



SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS  
AND MANAGEMENT  
Lund University

# Online Brand Community in Action

A Constitutive Netnography: Advancing a Wholesome  
Ethnomethodological Perspective on Brand Community

Annicken G. Abrahamsen Benjamin J. Hartmann

Master Thesis  
BUS 809

*Masters Programme in International Marketing and Brand Management  
School of Economics and Management  
Lund University, Sweden*

Spring 2006

Supervision by

Peter Svensson Jacob Östberg

# Abstract

- Title:** Online Brand Community in Action. A Constitutive netnography: Advancing a Wholesome Ethnomethodological Perspective on Brand Community
- Date of Seminar:** 2006.05.29
- Course:** BUS 809. Master thesis in International Marketing.
- Authors:** Annicken G. Abrahamsen, Benjamin J. Hartmann
- Advisors:** Peter Svensson, Jacob Östberg
- Keywords:** Online brand community, ethnomethodology, netnography, ordinary membership, community citizenship behaviour
- Thesis purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore how a brand community happens, that is how it is constantly created and maintained by its members.
- Methodology:** The study uses an inductive and qualitative design. The authors propose and apply constitutive netnography – a netnography suiting the ethnomethodological perspective. The interpretative sense making is based on interaction process analysis, conversation analysis, and netnographic content analysis.
- Theoretical perspective:** The study builds on prior literature of (online) brand communities, online communities, and ethnomethodology. Further, the concept of organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) inspired the categorization of the findings.
- Empirical data:** Data was collected for eight days via covert observation of messages on the Nikonian online brand community Internet site, and by two covert experiments whereby the authors interacted with community members.
- Conclusion:** This thesis advances an explicit, consequent, and wholesome ethnomethodological perspective on brand community. It recognizes brand community as a social problem – something to be continuously solved and achieved. The two main perceivably stable features of the Nikonian community are (1) practical usefulness and (2) the social link. The authors suggest that both features are constantly accomplished through three types of aggregate behaviour (1) lurking, (2) ordinary membership, and (3) community citizenship behaviour (CCB). These categories entail corresponding actions of different relevance for achieving online brand community.

# Table of content

CHAPTER ONE .....	1
1.1 Introduction .....	1
1.2 An ethnomethodological view on brand community .....	2
1.3 Purpose of the study .....	4
1.4 Possible contributions of the study .....	4
1.5 Structure of the thesis .....	5
CHAPTER TWO.....	6
2.1 Brand community .....	6
2.1.1 Describing brand community .....	6
2.1.2 Brand community vs. other communities .....	7
2.1.3 Prior Accounts of action in brand community .....	7
2.2 Online brand community .....	9
2.2.1 Definition of online brand community .....	9
2.2.2 Online brand community – a “real” community? .....	10
2.2.3 Evidence of interaction in online communities .....	10
CHAPTER THREE.....	12
3.1 The Study .....	12
3.1.1 Overall design of the study and research objects .....	12
3.1.2. About reality – studying the research objects .....	14
3.1.3 Constitutive Micro-netnography .....	15
3.1.4 Alternative Design.....	17
3.2 The Design of micro-netnography .....	18
3.2.1. The process.....	18
3.2.2 Our roles as micro-netnographers .....	21
3.2.3. The data collection .....	21
3.2.3.1. Observation – data finding .....	21
3.2.3.2. Experiment – data construction.....	22
3.2.4 Ethical concerns .....	22
3.2.5 The sense making process and categorization.....	25
3.2.6 Criticism .....	25
3.2.7 Gender aspects.....	26
3.3. Reliability and validity .....	27
3.3.1. Reliability .....	27
3.3.2 Validity .....	27
CHAPTER FOUR.....	28
4.1 Introducing the Nikonian Community .....	28
4.2 The Nikonian Experience.....	29
CHAPTER FIVE.....	30

5.1 Prologue .....	30
5.2 Categorization .....	30
5.3 Lurking .....	32
5.3.1 The notion of Lurking .....	32
5.3.2 Lurking and achieving brand community .....	32
CHAPTER SIX .....	34
6.1 The notion of Ordinary Membership .....	34
6.2 Ordinary Membership at Nikonians .....	35
6.2.1 The use of language in the Nikonian community .....	35
6.2.2 The use of photographs .....	38
6.2.3 Interaction.....	39
6.2.3.1 Helping .....	39
6.2.3.2 Motivation .....	41
6.2.3.3 Socializing and emotional support .....	41
6.2.4 Playing by the rules – practicing custody of rules .....	42
6.2.5 Standing up for .....	46
6.2.5.1 Standing up for other members .....	46
6.2.5.2 Standing up for the two founders/owners .....	48
6.2.5.3 Standing up for the brand .....	49
CHAPTER SEVEN .....	51
7.1 CCB vs. Ordinary Membership.....	51
7.2 CCB at Nikonians.....	53
7.2.1 Community development initiatives .....	53
7.2.2 Social drivers.....	55
7.2.2.1 Interaction stimulants .....	55
7.2.2.2 Social support.....	55
7.2.3 member acquisition .....	57
CHAPTER EIGHT .....	58
8.1 Summary of results.....	58
8.2 achieving the two main features .....	59
8.1.1 Practical usefulness .....	59
8.1.2 The social link .....	60
8.2 Finale.....	62
8.2.1 A dissenting perspective.....	62
8.2.2 Reflections.....	62
8.2.3 A second piece in the puzzle .....	65
References .....	66
Appendix .....	72
Experiment 1 .....	72
Experiment 2: .....	76

# CHAPTER ONE

## Raising The Problem

### 1.1 Introduction

This thesis is about brand community. More precisely, it is about an online brand community – the Nikon brand community “Nikonians”. It is an attempt of advancing a wholesome ethnomethodological perspective on brand community. Here, we aim to achieve an ethnomethodological understanding of an online brand community, an understanding that both builds on and differs to prior studies in the field of brand community. In the following, we motivate our study and raise the problem.

With the advent of modernity, traditional forms of community, such as village, family and religion, were challenged and began to be destroyed (Cova, 1997; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). As a consequence, the liberation from community restrictions aiming to reach to the free subject, entails that the plethora of personal social relations, inevitably bound to community, were drowned as the ship of traditional community foundered (Cova, 1997). Due to this shift from the personal, local and familial sense of pre-modern *Gemeinschaft* towards a more impersonal, urban, mechanical and disconnected nature of *Gesellschaft* (Tönnies, 1887), human understanding became more depersonalized (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001).

In postmodernism, individuals have only few durable social relations, while their actions are characterized by a high degree of mobility on social and spatial dimensions (Cova, 1997). Now freed from traditional community restrictions, individuals have become autonomous from collective ideals (Cova, 1997) and contrariwise to the old community, which offered pre-existing communal identity of a highly committed character, the postmodern society offers individualism and autonomy (Cova, 1997, 2002; Firat and Venkatesh, 1993; 1995). As a result, tragic postmodern individuals (Maffesoli, 2004) are characterized by a “homeless mind” (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001) and are on the “desperate search for the social link” (Cova, 1997 p.299):

“(…) the individual has never been so free in his or her private and public choices as today, and never so alone and cut off from the spirit of community”

On their quest for the social link (Cova, 1997), individuals’ actions are now guided by de-differentiation and decreasing autonomy, rather than further differentiation. The late postmodern decline of individualization entails the return of community – a redefined community (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova, 1997). The return to community offers emotionality and identity, and may be seen as an attractive mean to an end for decreasing autonomy and reaching the social link (Cova, 1997).

Phenomena of emerging new forms of communities (Goulding et al, 2002) include “communities of consumption” (McGrath et al. 1993 ; Celsi et al., 1993; Kozinets, 1999; 2001), neo-tribes (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova, 1997; Cova and Cova, 2002) and brand communities (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001, McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz and Schau, 2005).

These communities have become more than a place. Due to media’s ability of spreading the sense of community, members do not have to be physically close anymore, as media is thus

capable of uniting physically separated individuals (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). The now far-reaching community is more understood in terms of shared identity, mutual social relations and emotional bonds (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). This discharge from physical closeness of the members is regarded as the community-liberated view (Anderson, 1983).

A place is no longer solely the reason for gathering. Postmodern individuals see goods and services as offered cultural resources (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998) and besides using the cultural meanings and values linked to consumption (Holt, 2002; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Cova and Cova, 2002; Arvidson, 2005), they also produce meanings actively (Thompson and Haytko, 1997) and build self identity in a reflexive project (Askegaard et al., 2002). Hence, they participate in the construction of new social representations, norms and rituals (Holt, 2002; Thompson and Haytko, 1997; Amine and Sitz, 2004), which may be shared with others in new forms of community.

This thesis focuses on the phenomenon of brand community. McAlexander et al. (2002) suggest, that generally any community consists of the members and their relationships to one another, whereat individuals share cognitive, emotional or material resources. Brand community furthermore, as introduced by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001 p. 412), is defined as “ (...) a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand ”. Brand Communities are able to provide members with positive feelings and entail consumer-consumer interaction (McAlexander et al., 2002). Here, the brand can be viewed as playing the role of a divine entity, by linking consumers to the brand and thus consumers to each other in a religious sense (Cova, 1997). Hence, brand communities have strong cultures and oftentimes complex rituals, traditions and behavioural expectations built on communal enthusiasm deriving from shared feelings and passions for a brand (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001).

Although brand communities may be built by marketers (McAlexander et al., 2002), it appears that brand communities are interestingly also consumer-created (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) and emerge on consumer initiative (Amine and Sitz, 2004). Hence, individuals seem to have great interest in this new form of community.

## 1.2 An ethnomethodological view on brand community

Inspired by ethnomethodology (Coulon, 1995), we advance an ethnomethodological perspective on brand community. The term ethnomethodology refers to peoples' use of methods in order to construct their life (Coulon, 1995, p.2):

“ The scientific project of ethnomethodology is to analyse the methods, or procedures, that people use for conducting the different affairs that they accomplish in their daily lives. Ethnomethodology is the analysis of the ordinary methods that ordinary people use to realize their ordinary actions. This lay “methodology” is used by the members of a society or of a social group in a banal but ingenious way of living together (...)”

Ethnomethodology entails to look at life as a social problem (Coulon, 1995). Social problems can be found in various social situations, and the example of a court jury coming to a verdict (Coulon, 1995) serves as a good demonstration. Here, the ethnomethodologist perspective involves viewing the members of the social group of a court jury as social actors faced with a social problem – coming to the verdict – whereat the focus is on the methods applied for

tackling it. Hence, the knowledge interest lies more in the methods per se, rather than in the personality of social actors. Furthermore, the resulting verdict is then viewed as something that has been achieved by the use of methods, rather than given externally. Thus, the use of certain methods serves as means to an end for social actors encountered with a social problem. We understand ethnomethodology as a fruitful and promising perspective, which could allow us to reveal new, interesting and relevant knowledge by looking at brand community in a different manner.

Stimulated by this view, we understand a brand community – set up by members independent of any marketing objectives from the brand itself – as a social problem, that is to say we recognize it as something that has to be solved and achieved by the use of certain ethnomethods.

