

Digitally Facilitated Newspaper Consumption and Value Co-Creation

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Abstract

The upheaval of the newspaper industry's business model and value chain in the face of digitalisation has led to significant decreases in newspaper revenue. In order to stay successful in the modern digital climate it is essential for newspapers to utilise the interactive features of Web 2.0 to find new value sources. To do so it is necessary to focus not just on tangible financial value but also symbolic value. Recent literature has suggested that consumers collectively co-create value through consumption community practices. This study provides insights into value creation within a newspaper consumption community, adding to current research by demonstrating how an atypical consumption community can co-create value in ways different from those identified in extant research. Through the conduction of a netnographic exploration of active consumers on the *Guardian* website, and interviews with passive consumers, this research contributes to discussions of how communities co-create value and how this differs with different article subjects (lifestyle and political and types of participants (active and passive). The findings have opened up new ways in which newspapers can harness value through consumption communities as well as suggesting the future scope of research.

Introduction

The future of the newspaper has been under discussion since the increasing popularity of the interactive internet, Web 2.0. As with all industries, the introduction of Web 2.0 has drastically changed the business landscape for newspaper organisations, causing an upheaval of the long-established business model. From changes in the publication of the news, the authority of journalists, the generation of revenue and value, and the business to consumer relationship, newspaper organisations have had to contend with many challenges presented by society's increasing reliance on digitalisation. Despite most newspaper organisations adapting to the new digital business climate - offering online and mobile services - current research fails to agree on how newspapers can continue to create value in the new and challenging marketplace. While most research has been concurrent in professing the longevity of the industry as a whole, there is still much speculation and uncertainty as to whether print newspapers have a future or if they will be eventually and completely replaced by their digital alternative. The precarious future of the print newspaper necessitates a concentration on digital news sites which entails a complete disruption to the well-established foundations of news value chains. Consequently, it is vital for the future success and survival of the news industry to utilise the internet to its full potential. Literature has hitherto highlighted the internet as creating as many, if not more, value-creating opportunities as it has destroyed, a notion which this research aims to expand upon to reveal the ways in which digitalisation has opened up new symbolic value-creating opportunities for the newspaper industry with particular concentration on consumption communities and consumer roles.

Prior to the introduction of the internet newspaper, companies offered their news content solely in print form, generating revenue through purchase-sales and advertising. Following the last renovation of the newspaper business model in 1833, newspapers have procured the majority

of their revenue through advertising - accounting for up to 80% of total income -, subsidising this with purchase revenues (The Economist, 2011; Guardian, 2015). On top of print and advertising sales newspapers traditionally monopolised news content, selling it to television and radio organisations (Newman, 2011). This business model which newspapers had been grounded upon for so long was weakened with the appearance of the internet. The internet has provided a perspicacity to information, increasing the number of news sources and competition, and destroying value-chains. With newspapers no longer having absolute possession of the news, on account information being free and readily available, their content no longer holds the financial value it once did. In addition, with consumers discovering they no longer need to pay for news content, newspapers have become less appealing to advertisers causing advertising revenue to decrease. Advertising revenues have been falling in the UK since 2007 (O'Reilly and Edwards, 2014), once the principle income source, they have now dropped lower than circulation-generated revenue (Guardian, 2015) leaving them too low to cover newspaper running costs (The Economist, 2011). Despite the reach that the internet enables meaning that newspapers have a bigger audience than ever before, the fall in print circulation and sales means that revenue is dropping (The Economist). With 93% of newspaper income still originating from print advertising and sales, despite their demise, (Guardian, 2015) the lack of remunerative value that online news sites provide is conspicuous. While future forecasts are promising for the industry, with national advertising expenditure and revenue due to rise in coming years (Guardian, 2014), it is vital to be able to distinguish value sources within the sphere of digital news.

One of the key features of Web 2.0 is its interactive nature, something which has allowed a previously unknown consumer participation (Shang, 2011). While this has changed business dynamics and diminished organisational power over brands and marketing, it has also allowed

for the formation of consumption communities. Consumption communities have been identified as possessing the potentiality for the co-creation of brands, community and financial value. While, newspapers are identified as brands - with forerunning national newspaper organisations bearing distinctive reputations, consumer perceptions and attracting different consumer groups (Green, 2014) - they differ somewhat in nature to other brands. Newspapers provide national news content in a diverse array of subjects from politics, to sport, to lifestyle, lacking a single focal point or interest for consumers to congregate around as well as providing an asynchronous interactivity platform (Broekhuizen and Hoffmann, 2012). It is consequently of interest to gain insight into the dynamics of such an unconventional consumption community and how it generates value. By combining brand identity with the interactive and participatory features enabled by Web 2.0, newspapers are increasingly gathering groups of consumers who participate in online discussions and forming a type of consumption community.

The purpose of this study is to build upon and contribute to extant consumption, community and participatory theory and to gain further insight into how the digitalisation of newspapers can enable the continuation and enhancement of value creation both for news organisations and their consumers. With the instability of financial value, the intangible value of consumption communities needs to be considered for the future success of the newspaper industry. This research explores the nature of community formation around the news and the consumer behaviour within these communities, examining the differences in participation and practices around different genres of articles (lifestyle and politics). To achieve this, the research begins by outlining current themes within existing literature including how digitalisation has impacted the newspaper industry, its value creation (Everett, 2011; Thomson and Muminova, 2014) and its consumers (Constantinides, 2008; Bechmann 2012; Graham and Hill, 2009) as well as theory on value co-creation through consumption community's consumer participation roles.

This distinguishes the key concepts associated with consumption communities laying the foundation for the new explorations undertaken in the data collection. In order to procure the desired information on value creation within the newspaper industry, this study adopts an empirical outlook, using a netnographic exploration of the community surrounding the Guardian as well as conducting interviews with its readers. The data collection reveals the news consumption habits of the modern digital news reader, specifically that they are adopting a social and aggregative approach to news. The findings also reveal that the particular nature of news content consumption has produced its own discrete community practices and behaviours and participation which create value (not all of which comply with those divulged in prior studies). The Guardian attracts multiple transitory consumer communities which participate in ephemeral practices. While lifestyle articles attract a more cohesive community who work towards shared community driven goals, the political articles revealed much more individualistic behaviour with members striving for self-actualisation through competition. The exploration of passive and active participation contradicts extant theories, suggesting little value creation from passive consumers. This research has uncovered consumer motivations for participation which have not yet been discussed in literature, exposing a lack of satisfaction and representation as key drivers for active participation. Finally the implications and limitations of the study are discussed, suggesting that newspaper organisations must strive to build strong brands in order to differentiate themselves and stay competitive and attract loyalty and revenue.

The aim of this research is to explore the ways in which digitalisation has enabled value creation for newspapers. In order to attain the research objective, the following research questions have been developed: How can the *Guardian's* online consumption community create value for consumers and for the newspaper?

Literature Review

Threats and Changes brought about by Web 2.0

In order to better comprehend how newspapers can harness Web 2.0 as value-creating tool, it is necessary to understand the effects of digitalisation on the newspaper industry financially and in terms of changes in consumer relationships and behaviour. Firstly, an awareness of the complex nature of value, is required to facilitate an understanding of value-creation within the industry.

Value

It is important, when talking about value, to understand its multifaceted quality. Value does not just reside in the tangible - financial - but also in the intangible and symbolic. While the old newspaper business model focused principally on the goods-dominant logic of financial value, the renovated business model that digitalisation has influenced has necessitated newspapers to adopt a service-dominant logic approach. The service-dominant logic is the cornerstone of modern marketing theory, a concept believing value a product of co-creation between businesses and consumers (Vargo et. al., 2008). In the newspaper industry, this logic suggests that value is not created by the newspaper and its content but in its consumption and the consumer's experience of, and participation with, the news (Vargo et. al., 2008). Without the consumer, the newspaper has no value. This contemporary view of value creation sees value shift from purely remunerative, tangible and favourable to the business, to becoming an intangible symbolic customer-centric concept. Consumers are able to create value through practices which are performed in order to achieve a specific goal (Gummerus, 2013). Consumers create and co-create symbolic meanings and value through their consumption

activities, and these practices carry social, hedonic and emotional value within their context (Pongsakornrungrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011; Schau et. al., 2009; Gummeruus, 2013).

The Digital Consumer

Web 2.0 has influenced many changes in the behaviour and relationships of businesses and consumers market-wide. The newspaper industry has been significantly affected by digitalisation, disrupting the newspaper business model and creating a new generation of consumers to whom the internet is integral to daily life (Constantinides, 2008). The internet has made available vast amounts of free, instantly accessible data creating a demand for free news content (Bechmann, 2012). To keep up with contemporary consumer trends it has been necessary for newspaper companies to digitalise their content. Digitalisation has influenced consumers to become less habitual and more promiscuous with their news reading (Graham and Hill, 2009), due to the internet providing the means for a plethora of easily accessible content from a myriad of sources, resulting in decreasing newspaper subscriptions and print sales (Everett, 2011). Few organisations choose to combat this by charging for online subscriptions because readers are unwilling to pay (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008).

