

# The Anarconomy

A study of the *culture* of counterculture



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# ABSTRACT

<b>Title:</b>	Anarconomy – A study of the <i>culture</i> of counterculture
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<b>Thesis purpose:</b>	The purpose of this thesis is to understand Anarconomy as a culture.
<b>Methodology:</b>	The study utilizes two qualitative research methods: 1) an in-depth expert interview and 2) a netnography. The netnographic data was collected online through passive observation and participant online interviews in a focus group.
<b>Theoretical perspective:</b>	The study employs Consumer Culture Theory, Subculture, Anti-brand communities, Gift Giving and Tribalism.
<b>Empirical data:</b>	The qualitative expert interview was semi-structured, and lasted for 1 hour. The netnographic study was conducted at the English OpenOffice.org forum. The passive observation was conducted over 2 weeks, and the participant focus group interview, with 13 participants, was conducted over 3 days.
<b>Conclusion:</b>	As contemporary literature on countercultures often have a one-sided focus on being against other cultures, we set out to explore the culture of countercultures. Through our literature review, the theoretical framework and the empirical data, we have formed a new perspective on what counter culture is and what it means to belong to a counter culture.

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# 1. Introduction

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*We “are witnessing a pronounced flourishing of free content and services on the internet. This free content is created and distributed by the users themselves in voluntary networks according to rather anarchic principles: Wikipedia, open source software, books, music, films, and design, which the creators make freely available, are all examples of this phenomenon. All of this challenges and supplements traditional commercial companies by offering non-commercial alternatives. This is the anarconomy.”(Mogensen et al., 2009: 3)*

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Anarconomy is a global phenomenon, which has emerged in our contemporary consumer society, highly facilitated by the development of the Internet. It is defined as a counterculture as it is an appearance of a parallel economic system where knowledge products are developed by consumers and for consumers, often without financial interests and gains (Pedersen & Mogensen, 2011). It is a consumer culture phenomenon challenging the established capitalistic market, by sharing information and co-creating products in collectivist collaboration and thus emancipating consumers from the corporation driven mainstream society.

The Copenhagen Institute of Future Studies coined the term anarconomy in a research paper in 2009 (Mogensen et al., 2009). It is an overall expression covering a range of new trends, which has emerged alongside an increasing digitization and democratization in post-modern consumer society (Ibid). These trends include open-source products, which are software distributed with the source code available, so that programs may be altered or improved by anyone. If a user chooses to improve a program he is obligated to distribute it without limitations and free of charge. Examples of this kind of software are Ubuntu, Firefox and Open Office. Open-content communities are also a trend, which is regarded as part of anarconomy. Instead of an open source code, this is open exchange of texts and media content. Wikipedia is a good example of this kind of open content community. Lastly, Internet piracy is also a part of the anarconomy phenomenon. The illegal copying of intellectual property through peer-to-peer networks like torrents and newsgroups are a widespread trend and it does share the notion of open non-chargeable exchange, which is the common denominator of these anarconomy phenomena, but it still relies on established market actors to actually produce the immaterial products.

Anarconomy is an abbreviation of anarchism and economy. The anarchistic tendencies lie in the unregulated and decentralized co-production of ideas facilitated by the Internet, which in itself is anarchistic. Anyone can create online content and there are no central authorities regulating it. Where political anarchism suggests violent revolution against the system *"we could say that with the Internet, an anarchic parallel society has peacefully emerged"* (Mogensen et al., 2009: 5). This also describes the counter cultural aspect of anarconomy, suggesting the creation of a parallel society outside the established economic system.

One of the reasons why this co-creation system is possible is the obvious mutual gain in exchanging knowledge. There is an inclusive value to anarconomy trends, meaning that the more users who engage with the product the better the product will be (Ibid). This is illustrated with a simple example: In an open source community one person might put in 10 hours of work to improve a specific fragment of the code. If there is 100.000 users in that community also spending 10 hours to improve other parts of the code, and subsequently sharing their work, this means 1 million man hours equivalent of one man working for five hundred years (Ibid). There are considerable trade-offs in sharing your work and therefore considerable motivation for users, or as George Bernard Shaw states: *"If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas"* (Ibid: 8). Here lies the threat to the current economic market. If more and more products are developed, produced and distributed cost-free, and as considerable alternatives to commercial products in relation to value, the established brands should worry for their *raison d'être*.

There are historical parallels that may be drawn between Anarconomy and various countercultures of the last 50 years. The hippie movement of the 1960's had a clear cultural conflict with large corporations and the established economic system, but there was never a tension between the fundamental values of the two (Heath and Potter, 2006). The hippies bought Volkswagen vans to protest against big car manufactures but they still bought cars - they were still consumers. The young people of the yuppie culture in the 1980's wanted to rebel against their former hippie, now suburban, parents by purchasing four-wheel-drive cars that gave them freedom to get away from the idyllic suburbs. They wanted to oppose to the socialistic perspective by emphasizing individualism. Still there was no tension with the economic system - they were still consumers. In the 1990's there was a clear counterculture that opposed to the yuppie generation with their brands and record label music. Grunge music of the 1990's tried to

be alternative with a harsh critique of the established system but bands like Nirvana sold millions of records and became mainstream themselves.

The general idea of counterculture is not to sell out like the previous culture did (ibid), but countercultural history shows that rebelling against brands and corporations just open up for alternative business models (ibid). The Anarconomy movement has a similar cultural conflict with the established system. The difference is that, unlike the countercultures of the last decades, the anarconomy is breaking the structure of the economic system by circumventing the traditional buyer/seller relationship (Pedersen & Mogensen, 2011).

Contemporary literature on counterculture tend to have a cliché focus on the *counter* aspect of the phenomenon i.e. focusing on being against mainstream culture. In this thesis, we will explore the *culture* of a counterculture by studying the fundamental cultural dynamics of an anarconomy community. By acknowledging culture, we make sure not to limit our study to only consider anarconomy as a counterculture, and instead providing a thorough understanding of anarconomy as a subculture. This is important because when a community is *against* something, as a countercultural community evidently is, the community will automatically be *with* something as well. For instance, hippies being against materialism, yet paradoxically purchasing Volkswagen vehicles. This means that the countercultural aspect becomes a minor part of the culture; the countercultural facet serves as a motivation for the ideology for the community, yet not as the basic foundation. Hence, understanding the culture as such comes prior to the understanding of the countercultural ideology of the subculture. If we maintained a cliché analytical scope strictly focusing on counterculture, we would neglect to understand an imperative part of the culture as a whole. Thus, as we focus on the culture, we remedy what contemporary literature disregards.

## 1.1 Literature review

The Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies (CIFS) (Mogensen et al., 2009) is the main source of literature on anarconomy, as they invented the term. In general, additional literature on Anarconomy as a subject is very limited, which is a testament of the need for a thorough research of the field. In the CIFS report, they explain what anarconomy is, gives examples of it, employ scenario planning in order to foresee how the anarconomy will evolve towards year 2025 and suggests managerial implications for companies situated in that market. However, an academic understanding of the occurrence of this phenomenon as a culture is absent. Moreover, through our review of the contemporary



literature, we found that authors in general concentrate more on the managerial implications of a counterculture and little on the understanding of the actual culture itself. This superficial focus on a managerial perspective may mask the possibility of a thorough understanding of the phenomenon as a whole (Belk, 1986; 1987, and Holbrook, 1987), and thus we are determined to address this issue.

Literature on open source communities is available, but no one writes about Anarconomy per se. Various authors of open source literature focus on motivation and economics, however none are conceptualizing it as a culture as such. Nonetheless, the literature found provides us with a better understanding of the phenomenon and the practices surrounding it.

As we define Anarconomy as a subculture, we must look into previous and contemporary literature on subjects leaning towards this view. Thus, we find departure in theory of subculture, more particularly anti-brand communities and tribalism. These research domains, which have been the subject of vast research, share several similar underlying dynamics with the anarconomy phenomenon described by Mogensen et al. (2009). This includes the overall counter cultural market resistance, the social aspects of communities and the concept and characteristics of subcultures. An example of a phenomenon that centers on emancipation, communities and resistance, is Kozinets' (2002b) investigation of the Burning Man festival. In his research, he presents how the participants gather in resistance to consumerism and branded products in general through discursive actions, traditions, rituals and symbols of purification. The participants are feeling a sense of belonging and a social contribution (Putnam, 2000), and looks badly upon spectators (Kozinets, 2002b). However, this counter culture does not really open up for an entire new market, as they are not able to emancipate themselves completely from consumerism since they charge an entrance-fee, use Visa cards etc. (Ibid). Conversely, Anarconomy supposedly has the ability to overcome this obstacle, and create new market conditions, by going against the corporate society.

As the domains of subculture, counterculture and resistance add to the understanding of different perspectives of anarconomy, we can use this complimentary research to study the phenomenon and the subculture as a whole. The anti-brand communities have a strong sense of group dynamics in which the participants unify and mobilize against a common adversary (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). This way of perceiving the identity of the community as a universal good, fighting evil forces of the market, would be interesting to study in the context of anarconomy. While this counter cultural aspect proposed to be similar in both phenomena, the difference is that while there are no profound tension between anti-brand communities and the market itself, the

anarconomy subculture actually offers alternatives to the established economic system (Mogensen et al., 2009).

To explain the anarchistic nature of anarconomy communities, theory within the domain of tribal marketing offers a rich base for understanding the dynamics. Post-modern tribes are often characterized by a group of heterogeneous members only bound loosely together by their shared passion and with no apparent hierarchy (Cova & Cova, 2001). This abstract structure also applies in the anarconomy subculture.

Since there is no apparent economic gain related to these communities, it is imperative to analyze other possible motives that might be affiliated with anarconomy. In this perspective gift giving theory is an interesting aspect to include, when analyzing the social exchange that happen in these types of communities. This domain has been the subject of vast research in sociology, and focusing on social motives instead of material gain is a further testament to the sociocultural perspective of this thesis.

In general there are considerable similarities between these surrounding concepts in postmodernism, thus we believe that some transfer of theory is justified.

## 1.2 Our contribution

As the anarconomy phenomenon is the subject of research by Copenhagen Institute of Future Studies, it is a testament to the relevance of further investigation of this phenomenon, which is emerging in consumer culture theory.

The state of research of this subject in contemporary literature can be seen as rather introductory, focusing on managerial implications and a one-sided cliché view on counterculture as being nothing else than against other cultures. Levy (1959; 1981) argues that providing an understanding of consumer symbolism, lifestyle and cultural orientations is fundamental to successful marketing strategies. Although, *“being unduly wedded to a managerial perspective poses formidable barriers to investigating consumption in its full experiential and socio cultural scope”* (Belk, 1986; 1987, and Holbrook, 1987, in Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 870). Therefore, a holistic socio cultural understanding comes prior to the actual implication of it, and conducting an exploratory study of anarconomy, with a full consumer cultural perspective, is necessary for a subsequent examination of the managerial implications. Thus this is our contribution.

To explore the Anarconomy movement from a cultural perspective and contribute to consumer culture theory, we will discuss and analyze the fundamental aspects of this subculture. This will act as a foundation for further study within this area. More specifically, we have decided to pose the following research question:

### **How does Anarconomy function as a culture?**

To illuminate this question we will apply in-depth netnographic research within the OpenOffice.org online forum combined with exploratory interviews to gain insights in the practical and psychological aspect of Anarconomy. Furthermore, we will recycle and combine key concepts within CCT as the phenomenon of anarconomy belongs to a string of post-modern consumer culture theory dealing with consumer resistance and the defiance of consumerist norms, mainstream society and corporate power (Kozinets, 2002a; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). This approach will facilitate a thorough understanding of the underlying culture of anarconomy and guide future research in this increasingly important field. Subsequently, we will use the insights gained through this research to frame the managerial implications of the Anarconomy as a rising subculture.

As anarconomy covers a variety of different trends in post-modern society, we have chosen to limit our research study. This is done as we see significant differences in the dynamics and motives of open-source communities producing products and piracy communities illegally sharing products created by others. Thus, we have chosen to scope our analysis in the direction of the open-source subculture and limit ourselves from discussing open content and piracy movements beyond this point.

## 2. Theory

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*In this chapter, we firstly explain and argue for our departure in consumer culture theory (CCT) and how we contribute to this research field. Secondly, we use contemporary research of comparable domains in CCT, in order to understand and conceptualize the anarchy subculture. Through this theoretical examination, we gather the themes necessary to conduct our netnographic research and answer the research question posed in the introduction. We use additional theory to characterize anarchy, as sufficient research on this specific phenomenon is unavailable. For instance, theory of subculture, resistance, status seeking and identity are presented and used in our theoretical framework.*

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### 2.1 Departure in consumer culture theory

In this chapter we will discuss theory originated in postmodern consumer culture theory. The term postmodernism is closely related with the *“advent of naturalistic or interpretive approaches to consumption activities and the seemingly internecine struggle for control of the subject area”* (Brown, 1993: 19-20) which is further associated with the knowledge and understanding that postmodernism is concerned (Brown, 1993). As postmodernists, we should therefore be comfortable with and accept ephemerality and absence of certainty and learn to acknowledge the diversity in involvement and emotions (Ibid; Firat et al., 1995). In contrast to modernists, one should be *“investigating the underlying assumptions, particularly when those assumptions are flawed, hidden, ignored, or otherwise not made explicit”* (Ward et al., 2008: 35).

The post modernistic perspective has strengthened the field of research to which Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) belongs. As CCT explores the heterogeneity of social constructions in which experience, meaning and action is the very core of culture, it clearly relates to the post modernistic view. Furthermore, it explores how consumers actively reform and react symbolic meanings encoded in corporate advertisements to manifest their own identities both as personal and as social human beings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005 and Hansen, 2010). Thus, *“consumers are conceived of as identity seekers and makers”* (Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 871). This ‘making of identity’ is perceived as producing culture, which has a very persuasive base in tribalism and counterculture where the consumers encourage joint identifications in beliefs, meanings and social practices - often in opposition to mainstream consumerism (Arnould &

Thompson, 2005), and evidently seen in the counterculture conversation of the 'Burning Man' community (Kozinets, 2002a). Thus, anarconomy departs from this conversation of resistance, however in a very different context as the medium is far from the one used in 'Burning Man'.

Our research departs from the research domains of *Consumer Identity Projects* and *Marketplace Cultures* (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) in consumer culture theory. Consumer Identity Projects aim at investigating what socio-cultural dynamics that drive consumption and how the consumption - or non-consumption - helps consumers' achieve their goal of creating their identity. This research domain will assist in understanding why the individual are interested in consuming products of Anarconomy and how that helps them to find their identity. Marketplace Cultures explores how and why consumers form cultural shared beliefs and a feeling of solidarity within the community consisting of common consumption interests (Ibid). This strongly relates to tribalism and anti-brand communities, and offers a deeper understanding of why the consumers choose to share various products within and outside the anarconomy community. Furthermore we will employ the theory of gift giving to explain the motives behind this sharing of products and services. This research is a great example of theory developed in a post modernistic view (Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 871). We find both *Consumer Identity Projects* and *Marketplace Cultures* imperative for this study, as they will enlighten both why individuals choose to belong to the subculture in order to find their identity and how the subculture functions.

### 2.1.1 Subcultures of consumption

Consumer culture traditionally refers to a society where consumer commodities acquired through market exchange play an important role in the process of constructing culture, identity and social life (Hämäläinen & Moisander 2007; Slater 1997). Consumer culture is often dated back to the 17th and 18th century, with goods made for fashion and household. The increase of consumption through the years has resulted in critical views of the 'capitalist culture' and assassination of the 'real culture' making the consumers powerless (Moisander et al., 2010). Despite the rather negative perception of consumption and consumer culture, consumer culture is often understood as "*a socially integrated system of beliefs, values, practices and expressive symbols*" (Ibid: 79), which conceptualizes social order. However, these concepts are not static and are constantly renegotiated and changed (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006; McCracken, 1986), and have influence on consumer behavior (Moisander et al., 2010). When consumers, situated in the social system, identify their own beliefs and values, they can construct communities

and cultures within the greater culture system as they find others with similar beliefs and values (McCracken, 1986). These are denoted as either subcultures or consumer communities, being subsequent to the dominant mainstream society (Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007). The subcultures have norms apart from the surrounding society (Yinger, 1960).

Consumer culture is an organic whole, and the normative structure of the subculture makes it possible for the subculture to be rehabilitated to the dominant society since the subculture stems from the dominant culture (Parsons, 1951). The connection is thus strong. Subculture can also be viewed upon with a social-psychological dimension containing personality and groups (Yinger, 1960). This, in particular, seems to be relevant for this study of anarconomy, as some of the personal factors include frustration and resentment, where the participants gather in groups in opposition to the dominant society (Ibid).

A characterization of subcultures “includes an identifiable, hierarchical social structure, a unique ethos, or set of shared beliefs and values; and unique jargons, rituals and modes of symbolic expression” (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995, p. 43). Furthermore, indicators of communities, unrestricted by geographical boundaries, are consciousness of kind, which is the connection and recognition between members, shared traditions and moral responsibility with obligation to the community (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). The hierarchy can be established in many ways, for instance, by frequently referencing members with high rank or by the process of upgrading low ranked members to high ranked members (Kozinets, 2002b).

There are many forms of subcultures, for example, music, art, food, sport, literature, and cars. However, in this thesis we are interested in subcultures of consumption, predominantly, the subcultures rejecting the ideology of the majority. This kind of subculture is often named counter culture, and by specifying the term, it provides a more thorough understanding and sharpens the analysis (Yinger, 1960). However, counter cultures and for instance brand communities possess some similar characteristics (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). In both cases, the consumers are feeling a sense of belonging and a social contribution, which they are happily willing to share with insiders whom they care about (Putnam, 2000).

Counter culture is though still a continuum of subculture, but it differs in the way that counter culture focus on conflict and resistance. It is denominated as further away from the mainstream society than subculture, and is therefore harder to rehabilitate in the dominant society (Yinger, 1960) and thus it alienates itself from the dominant market.

