

# What is the role of a brand within a networked society?

Matthew Mitchell Working Paper

## Initial Research Question:

**In what ways can brand communications be a means for improving or facilitating people's lives to become an integrated part of their communities?**

The initial approach taken to this research question was focusing on creating advertising with physical executions that would provide benefit to the community and environment in which the advertising appears. Early experimentation reflected this; one experiment was looking at writing brand messages in unused or abandoned public spaces by planting vegetables to form the text. The community could then harvest the plants once they had reached maturity. Positive effects on the environment would be transforming an unused space into a green garden and possibly helping people's livelihood by providing food for the community. As a form of communication this would be appropriate for an organisation such as The Wellington City Food Bank.

## Revised Research Question:

**What is the role of a brand within the Networked Society?**

## What is the aim of the project?

In response to analysis of precedent material, literature on our current social structures, and emerging technology, the aim of this project has evolved from its initial approach. This research has suggested that aiming to create a transformational brand offering, transversing the physical and digital environment is a more appropriate response to the research question. This has led the project into the realm of creating long-term initiatives and engaging brand experiences, attempting to unite communities around a brand sharing their values and beliefs. The response is an attempt to satisfy the growing need for a sense of belonging in today's society, as well as participating in and facilitating conversations between members of these new communities. This has been explored through qualitative research: analysis of design precedents and leading literary texts. From this research, concept mapping as well as design and strategy experimentation has been undertaken. This research through design been used to investigate the potential of these concepts.

## Why is the project necessary?

### Changing social dynamics

In *The Cluetrain Manifesto* it is speculated that the brand landscape is reverting from marketing back to markets, where one to one communication establishes the relationships occurring within a space. This suggests the view that markets are conversations, between brand and consumer, and consumer to consumer about the brand. (Locke, Levine, Searls, & Weinberger, 2001) In the past brands engaged in one way communication with their audiences through mass media channels, which by their nature, are not able to distinguish different members of their audience and adapt the message accordingly or receive input from the viewer. The development of many to many communication has been assisted by increased use of the internet and emerging media channels such as social networks, which enable these conversations to occur anywhere and between anyone.

This change in the way we are now able to communicate through emerging technology is enabling users to engage in and participate with brand offerings as experiences and entertainment. This experience society is also encouraging and enabling us to co-create and customise our experiences. This is where conventional mass media fails in this new technological age where anyone can talk about anything to everyone, as it does not allow brands to respond to, and engage in, the conversations that are occurring around them. In order for brand communications to have a lasting and mutually beneficial effect on peoples' lives the brand needs

to become integrated into consumers' environments and communities as an active member or facilitator. (Aarts & Marzano, 2003)

This new space for brands to become life facilitators and simplifiers is emerging in today's society as "we are beginning to create our own 'mosaic' lives, made up of a kaleidoscope of simultaneous or sequential relationships, careers or lifestyles." (Aarts & Marzano, 2003, p. 23) This is because the availability of information through emerging technologies accelerates many activities in our day to day lives, and enables us to engage with many activities at once, while exposing us to an exponential number of new activities to engage with. The net result is that our lives are becoming more and more complex. Conversely, as our lives become more complicated we will become increasingly less tolerant of complexity and welcome things that simplify our lives. (Aarts & Marzano, 2003) This suggests that brand users will openly accept honest attempts from brands to create offerings that will facilitate users interactions with other users and the brand's products or services.

In relation to this new conversational marketplace, the new media marketer, Chris Heuer suggests that in order for a message to be effective consumers must engage with it, which allows loyalty to be built by fostering genuine relationships with members of the community; (Weinberg, 2009)

*"If you are trying to sell something to the community, and that is your reason for being there, it will be obvious to those people and you will never be as successful as you can be. If you are participating because you really want*

*to contribute to the community, because you really want to share what you know, because you really want to be of service to the community and its members, you will sell to the right people BECAUSE of your sincerity and honesty.” - Chris Heuer (Weinberg, 2009, p. 64)*