Consumers are employing a variety of devices to access and get involved with the news endowing them with a new sense of empowerment (Bechmann, 2012; Broekhuizen and Hoffmann, 2012; Everett, 2011). The new ways of presenting the news that digital devices provide are valuable marketing tools to be utilised by organisations. The ability to see customers opinions voiced through interactive features online means that news organisations can gain a better understanding of what their consumers want: their interests, media and device preferences etc. so that they can customise their content accordingly and heighten customer satisfaction (Graham and Hill, 2009).

Advertising

Despite provoking a decrease in print sales, the internet and its facilities have become a lifeline for the industry, currently being their “second-most revenue-generating element” (Everett, 2011, p. 102). While the growing popularity of online newspapers, and the decline of print, has inevitably impacted the industry’s value chain model, recent research has recognised the financial value that the internet offers. Although statistics show that digitalisation has significantly impacted advertising revenue (Green, 2014), with indications that the digital news consumer is less engaged and consequently of less value to advertisers (Graham and Hill, 2009; Kaul et. al., 2015), the latest research conversely suggests that newspaper consumers are prime targets for advertisers due to their increased propensity to be engaged by advertisements (Everett, 2011; Green, 2014). Thomson and Muminova (2014) have created a profile of newspaper readers (whether they read print or digital) as being more talkative, engaged and knowledgeable about current affairs and politics than those who do not read newspapers, being more easily stimulated by advertisements and generally better networked. Their research has proved that these attributes also extend to newspaper reader’s propensity for holding brand and advert related conversations. Such research advocates the potential for online advertising suggesting that news sites offer advertisers a more targeted audience, and a wide choice of sizes, positionings and formats which have only become more diverse with digital technology (Everett, 2011; Green, 2014).

Co-creation

The interactive and participative nature and functions of Web 2.0 have bestowed consumers with an influential online presence enabling them to contribute to online content. This instigation of power and potential for creation in the hands of the consumer, has seen an

alteration in the structure of the marketplace and the value creation process (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008; Graham and Hill, 2009). In order to maintain value within a digital landscape, newspapers must approach their business with a customer-centric outlook, focusing on collaborative enterprise, community value and co-creation all of which are advanced by social technologies (Serrano et. al., 2015). The interactivity offered in such social spaces as news site comment sections has driven content and value through collaborative efforts with consumers and newspapers co-creating value. While co-creation has required companies to relinquish some of their content and marketing autonomy, the value of the co-creating consumer is widely recognised in literature (Bechmann, 2012; Hartmann et. al., 2015; Malinen, 2015; Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011; Schau et. al., 2009; Serrano et. al., 2015). The main methods by which consumers co-create value is by widening the intelligence pool, sharing knowledge, and emotionally enriching online experiences. Co-creation can enhance the resources that journalists have access to, benefiting both the newspapers and readers through improved content (Everett, 2011). Consumer and citizen journalist input can increase consumer loyalty through a heightened sense of involvement, ownership and empowerment (Bechmann, 2012). Consumer participation was initially thought to news credibility but has since been identified as encouraging journalists to be increasingly accurate, honest and socially relevant which is of more value to consumers (Graham and Hill, 2009).

Just as news content is increasingly becoming a product of co-creation, so is the resulting value (Schau et. al., 2009). Web 2.0 sees consumers adopting the roles of providers and beneficiaries allowing value co-creation to occur between consumers and business and between consumers and their peers (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011). Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder expand concepts of co-creation, describing consumers who co-create value as “prosumers” because they produce their own consumption objects and value (2011, p. 304). It is important

for the creation of value that companies provide online discussion platforms to enable interaction and provide information on their customers (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011).

Consumption Communities

The *Guardian* and other newspapers convey a recognisable and acknowledged brand image and provide the online forum necessary for the formation of consumption communities, despite lacking a single subject of interest for consumers to congregate around. The nature of the consumption community which has gathered on the *Guardian's* website is that of a pool community, meaning that members assemble around a shared interest or value but have loose associations with one another (Hudson et. al., 2012). Pool affiliations offer limited community value and benefits, with expansive, unfocused brands such as the *Guardian* further diluting the common meaning holding members together (Fournier and Lee, 2009). In order to strengthen brand value, companies are encouraged to attempt to create web affiliations out of pool communities which are desirable because of the close personal relationships fostered between their consumers (Fournier and Lee, 2009). Extant research into consumption communities has focused predominantly on web or pool communities which are centred around a very specific interests or passions such as football clubs (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011). Therefore, it is of interest to observe the community dynamics and value co-creation within a newspaper community in order to understand how newspapers can continue to create value.

Consumption communities existed before the internet, however, online platforms have facilitated their formation by allowing members to more easily share and communicate (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008). Consumption communities are defined as text-based discussion forums which enable consumers to “co-construct their consumption, resistance, or

empowerment” online (Malinen, 2015; Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011, p. 306). Consumer interaction is key to the formation of communities which are created and strengthened through the acquisition of community-specific in-group behaviour or practices which when performed exemplify a shared understanding between members (Hartmann et. al., 2015). Schau et. al. (2009, p. 34) identify three main community practices - welcoming, empathising and governing - as “creating, enhancing, and sustaining ties among brand community members”, postulating that the more diverse and complex the practices, the stronger the brand community is. Hartmann et. al., (2015) attribute these practice performances as the true nucleus of a community, providing stronger unification than the brand or subject of interest itself. It is this transgression from outward to inward directed community interactions which allow a community to evolve; consumers become community members when they cease to participate peripherally and become active participants (Malinen, 2015). Such development and strengthening of communities through increasingly complex practices allows value to be created and experienced within the community (Hartmann et. al., 2015).

With interactions between community members being fundamental to the creation and development of online communities it is unsurprising that they are a key value creator. It is the social and cultural capital collected through community practices which satisfy consumer desires for belonging and group identity (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011). This is achieved via a multitude of community practices from acquiring information, enriching experiences, developing relationships and contributing to resources (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011; Hartmann et. al., 2015). There are two main sources of value which consumers strive to gain from community participation: individual goals and collective goals (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011). Individual goals are those which benefit the individual such as gathering information, experiencing, building relationships and enjoying

social interactions, while collective goals are beneficial to both the individual and the community as a whole - developing a group identity or sense of community, contributing to the community's intelligence pool and supporting the brand culture (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011). In addition, there is value to be gained through more individual practices which distinguish community members and produce feelings of personal gratification. Weijo et. al. (2014) suggests that community members have differences and multiplicity which prevent the completely homogeneous consumption identified in other studies. Schau et. al. (2009) extends this concept further, implying that some consumers use communities to differentiate themselves not apart from the community, but within it, securing a position within a consciously constructed community hierarchy. Such differentiation heightens consumers hedonic engagement and value through showing off their competencies, skills, knowledge, experience and dedication, thereby garnering the admiration of other members (Schau et. al., 2009).

Consumer Participation

To understand how value is co-created it is necessary to have a basic knowledge of participatory theory. In extant research, there is concurrent evidence that there are two types of consumer participation within online communities: active participation and passive participation (Hartmann et. al., 2015; Malinen, 2015; Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011). Active members, or providers, are more experienced members who contribute to online content (Malinen, 2015; Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011). Passive members, also referred to as lurkers or beneficiaries, are often inexperienced or new members who browse content without contributing (Malinen, 2015; Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011). The value of both types of participation becomes clear when understanding the value that consumers can derive from online communities - self-actualisation, esteem and social

acceptance - which can be achieved, both from the providing and receiving of information. It is active members who participate in productive moments, by which is meant they contribute via comments which become a value offering (Hartmann et. al., 2015). However, for a value offering to become a value experience consumptive moments are necessary. Hartmann et. al. (2015) argue that it is not just productive moments which build a community but also consumptive moments. Passive members participate in “vicarious consumptive moments” are an integral part of community participation, allowing consumers to experience value (Hartmann et. al., 2015). Both roles are viewed as valuable and essential to communities (Hartmann et. al., 2015; Malinen, 2015; Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011). The active-passive, direct-vicarious dichotomy is regarded as incorporating the pursuit for lurkers to transform into active members; lurking is considered a transitory role assumed by newcomers (Malinen, 2015; Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011). In the view that vicarious consumptive moments allow members to acclimatise to the community, learning practices, building of knowledge and acquiring social capital, passive members are therefore part of the cyclical process of community building. It is through this process that brand communities are strengthened, building more intricate practices which enrich consumer experiences and therefore the value they derive from participation (Malinen, 2015).

Value Creation for Newspapers

Loyalty

Consumption communities are of value to companies as well as to community members, becoming marketing instruments by strengthening brands, increasing loyalty, widening the reader base and providing information on consumer’s wants and needs (Hartmann et. al., 2015; Broekhuizen and Hoffmann, 2012; Graham and Hill, 2009; Malinen, 2015; Everett, 2015; Newman, 2011; Kozinets, 2014; Weber, 2014). It is speculated that when newspaper

consumers have an outlet for their voice to be heard i.e. online commenting facilities, they feel more valued inclined to loyalty (Everett, 2015). Interactivity and consumer interaction within communities has also been found to enhance preferences for brands and preventing users leaving sites (Broekhuizen and Hoffmann, 2012; Malinen, 2015).

