**The What and How of Online Communities**
**An exploratory desk research**

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**This study**

For this exploratory study we aim to provide knowledge and insights concerning the processes of setting up, implementing and managing online communities as a part of the product/services offer of media companies. The goal is to increase their reach amongst target groups, to strengthen involvement with their audiences and to entice their audiences to participate. This information should help us to understand the many different aspects important for developing and managing online communities. The research question for this phase is: *Which critical success factors play a role in the process of setting up and managing online communities using social media in order to activate and/or engage target audiences?* In this exploratory first phase we looked into literature relating to general guidelines and critical success factors in setting up and managing online communities. These aspects include, communication and interaction options, functionalities for sharing information, the content structure given, the importance of socialization within the community, the policies used and the usability of the platform (Ning Shen & Khalifa, 2008).

The results are to be shared with our partner SALTO, Amsterdam's Broadcasting Organisation. SALTO is a public-access television and radio broadcasting station. Public-access television, also called community-access, was born in Canada and the United States in the early 1970s and its birth coincided with the introduction of cable television. Many countries in Western Europe and Scandinavia quickly followed in the footsteps of these developments, including the Netherlands.

Currently, Amsterdam's Broadcasting Organisation holds the broadcasting licenses of news service AT5, youth radio station FunX, radio Concertzender and seven public access TV and radio channels. The programming of the public access segment is extremely varied. The English Breakfast talk show, for which the results of this research are targeted towards is one of the two simultaneously aired programmes of SALTO's radio channels. This radio show offers an overview of news items and events from both the expat and Dutch communities. The aim of SALTO is to help the volunteers who are producing the English Breakfast talk show immerse their audience by using social media and more specifically by using an online community.

The OLON (Organisatie van Lokale Omroepen in Nederland, Organisation of Local Broadcasters in The Netherlands) is aware of the fact that the use of social media within local broadcasting services

has not reached a mature point yet and the fact that the possibilities offered by Internet are not optimally used. The OLON recognizes the following strengths of the use of social media:

- Social media sites are often up-to-date and fast.
- Consumer-oriented programmes on Dutch TV, like RADAR and KASSA, highly rely on the reactions and contribution of consumers, the so-called 'crowdsourcing'.
- Social media content is almost always easy to share and it is very simple to spread through a network.
- The so-called 'trending topics' of Twitter can give programme makers an idea of what people are talking about at the moment.

The OLON also points out the following weaknesses of the use of social media among local broadcasting services:

- The Internet is barely used to actively involve listeners and viewers in the programming.
- Social media has a limited reach since not everyone is active on platforms such as Twitter or Facebook
- Social media is not always a reliable medium. Some messages on Twitter are based on rumours, which are reinforced by the public but appear to not be true.

To help address a gap in knowledge of local broadcasters in general and particularly SALTO, this investigation aims to provide information on the what and how of online communities.


**Web2.0 and social media**

Relatively soon after the Internet became available to citizens and businesses, it quickly turned out to be the preferred medium of choice for communication and consumption of information, whether it is for business or for regular citizens (Parent, Plangger, & Bal, 2011). With the advent of the so-called Web2.0, shortly after the turn of the millennium, internet users have gained access to many new options for communication, creation and production (O'Reilly, 2005; Slot & Frissen, 2007). Influenced by intelligent web services based on new technologies internet users are empowered to increase their contributions to develop, rate, collaborate and distribute internet content and develop and customise internet applications (O'Reilly, 2005; OECD, 2007). These internet applications laid the foundation for social media. Unlike any other medium the use of the internet is characterised by increased participation and interaction of users who use it to communicate and express themselves. A prominent concept to describe this evolution, which uses the internet's inherent capabilities, is called the 'participative web' (OECD, 2007). Online services shifted from offering channels for networked communication to becoming interactive two-way vehicles for networked sociality (Castells, 2007; Manovich, 2009).