## A need for belonging

Through the late 1900s to date there has been an increasing sense of individual within society. However with a decline in the old forms of belonging, such as church and family, there is now emerging, a growing desire for relationships to help define ourselves as individuals, and an increasing realisation of our need for others. (Cova & Cova, 2002) As a result “we are searching for alternative forms of belonging and support,” (Aarts & Marzano, 2003, p. 24) and because of the role now played by the internet and social media in our lives we are now able to choose which communities we belong to by shared beliefs and values rather than those communities being dictated by geographical location. (Cova & Cova, 2002) With their pre-existing core values, brands have in the past provided means to help people define themselves as individuals by relating to brands that share their beliefs. In the new social scapes there is an opportunity for brands to be centres for communities to form around.

## Knowledge of the collective

Through these networks of belonging people are creating a collective intelligence, the most obvious example being Wikipedia (Fig 1.1). Humans have always had an “unquenchable thirst for knowledge” (Aarts & Marzano, 2003, p. 24) that is

now being satisfied more readily by the availability of information on the web, but as we are becoming a more informed society we do not naively accept everything we are told, on the internet or otherwise, This means we are more inclined to question everything we are presented with and are more likely to trust a review or recommendation from an unknown individual than a mass communication from a brand. (Castels, 2007) Therefore brands need to demonstrate in authentic ways that they understand and care about the values and needs of their customers. Facilitating long-term relationships with these customers is necessary to create a sense of brand ownership and trust amongst their audience and will enable the creation of brand ambassadors. (Himpe, 2008) This developing of brand consumers into brand users encourages positive conversations to occur around the brand. This requires brand offerings to be executed in an honest manner, and in line with the community’s values and beliefs. If the communication is then continuing and responsive to the community it can create fierce and instinctive brand loyalty amongst its users. (Weinberg, 2009)



Figure 1.1: Wikipedia; A manifestation of collective intelligence

## Emerging mobile technology

When it comes to accessing these communities in the Networked Society *The Social Media Bible*, among others, speculates that in ten years the majority of Internet users will access the Internet via mobile devices. (Safko & Brake, 2009, p. 392) Currently 100 million users access Facebook via their mobile devices, and those who do are twice as active as solely computer-based users. (Facebook, 2010) This increased mobile access means users can be connected to their online communities instantly at any time and in any physical environment of their choosing. This blurring of the distinction between digital and physical self suggests that the strongest relationships between people, and therefore people and brands, will transverse the digital and physical environment. This presents a new opportunity for brands to literally get into people's pockets and become integrated into their lives by creating truly useful tools or even their own communities for their brand users which can be accessed anywhere, serving as a constant reminder of the brand's values, products and services.

As well as increased mobile Internet connectivity, other emerging technology is further assisting this digital integration into our lives. With the development of 3G iPhones and Android Smartphones the realm of augmented reality (inserting digital elements into the physical environment when viewed through a digital device in real time) is becoming more accessible and is able to be applied anywhere, allowing information to be overlaid into everyday environments. The prototype Sixth Sense device (Figure 2) takes this augmentation a step further. Instead of having to view the environment through a Smartphone camera it projects information onto the environment around the user, creating a seamless and intuitive digital integration.

## Who would engage with this?

Social Network sites have proliferated through the digital space over the last ten years (the large networks today were mostly founded between 2002 and 2005) with Facebook being the largest with 150 million active members as of March 2009 (Shih, 2009) (according to Facebook this number is now at 400 million (Facebook, 2010)). While larger sites like Facebook have very varied users, there are smaller, more specific sites catering for anything and everything, meaning that every brands audience will have members in the rapidly expanding online community. The current price of Smartphone technology means the people who can become involved with brand communications utilising this technology today will be upper to middle earners, tailing off towards young and old. However as with all technology it becomes more accessible over time, so as the price of Smartphones comes down and infrastructure such as Wi-Fi networks are established it will open up a larger audience range to engage.

