member the status and opportunity to influence the brand's policies and practices (in- and outside community)" (Porter et al. 19). If this is done correctly, these members can become your brand advocates. Brands advocates (also called brand 'evangelists') are super-fans and feel a sense of duty/responsibility to see your brand succeeding. They are influencers in the extremely important word-of-mouth conversation.

- **Encouraging members to co-create**
  You can ask community members to help think about innovative ideas and solutions. If you inform every member who co-created whether and how their input might be acted on, it will encourage them to return, participate and actively engage again. In some cases, it could even be "great to give top contributors a special status" (Porter et al. 33).

# Part C.

## Empirical Results

unite for
children

# Chapter 6:

## Strategic Perspective on the Creation of a Possible Online Community for UNICEF

So far we have looked at the definition of an online community, the different types, how companies use them and the way they work. In chapter 2, the opportunity for non-profits to invest in their brand by means of an online community was emphasized. In this chapter a strategic perspective will be given on the creation of a possible online community for UNICEF specifically. In this chapter I aim to guide UNICEF Netherlands in their decision of the type of community that will best serve their intention(s). This part is the result of the extensive field research that I carried out.

### 6.1 Designing a new decision matrix for UNICEF

Based on the theories learned during my studies (Strategic Management, Marketing etc.) and the new insights I gained about online communities, I was able to design a new model for UNICEF: a decision matrix (see figure 9) that UNICEF can use in their decision whether or not to invest in a brand community and if so, which issues they need to consider. I believe that the strategic decision of creating a brand community can be divided into 11 stages. My decision matrix highlights this process.

The first step (1) UNICEF should undertake is an analysis of the internal environment. Corporate objectives should be well-defined. It is important to look at the organization's current marketing objectives, strategies, policies and programs. Are they clearly stated or merely implied from performance and/or budgets? Are they consistent with the corporation's mission, objectives, strategies, and policies? It might be good to also look at how well UNICEF is performing "in terms of analysis of market position and marketing mix" (Wheelen 28). Besides, it is also important to look at the available resources that UNICEF has to use for possible investments. UNICEF should then extensively examine the external environment (2). They could look at what general environmental forces currently are affecting both the organization and the charity industry in which they compete. Are there any threats or opportunities ahead? They could also face what forces are driving the competition in the industry they represent. How big is the threat of new entrants? How large is the rivalry among charity organizations? And what is the relative power of the government or other special interest groups? Besides an analysis of the external environment I believe it is also good to analyse the target group. In the introduction a detailed description of this target group has been given. Still, I think it is also important to look at what *they* think of

UNICEF specifically and if and how they would possibly see themselves (further) engage with UNICEF. Based on the internal and external analysis of the environment, UNICEF Netherlands could create a SWOT analysis (an identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that may be strategic factors for UNICEF). After that, UNICEF can decide whether an online community strategy is necessary and relevant (3). If they think it is not necessary or that an online community is not relevant, they can decide to choose another marketing tool. If UNICEF comes to the conclusion that an online community can serve their intention and add value, the creation of a brand community can be considered as a relevant choice for the organization. (4) Of course, the idea of a brand community should be in line with the organization's marketing objectives and personal feelings and commitment.

Once UNICEF has made the decision that they are actually going to create an online community, they should define community objectives. (5) In the case of UNICEF these could be: developing closer relationships with the young generation, increase brand awareness, foster engagement etc. I advise UNICEF to make these objectives very specific and preferably quantifiable. This will make it easier for them to measure the return-on-investment of their community efforts later on. Once the objectives are defined, the head of marketing & communication must probably first approve the community project. Once the project is approved, responsibilities should be assigned. (6) It is important to assign people who are going to be responsible for the development, launch and maybe even management of the community.

After that, the community frame can be shaped (7). In this stage, UNICEF will need to start by deciding on the focus of their community (focused on UNICEF and their work or centred around a general topic), the platform (managed or direct community) and the content. I will elaborate more on these three elements in the upcoming sections.

Once the community frame has been decided, UNICEF needs to choose whether they have the right and needed competencies to successfully design and implement the community or whether they need external parties and consultants to help them (8). Once this consideration is made, the project can be implemented and the community launched (9). Then, the community needs to be managed and controlled (10). It is important to regularly evaluate the development of the community. Here, it is also important to find ways to measure the ROI (11). In this stage, it could be possible that the community objectives need to be adapted or changed. New objectives can influence the original shape of the community frame. In that case, it could be that UNICEF will need to start again at stage 5.

**Figure 9: Decision matrix for UNICEF Netherlands**
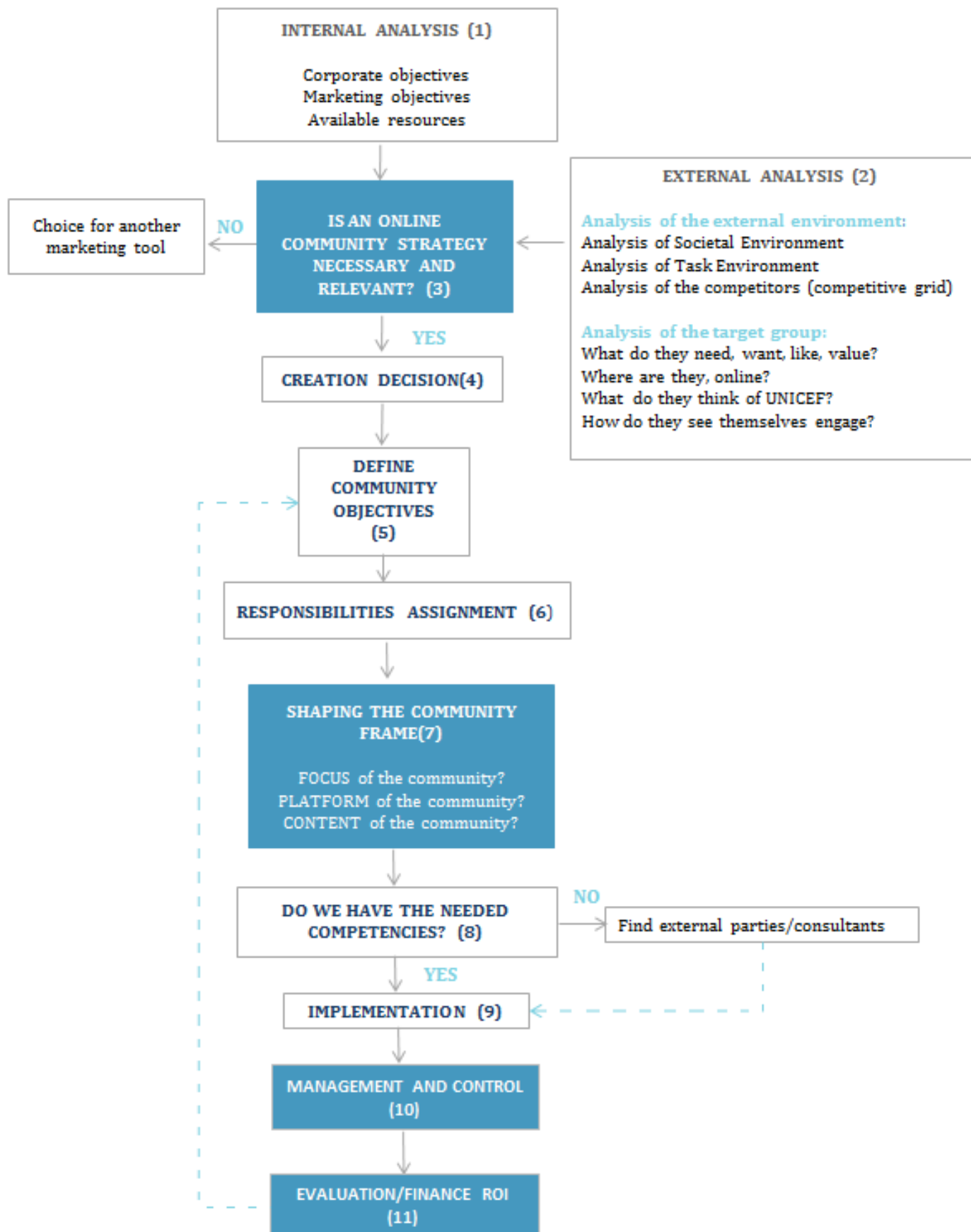
**The focus of my advice to UNICEF**

As can be seen in figure 9, some parts in the decision matrix are highlighted in blue. (stage 3, 7, 10 and 11). In the following parts of this chapter I will particularly advise UNICEF on these specific parts. The other parts were not in my power to study. Besides, these parts depend heavily on what UNICEF's management, strategies, objectives and budget allows. UNICEF Netherlands was not yet able to provide me with the budget that they have on engaging this relatively young generation. The decision on their marketing budget is still in progress.

My advices on these parts are the result of an extensive field research I performed. In the upcoming parts it will be explained how I conducted this field research and the results of it will be presented.

## 6.2 How I conducted my field research

As already explained in the introduction of my report, my central research question is:

*What kind of online community can best serve UNICEF's intention to engage the young generation and what are the main considerations they have to take into account when developing it?*

To answer this question and come up with a meaningful, comprehensive advice for UNICEF I had five different research populations.  My advice on parts 3, 7, 10 and 11 are based on the results of my empirical findings.

### Interviews - online community experts

In total, 52 (sample size) online community experts were contacted.  18 of them were Dutch, 25 from the U.S., 8 from the U.K and 1 from Australia. I chose to interview both Dutch and international experts as this would give me a more accurate view and broader perspective. The research method that I used was by interviews, in which the non-probability, self-selecting sampling method was used, because I did not randomly pick people, but chose very specific experts, based on their experience and expertise.

The research population consisted of people who are specialized in the field of online marketing, social media and community building/management. Some of them are consultants of large community building corporations. Others are academic researchers or authors that have done extensive research on online communities.  Etienne Wenger, for example, who is a famous researcher, consultant and speaker, contributed to my research as well. He also wrote many books on community building, which I used for my theoretical parts. To make my field research more comprehensive, I also decided to contact experts working for large brands that had already launched online communities.

I had, for example, contact with Bill Johnston, who is the director of the global online community Ideastorm of Dell. Jake McKee, who is the community relations specialist at LEGO, shared his thoughts as well. Seth Godin, who is considered to be the greatest marketing guru of this time, was also willing to express his opinion. I decided to also target experts who are specialized in community building for non-profit organizations. For example, I had an interesting interview with Margreet Heemen, online community specialist at WNF Netherlands. She explained me how their charity organization is making use of online communities to engage people. Furthermore, Beth Kanter, owner of the longest running and most popular blog for non-profits, was also intrigued by my project and willing to share her expertise. Most of these experts have a blog on which they share their knowledge on online community building. Of all the experts that I directly contacted, 37 people (71%) responded and were willing to share their view and answer my questions through Skype, a telephone call, email or a face-to-face interview. For my interviews I used the unstructured method: I changed/adapted my questions to meet the respondent's intelligence and understanding. I only asked open-ended questions. I believe the results of the interviews are quite reliable and valid. I only targeted experts from who I knew that they have reasonable experience and expertise in the field studied by me. For a complete list of the experts that contributed to my research: see Appendix 2.

## Interviews - community managers

For the purpose of my research, it would be interesting to interview community managers as well. This time, I decided to post very specific questions on focused online groups. I joined the Facebook group called 'Community Managers", consisting of 4.774 members. I also used different kinds of LinkedIn groups, such as: Managing Social Media (5,727 members) and The Community Management Group (279 members). Kirsten Wagenaar, founder of "Community Managers Netherlands" accepted me to join and to use her exclusive online community consisting of 566 members as well. One of the experts introduced me to a Yahoo group called E-mint, consisting of 1147 highly active members. This time, I used a combination of non-probability and probability (random) sampling. Each member in my research population had an equal and known chance of answering my questions. I did choose to use very specific groups, but I did not pick specific people within these groups. I posted open-ended questions. Again, the unstructured approach was used: my questions were changed/adapted to meet the respondent's intelligence and understanding. It was surprised to obtain so many meaningful responds to my answers, since my questions ignited very interesting discussions on these groups and platforms.

The results of my findings are not as reliable and valid as the results from the online community experts. I do not know the exact background and experience of the people that responded to me in these groups. However, all of the groups had moderators to who you first had to send an e-mail before you were accepted to the group. So, I assume that members of these groups have relevant experience and knowledge about online

communities. For a complete list of the people from these groups that contributed to my research: see Appendix 2. Appendix 3 includes some print screens of interesting discussions that I started on these platforms.

**Survey - The target group: young, high-educated, people in the age group 18-30**

To help UNICEF in their decision regarding the best content in their possible community, I decided to conduct a survey with people from their target group: the young, high-educated Dutch people in the age group of 18-30 years old. I asked 150 (sample size) people from this target group to fill in my survey. Finally 80 respondents (53%) filled in the survey. I used probability, stratified sampling because people were randomly picked to fill in the survey. I approached UNICEF's target group through Facebook groups of universities or student associations. I randomly asked people to fill in the survey. However, not everyone in my research population had an equal chance of filling in the survey. It was unfortunately impossible to send all of them a private message with the link to my survey. This is a limitation that makes the results of the survey less reliable. In the survey mainly closed, multiple choice questions were used, besides just one open question, that was optional to fill in. My questionnaire was self-administered using the Google Docs Form tool (See Appendix 1 for the survey).

**Interviews - UNICEF staff**

This research population consisted of three persons:

- *Jasper van Maarschalkerweerd* – segment manager "particulieren" (private individuals) at UNICEF Netherlands. In the interview I mainly asked him questions about what UNICEF Netherlands exactly wants with the segment "bereidwilligen".

- *Paola Storchi* – works for UNICEF Italy, but is currently located in the head office in New York to work for communities of practice.

- *Etienne Leue* – community manager of Voices of Youth – the global online community of UNICEF. Works at the head office in New York.


I used the self-selecting probability sampling method, with the unstructured approach with open-ended interview questions.  I deem the results of these findings are quite reliable, since these people represent UNICEF. Nevertheless, I could have interviewed more people to get more different views and perspectives, which is always better and improves reliability. Due to the relatively short time available for this research I decided to just interview three persons representing UNICEF.

**Observation - Existing brand communities**

Further, some brand communities were observed which were initiated by both commercial and non-commercial organizations. I discussed them already in the best practices part of chapter 3. In this case, I would describe myself as a participant observer (qualitatively), because I emphasized the discovery of meaning attached to actions via these communities. I wanted to recover the factors that have led to their success and learn from their community models and concepts.