Information Processing and Participation

Interactivity improves the quality of information processing which enriches experiences and increases a person's loyalty to, and preference for, the newspaper (Broekhuizen and Hoffmann, 2012). Consumers find peer opinions more reliable and valuable than that of organisations, when consumers are spreading messages, promoting news content and participating it is more authentic and influential to other consumers (Kozinets, 2014; Graham and Hill, 2009). In their research Broekhuizen and Hoffmann (2012) explore the concept of consumers' Need for Cognition (NFC), defined as "a person's tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive endeavours". Consumers have varying Needs for Cognition (NFC), those with a high NFC "put more effort into their consumption experiences and search more widely and deeply for new information", therefore it is these consumers who tend to participate more in community practices. Interestingly, however, interactive facilities proved most beneficial to those with lower NFCs because they provide an easy way to get more involved and better understand news content (Broekhuizen and Hoffmann, 2012).

Literature has identified high levels of contextual interest and personal relevance as influencing consumers to comment on articles (Weber, 2014) with Boczkowski and Mitchelstein finding that online participation in political articles allows consumers to "feel more informed ... and more competent ... report[ing] higher levels of internal and external political efficacy (2012, p. 5). In turn, Serrano et. al. (2009) highlight participation as helping personalise news content

and encourage feelings of community belonging and connection. Such research opens up ideas as to how newspapers can increase participation levels in consumers, which are identified as valuable assets, but fail to delve into why and how this creates value. This study aims to explore how this participation propensity can create value and what the motivations behind it are.

Method

In light of the ontological and epistemological stance and the nature of my research questions, my methodological approach is hermeneutical and dialectical (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), necessitating an explorative insight into the naturalistic settings of online consumer communities to show how consumers interact with each other and participate in online comment streams. Therefore, I have followed a qualitative research design using interviews and principles of netnography to collect data. Qualitative research is the most appropriate design because it provides the rich textual data which allows scope for interpretation and a subjective comprehension of socially constructed meanings (Saunders et. al., 2012).

Netnography

To gain insights into *Guardian* reader's co-consumption and co-creation it was necessary to observe their natural online behaviour in article comment streams. In order to do this I collected data through netnographic methods, borrowing the principles of an interpretive ethnography and translating them to online observations. Netnographies are:

qualitative, interpretive research methodolog[ies] that adapts the traditional, in-person ethnographic research techniques of anthropology to the study of the online cultures and communities formed through computer-mediated communications. (Jupp, 2006 cited by Kozinets, 2006, p. 281).

Because the community I have observed is web-based, naturalistic observational research had to be completed via netnographic techniques. Netnography has become a popular methodological approach to conducting explorations of online consumer communities with many researchers undertaking similar studies, such as Weber (2014), Schau et al. (2009), Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder (2011), Hartmann et al. (2015), Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2012) and Bechmann (2012) all employing such methods. Conducting netnographic research is advantageous because it allows an unobtrusive, authentic observation of the target participants and the reality of their online community (Kozinets, 2006). It also allows a readily accessible, data-rich insights into community behaviour, symbolic meanings, rituals, language, practices, membership and consumption patterns (Kozinets, 2006).

Interview

I conducted three semi-structured interviews based upon a series of open-ended questions and topics (see Appendix I) which were expanded upon and varied depending on where the interview naturally led. This style of interview best fitted the exploratory nature of my research because it allowed me to acquire knowledge on the consumers' perspectives of the community and how value is created, prompting new considerations to arise from the answers provided. The interview questions were developed to answer my research questions and to further explore topics of interest that arose in previous literature.

Data Collection Methods

The Guardian

I chose the *Guardian* as the newspaper to conduct my research around for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it is a newspaper that I read myself online therefore I have the involvement, prior knowledge and contextual familiarity with the newspaper that Kozinets (2006; 2010) deems necessary for strong netnographic research. I also understand the *Guardian* to be one of the largest newspapers in the UK, possessing a strong brand image a particular readership. I felt that a well-known, strongly branded newspaper was preferable for conducting research into consumer communities because the readers would be more likely to form a community based on their shared affiliation with the *Guardian*. Lastly, I was aware that *Guardian* has no online paywalls or restrictions to content access therefore enabling extensive research and unlimited access to articles and comment streams.

The *Guardian* is a British politically left-leaning (BBC, 2009) national daily newspaper, with a website open to an international audience. The *Guardian* is regarded as “a pioneer in online media” boasting the second largest English language newspaper site in the world (O’Reilly and Edwards, 2014), and holding the title for the UK’s most widely read newspaper site. Offering free unlimited content access, its website visits “more than double its net readership” (Reid, 2014). Currently holding an online readership of 9,016,000, 7,375,000 of which only access the *Guardian* via their website rather than print (National Readership Survey, 2015), the *Guardian* is emblematic of the changes in consumer reading habits with the digitalisation of the news. Efforts to keep up with digitalisation saw the *Guardian*’s online revenues increase by 24% in 2014 but have led to a stagnation in print revenues (O’Reilly and Edwards, 2014). Despite not implementing a paywall on their website, the *Guardian* have adopted a membership initiative which encourage readers to pay monthly fees for exclusive access to live events in the hopes of increasing subscription revenue (O’Reilly and Edwards, 2014). The *Guardian* website attracts a majority readership aged 18-25 from all demographic social grades

(with a 58%:42% split between readers of ABC1 and those of C2DE grades) who tend to possess far-left political beliefs and interests in politics and global news events (YouGov, 2015). The *Guardian* have initiated a scheme to encourage user-generated content with Guardian Witness which sets consumers tasks to contribute opinions, videos, pictures and stories on specific themes.

Netnography

I undertook netnographic analysis of twelve Guardian articles (see Table 1), choosing those with the most comments so that I would have a wealth of data to analyse. Six of the articles were political and six were lifestyle articles. I chose to look at two different classifications of articles in order to establish any differences in community behaviour and participation in relation to article content and context. This will help augment extant research on the relationship between context and participation (Boczkowski and Mitchelstein, 2012; Thomson and Muminova, 2014; Weber, 2014). I chose six articles tagged by the *Guardian* as “Labour” themed which follow the current issue of choosing a new Labour party leader after their loss in the 2015 general elections and the resignation of former leader. By choosing a series of current, politically charged articles I sought to extend and assess for myself the patterns Weber (2014) recognised surrounding increased interaction and participation during periods of heightened political activity. The lifestyle articles covered a variety of topics: “Food and Drink”, “Health and Wellbeing”, “Property”, and “Home Improvements”. The content of the articles ranged from general interest/advice - one article was about quiche - to covering contemporary trends such as the latest exercise movement. I chose these articles to see if interactions and participations differed from those surrounding political articles in order to widen the participant base and scope of the data. My study was cross-sectional, looking at the available data at a particular time in order to adhere to the short time-scale of this project. I

started my analysis of all the comment streams from the oldest comment, which allowed me to follow the comments as they arose and developed. I ended analysis when the data I collected was saturated and there were no new or interesting behaviours emerging.

Interview

I conducted three interviews for my research, using passive *Guardian* website readers, aged 23-26, who read comments left by consumers but do not comment themselves. This allowed me to better understand the value created and derived from passive participation, building upon research of active and passive participation in consumption communities (Hartmann et. al., 2015; Malinen, 2015; Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011). I approached the interviewees in person and via email, asking if they would participate in an interview for my research, providing them with a consent form (see Appendix II). Once they had agreed, I met them individually in Hartley Library where I conducted the interview over a 45-60 minute period.

Table 1: Data Collection of *Guardian* Articles

Article Title	Article Type (Political/Lifestyle)	Author	Tags	Date Written	Number of Shares	Number of Comments
1 "Yvette Cooper Hits Out at 'Startlingly Retro' Labour Leadership Campaign"	Political	Political Editor, Patrick Wintour	"Yvette Cooper", "Women in Politics", "Labour Party Leadership", "Labour", "Andy Burnham"	24/07/15	1,568	4,180
2 "Jeremy Corbyn: I only want genuine Labour supporters to vote for me"	Political	Political Editor, Patrick Wintour	"Labour Party Leadership", "Labour", "Jeremy Corbyn", "Andy Burnham", "Harriet Harman"	26/07/15	1,987	2,034
3 "Jeremy Corbyn backs British membership of EU"	Political	Nicholas Watt & Patrick Wontour	"Jeremy Corbyn", "EU Referendum", "Labour Party Leadership", "Labour", "European Union"	28/07/15	2,201	2,496
4 "Jeremy Corbyn's Supporters aren't mad - they're fleeing a bankrupt New Labour"	Political	Owen Jones	"Labour Party Leadership", "Jeremy Corbyn", "Labour", "Tony Blair"	03/08/15	13,720	3,557
5 "Kezia Dugdale: Corbyn win could leave Labour 'carping on sidelines' "	Political	Scotland Correspondent, Libby Brooks	"Scottish Politics", "Labour", "General Election 2015", "Jim Murphy", "Scottish National Party (SNP)"	02/08/15	1,623	1,792
6 "Labour is really two parties. And they Simply can't stand each other"	Political	Andrew Rawnsley	"Labour", "Electoral Reform", "Jeremy Corbyn"	02/08/15	4,900	1,119
7 "Brew do you think you are? Why tea needs to copy coffee in order to survive"	Lifestyle	Paula Coccozza	"Tea", "Food & Drink"	06/08/15	299	415
8 "How to Eat: Quiche"	Lifestyle	Tony Naylor	"Food & Drink", "Summer Food and Drink"	03/08/15	519	464
9 "Should I got vegan to lose weight?"	Lifestyle	Luisa Dillner	"Health & Wellbeing", "Diets and Dieting", "Veganism", "Vegetarianism"	06/08/15	4,404	414
10 "The Death of DIY: why can't I do it myself?"	Lifestyle	Stuart Heritage	"DIY", "Home Improvements", "Renting Property", "House Prices", "Property"	04/04/15	2,193	382
11 "Home improvements: the essential guide to getting it right"	Lifestyle	Donna Ferguson	"Home Improvements", "Consumer Affairs", "Consumer Rights", "Construction Industry"	20/09/14	246	61
12 "Is one minute of high-intensity exercise really enough to get fit?"	Lifestyle	Luisa Dillner	"Health & Wellbeing"	02/08/15	2,542	72