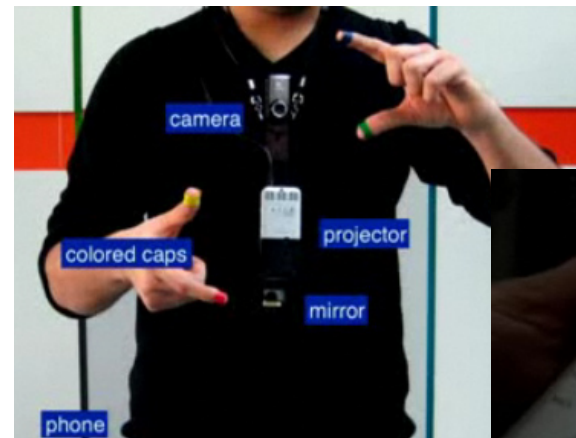


Figure 2.1: Pranav Mistry's SixthSense

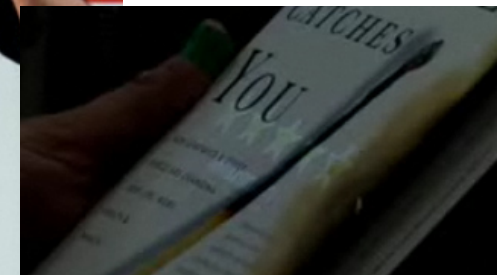


Figure 2.2: Automatically projecting a book's Amazon rating

## How can this be done?

### Five phases of proximity

An integral part to infiltrating or creating a community, as described in *Advertising is Dead, Long Live Advertising* (2006) and *Ads to Icons* (2009), is breaking down the level of communication to gain the closest proximity with your consumer until you occupy the same space. In *Advertising is Dead, Long Live Advertising*, Himpe makes the point that “conventional media... only allows consumers and brands to meet each other ‘in the middle’” (Himpe, 2006, p. 12) and that “‘your place or mine?’ should be the opening line for a successful relationship between brands and consumers.” (Himpe, 2006, p. 12) This reflects the views referenced earlier, such as that of *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, that there is an emerging need for two way communication, such as that occurring within social media networks, and the interpretation of markets as conversations.

The process of achieving closer proximity with consumers is described as five stages in *Ads to Icons* (2009), each stage creating a greater intimacy between the brand and consumer. The role of emerging technology is often an important factor in achieving this proximity. Phase one is in the realm of traditional mass media, and is summed up as “talking to customers.” One to many communication. Phase 2 is creating “dialogue” with the consumers, most easily achieved through digital technologies, such as SMS and viral emails. One to one communication. The next phase is “involvement” with the consumer via mediums such as advergames, and social network sites. One to one, two way communication. Phase four moves into

the realm of “advocacy,” where user generated content and consumers talking about brands become the communication to new consumers. Many to many communication. Phase five is described as becoming “enablers,” where the brands seek to unite those talking about them and facilitate the communication between consumers and brand within a likeminded community. (Springer, 2009, p. 273)

### Creating a sense of belonging

Once this proximity has been achieved Wenger speculates that there are three ways in which people can generate a sense of belonging, which brands could tap into in creating a community:

**Engagement:** *doing things together, talking, and producing artefacts. The ways in which we engage with each other and with the world profoundly shape our experience of who we are.*

**Imagination:** *constructing an image of ourselves, of our communities, and of the world, in order to orient ourselves, to reflect on our situation, and to explore.*

**Alignment:** *making sure that our local activities are sufficiently aligned with other processes so that they can be effective beyond our own... a mutual process of coordinating perspectives, interpretations, and actions so they realize higher goals.” (Wenger, 2000)*