The entire ecosystem of interconnected software applications and platforms is in constant flux. As Van Dijck (2012) points out, a full record of all platforms and characteristics that can be related to social media is impossible to create. However for purposes of understanding the broad spectrum of social media an elementary mapping can be made. Van Dijck describes four types of social media, realising that there are no sharp boundaries between the different platforms. In fact many sites offer features that are alike. She discriminates between: 1) trading and marketing sites: sites that focus on exchanging or selling products or services and 2) play and game sites: obviously sites that offer a playground for users. Think of popular games as Word Feud or Angry Birds. Furthermore Van Dijck recognizes 3) the social network sites (SNSs): sites that promote interpersonal contact whether between individuals or groups, whether used for social, professionals, geographical grounds etc. Typical examples are Facebook, LinkedIn and Foursquare. The 4th category on Van Dijck's list are the sites for user-generated content (UGC): these sites promote the exchange of amateur content. The overlap between platforms becomes very visible when we consider the fact that user generated content often forms the input for the afore mentioned social network sites. User-generated content, called user-created content by OECD (2007), is one of the main features of the participative web. It comprises various forms of media and creative works (written, audio, visual, and combined) created by internet - and technology users. Social networks and online communities are shaped by the 'works' of the community members. Despite frequent references to this topic by media and experts, no commonly agreed definition of user-created content exists. Yet central aspects can be determined but these are likely to evolve in time as well. For this exploration it is useful to look at prominent characteristics that we recognize today for identifying a possible spectrum of user-generated content. The OECD (2007, p.8) has proposed three central characteristics that are still suitable, and which are cited below.

1. Publication requirement: While theoretically UCC could be made by a user and never actually be published online or elsewhere, we focus here on the work that is published in some context, be it on a publicly accessible website or on a page on a social networking site only accessible to a select group of people (i.e. fellow university students). This is a useful way to exclude email, bilateral instant messages and the like.

2. Creative effort: This implies that a certain amount of creative effort was put into creating the work or adapting existing works to construct a new one; i.e. users must add their own value to the work. The creative effort behind UCC often also has a collaborative element to it, as is the case with websites which users can edit collaboratively. For example, merely copying a portion of a television show and posting it to an online video website (an activity frequently seen on the UCC sites) would not be considered UCC. If a user uploads his/her photographs, however, expresses his/her thoughts in a blog, or creates a new music video this could be

considered UCC. Yet the minimum amount of creative effort is hard to define and depends on the context.

3. Creation outside of professional routines and practises: User-created content is generally created outside of professional routines and practices. It often does not have an institutional or a commercial market context. In the extreme, UCC may be produced by non-professionals without the expectation of profit or remuneration. Motivating factors include: connecting with peers, achieving a certain level of fame, notoriety, or prestige, and the desire to express oneself.

User-generated content is originally seen as online content that is produced by users (i.e. non-media professionals/ordinary people) as opposed to traditional media producers such as broadcasters and production companies. Nevertheless, it needs to be understood that a lot of professional content is shared via social media sites as well. This could involve copyright protected material along with content that is created by professionals in their spare time (e.g. professional designers making artwork or video editors creating film at home). The idea that the creation of content is occurring outside of a professional routine and organisation seems to be challenged nowadays. The participative web phenomenon typically includes a broader set of developments, including the rise of commercial web services or other commercial ventures. Clearly the platform providers derive revenues by enabling the use of the platforms but there is a trend towards the monetisation of user-generated content from the user-side as well. At times, users are being remunerated for their content and some users develop to be professionals after an initial phase of non-commercial activity.

Social media thus are the online platforms and applications with interaction and dialogue between users as key features without or with minimal intervention of a professional editor. Where it started off as being of interest to citizens or consumers soon it became compelling for businesses to harness the 'collective intelligence' of internet users, using information and knowledge embedded in the web in the form of data, metadata and user participation (OECD, 2007, p.8; Van Dijck, 2012, p.4). Nowadays, companies use social media in various ways. Social media lie at the base of online or virtual communities.

**Online or virtual communities**
Especially in recent years online communities have become popular, but actually they exist by now for quite a while. Already in 1970, Usenet was also used for central text-based multiplayer games (so called multi user dungeons: MUDs). The Well, one of the first true online community (Mühlenbeck & Skibicki, 2007) is seen as the place where the 'online community movement' has its origin (Hafner,

2001). Stewart Brand and Larry Brilliant started the Well in 1985 under the name of the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link: the place where a dialogue took place between independent writers and readers of the Whole Earth Review. Howard Rheingold (1993), one of the members of the Well, coined the term 'virtual community'. Rheingold describes a virtual community 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 cyberspace" (p. 5). In her work from 2000, Preece offers the following definition of an online community: "An online community is a group of people who interact in a virtual environment. They have a purpose, are supported by technology, and are guided by norms and policies." These policies can be defined as sociability (Preece, Maloney-Krichmar, & Abras, 2003).

As features of an online community Preece (2000) indicates the following:
- people: who interact socially as they make an effort to satisfy their own needs or perform special roles, such as leadership or community's moderation;
- 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 interaction;
- computer systems: to support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness.

The features identified by Rheingold (2003) are different, but can serve as a supplement:
- Virtual communities are organized around affinities, shared interests, bringing together people who did not necessarily know each other before meeting online.
- Many to many media. Unlike few-to-many (broadcast) or one to one (telephone or SMS) media, virtual communities enable groups of people to communicate with many others. Every desktop, every wireless device, is becoming a printing press, broadcasting station, and place of assembly (as well as a computer and telephone).
- Relatively uncoupled from face-to-face social life in geographic communities. People communicating worldwide about shared interests most often do not live close enough to meet regularly face to face.