Data Analysis

I have adopted a semi-deductive approach to my research, exploring and identifying themes and patterns to provide new insights into the existing conceptual framework on value creation within the newspaper industry and consumption communities (Saunders et. al., 2012). The wealth of extant research into online consumption communities and value creation, both inside and outside the newspaper industry, has established a preliminary theoretical structure for my

research, however, my specific focus the *Guardian* and their readers - under a social constructivist and interpretivist view - means results are derived from the data collected. Each individual consumer's interpretation of their participation, and my own interpretation of the data will provide a unique addition to current knowledge and theories. I used thematic analysis with the principles of phenomenological analysis to identify reoccurring, relevant and interesting themes based on consumer experiences within my collected data. Comment stream analysis was conducted by transcribing the threads into documents allowing for comments to be coded by themes which correlated with my research questions. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed before being coded in correspondence with themes which arose in the netnographic analysis.

Reliability, Validity and Generalisability

When dealing with issues of reliability and validity I have endeavoured to ensure high levels of data quality and credibility. I conducted netnographies on a series of different articles, written on different days by different journalists and covering different topics. This means that the data I collected has an increased element of generalisability. While my research was based on my interpretation of socially constructed meanings, in order to reduce any biases as a researcher I asked open-ended questions in my interview trying to encourage descriptions, directions and expansions to come from the participant rather than myself. I also highlighted inconsistencies or anomalies found in the patterns I identified from my netnographies. Adopting a social constructivist approach to research leads me to believe that being able to replicate the study would be to undermine the philosophic principles of my research and the benefits of conducting semi-structured interviews (Saunders et. al., 2012).

Results

Consumer-Brand Relationships

The *Guardian*, despite its diverse content, is an established brand, widely acknowledged as politically left-leaning and attracting an identifiable readership. It can be discerned from consumer recognition of the *Guardian*'s brand image that the *Guardian* have created the strong branding which typically allows for the development of consumption communities. What many previous studies have failed to examine, when looking at value creation in newspapers, is an understanding of the consumer-brand relationship and how brands are perceived by their consumers. This research provides an insight into how consumers perceive and build relationships with the *Guardian*. The interviews conducted in this research showed that consumers associate the *Guardian* with “youngish adults” (Interviewee B, 23/08/15) like themselves identifying it as “trustworthy, reliable. Quite not cool but, I don't know, stylish. Not as low-brow and trashy as *Daily Mail* and *Sun* but more readable than the high-brow like *The Times*” (Interviewee, A, 13/08/15). This displays a consumer awareness of the newspaper's image and positioning within the newspaper market. It also indicates that consumers read the *Guardian* because they feel it identifies with their associative self and group.

Consumer Behaviour

The fickle, digitally-oriented modern news consumer identified in prior research is reinforced in this data. None of the interviewees read the *Guardian* in print - or knew anyone who does - , accessing its content through the website, social media referrals or via the mobile app. Likewise, none of the interviewees read the *Guardian* exclusively - and the frequent referencing of articles and sharing links from other newspapers on comment streams suggested that few consumers read only one newspaper. The interviews revealed that consumers are adopting an aggregative approach to news consumption using multiple news sources to enhance and synthesise content and knowledge:

I read [*The Daily Mail*] for the news because it's just like easy, all the stories are there, you just have to scroll down the screen and you get all the headlines and you know what's happening. Then you go to another website i.e. the *Guardian* and you get all the facts of the story. (Interviewee A, 13/08/15)

This shows a new symbiotic approach to news reading, presenting different newspaper brands as providing unique offerings and benefits which work well together to augment and benefit each other rather than being in competition.

The ability to access the news online proved to be important to consumers and their relationship with the news. The generation that the interviewees represented is one which has always relied on access to digital content and who find it is advantageous to their relationship with the news.

Interviewee A (13/08/15) highlighted the importance of news as part of a daily routine:

I quite like having a routine and its [news] just part of my routine so I enjoy it. And I like the thought of knowing what's going on in the world when you wake up.

Especially if something big has happened. You know? You want to know about it straight away.

The easy, on demand access to news which allows an immediate, real-time connectivity with world events would not be available without the digitalisation of newspapers and is of significant value and importance to consumers. Interviewee A (13/08/15) highlights how digitalisation has widened news access when saying:

I was a child when there wasn't much digitalisation of the news so wasn't buying newspapers anyway but if I had have been I wouldn't have been buying one

everyday so I wouldn't have necessarily been reading news everyday... but now I can just get updates whenever I want.

The interviewees attribute the easy access to news as allowing better engagement and connection with news brands because "there's just so many ways to get engaged" (Interviewee B, 23/08/15).

Social News

In the age of service-dominant marketing logic and consumer participation, the news is increasingly social with consumers integral to the sourcing and spreading of news content through comment spaces and social media. Social media sites allow consumers to share news articles with friends, which is identified by consumers as "really interesting because sometimes you'll come across things that you wouldn't otherwise have come across. Increased access really" (Interviewee B, 23/08/15). The *Guardian's* social media presence is discerned as a unique selling point of the *Guardian* by the interviewees: "I see a lot of links on Facebook which I don't really see with other newspapers" (Interviewee B, 23/08/15) "I notice their presence a lot on social media, they're probably one of the most social media savvy papers that would come to mind, I would associate them with being that" (Interviewee C, 23/08/15). The news is something which all interviewees said they shared with family or friends by sending links to news websites via email or social media. This was evident also in the comment streams where consumers often post links to other *Guardian* articles or newspaper websites. And it is not only the news content itself but its consumption which is social both online and offline, regarded as an "everyday" talking point (Interviewee A, 13/08/15). One consumer commented on another users comment saying, "This had my wife and I laughing and applauding. Well said" (*Guardian*, article 9, 06/08/15). This comment shows that consumers sometimes read and

participate with the news as a group, insinuating the social value can be created by the news outside of the community as well within it. This point supports Bockzkowski and Mitchelstein's concept (2012) that community participation can create value by increasing consumer's cultural capital which is of value to them both within the community and in everyday life, leaving consumers more informed.

Participation and Value

The current prevalence within consumption community focused literature on the subject of participation lends great attention to the participatory roles adopted by consumers and how they affect community dynamics and value co-creation (Hartmann et. al., 2015; Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011; Malinen, 2015). The data collected in this study contributes to the current discourse on consumer participation by extending extant research and providing new insights into why consumers adopt the roles they do and how this creates value.

Motivations for Active Participation

The data collected from the netnographic insights into the *Guardian*'s consumption community presents six principle motivations for commenting: 1) Commenting in opposition (challenging, contradicting and correcting); 2) Commenting in concurrence (showing solidarity, agreement or appreciation); 3) Commenting to provide knowledge (extending content, information pool and offering advice); 4) Commenting to seek knowledge (asking for advice, elaborations or expansion); 5) Commenting to express strong opinions; 6) Commenting to share experiences (story telling, memories). Although all six motivations surfaced in both political and lifestyle comment streams, there was an apparent difference in their tones and reasoning behind the motivations for each.

Commenting in Opposition

The political articles tend to attract a significant amount of contention, both between consumers and from consumers to the journalist and/or article. The majority of comments left on the political articles expressed angry or aggressive responses disagreeing with the article or the opinions of others. The subsequent dialogue between two consumers, following a disagreement, exemplifies the prevailing attitude of consumers who comment in opposition:

[Consumer B]: I over-reacted a tad, as I thought that after hitting “post” - it’s just on political things, there’s too much invective chucked about the place for me. Peace, etc. :)

[Consumer A]: No problem. I am obviously angry myself so I understand. The echo chambers are loud and sometimes I feel like I need to shout to be heard.

(*Guardian*, Article 1, 24/07/15)

This indicated the disparaging, heated comments that political articles attract, providing an insight into consumers’ motivations for commenting and how this impacts interaction. The above conversation highlights politics as a subject which consumers feel passionate about and which inspires consumers to comment impetuously and in anger. While the lifestyle articles also invited opposition - which was at times of an angry tone - there was less of it than seen for political articles and it tended to be a lot tamer, usually simply stating a disagreement.