## Case study

### Marmarati

In late 2009, before Marmite (UK Version) launched its extra strong Marmite product it realised it had a pre-existing core of marmite lovers. The brand successfully targeted its brand hardcore and actively enabled them to become brand ambassadors for the new product. Marmite is the kind of product you either love or hate, so a very passionate fan base had already developed around the brand over social networks. Marmite sent the word out through these networks that they were looking for the hardcore fans of Marmite and asked them to demonstrate their passion for the product (Figure 3.2). From these submissions the first circle of the Marmarati was selected. They were brought together in a Victorian style secret society and went through an experience where they were treated to all things marmite and chose amongst recipes of the new Marmite XO product (Figure 3.3). The first circle of the Marmarati then went and spread the word of the new product through their communities and assisted in the search for the second circle. This campaign has been very successful in many ways as it has accelerated the creation of brand ambassadors and enabled them to gain a large following in their communities before the product had even hit the shelf (product launched March 2010). This brand offering transversed physical and digital communities and facilitated co-creation of the new product, satisfying consumers wants from brands in today's societies and uniting people with a common interest. (We Are Social, 2010) This execution addresses and achieves the three points outlined by Wenger deemed crucial to creating and maintaining a community; it was a joint construct,

understood and negotiated by its members; had a mutual engagement that bound its members together with a sense of responsibility to other members of the group; and its members produced something of importance to themselves. (Wenger, 1998)



Figure 3.1: Marmarati homepage



Figure 3.3: The First Circle experience



Figure 3.2: User Submission

## Case study

### Nike+

Nike+ is another example of a Phase Five communication, it has become an enabler. The combining of the brands Nike and Apple has united a community centred on the core values of healthy lifestyles, personal improvement and music. Nike and Apple realised that their products were often being used simultaneously and saw an opportunity to enhance user experience and convert those currently using alternative brands. The Nike+ widget and online community provides motivational goals and stories for its members and allows them to sync music and running data to share and compete with other community members. The site also enables online interaction to cross over into the physical community by facilitating competition and event organisation and using Google Maps to share running routes with other members in a similar geological location (Figure 4.2 & 4.3). In an amplification effect, users running logs can be linked in and posted to their Twitter and Facebook accounts, spreading the Nike+ influence outside of its own community. Nike+ has been so successful because it has addressed most of the issues raised in this essay that are deemed necessary in the creation of this community. It has created a tool with genuine intent to simplify and enhance user engagement with an aspect of their lives and with the brands products, and so has been welcomed and engaged with by the running community. (Springer, 2009)