It is evident that in the literature a variety of definitions, typologies and attributes can be found (Porter, 2004). An online community may include a vast diversity of online activities. Researchers tend to rely on those variables that are important for their own discipline. So the author's background defines the way communities are looked at: from marketing, business, sociological or psychological point of view. One emphasizes the potential to generate money (Hagel III and Armstrong, 1997; Wind

& Mahajan, 2002) and the other one mainly investigates the interaction structures in the network (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). Anthropologists and social learning theorists (see Lave & Wenger, 1991), and researchers from the disciplines, marketing and management understand the importance of social norms within a community structure (see Hagel III and Armstrong, 1997), but this is absent in most of the information system literature. To overcome these 'problems' Porter (2004) attempted to come up with a general interdisciplinary useful definition: a virtual community is "an aggregation of individuals or business partners who interact around a shared interest, where the interaction is at least partially supported and/or mediated by technology and guided by some protocols or norms." This definition is versatile. Porter pays attention to the fact that communities can not only bring individuals but also business partners together. The definition also allows for the fact that are communities can be whole or partially virtual. There are levels of virtuality (Hafner, 2001; Komito, 1998; Rheingold, 1993; Virnoche & Marx, 1997). Wilson & Peterson, 2002 refer to this as fluid communities. Members sometimes meet face-to-face and at other times mediated by technology. Porter's definition accommodates for the importance to take notion of roles, protocols, policies and/or standards. She created a typology of virtual communities (see figure 1), which includes the aspects previously mentioned. Due to the high level of abstraction, it is suitable to classify many kinds of communities.

**Figure 1. A typology of virtual communities**
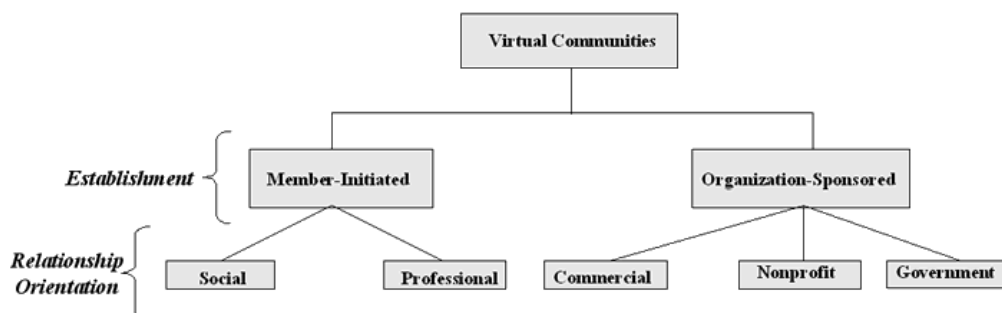


Bron: Porter, 2004

At the first level, a distinction is made between member-initiated and organization-sponsored community. The member-initiated communities are the communities that are set up and managed by the members themselves (so-called bottom-up initiatives). Organization-sponsored communities are communities that are financed by commercial or non-commercial (government, non-profit) organizations (Laudon & Traver, 2002) (so-called top-down initiatives). Communities that are part of the product offering of a media company are considered organization-sponsored communities. The sponsoring organizations have interests in the community - for example in the form of stakeholders or customers – they are an integral part of their mission and goals. On the second level Porter makes a distinction that is oriented to the relationships within the community. In a member-initiated

community social or professional relationships between members can exist. Organization-sponsored communities can involve the relationships between members and between individual members and the organization that facilitates the community.

The specific characteristics of particular communities are reflected by the attributes subsequently assigned to it. In the description of the attributes that have been distilled from literature, Porter (2004) characterizes virtual communities by using the five P's of virtual communities:

1. *Purpose (Content of Interaction).*
   This attribute describes the specific focus of discourse, or focal content of communication, among community members. The goal why people are participating in a community is taken into account.
2. *Place (Extent of Technology Mediation of Interaction).*
   This attribute defines the location of interaction, does the interaction occur completely virtual or only partially virtual.
3. *Platform (Design of Interaction)*
   This attribute refers to the technical design of interaction in the virtual community, whether designs enable synchronous communication, asynchronous communication or both.
4. *Population (Pattern of Interaction)*
   This attribute refers to the pattern of interaction among community members as described by group structure (e.g. small group or network) and type of social ties (e.g. strong, weak, stressful).
5. *Profit Model (Return on Interaction)*
   This attribute refers to whether a community creates tangible economic value where value is defined as revenue-generation.