Nonetheless, as regular counter cultures are usually integrated somewhat into the consumer culture, they cause little threat to the capitalistic structure (Sklair, 1995). Both anti-brand communities and tribalism are located within subcultures, which both have a strong connection to our research, as anarconomy is part of these particular subcultures. However, as Anarconomy is in a different format, it has the ability to cause a vast threat to the overall dominant market.

### 2.1.2 Anti-brand communities

There are distinctive parallels that can be drawn between the market emancipation tendencies of the anarconomy and that of anti-brand communities which sole purpose is to unite against specific brands or the capitalistic system in general.

Anti-brand communities emerged to challenge the increasing consumerism in modern society. With roots in *“an age of ideology in which society came to be understood as a social creation that is also malleable”* (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004: 692), these social movements seek to enlighten consumers and *“help them overcome the oppressive programming of managers and other technocrats”* (Ibid: 693). This is done by reciprocal exchange of ideas, advice and support within the community (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006) often combined with physical actions, occasionally in the form of anti-brand events or ad-busting campaigns (Kozinets, 2002a). As with most counter cultural consumer movements, this fight only offers alternative options for products and brands it does not offer emancipation from the market itself (Kozinets, 2002a).

The emergence of the Internet in post-modern society has provided a new platform for hosting these anti-brand communities. With the Internet, social gatherings is no longer restricted by geographical distance and social platforms has made it possible for international members to interact in time insensitive conversation through message boards and forums (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006). These technological advances have caused most contemporary anti-brand groups to solely originate and communicate in cyberspace (Ibid). The possibility for anonymity that the Internet offers, also influence the decision of consumers to become active members of anti-brand communities (Ibid).

According to Touraine (1981: 693) *“the postindustrial struggle of consumer versus managers takes place through ideology”*. The ideology of social movements, including anti-brand communities, can be conceptualized by three core elements: (1) their goal, (2) their identity, (3) and their adversary (Melucci, 1989; Touraine, 1981). Ideology stabilizes the relationships between actor, adversary, and objectives in a way that legitimizes the actor and also negates any positive social identity of the opponent (Melucci, 1989).

The goal of anti-brand communities is primarily to fight the economic system and the power of brands by liberating consumers from the imposed meanings or values that are prescribed by a brand. They regard their actions *“as affirming a beneficial social goal that transcends their immediate interests”* (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004: 693) - that they are doing something profoundly good.

Members of anti-brand communities see themselves as activists and *“as positive change agents - forces for good who protect and stand up for oppressed people and causes”* (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004: 694). As high-minded and noble citizens who are enlightened in contradiction to the mainstream consumers and as liberators who are morally obligated to convert others (Campbell, 1999). The mainstream consumers play a dual role in the eyes of the activist. On the one hand as a victim of the capitalistic system manipulated and deceived by brands, and on the other hand as an accomplice who willingly takes part in wrong doing (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). They are regarded as a sleeping activist army, which has been corrupted into a hedonistic soporific state by the economic system (Ibid).

While mainstream consumers are portrayed in a dual role, the corporations and the brands are the clear adversary in anti-brand communities. The existence of a clear defined adversary is paramount for the survival of these social communities, as it helps mobilize, motivate and unify the activist movement against the common enemy (Touraine, 1981). Activists often identify this anti-brand struggle as David's fight against Goliath. The good-hearted puritan against the stronger forces of evil (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004), stating that *“there is an irreconcilable opposition between the actor and the adversary”* (Melucci, 1996: 350).

### 2.1.3 Tribalism

One-to-one marketing and customer customization are buzzwords heavily used in our contemporary society. With the emergence of the Internet, consumers can buy whatever they want with a click of a button without ever leaving the comfort of their home and without any need for social interaction. Some argue that we have evolved into a period of severe social dissolution and extreme individualism, others that *“our era does not crown the triumph of individualism but rather heralds the beginning of its end”* (Cova & Cova, 2001: 4).



Tribalism is a reverse movement to the increasingly individualistic society, where individuals are attempting to re-create the social links experienced in the pre-modern era (Maffesoli, 1996). As technological development cause a constant up rooting of our society the need for re-rooting is evident and this leads consumers to be “*less interested in the objects of consumption than in the social links and identities that come with them*” (Cova & Cova, 2001:1). This establishment of social embeddedness is achieved by a reconstruction or re-possession of meanings through shared experiences and their enactment through rituals (Cova & Cova, 2001). Tribal members do not gather around something rational and tangible but rather around non-rational and archaic elements of locality, kinship, emotion and passion. These cultural meanings might manifest in shared language, morals, values, icons and myths defined and interpreted collectively by the tribe members (Ibid).

As post-modern tribes are often characterized by a group of heterogeneous members only bound loosely together by their shared passion, the structure of a tribe might seem abstract. It is possible to be a member of several tribes at a time, and belonging to a tribe does not exclude one from living a normal life (Ibid). Although there is an element of resistance to the market in contemporary tribalism, there is no reason why tribes cannot co-exist side by side with mainstream society (Ibid) and because their boundaries are often conceptual they may exist unnoticed.

The term ‘tribe’ is borrowed from anthropology and is in that context used to describe societies where social order was maintained without the existence of central power (Ibid). The emergence of the Internet, which is social anarchistic in its own nature (Klein, 2000; Mogensen et al., 2009), has made tribes even more participative, active and social. The possibility for online tribes to connect on a larger scale has made them even more influential participants in the construction of experiences through the integration of their resources (Baron & Harris, 2008). Collective projects conceived through the collaboration of large online tribes, may end up competing consciously or unconsciously with existing corporate brands (Cova & White, 2010). This kind of tribalization phenomenon is deemed *Tribal competitors* (Cova et al., 2007) and the definition of these online communities is closely related to that of the Anarconomy, including the counter cultural aspect and the appropriation of value within the community (Cova & White, 2010).

#### 2.1.4 Gift giving and status seeking motives

As development in open-source communities is driven by the willingness of members to produce and share improvements of code and to give feedback and advice to other members’ contributions, as described in the introduction, it is important to look at the

possible motives for users to do this. It can be argued that open-source communities are built on gift relationships in which members exchange pieces of code with the community (Bergquist & Ljungberg, 2001). Since there is no apparent economic gain, the motivation for sharing one's work is socially dominated. This could be the expectation of reciprocity, a rational calculation of gaining something in exchange for the effort (Lampel & Bhalla, 2007). It is also argued that motivation could be altruism and a simple wish to reinforce the long-term viability of the group.

As these explanations are well justified, other research suggests that status seeking is a powerful motivation for gift giving in offline as well as online communities (Ibid). The idea is that actors share their work to enhance their internal and external status within the community. The external status is related to the social standing in the group, defined by prestige, honor and deference in relation to other users. Blau (1964) hypothesized *"that individuals who make essential contributions to the group, or to its members individually, have a claim to superior status because others in the group are willing to exchange deference in return for the benefits that the higher-status individuals have to offer. Thus, status can be conceived as a product of others' subjective evaluations of an actor"* (Stewart, 2005: 824). Internal status is related to the emotional gain or ego boost an individual get as a result of acquired status (Emerson, 1962). Raymond (1999: 99) argues that *"in a gift giving community social status is determined not by what you control but by what you give away"*.

Giving a gift also creates power distance between people. On the one hand, when a gift is accepted in an open-source community, the receiver becomes subordinate to the giver. On the other hand, refusing a gift may be a way of stating a superior relative status (Bergquist & Ljungberg, 2001). In practice this could be a negation of a contribution offered by a user by criticizing the code or the user itself. The gift is rejected and thus relative status is stated. However, if a gift is accepted by the receiver, the contribution is acknowledged and the giver acquires a certain amount of fame, status and respect (Ibid). This form of interaction is one of the most effective ways of creating status in large communities, where the sheer number of actors makes it difficult to establish a clear hierarchy. As the number of positive or negative feedback on a contribution increases, that information is more likely to spread through the network and institutionalize as a part of that actors status (Stewart, 2005). Actors with continuously positive feedback, develops a positive reputation, which is hard to subvert, and these actors may become community heroes, based on their merits. The future opinions of these high-status members are regarded disproportionately high, in relation to low-status actors, even if that low-status user is the one with the correct answer. Since the opinion of community

heroes are proportionally higher valued *“receiving a positive endorsement from a high-status actor is highly beneficial to any member who is trying to gain social acceptance”* (Ibid: 826).

In this way, an open-source community resembles the academic society as a social entity. *“You write a piece of software and provide it to the community. Your contribution is peer reviewed by the owners of a software development project and, if it is good enough, you get your credits in the open source gift economy”* (Ibid: 319). As in academics, peer evaluation is important to secure the quality of the code by replicating and scrutinizing it for further use. Also recognition and future citations is used to create relative status, and just as in the academic society, contributing substantially to the community is what makes icons and heroes.

### 2.1.5 Identity

As explained previously, identity is important for the communities within subcultures, and it is important for the individual to find their identity, which can be assisted by joining a community (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Belk, 1988). One can separate the two, however they are highly interrelated, as the community’s identity cannot exist without the individual’s identity, and vice versa (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). The economic marketplace has been a dominant factor in the making of identity, where consumers find self-identity through consumption (Ibid; Belk, 1988, McCracken, 1987). In CCT, the consumers actively seek and conform their identity from their surroundings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998) and are often referring to the cultural community to which they belong (Kozinets, 2002a). However, if the mainstream market is controlling the surroundings, the consumers become passive as they simply adopt the symbols given by the market leaders (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). On the contrary, the counter culture communities wish to emancipate themselves from this by actively making their own surroundings distinguished apart from the dominant market (Kozinets, 2002a). Kozinets and Handelman (2004) define the identity as dynamic and heterogeneous, which is often shown through discursive actions, as with anti-brands communities. This tradition for discursive actions and rituals is a method of maintaining the identity for the community, as well as for the individuals (Cova & Cova, 2001).

Belk (1988) presents how possessions can contribute to form one’s identity, as the branded possessions represent the identity that the consumers wish to portray. This theory is useful, yet with inverted sign. With anarconomy communities, branded products are restricted, and we see it as self-identity through non-consumption. As previously

mentioned, they seek to rescue the consumers from the homogeneous masses (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004), or at least to apart from it themselves. That is the type of identity they both seek and possess.

The open source community participants identify themselves with the products they invented or at least contributed to invent or spread. So therefore what we produce is perceived as part of the self (Belk, 1988). However, a big part of the anarconomy community is the sharing of knowledge-products, and thereby gift-giving. Thus, they share themselves, and the acknowledgment of this sharing is their benefit.

## 2.2 Driving themes

Based on the complementary theories discussed in this paper, we have chosen the relevant themes that will drive our research of anarconomy and ultimately disclose the culture existing in these communities. Since these themes are paramount for the understanding of the related research domains of subcultures, anti-brand communities, tribalism, identity and status seeking, we will use the same topics to study the anarconomy phenomenon. It is always a subjective task to collect data, however by using these themes to guide the analysis we ensure that this at least becomes less sporadic task. It is important to acknowledge these factors as interconnected, and should not be seen as separate phenomenons.

1. **Goal:** The goal and the mission are the foundation or the whole purpose of the community. The goal should be shared amongst the community members in order to be able reach the goal. This is of course closely related to the motives of actors within the group, and thus an important aspect to consider. We base this upon the theories of sub cultural consumer identity projects and anti-brand communities.
2. **Adversary:** Since counter culture or resistance is an underlying theme of this research, it is important to investigate how this adversary manifests in the anarconomy environment. A clear defined adversary is moreover a fundamental aspect of the conceptualization of anti-brand communities and therefore interesting in this context. We support this with anti-brand community theory.
3. **Identity and relationships:** As presented in the theories dealing with subcultures, anti-brand communities and tribalism, it is important for both the community as such and the individual within the community to find their identity. Moreover, the community's identity will assist the individual's identity and vice versa , and the identity is part of the necessary relationships established in the community .The

values the community possess needs to be shared among all participants, so they can achieve a shared ethos, and thus experience the social links they searched for. We will characterize the identity of the users, and investigate how it correlates to the relationships among the users.

4. **Hierarchy:** A natural aspect of society creating a hierarchy and it is supposedly also apparent in all forms of subcultures. However, it can be discussed whether hierarchy is natural in anarchism or not. Investigating how the hierarchy is established will assist us in determining the overall characteristics of the anarconomy culture. This is further theorized by how gift giving results in hierarchy.
5. **Status seeking:** Gift giving and feedback are important instruments to create and sustain status in online communities. To assess the role of reputation and status within the anarconomy, this is an important research theme. This is also highly connected to identity and hierarchy.
6. **Language:** In communities, a certain kind of language is part of providing the participants with a consensus feeling of togetherness and unity, as described in the theories of tribes and subcultures. This language will differ from subculture to subculture, also apart from the dominant mainstream culture. Moreover, the language will show how a code of conduct and consciousness of kind appears. It is highly related to traditions of how to act, as with codes of conduct.

These core themes appropriated from the theory discussed in this chapter, is what we bring with us to the overall methodological reasoning, data collection and analysis. It is a way gaining some kind of structure in our sampling, harvesting the absolute core data from the interview and the online community. It is important to note, that although these are the core themes we have chosen to conceptualize the subculture, we are open to new and unexpected discoveries and will collect data that may pose insights not related to the themes proposed here.

## 3. Methodology

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*In this chapter, we argue for our methodological departure in CCT. Firstly, we present how the research philosophy will affect our further methodological reasoning and then present to which branch of research philosophy we belong. Secondly, we determine our strategy and present more precisely which kinds of research methods we use. The themes shown in the previous chapter are applied in order to structure the collection of empirical data. Thirdly, we present how we will sample, conduct and analyze data. Furthermore, we discuss the ethical aspect of the chosen data collection strategy.*

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### 3.1 Research philosophy

Our departure in the domains of CCT does not necessitate fidelity to only one methodology orientation, nor divide a qualitative/quantitative approach. However, as CCT explores how consumers actively produce subjective meaning, we believe that an exploratory study and thorough understanding is necessary, which determines our research philosophy (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Theory is *"an explanation of observed regularities"* (Bryman & Bell, 2011: 7), and through understanding the existing regularities, one can create a theory. This results in an inductive approach. Bryman and Bell, (2011: 13) states that *"...the process of induction involves drawing generalizable inferences out of observations"*, which means that induction is the process of turning observations into theory (Alvesson, 2003). Conversely, theory is often the foundation of research (Bryman & Bell, 2011), and we have applied theory with similarities, which we will depart from in order to have a theoretical basis for further research.

When interpreting our data, we will focus on the understanding of the participant's subjective thoughts and how they create and express them through language, hierarchy and goal etc. (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). When focusing on understanding rather than explaining, we use the epistemological perspective of interpretivism (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This perspective influences the outcome, and it is imperative to be aware of one's own ability and method of gaining knowledge (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). However, since understanding demands subjective interpretations of a subjective world, the outcome is colored by our choices and ability to comprehend the participant's actions and statements. Also, our choice of theory is subjective and influences the themes, findings and outcome. We are aware that we are subjective and biased ourselves, and we try to limit the subjectivity by collecting relevant articles from various authors, making a

thorough research in order to construct a broader picture from which we can make our own mindset.

As we are investigating a socially constructed world in which counterculture is the main object, we will understand how the participants perceive open source and anarchonomy in order to study the phenomenon. To do so, we will observe them and have conversations with them, as a constructionist view prescribes (Ibid). This is especially important since we cannot capture an individual's personal meanings and thoughts by putting them into static theoretical boxes.

### 3.2 Research strategy

As the aim of this study is to understand the culture behind the phenomenon of Anarconomy we implement an exploratory study. Therefore we will use a qualitative approach, as we are interested in learning how the participants view their world (McCracken, 1988). Furthermore a qualitative research focusing on words rather than numbers (Bryman and Bell, 2011) will provide the reader with a more thorough and researched understanding of the phenomenon of anarchonomy.

Our purpose is not to provide a generalization. It is commonly acknowledged in CCT that the irrationality and ephemerality are the main aspects of the consumers' cultural worldview, and that subjectivity is unavoidable (Brown, 1993; Firat et al.,1995). Furthermore, it is common practice within CCT that theory is created rather than tested. The qualitative approach will capture these views as it will be subjective and hard to generalize (Bryman & Bell, 2011), however it will make it possible for us to study anarchonomy as a culture.

A strategy that will assist us in understanding a "*social complex phenomena*" (Yin, 2003: 2) is case studies as we retain a holistic perspective. It entails both observation and interviews as evidence (Yin, 2003). We will use a single case study, namely the Apache Open Office forum. We find this case as representative for our research as it is a "*typical case*" and "*commonplace situation*" (Yin, 2003: 41) for open source forums. It is a mature community, which has existed for approximately 5 years, and it is a community that offers support not only for Apache OpenOffice but also various derivatives such as LibreOffice and StarOffice. Thus we expect this forum to have sufficient information and data in order to achieve our research goals. Our themes will assist us in staying within the holistic perspective and find the connectedness in the motives. We use Yin's (2003) embedded single case method as we research multiple embedded cases within one case.

However, at the same time, we will combine them and therefore retain a holistic perspective.

We are aware that a single case study is rather subjective (Ibid), and a multi case study could provide more objective lens to view the world with. Our chosen single case does however cover more than one open source product of knowledge, and only researching the one case is more time efficient. Thus, we find a single case study sufficient. Adding to this, we also have an expert interview helping us expanding our knowledge and thereby assisting us in our triangulation strategy.

Our inductive approach entail as a modicum of deduction. After defining our research question, we relate between theory and the research, and thereby collecting further data to uphold the previous data. Bryman & Bell (2011:13) describes this iterative strategy as *“a weaving back and forth between data and theory”*. The theory found sets a necessary frame of reference and a foundation from which we can develop a more thorough understanding of anarconomy (Thompson et al. 1994). With this knowledge, we firstly reviewed previous literature of anarconomy, open source and subcultures of resistance in order to loosely form a framework from where we could extract themes of analysis, useful for our empirical work. However, we are aware that we need to keep an open mind, as our subjective sight might hinder us from fully understanding anarconomy and the cultural aspects of it. Furthermore, we have made theoretical boxes for the purpose of making the data analysis more comprehensible. Since subjective worldviews cannot be generalized, we only use this for the research part as we will interconnect the results of analysis subsequently.