## 6.3 Limitations of the field research

My field research has one big limitation: all the results reflect opinions of people. They are not based on hard facts. Yet, for the purpose of this research (helping UNICEF decide) the views of experts and community managers next to the preferences of the young generation are extremely valuable.

I obtained much more empirical data than I could ever hope for.  In total, 163 people contributed to my project by sharing their knowledge and thoughts with me. I got an enormous amount of concrete ideas and advices for UNICEF. Dealing with such a large amount of qualitative data was a challenge. I decided to analyse them in order to hopefully find some kind of structure/relationship(s) in the essence of their answers. Indeed, there was a lot of overlap in the answers. In the following parts only the findings that are most relevant to each section will be presented. It was impossible for me to present all the findings in this report. It was therefore decided to make a separate file for UNICEF Netherlands with all the raw data of the interviews. I am sure that this enumeration will be extremely valuable for them.

I will now present each of the stages that are highlighted blue in the decision matrix and present the findings of my field research.

## 6.4 Is an online community strategy necessary and relevant for UNICEF Netherlands?

This is stage 3 in the decision matrix. I think here an important question is on the agenda. As has been described in the decision matrix section, the answer on this question will mainly depend on the results of an extensive internal and external analysis that UNICEF will need to do.  As described in chapter 2, there are hundreds of examples of brands that already invested in online communities. There are not many examples yet of non-profit organizations which also invested in them.  I found it interesting to see what the community experts and managers thought about this issue.

*I asked them two main questions:*

Do you think that UNICEF Netherlands should invest in an online community, when creating long-term engagement with the young generation (18-30 years) is their goal?

If they decide to build an online community, what would be the main difference(s) to a commercially, company-initiated community?

*I will give you some interesting examples of the answers that were obtained:*

"Building an interactive, engaging online community would definitely help support UNICEF's mission. Non-profit communities differ because the mission is different, but many of the best practices of branded commercial communities can be used for good effects. UNICEF has an advantage, in that the age group they are targeting is very inclined toward volunteerism and crowdsourcing activities. You also have a compelling mission that is ripe with opportunities for visual, video and eye-catching content" (Rosemary O'Neill, president and founder of SocialStrata – an community consultancy agency).

"UNICEF is in a great position to build a strong online community. The chance of success is much higher than a brand due to its existing membership base that shares a strong common purpose, and the goodwill of the organisation. You need to place a lot of emphasis on resourcing it properly, and have internal understanding about the goals and objectives of the community. I am convinced that UNICEF would benefit hugely from building such community" (Alison Michalk, co-founder and director of the Australian Community Manager's Group).

"I think that UNICEF has an advantage in that your organization is likeable and people think the organization is sympathetic.  I think it is even easier for UNICEF than for commercial brands to engage people in an online community: people will understand that your community is not commercially-oriented, but that the underlying goal is: creating a better world for children" (Martijn Staal, online strategist and blogger).

"I am convinced that UNICEF could benefit from a brand community. From a marketing point of view it will: save time, save money and will offer new perspectives" (Elien van Riet, community manager of several non-profit communities).

Richard Millington (blogger and well-known community consultant) agreed with these answers. In his answer he referred to an article he wrote on his blog called "Using Communities To Change the World: What Non-Profits Need to Change". His opinion: "Most non-profit social media efforts are broadcast-focused and achieve little more than short blips of awareness. This is such a waste of the Internet and the self-organizing power the medium offers. My message to non-profits on social good days is to switch their social media managers to community managers. Focus on building communities of interested people around issues they care about. If you do this, you have a sustainable

digital strategy with unlimited potential for growth. If not, you can best hope for short blips of attention."

Patrick O'Kofee (founder of the iFroggy Network, a publisher of websites) agrees that an online community for a non-profit organization is pretty much the same as for a commercial organization: "You will need people to manage it, you will need to set guidelines and policies. You will need moderation and proper documentation of moves that moderators make. You will need someone to lead the community and manage it as a department head. You will need to engage, praise great contributors and highlight great content. Non-profit or profit, all of these things are true".

**Analysis and discussion of the results**

What I can conclude from these answers is that in general the experts and community managers believe that UNICEF can highly benefit from an online community. And most of them think that a non-profit community is not that much different from a commercial oriented community. Some even say that a non-profit community has a higher chance of success. In paragraph 2.2.1 ('Why non-profits should invest in online communities'), I already highlighted the opportunity and importance of non-profits investing in an online community. It looks that my view on this is confirmed by the answers of the experts and managers.

## 6.5 Shaping the community frame: Focus, platform, content of a possible online community for UNICEF

Stage 7 is an important stage in the decision matrix. I am convinced that the focus, platform and content of a community will heavily influence the chance that you will have success or not. Do you remember the figure about the online community types that was presented in chapter 2? I placed part of it below (see figure on the next page). In this section all of these elements will be discussed. We are going to look what focus the community of UNICEF should have, what the best possible platform is and what the content should be.
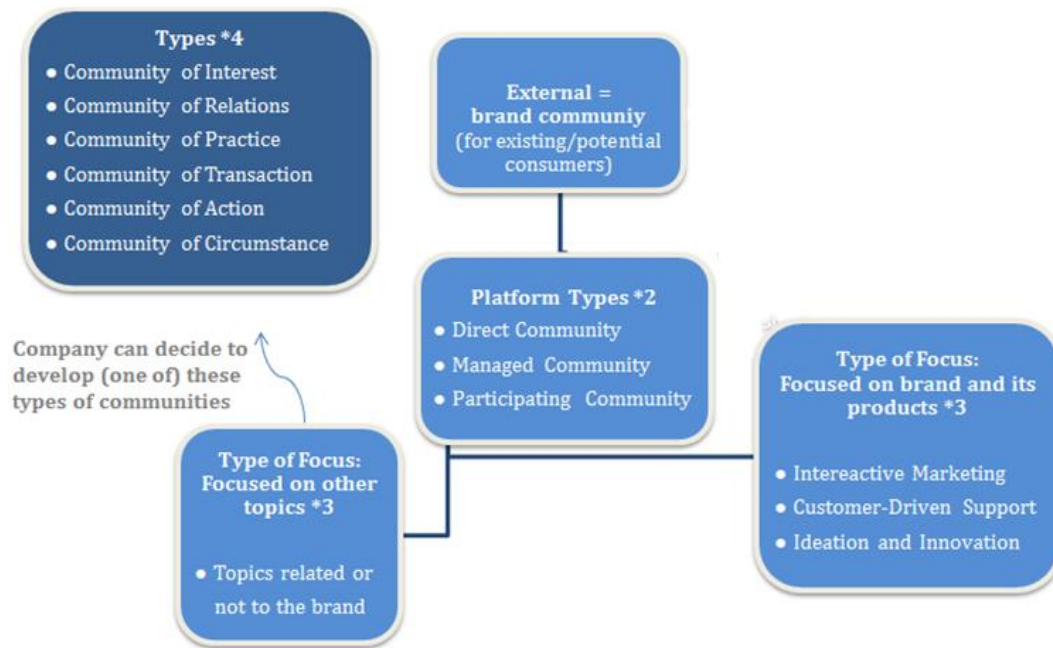
Because this is a large and important stage, I will split it up in three sections (i.e. paragraphs 6.5.1, 6.5.2 and 6.5.3).

## 6.5.1. Deciding on the type of focus

In chapter 1 the different types of online communities were explained. One distinction made was: a brand community focused on the brand and its products and a community community centred on other topics. The example of HarperCollins' community *Inkpop* that was described in chapter 2 shows that focusing on other topics instead of your brand and products can be very successful. But with the example of Oxfam Novib's community *Doenersnet*, it was seen that focusing on your brand and the work you do, can also work out very well. This made me wonder what focus would be best for a possible community for UNICEF.

*This inspired me to ask the community experts the following main question:*

What is the focus of your brand community? Brand-focused or generally-focused? What is your advice for UNICEF: should they focus on their charity, its mission, and the work they do or rather talk about other topics with their brand in the background?

I got a lot of different opinions on this topic. There was a lot of overlap in the answers as well. I decided to show you below some examples with arguments that represent the other answers as well.

According to Patrick O'Kofee (iFroggy Network), the work of UNICEF should be the focus. "You can share initiatives and details about them. You can provide ways for members to share their initiatives with their networks. To encourage people to engage around those initiatives, you can also ask for feedback and responses and, perhaps most importantly, answer questions. But if you want people to really bond, give them areas where they can engage off topic and talk about things besides your charity as well. You will need community guidelines, of course, and for obvious reasons, you don't want to have political or religious discussions. But, that shouldn't stop them from discussing a movie or music. This is where people bond and where community strengthens".

Jonathan Trenn (digital marketing strategist) agreed with Patrick and said: "Make you community issue-focused, i.e. issues that UNICEF is trying to create awareness on. There is nothing wrong with UNICEF pointing to its efforts and success stories as means of educating. They are the ones involved in the front lines. Community members can and should keep the flow of discussion going. It would be a mistake for UNICEF to continually take the lead. The organization essentially needs to play the role of gracious host to gathering, where they provide a setting in which they, when appropriate, lead the conversation, but usually let those in attendance to lead it themselves".

John Belshe (marketing analyst) did not completely agree with Patrick and Jonathan. He stated: "You must create a community that provides value to the consumers. Instead of creating a forum for UNICEF to push their initiatives, create a community for users to meet and exchange their stories and best practices as they relate to the challenges faced by the consumers or users that UNICEF is targeting. Post quick links to items they value and encourage them to connect with each other".

Christopher Childs (community manager) completely agreed with John. He argued: "A community that is based around what the consumer needs is always better. People will be turned off the moment they feel like they are being used and only getting brand propaganda. The fact that the community is being held on a UNICEF server, or was created by UNICEF, should be enough of a plug and people won't forget that. My recommendation to UNICEF would be not to be afraid to take part in the conversations, but always remember that they are another voice in the conversation, not THE voice in the conversation".

Philip Wride (social media marketer) added: "You don't want to do the hard sell, you want to be subtle about what you do or have a specific space dedicated to UNICEF activities. The rest of the space should be open for users in general with UNICEF reps adding to the discussion, offering unique insights or experiences without the "please go an donate NOW" mentality. The hard sell will turn people off. The biggest thing to remember about communities is: a lot of the time the users own the space, not the brand, the brand is just the custodian".

According to Zachary Chastain (IT consultant and blogger), it all really depends on your brand. "If it is a well-known brand that people like to associate with  (high-end clothing

is a good example of this, sports-wear as well, such as Nike) then you can have some of the focus on your brand. Still, the most well received content will always be structured around something that interests your fans. If you actually take the time to listen to and respond to each and every one of them then you will get great results from conversational content as well. For example: What is your opinion on X? Still, it's still best to try to keep this centred on the brand's focus, rather than getting too abstract (i.e. "What are you doing this weekend?" or "What is your favourite colour?").

Nellie Newman (director and advisor at interactive shops) confirms Zachary's opinion. She answered: "If the brand is a high-affinity brand (like Nike, Apple, Bare Escentuals), engaging with a community about the brand and letting them contribute in some way (e.g. suggestions, improvements) can be very successful. Communities of relations/passion (e.g. people affected by breast cancer) generally drive themselves and brands take a back seat. Highlighting your brand as part of the accomplishments is not a bad thing either as long as it aligns with the goals of the community".

**Analysis and discussion of the results**

I found it very interesting to hear all of these different opinions. When comparing all the answers (also the ones that I did not mention here) it can be concluded that the focus of a possible community can be centred on issues related to UNICEF, yet in a subtle way. Focusing on the interests of the community members will strengthen the community. Allowing your community members to go off-topic - with some nuance - is another insight that we can derive from these answers. There is an overlap in what Christopher, Philip and Jonathan say: UNICEF should be present in the community, but let the community members take the lead. Zachary and Nellie explained their answers by giving examples of high-affinity brands, such as Nike etc.

**Designing a new matrix to support UNICEF in choosing the focus on an online community**

The results of my findings on focus inspired me to design a matrix (see figure 10) that can help UNICEF and other brands decide on their focus. I call it the 'Shirt-matrix'.