Ad 1. The purpose is central to the functioning of a virtual community because communities are defined by a shared purpose by the members (see Gusfield, 1978; Preece, 2000: Preece et al., 2003). It is the basis for interaction. Clearly communities can revolve around an infinite number of shared interests (fish, living with a disability, magic, entrepreneurship, etc.).

Ad 2. There is some discussion about the role of "place" in a virtual community. It used to be mainly used for geographic locations affecting the community feeling. For a virtual community that can be different. Dourish and Harrison (1996), give a good explanation on the basis of the terms *space* and *place*. When it comes to the physical structure, geographical location, they speak of the community space, and when it comes to socio-cultural aspects in which the sense of belonging is the determining factor, they speak of the community place. They explain this by suggesting that virtual space is to

place as a house is to home. A house only has the physical properties that could form a home. Actually, these are the opportunities that exist to create hybrid communities (Virnoche & Marx, 1997).

Ad 3. Interaction can be explained as a continuum (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1997; Nathan Shedroff, 2000). In this case, it could imply a synchronous design with real-time interaction between members or an asynchronous design where members react to each other via so-called threads. Synchronous design may include chat room technology and asynchronous design a forum or email. Of course, combinations are also conceivable. It is therefore about the technical design but also about the current current pattern of interaction. Not only the length of the threads that are written is important, but also the amount of interaction that takes place between the members.

Ad 4. Porter considers the types of links that exist between the members of a community. The communication behavior of the members in a community can vary greatly. How often do they have contact or contribute something? Porter makes a distinction into three levels: a) a small group of members with strong ties, b) networks with less strong ties where members even could have the feeling to receive a type of spam and c) audiences, where the interaction is different as well as the ties. In the latter case, the online communities are seen as functional and useful for serving purposes, membership is often temporary and less commitment and loyalty exists between the members (see (Jones & Rafaeli, 2000; Komito, 1998).

Ad 5. This attribute relates to whether the virtual community creates a tangible economic value. You will think first of the commercial organization-sponsored communities, but is not exclusive for this type of community. Also member-initiated communities can, for example by placing ads, generate revenues if the target group would be interesting. Krishnamurty (2003) classifies communities in three business models: the community enablers, trading/sharing communities and communities as a website feature of organizations. The models that successively can be used are ads or subscription fees, transaction fees and owning the community to create interaction, which should lead to income.

**Member's objectives**

People are members of or use communities because the community can fulfil certain social or economic goals (Rheingold, 1993, Wind & Mahajan, 2002). There are e.g. "communities of transactions" where people buy and sell things and exchange information about products or services; "communities of interest" where people talk about shared interests and their hobbies; "communities of relationships" to maintain social relationships and fulfil social needs or "communities of fantasy" to experiment with identity (see Hagel III and Armstrong, 1997). Members could also be motivated by

professional objectives. Knowledge networks within professional fields of self-study communities are recognized as "communities of practice" (Wenger, 2006).

Each community has different types of members. All these members contribute in their own way. Smits (2012) distinguishes creators, critics, collectors, joiners and spectators. The 'creators' are members who contribute the most to the community: they write articles or blogs and respond to other members. The role of the 'critics' is different: they give solicited and unsolicited comments and express their opinions. The critics are important for the community though because their attention can be seen as some sort of reward for the creators. The third role is that of the 'collectors'. These members like to organize or collect information and gather everything they find interesting. Then there are joiners. Joiners do not specifically contribute content, but they participate in the community e.g. by participating in polls. 'Spectators' can be seen as traditional audience. They read, listen to and watch the content. Via the statistics of the site the other members are aware of their presence.

In a study of Ling (2006) it was found that members will contribute more to online communities when their contribution is unique. Members who receive signs that their contribution is meaningful for someone else are encouraged to be more active than members who do not receive these indicators. Another stimulant for contributing to the community relates to the member's objective. Community members who joined because they strive to reach individual goals tend to be more active than people who are assigned to group goals. This seems to indicate that although participants in a community are active within a group dynamic, their motivation to contribute is influenced by personal achievements, the individual status and the individual recognition they receive (Blom, 2009).

**Organisational objectives**

There are countless examples and ways how online communities could be used by organisations. Amongst the possibilities offered by online communities to achieve organisational objectives we have

- Improving or strengthening the relationship between company and client (Leadbeater, 2008; Blom, 2009)
- Receiving input and support from clients in the development of new products or services (Von Hippel, 2005; Shirky, 2008).
- Increasing the participation of clients and/or general public by acquiring original content, produced by the users themselves (Russo & Watkins, 2005), content that can subsequently be distributed via the online platform.