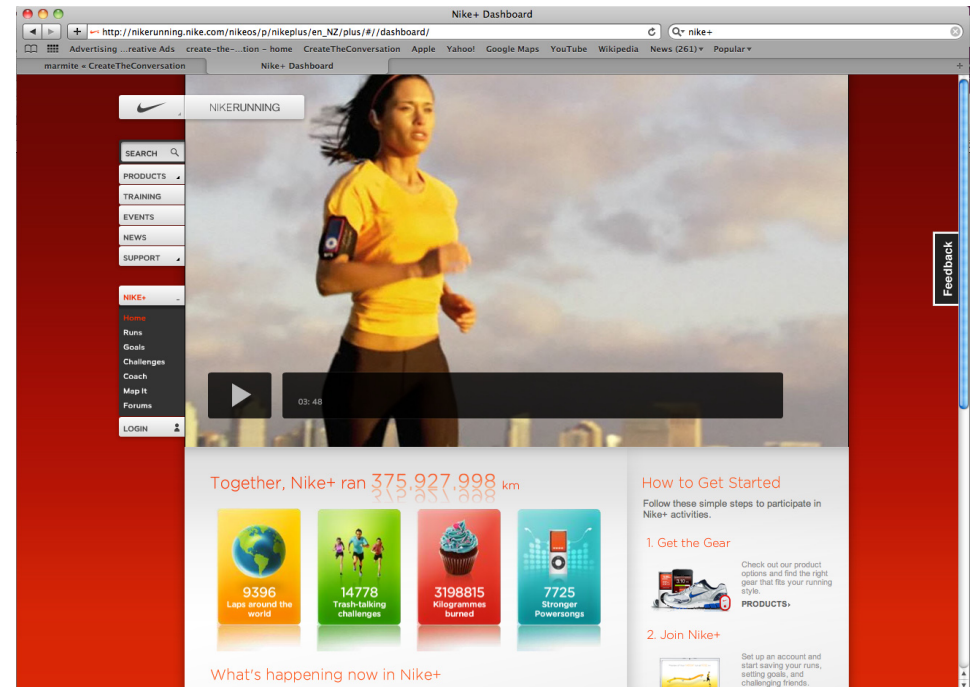


Figure 4.1: Nike+ homepage

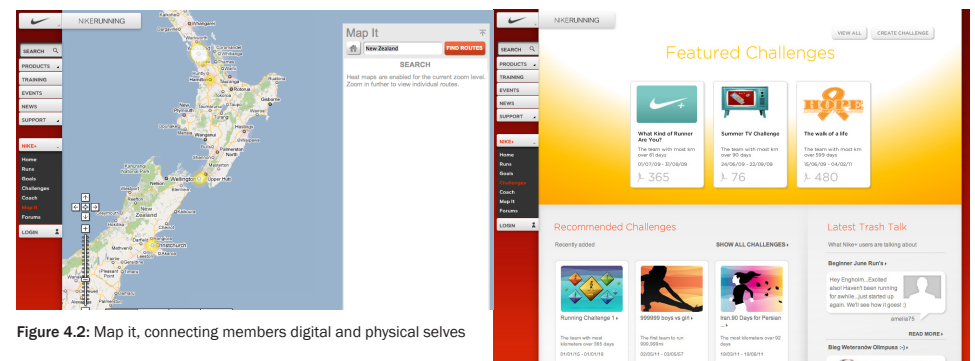


Figure 4.2: Map it, connecting members digital and physical selves

Figure 4.3: Challenges, facilitating user interaction

## Case study

### Foursquare

Nike+ is an exemplar for a brand transversing their users physical and digital selves, enhancing, user experience and creating a community and sense of belonging among its members. However it does not directly overlay digital information on the physical world, a key area this project is looking at. FourSquare is an example of an emerging social media that is based around this overlaying of information. FourSquare is a mobile-based community that allows you to make shout-outs to your friends based on geographical location. This is achieved via 'checking-in' at locations using a mobile device. As well as notifying your friends when you are at a location you can also review places and businesses, adding tips about what to do and what to avoid. FourSquare users are also able to search for specific types of places near them (e.g. restaurants) and then see what other people have said about these places. (FourSquare, 2010) Although FourSquare isn't a brand specific communication, it can be used by businesses as a means for offering rewards to customers who check-in regularly and can be used to send out notifications of events or offers.

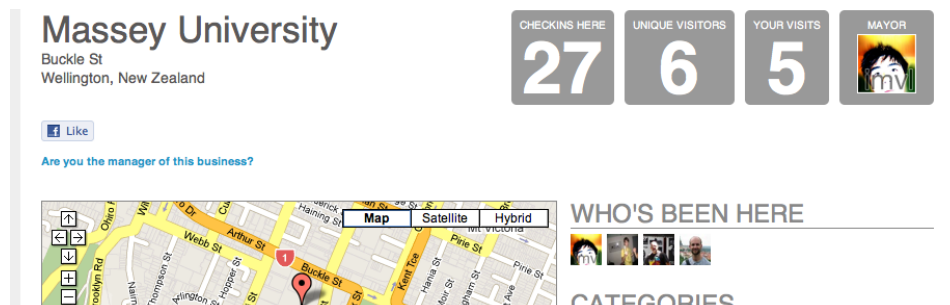


Figure 5.1: Massey University on Foursquare

## Case study

### Wikitude

The next step in this evolution of adding digital layers to the physical world is appearing through applications like Wikitude, where, unlike FourSquare, the information is laid directly over the physical landscape when it is viewed through a Smartphone camera. This is known as augmented reality and it is most likely that the outcome of this project will contain an aspect of augmented reality. Wikitude is currently applied as a travel guide, where Internet generated information about points of interest is overlaid into the users view. There is also a version of Wikitude that can be used as a navigation tool, utilising the phones GPS and then overlaying direction information. (Mobilizy, 2010) As technology develops further this exercise of overlaying digital information on the physical environment will become more seamless and intuitive, enabling augmented reality to be incorporated into things such as car windscreens and applied through devices such as Pranav Mistry's Sixth Sense.