### 3.3 Research method

We will implement several methods within the string of qualitative approaches. Firstly, we will conduct an expert-interview with one of the founders of the term anarconomy. We do this in order to get a further understanding of the phenomenon.

Secondly, we will conduct a netnographic study of an open source community that has existed for a long period of time. We aim at investigating and revealing our selected themes in two ways: 1) strictly observation, passive and anonymous and 2) participant interviews with revealed identity. We reason our choice of several methods with the technique of triangulation. When using several methods, it can result in *“greater confidence in findings”* (Bryman & Bell, 397) and in minimizing misunderstandings in both observations and interviews by testing both and thus improve trustworthiness



(Kozinets, 2002b). This approach is especially relevant when researching complex cultural societies.

### 3.4 Data Collection

As we have chosen to work with several different methods, we will go through them more thoroughly in the following section. Our research will however be mostly based on the netnography methods as the worldview of the community users are the world we aim at investigating. We are not going to test the community, i.e. go against the norms, as we have found that many new users already have done that, and most of them have been banned from the community afterwards. If that were to happen to us, we would not be able to contact the users in order to ask them to participate in our online focus group.

We collect our data following the grounded theory process. We can claim to do so, since we have divided our data collection into three processes, where the first method helped define how to collect the second set of data, and the second set of data defined what to collect in the last process of collecting data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Regarding theoretical saturation, we stopped collecting data when we felt that no more relevant information were emerging (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The following text is chronological with how we collected the data.

#### 3.4.1 Off-line Interview

As mentioned we have decided on a triangulation strategy by collecting data from several sources with different methods employed. This is common practice in qualitative research, as data collection should be diverse and *“no single interview should stand alone”* (Whyte 1953: 22) In addition to the netnography study, we are conducting an in-depth interview with Klaus Mogensen, one of the co-founders of the term anarconomy. The main purpose of this interview, as with most in-depth interviews, is to understand the meanings and motives the interviewee attach to issues and topics in the context of the research domain (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008), and in this case the anarconomy subculture. Thus the in-depth interview makes it possible for us to *“gain an understanding from the respondent’s perspective which includes not only what their viewpoint is, but also why they have this particular viewpoint”* (Ibid: 144).

Although a qualitative interview is often claimed to be one of the best ways to get insight to the respondent’s perspective because he has the ability to talk freely, this is

not always the fact (Ibid). If interviews become too unstructured there might be an offset between what the respondent thinks the interviewer is interested in and vice versa (Ibid). To overcome this obstacle, we will conduct the research as a semi-structured interview with an interview guide (see appendix 1) to make sure we reach our pre-defined goals. With this in mind, we will still keep the interview flexible, open for elaboration and make room for follow up questions as this is an important quality of the qualitative interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

This loose semi-structured nature of the interview is very similar notion of conversation (Burgess, 1984) and to further facilitate a relaxed atmosphere we will conduct the interview in the comfort of the respondents own office. Furthermore since we are two interviewers, the interview will seem like an informal discussion or conversation between three people instead of a direct uncomfortable one-on-one interview (Bechhofer et al., 1984). Another advantage of being two interviewers, is that one interviewer can be active while the other passive interviewer may oversee the general development of the interview, look for nonverbal cues, take notes and wait for the right moment to take over and switch roles with the other (Ibid).

As both the verbal and nonverbal cues is recognized and interpreted, this kind of interviews is, in line with our general research philosophy, exposed to a high degree of subjectivity. Furthermore there is always a threat that the subject limits the information disclosed to us as researchers. This is often the case in management research where respondents could have various reasons for holding back information (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In our case, the interviewee is employed at a non-profit organization, which is devoted to guide the public with information and future studies. Thus we can assume that there is no conflicting personal agenda, on the contrary there is an obvious motive to share knowledge about the research domain.

### 3.4.2 Netnography

Ethnography is an anthropological method based on participation and observation employing the researchers flexibility and skills. It is ideal when generalization or, in particular, an understanding is necessary (Kozinets, 2002b), and the thorough understanding is often termed 'grounded knowledge' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is considered rather intrusive because it involves researcher participant observation of the consumer behavior. However, it can reveal "*the rich symbolic world that underlies needs, desire, meanings, and choice*" (Kozinets, 2002b: 62) as it is a qualitative and interpretive approach.

The virtual communities are considered just as much real as traditional physical communities in the minds of the participants (Kozinets, 2002b). In order to capture and understand the behavior of the online participants, a prolongation of ethnography, being *netnography*, is applicable. The Internet is a cornucopia of data (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and one should take advantage of that especially when Anarconomy is located online. Netnography is less obtrusive and time consuming than ethnography (ibid) as the Internet stores data, and netnography does not consist of a fabricated setting, as the naturalistic and international online forums are publicly available and already existing (Kozinets, 2002b). Limitations of netnography are that it entails the skills of the researcher, and difficulties in generalizing (ibid). However, when understanding a phenomenon, generalizing is not the main aspect as rather a theory is created (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Though, combining the observation with other methods of research in triangulation will assist the netnography in its trustworthiness and mobility (Kozinets, 2002b). Moreover, as the participation is considered low, 'lurking' is a popular term for the observation (ibid; Bryman & Bell, 2011) and is looked badly upon from online users, but is still a good way to start the research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, this brings in ethical issues, as to, for example, whether to reveal one's true identity as a researcher in the online forums, privacy concerns of the (public) participants, and fake user-accounts not disclosing their true opinions (ibid). These could bring forward counterfeit answers, comments and thereby conclusions. Kozinets (2002b: 63) suggests that a participant observations should always include "1) making (an) cultural entrée; 2) gathering and analyzing data; 3) ensuring trustworthy interpretation; 4) conducting ethical research, and 5) providing opportunities for culture member feedback". Thus, revealing the researchers identity. We will follow these instructions in the last part of our netnography.

#### 3.4.2.1 Passive observation

In our passive observation we did not follow Kozinets' (2002b) instructions. However, as he focus on participant observation, we do not feel obliged to do so. We started by observing the online forum as suggested by Bryman and Bell (2011) to get to know how the forum practically works, get to 'know' the users and in general to get a feeling of the of the forum. The observation provides us, as "*researchers, with a window into naturally occurring behaviors*" (Kozinets, 2002b: 62), and is as naturalistic as possible due to the lack of obtrusiveness (Kozinets, 2002b). We define passive observation as a method where we only look at the online forum, not stating our presence, nor writing comments or messages. Bryman and Bell (2011) presents this discussion as it can be argued that even just by passively observing, we are participating. In our chosen forum, it is shown

how many views a certain post has had, and we contribute to that number even though we do not intend to participate in any form. The administrators of the site can see our IP-addresses and that makes our anonymity somewhat disappear. However, the regular user are not aware that we are observing the forum and what we are observing, and that justifies the passivity of the observation. Adding to this, the Internet itself makes us more passive and anonymous than a regular ethnographic observation.

The observation is colored with our subjective interpretation of the data. Being utterly objective is not possible, however as long as we are aware of our subjectivity, and are open about it, our result are both trustworthy and reliable. Our use of triangulation will further add to this.

Furthermore, since the observation transcribes automatically (Kozinets, 2002b), we are reluctant to get all details and thus miss less.

Even though strictly observation gives us plenty of useful data, we find it necessary to have participant online focus group interviews. With them, we will be able to get all the data needed for answering our research question, and thus our interpretation of the observation will become less subjective.

#### 3.4.2.2 Participant online focus group

To add credibility to our subjective interpretation of the observations, we use participant online focus groups. As suggested by Bryman and Bell (2011: 657) we: *“send out a welcome message introducing the research and laying out some of the ground rules for the ongoing discussion”* and thereby reveal our identity. This is supposed to make the participants respond more positively (Ibid) and maximize our credibility. Thus, we follow Kozinets (2002b) advice of making a cultural entrée. We identify key actors who are often online and very active and contact them.

We will conduct the interviews simultaneously and both synchronous, i.e. in real time, and asynchronous, i.e. not real-time (Bryman & Bell, 2011). When the respondents can contribute *“more or less immediately after previous contributions”* (Ibid, 655-656) they are synchronous, and they will be online simultaneously. However, due to time-zone differences, this is not entirely possible. Still, it resembles a normal turn-taking conversation (Mann & Stewart, 2000). When the interview is asynchronous, we send a question they can answer when they have time, to both us and the other respondents. Given the time-zone issue, our collection of data will take place both synchronous and asynchronous. However, we try to strengthen the synchronicity by placing the interview

in an online group where all the respondents can see everyone's answers and questions. In this way, we keep an open mind, and let the respondents elaborate their thoughts, and thus perhaps find more than we searched for.

Since our respondents all are members of the same community, we can draw on the pre-existing social groups (Stewart & Williams, 2005) hopefully making the respondents answer more truthfully. We also see the advantage in having participants of different geographic origin, making our data more broadly useful. We give the respondents the opportunity to be anonymous in the thesis, however, they are not able to conceal their online identity from each other, as they are already more or less familiar with each other. Bryman and Bell (2011) argues that since the respondents are less familiar with us as interviewers, we become less biased in their point of view. Further, as the respondents can be located where they wish, for instance at home, work, at a cafe, they are in safe surroundings, making them more comfortable (Ibid). Our research topic can divert unpleasant questions as it enables data that can be somewhat personal, for example identity, hierarchy and goal, and a safe surrounding ought to make the respondent more likely to answer truthfully and straightforward.

Mann and Stewart (2000) advocate that with synchronous interviews, the group should not be too large, contrary to asynchronous interviews. Ideally, the synchronous groups should consist of six to eight participants, whereas asynchronous groups can be very large (Ibid). Due to the fact that we will use both synchronous and asynchronous interviews, we will be somewhere in between. Kozinets' (2002b, 63) second step: "*gathering and analyzing data*" suggests that we should consider the research question when gathering data. We do this by having our selected themes of analysis, avoiding information overload. We also need to deal with our resources of data, making the number of participants suit the overall aim of the research. Furthermore, we need to consider whom we interview, if they are *tourists*, *insiders* or somewhere in between (Kozinets, 2002b), as that states how devoted they are and thus how representative they are for the aim of the research. The forum we use for our focus group is only for devoted users, but we cannot restrict which of these reply our topics. This means that any number of participants can occur. This can make the focus group questionable in form, however, since the participants can 'talk' with each other as a real conversation, we still regard it as a focus group.

Kozinets' advice of "*3) ensuring trustworthy interpretation; 4) conducting ethical research, and 5) providing opportunities for culture member feedback*" (2002b: 63) is used implicitly in the following.

### 3.4.3 Ethics

As mentioned, there are considerable ethical issues to address, before conducting data collection using a netnographic methodological approach. In contradiction to most data collecting methods, netnography makes it possible for the researcher to remain anonymous during the observation, in fact it is possible to conduct the research without the respondents ever knowing they have been the subjects of research. Thus giving netnographers the unflattering description of “*professional lurkers*” (Kozinets, 2002b). There are arguments that this approach has the potential to cause psychological harm to subjects if their actions are unknowingly observed, interpreted and reported without them knowing before the final report is public (King, 1996). Reid (1996) argues that this “lurking” approach, where you use data without the explicit consent of the subjects, could cause considerably distrust in all marketing researchers, and thus poisoning the research well for future researchers in the general area of marketing research.

The general ethical dispute boils down to a discussion of whether actions performed in the online sphere, should be regarded as private or public. This general topic has been the subject of heavy debate in the last decade, but with the emergence of social media as a commonly used communication platform, and people to a greater extent move their social life online, this debate has been steered in the direction of viewing the web as a public sphere where people can be held accountable for their actions as it is as much real as ‘real-life’ as we know it (Kozinets, 2002b). With this in mind, we believe that we can ethically defend our choice to do anonymous observation in online public forums.

Secondly, as part of our netnography analysis we will gather data through online interviews with actors on the forum. Since these interviews entail a proper introduction of us as researchers, there are no significant ethical problems to discuss in relation to this part of the netnographic research.

## 3.5 Sampling method

In the following, we present our sampling methods regarding our three strategies. The sampling methods influence the trustworthiness of the data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008) and is therefore imperative to discuss.

### 3.5.1 Offline interview

With interviews, *“issues of representativeness are less important in qualitative research than they are in quantitative research”* (Bryman & Bell, 2011: 489). When reaching the saturation point we can stop sampling, as no further sampling would contribute to the overall findings (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

We conducted an interview with Klaus Mogensen, the project manager of the report *Anarconomy*, 2009, and we consider this as an expert interview. As he is the co-founder of the term *Anarconomy*, it proves his credibility and trustworthiness, and obviously shows why interviewing Mogensen is worthwhile. Moreover, since Mogensen is an expert of *anarconomy*, and since we apply triangulation, we find no reason to find further offline interview samples.

### 3.5.2 Passive Observation

Our entire netnographic study was conducted at the OpenOffice.org community forum, at <http://user.services.openoffice.org/> (henceforth called OOo). The forum meet all Kozinets' (2002b: 63) requirements of a preferred community, as it should have: *“(1) a more focused and research question-relevant segment, topic, or group; (2) higher “traffic” of postings; (3) larger numbers of discrete message posters; (4) more detailed or descriptively rich data; and (5) more between-member interactions of the type required by the research question”*. OOo is highly active and has thousands of users, and since we are investigating consumers' cultural aspects we need the thoughts from the users and this is where we are able to collect them.

When observing we are able to gain as much data as we find suitable. However, we need to assess the material according to theme and reliability in for example the rank of the user, thus specifying the sample. Moreover, as the data transcribes itself it stays highly trustworthy and we less likely to transcribe incorrect. Observing helps us become more familiar with the characteristics of the community's culture and how to behave (Kozinets, 2002b) thus avoiding to offend the users in any way.

Nevertheless, sampling seems to less of an issue when it comes to strictly passive observation.

### 3.5.3. Online Focus group

As we are not aiming at generalizing, our sample size does not need to be large. As advised by Kozinets (2002b) and Bryman and Bell (2011), contacting possible

respondents before starting the actual research is “*basic ‘netiquette’*” (Bryman & Bell, 2011; 665). We chose to send private emails to 15 various highly active users in the hope of them approving to participating our survey. Only few responded, however, it is evident that those who applied positively were the ones that answered our focus group questions first.

Since few wanted to participate, we opened an open forum for the focus group letting active users reply as they wished. The group was variegated hierarchy wise, leaving us with a pursued broad perspective (see 4.6 for specification of rank).

Nonetheless, the openness of the group means that we are not aware how the response rate would develop (Hewson & Laurent, 2008). Despite the advice of having six to eight participants when collecting data synchronous, we have 13 participants. This is justified with asynchronous approach applied. Moreover, contacting certain members and inviting them to participate have resulted in a snowball effect (Bryman & Bell, 2011), which is aligned with our available resources.

As seen in table 1, the geographical origin and the duration of membership are highly dispersed in the participant group. They have their interest in open source in common and have therefore a unified foundation for being part of the community. This provides the data with credibility and relevance.

Our research is authentic as we use triangulation and thereby widen our scope. The trustworthiness of the data is high as the focus group interview is automatically transcribed.

**Table 1: List of Focus Group Participants**

Rank	Location	Member since	Number of posts
Moderator 1	USA	Mon Oct 08, 2007	12933
Moderator 2	Ireland	Sat Jan 31, 2009	8662
Moderator 3	Netherlands	Wed Nov 28, 2007	2418
Moderator 4	France	Sun Oct 07, 2007	20395
Moderator 5	USA	Sat Nov 08, 2008	2159
Volunteer 1	France	Fri Jan 14, 2011	467
Volunteer 2	Netherlands	Tue Apr 14, 2009	996
Volunteer 3	USA	Fri Nov 23, 2007	552
Volunteer 4	Germany	Wed Mar 19, 2008	1142
Volunteer 5	N/A	Sun Dec 07, 2008	377
Volunteer 6	USA	Fri Jun 04, 2010	1139
Volunteer 7	Germany	Mon Oct 08, 2007	12807
Blue User 1	Poland	Wed Apr 29, 2009	28



## 3.6 Design and conduction

In the following we will explain how we designed our data collection in order to fulfill our aim of understanding how anarconomy function as a culture.

### 3.6.1 Offline interview

Before the off-line expert interview, we emailed Klaus Mogensen inviting him to an interview and letting him know who we are and what the purpose of the interview is.

The setting for the interview was a meeting room at the Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies, making the surroundings and atmosphere nonthreatening (Easterby-Smith, 2008). We recorded the interview as prescribed by Bryman and Bell (2011) and McCracken (1988). We did this in order to be able to take active part in the discussion and not be distracted by having to take notes. This also made room for follow-up questions and elaborations expanding our view of Anarconomy. The follow-up questions were based on Mogensen's own words (Thompson et al., 1989) and thereby identifying unanticipated data.

We started the interview with practical questions easy for him to respond to. It is important to gain trust between interviewer and interviewee in order to get good data (Lavery, 2003) and the easy start questions and our introduction of the purpose of the study helped us gain the trust. One of the practical questions was to whether he wanted to be anonymous, but he wished to have his identity revealed. This adds to the trustworthiness of the interview.

The following questions were partly follow-up questions, and questions prepared beforehand, however all open questions with great room for elaboration. However, we did not follow the prepared questions chronologically, neither intended to, since we did not want to interfere with the flow of the conversation.

### 3.6.2 Passive observation

In our passive observation, we conducted data by looking at the 'General discussion' within the OoO forum. On the one hand, we searched through the pages looking for topics suitable for our themes, and topics that we found interesting or surprising. On the other hand, we directly searched for keywords adequate for the themes as well. As the data transcribes itself, the amount is vast and we guide the selection with our research question (Kozinets, 2002b) and themes. Drawing attention not to be overloaded with

information. Therefore, we will only present the important findings and leave the rest, though still keeping an open mind for unexpected findings. In the analysis, we will show a screenshot of the observation, as well as focus group interview, and blur out irrelevant text. Irrelevant text will occur since participants, both in observation and focus group, have the possibility of elaborating their answers and thus talk outside our focus. When we find no relevance for this study, we leave it out.