However, it is important to recognize that we understand solving and achieving brand community not as the founding or emergence (Amine and Sitz, 2004) of a brand community. Instead, it is our contention that a brand community is continuously challenged and has thus to be continuously solved and achieved in order to exist. We argue, that solving brand community is an ongoing process that does not end with its emergence, but contrariwise more begins with it, whereat this process of problem solving negotiates its existence.

Brand community is then a continuous practical accomplishment. It is part of ordinary life, and its members are ordinary people. The mere fact that these brand communities exist, pinpoints to the active influence of ordinary people in achieving brand community (Amine and Sitz, 2004). The additional fact that brand communities are rather stable groupings and are based on relationships (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001) points to their characteristics as social order – a main concept in ethnomethodology (Coulon, 1995) – and the happening of social processes.

It is our contention that the social problem of accomplishing brand community is twofold and consists of its constant *creation* and *maintenance*. As for creation we do not refer to the founding (Amine and Sitz, 2004) and building (McAlexander et al., 2002) of brand community. Instead, the notion of creation embraces the *continuous developments and improvements* that shape and form the brand community. Similarly, the notion of maintenance entails the *taking care of the community* and its present facets, ensuring its health, functions and utilities. Here, we attempt to point at the circumstance that a brand community is something dynamic (McAlexander et al., 2002).

We argue that the nature of an instrumental use of methods by social actors involves *action*. Furthermore, action is likely to provide reaction, both of which constitute interaction. It is hence our understanding that peoples’ *action*, *reaction* and *interaction* are the basic means for solving the problem of a brand community. Thus, we attempt to advance the perspective on brand community based on the use of methods as action, reaction and interaction concerning constant creation and maintenance.

Here, the ethnomethodologist perspective entails our primary interest in the methods and to look at members as they “do” membership not who members are (Cashman, 2005).

## 1.3 Purpose of the study

The loss of community is seemingly not attractive for individuals. Hence, new forms of communities appear, such as brand community. The continuous achievement and accomplishment of an already existing brand community is here viewed as a social problem to be solved by people in order to profit from its benefits.

In general, this study aims at providing an understanding of how the social problem of brand community is continuously solved by its members. More precisely, the purpose of this study is to explore how a brand community happens, that is how it is constantly created and maintained by its members. Here, the study seeks at exploring and revealing ethnomethods that individuals apply in concrete ordinary situations in their ordinary life in the community, in order to constantly achieve brand community.

The spatial independence of brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001), especially enabled through the medium Internet (Thomsen et al., 1998), leads us to focus this study on an online brand community.

## 1.4 Possible contributions of the study

All possible contributions of this study can be traced back to the ethnomethodological perspective on brand community. We perceive the attempt of advancing a *consequent and wholesome ethnomethodological perspective* as one possible main contribution of this thesis. Although prior research studied how a brand community emerges in its founding steps with an ethnomethodological undertone (Amine and Sitz, 2004), an explicit, consequent and wholesome ethnomethodological perspective is new to the field of (online) brand communities and could possibly deliver fruitful insights and enrich previous knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon brand community. Here, the study could potentially contribute in explicating and revealing ethnomethods, which are strongly linked to previous research, but have not explicitly been discussed in detail in terms of a wholesome and consequent ethnomethodological perspective, yet (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al. 2002; Muniz and Schau, 2005; Amine and Sitz, 2004).

At this point it is important to understand that this study aims to understand the *means* of how ordinary social life – the phenomenon of a brand community – is achieved through behaviour (Coulon, 1995), instead of solely describing and interpreting the phenomenon of brand community. Our work builds on prior research, which is concerned with the description of “what” happens in (online) brand community, with interpretations of “why” it happens (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al. 2002; Muniz and Schau, 2005), and also “how” a brand community emerges (Amine and Sitz, 2004) but does not explicitly investigate “how” the problem of a brand community is continuously solved in its everyday life. This thesis attempts to fill this knowledge gap.

In this way we take one step back to the literature, which describes and interprets the outcomes of brand community, and one step forward to research that explored the steps of how brand communities were founded, as we investigate a brand community that is already established.



Studying an online community may possibly bring forward arguments in the discussion of whether or not online brand communities are “real” and of equal validity as offline brand communities. The combination of researching a brand community on the Internet whilst applying a consequent and explicit ethnomethodological perspective could be perceived as a novelty and entails distinctive methodological considerations and decisions.

The attempt of advancing the method of constitutive netnography could be a possible practical contribution, as further research may use, develop and shape this approach. Additionally, the methodological decisions we have taken for researching on the Internet touch upon critical ethical concerns (Kozinets, 1998; 2002; Bryman and Bell, 2003) and may stimulate ethical discussions, especially about research in forms of experiments on the World Wide Web. We believe, that due to the continuous expansion of the Internet and its constantly growing diffusion into our every day life, research on the Net will gain importance in future – and therewith, ethical concerns. Here, this study may serve as a discussable example.

Researching an online brand community with the consequent ethnomethodological perspective may furthermore lead to the enrichment of existing concepts and even to the emergence of new concepts. Here, our attempt of advancing the concept of community citizenship behaviour (CCB) could possibly hold interesting views, which may invite and induce researchers towards testing or further development of this concept.

Prior studies indicate that (online) brand community may offer a social link (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Amine and Sitz, 2004). This study could explore *how* it is reached.

Overall, ethnomethodology is lay sociology (Coulon, 1995) and is oftentimes concerned with “common sense”. We believe however, that researching and explicating “common sense” may possibly make rewarding thoughts available for further studies in this field.

## 1.5 Structure of the thesis

In Chapter two we review existing literature and show what is known about community, online community and brand community. The methodological decisions we have taken in this study are presented and discussed in chapter three. Following, we give a brief introduction into the Nikonian brand community. Chapter five introduces the reader into the results of the data collection by presenting three categories and their distinction in brief. Chapter six and seven represent the main findings of this study, which will be displayed, interpreted and discussed. Chapter six deals with the concept of Ordinary Membership, and chapter seven with the concept of Community Citizenship Behaviour. Chapter eight frames and narrows this discussion and entails furthermore the conclusion, a reflection of this study, brief managerial suggestions, and ideas for further research.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Literature Review

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the background of (online) brand community. Firstly, a description brand community in general, its validity as community, its distinction to other ideas of community and prior accounts of action in brand community is presented. Secondly, we introduce the definition of online brand community, offer a brief discussion of literature dealing with whether or not online communities are “real”, and display what is known about interaction in online communities.

## 2.1 Brand community

### 2.1.1 Describing brand community

McAlexander et al. (2002) suggest, that generally any community consists of the members and their relationships to one another. In a community, individuals share cognitive, emotional or material resources, whereby this commonality and the shared creation and negotiation of meaning leads to the community’s identity. Brand community furthermore, as introduced by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001), is defined as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand ”. On this basis, Amine and Sitz (2004) advance another narrower definition of brand community. Their suggestion entails additionally the nature of self-selection, hierarchy of social relations and the sharing of values, norms and representations among its members. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) found evidence that brand communities are, similar to other communities, marked by three components of community, which they identified in reviewing sociology literature.

Firstly, *Consciousness of kind* is regarded as the most crucial marker of a community and describes shared consciousness of belonging, whereby members feel an intrinsic connection to one another. Furthermore, members inherently agree about the sense of community and share an understanding of difference from non-members of the community. According to Bagozzi and Dholahia (2006), consciousness of kind is what likeminded members make to form relationships.

Secondly, *Shared rituals and traditions* maintain the shared history, culture and consciousness of the community and additionally indoctrinate, memorize and celebrate behavioural norms and traditions. Hence they provide social solidarity and control the drift of meanings.

Thirdly, *Sense of moral responsibility* describes member’s committed feelings “of duty or obligation to the community as a whole, and to its individual members” (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001, 413). In times of threat, sense of moral responsibility guides and directs collective action.

Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) suggest, that brand community is a legitimate form of community, but more specialized, of its time and “something significant in their own right”.

Similar to McAlexander et al. (2002), Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) declare brand communities as simply a way in which consumers search and produce meaningful connections and bonding on the quest for satisfying their desire for community (Muniz and Schau, 2005; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001), which appears then to provide human well-being (McAlexander et al., 2002). Brand communities are venues where intense brand loyalty is expressed and fostered, and emotional connections with the brand forged in customers (Bagozzi and Dholahia, 2006; McAlexander et al., 2002).

### 2.1.2 Brand community vs. other communities

The definition of brand community as given from Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) emphasizes three issues of brand community. First, brand community is not holistic and more specialized, as it has branded goods or services at its center (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Second, brand community members are not compelled to a physical location. Hence, brand communities are in-line with the community-liberated view (Anderson, 1983). Here, a major difference to brandfests as described by McAlexander et al. (2002) is evident, as these brandfests happen at a certain geographic location and may be more dynamic and temporary. Third, a brand community gathers individuals that are emotionally involved with a brand. Consumers take advantage of the linking value offered by the object of consumption (Cova and Cova, 2002) – a particular brand – and, simply put, build a community around it (Amine and Sitz, 2004).

The distinction of brand community to communities of consumption (McGrath et al. 1993; Celsi et al., 1993; Kozinets, 2001), consumption subculture (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), and virtual communities of consumption (Kozinets, 1999) is found in the reason or the center of gathering. In contrast to communities of consumption and consumption subculture, both of which center the consumption of particular products or product categories, the brand community centers a particular brand. Similar to neighborhood communities (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001), brand communities may also be defined by opposition and contradistinction to other brands (Amine and Sitz, 2004), which allows members communal differentiation (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) whilst personally de-differentiating in the sense of Cova (1997).

In contrast to neo-tribes (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova, 1997; Cova and Cova, 2002), brand communities are rather stable (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Amine and Sitz, 2004), and more explicit, whereat neo-tribes may entail unknowing and not conscious membership (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova, 1997).

### 2.1.3 Prior Accounts of action in brand community

This section is an attempt to display what is known about action in brand community. Here, we examine the relevant literature with an ethnomethodological perspective, that is to say the assessment of literature on the quest for members' methods, which contribute to the happening or achievement of (online) brand community. Although the body of literature is relatively thin, it delivers valuable insights.

The forsaken Apple Newton community (Muniz and Schau, 2005) is a consumer-created brand community, which has been abandoned by the brand, as the Apple Newton is no longer available on the market and Apple cancelled their support for the brand community. This case is of particular interest here, it may roughly be comparable to other consumer-created and non-supported brand communities, like the Nikonian brand community.

Interestingly, brand experience is not only provided by intense experiences, such as using the brand in a collective and celebrative manner in the sense of the Harley Davidson Posse ride or the Jeep brandfest (McAlexander, 2002). As consumer magic is furthermore also being found in everyday-technological products, brand experience may very well derive from e.g. Apple Newton – and hence also Photo cameras – due to a quasi-religious understanding of the product and brand (Muniz and Schau, 2005).

Brand community members are described as fully responsible for creating and sustaining the brand experience. They take action in modifying, repairing and innovating the product and in addition to this promote the brand self-contained (Muniz and Schau, 2005).

Furthermore, members perform consumer-consumer narrative interaction, also regarded as storytelling (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001, McAlexander, 2002), in order to tie the community and enable reification of its values and beliefs (Muniz and Schau, 2005). Storytelling can be seen as (inter)action, it is a crucial factor in creating and maintaining community (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001) and is also part of the brand experience. Here, members put effort into creating a myth around the brand (Muniz and Schau, 2005).