**Figure 10:** Own model: T-shirt matrix for UNICEF Netherlands
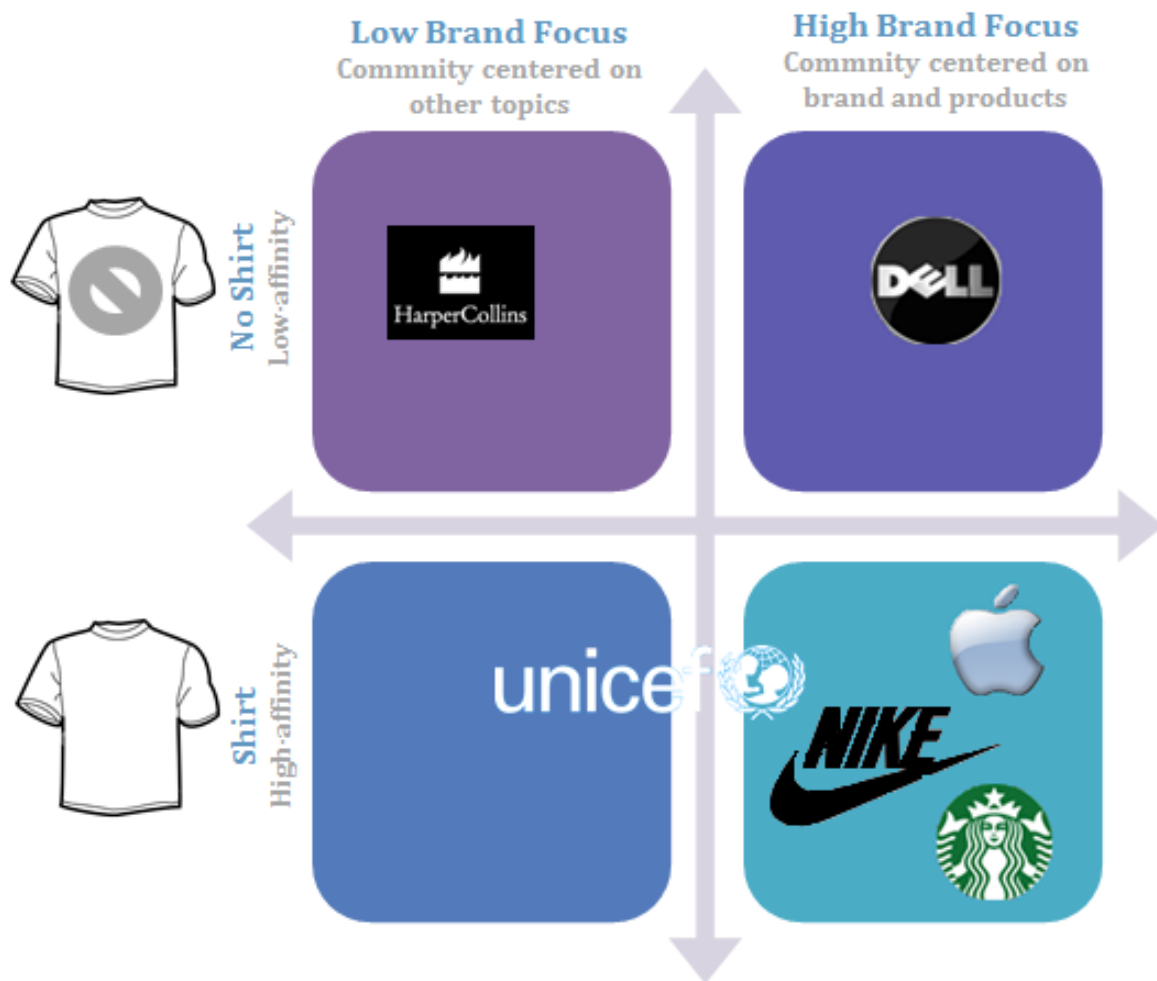


**Explanation of the Shirt-matrix:**

Nellie's and Zachary's answers inspired me to make a matrix that shows the relationship between the focus of your brand and the affinity of your brand. I conceptualized it using the example of a T-shirt. The Shirt/No Shirt element symbolizes the extent to which people would like to associate with your brand. In other words, the extent to which people think your brand is "cool". I think walking in a shirt with a huge logo of a brand on it shows the ultimate "coolness" of your brand. That is why I used a shirt as a symbol in my matrix. If your brand is a high-affinity brand, people like to relate/affiliate to your brand and would be willing to walk in a shirt with your brand logo on it. Well-known existing examples include Nike, Apple or Starbucks. Many people like to be associated with these brands and they use it to express their social identity towards others. Harley Davidson is another example. Some HD fans even go a step further than walking in a shirt with the logo of HD on it – they tattoo their entire body with the brand name. From the views of Nellie and Zachary we can conclude that if a brand is a high-affinity brand, the content on your brand community can be more focused on your brand and products. Starbucks, Apple, Nike and Harley Davidson are examples of brands that can be

classified in my matrix as: *Shirt* (high-affinity) and thus a high brand focus in their community. Dell is an example of a brand that people also like to associate with (it is a good, well-known brand), but people probably won't buy a shirt with its logo on it. Because Dell does have a huge base of fans of their products, they can afford to focus a lot on their brand and products. As could be seen in chapter 4, the brand community *Ideastorm* is very focused on their brand, product and services. Dell can be classified in my matrix as follows: *No shirt* (low-affinity), but a high brand focus. In chapter 2 HarperCollins' community *Inkpop* was briefly described. This is an example of a brand that is a low-affinity brand – people will probably not want to walk in a t-shirt with 'HarperCollins' on it. They might love the books that the company is publishing – but they do not want to associate too much with the brand. HarperCollins probably realized this as well, because their brand community is not focused on their products at all. Thus, HarperCollins can be classified as *No shirt*, low brand focus.

### Deciding on UNICEF's desired focus with the shirt matrix

I have classified UNICEF as: Shirt, middle-brand focus. I think that UNICEF is definitely a brand that many people would really like to be associated with. Walking in a shirt with the logo of UNICEF on it shows that you care about their mission and work. For some, it would show that they are a "good person". Given the arguments of the experts and community managers, I have classified UNICEF as middle-brand focus. I think it can be concluded from their insights that UNICEF can focus on their work, yet in a subtle way. They should focus on what the young generation interests and allow them to take the lead in a while and at the same time stay in the background in the community. Only talking about your work and encouraging people to donate will probably turn (potential and existing) members off.

## 6.5.2 Deciding on the type of platform

Deciding on the best platform type for UNICEF is another important step. It is the part that I got the most different opinions about. I first like to make clear that there is a difference between online communities and social media platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter etc.). Deborah Weinstein, president of Strategic Objectives, illustrates social media strikingly as: "the new Wild, Wild West of Marketing, with brands, businesses, and organizations jostling with individuals to make news, friends, connections and build communities in the virtual space". Social media offer a space for brands to build their community or create a "community feeling" among their fans. It is important to recognize that there are a variety of options available to build a brand community upon. As described in chapter 2, company-initiated external communities can be classified as:

- **Direct communities**: Brand communities that are started and managed by an organization. They often "run on proprietary community and enterprise

collaboration software solutions" (Howard 2011). Examples include Starbuck's *MyStarbucksIdea*, Dell's *Ideastorm* or the one from the Asthma Foundation. "The organization is responsible for running and managing the community and benefits from rich data and user profiles created within that community" (Howard 2011).

- **Managed communities:** Brand communities that are started and managed by organization but run on social media platforms, like Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter. "Examples here include WNF's online communities, Starbucks' Flickr group pool, or Dell's presence on Twitter. The organization is responsible for running and managing the community, but does not necessarily benefit from the rich data and user profiles created within such community. Typically, the facilitator of the community (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) benefits the most from the underlying data" (Howard 2011).

- **Participating communities**: Brand communities started and managed by individuals or groups of users who have an interest in the brand. "An example here would be a fan site for Microsoft's *Xbox* or an independent Porsche enthusiast group. Typically the organization whose products or services are the topic of discussion can participate, but has no authority or access to the data created within the community" (Howard 2011).

For the purpose of this research and the intention of UNICEF, I will not consider a participating type of community as an option, since it is not started/managed by an organization, but more by outsiders. Therefore, I will just compare the direct and the managed community as possible and realistic options for UNICEF. I made a list of several platform possibilities that UNICEF can choose from. Subsequently, the community experts and managers were asked the following question:

*If you were UNICEF, which of the three options would you choose for creating long-term engagement and increased awareness (of child-related development issues and UNICEF's work) among the young generation (18-30 years) is your goal? Why?*

**Option 1:** Build an entirely new platform in your own space on which you start an online community (direct community);

**Option 2:** Fish were the fish are. Do not invest in building a complete new platform, but run your community on existing social media platforms (managed community);

**Option 3:** Integrate your community with your corporate website, as a micro-website.

I got such a large amount of different opinions on this question, that I decided to classify them based on similar underlying arguments.

**Classifying the views on choosing the best UNICEF platform**

Basically, the answers can be classified into five sections:

**Classification 1. Choose option 1: UNICEF should build an entire new platform that they own by themselves.**

**Main arguments that experts/managers gave:**

- Your own platform will allow you to get very valuable insights about your community members. It will also allow you to get very specific data and statistics about your target group.
- An own platform will allow you to have control of what happens. You won't rely on what social media platforms (Facebook etc.) decide to do.
- On an own platform you will have more influence on the atmosphere, culture and content in your community.
- An own platform will allow you to get more depth with your community members.
- In the end, people will leave their social media platforms and go to a specific online community dedicated to a topic of their interest/needs. They want a focused concentration – having your own platform will allow you to give them what they need and really engage them.

**Examples of answers:**

"I strongly believe that UNICEF would benefit more from building a community on an own platform, a direct community. It is the only way to have a real influence on the atmosphere, culture, and content of your community. Besides, an own platform will allow you to get very interesting insights of your community members. This will allow you to manage the community more efficiently, get higher levels of engagement, and be overall more successful. Though, I recommend UNICEF to also pay attention to the social media platforms. Make sure you add content on there as well. You can use these platforms to find your target group and persuade them to visit your online community" (Kirsten Wagenaar, community consultant).

"I normally always say "fish where the fish are". However, I believe that UNICEF is a large enough organization, a recognized enough brand, and an initiative with enough calls to action and opportunities to support sustained engagement that it may be worth investing in building a public dedicated community space" (Amy Sample Ward, community development manager).

"Don't build your core on someone else's toy. UNICEF should understand that people don't hang out on a social media platform. There is no platform loyalty. You hang out for your social stuff where your friends hang out. But when you are interested in movies, you go to the cinema. The cinema doesn't try to be a social platform. Community is like cinema, or a club – it will attract people interested in it, and at that point you need your own place because it's the only way you can actually give them what they need" (Ian Dickson, business coach).

"Relying on social media platforms has some serious downsides. How people are accustomed to using Facebook, for example, is limited too. On Facebook people connect with other people (generally). When people want to connect around a specific topic or passion, they go to a specific community dedicated to that topic. This is why the most engaging conversations in the social web often occur in forums and on structured online communities. When someone wants martial arts discussion, they are more likely to go to a martial arts community than to Facebook. Such people want a focused concentration of material artists. The same counts for a community dedicated to UNICEF" (Patrick O'Kofee, Ifroggy Network).

**Classification 2.** Choose option 2: use existing social media platforms to build your community on.

**Main arguments that experts/managers gave:**

- People like to hang out where their friends hang out – on social media platforms. Go where they are.
- It will be challenging and probably unrealistic to get people to your own platform and make them come back. You will have to compete with the popular social media platforms.
- It's way too expensive and a waste of resources to invest in your own platform. Social media platforms are a relatively cheap and easy way to reach your target.
- You will get more engagement with a broader sweep of people, where the conversation is already happening: i.e. on the social media platforms.

**Examples of answers:**

"I would advise UNICEF to go for option 2: fish where the fish are. Definitely. If you succeed in engaging this generation on these platforms you can later on decide to build a community integrated on your current website. For now, use Facebook and Hyves. Our WNF community on Hyves currently consists of 82,450 active members. This number is only growing. Last year we managed to get an extra 20,000 community members. We have succeeded in engaging the young generation by going were they like to spend their time online: social media platforms" (Margreet Heemen, WNF).

 "Go for option two. With all will in the world, you're never going to build a platform that attracts as many people, or keeps up with emerging communities and spaces, like Facebook etc.. Piggy back on the cutting edge that other space is providing and developing. Go where the people are. Just make sure you capture that activity, net it all together, curate the great comments and ideas and build something unique that way. I would anticipate that you will get more engagement, with a broader sweep of people, if you go to where conversation is already happening and if you stay sharp to new spaces where people are gathering, so you can go and (very openly and transparently) join

conversations. I think by listening to people where people are, reflecting on those conversations, asking them to help raise awareness, will be an organic process" (Holly Seddon, editor and writer).

"For UNICEF especially I don't see much value in trying to create your own walled garden, because you really want to get more donors and volunteers and the sharing that comes from being where they already are. Plus: with so much competition as well as scepticism about charitable donations, it's a goldmine for spreading facts about all the great work being done" (June McDonald, consultant).

 "I think option two is the best for UNICEF to start with" (Seth Godin, entrepreneur).

"If I was UNICEF I would start simple and use existing social media and collaboration tools. Many new communities waste countless hours on debating tools and infrastructure, and my recommendation is to always get something simple up and running, get people involved and collaborating, and then you can refine the tools later" (Jono Bacon, consultant and community manager).

 "Option 2 is the option I whole-heartedly support. I was involved in the USA for UNHCR's Blue Key campaign, and they initiated a multi-pronged approach to their blue key campaign that had a goal of both selling blue keys to raise money, but also creating a group of deeply engaged people. They tied the website into a Facebook page and group, and a Twitter profile. It was a huge success" (Debra Askanse, UNHCR manager).

 "People (especially young people) tend to hang out online where their friends are. So often it works better to start where they already hang out online (e.g. Facebook) than to create a new community from scratch (if you build it, they will not necessarily come). Many non-profits have invested in their own private online community only to have it fail, because their constituents don't want to have to join yet another social network" (B.J. Wishinshky, communities program manager).

I decided it would be interesting to interview somebody who had to choose between these options as well, when his organization decided to build a community. I interviewed Job de Groot, who currently works at STAR, the student association of the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. In 2010, STAR decided to launch an online community. Starting a dialogue, stimulate interaction and increase engagement among the students was their goal. They decided to invest in building an entire new platform called the 'STAR MAX community'. It was not a success at all. Students did visit the online community, but just to find some specific information. They did not use the platform to interact with other students. Instead, they used Facebook. STAR decided to change direction and built a vibrant community group on Facebook. Their Facebook group is highly active and visited on daily basis by students. Job also sees some disadvantages in STAR's change of direction. "First of all, we are very dependent on what the platform Facebook decides to do. If they change the design or tools, we are forced to adapt to these alterations. Facebook is also quite limited in the tools they offer for

branded pages. They don't customize tools according to your (often specific) needs. Besides, we are missing the opportunity of getting valuable data and statistics of the students. It is also challenging to deal with the information load on Facebook. The messages that we post disappear quickly in the mass of other updates. I would advise UNICEF to only build a new platform if they are convinced that you can give the young generation the right and enough incentives to visit your website. It will be an extra step for them. Maybe one step too much".

Other experts and community managers advised UNICEF to go for a blended approach of options. This brought me to the third classification.

**Classification 3.** **Integrate option 1 and 2: build your own platform and use existing social media platforms.**

**Main arguments that experts/managers gave:**

- Use social media platforms for the broad reach and your own platform to get more depth and higher levels of engagement.
- A real community should have its own platform but also social media platforms to generate traffic to your community.
- Use platforms like Facebook to test what works and what doesn't with engaging this generation. Use that information, learn from it, and use it for your online community.

**Examples of answers:**

"Your answer could depend on your goal. Going with a strong presence on Facebook will yield you much higher numbers and make your content more likely to go viral on the platform. That will give you a very broad reach, but you won't get a lot of depth (narrower insights). Going with something on the UNICEF portal will narrow your audience markedly, but will increase the insights you can draw from them. You are choosing between the broad market, and your most engaged community members in that sense. A blended approach would be best. Go with your high level outreach on Facebook and try to engage as many people as possible, and then make a honey pot in the UNICEF space to draw in the most engaged and reward them with higher levels of support. That is a bit of the best of both worlds "(Craig TD, community manager).

 "A real community needs to have a single centralized "home" – and that would be the official UNICEF platform. At the same time, the engagement effort needs to be made throughout the community ecosystem – and this means fishing where the fish are and engaging people wherever they may be. Very often, option 2 can be used to "test the

waters" and learn more about the audience in order to determine whether option 1 would be a viable option" (Martin Reed, community consultant).

"I would prefer a combination out of option 1 and 2. In my opinion it is not a black-or-white-question. Grey suits better. Fishing where the fish is, is an argument I could easy agree with, but on the behalf of a sustainable social media architecture I would prefer to have a backup and profile my social media users. To backup social media results and reach and to integrate business processes it needs an own ground. To get engagement and to use the personal social networks of the social media, users on this ground need a strong connection with Facebook as an example" (Wilfried Schock, consultant).