Since we are responsible for which keywords we searched for and what we found interesting to observe we are highly subjective. Thus we might overlook some important. Due to the likelihood of information overload, we overcome this subjectivity with our triangulation strategy and especially the open focus group strategy where the respondents can elaborate their statements.

We took a few field notes, as suggested by Kozinets (2002b) in form of screenshots and notes thereto. Our reasoning for not taking a great amount of field notes is, for one, the automatic transcription and, two, the concomitant analysis of data (Ibid).

### 3.6.3 Online focus group

For the netnographic focus group, we created a user account, and called ourselves 'Student@Lund' and thereby clarifying that we are students on a mission. Our e-mail address we used for sending invitations to participate in the focus group was 'betinalasse@gmail.com', also not hiding our identity. One of the users we contacted was kind enough to help us create a forum for the focus group interview, as we did not have the authority ourselves. Because a respected user set up the forum for us, it was easier to convince the other users that we were not hackers or any kind of intruders, and thereby make the users participate in our focus group.

Firstly, we wrote a welcoming message revealing our identity, stating our purpose and how we wanted the respondents to participate. We made a promise of showing them our thesis and hold them anonymous if requested. This was done with the purpose of trying to establish a personal touch and to avoid suspicion of us being impostors (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Thus we satisfy Kozinets (2002b) last suggestion of cultural member feedback.

Secondly, we posted seven questions in seven different topics, so the topics would not be mixed up, confusing for both us as researcher and the respondents. The seven questions had no real order. It is not necessary since the respondents can choose to look at them in which order they wish to. We provided each question with an exploratory headline, aiming at tempting the users to respond. All questions were open empirical questions,

and none of which revealed the true sense of the purpose. We were very aware that the chosen questions guide our further research as so does the interpretation of the questions in focus. One question we posted was not clear enough, so we changed the question to better fit our theme and to make it easier for the respondents to understand it.

Lastly, we used follow up questions when necessary, however the established relationship between the respondents have automatically made them converse in discussion emerged from our posted questions. This adds a real-life experience and thereby a sense of trustworthiness. Our follow-up questions were both directed at certain users, and to the general discussion within the specific topic.

Since each participant can be located wherever they wish, they are located in safe surroundings. As previously mentioned, this is important for the trustworthiness of the data. However, since the respondent are writing their answers, they have better time to consider what they want to answer and share, and thereby disguise their true thoughts (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Because the participants are somewhat familiar with each other, we find that they are not restricting themselves in their answers.

The focus group took place between May 13th 2012 12:00 and May 16th 2012 16:00, ending with a thankful message to all participants.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

Since qualitative research generates a large amount of attractive yet cumbersome data, it is easy to fail to carry out a true analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and be contaminated with "*analytic interruptus*" (Lofland, 1971:18). Due to few rules when it comes to analyzing qualitative data, we intend to follow the guidelines provided by Bryman and Bell (2011) explained in the following.

As previously mentioned, we will use an iterative approach following the lines of induction (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Our theoretical themes will guide our analysis and support our findings, as well as the findings will support our theory - if possible. When using an inductive approach it is not uncommon to collect more data than needed, and to discover new themes that have not been covered in the provided theory chapter. Using an iterative approach would demand a new literature review and new theory (Ibid), however, due to time constraints we do not feel obliged to do so. Instead, we will go into deep with the findings we can combine with theory, and mention the extra findings more briefly. This is also contributory as future research then has inspiration to what to investigate more thoroughly.

The iterative approach also means that our analysis is simultaneously happening with the data collection, and the data collection and analysis therefore are influencing each other (Ibid). According to this, we are advocates of grounded theory as a way of analyzing data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We use axial coding as a way of fluidly organizing our data, using the data as indicators of concepts named in the themes, rearranging them so they fit best. This implies, that connections can be made between categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Furthermore, we will use *“constant comparison”* (Bryman & Bell, 2011: 577), which entails the researcher to *“constantly compare phenomena being coded under a certain category so that a theoretical elaboration of that category can begin to emerge”* (Ibid). Since we have three methods, we will combine them in every theme, either proving or rejecting theory, and for this, we will constantly return to our research question. We will stay sensitive to potential contrasts between categories.

When analyzing data with this approach we will be able to draw out concepts and thereby create theory or new phenomena (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

### 3.8 Collection of primary and secondary sources

For this study, we used several methods for collecting sources. In general, we continuously searched for new literature in order to stay updated.

We distinguish two sorts of primary data: on the one hand, original literature such as journal articles; and on the other hand, the data we collected ourselves through the qualitative offline interview, online passive observation and online participant focus group interviews.

The primary literature was applied throughout the entire study, however mostly in introduction, theory and methodology. This literature gave us insights in recent developments in research and practice, however also older theories were useful.

We used very few websites, as few online articles were able to add any kind of relevance to the study. However, the online community, from where we conducted our second kind of primary data, was very useful. This primary data was mainly used in analysis and discussion.

We also used secondary literature when necessary in different stages of our research, mainly in theoretical departure and methodology and somewhat in the discussion as well. It can be argued that secondary literature is biased because it can be misinterpreted by the authors of the primary source. However, since it is printed in academic journals or

books, we find it highly reliable. This regards for the primary data as well. It is peer reviewed, that is approved by experts before publishing, and that works as a testament for its reliability.

## 4. Analysis

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*In this section we use the themes derived from the related theory in chapter 2 and illuminate them in the context of an anarconomy environment. The analysis is structured around these fundamental themes while empirical data from the netnographic research as well as the online and offline interviews provides the basis for the analysis. This structure provides clarity and a firm guideline while attempting to explain an abstract phenomenon as culture from a vast amount of empirical data. The overall findings of this analysis will be outlined and discussed in chapter 5.*

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### 4.1 Case Study: OpenOffice.org

For our netnographic analysis, we have decided to focus on one case that we believe represents the anarconomy communities by having an anarchistic nature as well as offering a non-commercial alternative to established products. We have decided to use Apache OpenOffice (A00) which is an open-source productivity suite aiming at offering free alternatives to the Office suite by Microsoft. Supporting this software, developers and regular consumers gather in a community called OpenOffice.org (OOo) that offers help and guidance for Apache OpenOffice, LibreOffice and all the OpenOffice derivatives based on the original code. Being a relatively mature forum with a firmly rooted culture is it possible to collect extensive data through observations as well as an online focus group.

#### 4.1.1 Historical development

In 1999, Sun Microsystems bought StarOffice, a poor performing alternative to the Microsoft Office suite, which was (and still is) a major market leader in productivity suites. Sun released the source code under an open-source license with the aim of creating an open-source community that could create a viable cost-free alternative to MS Office (Merril, 2011). The software thrived through the last decade due to a very active community of programmers and it was established as a professional easy-to-use viable alternative to MS Office.

When the IT-giant Oracle bought Sun Microsystems in 2010, this positive momentum stopped. Oracle employed a control group to review and select every piece of code offered by the community and by that, moving away from the anarchistic hierarchic nature of typical anarconomy communities. The decision to employ a top management group was not well received by the community. Central actors who had spent many

hours working on the OOo project copied the source code, which could be freely obtained due to the open source license, and started LibreOffice (LO). This was done by simply finding every instance of OpenOffice.org in the code and replacing it with LibreOffice - a complete copy-paste of the source code. The LO community recaptured its anarchistic roots and released its first version in January 2011. Due to the exodus of the former core contributors, OOo donated the source code to Apache, which is a community-led software foundation, trying to reintroduce the project as a true open-source project (Merril, 2011). This attempt has been fairly successful, as the community is still very active.

It is possible to draw parallels between the development of OOo and what we know from counter cultures “selling out” to mainstream society (Heath and Potter, 2006). When becoming too commercialized or top managed, they lost their core developers who formed a new counter culture - the LibreOffice project (Libre being the Spanish/French word for freedom and liberty). Although the LO has its own community, it is far less developed than the OOo and not suitable for this case study because of the limited data access. Since OOo offers support for both Apache OpenOffice and LibreOffice, it is the best fit for our analysis.

#### 4.1.2 Online environment

In contrast to commercial products, open-source software is usually known to be less structured and harder for new users to install and use. The online environment of OOo are far from that description as it is highly user friendly in its design, as well as offering a significant amount of information freely to all users.

The website offers detailed install documentation of all features of the software, a Q&A of the most frequently asked question posed by users, a user contributed wiki and of course a forum where all users meet to give advice and discuss various topics within the community. This forum is the backbone for communication and social exchange in the community, and thus this is the social setting in which we will conduct our netnographic research.

### 4.2 Themes

As provided in chapter 2.2, we will analyze this forum based on six themes of high relevance for understanding anarconomy as a culture. We have made room for additional findings, as it is important to be open for supplementary information.

1. **Goal:** The ideological goal is both apparent in why the user is a member of the community, and in what they achieve from it regarding satisfaction and identity.
2. **Adversary:** Since counter culture is an underlying theme of this research, it is important to investigate how clearly this adversary manifests in the anarconomy environment.
3. **Identity and relationships:** There is a strong correlation between identity and relationships, and further to the ideology of the community, and it is interesting to study how unified the identity is, and thus how strong the relationships are.
4. **Hierarchy:** As hierarchy is a natural contradiction to anarconomy, the level of hierarchy is crucial to investigate.
5. **Status seeking:** Motivation for contributing to the community could be the search for status, and hence correlates to the hierarchy theme.
6. **Language:** Language is a way to identify a culture, and we must therefore look into how language is used in the OOo forum.

#### 4.2.1 Goals

We have previously explained how an anti-brand movement is conceptualized by its goal, adversary and identity (Melucci 1989; Touraine, 1981). The goal is to make a change (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004) and we have data supporting this view for the OOo community having the Apache OpenOffice as their object of change.

The AOO has the potential to liberate the consumers from the imposed meanings and values that are prescribed by a corporate brand like Microsoft Office (MSO), which is the common goal for an anti-brand community (Ibid). However, the OOo community's goal is not to annihilate MSO, rather to compete with them in a fair economic market, giving the consumers a choice.

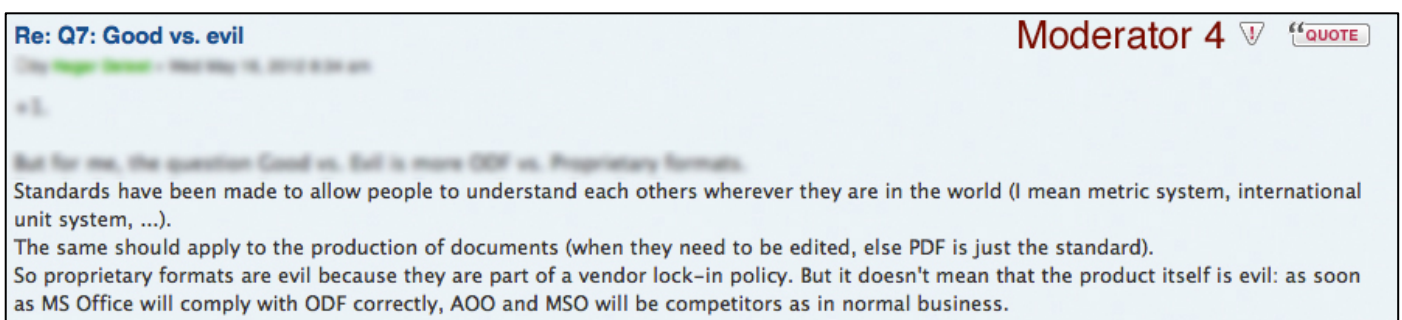


Figure 1: Focus group

Shown in figure 1, Moderator 4 wants AOO and MSO file types to be compatible and connectable, making it possible for documents written in one software to function in other software. This would make it possible for consumers to work together, even though



they use different software. Mogensen agrees with the fact that the commercial world and the anarchonomy system cannot be separated: *“It is not two separate (economic red.) systems (...) it is not either or, it is both and. The two systems challenge each other but they can also use each other”* (Mogensen Interview, 2012: 27 min 30 sec). The AOO community and AOO product is therefore trying to change the balance in the economic market by changing Microsoft’s vendor lock-in policy and create a more free market. In trying to shift the balance, the users believe that they are doing something profoundly good. This ‘feeling’ is often seen in anti-brand communities as well.

It is often stated that the users’ goal is to help other users by answering their problems. In figure 2 and 3, Moderator 1 and Blue User 1 explicitly state how they are satisfied when helping other users.

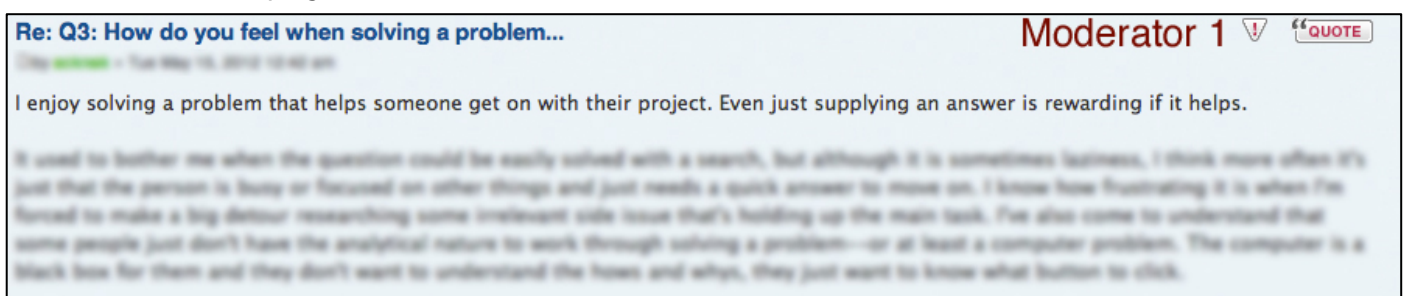


Figure 2: Focus Group

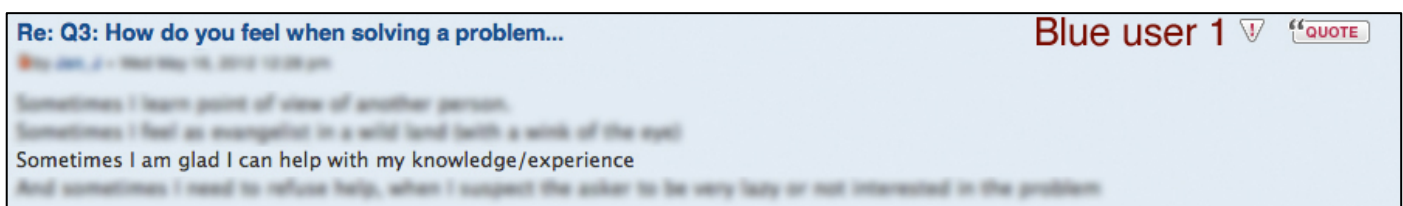


Figure 3: Focus Group

However, we find underlying motives for helping other users. Firstly, the users want the AOO to be bigger and a serious competitor to MSO. So by helping new users, they silently market AOO by functioning as a volunteer customers service and make the shift to an open standard easier. Secondly, it is contributory in giving the AOO a good and friendly reputation because of the vast amount of volunteers. Thirdly, the helping of others will make the AOO more serious as a product and this will, ultimately, make the AOO a better competitor of MSO. This is shown in figure 4, where Moderator 1 says that he is contributing for the reason of helping the AOO become a success, and thus a serious competitor of MSO.



**Figure 4: Focus Group**

These motives differ in terms of engagement from the users, as some users simply only want to use the product, and others are heavily interested in improving it.

Besides the community's goal for the product, there is an underlying goal of creating identity (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). The community's goal must be aligned with the goals of the individuals in order for the community to work and be normative. However, we find that some users' goal is not aligned with the one of the community as a whole. These users are predominantly new users who make little or no contributions, and therefore feel less connected to the community than users who make important contributions. The making of identity is further elaborated in section 4.2.3.

#### 4.2.2 Adversary

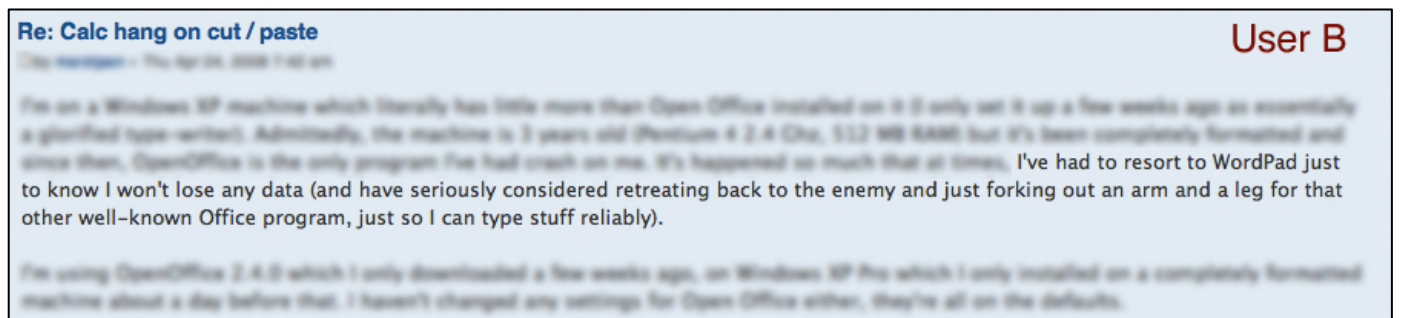
A clear defined adversary is one of the key characteristics in anti-brand communities (Melucci 1989; Touraine, 1981) and thereby an important phenomenon to observe when discussing the countercultural, anti-brand nature of anarconomy and in this case of the OOO community.

The empirical data collected to illuminate this important theme points to various different directions. The observation data shows that in several instances Microsoft, and their Office software, is viewed as a clear opponent due to the nature of the AOO software working as a clear alternative to the commercial software. Microsoft is often portrayed as the capitalistic, powerful and evil force, which should be avoided as much as possible. In figure 5, we can observe how the new user, who states a positive view on the adversary, is completely dismissed by the other user in a much more tough rhetorical tone. The Microsoft name is displayed as *Micro\$oft* to reflect the capitalistic, commercialized characteristics of the brand combined with clear war rhetoric from User A suggesting; "*we will fight until death to avoid this horrendous thing*". Moreover, User A accuses the OP (Original Poster) to be either in love with the Microsoft interface or even a Microsoft secret agent for expressing a moderate positive attitude towards MSO.