Sharing brand stories is an important process as it points to and assists in learning communal values (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). These narratives are characterized by the use of religious language and serve as a means to increase morality in the community (Muniz and Schau, 2005). Sharing of experiences in narratives is welcomed and rewarded by the community, which encourages other members to share their experiences (Muniz and Schau, 2005; McAlexander, 2002). The forces that seem to energize these communities are the on-going sentiments that occur in fellowship as members relive past happenings and share current concerns (Bagozzi and Dholahia, 2006).

All (inter)actions function as sustainers of the brand experience, whereby members are capable of providing the brand experience themselves (Muniz and Schau, 2005). Although consciousness of kind is regarded as more a feeling and located in the members’ minds, living it out means action such as honking the horn as evident in the case of the SAAB community (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001) and Jeep community (McAlexander et al., 2002).

Moral Responsibility is linked to the basic concern of the survival of community (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001, McAlexander, 2002). Moral responsibility provides action in terms of firstly integrating and keeping new members, and secondly, assisting other community members in the proper use of the brand (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). The underlying notion here is that the attempt of acquiring new members through educating (Muniz and Schau, 2005) and taking care of new and old members of the brand community serve as means to ensure the survival of the community (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Actively educating outsiders about the brand or product can be seen as a kind of branding activity motivated by moral responsibility (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001), affecting the outside reputation (Muniz and Schau, 2005).

Here, it is an unwritten contract what keeps members “naturally” performing these activities (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). The behaviours of the members create a strong community around the brand and friendships are formed (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Amine and Sitz, 2004).

However, literature is focused on activities and behaviour that is related to the brand in question, whereby more personal aspects of activities are merely mentioned (Amine and Sitz, 2004). Personal aspects could be members helping each other on a more private level, with or without the brand being in the picture. It is questionable, whether all actions and activities can always be traced back to the brand.

## 2.2 Online brand community

### 2.2.1 Definition of online brand community

Similar to the rise of mass media mentioned above, the expansion of the Internet as communication medium enhances the gathering of different and geographically separated people with shared interests (Thomsen et al., 1998). Community described as a particular social network (Wellman et al. 1999), which also can be created on the Internet. These virtual communities (Rheingold, 1993) or cyber communities (Amine and Sitz, 2004) exist entirely in the non-geographical space of the World Wide Web (Kozinets 1997) and may be seen as extreme and advanced versions of the community-liberated view, as the Internet has become an accessible and inexpensive communication medium (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001).

Since all communities, even the pre-modern rural communities, are characterized by a certain degree of imagination and thus “virtuality”, we reject the term virtual community (Kozinets, 2002). However, the term “virtual” as used by Rheingold (1993) aims to characterize these communities as happening on the Internet. However, we suggest this could be misleading. The term “cyber community” (Amine and Sitz, 2004; Kozinets, 2002) is more appropriate, but it also has an underlying resonance of something flashy and Sci-Fi. Similar to Kozinets (2002), we argue that the word “cyber” could be mistaken in the sense of judging the community itself as more fashionable, sophisticated or futuristic. On the other hand, this could be good in making clear the development and re-definition of community into our times. But then, one may wonder if new forms of community that are not happening online are less sophisticated and closer to traditional communities (Kozinets, 2002).

Maloney-Krichmar and Preece (2005, p. 203) defined an online community as “a group of people with a common interest or a shared purpose whose interactions are governed by policies in the form of tacit assumptions, rituals, protocols, rules, and laws and who use computer systems to support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness.”

Using these thoughts, we understand an online brand community as a brand community, which uses computer systems as the *central* tool for mediating interaction between members and is thus a brand community primarily located in the Internet. Since “community” carries a historical heritage, we prefer the term of online community, as it firstly, acknowledges the development of community, and secondly, is capable of defining this special kind of community. We suggest it has few underlying notions and makes clear what is meant by it – a community that happens online.

This definition implicitly entails a dichotomy and negative definition: offline brand community. However, this does not imply that an online brand community lacks of any offline activity – or vice versa – but it means that the community itself is primarily located in the space of the Internet. We are aware of the weaknesses of this definition, as it does not

provide a pin sharp distinction, however it does allow intermediate stages of online/offline activity (Amine and Sitz, 2004; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz and Schau, 2005) by defining only the central tool of mediating interaction. Due to the very common and increasing everyday-use of Internet as communication medium, it is not surprising that offline brand communities use the Web as a supplement to face-to-face encountering (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001).

## 2.2.2 Online brand community – a “real” community?

Clearly, the computer-mediated environment has been changing the community concept (Thomsen et al., 1998; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). However, the appearance of online communities in general is frequently discussed in terms of whether these special communities are temporary, solely imagined and too superficial, and hence no “real” communities (Calhoun, 1991; Thomsen et al., 1998). In existing literature, it is argued that a “true” community necessitates direct social relationships, whereat the in online communities the connectivity between individuals is rather imagined and parasocial than “real” (Calhoun, 1991). The suggested disparity of “imagined” and “real” entails a more philosophical discussion about “reality”.

Interestingly, for Rheingold (1993), online community is “real”, as firstly, chat rooms and online cafes provide feelings similar to an actual pub or cafe visit, and secondly, the online community is grounded in the new everyday physical world. Current established culture leaves the need for conviviality unfulfilled, as shrinking informal public space (Rheingold, 1993) and residential “cocooning” charge the two remaining interactive spheres, the workplace and the home, with the task of emotional connectivity (Oldenburg, 1989). Individuals then naturally take advantage of the Internet in order to re-establish a sphere of conviviality that has been suppressed in an autonomous society (Oldenburg, 1989) and hence re-create a sense of community (Jones, 1995; Rheingold, 1993; Oldenburg, 1989).

Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) acknowledge that some may see the very existence of brand communities as evidence of complete appropriation of real community. Online communities counteract the emotional disconnect of *Gesellschaft* (Oldenburg, 1989; Jones, 1995; Rheingold, 1993) and by rather connecting than atomising us (Jones, 1995), they provide a social link (Cova, 1997; Cova and Cova, 2002). The renewal of sense of community fosters new types and formations of community (Jones, 1995; Thomsen et al., 1998), so that online brand communities as one of the new forms may very well exist and be real (Amine and Sitz, 2004; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Muniz and Schau, 1995, Kozinets, 1998; 2002).

Thus, similar to offline social groups, online communities have impact on the behaviour of its members (Kozinets, 1998; Amine and Sitz, 2004), a crucial implication for this study.

## 2.2.3 Evidence of interaction in online communities

This section aims to provide a brief overview of the nature of interaction in online communities. Generally, a high degree of social interaction in online communities was found in the literature (Amine and Sitz, 2004), indicated through the high number of messages and their views (Maloney-Krichmar and Preece, 2005). Interactions may be either synchronically, in case of e.g. chat rooms, or a-synchronically (Wellman, 1996), whereby significant time lags between messages of a conversation may occur. For the latter, interactions are mainly structured in diverse forums and threads and they may be stored in archives (Amine and Sitz,

2004). In general, online community members may take advantage of textual language, visual and/or audio devices, and the use of various symbols such as emoticons in order to interact (Kozinets, 2002; Amine and Sitz, 2004). Access to information about communal events, participants' stories and anecdotal information, and opinion-, ideas-, and interest forums, are common features of online community websites (Navarrette, 2006).

An online community is made up through interactions between members, whereby these promote that communities are 'alive' and reach its goal (Maloney-Krichmar and Preece, 2005). Online communities are interconnected networks in which members are linked through messages. The two actions of posting and viewing messages are the primary factors, which provide that members interact (Maloney-Krichmar and Preece, 2005), get to know each other and establish connections (Amine and Sitz, 2004). The exchange of "virtual food" – images and music – additionally helps to build interpersonal relationships (Maloney-Krichmar and Preece, 2005). Many online relationships are marked by characteristics that are associated with strong offline relationships (Amine and Sitz, 2004) such as frequency, companionable contact, reciprocity, empathy, supportiveness, and longevity (Maloney-Krichmar and Preece, 2005).

Commonly it is described that online community members exchange information and emotional communications (Blanchard and Markus, 2004; Amine and Sitz, 2004) and members support each other (Maloney-Krichmar and Preece, 2005). Members create social connections and build common values, norms and representations (Amine and Sitz, 2004). The most common types of support offered by community members are described as emotional support, information support, and esteem support (Maloney-Krichmar and Preece, 2005). Emotional support is given either face-to-face or online (Navarrette, 2006). Here, the distinct and humorous way, in which talk is configured, facilitates informal conversation comparable to physical informal conversation (Maloney-Krichmar and Preece, 2005). This positive and supportive communication among members indicates strong social interaction.

Furthermore, there is evidence of high member commitment in online communities in form of "emotional attachment" and "obligation" (Blanchard and Markus, 2004), and "investment" (Navarrette, 2006), all of which describe the commitment to actively engage in community activities and are expressed through online actions and behaviour (Navarrette, 2006). Here, Amine and Sitz (2004) describe "hardcore" members who engage more often in the community.

Rules and tacit assumptions are an important part of online communities (Maloney-Krichmar, 2005; Amine and Sitz, 2004). Here, rules serve to symbolically construct the community whereby rule breaking is sanctioned by members themselves (Amine and Sitz, 2004). They also describe the rule of netiquette and friendliness and the occurrence of conflicts. Interestingly, Amine and Sitz (2004) suggest communal patterns, not only for individual behaviour, but also for collective action (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). This may be seen as a hint for an implicitly applied ethnomethodological perspective.

In conclusion, the main three types of online interactions of community members are (1) giving advice and support, (2) sharing social information, (3) through the use of personal informal communication (Amine and Sitz, 2004; Thomson, 1998), based on high commitment (Blanchard and Markus, 2004; Navarrette, 2006) and implicit assumptions and rules (Maloney-Krichmar, 2005; Amine and Sitz, 2004).

# CHAPTER THREE

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## Methodology

### 3.1 The Study

This study researches the Nikonian online brand community using the qualitative approach of constitutive micro-netnography based on observation and enriched with experimental data construction. We use the term constitutive netnography, which derives from constitutive ethnography (Mehan, 1978), in order to emphasize the applied ethnomethodological perspective. Constitutive netnography will be explained in more detail further on.

In the following, we present our methodological reasoning in displaying and discussing the methodological decisions we have taken. We begin this section with describing the characteristics of this study taken as a whole and stepwise narrow the focus towards the actual design of the data collection.

#### 3.1.1 Overall design of the study and research objects

Categorizing the specific nature of this current study is not easy. Speaking from an overall perspective, before entering the discussion of particular methods, we regard this study more as pure research. It is driven by human interest and one possible contribution is the enrichment of academic knowledge, whereby practitioners potentially benefit from possible insights and may derive practical conclusions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

There are however further tendencies of other research categories. Concentrating solely on one online brand community could categorize this thesis as a case study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Hence, the findings are highly contextual. Considering additionally that its possible knowledge production is of a less linear character, this study may be situated more in-between Mode 1 and Mode 2 research (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

This mix of research modes and categories was however not chosen a priori and on purpose, it was more the need for data, which guided the methodological decisions of this study. More precisely, the chosen design of (constitutive) netnography as an overall research method, which allows combining various methods of data collection (Kozinets, 2002; Bryman and Bell, 2003), may be responsible in particular and is discussed in more detail further on.