**Classification 4.** **Choose option three: integrate your community with your corporate website.**

**Examples of arguments that experts/managers gave:**

"The biggest advantage of this aproach is that you can benefit from existing traffic that your current website already generates. You have to realize that if you build a community on Facebook, that your target group is not already there. You will also need to invest time and resources to make people visit your community on there" (Grietje Blom, community manager).

"Have your community discussions and news broadcasting on Facebook and Twitter, but frequently drive people from there back to your micro-website to get related value, e.g. more in-depth stories" (Caroline Bottomley, global brand marketing manager).

"I would suggest that UNICEF should "own"' the community by hosting it upon their own corporate site, rather than exclusively using Facebook. Subject areas, conversations, and moderation are easier to manage upon your own corporate website - you can control what ads are served to the community areas and you own and can reuse all the content (as long as you make it clear in your terms and conditions). You can feature the content (debates, quotes, opinions etc.) in newsletters (which in turn will attract more traffic to your site and its related campaigns) and perhaps also compile white papers, reports and books from community content. Any articles of interest from the community can also be posted onto Facebook in order to reach even more people - and to bring them onto your site'' (Michael Howard, communication consultant).

**Classification 5.** **Choose none of the options above.**

**Examples of arguments that experts/managers gave:**

"I think all of the three options are pretty bad. Option 1 sounds the best, but it's going to be difficult to make that work. You're assuming that it'll be easy to get 18-30 year olds incredibly passionate about your work. In practice, it doesn't quite work like that. Option 2 will feel like you're getting a lot of engagement, but in reality just a tiny fraction

of your audience will participate. It will look good to your boss, but won't achieve anything of importance.  Option 3 will make you hit all the usual bumps when using a corporate website. What can or cannot be said etc. This would be ideal, but it's pretty much impossible to pull it off. You're also assuming the platform is the key decider here. It's not. It's the community manager's ability to get people to interact with each other. I say start by using a mailing list or something dead simple to get a few people interacting with each other. Once you have that, grow from there" (Richard Millington, community consultant).

Beth Kanter (non-profit innovator) concludes: "Spend more time on the engagement, less time trying to build software. Many non-profits made the mistake of building their own, and they spend so much time in design and fixing glitches that it prevented them from doing the engagement".

**Another possible option: UNICEF's Voices of Youth**

There is another possible option that has not been discussed yet. In 2011 UNICEF New York launched a global UNICEF online community, called "Voices of Youth" (see figure 11 on the next page). Voices of Youth (VOY) is a global community for young people to learn about development issues (such as environment, education, human rights etc.) and express their opinions. Voices of Youth seeks to create a space that will help young people develop into active global citizens equipped to communicate and collaborate effectively to make a positive difference in their countries and communities.

**Figure 11:** Voices of Youth, UNICEF's global online community

On VOY, young people can gain knowledge and awareness of the key thematic issues affecting young people around the world, enabling them to have an open and honest dialogue about the world in which they live.

I observed the VOY community to see whether it might be an appropriate community model for UNICEF Netherlands to copy. Overall, I think the website is beautifully designed and well set up. I really like the fact that content creation (with the button "Create a Post") is encouraged. In chapter 3 it was explained how encouraging content creation can fulfil higher level needs in the hierarchy of Maslow. Also, I explained that it is a way to foster and sustain engagement in your brand community. Most interestingly to realize is that the focus of the community is not on the work of UNICEF at all: UNICEF stays really on the background of this website. The content published is about development issues in general.

I decided to ask the community experts/managers to have a look at VOY and share their opinions. Below are some typical examples of the answers I got:

"I looked at the Voices of Youth site and while it looks nice, I am not sure what I am supposed to do. It looks mostly like it is a site where I am supposed to read what others do. "Create a Post"… create a post about what exactly? I feel like some helpful guides and calls to actions could go a long way with that site" (Patrick O'Kofee, iFroggy Network).

"My first impression is that it still looks like a publishing platform for UNICEF content – rather than a platform to engage and encourage opinion and discussion. I like the big "Create a post" button – but I am not sure how much encouragement members are given to create their own topics on the subjects that mean most to them" (Michael Howard, communication consultant).

"Voices of Youth – my initial assessment is that it is very "earnest" - it probably has an audience of "development/education workers" who might pick up an idea and use it locally. I doubt that many "normal" 18-30 year olds use it" (Ian Dickson, business coach).

From these comments it can be concluded that the community can still be improved. Ian Dickson doubts whether the community would really engage the target group of UNICEF Netherlands. To really find out whether this platform could be appropriate for UNICEF Netherlands, I decided to interview staff from the UNICEF head office in New York. I interviewed both *Paola Storchi* and *Etienne Leue*, who both gave me more insights on Voices of Youth.

According to Etienne Leue, UNICEF Netherlands can easily copy the platform. "We already have a French and Spanish section on the website. A Dutch section can be easily implemented. The content should be similar though and appropriate for our target group. Anyone can use Voices of Youth, from anywhere and at any time, however, our site is targeted for people in the age group 13-25. The aim of our community is to give young people living in the developing countries where we work, a voice. We want them to spread the word about what is going on in their countries. We want them to express

their opinions and learn more about the development issues that are going on in their countries". I asked Etienne what his main challenges are with engaging this target group: "The main challenge is to decide upon the content that is posted on the community. A lot of people create posts, but we have to be strict in what content we actually publish. The content should be really in line with our policies and the underlying goal of our community". I then asked Etienne if the community is a success and how they measure success. "I wouldn't call Voices of Youth a success yet. We are on our way to make it a success. We still struggle to find ways to measure the ROI of the community. There are still no good metrics out there that can help us keep track on the success of the community".

Based on the answers of Etienne, I can conclude that the people they are targeting are very different from the group of people UNICEF Netherlands is aiming to engage. VOY targets a younger generation, who actually live in the countries UNICEF is working in. Etienne and I came to the conclusion that this is not the appropriate community model for UNICEF Netherlands.

Paola Storchi advised the following: "I think UNICEF Netherlands could definitely benefit from an online community. However, I would advise to first start small using social media platforms. It is something that we do at UNICEF New York as well. We see that a lot of young people like what we do and are willing to engage. Start small, but aim to grow bigger would be my advice".

**Analysis and discussion of the results:**

It is clear that there are a lot of different opinions on this problem statement. Some experts argue that building a community on your own-hosted platform is the best option because it allows you to have more control, influence, depth and engagement. Besides, an own platform can give you a rich source of valuable insights about your community. Others say it is too risky and too expensive to invest in an own platform. They believe it will be too challenging and probably unrealistic to make these young people leave 'their' platforms and visit your platform. I somewhat agree on this. UNICEF will need to invest a lot of money, time and resources to build a platform and manage it well. I think the example of Job de Groot's STAR community shows us that an own platform can fail. For UNICEF, it is obviously important that they invest their money wisely. They cannot take risks. It seems that an integration of options is maybe better. I agree with Ian Dickson and Patrick O'Kofee. I think, in the end, people will leave their social media platforms and go where like-minded people go. There are hundreds of examples of thriving online communities that succeed. Social media platforms are very popular and these young people do like to hang out there. But still, if they have a specific interest they will leave that platform. Besides that, as I discussed in chapter 3, people fulfil certain needs in an online community. Needs that in my opinion cannot always be met on social media platforms.

It looks that the best option for UNICEF is to start small, with simple collaboration/engagement tools. Social media platforms are a great and cheap way to start with this. UNICEF can heavily benefit from these platforms and use it to "test the waters". If we look at the examples of WNF and UNHCR's Blue Key campaign, we can see that using social media platforms to engage people can work out very well. I think UNICEF can use these social media platforms to find out what works and what doesn't with this young generation. It is a great place to start the dialogue. If UNICEF succeeds on these platforms, they can always decide to invest in their own-hosted platform. This can be either a new platform or a micro-site on their current website. In other words, they could start with a managed community and then later on decide whether a direct community can/will be a next step.

**"Go with your high level outreach on Facebook and try to engage as many people as possible, and then make a *honey pot* in the UNICEF space to draw in the most engaged and reward them with higher levels of support. That is a bit of the best of both worlds" (Craig TD).**

I think that some of the experts are right about the fact that UNICEF will eventually need an own-hosted platform to really foster and sustain long-term engagement among this generation. As Craig already said, an own platform will allow you to get more in-depth conversations with your target group. I think UNICEF could extra benefit (in the long-run) from more depth. I believe investing in building strong relationships/engagement with a smaller group of people can be a great starting opportunity. If you succeed in creating a new group of enthusiastic brand advocates/super-fans , they can help you in future steps of engaging others, i.e. new ones. I also tend to agree with the blended approach. In chapter 2, I already discussed the value of having brand advocates. Besides, I think UNICEF can benefit hugely from getting very specific insights (data and statistics) from their community members. You will need your own platform for that purpose. Having these insights, can/will help UNICEF in the future to target these people very effectively.

Of course, the final decision on a platform will heavily depend on the budget that UNICEF Netherlands is planning to spend on engaging the young generation. Unfortunately, UNICEF Netherlands was not able to give me an indication of their budget. Otherwise, I could have interviewed some consultants on the exact financial consequences of each of the options. This would have allowed me to provide a financial analysis (to some degree) for UNICEF.

Although the option of copying the community model of UNICEF New York is not relevant, it did provide me with some interesting insights.

### 6.5.3 Deciding on the type of content

In chapter 3 it was explained what specific needs member fulfil in an online community. Information seeking, relationship building, helping others, self-expression et cetera are some examples of needs that members satisfy in online communities. With the corresponding Maslow's hierarchy of needs model, that I designed, we could clearer see the importance of these needs. I also discussed how brands can foster and sustain engagement in their online communities, by describing a three-stage process that managers can use to turn their community members into highly engaged contributors. I emphasized the importance of encouraging content creation and co-creation among members. Creating enjoyable experiences for your members is also an important element.

In this thesis section, I like to translate all of this into a concrete advice for UNICEF.

In the introduction of this report, I gave a detailed description of the target group. They are in general quite individualistic: very focused on their own. They have a hedonistic attitude: they want enjoyment, experience and fun. At the same time they are very ambitious and career-driven. They have a relatively positive attitude towards non-profit organizations, but only support them if they get an 'experience' in return. They want to get the feeling that they contribute(d) to a better world. They seek transparency and want to see the effect of their support/donated money.

So what should be your community about if you target these people? How can you engage this somewhat restless, individualistic generation? What could be the main elements if you want to turn them into engaged members?

I asked the community experts and managers to share their thoughts with me. I got a huge amount of concrete ideas and suggestions on the content of a possible community for UNICEF. Some experts said it is better to first take other steps before deciding on the content. So, before I start with giving a concrete advice on the content for a possible community, I would like to go over the steps that need to be taken first according to the consulted experts.

**First things first**

Community consultant and market researcher Wim Woning thinks "it is crucial to first find out what your target group really likes, before even considering about the content. What do they enjoy talking about? What makes them enthusiastic? What (child-related) development issues do they care most about? You could do this with a market research or just simply with trial and error approach. Poll some discussions on Facebook and see what works and what doesn't. Learn from that and then start decide on the content of your community".

Axel Schultze (founder Social Media Academy) confirms Wim's opinion with his answer and adds: it is first important to ask your target group what they think and how they can see themselves engage. But first, it is important to have a grand vision for your community. He advises UNICEF to use the following strategy model:

- Social media monitoring and sentiment analysis/opinion mining (determine attitude of the target group);
- Identifying interests, needs and wants;
- Full audience assessment;
- Purpose definition and vision (objectives);
- Engage and figure out what and how they want it;
- Build a strategy together with your constituencies to all this (the bigger the group the more complex its organization);
- Create an execution plan to do what is really needed.

Jake McKee (chief innovation officer) thinks it all starts with understanding what the objectives are that you are trying to support by putting the community in place. "As you think about your overarching goal (creating sustainable relationships with the younger generation), think about what that really means: do you want to have young people understand issues better? Do you want them to take a specific action? Do you want them to participate in a certain way? What does your top 2-3 priority list look like? You need to find out what the specific behaviour change is that you are looking to achieve. For instance, I have to assume that "building relationships" isn't an end; it's just a means to an end. Are they trying to get young people to do something? Are they trying to get more volunteers? More donations? Something else? UNICEF NL should first make this clear before considering about the content".

Robert Jan Droogleever (online community expert) thinks it might be relevant to first find out what these people think about UNICEF. "What is the current brand image that UNICEF has among this target group? What is the first thing that comes to their minds when they think of UNICEF? If you know this, you will know what you should change or improve. Then, you really need to find out what these people would like to see on your community. Just simply ask them for their opinion on platforms like Facebook. Poll a panel and give them options to choose from".

Business coach Ian Dickson thinks UNICEF should first decide on which groups in this segment they want to focus on. "Community is about focus. The world is full of well meaning "communities for young people" that have failed miserably. Mainly through lack of focus, which wastes resources? Decide which young people matter to you, based around their common interests, and start from there. For example: young people with social problems, young people and volunteering, young people and politics/education/football etc. In that way you might do something useful. But "all young people" is a waste of your time. Between 18 and 30 years of age you go from school to university, or you find a job. Your career starts to fly, or fails. You rent/buy a

place to live. You find love and have kids, or not. A wide community aimed at that group, even when chopped into a few segments, it will fail".

**Analysis and discussion of the results:**

It is clear that UNICEF will first need to do some extra research before deciding on the content of their possible community. As could be seen in my decision matrix, I advised UNICEF to first do an external analysis in which they clearly analyse their target group. It looks like this is confirmed by the opinions of the experts that I mentioned above. The group high-educated, young people in the age group 18-30 might be too broad. UNICEF could, as Ian Dickson advises: segment this group according to some interests, characteristics or other factors they have in common. Then, the specific needs and interests of these groups could be identified. Once this is clear, it should be easier to decide upon the content of the community.