Other organizational objectives that can be achieved through online communities integrated in an organizational strategy are: sales increase, positive word-of-mouth promotion, effective market

segmentation, increase of website traffic, building brand value, increase of advertising and transaction turnover, raise interest amongst customers for available products and services, better product support services and service provision, source of marketing research data, and support a virtual workforce (Blom, 2009; Solis, 2010; Hagel & Armstrong, 1997; Porter, 2004). The community is used as an advertising, sales and distribution vehicle to provide a company with economic leverage, or as defined by Balasubramanian & Mahajan (2001): "the utilisation and integration of social interaction within a virtual community to support profit oriented markets with formal exchanges of goods, services and money".

In order to successfully implement online communities and social media from a marketing perspective, it is important to be aware of the meanings the implications of concepts such as Web 2.0 or social media. Marketing wise, and as defined by Berthon et al (2012), the Web 2.0 can be seen as the technical platform that enables the phenomenon of collective media and facilitates consumer-generated content, with social media focusing on content. The focus area of value creation has switched, from organization to individuals or communities. In this day and age, using social media for marketing purposes goes beyond creating a Facebook fan page or being active on Twitter, it also entails being aware of the function and impact that technology, culture, government and globalization have in a particular geographical location.

In order to successfully deploy marketing strategies involving social media and online communities, Berthon et al suggest that it is important for marketers, and community managers for that matter, to comprehend the way Web 2.0 technologies work and the phenomena they enable, to understand their end consumer and end users and the active role they have and to understand social media. According to Spaulding (2010) virtual communities can provide direct support to most of the activities on the value chain of a firm and any potential benefits derived from the communities will depend on the individual characteristics of the firm and its core activity. Examples of this are the following:

- The primary activities of an organization can be benefited from internal virtual communities.
- Involving consumers in the development of new products or services can help an organization in the process of developing products or services according to the wants and needs of the consumers.
- To support marketing activities, virtual communities can be used for advertising purposes and for building brand loyalty.

Kannan et al. (2000) divide the virtual community space into four categories: transaction-oriented; interest-oriented, relationship-oriented and fantasy-oriented communities. Laine (2006) distinguishes several perspectives most of them strongly commercially driven. His description of business, e-commerce, marketing and economic perspectives show some overlap. Besides the commercial

potential, Laine also mentions a sociological and a learning perspective. "Knowledge exchange is an important benefit of a virtual community. Individuals can either give information (by posting conversations) or get information (browsing or soliciting information by posting questions or comments). As members interact in the virtual community, over time the virtual community emerges as the most authoritative and influential source of knowledge". In order to 'operate' for example an organization-sponsored community, you need members who interact and raise issues and ideas. From a learning perspective online communities can contribute to learning by stimulating continued learning and nurturing a sense of fellowship and identity. Both Laine (2006) and Spaulding (2010) stress the fact that trust is an important factor. Spaulding (2010) concludes that advertising should not be the primary activity since the social contract and the topic of interest of the community should be respected.Virtual communities have trust building capabilities but operate on it at the same time. Marketing in online communities is still a very experimental activity.

It is important to realize that the benefits of online communities can be viewed from various angles, which are not mutually exclusive (Gupta & Kim, 2004). Before defining any (critical) success factors it is important to pay attention to the view point(s) from which success will be assessed. Is it from a managerial perspective or from the users' perspective? The nature of the online community influences the definition of the relevance of the critical success factors relevant. According to Porter (2004), online communities "have unique combinations of attributes which will likely lead to different critical success factors". These attributes have been named the five Ps of online communities and have been explained above. Through an empiric research, conducted amongst members and operators of online communities, Leitmeister et al. (2004), described hypotheses on success factors applicable to virtual communities:

- Design, performance, stability and security are the most important success factors of an online community.
- Restrictions in communication and interaction cannot be maintained for longer periods. To aim for sustainable success, both user-generated content and high quality, up-to-date information are necessary.
- Sensitive handling of data of community members is an essential success factors.
- Community managers should quickly react to eventual problems without intervening too much in the community's life.
- Concerning the implementation of changes in the layout and features of an online community, community members should be given the chance to participate of the process of adjusting offers, design or functionality.
- For operators, it is more important to maintain neutrality than to expand the offers to members of the community.

Online communities are defined by many different elements. Factors such as physical versus virtual presence, the purpose of the community, the software environment, the size (small communities of fifty people are different from those of 5000 or 50,000) the scope, the duration of existence, the stage in the life-cycle, the culture of their members (e.g., international, national, local) and governance structures are determining communities. Depending on these factors all the design -, implementation - and management decisions have to be aligned with these elements.