Although this is the methodology chapter, the term ethnomethodology that appears here as well should not be mistaken as a research methodology or research design; it is more a distinctive way of viewing life (Coulon, 1995). However, applying such a perspective has certain consequences for our research design and methodology.

The ethnomethodological research question of *“how does a Brand Communities happen”* guides the need of data. In viewing brand community as a social problem, we understand it as a complex and interactive social situation. Here, we take the standpoint of the ontological assumption that it firstly exists, and secondly, that we are able to research it. The ethnomethodological project furthermore entails the interest in the methods of solving a social



problem, applied by ordinary people (Coulon, 1995). Then, another ontological assumption is crucial, namely the assumption that brand community members indeed apply such methods – conscious or not conscious – and that these methods have relevance in terms of solving the social problem of brand community.

Through advancing an ethnomethodological perspective on brand community, the aim of this study is the exploration and development of close understanding of how a brand community happens, that is to say the exploration of a complex situation, complex interactions and complex methods. With close understanding we refer to the investigation of methods applied in order to continuously solve *concrete* ordinary problems that members are facing in achieving the brand community as part of their ordinary lives, and *concrete* ordinary problems as part of the ordinary life of the community per se. The general ethnomethodological interest in the use of methods highlights inevitably the significance of action, interaction, processes and procedures (Coulon, 1995), all of which are expressed through behaviour and are the objects to be researched.

Since ethnomethodology is about discovering rather than presuming the descriptive methods of matters studied (Coulon, 1995), we chose an inductive research methodology, which allows likewise the description, exploration and emerge of new findings by collecting data first (Bryman and Bell, 2003) and its interpretation, rather than hypothesizing in advance with a deductive approach. Because ethnomethodology is more regarded as a research perspective than a theory (Coulon, 1995), applying this perspective in advance does not inevitably entail a more deductive approach in building and testing a hypothesis about an ethnomethodological nature of brand community.

The overall methodology of the entire research process may be seen more as a weaving back and forth between theory and data (Bryman and Bell, 2003), since we also re-examined relevant literature after our data collection aiming for categorization of our findings. However, we attempted to apply a research methodology of a more inductive character for our data collection and its interpretation.

Here, we are aware of our pre-existing knowledge derived from studying related literature, theories, and research findings, so that we see the induction as based on this knowledge. We assume that this pre-existing knowledge indeed influenced us in focusing on circumstances and constructs that are regarded as relevant in literature and which we unknowingly selected to be promising considering our research purpose. We attempted to achieve the delicate balance between *using* prior knowledge and keeping a fresh and open mind to new concepts as they emerge from the data, which is however a difficult task (Goulding, 2005). It is also a common “misconception, that the researcher is expected to enter the field ignorant of any theory or associated literature relating to the phenomenon and wait for the theory to emerge purely from the data” (Goulding, 2005, p.296). Hence, we perceive our pre-existing knowledge more as supporting than harming sound induction, as it helped us saving precious time during the fieldwork, which was crucial as we had few time for conducting this study.

We believe that the inductive approach allowed us to gain deeper insights, since complexity is to a certain extent rather embraced than ignored, unlike making narrow a priori hypothesis using a deductive approach. The use of our pre-existing knowledge helped us exploring and discovering and we argue that it would have been a mistake, not to exploit prior knowledge. In conclusion, we suggest that this design has more inductive than deductive tendencies.

### 3.1.2. About reality – studying the research objects

Brand community is a social phenomenon. It can be viewed as interactions, which build the “reality” of brand community dependent on social actors. Ethnomethodology considers social interactions as the building blocks of any social order (Coulon, 1995), which is of relevance here, as a certain social order seemingly exists in brand community (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; McAlexander, 2002; Muniz and Schau, 2005; Amine and Sitz, 2004) and we understand brand community as a social order.

The “reality” investigated by this study is constructed of social actors, the members of the brand community. Here, a social constructivist perspective is applied, which considers reality as interactions and fosters understanding of complex situations and, furthermore, corresponds with the inductive approach (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). We suggest that it is thus an appropriate perspective in guiding the further methodological decisions of this study.

The requested sense data is about action and social interaction. The ontological position that the “reality of a brand community” is created when people act and interact is crucial for this study. Ethnomethodologists argue that interactional activities constitute social facts of practical accomplishments (Coulon, 1995), whereat we view brand community as such.

Nevertheless, peoples’ thoughts are involved to a certain degree. This needs further explanation. Although the interest of ethnomethodology lies in revealing ethnomethods in interactions, peoples’ thoughts are inherently involved, as individuals are charged with the task of interpreting ongoing interaction – that is communicative coding and decoding (Schulz von Thun et al., 2003).

Language in general as a means for interaction is crucial here (Coulon, 1995). The ethnomethodological perspective states that the “real” is already described by people, whereat this view regards ordinary language as capable of telling the social reality, describing it and constituting it at the same time (Coulon, 1995). Hence, social interaction in the form of ordinary language constructs social reality (Coulon, 1995). This powerful implication for this study entails that the reality of brand community lies in interaction of individuals through the use of language.

Given this, language may therefore represent the reality of the practical accomplishment of brand community. Hence, we understand textual language not only as the expression of behavior, but furthermore, as a way of behaving online. Kozinets (2002) develops philosophical thoughts from Wittgenstein towards the notion of posting of text on the Internet as an actual behaviour. The natural fact, that textual messages are capable of producing reaction in form of responds, pinpoints to the understanding of written language as action. It is words, unspoken, but possibly yet as powerful. This assumption allows us to “read” an online community.

Since Coulon (1995) suggests that any social group is able to understand itself, the interpretative task of the individual lies then in the decoding of interaction through the process of thinking. Then, as an ontological assumption, the reality of brand community is constituted of interaction and its interpretation.

The implied epistemological assumptions about gaining access to relevant data – data that mirrors reality and contains information about how people solve the problem of the brand

community and thus how the brand community happens – are twofold. On the one hand, relevant data can possibly be found in the asynchronical message threads of the Nikonian brand community in form of textual language rather passively via observation. On the other hand, the material itself does not deliver information about the applied methods for solving the problem of the brand community – however, it may potentially contain hidden answers to our research question. The found sense data has to be actively interpreted by us, that is to say we have to interpret a certain action, interaction, or procedure as a certain ethnomethod. Here, the context in which such activity is situated is highly relevant. This context is not only consistent of the content or topic of previous interactions, but also is very much dependent on members' interpretations of prior texts. Previous text may be interpreted as e.g. an offense or assistance, which may then be expressed in a following reactive message. In order to reveal ethnomethods, it is crucial for us to consider members' interpretations of prior messages and context and attempt to view life with their eyes.

Additionally, the assumption that written language is containing relevant information does not imply that all available and observable messages, texts or conversations carry important information in terms of revealing possible ethnomethods. This does not only mean that many observable textual interactions are potentially unfruitful, but furthermore, that textual sources which could indeed hold relevant information are not observable, since they are not existent. As a result, this possibly valuable data – containing interaction that is conducive to the happening of the brand community – had to be collected actively.

We chose a qualitative design for this study, as this allows us the use of interpretative techniques, that are concerned with describing, decoding and translating of phenomena in the social world (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). In particular, we decided on constitutive micro-netnography.

### 3.1.3 Constitutive Micro-netnography

In this section, we display how we developed the method of constitutive micro-netnography. First, we discuss netnography and micro-netnography, and second, we show what is meant by constitutive netnography.

Netnography originates from traditional ethnography and is a method specifically adapted to the study of online communities (Kozinets, 2002; 1998; 1997). Besides its promising appropriateness of conducting a potentially valid study of an online brand community, it is furthermore faster, simpler, and less expensive than ethnographic fieldwork (Kozinets, 2002), all of which have been crucial decision factors in writing this thesis. We adapted the term micro-ethnography, meaning a more small-scale ethnography characterized by short fieldwork (Bryman and Bell, 2003), and transferred it to micro-netnography. Although netnography is incomparable less time-consuming than ethnography, we want to indicate the rather small-scale character of this study with this term, as netnographic studies may possibly have also longer time horizons (e.g. Maloney-Krichmar and Preece, 2005).

Prior studies of the social phenomenon of brand community applied ethnographic methods (McAlexander, 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Muniz and Schau, 2005) and also netnography (Kozinets, 1997; 1998; 2002; Amine and Sitz, 2004), or both (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Muniz and Schau, 2005). Ethnography and derivatively netnography are based on participation and observation (Bryman and Bell, 2003) in specific social groups (Kozinets, 2002) and usually include data finding (through observation) and data construction

(most commonly via interviews) before the researcher is engaged in a sense-making process based on his or her knowledge and experience (Kozinets, 2002; Bryman and Bell, 2003).

In terms of relevance for this particular study, ethnography and netnography are aiming to explicate the more social patterns of action (Goulding, 2005) and practices (Kozinets, 2002). We were especially encouraged to apply netnography, seeing that Kozinets (2002) suggests its perfect match to Mead's approach, where the behaviour or the act itself is the unit of analysis rather than the individual behind it, and its ability for exploration (Kozinets, 1998). Hence, it suits our ethnomethodological perspective focusing on actions, interactions, and procedures as behaviour, and not on the actual person.

Unlike ethnography, netnography does not involve the possibility of observing offline in-person behaviour, as it relies on textual sources. However, given the earlier-made ontological assumptions, written language as an online textual source then provides relevant information about how the online brand community happens, as it contains, describes and constructs the reality of the brand community. Further, we suggest the online actions to be of more relevance to the happening of the online brand community, than offline in-person behaviour.

From this perspective, netnography seems to be a suitable method and should gain access to relevant data, since it considers, like ethnomethodology, the actions, interactions, and procedures as more noteworthy than social actors. This becomes more clear when having in mind that persons who act and behave on the Internet have nearly unlimited options of creating more than one nickname, fake-personality, or account and one can never be sure of the actual identity of the counterpart. Spotlighting the mere activity fades out this negative side of conducting a study on the Net.

Similar to ethnography (Goulding, 2005), netnography is not perceived as a single data collection method (Kozinets, 2002). It is highly contextual and enables the combination of data collection methods, depending on the purpose of the study (Kozinets, 2002). This character of a more overall research method (Bryman and Bell, 2003) and our need for data encouraged us, besides observation, towards the additional use of two rather small experiments in order to construct yet non-existent data by certain stimulation. Hence, it is misleading to speak of data collection, as it is rather data finding in observing and data construction in experimenting here. We suggest, that a data construction via interviews is not suiting the ethnomethodological perspective, as it does not provide knowledge in terms of ethnomethods, although language here is as well the central medium (Goulding, 2005). Further, interview data is based on purposive sampling and provides more personal views from participants with the assumption that these are taken for granted (Goulding, 2005). However, experimenting on the Internet involves several delicate and fundamental ethical concerns, which we dedicate a section of its own further on.