Although it is clear that UNICEF will first need to take some other steps before deciding on the content, I do want to give some concrete advices. As stated before before, I got a huge amount of concrete ideas and suggestions from the leading experts/community managers regarding the content for a possible community for UNICEF. I show some of these concrete examples in Appendix 3. Based on their suggestions, the theory discussed in my desk research and my observations of existing brand communities (both commercial and non-commercial) I came to the conclusion that there are three different types of communities (content-related) that could serve UNICEF's intention.  Of course, there are many other possibilities, but this is what most experts and managers agreed upon:

- **Option 1:** **A crowdsourcing (co-creation) community on which (young) people can share innovative ideas, suggestions and initiatives to help UNICEF in creating a better world for children.**

- **Option 2:** **An online community where students/young professionals can come to network, discuss and talk about child-related development issues.**

- **Option 3:** **An online community on which (young) people can get inspired by reading about new fund raising actions undertaken by others or UNICEF. They can also share the charity work that they are doing (whether or not it involves UNICEF).**

UNICEF could decide to combine the three options into one community, but I think so far we learned that focusing and starting small and simple is better. When considering one of these options, I believe UNICEF should realize that the different platform options also have their limitations. For example, building a crowdsourcing community is an option that would work out better on an own-hosted platform. Platforms like Facebook have

their limitations and not all of the elements of these options will be possible on platforms like that.

**Surveying the young generation**

To help UNICEF in the decision of choosing one of the options above, I decided to conduct a survey (see Appendix 1) among their target group. I approached the young generation through Facebook groups of higher vocational educational institutes and universities (HBO and WO in Dutch, respectively). In the survey I asked them in which of the three above-mentioned communities they would see themselves engage. Eighty students shared their opinion. Below are the results of this survey:

**Figure 12.1:** Results of question 1:

**Survey question: What is your gender?**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Male** | 41 | **51%** |
| **Female** | 39 | **49%** |
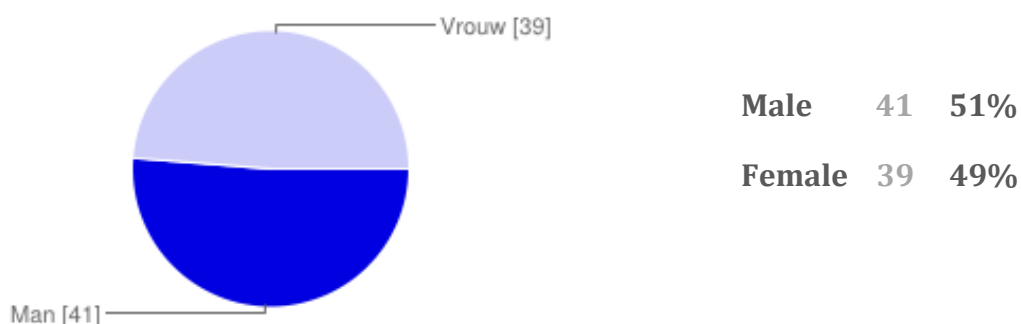
**Figure 12.2:** Results of question 2:

**Survey question: Which age group are you in?**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Younger than 18 years old** | 0 | **0%** |
| **18-23 years old** | 55 | **69%** |
| **24-30 years old** | 23 | **29%** |
| **30+** | 2 | **3%** |

**Figure 12.3:** Results of question 3:

**Would you engage on a crowdsourcing community on which you can share your innovative ideas, suggestions and initiatives to help the charity organization in creating a better world for children?**
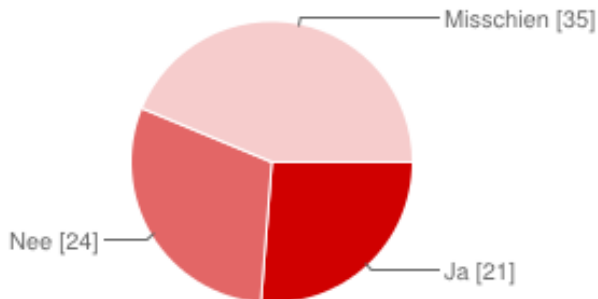


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Yes** | 21 | **26%** |
| **No** | 24 | **30%** |
| **Maybe** | 35 | **44%** |

**Figure 12.4:** Results of question 4:

**Would you participate in an online community where students and young professionals, like you, come to network, discuss and talk about child-related development issues?**
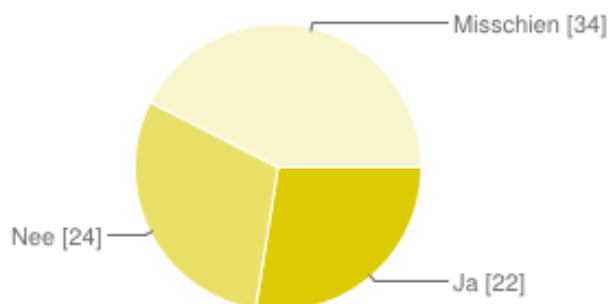


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Yes** | 22 | **28%** |
| **No** | 24 | **30%** |
| **Maybe** | 34 | **43%** |

**Figure 12.5:** Results of question 5:

**Would you visit an online community on which you can get inspired by reading about new fund raising actions undertaken by you, others or the charity organization?**
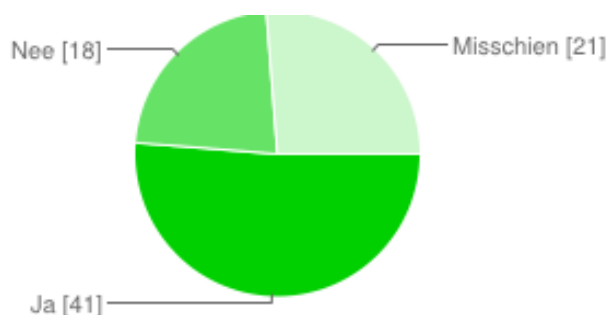


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Yes** | 41 | **51%** |
| **No** | 18 | **23%** |
| **Maybe** | 21 | **26%** |

**Analysis and discussion of results**

From the figures above it can be concluded that the respondents were quite equally divided when it comes to gender. Most of the respondents are in the age group 18-23. This makes the results of my survey a little bit less reliable and accurate. From the figures, we can conclude that option 3: 'which (young) people can get inspired by reading about new fund raising actions undertaken by others or UNICEF?' is most popular of all: 51% of all respondents would see themselves engage in such a community, 26% of them maybe.

Option 1 and 2 are quite equally divided when it comes to popularity: 30% of the respondents won't not see themselves engage in these types of communities. Overall the positive outcomes (yes and maybe) are dominant in the results of the survey.

I was quite surprised about these results. In chapter 2 I discussed the different needs that members fulfil via an online community. Relationship building, status, and influence are important needs that members fulfil. I therefore expected that option 2 would be (very) popular. I expected that option 1 would be the most popular. Crowdsourcing/co-creation communities are becoming more and more popular these days. In chapter 4 I have given the examples of Dell's *Ideastorm* and *MyStarbucksIdea* – which are still very successful. I think it is interesting to see and conclude that option 3 is clearly the most popular one.

Of course, there are some limitations about this survey. Eighty respondents are obviously not enough to get a really accurate view. Besides, people can say that they will engage in an online community, but in practice they can act differently and would maybe not engage at all. Brand communities are such a new development that it is quite hard for them as well, I guess, to already make a prediction on whether they like it or not. In my survey I could not mention the brand UNICEF: the organization did not want to raise expectations among these people that they might actually launch an online community already. This makes the results of this survey not very accurate. If people would know that the online community options were from a specific brand, they might have answered differently.

In conclusion: although this survey gives not a very reliable view on what option UNICEF should choose, it does give an indication which of the three options is most popular among these respondents: option 3.

We now have a clear idea on what could be the best possible focus, platform and content for a possible community for UNICEF. Let us continue with another important topic: management and control.

## 6.6 Management and control

We have come to the point that it is important to discuss management and control. (stage 10 in the decision matrix). UNICEF can launch a wonderful community, with great content, and even better tools, but if the community is not managed well, it will probably become a failure. "New technologies make new economies, and new economies make new jobs" says blogger Daren Brabham. Community management is an "emerging and fast growing profession, especially given the growth of branded online communities" (MacAlpine). I like to recall Richard Millington's advice:  "My message to non-profits on social good day is to switch their social media managers to community managers". Dachis Collaboratory, a social business design and strategy firm, asserts that: "The relatively new role of the community manager has become business critical in today's dynamic business environment". Dachis further states that: "For businesses to extract real, measurable value from a community, the community has to be integrated into the business and the business has to be both willing and able to collaborate with the community". "Community managers are expected to guide their organization through the community development process" (Millington). So, how can UNICEF Netherlands professionally manage their possible online community?

"The naive farmer farms as his parents, grandparents and great-grandparents did. He/she plants, hopes and harvests. Anything that goes well or poorly is the work of the gods. The professional farmer measures. He/she tests and understands how systems work and is constantly tweaking to improve them. When failure happens, the farmer doesn't rest until he/she understands why. Mostly, the professionals ask questions. What's next? How to improve? What's it worth? Why is this happening?" (entrepreneur and blogger Seth Godin).

According to Seth Godin, professional community managers should "have a deep and broad knowledge of their sector. They know the theory behind their work. They know the case studies of success and failure. They test, measure and adapt. They work to understand what is and isn't working and why". Millington advises managers to follow the "10 principles of professional community management". I have listed them in figure 13 below. It is important to note that these principles can change over time. Technology changes, so does the role of the community manager. Nevertheless, I think these principles are a good start for UNICEF to follow when managing their possible community.

**Figure 13:** **Principles of professional community management**

## The 10 Principles of Good, Professional Community Management

❑ Professional Community Managers build a strong sense of community amongst a specific group of individuals.

❑ Professional Community Managers work from proven templates to develop their community through the community development process (they are proactive, not reactive).

❑ Professional Community Managers excel at building relationships both with and between members.

❑ Professional Community Managers master their data and use their data to optimize every activity and stage of the membership life-cycle.

❑ Professional Community Managers have deep knowledge of technology, sociology, social-psychology, anthropology, network science, psychology, group dynamics and community development.

❑ Professional Community Managers build internal and external systems to scale their communities without incurring a large financial burden.

❑ Professional Community Managers integrate the community with the organization's systems.

❑ Professional Community Managers excel at stimulating and sustaining high levels of participation per member.

❑ Professional Community Managers excel at conflict resolution and work from proven techniques to resolve potentially detrimental disputes.

❑ Professional Community Managers deliver a clear ROI to their employers (not fuzzy statements concerning *engagement*).

unicef ✦

## 6.7 A financial perspective on the measurement of the ROI of the online community

In chapter 2 I introduced you to the business value of brand communities and some of the benefits that organizations have come across. Now that we have a kind of an idea of what type of community would best fit UNICEF's intention, it might be relevant to look at it from a financial perspective. In this part I will advise UNICEF on stage 11 in my decision matrix with a financial perspective on measuring the value of an online community. If they decide to invest in an online community, how do they know that it will pay off? Especially for non-profits, like UNICEF, every investment should have a reasonable return-on-investment (ROI). Every dollar needs to be spend wisely.

UNICEF obviously wants to understand and see through the relative impact of their online community efforts. The ideal situation would be to be able to determine quantifiable business results that are directly extractable to the online community. In reality, however, this is a very challenging (almost impossible) task due to a variety of reasons. Some brands measure the increased revenue (by overlaying their sales before their online community efforts) with the sales for the comparative time period since they began to invest in a community. They notice the difference and present the ROI. UNICEF could do this, but then with the number of donations or monthly supporters. In my opinion, this would not give an accurate presentation at all. Firstly, the brand community will be too entwined with other marketing efforts that UNICEF is doing to attribute any number to their community. Furthermore, there are other external forces that can influence results, such as the rebounding economy. Next, an online community is a platform where user-generated content, insights and ideas can inspire your business to do things differently. How are you going to measure the effect of a fundraising idea that a community member initiates? If you do not take other factors into account, you won't get an accurate and reliable indication of the ROI of your online community.

The main reason that it is very difficult to forecast or measure the ROI for UNICEF's online community is that their objectives with the young generation are very difficult to determine. They want to make the young generation more engaged with their organization. But what is an engaged young person? A person clicking through your website? A person watching a video that you hosted? A person commenting on one of your posts? Or is it a person who invites his friends to brainstorm an entire day on how to fundraise money for UNICEF? UNICEF has not yet made clear what exact behaviour they are looking for. They want higher brand awareness, increased trust, a stronger brand image and a higher awareness of child-related development issues among young people. But how do you measure this aspect and attribute it to your community? These are qualitative data. Their end-goal is an increased base of supporters, which is quantitative and easier to measure. However, this is their ultimate end-goal. It can take several years before they actually see this change happening.

**The difficulty with calculating a ROI for an online community**

I asked several experts to advise me on how to measure the ROI of an online community. Most experts said that the ROI of online communities and social media efforts are almost impossible to calculate. According to them, there are still no real valid metrics on the market. How to justify your online (community) practices is the B-I-G question for many managers. So why is it that so many brands dive into something that seems immeasurable? How do they ask for a budget if they cannot present a reasonable ROI?

Luckily, I found some ways that UNICEF could help in the process of seeking a way to determine their ROI.

**What UNICEF can do to measure the ROI of their Community Efforts?**

The more people love your community and brand, the more they will show their engagement. UNICEF Netherlands' Facebook page currently (June, 2012) has 3368 likes. But what does that really mean? Anyone can click on the 'Like' button. It does not yet mean that the person absolutely loves your organization, your work or cares enough to comment and/or share it with friends and eventually engage.

**My own pyramid**

I tried to visualize the levels of interaction that people can show during online community efforts in figure 14 below. How engaged people show up in their actions: the more engaged they are, the more they will interact. The more they interact, the more engaged they 'become'. In the first level, fans can visit your community or like your Facebook page. You know that they start to care more about your brand when they turn their observation into commenting and contributing. At the most engaged level they act. In the case of UNICEF for example, they might donate, volunteer or become a monthly supporter. The higher the levels in the pyramid, the easier it is to identify clear metrics to measure your ROI. In chapter 5 it was explained how online communities evolve in a community life cycle. I showed that in the very first stage, inception, it is very difficult to measure and determine the ROI. In the maturity phase, you should be able to have some clearly established ROI metrics. This correlates with the pyramid that I have composed below.