**Figure 5: Observation**

During our observations we also discovered that war metaphors often are used to describe the relationship between OpenOffice on one side and MS Office on the other. As we know from theory of anti-brand communities, this stigmatization of the enemy is paramount to the survival of these communities as it generates unity, mobilization and motivation within the group (Touraine, 1981). In figure 6, we can see how performance instability in AOO has caused User B to reluctantly considering “*retreating back to the enemy and just forking out an arm and a leg*”. Indicating that the countercultural image exists in this particular anarconomy forum.



**Figure 6: Observation**

Another example of the clear counter cultural differentiation is illustrated below in figure 7, where the new User C is greeted and welcomed to the forum. In this instance, User C uses a Star Wars reference to comment on the welcome message, showing that there are implicit battle lines drawn between the two adversaries.

**Re: need to keep Microsoft office**

by [Hager](#) - Thu Apr 26, 2012 11:17 am

Hi and welcome to the forum!

You can keep MS Office, why remove it? It may be useful in the future. Check these topics, it will give you some information about OOXML (default file format for MS Office) and its lack of interoperability: [MS Office 2007 OOXML file format \(docs, xlsx, pptx, pptm\)](#)

Standards like ODF (native format for OOo) have been designed for interoperability. OOXML has not been designed for that. MS will continue the vendor lock-in policy to keep their market shares...

Please add "[Solved]" at the beginning of your [Subject](#) title ([help button](#)) if your issue has been fixed.

OOo 3.3.0 on Windows - OOo 3.3.0 & LOo 3.4.1 on Ubuntu 10.04 (Previous Posts)

**Re: Need to keep Microsoft Office?**

by [matt](#) - Thu Apr 26, 2012 11:28 am

User C

Hi and Thank you. I am glad I have come over. Sounds like something from Star Wars "Come to the Dark Side Luke". Ha Ha

**Figure 7: Observation**

Besides defining the obvious enemy, members of the OOo forum also discuss the importance of converting mainstream MSO users and liberate them from commercial bonds. Liberating mainstream consumers can be strongly related to anti-brand communities as well. In a thread called "Roadblocks for OpenOffice.org" several users discuss how to effectively argue for AOO in order to convince others to change (see figure 8) This need to convert others is a distinct indication that the counter cultural aspect is a part of the OOo community.

**Roadblocks for OpenOffice.org**

by [danning](#) - Sun Feb 27, 2012 1:46 pm

Hi all,

I've been using Open Office since 2.0 and always encourage others to use it. We recently rolled Calc out at work to replace Excel for around 200+ users and I've able to get Open Office for my Desktop at work as well though.

Convincing people to use it has never been as easy as I originally thought it would however.

So that I could better understand peoples reasons for not using (and hopefully develop answers for), I posted a question on Superuser.com asking for "Common reasons for not using Open Office". Disclaimer: I do not own, run or have any affiliations with this site.

If anyone from here has more reasons/perceptions you believe that currently stop people from trying or continually using Open Office, I'd be much appreciative if you could add them to the answers!

I ask this question because I want to have a greater understand behind reasoning for using or not using OOo. I believe the better I understand these reasons, the better I can evaluate when/where advocate OOo.

Cheers!

**Figure 8: Observation**

While several observations show a trend in regarding commercial products as a clear adversary, the focus group interviews reveal a much more pragmatic view. Several of the experienced users dismiss the adversary notion, instead they argue for open standards and consumer choice. In the interview extract in figure 9, we can see how Moderator 4 states that there is no particular ideology in the forum and he would advise some users to return to commercial software, simply because it is sometimes the best option. Moreover he shows an understanding for “market rules” stating that the established market and commercial products is not as stigmatized as usually seen in countercultures.

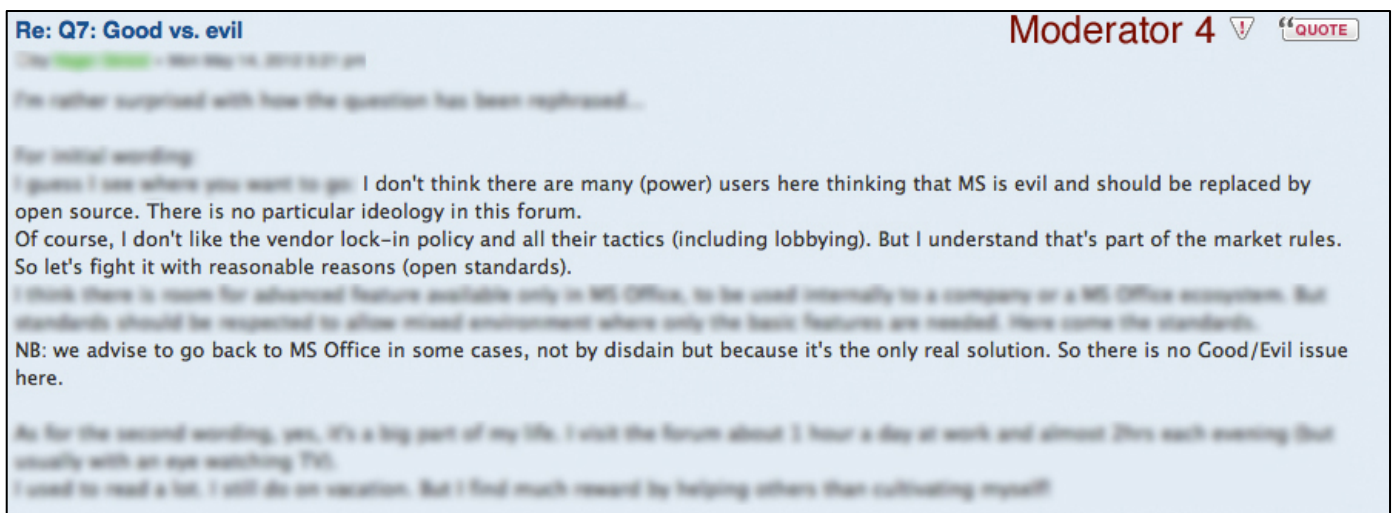


Figure 9: Focus Group

Moderator 5, who also shows a restrained aversion towards the tactics of Microsoft, argues for open formats as well. Moderator 1 argues for free choice and believes that consumers should have the ability to choose which software they want to use. This is seen in figure 10 and 11.

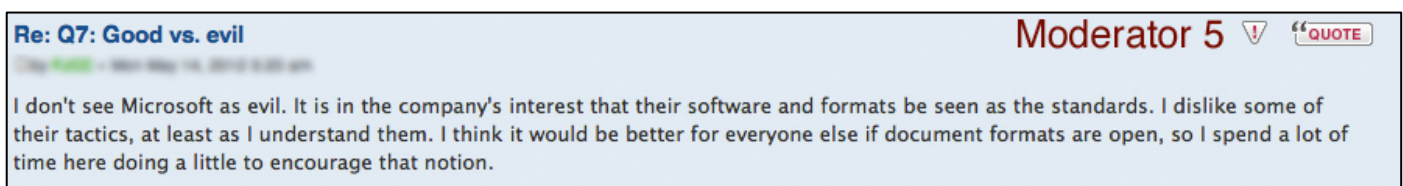


Figure 10: Focus Group

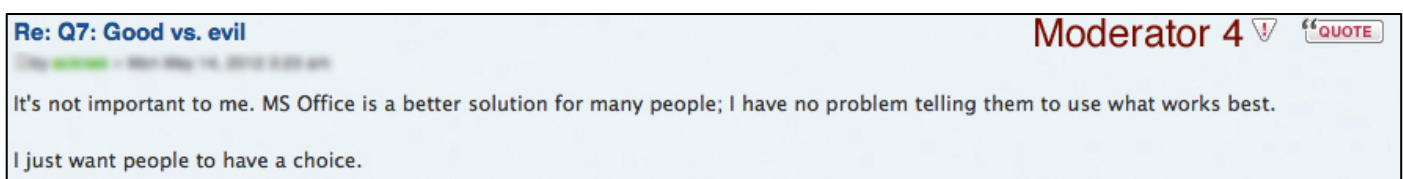
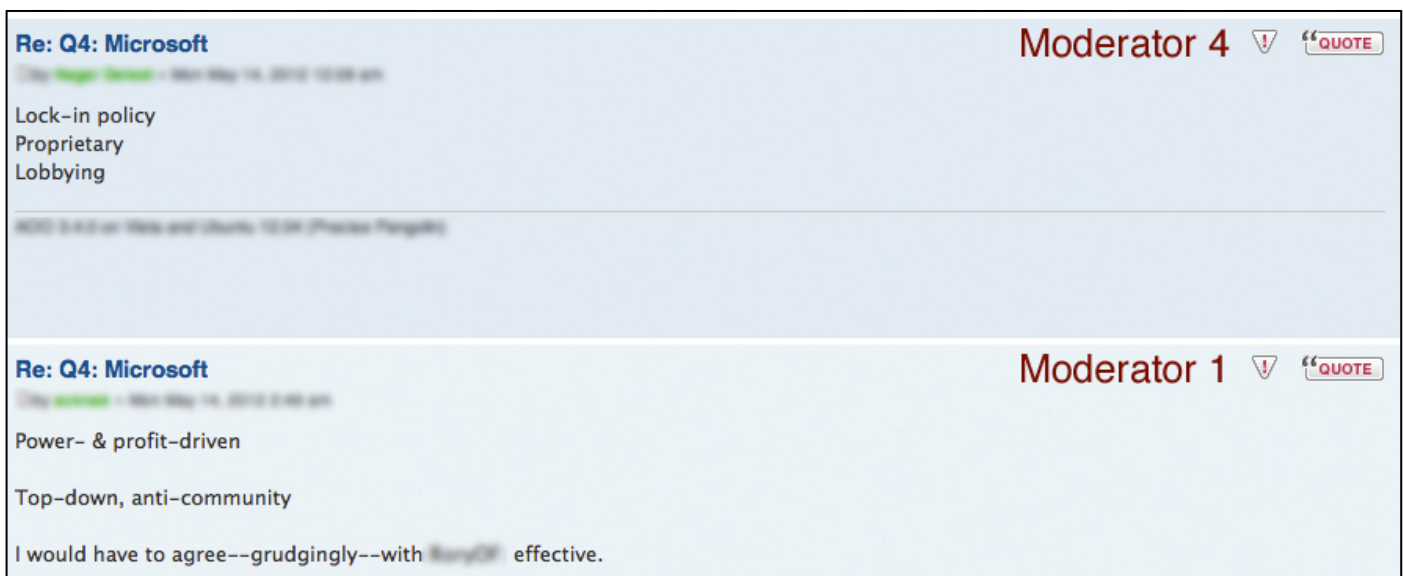


Figure 11: Focus Group

There are definitely contradictory views on adversaries in the 00o forum. The two interviews extracts in figure 12 show this diversity very well. When asked to define Microsoft in only three words these users show two very different views. Moderator 1 argues that Microsoft is power and profit driven, anti-community and grudgingly effective. Moderator 4 also views MS in a negative image, but this is due to their lock-in-policy and their methods trying to maintain their monopoly. If we look at this in a basic political perspective one user accuses Microsoft of being too capitalist, the other user is advocating for a free market and more competition – just as a true capitalist would.



**Figure 12: Focus Group**

As in anti-brand communities, adversaries seem to be a part of the anarconomy subculture as well. A clear defined enemy adopted by the whole community, as often seen in counterculture, is however not the case in this community. Users have different degrees of aversion towards the adversary and different reasons for that.

Although we have no vast amount of data supporting it, there seems to be a tendency that new users tend to be more candid and bluff in the antipathy compared to more experienced users. This is confirmed by Moderator 4 in figure 9, where he states that there are only few “power users” who think Microsoft is evil. This may be due to indoctrination of the implicit code of conduct that exists in the community, where users are urged to be as pragmatic as possible. It could also be because they simply have given up on the extreme countercultural opinion and moderated their view. This notion of different opinions regarding adversaries is supported by Mogensen (Mogensen Interview, 2012: 21 min 00 sec) who states: *“There is a wide spectrum between the pure commercial products and the anarchistic ideas where everything should be free”*. This seems to be very evident in this particular subculture.

### 4.2.3 Identity and relationships

According to subculture theory discussed in chapter 2.1.1, the community's identity cannot exist without the individual's identity, and vice versa (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). It is so strongly related that when discovering the individual's identity and motives for joining the community, uphold by shared beliefs, one must be able to understand the community's identity as well. From theory, we also know that consumers connect and identify through consumption of goods and surroundings (Ibid; Belk, 1988; Arnould & Thompson, 2005) and thereby with the community they have chosen to join. Mogensen also agrees with this: *"It is clear that there is identity related to this. It is a part of who you are and shows what values you have"* (Interview 2012, 24 min 26 sec). As previously mentioned, the consumption of goods is however not commercial goods. Here, it is the open standards the users consume, and we can therefore name it non-consumption, referring to Belk's (1988) theory of the extended self through consumption.

With identity and relationships, we find that most of our observed and interviewed users share consensus in helping other users. They have several reasons for this: 1) for practical reasons for the sake of the program, 2) altruistic reasons and 3) for spreading the word of AOO.

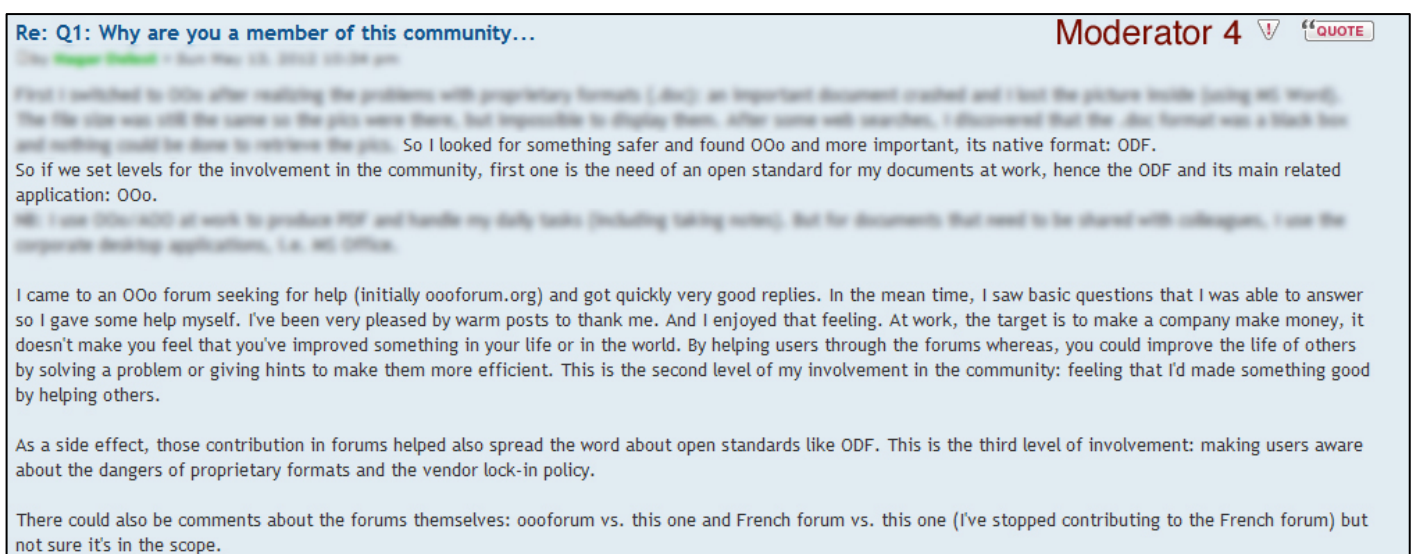


Figure 13: Focus Group

As we can see in figure 13 from the focus group, Moderator 4 stresses these three points. The practical reasons are quite often shared among the users. It is interesting that Moderator 4 even mentions that he feels that he is improving other people's lives. This is rather drastic and romantic to state, considering the constraints of an online community, e.g. no physical relationships. Especially, since he also mentions spreading the word of the open standards as one of the main motivations for joining the community.

We can connect these to the making of identity, as doing good deeds for others clearly is one of the main reasons why the users contribute to the community. And by this, we can see that they wish to display their altruistic personality. Adding to this, Volunteer 5 (see figure 14) and other users say they are part of more than one community, which could mean that they wish to share their knowledge and altruistic feeling more than one place, both for their own sake and for others. It relates to the urge for creating social links and the possibility of belonging to more than one social society without any central power, as in tribalism (Cova & Cova, 2001).

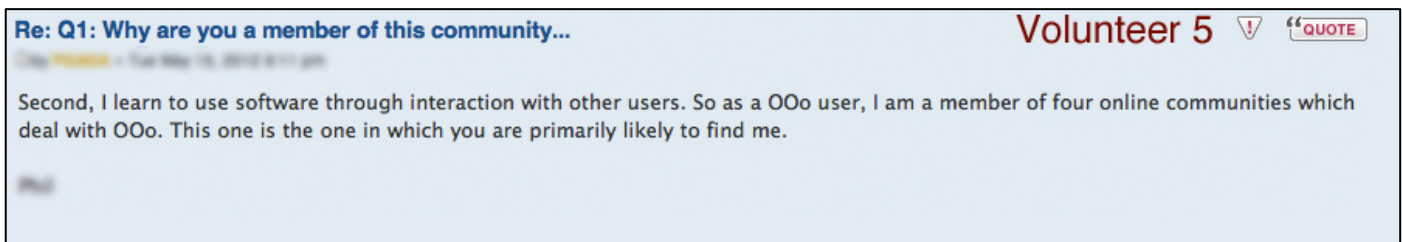




Figure 14: Focus Group

This is a testament to the wish for showing how much they contribute. As seen below in figure 15 and 16, Volunteer 4 points out that he feels good when he contributes and Moderator 1 adds that he wants to contribute back to the community. It is evident that contributing and the good feeling they get is a key ingredient for the membership, as much as the altruistic feeling.