**Community life cycle**

In a study conducted by Iriberri and Leroy (2009), five stages of the life cycle of online communities were defined: inception, creation, growth, maturity and death. Each of these stages requires a different mix of tools, mechanisms, technologies and management activities. By matching these to the life cycle of the community, success might be achieved more efficiently. Preece (2000) also presents an evolution schema, where a community's life cycle can be thought of in four stages: prebirth, early life, maturity and death.

During the initial phase, named Inception in the study of Iriberri and Leroy (2009), and Prebirth according to Preece (2000) most of the development takes place. The idea for an online community emerges to satisfy a need for information, support, recreation or relationship. The success factors that play a role relate to purpose, focus (target audience), and codes of conduct, trademark or tagline, funding and revenue sources (Iriberri & Leroy, 2009). Software is designed or selected, and initial social policies are planned (Preece, 2000). Iriberri & Leroy classify these activities in the following stage, Creation. The technological components that will support the online community are chosen, based on the needs of potential members and the purpose of the community. A different set of success factors applies to this stage, keeping in mind the importance of maintaining the success factors of the previous stage. In this phase, the focus should lie on the needs of the users and in ensuring the usability of the tools and a reliable platform, with an adequate performance level. The ease with which the software can be used is known as its usability and this depends on how well the user interface supports human-computer interaction (HCI) (Preece, 2000; Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2002). Examples of success factors for this stage include user-centred design and evolution, interface usability, security and privacy, anonymity, identity persistence, reliability and performance.

Based on this study of Iriberri and Leroy (2009), upon setting up the online community platform it is important that the purpose of the community is clear. The potential members of a virtual community should be aware of the purpose before they can decide whether to participate or not. It is also important to identify the characteristics of the target audience for the community, aspects concerning interests, age or gender.

During the actual process of setting up an online community, the focus must lie on ensuring the usability, performance and reliability of the community's platform and tools. In Iriberri and Leroy (2009), importance is also given to the secure handling of the personal data and information shared by the community members.

Growth is the following stage. In this stage, culture and identity start developing. During this phase, community managers should ensure the smooth integration of new members and the provision of up-to-date and quality content. Examples of success factors of this stage include: attracting members, growth management, and interaction support, building trust and reaching critical mass. Preece refers to this stage as the early life of the community. The developers' involvement diminishes, but their attention and nurturing are still needed to ensure that the community is successfully populated.

Upon success in the previous phases, an online community will enter Maturity (Preece, 2000; Iriberri & Leroy, 2009) and become a formal organisation. In the Maturity phase, the virtual community reaches a critical member mass and user-generated content is achieved. Some of the success factors relevant to this stage are: permeated management and control, recognition of contribution, member satisfaction management. In this stage many communities function independently, unless developers see a need for overseeing activities as in some business communities.

After having reached a mature status, online communities could take several paths. Nevertheless, if the community achieves sustainability in this stage, benefits will become visible. Preece (2000) is mentioning Death of a community when members leave and the discussion slows down or ceases, because it has served its purpose, the number of participants has dropped below the critical mass necessary for it to function, or is has become dysfunctional. Naturally, not all communities die and these stages and the development vary depending on the community. Also the needs of users and community managers evolve during the different life cycle stages. Therefore, developers must understand this cycle and identify needs relevant for users and community managers. The purpose or type of online community determines the degree of relevance each specific factor may have in the success of the community.

In the particular case of the online community that will be built for The English Breakfast radio programme, the following success factors compiled in the study of Iriberri and Leroy (2009) have to be considered, based on their relevance to both community managers and members as well as the life-cycle stage of the online community:

| Phase | Success factor |
|-------|----------------|
| *Inception* | • Clear purpose and goals for the online community<br>• Clear focus on a target audience |
| *Creation* | • The online community has to be designed and subsequently evolve according to the needs of its members<br>• The ease of use should be considered (the existing Facebook page of English Breakfast Radio will be used as platform) |
| *Growth* | • Actively encouraging current and potential listeners to join and participate in the community<br>• Manage the growth in the number of members<br>• Encourage existing members to assist new members in the process of integrating to the community<br>• Offering up-to-date, high quality content<br>• Community managers in charge of organizing, upgrading and distributing interesting content<br>• Encourage the interaction between members as one of the tasks of the community managers<br>• Aim to reach a high number of members ('critical mass') within a short period of time<br>• Supporting the online community through offline events/gatherings |
| *Maturity* | • Encourage volunteers to become part of the community management team<br>• Appreciation and recognition of the contributions made by community members<br>• Establishing and supporting sub groups within the community (in this particular, a community for the volunteers of ENGLISH BREAKFAST RADIOand a community for listeners/viewers of EBR)<br>• Focus on member needs and managing member satisfaction |

Next to the success factors Iriberri and Leroy (2009) identified determinants as threats to the sustainability of the online community. These so called anti-success factors are the undersupply of content; poor participation by members; unorganised contribution; lack of willingness to share information; time limitation and shyness amongst members about public posting. The determinants are sometimes interrelated and seem to concentrate around the activity performed in a community. Proper community management is essential in this respect.