**Figure 14: ROI engagement pyramid**
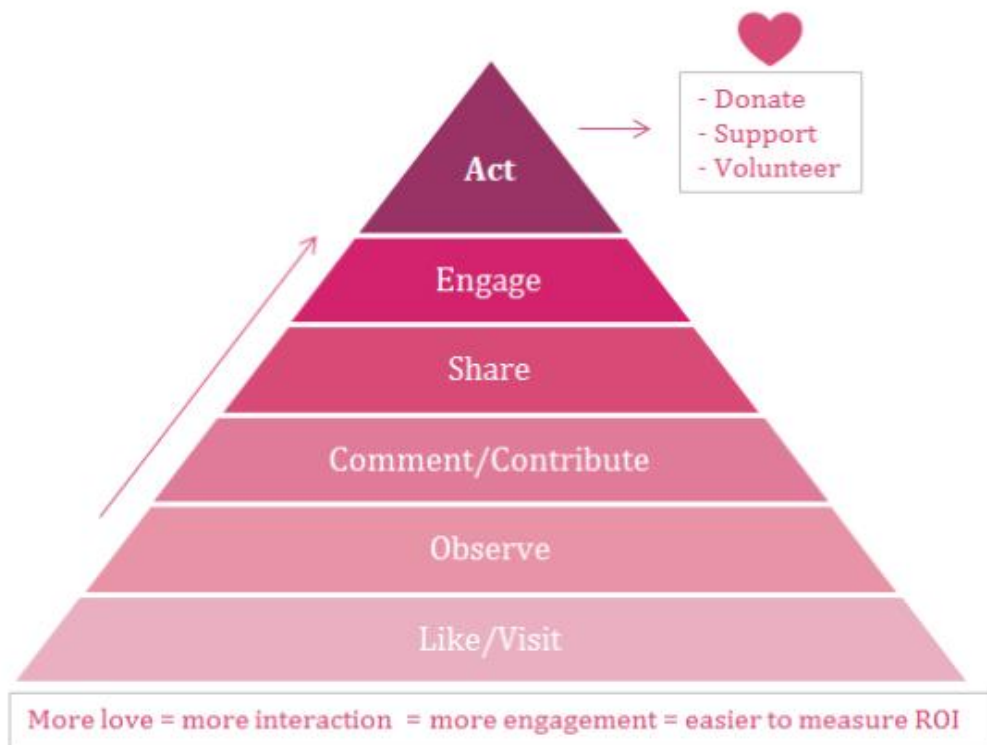


If your community becomes more mature, there will be higher levels of interaction and thus more engagement. The more engaged a person is and starts to act, the easier it is to identify ROI metrics.

So how do you measure engagement in your community? I have compared some metrics that are often used and listed the most important ones:

- number of unique or return visits
- number of page views
- number of community members/fans
- number of active users
- number of RSS feed subscribers
- number of comments or amount of user-generated content
- number of relevant topics/threads
- number of "likes" or "shares"
- number of responses to polls, contests etc.
- average length of time spent on the website
- read-to-post ratio (in member-to-member interaction programs)

"Most of these metrics describe what is happening in the community, but they do not tell much about what it means to the business," says consultant and community manager Joseph Cothrel (18). "Many people mistake these metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) for ROI. Metrics and data are not ROI. Metrics are how you show a positive or negative change in your business. Some things go up, some things go down. Metrics are numbers that describe which business indicators go up or down. Metrics alone won't show your company's return on investment" (Natalie Petouhoff 12). More important are the economic metrics, which measure the on-going financial value, or ROI for the community, says Joseph. He introduces two concepts that are central to thinking about community ROI: incremental value and conversion rate.

**Incremental value**

According to Joseph, this is "the difference between the value created by a business with an online community and the estimated value that the business would generate in the absence of such a community" (8). You basically compare a community member and a non-community member in terms of the activities that are most relevant to the business objectives of the community. UNICEF could measure the awareness of child-related development issues that non-members have compared to members. Or they can measure whether community members donate more or more often than non-members. When the difference is quantified it allows not only a point-in-time measure of the value created by community, but also a method for quantifying the value of future growth in community membership. It is important for UNICEF before applying this metrics, to first define the term community member clearly. Is it a person that visits your community weekly? Or is a community member also someone that visited your community just a couple of times?

**Conversion Rate**

"While many people think of conversion as the process of driving commercial transactions, the notion can be applied to any situation in which a business is seeking to motivate action on the part of the user" (Gurley Bey). A good example is Amazon, one of the web commerce leaders in the world. They have segmented their users into three categories: visitors, users and customers. Visitors are people who just visit the site; users are people, who have offered information, wrote a book review or provided feedback on the site; customers are people who have made an actual purchase. "Amazon.com focuses on conversion at each level, despite the fact that only customers put money in the till" (March). When calculating the ROI, conversion rate is an important input for calculating the impact of your community and the management of it. UNICEF can measure, just as Amazon, segment members into categories. For example a category that exists of people that just visits and observes a group that actively engages/generates content, and a group that donates, volunteers or becomes a monthly

supporter. Once they distinguished what they see as a conversion, they can clearly measure the ROI of their efforts.

*In conclusion:* although ROI is not the same as metrics, they do complement each other. You need metrics to measure the business value of your brand community. The equation is as follows:

$$ROI = \frac{Benefits - Costs}{Costs} \times 100 = \text{Percentage Return on the Investment}$$

This calculation is "based on coming up with numbers for the benefits that the brand community brought to the organization and the costs or investment associated with the initiative" (Natalie Petouhoff 18).

If I think of an example for UNICEF it would be as follows: metrics can show that the amount of community members went up.  Benefits of this change could be an increase in number of donations. This benefit could be a reduction in the amount spent on offline marketing activities that encourage people to donate. The costs can be determined by calculating the cost of the brand community. This would include the costs of the community manager, the amount spent on the platform, technology, campaigns etc.

To conclude: finding accurate and reliable ways to measure the ROI of your brand community is still a challenge that many brands deal with. Though, as we could read in chapter 2, there is significant business value that organizations can benefit from when investing in brand communities.

# Part D.

## Conclusion
## Recommendations

unite for
children

# Chapter 7: Conclusion

UNICEF Netherlands has a clear goal in mind: engaging the young generation. The organization realizes that this is the only way to turn them into donors who support their mission. But they are in a competitive environment and their target group is changing: they want an experience, an online experience. They are online, engaged in conversations with countless others. They use technology and Internet to find people with whom they share "important affinities, ranging from experiences to interests to beliefs to lifestyle choices" (Brown 35). They join online communities: groups of people with a shared interest and/or goal who meet with a certain frequency on the Internet.

The rise of branded online communities has offered marketers a great opportunity to create significant business value through powerful member participation. If executed well, increased word-of-mouth, a higher brand awareness, customer loyalty and valuable customer insights are some of the common main spin-offs. Reaching your consumers by means of brand community has become a significant source of competitive advantage for organizations. Large consumer brands, like Starbucks, LEGO and Dell, are already enjoying the benefits of strong consumer engagement as a result of their early experiments with community building. Although non-profit organizations also realize that engaging (potential) donors and supporters via online communities can create powerful value, it is clear that they are still hesitant. They need a call for action. High trust and a strong brand image are vital elements in creating a loyal base of supporters of your charity. Online communities are an opportunity for non-profits to build a stronger brand image and create meaningful relationships that are based on trust.  It is a great chance to build long-term engagement among the young generation.

When considering investing in an online community, it is important that UNICEF has an understanding on how online communities actually work.

People join online communities to fulfil both social and psychological needs. Some of them include: relationship-building, social identity/self-expression, enjoyment, helping others or belongingness. We can relate the needs that Maslow illustrated in his hierarchy of needs to online communities. Making your community members responsible for the content in an online community can help them fulfil higher levels of needs. Members derive fulfilment from the act of creation. Online communities evolve following five distinctive life cycle stages: inception, establishment, maturity, death and mitosis. It is important that managers understand this life cycle and are willingly to adjust their strategies in each stage. It is also important that they understand what different roles people play in online communities.  Understanding this will help them to make and maintain their online community a friendly place for both newcomers and old-timers.

There is a three-stage process that UNICEF can follow to foster and sustain engagement concerning their brand communities. The first stage is about understanding consumer needs and motivations. In the second stage, UNICEF can start to promote participation by cultivating connections, creating enjoyable experiences and encouraging content creation among members. The third stage is about motivating cooperation by mobilizing member leaders and encouraging members to co-create.

Once UNICEF understands all of this, they can use the decision matrix that I developed as a guideline in their decision-process of considering an online community. After an extensive internal and external analysis, UNICEF can decide whether a community strategy is necessary and relevant. According to the community experts and managers, a community strategy will be of great value to UNICEF and once executed and managed well, definitely serve their intention. They believe that a non-profit community is not much different than a commercially oriented community. Some even state that UNICEF's community will have a higher chance of success.

If UNICEF agrees upon the relevance of an online community, they can start with the creation decision and define objectives and assign responsibilities.  After that, they can shape the community frame.  UNICEF should first decide upon the focus of their online community. Based on the Shirt-matrix and the arguments given by the experts and managers, we can conclude that UNICEF should focus their online community on their brand and work, but in a subtle way. The main focus should be on areas that interest the young generation.

Deciding what would be the best platform is the next step in shaping the community frame. There are several options that UNICEF can choose from. They can build an entire new platform, use existing social media platforms or integrate their online community with their corporate website. Copying the community model of UNICEF New York's community Voices of Youth is not a realistic option, because they have a different goal and target group. Based on the views of the community managers and experts we can conclude that the best option for UNICEF is to start small, with simple collaboration/engagement tools on existing social media platforms. If UNICEF succeeds on these platforms, they can decide to invest in their own hosted platform, either new or an integration with their current website. In other words, start with a managed community and move on to a direct community if you are successful.

Once the platform decision is made and UNICEF has an idea of what interests and engages the young generation, they can decide upon the content of their community. Based on my theoretical research, observations of existing brand communities that I have done and the views of the experts and managers, we can say that there are three possible community content options that can serve UNICEF's intention.  The first option is a crowdsourcing (co-creation) community where (young) people can share innovative ideas, suggestions and initiatives to help UNICEF creating a better world for children. The second option is an online community where students/young professionals can

come to network, discuss and talk about child-related development issues. The third option is an online community on which (young) people can get inspired by reading about new fund raising actions undertaken by others, themselves or UNICEF. Based on the survey that I conducted among UNICEF's target group, it can be concluded that option three is the most popular: 56% of the respondents said they would definitely visit such an online community and 34% said they maybe would, which adds up to 90% of (actual and potential) young visitors to such UNICEF community platform.

When the community frame is shaped, UNICEF can decide whether they have the needed competencies to build and implement the online community. If they do not have the right capabilities, they can find external parties or consultants to support them. Then, the online community can be implemented.

UNICEF can launch a wonderful community, with great content, and even better tools, but if the community is not managed well, it will probably become a failure. Here, the role of the community manager is crucial. "Community managers are expected to guide their organization through the community development process" (Millington). They can do this by following the 10 principles of good and professional community management. Important elements in these principles are: building a strong sense of community among members, excelling at building relationships, conflict resolution and stimulating high levels of participation per member.

UNICEF probably also wants to understand and see through the relative impact of their online community efforts. Therefore, it is important that UNICEF management regularly evaluates the success of their online community. The ideal situation would be to be able to determine quantifiable business results that are directly extractable to the online community. But this is a challenging task. The main reason that it is very difficult to forecast or measure the Return-on-Investment for a possible online community for UNICEF, is that their objectives with the young generation are very difficult to measure, because they are mostly qualitative. Besides that, finding accurate ways of measuring the ROI of online communities and social media efforts is still something that many businesses struggle with. Fortunately, there are methods that can help UNICEF in getting an indication on the results of their community efforts. UNICEF can use the method of "incremental value" and measure the difference of value created with an online community and the estimated value that UNICEF would generate in the absence of a community. UNICEF could also use the conversion rate as a way to measure their online community success. If they want to use this method, it is important that they first clearly define what they consider a conversion. UNICEF could also use metrics that are quantifiable (such as number of active users or number of page views) to identify the resulting benefits. These benefits could lead to reduction costs. This data will therefore allow UNICEF to get a more precise indication concerning the return-on-investment of their online community.

# Chapter 8: Recommendations

## Seven concrete pieces of advice

I will now give some recommendations on concrete next steps that UNICEF can take in order to set up an online community especially submitted to the relatively young (18-30 years old) generation. Also, I will give some suggestions for further research.

### Recommendation 1: It is all about the online experience.

Remember that guy on the street I gave €50 euros to and tell him to donate it to the charity organization of his choice? This guy, representing the young generation, is bombarded with constant images and messages of charity organizations asking for support. This generation might want to do good and support (financial and/or non-financial), but it is clear that they want/expect an experience. They want something in return, more than just a warm feeling. They want to feel that they contributed to a better world and see the actual effect of their donated money. And most importantly – they want to share their contributions with others. "Look at me, I donated, I am a good person". I am convinced that UNICEF can engage this generation and turn them into loyal brand supporters as long as they give them the experience they are looking for, as longs as they invest in building meaningful relationships with this generation, based on trust. Why: because donating and supporting a charity organization is all about trust. I think that trust has become even more important in this competitive 'giving environment' and the quite sceptical attitude that some people have about non-profits.

I believe the main strength of UNICEF is their strong brand image. UNICEF is a global organization, driven by the urgency to improve the lives of children all over the world. Their brand is known for professionalism, transparency and results. But what is their brand personality among young people? This generation is often online: highly active on social media platforms and online communities. If you want to reach and engage them with success you need to give them an online experience. UNICEF Netherlands is not giving them a real online experience.  At least, not yet. An online community is a great way to reach this target group and donate them an experience in return. You can give them a voice, listen to their conversations and inspire them. Once executed well, engagement and meaningful relationships will be the main spin-offs. Non-profits think they have a problem: "it is a charity community, it is not amusing". Remove this idea from your head. Forget about being charitable, you are creating a community, study your audience, and give them what they care about. Give them enjoyment and inspiration. It is not charity; it is an activity that is important for you ánd them. It is fun!

## Recommendation 2: Dig a little deeper.

I recommend UNICEF Netherlands to pre-start by doing more research on the following elements:

- What is the current brand image of UNICEF among this group? What comes first to their mind when they hear about UNICEF?
- How would they see themselves engage in an UNICEF online community?
- What (child-related) development issues do they care about?
- Where do they mostly spend their time online?

These are some clear examples of questions that could be of importance before really starting an online community. Answers to these questions can be found with something dead simple as an online survey. The results of the survey that I conducted among this generation shows that people are willing to share their opinion about this subject. UNICEF could also use Facebook and/or LinkedIn to start some polls and ask people to vote for certain options.

Other important elements to consider researching are:

- Are there any online communities or websites on which people already talk about non-profit organizations? Or even about UNICEF in specific?
- What is said online about your organization, negative and positive?
- Do you already have super-fans/brand advocates out there that you can try to reach?
- How are other non-profit organizations making use of brand communities? What can you learn from that?

These are important elements as well. I think it is a crucial first step to find out whether you already have an audience online that talks/converses about your brand. It would be great if UNICEF would find out that they already have a base of brand advocates who are willing to help them with their online community. Brand advocates are a great way to make your online community go viral and reach your target (group) more effectively.