Commenting in Concurrence

Similarly, to the expression of opposition, the comments of concurrence following lifestyle articles, while being much more common, lacked the fervency displayed around the political articles. Although the majority of comments left on political articles expressed opposition and negativity, the strong feelings and opinions that political subjects provoke are also very evident

when they comment in concurrence. When consumers commented to agree with each other or with the article it was a passionate agreement which was exhibited using exclaimatives or repetition: “So do I!” “well said this needs repeating again and again” (*Guardian*, Article 1, 24/07/15) to emphasise their excitement in finding someone who shares their opinions.

Commenting to Provide Knowledge, Seek Knowledge and Share Experiences

When commenting on political articles the passion seen put into the expression of concurrence and opposition are also evident when consumers comment for the other four motivational reasons highlighted. When contributing to widen the information pool, express their opinions or share experiences they are all presented in a forceful way, with consumers adamant that the experiences, opinions and knowledge they have are irreproachable. Definitive statements are issued more than advice or suggestions. It is evident from analysis of the comments that participants are very much aware of this prevalent nature in political commenters: “I have a question here - not a pro or anti immigration stance just a question” (*Guardian*, Article 3, 28/07/15). This example shows a consciousness within the community of the assertive disposition of commenters on political articles, which is why the consumer here feels the need to make their intentions in asking for advice explicit, ensuring nobody mistakes it for a “stance” as is common within the community.

The aspect of commenting that contained the most impassioned responses in the lifestyle articles was in giving advice and sharing stories. While the political articles received comments overrun with vehemently presented opinions and oppositions, the consumers who commented on lifestyle articles enjoyed sharing their knowledge for the benefit of others or to revel in nostalgia. Consumers often used the comment streams to recommend additional sources to read, places to visit, tips on how to do things and achieve the best results:

When I was much younger my grandmother taught me to make tea - PG tips, warm the pot, brew for 4 minutes, second cup the best. As life has gone on I've added my own improvements, the most significant being to use a metal sieve [...] Darjeeling is great black. Assam or Ceylon if you want milk." (*Guardian*, Article 7, 06/08/15)

This personal anecdote has nostalgic connotations and suggests that the applicable and personal nature of the article (and potentially for lifestyle articles in general) brings about fond memories which the consumer wants to share and use their personal experiences to advise others. However, because the consumer went further than just giving advice, the inclusion of the personal story shows that the article had emotional value.

Commenting to Express Strong Opinions

When consumers comment in an articulation of a strong opinion it often seems a cathartic act. It is evident from some consumers that the article or comments of other consumers have inspired such a reaction that they are eager to express their opinion: 'Milk in 2nd.....breathe.....again.....and relax' (*Guardian*, article 7, 06/08/15). The consumer's use of ellipses and hyperbolic notation of his physical reaction to having the desire to express something they feel so passionately about gives an insight into why consumers comment and in what frame of mind they comment.

Passive Participation

Community Membership

Extant insight into participation theory identifies passive participants, or lurkers, as creating value through their vicarious consumption (Hartmann et. al., 2015; Malinen, 2015;

Pongsakornrungrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011). While vicarious consumption may have value in developed consumption communities who exhibit complex consumptive practices, the *Guardian* appears unable to foster such value-creation from passive consumers. Although passive *Guardian* consumers were able to identify an online community formation in the *Guardian*'s comment streams, they are unable to feel an affiliation with the community themselves. It was speculated by the passive interviewees that, "If you've commented on one article it is more than likely that you've commented on others" (Interviewee C, 23/08/15). This comment recognises repeat participation and the evidence of a community is supported when the same interviewee noticed community practices occurring:

clearly they've used this language before with each other, well not necessarily each other but within the network. Like some people you can just tell they comment a lot from the way they interact with other users but some people you think oh that's just a one-off comment (Interviewee C, 23/08/15)

This observation shows that there are some definite recognisable group dynamics occurring within *The Guardian* communities yet the passive participants, because they fail to engage in such practices, are unable to feel connected to the community.

Despite gaining knowledge and enjoyment from comments, recognising community dynamics and believing them to provide an insight into the lives and opinions of members, none of the interviewees felt that they belonged to the community. One consumer felt that even if they did actively participate they would not feel part of a community, whilst the other two felt that because they do not "participate in the discussion" they fail to feel "a part of it" (Interviewee A, 13/08/15). Interviewee A (13/08/15) also commented that they "don't really see [themselves] like, "I'm a *Guardian* reader" - [they] just read it." Interviewee C (23/08/15) felt

that if they read the *Guardian* exclusively they would feel more a part of the community, therefore suggesting the possibility to feel a sense of belonging (to a lesser extent however) as a passive participant.

Satisfaction and Participation

A fundamental aim of this study was to fill in gaps in extant research as to why consumers participate and what value they derive from participation. Current research has identified *what* inspires participation - personal relevance and prior involvement with subjects (Weber, 2014) - but has failed to identify *why* that inspires participation. While all of the interviewees found the *Guardian* to be relatively trustworthy, “not as biased as some papers” (Interviewee C, 23/08/15), feeling ultimately satisfied with the news content they provide, active participants revealed more scepticism towards the *Guardian*’s credibility and reliability. These differing satisfaction levels between passive and active participants indicate why the passive are passive and the active are active. The passive who were interviewed were only occasionally tempted to actively participate and in response to other comments rather than the article itself: “[I am not tempted to comment] of my own accord, um not in response to the article but in response to other commenters” (Interviewee A, 13/08/15). Although this consumer’s reasons for not commenting are because they are not “the kind of person who would want to express [their] views” (Interviewee A, 13/08/15), it could also be to do with their news content satisfaction levels. The same interviewee, although they enjoyed reading comments, felt that their “whole experience [didn’t] depend on it. For example if the *Guardian* was the only website where you could comment on stories, um [they] wouldn’t exclusively read it because of that” (Interviewee A, 13/08/15).

When comparing this interview data to the data collected from the netographic research it becomes evident why some consumers actively participate and others do not. All three of the interviewees while reading news daily, did not consider themselves heavily involved or exceptionally knowledgeable in politics and current affairs. Passive participants found the *Guardian's* articles sufficient in content and reliability, not feeling the need to comment and, although normally doing so, not finding it of absolute necessity to continue their reading of articles into the comment streams. Therefore, it is conjecturable that a lacking knowledge and involvement in news topics and an introverted predisposition leads participants to accept newspaper articles as fact, feeling little or no need to challenge or add to the content or to broaden their knowledge by actively participating. This postulation is substantiated further when understanding how active participants perceive the news. A frequently reoccurring comment from active participants was a portrayal of distrust for the media, feeling news content to often be manipulated and “twisted by the press” (*Guardian*, Article 1, 24/07/15). There is evidence that active participants have “come to the point where [they] really can’t be bothered with what any commentator says anymore” (*Guardian*, Article 4, 03/08/15), with the general consensus amongst them being that “the press don’t want facts to get in the way of a good smear!!!” (*Guardian*, Article 2, 26/07/15). Not only are active participants cynical of the news but they also feel that they are not being represented by the journalists. Many consumers believe the *Guardian* journalists are out of touch with their lives and realities as consumers: “these are prices quoted to high salary earning Guardian writers who live in expensive fashionable areas of London and are out of touch with reality” (*Guardian*, Article 11, 20/09/14). There are many comments which exemplify this with consumers complaining that articles are “riddled with contradictions” (*Guardian*, Article 8, 03/08/15) or pointing out that “a lot of this is wrong” (*Guardian*, Article 11, 20/09/14) before continuing in their comment to correct mistakes. The knowledge and experience detailed in the majority of comments on both political and lifestyle

articles suggests that most of those consumers who comment are well informed in the subjects they are commenting on, therefore their lack of trust in the journalists and articles may arise from an awareness of perspectives and information being misrepresented through their own knowledge of the subject. Therefore, it can be suggested, that these participants take an active role in the community and comment on articles because it allows them to fill in missing information, present their own perspectives to represent themselves, expressing their informed opinions on their subjects of interest and to broaden their knowledge further through others' input.

Value in Participation

In light of why participants are active or passive it then begs the question of how value is co-created through the participation in consumption communities. As an atypical consumption community this research explores if value is co-created and gained in the same way as extant research suggests which highlights individual and collective goals being sought by consumers through their participation (Pongsakornrungrasit and Schroeder, 2011).

Value to Passive Consumers

The passive consumers interviewed although not finding it vital to their experiences to extend their reading to the comment streams did so because they gained value from it in three main ways: (1) widening knowledge and perspectives; (2) aiding information processing; and (3) entertainment. Passive participants appreciated that active consumers created additional more relevant and enriching news content for them, so that they could accumulate a broader and deeper knowledge of the subject through the reading of comment streams:

sometimes it's good to put it into context. Like, people who are maybe affected by the certain issue are commenting on it so you're getting like opinions from people who are actually affected by it which is what it's all about. (Interviewee C, 23/08/15).