In passively observing and actively participating through our experiments, we were "socially embedded" in the research setting (Bryman and Bell, 2003), namely the site of the Nikonian brand community. This entails the consideration of the social constructivist perspective: We, as researchers, are part of what is being researched (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002), however, only to a certain extent. Nevertheless, we have to perform similar to those in the research setting active interpretation of passively found social interaction, and context. Netnography is seemingly in-line with inductive social constructivism.

Mehan (1978) developed the approach of constitutive ethnography, an ethnography especially suiting the ethnomethodological perspective. Since we decided on micro-netnography, which originates from ethnography and we indeed apply the ethnomethodological perspective, we propose the approach of *constitutive netnography*. Constitutive netnography is a netnography based on the fundamental premises of the ethnomethodological perspective – viewing social structure as social accomplishments.

“Rather than merely describe recurrent patterns of behaviour or seek for correlations amongst variables, constitutive analysts study the structuring activities that construct the social facts (...).” (Mehan, 1978, p.36 in: Coulon, 1995 p. 45).

It is however important to understand that a description of behaviour is necessary in the first place (Coulon, 1995). But instead of solely describing actions in the research setting, constitutive netnography aims to display the *means* of how social life – the research setting – is structured and achieved through the investigated and described behaviour (Coulon, 1995). In this study, constitutive netnography entails hence the description of behaviour as well, however with the focus of how this behaviour contributes to achieving the brand community. The term “constitutive netnography” seeks thus to emphasize this particular ethnomethodological focus, and to distinguish between other types of netnography, that possibly are merely concerned with giving back researchers’ experiences in a specific research setting, or the description and interpretation of social phenomena applying a non-ethnomethodological focus.

### 3.1.4 Alternative Design

A *quantitative design* was also considered, as both researchers are trained in statistical analysis, and one of the researchers has worked as a teacher for statistics at a university. We argue, that certain personal skills and abilities are crucial decision factors for conducting research and should not be underestimated.

We suspect that a quantitative approach could indeed deliver interesting results via survey and statistical techniques. Prior research concerned with community has commonly applied quantitative methods, especially in developing the construct of PSOC – the Psychological Sense Of Community (e.g. McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Obst et al, 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; Obst and White 2004; 2005; Tartaglia, 2006). Here, factor analysis is used to explore the constituents of PSOC and how PSOC happens. Although this work is aimed to a more psychological understanding of community, it could be stimulating to transfer this approach in terms of methodology to the understanding of how a brand community happens. Then, factor analysis may potentially reveal certain underlying factors, which possibly contribute to the happening of brand community. The survey may be conducted via e-mail on the Internet.

However, being based on survey, such design then mirrors and measures personal opinions of participants. Ethnomethodological actions, interactions and procedures are hard to catch in surveys, as participants had to reflect on their own behaviour. On the other hand, these reflections may be of more validity than an interpretation by us. Further, a categorized observation and its subsequent processing through factor analysis may be reasonable.

However, the inherent great obstacle is the development of items or questions a priori, which is a major task due to the rather small literature body, or via a time-consuming pre-exploration. This pinpoints at the quantitative design as a methodology that addresses the

research problem in an entirely different manner, as it corresponds more with deduction and positivism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Quantitative research carries objectivist ontology and has a “static view of social life that is independent of people’s life” (Bryman and Bell, 2003 p.86). It is hence not embracing the complexity of dynamic interaction and its interpretation. Henceforth, we suggest, that the ethnomethodological perspective is not thoroughly conformable with a quantitative design.

These characteristics, together with low economic validity (Bryman and Bell, 2003), are the reasons for rejecting a quantitative design, as we in conclusion suspect its inability to study the research objects. Furthermore, the time-consuming nature, the enormous task load, and the rather small literature body, also directed us in our decision.

## 3.2 The Design of micro-netnography

### 3.2.1. The process

Our fieldwork took place in the Nikonian online brand community for the period of 8 days in total. The choice of one specific case is consistent with the social constructivist perspective (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002) and the short data collection period does not entail low quality data (Kozinets, 2002). With “case”, we refer to the community as a non-geographical location. By that we mean however not the set-up, or the specific structure of the community. The case of this particular community is provided by particular behaviour taking place in its non-physical space. Hence, persons are not of interest, it is the persons’ actions that provide the case. Further, it is peoples’ aggregate distinctive and unique communal behaviour, which constitutes the case of the Nikonian community.

Search engines ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)) were used in order to find an online brand community. Here, as both researchers have access to Nikon digital cameras, we found the Nikonian community due to personal Internet research. After identifying a few additional cases, we conducted a pre-observation with the purpose of selecting the most promising one. Here, our personal interest was also relevant, as we wanted this research to be enjoyable for us. Further, the Nikonian brand community was also selected for the following reasons: it is consumer-created, appeared to be vital and rather big in size, and a great amount of archived threads is available.

The guidelines of “(1) making cultural entree, (2) gathering and analyzing data, (3) ensuring trustworthy interpretation, (4) conducting ethical research, and (5) providing opportunities for culture member feedback” (Kozinets, 2002, p.63) helped us in conducting this research. However, we were in less accordance with points four and five, which is discussed further on.

Firstly, we explored the Nikonian brand community and its facets in general in order to get an overview and access (Bryman and Bell, 2003). We browsed through the Nikonian site, and its various forums, read messages and tried to understand the structure, codes, and the distinctive way of communication. In short, we tried to get familiar with the research setting.

Secondly, through observations, we investigated member interactions whilst applying an ethnomethodological perspective. Here, the netnographic method is enriched with some smaller experiments. The combined information of observing and experimenting was planned

to deliver good holistic understanding. Together, we intended them to promote sound sense making. Here, our role as active interpreters is highlighted:

The ontological and epistemological assumptions mentioned earlier imply that, in order to interact, people have to interpret others' texts actively, that is to say the process of seeing something *as* something. We interpret and translate the research setting and data from participants actively as well. Hence, this constitutive micro-netnography is based on our interpretation as well as the interpretations of participants. The research process is subsequently taken one step further and gets even worse – the already interpreted material is then being analysed and interpreted again:

The tertiary interpretation aims to reveal the ethnomethods, which are suggested to contribute to the happening of the Nikonian brand community. Here, we were not bonded to one specific method of either grounded analysis (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002) or (n)ethnographic content analysis (Goulding, 2005), as we see ourselves in-between by applying also Interaction Process Analysis (e.g. Maloney-Krichmar and Preece, 2005) and conversation analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Here, we were in a dilemma. Traditional conversation analysis is bound to ethnomethodology and is concerned with analysing and uncovering underlying structures of talk in interaction, and hence is merely concerned with the achievement of social order via interaction (Akman, 2000; Bryman and Bell, 2003). This entails, that the meanings or motivations of actions and its interpretation of the researchers are illegitimate, although certain context may be considered (Bryman and Bell, 2003). (N)ethnography on the other hand uses a qualitative (n)ethnographic content analysis for the sense-making process. Here, the meanings of actions and its interpretations are of main interest, and it is furthermore desired to categorize the findings (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

These two seemingly contradictory approaches for trying to make sense out of the material appear to be relevant for this study. Although they apparently do not go along together, we attempt to justify our “violation” of methodology as follows.

We understand the methodology of this study mainly as a netnography. Thus, netnographic content analysis is suitable (Kozinets, 2002). In advancing an ethnomethodological *perspective*, we allow influence of another way to look at life, which is expressed by the term constitutive netnography. This then inherently involves the allowance of consequences that come with it, such as conversation analysis.

Under this premise, Interaction Process Analysis seems suitable, as we investigated interactions between group members. Although interaction process analysis reminds of group membership role analysis, it studies and focuses more on social behavior rather than the roles assumed by community members. This basic thought guides us throughout the analysis. Further, as netnography is based to a great deal on conversations as textual sources, a conversation analysis of texts seems reasonable. However, in order to understand how a brand community happens, we are not solely interested in the mere structure of social order, instead, we perceive it as our duty to understand the life in the community with the eyes of the members. Here, we are interested in actions and interactions in terms of their meanings, consequences and relevance for the community per se, that is how they contribute to the happening of the brand community. Thus, we are of the opinion, that in order to reveal the ethnomethods, we have to fulfil an interpretative task, which is in-line with netnographic content analysis (Kozinets, 2002). Hence, we take the view of Thomsen et al. (1998), as they redefine conversation analysis particularly for online studies as a tool “(...) to identify

patterns, rules, or procedures that occur among participants and the way in which these structures or conventions influence meaning and effect”. Unlike content analysis, which typically treats each posting as an individual unit of analysis, conversation analysis requires that we notice a complete conversation (Thomsen et al., 1998). Here, we regard utterances – textual language – as tools for the performance of activities, and not merely as things that stand in for other things (Canadian review, 1996). The situative aspect or context of a conversation is a crucial part for us in aiming to find behavioural patterns, whereby these patterns are in turn necessary to understand the elements of details of a conversation (Coulon, 1995). As for details, it also has to be noticed, that a true traditional conversation analysis with great attention to details, such as length of pauses between sentences or words (Bryman and Bell, 2003), is not applicable on the Net. Hence, we suggest that we consider merely some basic thoughts of traditional conversation analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2003) and more apply the view of Thomsen et al. (1998). Considering the importance of context (e.g. Cashman, 2005), the netnographic content analysis and our assimilation to the research setting are crucial, in order understand not only what a speaker means, but also to reveal possible embodied ethnomethods.

Let us put it this way: In conducting netnography – through observing, experimenting, and sense-making – we put ethnomethodological glasses on, which allow us to focus on certain issues while fading out others. In the same vein, we merge these methods of sense making together, by concentrating on certain aspects of a method and fade out others.

In order to fully raise the roof, we also interpret and analyse textual language immediately through field notes (Kozinets, 2002) guided by ethnomethodological thoughts, so that a characteristic of grounded theory is found here as well. We are pretty much aware of the weaknesses involved with such a multiple approach, and one may argue that it is neither fish nor fowl. However, the need for data and the desire to achieve a reasonable conclusion of this study guided us here, rather than selecting one specific methodological category. We understand methodology as a helpful tool, and not as law. Metaphorically spoken, one may say that complex tasks require the need of more than one tool, such as building a house, where numerous different tools are used in order to construct a whole.

The entire process aims to the point, that we attempt to make sense out of what we have been researched. Clearly, one may argue that this is far from objectivity, as we partly reflect a subjective picture of our experiences. However, due to the ontological and epistemological assumptions, there may be no better research outcome than an interpreted one. The following graphic is an attempt to provide an overview:

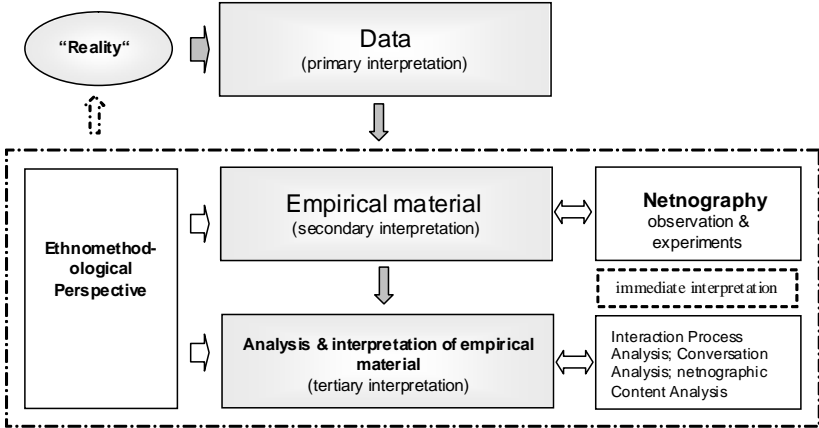


Figure 1: The research process



## 3.2.2 Our roles as micro-netnographers

We chose the role of the complete observer (Bryman and Bell, 2003), meaning that we were not explicit about us being researchers. This is also hard to manage, as the Internet does normally not entail that visitors of a site can be seen by those in the research setting. In other words, one is never sure of if someone else is watching one's actions on the Internet. We suggest, that browsing the Internet is naturally complete observation, as long as no self-revealing action is taken. Hence, this study is a covert study, allowing us to unnoticeably take field notes, observing and discussing threats together at our screens, while ensuring natural and authentic behavior of members, as no effects of socio-normative desirability and reactive effects (Trommsdorff, 2003) are likely to occur.