**Recommendation 3: Start small, grow bigger.**

Based on the findings of my research, I can recommend UNICEF to start with small, simple engagement tools using existing social media platforms (Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter etc.). It is a great way to "test the waters" and to see whether this generation is willing to show small acts of engagement. See figure 15 below for a visualization of what I mean.

If UNICEF succeeds and finds out that these people are willing to engage more, I would recommend to slowly integrate these smaller communities into more larger, focused communities. UNICEF could start very simple by using free blog websites, such as Blogger or Wordpress. On these blogs they can have more focus. They can even decide to make different blogs for different segments in their target group. For example a group of young people who did voluntary work and want to share their experiences. What about a group of people who want to start a small project to raise money for children in developing countries? The ideal situation would be if UNICEF could create a base of brand advocates through these focused communities. Brand advocates can become one of your greatest assets: they will evangelize everything you do and encourage others to support your brand too. Once you have real success in these focused communities, I would highly recommend UNICEF to build an own community platform, where (important) actual issues come together. As I discussed already, there are a lot of benefits from having your own platform. UNICEF could use brand advocates to generate new traffic to this new community. Once executed well – the community can be a vibrant, lively place where UNICEF and the young generation meet to create a better world for children. I would highly recommend UNICEF to encourage content in any of these communities. It will help them to foster and sustain engagement, because this fulfils an important need of many people.

**Figure 15:** Start small, grow bigger.



Step 1: Build small online communities on existing social media platforms    Succes?    Step 2: Integrate these small communities into larger, focused communities    Succes?    Step 3: Build a large online community on your own platform

### Recommendation 4: Avoid "me too" marketing.

I would advise UNICEF to learn from existing community examples (for example the ones I discussed in chapter 4), but avoid copying their community concepts or models. UNICEF should find their own unique way of building a community aimed at serving their intention. Building similar community models with little or no distinctiveness will not benefit UNICEF in the long run.  If your community is similar to other ones, your community will be harder to remember for people. Besides, the chance that people recommend your community to others will become smaller.

Key differentiators would be: focus, specialization and a strong (brand) personality on your community. Be unique and people will come back.

### Recommendation 5: Be online, live offline.

I believe UNICEF will reach the full benefit of their online community efforts if they host offline activities for the young generation as well. In other words: integrate your online communities with offline activities. Your community members will bond much more with each other and with your organization if you organize offline meetings. Your online community and brand is static. You will give your brand and organization a "face" if you organize exiting offline activities as well. People will not then only see a logo, but the passionate enthusiastic staff of UNICEF as well. I am convinced that this will definitely lead to higher levels of sustainable engagement among the young generation.

### Recommendation 6: A call for action.

Let's face it. The chance is big that the results of my thesis will be found important to UNICEF, but not urgent (yet). But I think UNICEF need to realize that they are in a competitive industry and that the "donating behaviour" of the young generation is changing. In the nearby future technology and developments might allow them to start up own projects or support projects of others with just a simple click on their smartphones. I would recommend UNICEF to make a forecast of their position in 2020. Who do they think will support them? What main threats could they face? What opportunities? I think it is urgent to brainstorm about this future look and start to think of concrete steps to (be) take(n). I think I have given the necessary food for thought to seriously consider the option of an online community to serve UNICEF's intention. Now, it is time for UNICEF to give (online community) efforts aimed at engaging the relatively young generation a high-priority.

## Recommendation 7: Treat your online community like a garden.

I would recommend UNICEF to treat their possible online community like a garden. Ian Dickson gave me the following advice about this aspect:

*"You can't create Community. You can create Content, and you can outreach to people to empower them through that content and then you might end up with a community. Community is like a garden - seeds (technology) you can buy and planting (content) you can do too, but to turn that into a garden takes long term hands on effort".*

I recommend UNICEF to be patient with the results of their online community efforts. Like Ian Dickson says, you cannot just "create a community". In theory you can build one. In practice, it will only be a community as long as people start to feel a passion for the community and regularly come back to deliver contributions to it. Every successful community started small. Do you know how Facebook looked like when it was just hosted? Both boring and ugly. Thus, it takes time to make and keep a community vibrant and lively. But it can be worth the effort and patience. UNICEF should treat their online community like a garden. They should give it enough attention, love, and beautiful plants (interesting content) and your community will grow, flourish and prosper. Yet be patient.

# Part E.

## Bibliography

# Bibliography

## Works cited

Abrams, Dennis. *"Are Social Media Sites the New Publishing Slush Pile?."* Publishing Perspectives, 4 Nov. 2011. Web. 8 June 2012.

Ahearne, Michael, John Mathieu, and Adam Rapp. "To Empower or Not to Empower Your Sales Force? An Empirical Examination of the Influence of Leadership Empowerment Behaviour on Customer Satisfaction and Performance." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 90.5 (2005): 945-55. Print.

Ahituv, Niv, and Seev Neumann. *Principles of Information Systems for Management.* Dubuque, IA: W.C. Brown, 1982. Print.

Algesheimer, Rene, and Paul Dholakia. "Do Customers Communities Pay Off?" *Harvard Business Review* Nov. 2006. Web.

Algesheimer, Rene, Uptal Dholokia, and Andreas Herrmann. "The Social Influence of Brand Community: Evidence From European Car Clubs." *Journal of Marketing* (2005). Print.

Andrews, Dorine C. "Audience-specific Online Community Design." *Communications of the ACM* 45.4 (2002): 64. Print.

Ashenden, Angela. *Strategic Insight Building Online Communities for Business.* Rep. MWD Advisors, 2010. Print.

Baird, Carolyn. "From Social Media to Social CRM: What Customers Want. The First in a Two-part Series." *IBM.* IBM, 1 Aug. 2011. Web. 6 June 2012.

Ben Yahia, I. "Non-commercial B2C Virtual Communities: Definition and Classification. An Exploratory Qualitative Study." *IADIS International Journal* 5 (2005): 129-44. Print.

Brabham, Daren. "Defining Online Community Management." Web log post. *Dbrabham.* Wordpress, 24 Jan. 2012. Web. 22 May 2012.

Brown, Arnold. "Relationships, Community, and Identity in the New Virtual Society." *The Futurist* (2011): 29-34. Print.

Chojnacka, Anna. "1%CLUB." *1%CLUB.* One Percent Club, 2006. Web. 12 June 2012.

Collie, Mack. "How Do YOU Define Community?" Web log post. *Moblogsmoproblems.* Blogger, 4 Oct. 2006. Web. 28 May 2012.

Cothrel, Joseph. *Measuring the Success of an Online Community*. Rep. 2011. Print.

Crossley, Craig D., Rebecca J. Bennett, Steve M. Jex, and Jennifer L. Burnfield. "Development of a Global Measure of Job Embeddedness and Integration into a Traditional Model of Voluntary Turnover." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 92.4 (2007): 1031-042. Print.

Dachis Collaborator. *The New Community Manager Defined: Secrets of Success and Five Common Mistakes to Avoid*. Rep. Sysomos, 2011. Print.

Dholakia, U. M., V. Blazevic, C. Wiertz, and R. Algesheimer. "Communal Service Delivery: How Customers Benefit From Participation in Firm-Hosted Virtual P3 Communities." *Journal of Service Research* 12.2 (2009): 208-26. Print.

Foster, Dawn. "Defining Online Community." Web log post. *Fastwonderblog*. Fast Wonder, 28 Dec. 2007. Web. 27 May 2012.

Fuller, J., G. Jawecki, and H. Muhlbacher. "Innovation Creation by Online Basketball Communities." *Journal of Business Research* 60.1 (2007): 60-71. Print.

Funny Garbage. "Harper Collins Gets Their Tween on with Inkpop Fan Fiction!" *HarperCollins Inkpop Website*. Funny Garbage, 2011. Web. 14 June 2012.

Furendal, David. "Quality of Life: Can Online Communities Satisfy Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs?" *Cap&Design* 2007. Web.

Glaser, Barney G., Anselm L. Strauss, and Elizabeth Strutzel. "The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research." *Nursing Research* 17.4 (1968): 364. Print.

Godin, Seth. "Naive or Professional?" Web log post. *Seth Godin's Blog*. Seth Godin, 15 July 2011. Web. 5 June 2012.

Godin, Seth. *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us*. New York: Portfolio, 2008. Print.

Guidry, Julie. *Increasing Customer Satisfaction and Reducing Costs through an Online Technical Support Community*. Rep. SSPA Horizons, 2002. Print.

Gurley, B. "The One Internet Metric That Matters." *Fortune* 2000. Web.

Hagel, John, and Arthur Armstrong. *Net Gain: Expanding Markets through Virtual Communities*. Boston: Harvard Business School, 1997. Print.

Halbesleben, W., and S. Wheeler. *Engagement*. Rep. Van Door Lemon, 2009. Print.

Howard, Michael. "HOW TO: Manage a Sustainable Online Community." *Mashable*. Mashable, 30 June 2010. Web. 12 May 2012.

Howard, Rob. "How Businesses Can Harness the Power of Online Communities." *Mashable.* Mashable, 9 Apr. 2012. Web. 1 June 2012.

Iriberri, Alicia. *Building Online Community: An Action Research Project.* Rep. Romano N., 2005. Print.

Jarvenpaa, S., and K. Knoll. *Is Anybody Out There? Antecedents of Trust in Global Virtual Teams.* Rep. 1988. Print.

Jarvis, Jeff. "Dell Learns to Listen." *Bloomberg Business Week*. Bloomberg, 17 Oct. 2007. Web. 5 June 2012.

Kim, Amy Jo. *Community Building on the Web*. Berkeley, CA: Peachpit, 2000. Print.

Kling, Rob, and Christina Courtright. "Group Behaviour and Learning in Electronic Forums: A Sociotechnical Approach." *The Information Society* 19.3 (2003): 221-35. Print.

Lam, Johny. *Customer Community CRM Integrations for Social CRM*. Rep. 2011. Print.

Lee, F.S.L., D. Vogel, and M. Limayem. "Virtual Community Informatics: A Review and Research Agenda." *Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application (JITTA)* (2003): 47-61. Print.

MacAlpine, Steve. "Social Insights." *Community Managers in Australia*. Social Insights, 24 Jan. 2011. Web. 15 June 2012.

Malohtra, A., S. Gosain, and A. Hars. *Evolution of a Virtual Community: Understanding Design Issues through a Longitudinal Study.* Rep. Degross, 1997. Print.

March, Andre. "Riding the Wild, Perilous Waters of Amazon.com'" *New York Times* 1999. Print.

Marshall, Alex, and Sean Moffitt. *Brand Communities: "It Takes a Community – Not a Campaign – to Raise a Brand"*. Rep. 2009. Print.

Mathwick, Charla, and Edward Rigdon. "Play, Flow, and the Online Search Experience." *Journal of Consumer Research* 31.2 (2004): 324-32. Print.

McClure, Jen. "Word-of-Mouth, Insights, Customer Loyalty Big Benefits of Online Communities." *Marketing Charts*. Marketing Charts, 2008. Web. 11 June 2012.

McDermot, Clare. "LEGO: From Toy Company to Multi-Media Brand." *Content Marketing Strategy, Research and "How-to" Advice*. Content Marketing Institute, 1 Apr. 2011. Web. 17 June 2012.

Millington, Richard. "Adopt a 24 Hour Response Rule." Web log post. *Feverbee*. Feverbee, 2 Sept. 2010. Web. 1 June 2012.

Millington, Richard. "Different Types of Communities." Web log post. *Feverbee*. Feverbee, 23 Nov. 2012. Web. 1 June 2012.

Millington, Richard. "Introducing The Map - A Proven Process For Developing Successful Online Communities." Web log post. *Feverbee*. Feverbee, 12 Jan. 2012. Web. 21 May 2012.

Millington, Richard. "Using Communities To Change The World: What Non-Profits Need To Change." Web log post. *Feverbee*. Feverbee, 23 Sept. 2010. Web. 13 June 2012.

Millington, Richard. "The 10 Principles Of Professional Community Management." Web log post. *Feverbee*. Feverbee, 11 Oct. 2011. Web. 1 June 2012.

Nonnecke, B., and J. Preece. *Lurker Demographics: Counting the Silent.* Rep. The Hague: Human Factors, 2000. Print.

Owyang, Jeremiah. "Defining the Term: Online Community." Web log post. *Web-strategist*. Engage Sciences, 28 Dec. 2007. Web. 28 May 2012.

Petouhoff, Natalie. *ROI of Social Media: Myths, Truths and How To Measure*. Rep. Radian, 2012. Print.

Porter, C. E., and N. Donthu. "Cultivating Trust and Harvesting Value in Virtual Communities." *Management Science* 54.1 (2008): 113-28. Print.

Porter, Costance Elise, Naveen Donthu, William H. MacElroy, and Donna Wydra. *How to Foster and Sustain Engagement in Virtual Communities*. Rep. 2011. Print.

Porter, E.C. "A Typology of Virtual Communities: A Multi-disciplinary Foundation for Future Research." *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 10 (2004): 2-6. Print.

Preece, Jenny. *Online Communities: Designing Usability, Supporting Sociability*. New York: John Wiley, 2000. Print.

Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub., 1993. Print.

Rhodes, Matt. "Social Media Case Study: LEGO CLICK." Web log post. *Fresh Networks*. Fresh Networks, 21 Jan. 2010. Web. 24 May 2012.

Rock, Sara. "Dell Invites Customers to Share Ideas and Original Video via Dell IdeaStorm and StudioDell." *PR Web*. PR Web, 20 Feb. 2007. Web. 5 June 2012.

Schau, H.J., Albert M. Muninz, and Eric J. Arnould. "How Brand Community Practices Create Value." *Journal of Marketing* (2009). Print.

Shirky, Clay. *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*. New York: Penguin, 2008. Print.

Smack. *Brand Communities: For the Love of Brands*. Rep. Smack, 2011. Print.

Thompson, Ken. "New Research on Hard Benefits of Online Customer Communities." *The Bumble Bee*. The Bumble Bee, 15 Apr. 2012. Web. 5 June 2012.

Vargo, L., and R. Lusch. "Service-Dominant Logic: Continuing the Evolution." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* (2008): 1-10. Print.

We Media. "Chapter 4: The Rules of Participation." *We Media*. The Media Center, 21 Sept. 2003. Web. 1 June 2012.

Weisnewski, Mary. *Why Should Nonprofits Invest in Brand? And, Where to Begin.* Rep. 2009. Print.

Wenger, Etienne, Richard A. McDermott, and William Snyder. *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School, 2002. Print.