Figure 15: Focus Group



**Re: Q1: Why are you a member of this community...** Moderator 1  



The Moderator - Mon May 14, 2012 4:07 am

*(Answering without reading the previous discussion...)*

I'm active here because I want to contribute something back to the OOO community, and I enjoy working with the people here and using the forum for communication. I much prefer the forum over the official project mailing lists, and I believe the forum makes it easier for users to get help. Since OOO is comparatively more difficult for new users to get up to speed with, I feel we are making an important contribution toward the success of the software.

**Figure 16: Focus Group**

Even though they all highlight the selflessness in their contribution, it is further said by Volunteer 4 that the motivation also consists of personal interest, making the contribution more selfish (see figure 15). He only answers the topics he finds interesting, which makes his identity come forward. Interesting is, that he finds the upgrading from Blue User to Volunteer as a strong motivation for staying in the community. Evidently, he is highly motivated by this. Moderator 4 (figure 17) tells us that within the level of hierarchy, they have a stronger relationship, which can be the motivator for Volunteer 4.

**Re: Q2: How would you describe the relationship...** Moderator 4  

The Moderator - Mon May 14, 2012 11:08 am

Re Moderator's answer Moderator 2

The Volunteer body is too widely dispersed geographically in general for social contacts. Should it arise that a Volunteer was visiting my country/area I would be happy to meet him socially.

+1.



As in every social group, there are different levels (circles) of friendship. It all depends on the individual education, experience, and also what we show to the others through our posts and behavior.  
 So I would consider some as friends, some others as close acquaintances. Definitely not as professional network (but who knows? in some cases). NB: there are a hundred members in the Volunteers group, many seldom contribute now.

As for the standard users (those we help), no real relation (personally), many come once and that's all when they have their answer.

Humor is not easy in forums due to cultural differences, so after some early failures, I've stopped making jokes except with Volunteers when I'm sure that it'll be understood.

**Figure 17: Focus Group**

Moderator 4 regards the other Volunteers and Moderators as “friends” or close “acquaintances”, however this is not the case with the Blue Users. One problem he and Moderator 2 find is the geographical distance, which makes the relationships distinguish from the real-life ones where face-to-face meetings are important.

**Re: Q2: How would you describe the relationship...** Moderator 5  

The Moderator - Mon May 14, 2012 4:08 am

I wouldn't say I'm friends with other volunteers. I certainly respect them, but we don't share much personal information. Personalities are revealed to some extent through forum answers, but not enough to really know someone. I do have enough allegiance/community feeling that if a volunteer is criticized by an "outsider", I tend to react defensively.

**Figure 18: Focus Group**

Moderator 5 does not characterize other users as his friends (see figure 18). He finds reason to this in too little personal information and thus not being able to get to know someone.

In general, we see that they have some kind of consensus within the groups of users, and that they respect each other. Moderator 5 illuminates this when he notes that he would “*react defensively*” if a volunteer were criticized by an outsider. This need to protect the *tribe* has strong association to the theory of tribalism (Cova & Cova, 2011). He finds allegiance, unity and a community feeling, and Moderator 4 agrees. This shows that the relationship they share, that they have found a feeling of solidarity (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

To this relationship, we find more evidence in our observation (see figure 19). After a useful reply, User D says “*thanks, my brother*” which is a strong reference to family, however often used as slang between male friends. Nonetheless, it is a confirmation of the relationships located in the community, also in relation to tribalism where familial relationships are key.

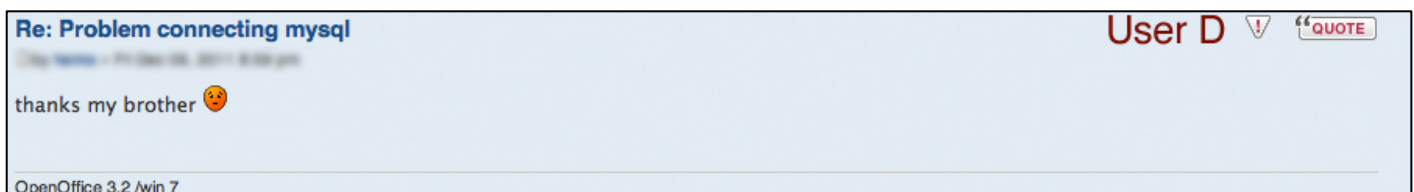
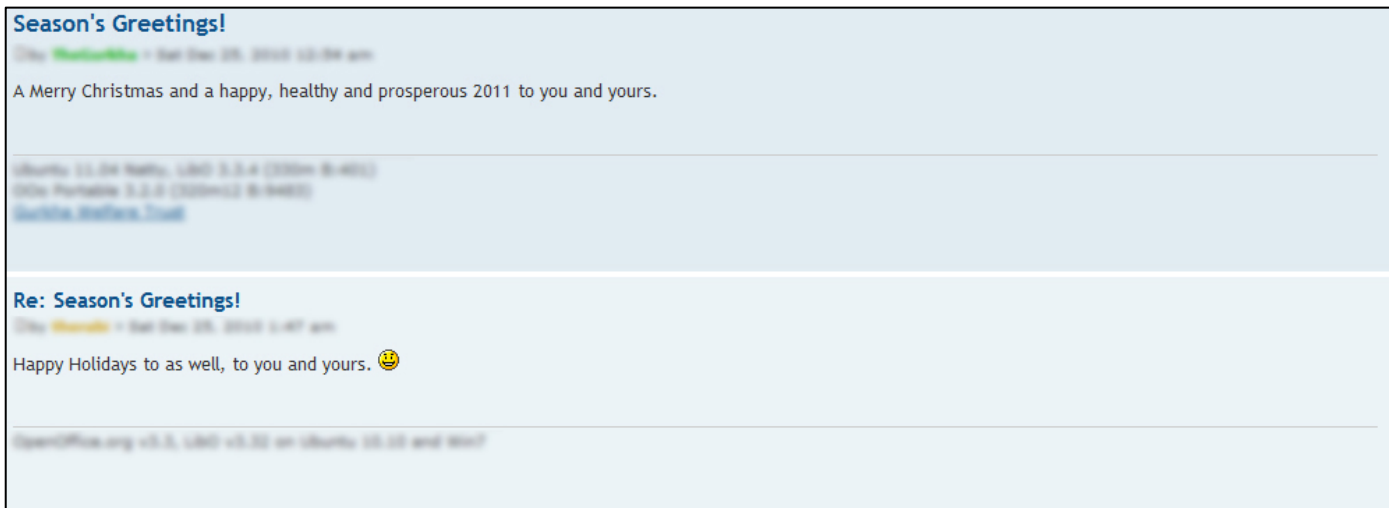


Figure 19: Observation

And adding to this we see several season’s greetings, as seen below. This is common etiquette in everyday life, however, online it is more than being polite. It is a sincere thought which is rare to share between people with little knowledge of each other, as was stated previously.

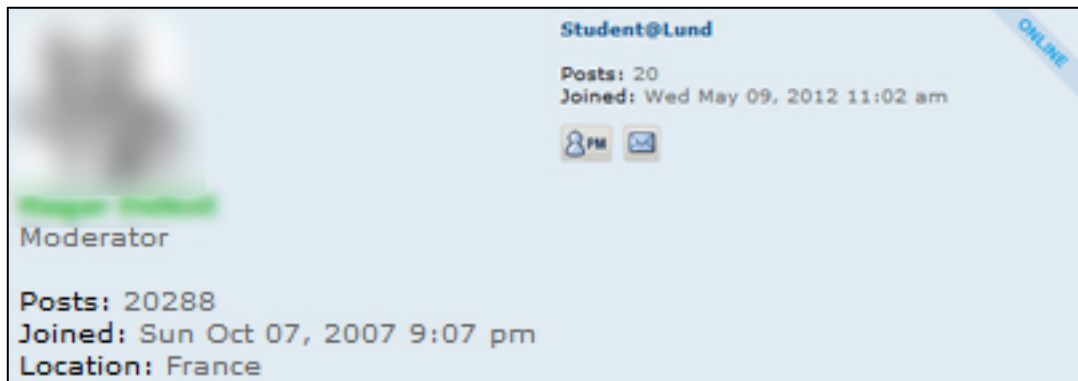


**Figure 20: Observation**

All in all we can see that the users share a feeling of unity, solidarity, respect and a need for altruism in the community. This relates to the identification of users and thus of the community. The relationships get stronger in the higher ranked levels, yet they are restricted by geography which results in less close relationships un-comparable with real life face-to-face relationships.

#### 4.2.4 Hierarchy

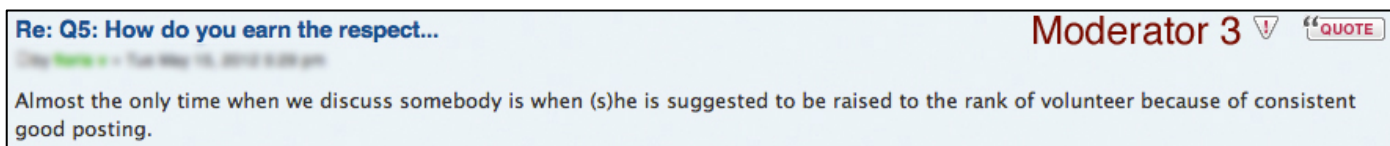
In the 00o forum, the hierarchy is explicitly stated, as they have provided a list of how the ranking process works in a 'survival guide'. A Blue user (shown in a blue color) is the standard user, who can read and post in the public forums and a Volunteer (yellow color) is a user who has contributed with many useful answers. A Moderator (green color) can move, delete and edit posts, and ban other users. An Admin (red color) has the rights of top-level administration of the forum, and an Apache Observer (purple color) is an Apache Management user and has rights to the administration forum. A Blue User can request a Volunteer's status, and Moderators and/or Volunteers will have to decide whether to upgrade a Blue User to Volunteer status. Users can decide how they choose to rank themselves, only depending on their eligible rank. This is presumably because some are against the hierarchical perspective.



**Figure 21: Observation**

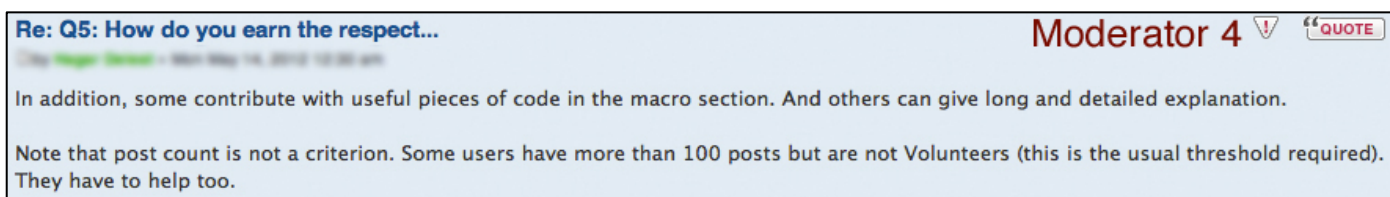
The ranking system is clearly shown in the forum, namely beneath the user's name and avatar/picture. Here, it is also shown when the person became a user, and how many posts he/she have created, and where they are geographically situated (see figure 21)

What we have described above shows that a hierarchy is explicitly developed and is rather important for the forum in general. This observation belongs to the theory of cultural consciousness of kind (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), as the users easily can recognize their own kind, e.g. Moderator or Volunteer. Moreover, it is evident from our observation that the hierarchy provides the high ranked users with control and power over lower ranked users since they decide whether a Blue User should be able to become a Volunteer or not. Seen in the focus group figure 22, the Volunteers and Moderators seldom discuss other users, except when upgrading. This belongs to Kozinets' (2002b) theory of upgrading users and how that states a hierarchy within the process of how the low ranked user is upgraded to a higher rank.



**Figure 22: Focus Group**

Moderator 4 explains in figure 23 how they make a subjective decision based not only on number of posts, but also on whether the user has contributed to the community, meaning that the Volunteers and Moderators use their power to control the hierarchy.



**Figure 23: Focus Group**

Hierarchy should not be considered as static, and besides the main explicit hierarchy, we find an implicit subsequent hierarchy. It shows that the hierarchy is reproduced on a frequent basis. In theory, referencing to other members state a kind of implicit hierarchy (Kozinets, 2002b) and in our focus group Volunteer 4 notes that when referring to a tutorial made by another user it is an implicit praise, even more so when complimenting the tutorial by saying that it should be read carefully (see figure 24).

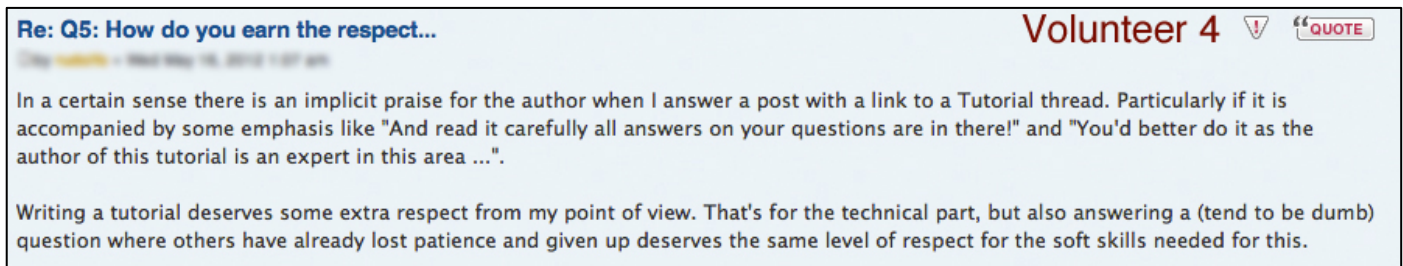




Figure 24: Focus Group

This praise gives additional status, and can be excluded from the explicit hierarchy since anyone can make a tutorial.



From our passive observation, we can see that a Blue User looks up to higher ranked users. In figure 25 below, a blue user, User E, talks badly about OpenOffice, and his complaints are being taken into consideration from User F, Admin, though perhaps in a sarcastic tone. User G, Volunteer, claims that User E is 'trolling' (provocative or off-topic message with the purpose of provoking readers to respond emotionally) and thereby demonstrates his rank as higher than User E by saying that User E "*displays aggression with little substance*". User H, new blue user, agrees by giving overly positive feedback to the community. He exemplifies his undermining status as he states that he is new, and that he is very impressed by the community for not talking badly back to User E - he even expresses twice how impressed he is, thus differentiating himself from the negative attitude of User E by exceedingly flattering the high-ranked users.

From this we learn that low ranked users admire high ranked users, and is willing to indirectly lower their own status by outlining other users' hierarchical status.

**The worst office suite ever** User E    
by [Ruben Bergstein](#) - Fri Feb 26, 2009 7:27 pm

open office is not even good for kids to play. It has serious flaws. I am not a pro microsoft or anything.. but compared to ms office your software sucks... learn some programming before you continue with this.. a real help that you can do to mankind would be to quit

---



**Re: The worst office suite ever** User F    
by [BrechtBennet](#) - Fri Feb 26, 2009 7:28 pm

Ah- @Ruben, thanks for the feedback.

---

The Document Foundation member  
 Apache OpenOffice Incubator podling PPMC member  
 LibreOffice & OpenOffice.org on Ubuntu 11.04 + Windows XP - 7

---

**Re: The worst office suite ever** User G    
by [Bennet](#) - Thu Feb 25, 2009 3:24 pm



Our [Ruben](#) did address the forum in a big way, but didn't return with the promised evidence to back up his views. I know I called troll before, and have sometimes received flames in return. Still, seeing that R displays ample aggression with little substance, I gather the purpose was to initiate some controversy, and not to contribute to progress in any way. That fits the troll bill to me... Consider it called.

and btw, Draw is the one OOo application that doesn't have any parallel in any MS Office suite. With layers, object grouping, transparency, and connectors, it helps my productivity immensely. That one application is the most important reason why MS Office isn't enough for me. (Then again, I could easily have bought this, looking out the same amount again as my employer already did for the Office suite, and none would have raised an eyebrow. Don't see the point, though.)

---

OOo 3.1.1/Novell, 3.2.1 and 3.3.0 on Ms Windows XP, Mac OS-X, Linux

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**Re: The worst office suite ever** User H    
by [grahnd](#) - Fri Feb 26, 2009 1:22 am

New to the forum but not new OpenOffice, I just have to make an observation:

The patience and kindness extended to someone coming in with a huge shoulder chip and even bigger attitude, well you guys are pretty impressive.

I think it would be fair to call me an MS Office power user and I do sometimes drift back to MSO 2003 for very specific things that I haven't figured out how to do easily in OOo yet. But I recognize that in making the trade off against learning the right way to do it (the open source way) and immediate gratification (and, if I had started with OOo, I would not have these mental glitches or trade offs to deal with.

OOo has saved me hundreds of dollars in avoiding upgrading to MSO 2007. My only big whistler item is for my other big open source tools Thunderbird and Firefox to more completely integrate with OpenOffice, but hey, I haven't been prevented from doing more than I need with the projects exactly as they are.

I continue to recommend them as key assets in avoiding excess costs for my small business clients. Keep in mind that your efforts enable start-ups and OOo's to have seriously robust applications that otherwise they could not afford or in some cases would feel forced into cheating. It is a truly massive contribution literally on a global scale.

So sincere thanks to the whole community that develops and tests OOo. And really impressed that no one took off Reuben's head.

Oliver Cabral

**Figure 25: Observation**

During our collection of empirical data, we found that a deep state of hierarchy is located in the community, and this hierarchy could be argued to be conflicting with the regular characteristics of a true anarchist community. In an anarchistic community there should be no hierarchy as everyone are equal, however this study shows that it does not have to be all black or white in the perspective of whether a community is anarchistic or not. We find both anarchistic and hierarchical situations.