As both researchers are not members of any brand community or online community, we have no experiences and thus little familiarity with the construct of online brand community in general and the Nikonian community in particular. Consequently, we had to assimilate into the setting. "Cultural blindness" (Berg, 1998) corresponds with the degree of familiarity to a culture, and we suspect low blindness due to our lack of familiarity. Assimilating however entails the shrinking of distance towards closeness, which can result in the phenomenon of "going native", meaning the risk of losing sight and identifying with the social actors (Bryman and Bell, 2003), which could hinder sound research. Although we tried to develop a high degree of self-awareness and live our roles as researchers, we experienced the phenomenon of "going native" towards the end of the data collection. Seeing the world with the eyes of community members and inevitably learning more about them fostered a feeling in us, as if we would actually know them.

Nevertheless, we have been very much aware of our upraising personal involvement and tried to distinguish between our private life and our life as researchers. Further, these feelings may indicate that a successful assimilation into the setting is possible through passive observation, without actively taking part in the social life – which is normally required by (n)ethnography (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

## 3.2.3. The data collection

### 3.2.3.1. Observation – data finding

The Nikonian brand community provided us with plenty of text. The text was there for us to study at any time and furthermore, there was possibly few for us to miss in a text-based world of interaction, as all speech, behaviour, community rules, and community history is available in it (Thomsen et al., 1998). We observed messages and conversations in threads, were "listening in" on ongoing dialogues as we "lurked" (Kozinets, 1998) around the page and downloaded particular conversations, which subjectively appeared to be of relevance for us. Hence, we had the possibility to consult data at any time (Coulon, 1995). These interactions can be conceptualised as "talk" among members, and can be analysed as such (Thomsen et al., 1998). One major advantage of netnography is that the talk is already transcribed (Kozinets, 2002).

Despite the epistemological assumption derived from ethnomethodology, the use of language as a data source holds critical assumptions: language is a neutral medium for transmitting information and, furthermore, the meanings are the same for all recipients (Stern, 1993).

Poststructuralism questions the use of language as a medium that truthfully represents the social world, so that authentic understanding can only be achieved with a degree of caution, instead of blind acceptance (Cameron and Gibson, 2005). To put this into perspective, we suggest that the assumption of language holding hidden or obvious information reflecting and building reality, there is a wide scope of interpretation to it. Hence, we tried to develop a high degree of caution and sensitivity in interpretation, always guided by the ethnomethodological perspective. We believe, that this reflects thorough treatment of data (Mehan, 1978).

### 3.2.3.2. Experiment – data construction

As stated earlier, the need for relevant data led us to the decision of conducting experiments. Here, the notion of experiments is not to be seen as traditional (Bryman and Bell, 2003), but more as a deliberately taken action by us, with the purpose of stimulating a certain and possibly yet unknown reaction, which may potentially help us in solving the puzzle.

Through our observations, we developed a certain “feeling” of the community and gained a certain degree of knowledge concerning the use of language, emoticons and codes. We do not claim universal knowledge, instead more a limited but sound intuition. We also had, due to our observations, a broad picture of the missing piece in our puzzle, so that these experiments were conducted in a specific manner, in order to deliver potentially interesting results.

Both researchers created accounts on the site and were then, technically seen, part of the community. The sound understanding of how members behave and express themselves, helped us pretending to act a little like actual members. However, the crux is that all postings of a member are counted and this number appears under the username in each message. Hence, also due to our limited time, we were not able to pretend being long-term members. Instead, we used our knowledge in order to act controversial in terms of the message contents, especially for new members, but consistent with long-term members regarding the use of language.

One researcher used the pseudonym and username “Sunshine”, the other researcher acted under the pseudonym “Greg” with the username “TNT”, whereat we used our true and valid e-mail addresses to create the accounts

### 3.2.4 Ethical concerns

It is crucial for us as researchers to be aware of the ethical principles involved and the nature of the concerns about ethics in research (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Ethical concerns must be addressed by specifying how informed consent was obtained, how the dignity and interests of community members were respected, and by ensuring anonymity and confidentiality where required (Kozinets, 1998). As Netnographers it would be wise to consider the chief ethical concerns apparent in netnography: privacy, confidentiality, appropriation of others' personal stories, and informed consent (Kozinets, 2002; Bryman and Bell, 2005). We propose that our ethical concerns have to be put into two categories when it comes to our research. Firstly our *observations* about what is happening on the site and secondly the *experiments* that we conducted in order to retrieve more data/information.

We define our observations as a low-risk situation (Hudson and Bruckman 2004), as we have looked at members' actions from an overall perspective and because we have not deliberately used any (sensitive) information. In our experiment however, we did derive information from

members, but none of it can be described as of having any personal or sensitive character. This is especially important as we are downloading and using of allegedly "public" postings. We were aware of the possible negative attitudes towards gaining permission to anonymously quote members' posts (Kozinets, 1998; Kozinets, 2002; Hudson and Bruckman, 2004). This information is of value to us as it indicates that we may not have been able to do this research if we did reveal that we were doing. Even though it was unethical of us to behave in this manner it did give us the valuable results.

As researchers we should firstly *fully reveal our presence, affiliations, and intentions to online community members during any research* Kozinets (2002). This is where we break ethic procedures, as we did not reveal to anyone that we were researchers – known as informed consent (Bryman and Bell, 2003). This procedure requires the researcher to contact community members and obtain their permission to use any specific postings that are to be directly quoted in the research. Permission must also be obtained for using idiosyncratic stories (Kozinets, 2002). Before using any online artifacts, such as newsletters, poetry, stories, or photographs, permission from the copyright holder must be granted. Both, the covert online observation and especially the conducting of experiments with fake-accounts are highly critical practices when it comes to ethics of research, and may be perceived as cases of ethical violation (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

As Netnographers we were professional "lurkers" (Kozinets, 2002) in other words, members are not aware that their text is being investigated by us. Thus, participants can neither chose nor refuse to take part in this study; we inherently force them. From a mere practical viewpoint however, when it comes to observations it is almost impossible to contact every participant of a conversation in advance – before reading it – in order to reveal our identity and get permission to read it. The fact, that members do not attach e-mail addresses to their username also hinders contacting them. Therefore, we suggest this to be a case of "no choice" (Bryman and Bell, 2003). It could be argued however that it may have been more ethical of us to ask the owners of Nikonians for informed consent, in this way the members would not know but at least someone in the community would be aware of our research.

Secondly *researchers should ensure confidentiality and anonymity to informants*. When using the posts by Nikonians we have changed the names and secluded private information (living area, town etc.) however, it is possible for any third party to go on to the site and find the thread as we have used their direct quotes.

*Seeking and incorporating feedback from members* of the online community being researched is impossible for us to do as we have not revealed ourselves as researchers, on the other hand it would be problematic for us to do this as we are concentrating on members activities and not who is saying what.

Lastly, *researchers should take a cautious position on the private-versus-public medium issue*. As complete observers, we take the standpoint of Internet forums being public space, as it is not required to enter any password to visit them. Further, statements made by members have the purpose to be read by others and we hence assume that members are aware that any third party can inspect their postings. Furthermore, as all threads are archived and saved on the site, they are durable, which increases the probability of someone else reading it. In addition to this, there is the possibility of a printer friendly view, which to members should be a clear indication that their data can be read and even printed out by others.

When it comes to invasion of privacy of the members, as we consider the Internet a public space we do not feel that we are invading it. However we had to become subscribed members to interact with the other members to conduct our experiments. In these threads the members did reveal personal information but it is hard to say whether our thread was any different from the others. Members show that they like to share personal information on the site, posting family photos and personal information, indicating to us that this is not a sensitive matter.

Speaking particularly of the electronic eavesdropping of observational ethnography, Rafaeli (Kozinets, 2002) summarizes the consensus of a certain group of scholars who debated the private versus public issue by stating that informed consent was implicit in the act of posting a message to a public area - this was violated by us when we conducted our experiments. King (Kozinets, 2002), however, bases his analysis on the notion that online forums dissolve traditional distinctions between public and private places, making conventional guidelines of anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent unclear.

When considering if there was any deception involved, our feelings of guilt that we had after the experiment reveals that it was perhaps not a nice and desirable thing to do to pretend we were members and make up information to get a reaction to cause interaction. It is a question of honesty and we were simply dishonest. However, we argue that if we had revealed that we were researchers to the members then their behaviours and action would not be natural/normal. In addition to this we were also unfriendly and quite offensive on the thread in one experiment but only to each other, this is unethical due to the fact that we attempted to “stir up trouble” in a seemingly friendly and peaceful online brand community.

Within Netnography most reported cases of significant harm have involved conversations about sensitive topics (Hudson and Bruckman 2004) and the potential for netnography to do harm is a real risk (Kozinets, 2002). We have considered this especially for certain parts of our data as some of this information could be of a sensitive character to certain members (Hudson and Bruckman, 2004). Publishing sensitive information might lead to embarrassment if an associated person's identity was discerned and may be of importance when our experiments are concerned; however we have not published any personal information or anything that could lead to a member's exclusion from the community. The closest we have come to this is interpreting a few negative quotes that members have written, which is available to the rest of the community. This then banishes the contention that there is a potential for psychological harm to the members of these online community groups (Kozinets, 2002).

It can be argued however that there is an ethical difference between the actions that we have studied. In certain threads members have spent a lot of time and effort to help or communicate with other members. However, most importantly after discussing all of our ethical considerations and what we could have done differently, we want to again put the possible violation of ethical norms into perspective. We were interested in the *actions, interactions and procedures* of members as being part of a whole community. In addition to this both researchers are planning to become Nikonians and will then be able to give back to the community in the form of efforts and commitment. We did not (knowingly) break any community rules whilst we were members and provided a happy ending for our fake stories in our experiments so that it would not “harm” any members<sup>1</sup>. Our main argument here

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<sup>1</sup> The original material of both experiments can be found in the appendix

however, is that the Internet is considered a public space and that no members have been caused any harm.

### 3.2.5 The sense making process and categorization

In the following, we attempt to provide an understanding of how the applied methods of interaction process analysis, conversation analysis, and netnographic content analysis come together in this study, and how we handled the actual sense making process.