Zogby, John. *The Way We'll Be: The Zogby Report on the Transformation of the American Dream*. New York: Random House, 2008. Print.

## Appendix 1: Survey

Below is the survey that I conducted among the young target group of UNICEF. Unfortunately it is in Dutch. For the reader who does not speak Dutch: I basically first try to convince the reader to fill in the survey. Then, I ask them to "donate" their clicks in just one minute. The questions are about gender, age group and the three options that I discussed in section 6.3.3. In the last, optional question I ask the respondent to fill in any comments or suggestions that he/she has.

### Donate 5 Clicks in 1 Minute With this Short Survey!

Met slechts 5 clicks heb je dit korte survey al ingevuld!

What's in it for me?

Een bevredigend, voldaan gevoel.

Zie die paar klikjes tijdens het invullen als een kleine donatie aan het goede doel waar ik dit onderzoek als studente voor doe. Besef dat jouw antwoorden heel waardevol zullen zijn. Jouw inzichten zullen de organisatie helpen in hun missie een betere wereld te verwezenlijken voor kinderen in de wereld. Want terwijl wij ons druk maken om onze studie, geld en relaties zijn er ook kleine kinderen aan de andere kant van de wereld aan het vechten voor hun leven en toekomst.

Een van de grootste goede doelenorganisaties wereldwijd waar ik mijn afstudeeronderzoek voor doe, wil graag de volgende vraag beantwoord zien:

Hoe moet een online community eruitzien met als doel hoogopgeleide studenten en young professionals zoals jij, bewuster en meer betrokken te maken met de problemen van kansarme kinderen in de wereld?

In slechts 5 clicks, doneer jij jouw antwoorden en draag je al bij aan een betere toekomst voor deze kinderen.

Je input zal ontzettend worden gewaardeerd.

*Vereist

**Geslacht** *

○ Man

○ Vrouw

**In welke leeftijdsgroep zit je?** *

○ Jonger dan 18 jaar

○ 18-23 jaar

○ 24-30 jaar

○ 30+

**Zou je actief worden op een crowdsourcing community waarop je met jouw innovatieve ideeën, suggesties en initiatieven mee kunt denken over de positieverbetering van kansarme kinderen in de wereld?** *

Voorbeelden van soortgelijke online communities: Dell Ideastorm, My Starbucks Idea, Battle of Concepts etc.

○ Ja

○ Nee

○ Misschien

**Zou je deelnemen aan een online community waar studenten & young professionals zoals jij komen om te netwerken, discussiëren en mee te praten over onderwerpen gerelateerd aan de positie van kinderen wereldwijd?** *

○ Ja

○ Nee

○ Misschien

**Zou een online community je aantrekken waar je inspiratie op kunt doen door te lezen over het werk/projecten dat de goede doelenorganisatie, anderen of jij hebben uitgevoerd om een betere wereld voor kinderen te verwezenlijken?** *

○ Ja

○ Nee

○ Misschien

**Heb je zelf nog opmerkingen, suggesties of ideeën voor een online community (voor een goede doelenorganisatie) waarop studenten & young professionals zoals jij actief zouden worden?**

Het beantwoorden van deze vraag is niet verplicht.

[ Insturen ]

Mogelijk gemaakt door Google Documenten

# Appendix 2: List of Contributors

## International community experts

### Seth Godin

Entrepreneur, author and public speaker.

American Way Magazine calls him: "America's greatest marketer".

www.sethgodin.com


### Beth Kanter

Author of Beth's Blog: How Nonprofits Can Use Social Media, one of the longest running

and most popular blogs for nonprofits.

Co-Author of the book *The Networked Nonprofit.*

Visiting Scholar: Nonprofits and Social Media at David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

http://www.bethkanter.org/


### Etienne Wenger

Consultant and public speaker. Globally recognized thought leader in the field of social

learning and communities of practice. He has authored and co-authored seminal articles

and books on the topic.

http://wenger-trayner.com/


### Amy Sampleward

Membership Director at NTEN.

Contributor/Blogger at Stanford Social Innovation Review.

Community Organizer at Nonprofit Technology Network & NetSquared.

http://amysampleward.org/

## Richard Millington

Richard Millington is the founder of FeverBee Limited, an online community consultancy, and The Pillar Summit, an exclusive course in Professional Community Management. His blog is a rich source of interesting articles about online community building.

http://www.feverbee.com/

## Debra Askanase

Blogger and experienced digital strategist, non-profit executive, and community organizer. Community Organizer 2.0 works with businesses and nonprofits to develop actionable and measurable digital media strategies that meet organizational goals.

http://www.communityorganizer20.com/

## Lauren Klein

Lauren partners with organizations that are designing conceptual models for creating vibrant and sustainable community models in strategic and highly collaborative ways.

http://www.laurenklein.net/

## J-P De Clerck

Marketing trainer, speaker and author.

http://www.conversionation.net/

## Angela Connor

Blogger and Online Community Strategist.

http://blog.angelaconnor.com/

### Bill Johnston (Dell)

Director of Online Community & Social Media, Commercial Business at Dell.

http://redplasticmonkey.wordpress.com/

### Vanessa Dimauro

Blogger and CEO of Leader Networks - a research and consulting firm that helps clients create social strategies and online communities for business.

http://www.leadernetworks.com/

### Rosemary O'neill

President at Social Strata, Inc. - a social content technology company.

http://company.socialstrata.com/

### Philip Wride

Director, Client Services EMEA at Zmags.

Social Media Strategist, Community Manager and Blogger at

http://www.pwride.co.uk

### Patrick O'kofee

Blogger and the founder of the iFroggy Network, a publisher of websites. He has been managing online communities since 2000 and is the author of *"Managing Online Forums"* a practical guide to managing online social spaces.

### Jono Bacon

Community Manager Canonical Ltd., engineering manager, consultant and author.

http://www.jonobacon.org/

### Martin Reed

Community manager, builder and consultant at Community Spark.

http://www.communityspark.com


### Jake McKee

Jake McKee is blogger and the Chief Idea Officer and Ant Wrangler at Ant's Eye View, a customer experience strategy practice focused on helping clients escalate their customer experience. Jake used to work as the Global Community Relations Specialist for the LEGO company.

http://www.communityguy.com/


### Holly Seddon

Editor, writer and community consultant.

http://www.hollyseddon.com


### Blaise Grimes-Viort

Online communities manager and social media strategist

http://blaisegv.com/


### Alison Michalk

Australian Instructor at The Pillar Summit.

Co-Founder at Swarm.

Director and Community Manager at Quiip.

http://quiip.com.au/

## Dutch community experts

### Kirsten Wagenaar

Senior community consultant at KREM.

Founder and Chair at Vereniging Community Management NL.

http://www.communitymanagers.nl/

http://www.krem.nl


### Martin Kloos

Senior strategist at Social Embassy.

Board member at Community Managers NL.

Blogger and Web developer.

http://www.martinkloos.nl


### Wim Woning

Community consultant at ADV Market Research.

Blogger at Marketingfacts.


### Robert Jan Droogleever-Fortuyn

Projectmanager Business Development & Partnerships at Hyves.


### Pelle Aardema

Freelance consultant on online collaboration and online communities for non-profits.

www.pelleaardema.nl

## Martijn Staal

Online strategist & accountmanager at Oogst.

Blogger at Marketingfacts and Frankwatching.

www.martijnstaal.nl

## Elien van Riet

Community manager: she develops and maintains off- and online communities for the non-profit sector.

www.elienvanriet.com

## Irene den Ouden

Independent social media consultant and market researcher.

Founder and owner of IDO Connect.

www.irenedenouden.nl

## Jasper van Elferen

Owner of Demare – an agency that gives strategic advice and helps develop communication plans, websites, apps and (digital) magazines and print productions. Demare is specialized in advising organizations with a social mission (such as healthcare, housing, welfare, education, government, and charities).

www.demare.nl

## Frank Meeuwsen

Founder and Editor in Chief of Lifehacking.nl, the first Dutch blog about smarter working and living.

http://incredibleadventure.nl

**Marco Derksen**

Lecturer at Hogeschool Arnhem Nijmegen (HAN).

CEO of Marketingfacts BV.

CEO of Upstream BV.

www.upstream.nl


**Margreet Hemmen**

Community manager WNF-hyve at WWF Netherlands.

Interim Internet en communiation advisor at INFAQT (self-employed).

http://margreethemmen.wordpress.com/


**Job de Groot (STAR)**

Information & brand manager XXXIVth STAR Board at RSM STAR.

Owner of ThinkBeyond.

Member of Philips Student Panel PHI 2012 at Philips.

Coordinator production team at TEDxRotterdam.


**Grietje Blom**

Community manager at inSided Media.

Board member at Stichting Duurzame Samenleving Papua Barat.


**Lode Broekman**

Community Manager at Flexplek 020.

http://www.flexplek020.nl

# Community managers

**Ian Dickson**

**Michael Howard**

**John Belshe**

**Christopher Childs**

**Zachary Chastain**

**Marlies de Gooijer**

**Aldo de Moor**

**Mohamad Al Shafie**

**Rob Quick**

**BJ Wishinsky**

**Axel Schultze**

**Alexander Drebs**

**Jonathan Trenn**

**June Macdonald**

**Wilfried Shock**

**Craig TD**

**Lovisa Williams**

**Nellie Newman**

**Monika Roozen**

**Caroline Bottomley**

**Arie Moyal**

**Edward Davies**

**Rebecca Newton**

## UNICEF staff

**Paola Storchi**

**Jasper van Maarschalkerweerd**

**Etienne Leue**

## Target group of UNICEF Netherlands

**80 survey respondents**

# Appendix 3: Examples of group discussions

I will now show you some examples of group discussions that I commenced on platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn – were community managers meet to share their knowledge.

Follow
Christopher
"Toby"

**Christopher "Toby" Childs** • I agree with John. A community that is based around the consumers needs is always better. People will be turned off the second they feel like they are being used and only getting brand propaganda. The fact that the community is being held on a UNICEF server, or was created by UNICEF should be enough of a plug and people won't forget that.
My recommendation to UNICEF would be to not be afraid to take part in the conversations, but always remember that they are another voice in the conversation, not THE voice in the conversation.

24 days ago • Unlike • Reply privately • Flag as inappropriate                     👍 1

Follow Zachary

**Zachary Chastain** • No matter what your theme is, conversational posts, calls to action, and with Timeline lots of visual content, are all key to getting engagement from your followers.

As for whether to focus on your brand or on the problems your brand tries to solve, it depends on the brand. If it's a well known brand that people like to associate with simply for the brand (high end clothing is a good example of this, sports-wear as well, such as Nike) then you can have some of the focus on your brand, but the most well received content will always be structured around something which interests your fans (ie. the problem your brand should solve for them, or service it should provide for them, rather than talking too much about the brand itself) and if you actually take the time to listen to and respond to each and every one of them (trust me, I know this is no small feat with 1 Million+ size Facebook Communities) then you'll get great results from conversational content as well. (ie, "What's your opinion on "X"), though it's still best to try to keep this centered around the brand's focus, rather than getting too abstract (ie, "What are you doing this weekend" or "What's your favorite color").

Also, when reaching important milestones in your community's growth (or important milestones for the brand) be sure to thank the community, and remind them that it wouldn't be possible without their contributions and support. They'll absolutely love this, the engagement on posts that thank and reward your community will blow you out of the water, and you won't even need to include a call to action! :)

Technically the community is a type of loyalty program, just not quite so overt about it. It's a great idea to approach the most active, knowledgeable, and helpful voices in your community, those who truly support the brand and its message, and create an advocacy program around those people. Reward them for the contributions in some way, big or small, and create a real ongoing conversation with them. Ask them for feedback and their own opinions. Get them in touch with important people in the company, do something to make them feel special. If you truly want a sense of community, you need influential advocates who will drive that sense of community and get fan to fan conversations going and keep them alive. This is particularly difficult with the advent of Timeline, as user to user engagement has fallen because fans rarely actually come to your page to engage with you, most interactions are done from the feed now. This is also why conversational content and calls to action (ask them a question, ask them to share their own thoughts, ask them to like the post, etc) are so important to getting your community to engage with your content, with your brand, and with each other.

**Amy Kuenzi** I think option 2 is a good way to reach people (where the fish are), and you can direct them to your website, which is a platform that you have more control over. FB users understand how the platform changes and how business pages have to adapt, but using social media campaigns on already-popular platforms can increase awareness and lead fans to the next steps of involvement.

22 mei om 16:10 · Vind ik niet meer leuk · 👍 1

**Anne-Sophie Gaspersz** Amy Kuenzi Thanks for your contribution in this discussion! I appreciate it. So basically you are suggesting to first reach this generation on existing social media platforms, start with engagement on there - and then find ways/tools/call-to-actions to convince them to the integrated community on the corporate website. Good one! Sounds like a smart masterplan :)

22 mei om 16:19 · Vind ik leuk · 👍 1

**Amy Kuenzi** Thanks! It's what I try to do with my own community.

22 mei om 16:20 · Vind ik niet meer leuk · 👍 1

**June Macdonald** Depending on what groups you are trying to reach, you may never really get them on your website to engage in a separate community and you miss the benefits of extended social reach. If you can build the corp site registration to integrate users' FB, Twitter or other accounts would be ideal. For UNICEF especially I don't see as much value in trying to create your own walled garden, because you really want to get more donors and volunteers and so want the sharing that comes from being where they already are. Plus with so much competition as well as skepticism about charitable donations, it's a goldmine for spreading facts about all the great work being done.

24 mei om 6:53 · Vind ik niet meer leuk · 👍 1

**June Macdonald** Thanks for the question Anne-Sophie Gaspersz! The other thing that occurs to me is whatever your choice, make it really easy for volunteers to share their contributions and promote UNICEF to their friends. But I agree with your decision on starting with #2 and then trying #1, especially if you can have volunteer sections. I volunteered on a marketing committee many years ago and was struck by the huge numbers of volunteers vs miniscule staff they have, and how necessary volunteers are to reach fundraising goals.

24 mei om 6:57 · Vind ik niet meer leuk · 👍 1

**Wilfried Schock** I would prefer a combination out of option 1 and 2. In my opinion it is not a black-or-white-question. Grey suits better. Fishing where the fish is, is an argument, I could easy agree with, but on the behalf of a sustainable social media architecture I would prefer to have a backup and profiling of my social media users. To backup social media results and reach and to integrate business processes it needs an own ground. To get engagement and to use the personal social networks of the social media users this on ground it needs a strong connection with Facebook as an example.

24 mei om 12:00 · Vind ik niet meer leuk · 👍 1