This shows how enriching the perspectives of other community members can be to online experiences, providing a well-rounded and authentic insight into topics that it is not possible to get from the article alone. The links to external resources and advice provided by active participants is also of value, allowing a further exploration into topics and exposure to other articles or sources of interest: "people often link to stuff that's quite interesting. Um yeah, um yeah I find those ones quite helpful" (Interviewee A, 13/08/15). As well as the value acquired through gaining more information is the value derived from being entertained by comments and conversations. Interviewee A (13/08/15), commented with a smile that:

often, they're quite amusing, you get quite radical individuals with strong views which is sometimes really interesting and will be, like, will give you like a totally different view or angle or sometimes it's just quite funny.

The interviewee extended this comment to say that they expected and anticipated this kind of response to certain articles, finding it prevalent in topics which spark moral discussions and strong reactions such as religion, politics, war and racism.

Regardless of whether feeling or wanting to be a part of the community, the interviewees all felt that the interactivity that digitalisation has enabled for newspapers is a positive and value creating phenomenon which can enhance online experiences greatly. Interviewee A (13/08/15) discussed the merits of the *Guardian's* encouragement of consumers to participate online in their *Guardian Witness* activities as creating "a variety of inputs and fresh ideas" and identified

that were they to ever have their contribution published and featured then “it would definitely improve [their] connection, [they would] be thrilled!”. They attributed their positive feelings to the hypothetical situation as stemming not from social belonging but from their ideas being valued: “I don’t think I need acceptance of my opinions but more like people thinking that what I have to say is interesting enough to read” (Interviewee A, 13/08/15), it appears that active participation lies in the value gained from boosted self-esteem rather than the development of community relationships.

Value to Active Consumers

As was identified when assessing consumers’ relationship and perception of the media, active participants appear to find a sense of true representation and the satisfaction of filling in the gaps or correct mistakes in the news content from their participation in the comment sections. It is evident from observing active participants that there is much value to be derived from finding a place to represent themselves within the news. When *Guardian* moderators deem a comment unfit for the discussion and delete them consumers will often object to the emission, claiming it “a disgraceful abuse of moderating powers” (*Guardian*, article 2, 26/07/15). Comments such as this which display adversity towards censorship of consumer opinions and input shows how much active participants value the chance to express themselves and see the opinions of others (as most of the aggrieved comments were in response to other consumer’s comments being deleted as opposed to their own).

There is much evidence of consumers gaining value through heightened online experiences. Some consumers showed their appreciation of the articles themselves, describing them as “funny, ironic, thought provoking, myth debunking” (*Guardian*, Article 8, 03/08/15). This comment not only shows the value consumers derive from articles but by describing the news

as “thought provoking” and “myth debunking” suggests that they stimulate responses from consumers which comment streams allow them to express, enabling them to share and process their thoughts and unravel any confusions or false ideas. Other consumers show the value they gain from interacting with other consumers: “I could do with a few new ideas, so I’m delighted to see these, thanks, folks!” (*Guardian*, Article 8, 03/08/15).

Co-creating Value Through Co-Consumption

Community Practices

With much of the extant research into consumption communities focusing on what makes a community and how they can create value, it was of interest to see how the consumption community pool surrounding the *Guardian* would fit into the prescribed practices which create communities and their value (Schau et. al., 2009; Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011; Malinen, 2015). The majority of studies represent consumption communities as largely homogenous, identifying how the similarity in consumer’s behaviour and their collective consumption practices helps form a cohesive community - heterogeneity is considered outlier behaviour (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011). While the *Guardian*’s online community perform a selection of community consumption practices, the netnography revealed a considerably heterogeneous consumptive experience with weak community practices.

There is evidence of *Guardian* members accumulating certain community practices which signify of in-behaviour, community membership and experience. Malinen (2015) details a transgression of the specific website content as a participation practice which allows communities to evolve and strengthen. In the *Guardian*’s community, there is evidence of

consumer's taking their conversations beyond the immediate article subject, digressing into unrelated jokes or conversations:

[Consumer A to consumer B]: I live in the country... no more townies please

[Consumer C to consumer A]: Bloody nimbies!

[Consumer A to consumer C]: Bloody Townies!... I was in our local butcher a recent townie was in asking for a lamb joint on a Monday... he said none available but I'm killing today ready for Friday... she says... I don't want you to kill anything.. in total horror.. Mr Simons and myself just laughed or heads off!

[Consumer C to Consumer A]: Oh I know. We had some yokel in our street one winter evening, couldn't understand why it hadn't got dark. We pointed out the street lamps - he cowered, shouted "martians" & ran away

[Consumer A to Consumer C]: War of the worlds has so much to answer for! At least we know in the country which cousin we're going to marry!

[Consumer C to Consumer A]: Usually one with a nice woolly coat & 4 legs! No sorry, they are kept for affairs!" (Article 3, 27/08/15)

This good-humoured interchange exhibits two consumers building a rapport surrounding a joke which was then extended into a string of reciprocal banter. By diverging from the political subject matter of the article, the consumers are able to form more of a social connection and glean a stronger feeling of community (Malinen, 2015). Another community practice which pervaded both political and lifestyle articles was consumers directly quoting from other consumer's comments by copying and pasting it before their own comment. Another practice, common to both types of articles, (yet more prominent and prolific in political articles) was the use of certain words or phrases to challenge the consumer they were talking to. The phrases (or similar variations of) "Evidence? Take your time" (*Guardian*, Article 2, 26/07/15) and asking

another consumer a question followed by “Over to you...” (*Guardian*, Article 1, 24/07/15) were both used by multiple consumers in different conversations and articles. As well as noticing phrases common to all articles, there were also subject-specific phrases which were used by one consumer in a comment stream and then continued to be picked up and used by others within that same stream. In article 2 consumers started using the puns “torygraph” (referring to the *Telegraph*’s conservative following) and “Jez we can!” (signifying support of Jeremy Corbyn) (*Guardian*, 26/07/15). This exemplifies the larger and more complex range of community practices which were subject- and article- specific therefore ephemeral and while in the moment may provide social value are potentially too weak to build up community feelings outside of that particular comment stream.

Community Behaviour

An additional element of community behaviour which can be recognised within the *Guardian*’s comment streams is the monitoring of consumer behaviour by fellow community members. Such comments are indicative of co-created participatory parameters and expectations which indicate consumer desires for a homogeneous community. In the trivial, light-hearted subjects covered in lifestyle articles, consumers do not expect or well-receive overly opinionated or aggressive comments. In article 8, whose topic of discussion is quiche, a consumer criticised the article questioning, “How is this column still going? It’s pompous and ridiculous” (*Guardian*, 03/08/15). In response, other readers voiced their opinions about how such articles should be received and discussed: “I’m amazed by the ire this article seems to have generated. It’s a bit of light relief in the fucking food section” (*Guardian*, Article 8, 03/08/15). With the general consumer consensus being an expectation of lifestyle articles being read for casual enjoyment and light entertainment, such negativity is considered inappropriate to internally-constructed etiquette.

Consumers also help to moderate behaviour within the community, with conveyances of disappointment in others' misbehaviour often observable. While sometimes consumers simply reprimand each other: "How vulgar. You should be ashamed of yourself" (*Guardian*, Article 1, 24/07/15), others express inappropriate behaviour as ruining their online experience. Comments such as: "there's no need for that kind of ad hominem attack. It's just rude and unnecessary" and "What an unproductive sexist comment" (*Guardian*, Article 1, 24/07/15), exemplify the expectation consumers have to gain knowledge, cultural capital and social value from comments. These comments signify a desire for relevant, productive input from others and when that is not offered - especially if it is replaced with impertinence - it has a negative impact, devaluing their experience. Similarly when one consumer asks another, "Why do you have to say "shitty person"? It pretty much invalidates your opinion" and "What a silly comment. You don't you respond to my comment rather than write some baseless comments" (*Guardian*, article 1, 24/07/15), there is an indication of the consumer's desire to be involved in mature, polite, intellectual debates, which immature behaviour and swearing prevent.

Us and Them Dichotomy

The commenting sections which follow news articles are interactive platforms which invite debate and discussion about the news content between consumers, therefore it is unsurprising to discover *Guardian* consumers having a tendency to group themselves together according to their stance on a particular subject. This creates an us-and-them inclination within the comment streams, involving consumers laying claim to their associative groups and rejecting dissociative consumers and ideas. While syndication can help promote in-group behaviour and develop shared practices to help strengthen consumption communities, it also always involves the rejection of consumers, causing distancing and divides within the community. This is

particularly prevalent in the *Guardian*'s comment streams because of the diversity of interests and opinions of its readership.