Figure 6.1: Wikitude World Browser; using augmented reality to overlay digital information



## Experimentation

Parallel to researching into today's society and ways in which brands can engage with the network, exploration into addressing some of these issues has been attempted.

### Digital Graffiti Viewer:

The most developed concept is an augmented reality digital graffiti program for Smartphones. The general concept would be to create a socially acceptable way of adding beauty and artistic expression to the environment by allowing members to paint their landscape, visible to those who wish to engage with the art. The artist would start by defining the dimensions of their canvas and aligning it to an object in the physical space (Figure 7.2). Then using the phone as a 'digital spray can' they can begin painting on the surface. Using the phone itself as the instrument enables the user to capture the movements involved in street art, keeping the forms and skill required, with distance from surface and angle controlling spread and opacity. Once a work has been completed it can then be uploaded to the digital space, where it becomes a permanent layer over the physical. Other users will then be notified of a new artwork in their area via pings on their phone. They will be able to view a map of their current location at any time, showing art in their area, distinguishing between ones they have and have not viewed, and works of their favourite artists (Figure 7.1). Once they are near an artwork they can view it through augmented reality, as it would appear if it was a physical work, take pictures and leave comments and ratings (Figure 7.3). At sites sponsored by councils or businesses, users could submit

concepts for other community members to vote for their favourites. The best artist would then be able to paint their design on the physical space. This would open up the realm of street art to a wider audience of people than those currently involved, as it would be a legal way for people to have artistic expression and contribute to beautifying their environment.

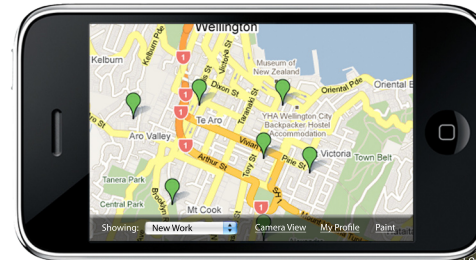


Figure 7.1: Map showing artwork in users area

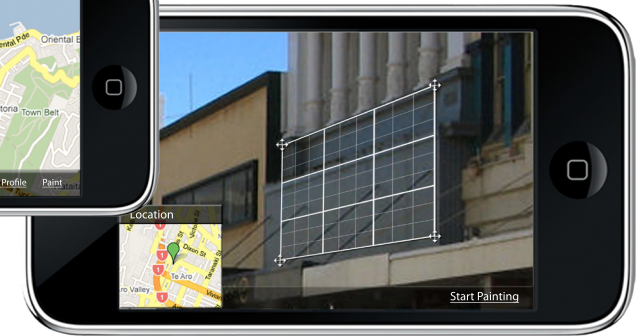


Figure 7.2: Defining the canvas aligned to a physical space



Figure 7.3: Viewing the artwork through augmented reality, where users can take pictures, rate work and leave comments

## Where to from here?

These case studies illustrate the points that the outcome of this project should cover. The execution needs to be brand specific focused, facilitating moments and conversations in users lives, and engaging in these conversations. The outcome should unite/create a community transversing the users physical and digital selves, enhancing users brand experience. The communication should also have a method of enabling the creation of brand ambassadors, encouraging positive conversations about the brand to occur in the users other communities. The exploration of project outcomes to date has only attempted to answer a select number of these per exploration. For example, the digital graffiti experiment is more an exercise in exploring augmented reality as a means for transversing the digital and physical worlds, and creating a community and conversation around a common activity. However it is not a brand driven execution, so the brand-associated aspects of the project are currently lacking. As the project moves forward through a brief and final execution it will need to address all of these areas, particularly finding brands that will be appropriate for exploration into these areas.

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### Figure 2

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### Figure 3

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### Figure 4

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### Figure 7

Personal work