As mentioned earlier, we took immediate field notes while observing conversations. We paid attention to details of messages more in terms of the use of language, use of emoticons and their structure, than in terms of use of punctuation and other more narrow details. We attempted to be as consistent as possible in evaluating and interpreting the data. Here, we mostly observed on two screens sitting next to each other, while interpreting independently first. Subsequently, we discussed and presented our findings and interpretations to one another before we derived a conclusion. The primary interpretation of one researcher was checked with the interpretation of the other researcher. Further, interpretations were checked and rechecked by finding other examples of similar conversations and possible divergence. Our experience through passively observing the page first was crucial. We structured our findings with their corresponding interpretations and consulted this material several times by comparing and checking conversations of relevance with one another. This quasi-hermeneutic sense making process and synthesis (McAlexander et al., 2002) took us long time. After this procedure, we experienced that conversations and their containing statements or messages are highly interrelated, and that messages which were firstly interpreted in one way, could be interpreted in another way as well.

This “thickness” (Geertz, 1983) of the material provided us together with the interrelation to other messages problems in categorizing our findings. We wished to reduce the complexity of the material. However, we feared a generalization of our findings and loss of information due to abstraction. We admit that we faced the major obstacle in conducting this study in or attempt of categorization and displaying the findings in an attractive manner.

We considered previous literature in fields of relevance, in order to find inspiration. However, as the ethnomethodological perspective of this study profoundly differs from most research, no fruitful inspiration was found immediately. After we gained distance to the findings and our corresponding interpretations, we inspected the material once more and we found that the greatest source of inspiration was the ethnomethodological perspective per se. Based on this “going back to the roots”, we found stimulation in sociological research of employee behaviour in organizations. Thus, we believe that we categorized the findings in an attractive manner, meaning that it is able to distinguish between categories, without giving up their interrelation and dynamics, and it furthermore recognizes previous research in the field. However, this also entails possibly a major weakness, as the findings may not easily be transferred to other fields. Nevertheless, we hope that this categorization may possibly hold potential for further studies in this field.

### 3.2.6 Criticism

Although we conduct this study as a duo, further fruitful interaction with more experienced researchers, other than our two supervisors, is missing and may lead to less reflexivity (Goulding, 2005) through group think (Janis, 1972). Furthermore, the combination of multiple

methods, partly being adapted to conducting online studies may possibly confuse the reader and ourselves. The interpretative task is difficult (Goulding, 2005) and new field for both of us, as we are not trained in interpretative research. Further, the fact that both researchers are no English native speakers could entail biases in interpreting English text due to language issues (Winchatz, 2006). In the same vain, semantic matters have to be considered in writing up this study, indicating a possible divergence between the meaning our sentences provide for a native speaker and our intended meaning. Further, both researchers spoke English to one another, which could possibly have distorted meanings during our interaction.

The short period of data collection and the fact that we did not collect data until we reached a true full-scale saturation effect could mean that potentially promising and relevant facts remained unnoticed and did not find their way in our material.

The way of data construction in our experiments can easily be perceived as ethically doubtful or even as a violation of ethical norms in research. As a consequence, this could negatively taint this study and possibly lead to a negative image of the class of netnographic studies in general and the proposed constitutive netnographic approach in particular.

Additionally, this study does not fulfil all four requirements of netnography in not considering feedback or checking for congruence of our interpretation with those in the research setting. However, we believe that for studying actions, the re-checking with participants is especially difficult and not principally fruitful.

### 3.2.7 Gender aspects

Being one female and one male researcher studying behavioural actions of both sexes, we tried to be sensitive in terms of gender aspects. On the one hand, one researcher might have had privileged insider status to the corresponding sex, due to a better understanding and reflection of actors with the same sex, which could allow a more authentic netnography (Bryman and Bell, 2003). On the other hand, this researcher could have experienced the exact opposite with researching actions of the opposite sex. In conclusion, we suggest, that the authenticity of this study is whether enhanced or weakened, as we understand gender as dynamic characteristics (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

As a mixed duo, we believe that we had a good chance to deaden “gender-blindness”. Although this study is not explicitly about gendered behaviour, gender is inevitably bound to actions, where it may be challenged, reproduced or stereotyped (Stern, 1993). We tried to be aware of this and attempted to write a gender-neutral study by avoiding reproduction or stereotyping of gender.

Nevertheless, we present a discussion of participants in chapter six dealing with gender. However, this conversation was chosen for displaying interaction rather than for gender reasons. Since we present extracts of the authentic material, authentic behaviour is bound to it. Here, it could be possible that participants challenge or reproduce gender aspects.

## 3.3. Reliability and validity

### 3.3.1. Reliability

Reliability is concerned with the question of transparency in sense-making from raw data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Here, netnography has the advantage that the reader is stepwise introduced into the findings by rather developing interpretations and conclusions based on observation abridgements of the actual conversation than just presenting results. We tried to display the process of analysing and interpreting the data. The revealing of how we derive a certain interpretation and the presenting of the research process as a whole is referred to as *external reliability* (Bryman and Bell, 2003), as it eases the reproduction.

Since both researchers were involved in the observation process, there is concern about inter-observer consistency, which may affect *internal reliability* (Bryman and Bell, 2003). We attempted to be as consistent as possible in evaluating and interpreting the data. Despite our efforts in the sense making process, we assume that we cannot speak of total consistency, which negatively affects internal reliability. We also attempt to be trustworthy in our interpretations. Here, we display actual statements and messages to show where the information comes from. Further, we add the entire threads of our experiments in the appendix. Overall, we suggest a quite fair reliability, which is a prerequisite for validity of this study (Trommsdorff, 2003).

### 3.3.2 Validity

Generally, validity is concerned with whether or not a study gains access to relevant data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

Our short-term observation of social life allows a certain authenticity of findings (Bryman and Bell, 2003), indicated by our feelings of “going native”, we believe that we gained to some extent access to relevant data. However, as touched upon above, the short period of data collection and the lack of a true full-scale saturation effect may entail that potentially relevant data is possibly missing. We did however experience a small-scale saturation effect during our observation. Nevertheless, the problematic of non-native languages has to be taken into account here. We suggest somewhat fair *internal validity*, considering the short time horizon of the overall research process.

The choice of one case implies that this study produces rather local knowledge (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002) and contextual understanding (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Qualitative research is not claiming representativeness, however, the relevance of findings to other settings is questionable and we suggest poor *external validity*.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## The Nikonian community

### 4.1 Introducing the Nikonian Community

The Nikonian community – [www.nikonians.org](http://www.nikonians.org) – started where it is today, namely online. The two founders met in a photography forum in 1999 and swiftly a strong friendship developed. The friendship grew from mutual respect, shared values and a common interest - Photography with a Nikon®. They both reacted to the fact that many discussion forums online were quite rude, with an impolite tone in the messages exchanged, and false. There were several issues that they thought were of a negative nature, and therefore they decided to create their own community.

Nikonians™ is the community for all passionate Nikon™ users, a worldwide home for Nikon photographers. The sites are for all who either suspect or know that a Nikon makes a difference. Both founders are Nikonians, that is, they believe in Nikon technology and employ Nikon imaging equipment extensively. These sites are not related or affiliated in any way to Nikon Corporation.

Nikonian members are professional or amateur photographers who want to share ideas, images and opinions, have fast access to the latest Nikon product information and industry news, share real hands-on experiences and facts and know what they want – Nikon. Nikonians.com is an open, easily accessible and honest community for Nikon users on the web. All members are encouraged to openly and respectfully communicate on this platform. New members on trial memberships are encouraged to become contributing members. The Nikonian community spans more than 140 countries, rich in photography knowledge and more than willing to share it. They pride themselves as a friendly community for photographers of all skill levels, from beginners to seasoned professionals and over 40,000 photographers visit the site daily, to share, learn and be inspired.

Many areas of interest covering the latest in digital and film photography exist. They have forums and resources to cover a wide range of topics. There are over 60 dedicated forums where users are helping users with tips, tricks and answering questions. Under the topic “resources” members can find a large knowledgebase with a vast amount of information to examine. News and Podcasts provide members with the latest daily news on photography and imaging. "The Image Doctors" - a semi-monthly Podcast - entails pro photographer interviews and a regular talk show. In addition to this are galleries where members can share their images, contests and impressions from events. Members can also visit an online shop, which carries hard to get equipment and Nikonians merchandise and workshops that offer a rich variety of workshops on various themes.

The Nikon Community offers both a free trial membership as well as full memberships, available in three levels: Silver, Gold and Platinum. Members receive several different benefits. They are able to obtain their own personal image gallery with many features. They can participate in the Nikonians Photographers of the Year Contest, and prizes are awarded during the year as well as in the contest finals. They are able to buy and sell their gear in the "I Want to Sell" and "I Want to Buy" forums. Members are also given Access to Nikonians



events, which give members a chance to meet each other face to face. All in all - a vast amount of activities are available for the members to use in form of interactions with other members within the community.

## 4.2 The Nikonian Experience

As researchers we started the experience by lurking around the site. To get a feel of the community we observed in an immense amount of different forums. Here we observed the conversations/threads available, looking for patterns within this particular community. What were the members discussing? How was the tone in the forum and in the particular conversations?

As we manoeuvred ourselves around this rather large and multifaceted site, we found it to be very easy to use. The conversations were labelled and it was easy to find a lot of different topics. The main pattern we found was that people had a friendly tone and we quickly noticed the frequent use of emoticons.

After several days of observations we gathered heaps of information about how this community functioned. Firstly we had to sign in and become “Nikonians”. When signing in we had to provide our email address and chose a nick-name. We then received an email with our nick-name and a password. As we started our experiments we noticed how friendly and helpful the Nikonians were. At a very early stage we actually felt like we were a part of this community, partly because of swift responses from other members. These responses come in at all points of the hour as there are people all over the world using this community. Our general feeling here was that we were excited to get responses we wanted. This is a very positive aspect to the community as it is very active, reactive and interactive – indicating to us that the community is alive and thriving.

The Nikonian café is a forum where anything goes. One can discuss any topic one wishes and it is a more social forum where people are posting questions to get to know each other aside from the Nikon brand. There is a general pattern of where to post certain questions (Amine and Sitz, 2004), this however is not written down in any “rule book” so this has to be observed by each member. This pattern of action and behaviour is all a part of how the community works, where people help each other along and rules are constantly discussed.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Introduction into the findings

### 5.1 Prologue

In this chapter we give an introduction into our findings. In order to answer the question of how a brand community happens, we investigated online behaviour in the Nikonian online brand community. Here, we explored how the social problem of the online brand community – its continuous creation and maintenance – is solved through peoples' actions, reactions and interactions.

Most of the findings are strongly related to the aspects of brand community and online brand community, as already described in previous research of brand community (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al. 2002; Muniz and Schau, 2005). Our findings are also strongly connected to the study of Amine and Sitz (2004), who explored how the Nikonian online brand communities emerged in its founding steps. Further, our material is linked to prior findings of online community (Maloney-Krichmar and Preece, 2005). Previous research describes the phenomenon of (brand) community and shows "what" happens and "how" the phenomenon emerges. Naturally, these findings are related to this study, which explores "how" an online brand community is continuously achieved.