While lifestyle articles attract predominantly good natured side-taking based on the topic of discussion - such as article 7's discussion of tea and coffee stimulating a tea-drinkers verses coffee drinkers debate - it was rare that they initiated offensive behaviour or serious rivalry. Whereas the comments on political articles were rife with contentious divisions and enmity. Some consumers chose to define their political stance through affiliation, using "we" to talk on behalf of all those with a similar opinion, while others chose to define their political stance through detachment, using "you" or "they" in reference to those with opposing opinions. The *Guardian*'s notoriety as left-leaning in their political views and consumer following has caused a conscious division within the community between right-wing conservatives and left-wing labourites. Consumers have expectations of a left-wing following so often assume an authoritative labour-supporting voice for the community with statements such as, "We now have Jeremy who offers distinctly different policies to the Tories. Its ABOUT TIME LABOUR!!!!!!" (*Guardian*, Article 3, 28/07/15). The general assumption that the community consists of consumers with similar political allegiances leads readers to be surprised to find right-leaning consumers reading the *Guardian*. When one consumer identified themselves as conservative multiple community members expressed their surprise: "why do you read The *Guardian*?" (*Guardian*, article 2, 27/06/15). The politically charged us-versus-them attitude which *Guardian* readers adopt helps set membership standards and prompts them to become advocates for the *Guardian* through their dismissal of opposing newspapers. Comments such as "You've been bamboozled by the hard-right Tory party and its hard-right media acolytes Murdoch and Dacre" (*Guardian*, article 1, 24/07/15) display the lack of credibility *Guardian* consumers assume rival newspapers to have, therefore bolstering the *Guardian*.

Competitive Nature

The distinctly and predominantly opposing, angry and aggressive nature of the comments political articles attract reveals a competitive drive and dynamic within the *Guardian's* community. While us-and-them dynamics can help to strengthen the community and set membership parameters, even amongst supporters of the same political parties there is a predominant competitive overtone.

The aggressively competitive nature of the political comment streams is recognised by both active and passive participants. Passive consumers recognise active consumers as people who “aren’t willing to accept a counter argument” (Interviewee C, 23/08/15) and who are “adamant that their opinion must be shared but not really to be discussed: it’s a statement and when someone does counter it they’re confrontational” (Interviewee A, 13/08/15). The passive participants showed an understanding of the contentiously competitive motivations behind commenting by admitting that part of the reason they refrain from commenting is to avoid “online arguments” knowing that they would “be feeling wound up and say something stupid” (Interviewee A, 13/08/15). Although this behaviour is prominent yet entertaining for passive participants, it receives a double sided response from active participants. Some active consumers provoke others into engaging in debates, purposefully elongating arguments and obviously enjoying doing so. The encouragement and enjoyment of competitive group dynamics is exemplified when consumers treat such competitive behaviour as a game. Following a debate between two consumers, a third consumer concluded the comment stream by writing “Point!” (*Guardian*, Article 2, 26/07/15) to one of the consumers, acknowledging that they thought that consumer had won the argument within the contentious environment. The following comment displays a similar point-keeping behaviour by comparing how many

recommends two consumers received for their battling comments (consumers can “recommend” comments they like by clicking a button at the side of the comment, the number of recommends a comment receives is displayed at the side of each comment): “That was [consumer A] who gets 97 recommends to your 2. You might not understand why, but your hubris at putting the fault on someone else is magnificent” (Guardian, article 5, 02/08/15). Both of these examples show an enjoyment in the sense of competition, highlighting it to other consumers. And in both cases it is a third consumer who is keeping score. Others find such competitive behaviour ruins their online experience: “This board has basically turned into poisonous abuse. There is always an element of that ... I personally think the mods should be a lot stronger and all this labelling just get deleted” (*Guardian*, Article 5, 02/08/15).

It has been identified that political articles attract a wealth of comments which are written in contention, expression strong opinions and asserting superiority and authority of opinions. There is a definite sense of oneupmanship even when commenting to widen the intelligence pool; extra information and references are provided to show off knowledge and validate their opinions. These displays of authority are ego boosting and are made more so by the prevailing habit of consumers to not just assume authority but to actively compete for it and challenge others.

The use of sarcasm is prolific between competitive consumers with the comment streams displaying much mockery, sometimes light-hearted banter and other times to affront other consumers:

[Consumer 1]: It’s all going Pete Tong for Labour, Pass the popcorn.

[Consumer 2 to Consumer 1]: Yeah, they’ve just enlisted 60,000 new members, with numbers rising rapidly - things are looking really bad.

[Consumer 1 to Consumer 2]: Is this a serious analysis?

[Consumer 2 to Consumer 1]: Is this: *It's all going Pete Tong for Labour*. Don't choke on the popcorn.

[Consumer 1 to Consumer 2]: My comment was schadenfreude. Yours was delusion. Get used to opposition fella.

[Consumer 3 to Consumer 2]: "Don't choke on the popcorn." No, choke and then try to get NHS choices on the line...

[Consumer 4 to Consumer 1]: schadenfreude, is that German for clueless?

[Consumer 5 to Consumer 2]: *Yeah, they've just enlisted 60,000 new members, with numbers rising rapidly - things are looking really bad*. Considering most of those are following the directions in the Telegraph, I'd agree.

[Consumer 2 to Consumer 5]: Is that a serious analysis, or are you just being a pillock?" (*Guardian*, Article 2, 26/07/15).

The above dialogue shows consumers scrutinising and mocking each other's input into the community discussion, offering sarcastic responses, criticising comments and insulting each other.

Aside from consumers finding vulgar language and opinions offensive and disruptive to their desire to have meaningful, valuable input from - and discussions with - other consumers, is the issue that arises from personal attacks between consumers. It is evident that certain consumers enjoy provoking strong alternative opinions from others and take pleasure from engaging in debates, however, other consumers dislike it: "whats the point of continuing negativity all it does is creates bad feeling" (*Guardian*, article 3, 28/07/15) "That particular poster has directed abuse at me in the past - unpleasant stuff. I don't attempt to debate with him. It's a waste of

time” (Guardian, article 5, 03/08/15). These two comments exemplify the existence of consumers who do not enjoy the competitive and argumentative nature of the comments on political articles and find that it negatively impacts their online experience.

Discussion

The fundamental focal point of this study is to better understand how the *Guardian*'s consumption community co-creates value. While members of pool communities typically “share a set of abstract beliefs” (Fournier and Lee, 2009) this study indicates that newspapers foster an atypical environment for the creation of a cohesive consumption community - something that has failed to be appreciated in extant research - because their diverse content influences the formation of multiple community pools with members who do not always share the same beliefs. It was therefore necessary to explore the value creation processes of such a community. This research reveals that the *Guardian*'s online consumption community co-creates value without strict adherence to the prescribed contingencies set out in current literature. The data collected uncovers new patterns in community behaviour proving value to be created not just through their co-consumption but also through individual consumption.

Turning Consumption Habits into Value Creators for Newspapers

The data collected corresponds with current evidence of the modern news consumer lacking brand loyalty with increasing use of the internet (Graham and Hill, 2009). Despite evidence of fickle news consumption habits, this research has uncovered trends which can be used by newspapers to help strengthen their brand and promote customer loyalty. One of the most interesting consumer-news relationship trends to arise from the interviews was evidence of aggregative news consumption. Consumers are reading various news sources consecutively, using each newspaper's distinct benefits in conjunction to build up a comprehensive

understanding of current news topics. The idea that competing newspapers can compliment and become assets to each other uncovers a source of potential value to newspaper organisations. The interviewees found different news sources complimented each other because of their individual contrasting features and differentiated offerings. And because “Companies enhance the value by delivering consistent brand experiences that consumers can trust” (Gunelius, 2014), it is therefore essential for newspapers to possess a strong, differentiated brand image. The *Guardian* readers perceive the newspaper to be a trustworthy, factual, stylish, politically left-leaning brand which provides a middle-ground between its “low-brow” and “high-brow” competitors (Interviewee A, 13/08/15). Accordingly, it is this brand image and positioning within the market which the *Guardian* need to focus on maintaining, building and promoting in order to stay competitive and create value. Such targeting and positioning will help to increase customer loyalty, brand championship, shareholder value and potential revenue sources (loyal consumers may be more inclined to become paying members within the *Guardian*’s membership initiative and will make the newspaper more attractive to advertisers). In addition to monetary value it will also enhance community and social value by encouraging a more cohesive community consisting of like-minded consumers.

The findings also show evidence of the social importance of news, both online and offline, allowing interactivity and heightening the cultural capital and social values that consumers can derive from the news. The sharing network, which interactive and social media functions embrace, will increase the reach of news, widening the customer base. This supports studies by Thomson and Mumivova (2014), Green (2014) and Everett (2011) who highlight news consumers as prime candidates for advertising exposure due to their propensity to share and engage socially with the news. The results of the study demonstrate that in the current digital

and social environment, newspaper companies should be utilising social media and providing increasing platforms for social interactivity which offer constant updates of real-time news.

Co-Creation in Article Specific Consumption Communities

The pool community which has formed around the *Guardian's* website, although showing definite evidence of being a community, lacks both the inter-consumer relationships and shared interests necessary to develop the complex practice performances which compose a strongly developed consumer community. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) define the markers of a community to be consumers sharing a sense of moral responsibility, a group consciousness and rituals, of which the *Guardian* community to a certain extent display all. Hartmann et. al. (2015) and Schau et. al. (2009) attribute practice performances as the foundation of a strong community, prescribing them as influencing more value creation within a community than a shared brand interest. Although there are displays of consumption practices specific to the *Guardian* community, the most complex practices tend to be practiced only within single comment streams and therefore they are temporary and any community building is ephemeral. According to current theory, the cultural capital to be gained from such transient community relationships and practices is limited (Schau et. al., 2009). Extant research into online participation with the news is also limited in that it has been focused solely on political articles (Weber 2014; Boczkowski and Mitchelstein, 2012). To better understand the nature of newspaper consumption communities it was necessary to investigate whether different articles attract different consumers and therefore different consumption communities with differing practices and behaviours. By completing netnographic explorations on both political and lifestyle articles the findings revealed that the two different genres of articles did indeed attract varying consumers, consequently creating separate communities with differing dynamics.