**Community development and community management**

When starting a community, there are several things that need to be considered very carefully right from the start because after the start of an online environment there is limited scope for software changes. Ideally the community should be launched with well-designed, carefully selected software or software platform. In deciding upon the software to use and the functionalities to offer one decision may impact others and these might impact interaction to a greater or lesser extent. Sociability and usability are essential but technical considerations must be involved (Preece, 2000).

The development of an online community can be a challenge when the user population has not been clearly defined or it is not easily reachable. Preece (2000) discusses the community-centred development (CCD), where the focus lies on the community and the development is a participatory process. CCD must focus on the needs of the community prior to taking decisions regarding technology and social planning. On the one hand, there is usability, which is concerned with the appropriateness of the software design for the tasks and purpose of the community and on the other hand, we find sociability, which is concerned with the appropriateness of social policies and the guidelines for social interaction. In this situation, the community members will work with the developers in building the community from the start.

From an evolutionary point of view, when software design is complete, the initial social policies are in place and people will participate in the community. Even though the work of the developer can be seen as completed, the community continues evolving, shaped by its activities and social needs. Community development is an iterative process with several develop-and-test cycles during which the members can participate and provide feedback. Preece (2000) mentions five stages within the community-centred development process:

*1st stage: Assessing community needs and analysing user tasks.*
Understanding the needs of the community and the tasks to be performed by the users. In determining this, it is important to know who is the community (who the users will be and what they will expect, determining the level of experience using the Internet and other online communities) and what is the purpose. By understanding the needs of the community, it is possible to identify the main activities the online community will engage in. This may include information dissemination, information exchange, discussion, support, entertainment or exchanging so-called user-generated content. The demographics of the community and any potential technical constraints are also important factors to be analysed during this stage.

*2nd stage: Selecting technology and planning sociability.*
In the case of the Practoraat, the technology to be selected is social media in combination with other technologies such as websites, newsletters, etc. Sociability planning is parallel to this process and involves planning policies and social structures. The software choice depends on costs, technical

skills, time, host, technical constraints and usability. The user interface must be consistent and intuitive. For a new or improved website for that matter, the content, navigation and page design are important features to take into account. Here it should be considered if the user needs are met and if the design is appropriate. Social planning involves analyzing whether a closed community is required, with a registration policy or if moderation is required. Other similar questions include: is an editorial policy required?, should there be a disclaimer policy?

*3rd stage: Designing, testing and implementing prototypes.*
In this stage, the needs of the community are mapped with the features offered by the selected technology (or software). In this phase, the general conceptual design of the community platform is determined. With a prototype, users can test the interface design and the social process linked to it (for example, a welcome screen, regulations, etc.). This process encourages user involvement and provides the developers with first-hand feedback and strengthens the relationship between both community users and community developers. Usability can be tested in a variety of ways and the goal is to identify any navigation problems, errors, poor design, etc.

*4th stage: Refining and tuning sociability and usability.*
Formal and large scale sociability and usability are tested with the community during this stage. Any problems that might arise are resolved.

*5th stage: Welcoming and nurturing the community.*
The phase of "seeding" the community and publicizing it, to later welcome and support new members. The challenge is to entice people so that they keep coming back. Roles start to arise within the community and community developers provide ongoing support.

According to Williams and Cothrel (2000), there are three critic support activities involved in managing an online community. These activities can also be regarded as success factors, since they play a role in the sustainability of the community. First the community managers will have to think about 'Member development': to remain active, online communities require critical mass and the attention of members. Critical mass means "reaching a high number of members within a short period of time" (Iriberri and Leroy, 2009). This continuous process can be achieved by approaching the opinion leaders and influencers of the community but also through one-on-one promotion activities such as direct mailing, phone calls, online and offline presentations for selected groups, etc.). The second job the community managers need to work on is called 'Asset management'. This activity ranges from internally and externally generated content, cooperation, and infrastructure including hardware, software and design elements, to member engagement. A community manager should be in charge of maintaining a unique combination of services, content and engagement, help the integration of new members and support interaction through creating a process that facilitates discussion and

cooperation. Awareness of the constant changes of member needs is important. Valuable feedback can be obtained from one-on-one conversations, electronic forms or monitoring of discussion groups. The third critical community management task has to do with community relations.  Interaction is the most important reason for participating in any type of community. Connections should be strengthened and nurtured in a subtle way. According to Williams and Cothrel (2000): "managing community relations involves tending to connections between people, rather than the assets the community creates". Another goal of community managers should be to offer the highest level of interaction possible. The study of Lin (2008) mentions that most members of a virtual community participate because there are common shared interests and interaction with others. Despite the fact that there many online communities are successful, lots fail as well. In many online communities, the activity drops to zero. The members of a community are the most important asset of a community. In the blueprint for a successful community a member-centred approach is on top of the list.