In our expert interview with Mogensen, he states “that some sort of control is probably necessary” (Mogensen Interview, 2012: 10 min 05 sec) because “the bigger the projects, the bigger the need is for control. It depends of course on the goal, if the goal is to be a serious alternative to a commercial product, then it needs to be streamlined” (Mogensen

Interview, 2012: 55 min 15 sec). The hierarchy of OOo is still not as established and static as one of a corporate organization, with for example an organizational diagram, and we can therefore still regard the community as belonging to anarchy. Adding to this, Moderator 4 (figure 13; section 4.2.3) tells that he found the French forum too controlled and immigrated to the English forum, being less structured. It illuminates that the OOo forum is relatively anarchistic and qualified to belong to the anarchy culture, when comparing to the French forum.

The OOo is quite democratic and votes for new initiatives, which can be seen in figure 26 below, from our observation.

**[Solved] Forum banner**  
The current banner says:  
User community support forum for OpenOffice.org, LibreOffice, StarOffice, NeoOffice, OOo4kids and OOoLight  
Since AOO 3.4 should be released soon, we should change it to reflect the new branding.  
I propose something sober like:  
User community support forum for Apache OpenOffice and all the OpenOffice.org derivatives  
Comments?  
I think we can make the change as soon as a consensus has been reached.

**Re: Forum banner**  
“  
+1 for [user]'s suggestion  
+1

**Re: Forum banner**  
+1 for [user]'s suggestion

OpenOffice3.x on WindowsXP/Ubuntu

**Re: [Solved] Forum banner**  
Since the agreement is obvious, I've made the change. Adding LibO in clear is indeed a good idea.

**Figure 26: Observation**

As seen, differently ranked users votes, and all users' opinion are taken into account, meaning that the OOo is anarchistic in a democratic way, letting the users be equal. Again, this is contradictory with the established hierarchy, and thus shows that it is not static nor black or white in this culture. It rather lies somewhere in between on the scale of anarchist versus hierarchical.

### 4.2.5 Status seeking

Open-source communities are based on members sharing ideas and advice and by that contributing to the overall development of the product and the society. There could be various social motives driving members to share when there is no apparent economic gain in doing so. In the theory section we argued that this social motivation could be a rational expectation of reciprocity, if you help a user with a problem you might get advice back sometime in the future (Lampel & Bhalla, 2007). There could also be instinctive altruistic intentions for contributing, an unconscious wish to reinforce the social bonds of the society (Ibid). Another theory we presented earlier was gift giving motivation and status seeking. According to this theory users are exchanging ideas to enhance relative status in the community, advice and contribution is traded with deference from members in the society (Blau, 1964).

The empirical data collected in our case study indicates that there are various more or less cognizant motives that play a role in this particular society. In the focus group, Moderator 5 expressed a rather altruistic pragmatic attitude towards the exchange (see figure 27. He mentions personal learning when working on a problem for someone else as giving him *“a rewarding sense of accomplishment”*. Moreover he expressed that it is rewarding to help a less skilled user with a problem, because he can easily sympathize with the situation. This shows that altruistic deeds are a part of the motivation.

**Re: Q3: How do you feel when solving a problem...** Moderator 5 QUOTE

One thing that affects my feelings about an answer is the novelty of the question. If I learn something along the way, I feel a rewarding sense of accomplishment. The other major factor is how the question is presented. If a user shows evidence of having tried to find a solution, even to a very simple question, I feel better about answering. Alternatively, acknowledgement that a user just needs a particular problem solved and isn't skilled with computers or doesn't have time to learn much about OpenOffice makes giving an answer somewhat rewarding. I can easily sympathize with needing to get a problem solved and then moving on with life.

Three things that make it less rewarding to answer questions:

1. Question that amount to "Why isn't OpenOffice exactly like Microsoft Office?" This strikes me as similar to asking why everyone doesn't speak English instead of using these strange foreign languages.
2. Users who want large projects done for them. "I need a macro that does X, Y and Z."
3. Related to #2, users who ask about every step of a task without apparently trying to solve anything themselves. "How do I do X?", "Thanks, now how do I do Y?", "Now, how do I do Z?"



All of these make me feel exploited, but since we have the option to simply not answer, they are not hard to deal with.

Figure 27: Focus Group

Moderator 1, in figure 28 below, supports the notion that it is rewarding to solve a problem for someone else. Again, less skilled members are mentioned as recipient for advice. Besides helping others, there seems to be a hidden motion in the answer provided by this user. He is somewhat complacent in the way he talks about less skilled users who *“just don't have the analytical nature to work through solving a problem”* and himself who *“enjoy solving a problem”*. This points to the fact that there is an unconscious sense of relative status. When solving a problem for another user who



cannot do it himself, he proves that he is the more skilled of the two. If we relate this to gift giving theory, Moderator 1 gives away a gift that can never be reciprocated. When this gift is accepted, relative status is established.

**Re: Q3: How do you feel when solving a problem...** Moderator 1  



by Moderator 1 - Tue May 15, 2012 12:42 pm

I enjoy solving a problem that helps someone get on with their project. Even just supplying an answer is rewarding if it helps.

It used to bother me when the question could be easily solved with a search, but although it is sometimes laziness, I think more often it's just that the person is busy or focused on other things and just needs a quick answer to move on. I know how frustrating it is when I'm forced to make a big detour researching some irrelevant side issue that's holding up the main task. I've also come to understand that some people just don't have the analytical nature to work through solving a problem--or at least a computer problem. The computer is a black box for them and they don't want to understand the hows and whys, they just want to know what button to click.

**Figure 28: Focus Group**

Volunteer 5's answers compliment further to our theory of gift giving as an implicit part of the culture. In figure 29, he states his frustration when a recipient asks further questions showing that he had not read the answers carefully. In the scope of gift giving, this could be translated into the Volunteer being frustrated that the recipient will not accept the gift that was offered. This rejection or negation of the value of a gift means the contributor suffers a drop in relative status because his gift simply was not good enough. The need for positive acknowledgement for a contribution is indicated in the latter paragraph where he states that an explicit thanks is appreciated.

**Re: Q3: How do you feel when solving a problem...** Moderator 5  

by Moderator 5 - Wed May 16, 2012 12:42 pm

As others have said before solving a problem can have very different flavors. I have once promised to myself not to respond anymore to one-sentence questions, because very often such initial posts are a sign that the poster is not interested in working together, but waiting on cheap solutions. Sometimes when Mr. Hyde comes up inside me, I fail to keep this promise and throw back a "This query would have answered your question, without needing you to wait for a response on your posting". Also I feel disappointed, when the poster continues with his questioning and shows that he hasn't read my answers (carefully). I might be wrong with my judgement in such a case because sometimes/often the different languages are the reason for such misunderstandings.

On the other hand if the thread is interesting for me I don't even need a "thank you" from the other side, it simply pleases me, that we had a successful dialog and discussion. If someone describes his problem in 2 or 3 paragraphs I know that he has the same commitment that I have (or even more). But yes, I do always appreciate explicit words of thanks.

**Figure 29: Focus Group**

From the online focus group it becomes somewhat clear that status seeking is a part of this anarconomy culture. Mogensen also supports this hypothesis (Mogensen Interview, 2012: 13 min 10 sec): *"There are many motives for doing it (contribute to the community red.). Status is without a doubt a part of it"*. There are several instances in the focus group data suggesting that the way to earn status and respect in the forum is to contribute in a significant matter. In figure 30, 31 and 32 we see how different members express this. Moderator 5 says is explicitly and right to the point, Moderator 3 points out that in the evaluation of a volunteer application, consistent good posting is the key criterion assessed. Volunteer 4 reveals that he even praises the authors of tutorials

indirectly when referring to their work, because he thinks their contribution deserves extraordinary respect.



Re: Q5: How do you earn the respect... Moderator 5    
by Moderator 5 - Mon May 14, 2012 8:08 am  
Respect is earned by effectively answering questions and displaying the good manners that make this forum such a pleasant place to visit

Figure 30: Focus Group



Re: Q5: How do you earn the respect... Moderator 3    
by Moderator 3 - Tue May 15, 2012 8:08 am  
Almost the only time when we discuss somebody is when (s)he is suggested to be raised to the rank of volunteer because of consistent good posting.

Figure 31: Focus Group



Re: Q5: How do you earn the respect... Volunteer 4    
by Volunteer 4 - Mon May 14, 2012 1:07 am  
In a certain sense there is an implicit praise for the author when I answer a post with a link to a Tutorial thread. Particularly if it is accompanied by some emphasis like "And read it carefully all answers on your questions are in there!" and "You'd better do it as the author of this tutorial is an expert in this area ...".  
Writing a tutorial deserves some extra respect from my point of view. That's for the technical part, but also answering a (tend to be dumb) question where others have already lost patience and given up deserves the same level of respect for the soft skills needed for this.

Figure 32: Focus Group

The data collected in our empirical study indicate that there are multiple possible motivation factors that drive sharing in anarconomy culture. The altruistic values found in tribalism also seem to exist in this society as users explicitly proclaim that they are doing it to help others. Mogensen confirms this in the offline interview and adds that this could be in expectation of upstream reciprocity. Meaning that members contribute to other users *"in expectation that they will do something for others and at some point it will come back to yourself"* (Mogensen Interview, 2012: 14 min 35 sec). This could also be a viable underlying motivation.

In our theory chapter we proposed the theory of gift giving in order to enhance social status. We have shown that there are answers from our focus group indirectly indicating that gift exchange and status seeking is a part of this subculture.

#### 4.2.6 Language

Tribalism is a society replete with intangible elements manifested in a, for example, shared and unified language (Cova & Cova, 2001). This language can serve as a code of conduct of how to act within the community and will therefore differ from culture to culture. The difference in each culture, i.e. community, is providing the community with

uniqueness and thereby a united feeling of belonging. We see similar characteristics from the subculture theory, where unique jargons and symbolic expressions (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) help the members recognize their own kind (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Thus, language is culturally embedded and hard to analyze.

In our collection of data, we have been able to observe some language characteristics for the 00o community. In general, new topics and replies are written mostly in correct English with correct grammar and few typing mistakes. They do not use abbreviations for normal words as one could suspect they would. They do not use ‘u’ instead of ‘you’, even though it is quite common when writing on online platforms. This gives the forums a more professional appearance, and makes the users seem more trustworthy. However, they do use abbreviations as slang: OP, RTFM, IMHO, translated to ‘Original Post’, ‘Read The Fucking Manual’ and ‘In My Honest/Humble Opinion’ as seen in figure 33.

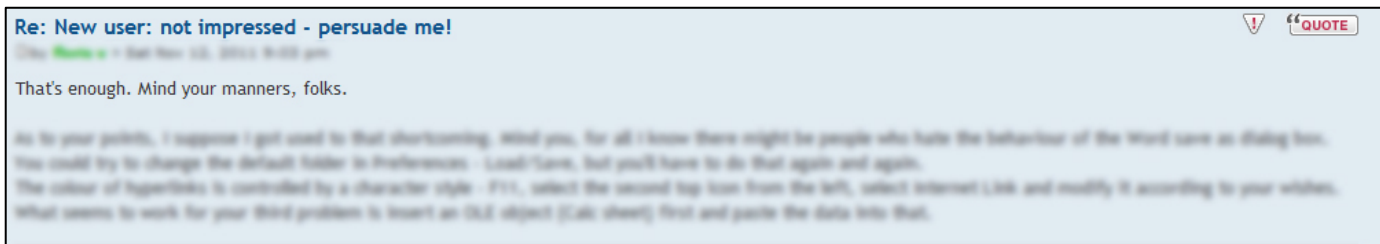


**Figure 33: Observation**

Being a new user, this complicates the understanding of the internally embedded culture, comparable to spoken language and words with different accents. It relates to the consciousness of kind (Ibid), as the language is a recognizable feature.

Furthermore, when posts are being replied, quotations are often used for referencing purpose, which relates to hierarchy, as stated by Kozinets (2002b) and shown above in the reference box in the screenshot. This makes it easier to eliminate misunderstandings, especially since written words are more often misunderstood than spoken due to the lack of body language. They substitute body language with “smileys” in order to clarify the meaning and purpose of a statement, for instance if they are being sarcastic.

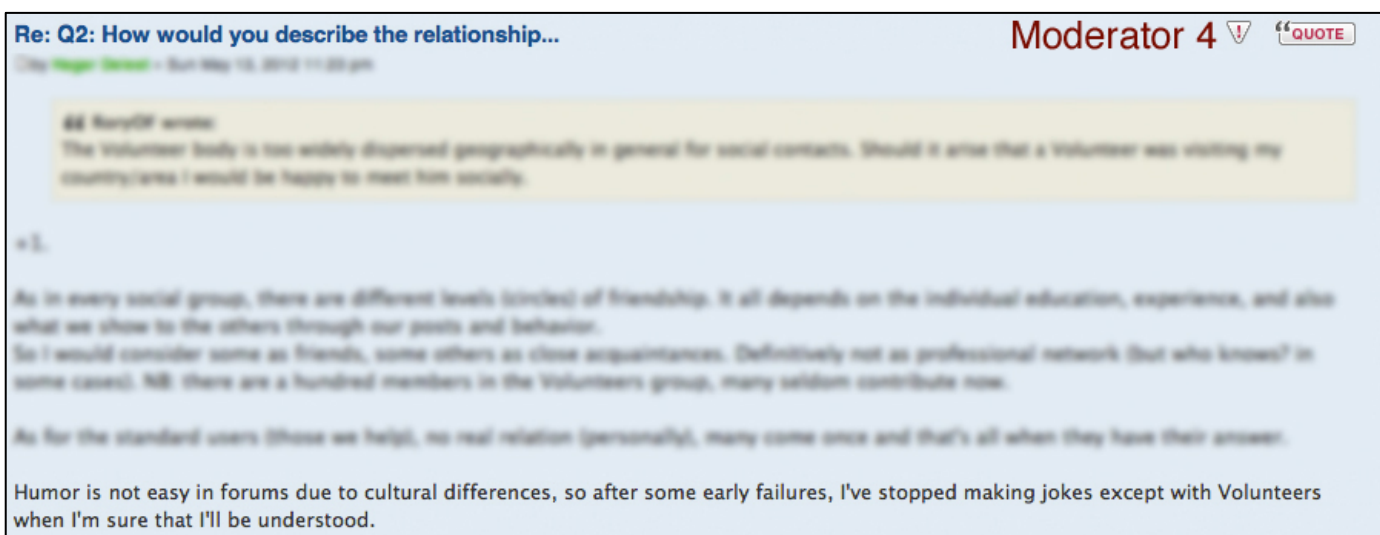
Writing in a polite language is also very important in the community. Figure 34 shows how language and protocol are being taken quite serious. After a long heatet discussing between 4 blue users, Moderator 3 steps in: *“That’s enough. Mind your manners, folks”*. The OP apologizes for his use of blunt and harsh language and he is forgiven.



**Figure 34: Observation**

From this, we learn that language and being polite is a big issue for the community and therefore serves as a code of conduct for the shared view upon language.

In our focus group it is clarified that being humoristic is not really an option in an online international community. Firstly, having many different nationalities in the community translate humor badly as there are vast cultural differences. Finally, writing messages does not leave much room for humor, as written words are easily misunderstood. The user in figure 35 simply has given up humor in the community. Nonetheless as he is still joking with Volunteers, it shows that their relationship more established.



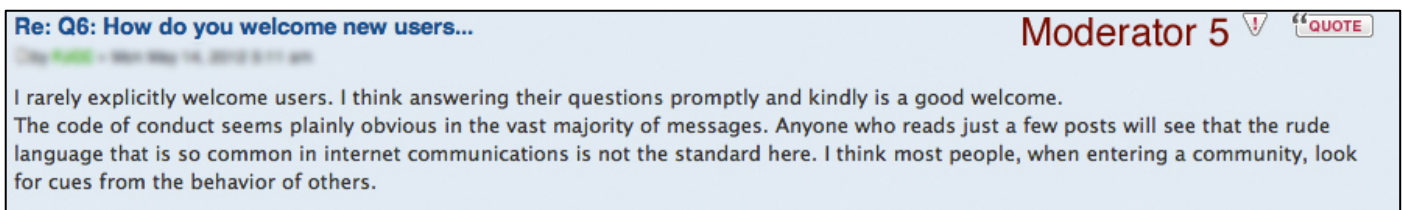
**Figure 35: Focus Group**

The language in the OoO community would perhaps be even more unique if the users were able to connect in stronger relationships. Often, in close real-life relationships, a unique internal jargon is existent, but since the relationships in this community are somewhat restricted, the language loose a bit of its uniqueness. Still, being a new user, we find it clear that the language is culturally embedded since it can be hard to understand and use. The code of conduct in language is thus very important, and stepping outside the lines will result in getting the status of an outsider. Moreover, the users try to ease up the language with smileys and quotations, also making it more personal and relate to symbolic expressions (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995).

### 4.2.7 Additional findings

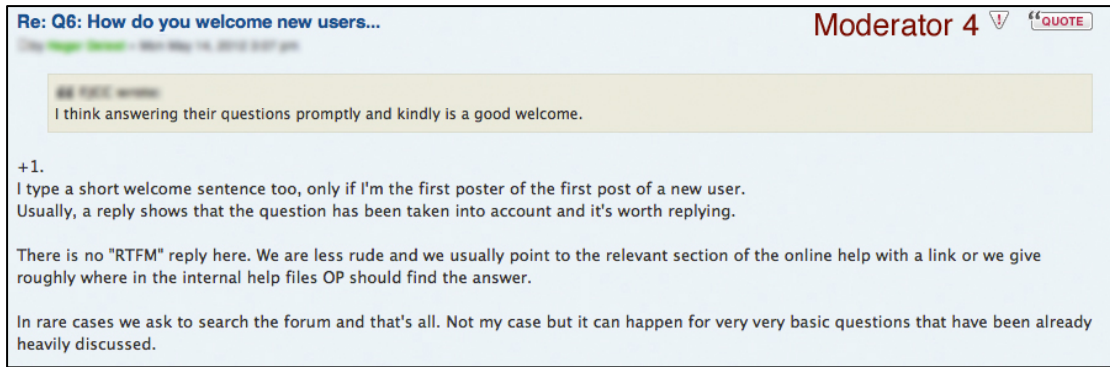
The data collected in our empirical study, is centered on the themes from the theory chapter. However during interviews and observation other interesting perspectives have emerged. As it is important for netnographic researchers to take unexpected occurrences into consideration, these angles will be illuminated in the following.