The lifestyle articles invite a community who display limited ranges of generic community practices but nevertheless participate in co-creating value and community culture with members both providing and receiving value offerings and experiences. The majority of comments were laden with the basic value-creating practices and community goals highlighted in Schau et. al.'s (2009) study such as empathising and governing. Despite no exhibitions of lasting or continued relationships or complex practices the consumption community surrounding lifestyle articles - by giving advice and sharing personal stories and experiences - co-create social, community and emotional value. The evident primary motive of participants is to widen the information pool helping others and themselves. Therefore, the lifestyle articles more aptly fit the parameters of traditional consumption communities. Ponsakornrunsilp and Schroeder (2011), identify the two main participatory goals as being individual goals (developing relationships, gaining experiences and information and engaging in social interaction) and collective goals (contributing to the community's shared resources, supporting brand culture and developing a sense of community or group identity). The tenet of these goals lie in a recognition of consumers' need for love, belonging and esteem with even the individual goals being socially directed. The strife for these goals is evident in the lifestyle community, with almost all participation geared externally towards the community therefore co-creating emotional and social value.

The consumption community which formed around the political displayed an array of slightly more complex practices but they were - as with the lifestyle - temporary, only existing within the comment stream at that moment in time. It was also evident that the political consumption community, through displays of definitive statements and contentious interactions, lacks cohesion and is largely based on inwardly-directed individual practices. Although in the governing of the community and us-and-them dynamics there were indications of a desire for

a united community, the majority of consumers seemed to participate for individual rather than community value. Current discourse on value-creation within consumption communities fails to capture the extent of the value which can be created as identified in this study. With the majority of emphasis to date put on the formation of collective consumption participation and value co-creation - thinking and acting towards shared community-driven goals (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011; Malinen 2015) - the *Guardian*'s online political community display a far more individualistic approach, acting predominantly as individuals towards individual goals. This adds another dimension to the individual goals as stated by Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder (2011), where members act towards more selfish and personal motives for self-actualisation and fulfilment rather than social motives. This is shown in the competitive, contentious behaviour which heightens consumers hedonic engagement stimulating a sense of personal gratification through members' ability to show off their competencies, skills, knowledge, experience and dedication, thereby garnering the admiration of other members (Schau et. al., 2009). Weijo et. al. (2014) and Schau et. al. (2009) attribute competitive and distancing behaviour within communities as contributing to the community structure and hierarchy, however, within the evanescent nature of the *Guardian* community there is little basis to form social status' therefore this study suggests that such behaviour instead builds a platform for self-actualisation. While this insight disrupts the majority of community value co-creation theory, it also opens a new potentiality for value creation within more disparate communities which lack unity. Without the consumption community - predominantly without having the audience to express to or the responses of other members - the inwardly individualistic value that consumers display in comments on political articles would have no value. This shows that community goals and practices and the mutual construction of their desires (Sashi, 2012) are not necessarily essential for value creation within

a community, hedonic value can be achieved in the lack of their presence whilst still being collaboratively constructed.

Value in Participation

Consumption community theory attributes heightened involvement and contribution to increasing consumer loyalty through feelings of ownership (Bechmann, 2012). This research has identified that a sense of consumer ownership holds value for consumers because they are able to represent themselves within the news finding stronger associations and personal relevance. The findings from the netnography suggested that those consumers who actively participate possess the high NFC and prior interests which Broekhuizen and Hoffmann (2012) and Weber (2015) relate to increased engagement and participation. It is consumers' need for cognition and interest in the subjects which also influences consumers to participate because it decreases satisfaction and complacency with the news provided and drives a motivation to add to, correct, or challenge what they are reading. Therefore the comment streams provide a valuable and cathartic outlet for them, enabling them to personalise the news and increasing their accrue ment of cultural capital (Serrano et. al., 2015). Broekhuizen and Hoffmann (2012) suggest that while consumers with higher NFC are more engaged with the news and therefore actively participate in the community, those with low NFC - in this case the passive consumers - benefit more from consumer participation yet do not feel the need to participate themselves.

Malinen (2015) defined the point at which consumers become community members as being when they cease to be peripheral and begin to actively participate. Much of the literature on the passive-active participation dichotomy identify both roles as creating value because of the cyclical nature of participation i.e. passive participant learn community practices peripherally before themselves becoming active (Malinen, 2015; Hartmann et. al., 2015;

Pongsakornrungrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011). However, this research found that passive participants were set to remain passive, not feeling part of the community or wanting to contribute to the community. So while passive newspaper consumers do not play a role in the value-creation process, they do derive value from the participation of active consumers.

Conclusion

The newspaper industry faces many challenges in the presence of digitalisation with the continual development of new technologies keeping the industry in a state of flux. To stay afloat newspapers must utilise the full potential of the value-creating offerings the internet possesses, one of which is the ability to provide a platform to facilitate the formation of interactive consumption communities. In the face of depleting financial value, the interactive platform offered by Web 2.0 has enabled the creation of symbolic value instead, with businesses able to serve consumers' intangible needs. Community platforms facilitate needs of belonging and self-esteem and allow consumers the creative expression necessary for self-actualisation (Deloitte, 2014). With a vast range of interests for communities to congregate around, the *Guardian* website proves an atypical platform for the creation of consumption communities, indeed proving to foster multiple, ephemeral communities. This research has employed literature which establishes theories of value co-creation within consumer communities to inform an understanding of the digitally facilitated value potential within the *Guardian* community. By completing a series of netnographic explorations on the comment streams of lifestyle and political articles this study provides insights into why consumers participate in communities and how that co-creates value for the industry and community.

The findings highlight the relationship that modern news consumers have with the news, identifying an aggregative approach to news consumption which organisations can use to

increase revenue. The examination of two types of article, lifestyle and political, showed different consumption community behaviours and practices. The lifestyle communities revealed a desire for social and emotional value, widening the information pool and working collectively towards co-creating value. The political communities displayed how consumption communities can also form a platform for individual hedonic value creation through differentiating themselves from the community and striving for self-actualisation. Contrary to existing theories on participation, this research failed to attribute any value creation to passive consumers because of their lack of desire to participate or co-operation within the community. An observation of active consumers showed them to have high involvement in and knowledge of politics and current affairs. This revealed a fundamental motivation for contributing to the community to be to increase their own satisfaction by completing or correcting missing or (in their view) incorrect information.

Implications, Future Research and Limitations

The findings of this research have offered new insights into news consumers which will assist future value creation within the industry. In order to capitalise on the interactive features that the internet provides the *Guardian* must focus on maintaining and strengthening their market position. This concept - when tailored to the specific newspaper brands and its audience - is transferrable to all organisations within the newspaper industry. The new understandings of the complexities of community formation, dynamics and consumer participation and the value they have contributes to existing discourse, widening the possibilities of value creation and insights into unconventional communities. The glimpse into consumer perspectives and behaviours that the netnography provides, highlights the wealth of free and easily accessible information on their consumers newspapers have access to in online discussion spaces. A feature of their

business model which should be utilised in order to enhance their knowledge of their consumers and customer experience management. This research has just scratched the surface of the exploration into such communities and their value-creation potential, something which must be extended in future research. Further research should expand into an exploration of how social media and mobile technologies can facilitate value creation.

The transferability and reliability of this research is limited due to the study being focused on a single newspaper, the *Guardian*. The short time period in which the netnography was conducted and the small sample of interviewees would need to be expanded as well as completing observations of multiple newspapers in order to improve the research. The constructivist approach which this research adopted aimed to construct a subjective understanding of consumption communities however the nature of this philosophy leaves interpretations open to revision and improvement (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

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Appendix I: Interview Questions

1. Can you describe your perception of *The Guardian* and its readers and in what way if any it can be considered a brand with an online community?
2. Can you describe any identification you feel with *The Guardian* as a brand or as a *Guardian* reader?
3. Can you share the ways in which you access the news i.e. devices used, sources, media platforms? and discuss why you access the news in this way.
4. Can you describe how the digitalisation of newspapers and its enabling of consumer participation has improved or impaired your engagement and experience with the news?
5. Describe why you extend your reading of an article to the comment streams, what do you expect from them?
6. Are you ever tempted to comment and if so, why don't you?
7. Can you describe any sense of being part of a community that you feel from reading comments from other readers?
8. Have you noticed any insider behaviour/practices used by readers who comment?
9. Explain the effect comments can have on your experience on *The Guardian* website.
10. Can you explain to what extent you think of news as social, how do you use it socially?
11. Can you describe a time where you noticed competitive behaviour arising in comment streams?
12. Can you describe the value you think can be created or derived from Guardian Witness? if you contributed and found you name/ideas mentioned/featured in an article, how would it make you feel?