**Conclusions and recommendations**

This section provides conclusions and recommendations for English Breakfast Radio based on the desk research conducted. Many of the following conclusions and recommendations act together and cannot be seen as fully separable.

*Online communities and public access programming*

Conclusion: The content shared through social media platforms is easy to spread through a network. Furthermore, the content and reactions supplied by co-creating volunteers, listeners and/or viewers form the basis of 'crowdsourcing', which is particularly important for broadcasting services.

Recommendation: In order to maximize the leverage of an online community, English Breakfast Radio has to define a tactic that will help to activate and involve the target groups of the programme. In order to be able to implement an informed strategy a proper understanding of (potential) community members (in all possible roles) wishes and needs is required.

*Purpose of the community*

Conclusion: Online communities can be formed by smaller or larger groups of people who interact in a virtual environment under a shared purpose that provides the raison d'être of the community. Online communities may host or offer a vast diversity of online activities, depending on its purpose. Therefore, it is important to ascertain the purpose or the 'content of interaction' of the online community.  It is likely that the objectives of participation in the community will differ between both volunteers and listeners of English Breakfast Radio.

Recommendation: English Breakfast Radio is broadcasted by SALTO, the public access broadcasting service of the Publieke Omroep Amsterdam and it is entirely produced by volunteers, coached by

SALTO. Based on the empirical study of Leitmeister et al, it can be seen that the needs and perceptions of the members of online communities tend to differ from those of community managers. Therefore, it is clear that English Breakfast Radio should distinguish between the different groups. This will require the setting up of two different types of online communities. One to serve as an umbrella for all the people who volunteer in the process of producing the radio programme and another community specifically targeting the listeners of the programme as a tool aiming at the engagement of the audience. English Breakfast Radio should both define and clarify the focus of the communities based upon the needs and wishes of these two groups as well as grasp understanding of their objectives to participate of the community.

*Technology / platform*

Conclusion: The technology of an online platform influences the type of interaction that is facilitated. Also usability aspects are related to the technical possibilities offered. English Breakfast Radio already has an online community on Facebook, this implies that the technology of the community platform is mostly defined despite some possible variation of settings.

Recommendation: The recommendation for English Breakfast Radio is to make use of the existing Facebook page to engage listeners. For the volunteer community, the functionalities of Facebook to create groups can be used. English Breakfast Radio should look into the different settings available for Facebook community pages in order to make the most optimal use of the technical possibilities offered.

*Community members*

Conclusion: The interaction behavior of the members of a community can vary greatly. Different roles can be distinguished, from creators to spectators, where 'creators' represent members who contribute the most to the community and spectators (classical audience) the least. In order for a community to be sustainable, not only highly active members are needed. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that different types of members participate in or join a community for different reasons or to satisfy different needs. Different activity levels and contribution types are important for the 'shelf life', liveliness, charm, and attractiveness of the community.

Recommendation: English Breakfast Radio should find out about these roles in terms of the current types of links that exist between community members (ties) and the activity levels as well as learn about the reasons why people are interested in the community. English Breakfast Radio should make sure to have insight in wishes and wants of community members and potential community members.

*Life-cycle of community*

Conclusion: Online communities know a community life cycle. Depending on the phase the

community describes along this cycle, the focus on activities differs. In order to be able to set out a path of activities and take into account considerations for the development of the community, it is important to be aware of the current life-cycle status of the community.

Recommendation: English Breakfast Radio community should define with which stage the current community/communities can be associated in order to develop a plan of action.

*Community management*

Conclusion: Community managers have a very important role in the development of a community, especially in the early phases. They can welcome new members to the community, show them around, activate overall activity in the community, solve problems members may experience, guard community policy and rules (to a certain extent) and influence the sociality and atmosphere within the community.

Recommendation: English Breakfast Radio should appoint one or more community managers who will take this role seriously. The community manager should oversee that members comply with the rules and have a genuine interest in the community. The community manager should be able to attract new members, keep the community lively, supply relevant content and enthuse members to create content themselves (user-generated content).

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