Through our observation and interviews we discovered that the strict code of conduct, which is explicitly stated in the forum rules, is to a large extent reinforced by the power users. The majority of Volunteers and Moderators pass this cultural code of conduct to new users by reprove unconditional behavior as explained in earlier in section 4.2.6 Language. In addition to the explicit reprimand given to misbehaving users, the code of conduct is also passed on indirectly. This view is supported by Moderator 5, in figure 36, who suggests that new users look for behavioral cues when entering a new community. By setting an example and answering questions promptly and kindly and avoid foul language, the culture is passed on.



**Figure 36: Focus Group**

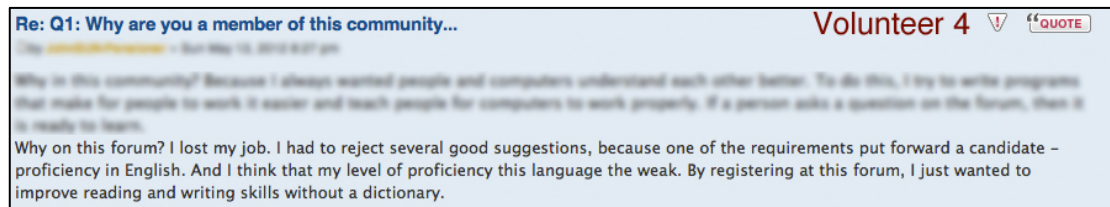
Moderator 4, in figure 37, also indicates a silent approval of new users. When a question is answered it implies that the post is worthy. Furthermore, he supports the view that the volunteers or moderators use no ill-mannered language. Instead of “Read The Fucking Manual”, the OP is presented with a link to a relevant guide or encouraged to use the search function.



**Figure 37: Focus Group**

These observations point to the direction that the code of conduct, which seems to be firmly rooted in the community, is passed on to new users directly and indirectly by the power users in the forum.

Another unexpected finding is the enhancement of skills, and in particular language skills. We posed no question directly to this point, however two focus group participants noted that a motivation for them to join the English 00o forum, was the improvement of language skills. What is interesting to note is, that Volunteer 1 does it to ease his job situation (see figure 38). Thus, being a member of the 00o community can, if sought, have professional career motives.



**Figure 38: Focus Group**

### 4.3 Summary of findings

Throughout our analysis, we have dealt with a vast amount of complex data and weaved back and forth between theory and data. We will now summarize the most important findings and connect the themes, as they should be interpreted as a whole, and not as separated situations, in order to understand the anarconomy culture.

When analyzing the data, we found a strong and omnipresent hierarchical structure in the community.

Firstly, the goal of the users differs between high and low ranked users. High ranked users has the goal of helping other users and to improve the software, while low ranked

users are more interested in receiving help, without contributing to the AOO suite. In theory, anti-brand communities need a shared goal in order to conceptualize their ideology (Melucci, 1989; Touraine, 1981). It also relates to the shared identity of the members, which is seemingly not unified among all users. Thus, not sharing a unified goal and identity results in a difficult foundation for the forum to exist upon.

Secondly, hierarchy relates to the theory of gift giving, and how giving a gift of knowledge will grant the giver with high status, and decrease the receiver's status. Our interviewees from the focus group were in general happy to share and gives gifts of knowledge, yet twelve out of thirteen of the participants were high ranked users, adding to the point of higher ranked users being most willing to support other users. It complicates the thought of the users being unconditionally altruistic, as users find motivation in the status the giving of gifts provides.

Thirdly, relationships are stronger between high ranked users, though none consider other users as their real friends compared to real-life friendships. In tribalism, social links are important (Cova & Cova, 2001) and shared experiences are supposed to make the relationship stronger. However, in the OOO community, the users are more 'friendly' than actual 'friends'.

Finally, language serves as an identifiable factor among members of the community. New users will make more mistakes regarding language and jargon, and automatically be depicted as new and thus low ranked users. Adding to this, high ranked users tend to give notice when bad language is being used, and the language thus becomes an entry barrier for new users.

In general, we found the degree of resistance and adversaries rather mottled. Few users from our focus group viewed their opponent, Microsoft Office, as the evil force. Nonetheless, they did want the competition between the two to be fairer, leading us to believe that they find MSO too commercial and dislike the strategy they use. The observed users were more reluctant to describe MSO as evil, which can be related to the users' overall goal that differed between the rank levels as well.

In addition to our predefined themes, we found that some member use the forum to improve personal skills like language proficiency. Furthermore we discovered that the culture is passed on to new members directly and indirectly. New users learn the unofficial code of conduct indirectly by imitation of social cues from existing users. If they break the code of conduct, they are reprimanded by Volunteers and Moderators either officially or discretely.

## 5. Reflection & Conclusion

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*In this chapter, we will present our most distinctive findings throughout our analysis of the collected data. Related to contemporary literature on anarconomy and the additional theory suggested in chapter 2, this will be the basis for a final reflection. Due to our culture perspective, questions surrounding core aspects of anarconomy have arisen. These aspects will be discussed and reflected upon in the following. Moreover we will end this thesis by discussing managerial implications, limitations and future research.*

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### 5.1 Discussion

Through our analysis we have found some contradictions and in the following, we will discuss and reflect on our most important findings. With this elaboration, we can more clearly conclude on our analysis.

#### 5.1.1 Anarchy vs. hierarchy

Since anarconomy is the abbreviation of anarchism and economy, this points to the significance of the anarchistic tendencies in anarconomy. The emergence of the Internet, as a place where anyone can create anything without restrictions, is moreover emphasized as the catalyst making this kind of anarchistic co-creation possible. In contemporary literature on anarconomy, the absence of hierarchy and central governance is one of the key aspects differentiating anarconomy from mainstream culture.

In our analysis of the OoO community however, we found contradicting data suggesting that the actual hierarchy, rules and code of conduct is far from the anarchistic structure described in anarconomy literature. There is an obvious explicit hierarchy where users are ranked as ordinary users, volunteers and moderators. Based on ranking, members are given certain privileges. Moderators for instance, have the ability to censor or ban other users and to define the overall rules of the community. This hierarchy is implicitly reproduced continuously when a moderator edits a post or corrects someone for violating the code of conduct by using foul language etc.

Through our analysis it has become evident that this anarconomy community cannot be characterized by true anarchism. It might be due to the maturity or the large scale of the operation as the need for control rises proportionally with the number of members in the community (Mogensen Interview, 2012). According to Mogensen (Ibid) the goal of the community also has an effect on the degree of anarchism. When an open-source product



is made as a serious alternative to commercial products, it needs to be streamlined in relation to design and functionality. This poses a significant paradox: If an open source anarconomy product wants to be a viable alternative to commercial products, and thus emancipate consumers from the mainstream market, it has to adopt commercial culture and cease to exist as a *true* anarconomy community.

This paradox illuminates the relationship between the anarconomy and the traditional economic market. Where initially this phenomenon was proposed as an alternative to the traditional commercial market, it is now clear that there are no concrete lines between them; there is no black and white. The decentralized anarconomy power structure is excellent in initial phases of idea generation as the creativity existing in these communities is vast. When it comes to design of the end product, there are tough decisions to be made regarding which functions should be in the final release and how they should play together. Commercial products have an advantage here, as there is a limited amount of people appointed to design the product in their image. True anarconomy products on the other hand, might end up being a blend of different functions with no stringent design as there is no one appointed to make these decisions.

What we can learn from this is that the two belief systems challenge each other but they also co-exist. If anarconomy communities want to compete with traditional commercial products, and thus liberate consumers from corporate bonds, they have to adapt in some way and 'sell out' to corporate culture.

### 5.1.2 Giving vs. gaining

There are multiple motives for sharing and contributing in an anarconomy community. Theory on anarconomy suggests that members contribute to the community knowing that there is an inclusive value to gain from their work. Meaning that if everybody put in a few hours of work, they will get much more in return. This motivation however, cannot stand alone as there is a social trap incorporated in the notion. As open-source products are published online for anyone to download, consumers do not have to contribute; they can just take without giving anything back. According to Platt (1973) consumers would, in an environment where it is possible, generally pick short-term individual gain, i.e. download without contributing, resulting in a long-term loss for the entire group. As this would lead to the diminishment of the community, which is not the case in OOo, there must be other motives that drive some members to contribute.

Based on theory from tribalism, we suggested altruism to be part of the motivation for this subculture. This was confirmed by our focus group interviewees, who believed that

they were doing something profoundly good by helping other users with their problems. In addition to this, there was a wish to create a sustainable alternative to MS Office and spread the use of open standards instead of vendor lock-in formats. In relation to theory of anti-brand communities this can be seen as a way of liberating consumers from the adversary by removing their dependence on their software. A silent revolt against the market driven culture that proves the countercultural aspect of the community.

Besides altruistic motives of giving to society and freeing consumers from corporate bonds, the analysis also proved that there are considerably social gains of contribution to the community. The gift giving theory we presented in chapter 2, proposed that the gift of contribution is exchanged with deference from the community. Basically stating that giving is a way of gaining social status, and that this is the primary motivation for contributing. This theory was also indirectly confirmed in the analysis to be a big part community.

It seems as there are multiple motives existing in the OOo forum. These motives however, does not seem to stand alone. On the contrary they appear to be very interconnected. If contributing is viewed as a social trap, there needs to be additional incitement to do it, e.g. gaining social status via gift giving. Still gaining social status through sharing is only possible because it is generally seen as a good thing to share unconditionally and to free consumers from mainstream society. The motives are interdependent and the community cannot exist if one would be excluded.

### 5.1.3 Counter vs. culture

There is no question that there are significant counter cultural aspects of our anarconomy community. The stigmatization of the direct enemy is obvious when some new members use Micro\$oft instead of Microsoft. The aversion towards Microsoft is however not as explicit when Volunteers and Moderators discuss it. Here the enemy is the vendor lock-in policies employed by companies like Microsoft. Their objective to liberate consumers by offering them the freedom of choice, is much more pragmatic than first assumed. This diversity in counter culture passion may be explained by the sheer limitation of counter culture itself. New members tend to have a more extreme view, simply because they have not yet reflected on the aversion, while experienced users have adapted their view because there are no other way out. The time issue is also addressed by Kozinets (2002a) in his study of the Burning Man Festival. It seems as it is only possible to be *true* counter cultural in a limited time frame, because it is simply too hard to maintain. Over time it

becomes evident that there are no escaping the market, and members have to de-radicalize their view.

There may also be limitations in space. Where consumers go home after a Burning Man festival and continue to buy branded products, open-source members log off their computer, lose their community alias and return as consumers.

While it may not be possible to retain a *true* counter cultural passion, the counter aspect is still an important part of the culture. The image of the adversary, the goal of consumer choice and the identity that follows by being an underdog, are still fundamental aspects that shape the culture. By acknowledging or moderating the counter aspect to be only a part of the culture, it is possible to withhold the community. On the contrary, if *counter* is the key aspect then it would be impossible to avoid selling out.

## 5.2 Conclusion

In this thesis we have studied how the counterculture anarconomy functions as a culture. As contemporary literature on countercultures often have a one-sided focus on being against other cultures, we set out to explore the *culture* of countercultures. Through our literature review, the theoretical framework and the empirical data, we have formed a new perspective on what counter culture is and what it means to belong to a counter culture.

The anarchistic elements were initially proposed as key characteristics differentiating the anarconomy subculture from mainstream society. It has become clear that, although a degree of anarchism is present in the culture, a certain level of hierarchy is unavoidable when the community matures.

There are multiple motives for participating in and contributing to an anarconomy community. As open source software rely on multiple users contributing, sharing contributions unconditionally with the community is perceived as one of the cornerstones of open source communities. Thus actually sharing your ideas can lead to a rise in internal as well as external status in the community.

The identity of the community and the identity of the individuals are crucial components in creating relationships in anarconomy forums. The identity and goal of the OOo community and its members, is not unilateral which results in superficial relations between some members. This is not the case between some Volunteers and Moderators who share common beliefs, as they use this to strengthen their social bonds.

Culture is an abstract term. Empirical data collected in this thesis have shown that although there are common tendencies, there is no completely unified set of beliefs. It has become evident that culture is not static but an organic ever changing phenomenon, which is constantly renegotiated over time. Although the *counter* aspect, which in some way influences almost every part of the culture, still retains in the community, it is diluted as the community matures.

### 5.3 Managerial implications

Managers can benefit from this study in several ways. Our analysis of the culture embedded in an anarconomy community can assist a manager in understanding the specific culture and thus how to approach an open source community.

As we have found identity to be imperative regarding ideology, managers can adopt the identity of an open source product and use it to enhance the identity of the company brand. This brand strategy was very lucrative for Apple around the millennium where they were seen as the cool underdog who rebelled against corporate Microsoft by introducing colors instead of grey-white. This rebellious underdog identity appealed to many people, although Apple still belonged to the commercial world. Fashion brands have used a similar strategy as they have adopted the characteristics of the counter culture and become a physical manifestation of that identity. There is no reason why software companies cannot do the same.

Openness and free choice is important for the anarconomy culture. This can be directly transferred to how managers should guide their company's identity and business method. If the company becomes too dominant and hence displays a capitalistic image, they would become subjects of adversary communities. Managers should therefore be careful about how open the company is.

When a new and opposing product or community sell out to mainstream culture, the true believers in opposition will desert and perhaps gather to form a new community opposing to the former. This knowledge is usable for other social movements within the domains of resistance – when the movement becomes too extensive and corporate, it loses its core.

The creativity integrated in the community can have important implications for managers. In our netnographic study we have found that creativity in this kind of forum is flourishing, due to the vast amount of people involved. Especially, since it is the users themselves who create the product, and therefore have firsthand knowledge of what the

consumers needs. This knowledge is imperative for managers, and they should consider including the users in their idea generation phase, and thus use the consumers as value co-creators (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Our study provides managers with a proper understanding of the culture and thus the ability to understand how the culture functions and hence how they should approach the consumers.

## 5.4 Limitations and directions for future research

“As with grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), data collection should continue as long as new insights on important topical areas are still being generated” (Kozinets, 2002b: 64). Even though we feel that we have gained a vast and sufficient amount of information and insights, new insights can appear after we stopped our netnography. The study was developed under a time restraint of ten weeks, which limited us in regards to the time period our netnographic study, was conducted. If time was an unlimited resource, we could have observed the forum more thoroughly over a longer time period and acted more active. This could have brought more insights to how the community works. Moreover, if time was not an issue, we could have studied and analyzed more cases. It would have brought breadth and a stronger reliability to the study. However, limiting ourselves to study only one case, in a short time frame, have narrowed our thesis, made the analysis less shallow and brought depth to the project.

Since passive observation allows further research as one researcher can continue where another left (Kozinets, 2002b), future research could benefit from adding a case to this study and compare the two to see if the cases would have similar characteristics, of for example hierarchy, or contradictory elements. The same would apply for a new and less settled community. Studying a new community could illuminate what time does to a community, regarding adversary, goal, identity, hierarchy, and language.

If we were both users of the AOO suite and thus more familiar with the AOO, we could set ourselves in the community members' place. This could have developed some interesting insights, especially to how one becomes a respected member of the community and perhaps even be upgraded to volunteer status. Moreover, we would be subjects of analysis ourselves, as to whether we would be reluctant to portray the same kind of identity the current members portray. That would have brought further breadth and depth to the analysis, though it would suffer from vast subjectivity.

Studying other cultures within the Anarconomy umbrella would also apply for future research. This could be either open content or piracy communities. Since we find a

paramount difference between open source is was not possible to analyze every aspect in this thesis. Still a thorough understanding of the whole concept would bring breadth to the study of Anarconomy as a culture.

Methodologically, we have chosen what themes to pursue, where to look for clues and how to interpret them. Naturally we believe that we have made the right choices regarding theory and methodology but if we were to choose different theories or a different research strategy, the result could have been of a different kind. We have found guidance in theory, but our subjectivity still colors the result. We have applied triangulation in order to limit the subjectivity, and we would recommend future research within the domain of anarconomy to use at least two research strategies. More importantly, as we have argued for and chosen to study anarconomy as a culture, rather than a counterculture, this choice have also had a big influence on the result. Nevertheless, this choice has brought nothing but a more useful view and understanding of this subject, as we in this thesis have studied the very core of anarconomy.

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#### Websites

**OOo forum:** <http://user.services.openoffice.org/>

**OOo English forum:** <http://user.services.openoffice.org/en/forum/>

#### **Our focus group forum:**

<http://user.services.openoffice.org/en/forum/viewforum.php?f=105> (not accessible without userprofile and password, this cannot display due to anonymity issues)

# Appendix 1: Qualitative interview guide

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The interview was conducted May 02. 2012 between 10.00 and 11.00 at Klaus Mogensen's office at the Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies, in Copenhagen, Denmark. The interview was conducted in Danish, and our citations of Mogensen is therefore translated by us.

In the interview, we followed the subsequent order:

1) Presentation of the project and us as students. Explain how we have a focus on open source products, in order to avoid too much noise.

2) Purpose of interview – we regard this as an expert interview. We explained the interviewee that we would propose broad topics for and open dialogue and discussion.

Also, we gave Mogensen the choice of being anonymous, and he declined, even though he was informed that the thesis will be publically available.

We recorded the interview.

3) Topics for discussion, however without any fixed order:

- What is the background for the occurrence of anarconomy in today's society?
- Why is anarconomy considered to be a new market, beside the traditional economic market?
- How would you characterize a typical anarconomy-consumer?
- Please elaborate how anarconomy goes against mainstream culture.
- Theory of anti-brand communities addresses identity, goal and adversaries. Do you find similarities with that in anarconomy?
- Can you explain why anarconomy is anarchistic? Can the culture remain anarchistic?
- Does an anarconomy community begin more anarchistic than it ends?
- Is there hierarchy/ status seeking behavior in developed anarconomy communities?
- Open source products is free – what is the motive to contribute to the product?
- Which new anarconomy open source products are there?

We used follow-up question whenever appropriate.