However, in advancing and applying a consequent and wholesome ethnomethodological perspective, we had the possibility of researching online brand community unlike previous research, which led us to findings that are innovative in terms of a different, ethnomethodological understanding of a long-term existing online brand community – an online brand community as a *social problem*. This study uses the results of the data collection to bring forward this special perspective, which we perceive as a major contribution of this thesis. We present and discuss the main themes and concentrate on incidents that have not been satisfactorily discussed in literature.

Hence, readers familiar with literature of (online) brand community may identify main concepts and findings of prior studies. It is however important to recognize, that this study is not an attempt of challenging and questioning this valuable previous research. It is an invitation to a wholesome ethnomethodological perspective on an online brand community.

### 5.2 Categorization

We found two main perceivably stable features of the socially organized environment – the Nikonian brand community – continually created and sustained by its members: (1) Practical usefulness, and (2) the social link. These accomplishments are conducive to the overall achievement and happening of the online brand community. Here, we observed actions and interactions of members and identified behavioural patterns which contribute to the continually creation and sustaining of these features and hence the brand community.

One major concern however is the fact that we observed solely the actions, which took place and happened in the brand community. Hence, one may argue that each and every single

action taken by members contributes to the happening of the brand community. Further, under the condition of brand community as something beneficial for a member, then all actions should aim to contribute to the well being of the community.

We attempt to address these issues by adjusting and articulating the focus and by categorizing our findings. We perceive brand community as a broad, yet complex social problem. Hence, a more wide and contextual ethnomethodological perspective is applied. By that we mean underlying patterns and methods of interest here should have noteworthy relevance for solving and achieving the online brand community. Here, our subjective interpretation of ethnomethods to be more noteworthy than others is crucial. Our categorization distinguishes between different types of aggregate behaviour.

We suggest the three basic types of behaviour (1) *Lurking*, (2) *Ordinary Membership*, and (3) *Community Citizenship Behaviour (CCB)*. Each type of behaviour entails actions, which have firstly, different degrees of relevance for solving the social problem; secondly, differ in complexity; thirdly, are whether more unknowingly or knowingly processed; fourthly, reflect different levels of commitment into the community; and lastly, reflect different degrees of consciousness of kind and moral responsibility (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). *Lurking* (Kozinets, 1999) represents the lowest and *CCB* the highest marker of these separation criteria, whereby *Lurking* does not reflect any sense of moral responsibility and consciousness of kind at all.

The three categories of *Lurking*, *Ordinary Membership*, and *CCB* are separated by the characteristics of their corresponding entailed actions. However, there are degrees in between and the intersections are blurry. It is crucial to understand this behaviour in its aggregate forms; it is not to be mistaken as individual behaviour. The strong focus on aggregate behaviour fades out the interest in the behaving person. We argue that solely collective behaviour can be conducive to the constant "happening" of brand community – not the personality of social actors per se. However, the aggregate consists of cumulated individual behaviour, which provides a demonstration of the whole and are thus used as examples here.

We suggest that the online brand community basically happens by means of these three types of behaviour. As mentioned above, we are however mainly interested in behaviour of noteworthy relevance for achieving the brand community. Since *Lurking* represents behaviour that is from an overall perspective more or less only a weak contribution to the happening of the brand community, it is not a focal point here. Instead, we centre our attention on ordinary membership and *CCB*, both of which we understand as the main categories that the ethnomethodological perspective delivered.

The general logic of presenting our findings follows the suggested relevance of entailed actions of the three types of behaviour, beginning with *Lurking* and ending with *CCB*.

The next two chapters deal with the focal points and main categories – first ordinary membership, and second *CCB* – explaining the concepts in detail first, and subsequently display and discuss the results of the data collection.

Nevertheless, we want to introduce the category of *Lurking* in the following first, as it possibly helps us to bring out the distinction between all three categories more clearly. However, we cannot provide observational material, since *Lurking* per se is not observable.

Nonetheless, we present how it is indicated and discuss briefly its relevance for achieving the brand community.

## 5.3 Lurking

As mentioned, due to the suggested relatively low relevance for solving the problem of the online brand community, Lurking is not the centre of our attention. Hence, it will be discussed rather briefly.

### 5.3.1 The notion of Lurking

With Lurking we refer to those actions of individuals, which merely involve observing, surfing and browsing through the community without any form of engagement in the life of the community, such as posting messages (Kozinets, 1999). These actions can be seen as being of low complexity. Further, Lurking does not necessarily involve commitment in the community as it is natural Internet behaviour, and we suspect it is hence more unknowingly processed.

Lurking is not entirely invisible for others. The Nikonian message threads have an automatic counting function distinguishing between the number of posted messages in a thread, and the number of how many times a thread has been viewed. Lurking behaviour may be indicated in case a thread has been viewed more often than it contains messages.

However, we have to take the following into account: First, individuals who have posted a message may check if their message has been implemented correctly and visit the thread again after stating their text. Second, individuals may take advantage of the asynchronical character of the threads in reading a message first; leave the thread to possibly re-visit it in order to post a response or statement. In both cases, the number of views exceeds the number of messages, but the thread has been visited by the very same persons.

Besides these more technical biases, there is however the possibility that other individuals visit a thread, without engaging in it. Here, we assume that visiting a thread implies reading its messages. Then, we classify this behaviour as Lurking. Individuals may browse through the forums, read the available headlines and possibly visit threads that seem to be subjectively interesting.

### 5.3.2 Lurking and achieving brand community

Although Lurking is a rather passive behaviour, it is nevertheless conducive to the happening of the brand community, however, in a relatively weak manner.

Interestingly, the Nikonian brand community provides this possibility of lurking, without a subscription or the necessity of an account. Hence, any individual may lurk around the page and read messages and follow conversations of others.

Lurking individuals, who do not belong to the community, have the possibility of assessing and evaluating the community and may decide if it is worthwhile to actively engage in it, and

possibly become members. The mere fact that lurking is allowed can hence be seen as a rather passive method of member acquisition.

The fact that lurking is indicated through the number of views can provide the feeling that “somebody out there” is interested in the community, which may be perceived as a confirmation of the community per se.

Lurking may also affect the interpretation of a thread as more interesting, when it has been visited a lot and may motivate others also to visit the thread. This then increases the probability of active engagement in a conversation, as reading a message can be perceived as the first step on the way to interaction. On the other hand, lurking may indicate a thread as uninteresting, if it is viewed several times but remains unanswered. Here, lurking may potentially cause negative emotional reactions.

Although Lurking is a rather passive behaviour, it contributes in some way to the happening of the brand community. It has a weak community creating and maintaining effect in possibly solving the communal problem of member acquisition, and fostering the sense of “somebody out there”. Lurking is also conducive to achieving the practical usefulness, as messages containing possible desired information are allowed to read without engaging.

# CHAPTER SIX

## Ordinary Membership

In this section we first explain the concept of ordinary membership in general, followed by the presentation and discussion of our observation findings of this category.

### 6.1 The notion of Ordinary Membership

The ethnomethodological notion of “member” is rather special (Coulon, 1995). With “member”, we do not refer to an individual person having a technical membership of a group, like a subscription. Membership is more than the mere belonging to a group (Coulon, 1995). Membership is a state that has to be achieved. It is to be understood in terms of individual and collective behaviour and is related to the familiarity to the community.

In order to “be” a member, individuals constantly have to display and show their membership through certain actions, behaviour and use of language (Coulon, 1995). Membership has to be negotiated, it has to be recognized and accepted by others (Coulon, 1995). It is thus constantly challenged and reproduced. Becoming a member means affiliating to the community, which does not only request the mastery of a specific language, but furthermore the natural embodiment of the specific basic ethnomethods of the community (Coulon, 1995). Membership then provides an individual unknowingly with sets of actions, processes and procedures, and simply “know-how” (Coulon, 1995) and interaction patterns that are taken for granted (Coulon, 1995, Amine and Sitz, 2004) allowing the management of life in the community due to a certain degree of familiarity. Membership entails relevant behaviour for accomplishing social order. A member shows that he is familiar with the community, which is crucial for “daily life accomplishments as practices which are fundamental to any form of collaboration an interaction” (Garfinkel quoted by Coulon, 1995).

Aspects of textual language use are relevant here – such as structure of threads, the use of codes and esoteric language – as individuals “do” membership through what they post in text on the web page. Membership of brand community entails further the living out of *consciousness of kind*, *sense of moral responsibility* and *shared rituals and traditions* (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). These may be seen as the underlying motives, or reasons, which not only produce action, but also guide action (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001) of membership. Moral responsibility is shown through members’ actions of helping, teaching and integrating fellow members. As for consciousness of kind, the methods of sharing rituals and traditions and the unique way of how storytelling is processed, are unknowingly embodied and central here. We too understand membership as based on an emotional contract (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001).

Where does membership start and where does it end? There is no such distinction, or checklist of membership. It is the cumulative interpretation of aggregate behaviour that decides on membership, however with a certain variance, which may significantly deviate in individual cases of interpretation.

Our observation findings led us to suggest that certain behaviour exceeds this understanding of the notion of membership. In order to recognize this, we use the term Ordinary membership

and propose the concept of Community Citizenship Behaviour (CCB) later on, with the purpose of acknowledging behaviour that shows something of a more advanced membership and is of more relevance to the happening of the brand community.

Hence, this study regards ordinary membership as the basic, yet not trivial actions of individuals necessary to show and display the belonging to the community. Ordinary membership describes the “natural” behaviour of members, which we found to be consistent throughout our data. Ordinary membership entails commitment and engagement in the life of the community with natural community behaviour – behaviour that can be expected from an ordinary member. Here, Lurking can be seen as part of ordinary membership. However, Lurking is then an embodied natural behaviour and a precondition for interaction and engagement.

In conclusion, we suggest that ordinary membership entails actions that are more or less unknowingly embodied, are relatively complex, and relevant for achieving the brand community, as it describes natural actions of ordinary members.

## 6.2 Ordinary Membership at Nikonians

We found efforts and behaviour, which we believe are attached to ordinary membership and are already described by literature (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Amine and Sitz, 2004; Muniz and Schau, 2005). They include: sharing of stories and information; basic helping behaviour in form of integration of novices, and assisting in the use of the brand; the living out of rituals and traditions; and the motivating of one another. There is no doubt, that these forms of behaviour are in the aggregate conducive to the happening of the Nikonian brand community.

First, we present the use of language in the Nikonian community. Here, we attempt to display the function of language for negotiating ordinary membership. Second, we have a look at the use of photographs as communication tool and as ordinary membership behaviour. Third, we show the basic forms of interactions. It is our contention that these basic interactions are attached to ordinary membership, and for those interactions, which have been elaborated on in literature, we present the Nikonian way briefly. Fourth, the role of rules in ordinary membership will be explained. The importance of rules and their community creating effect have been mentioned in prior research (Amine and Sitz, 2004). Hence, this section aims at providing an understanding of the role of rules in continuously living every day life in the community. Last, we present how members stand up for the three main entities of their community – fellow Nikonians, the two founders/owners, and the brand.

### 6.2.1 The use of language in the Nikonian community

Members communicate through the use of textual language and hence, language is a tool that allows the community to “happen”. Members must use language to interact and create a living community – without the thousands of posts written by members, the community would be non-existent. Thus, language is the central mean to interact and it is something that all members have to use in order to achieve ordinary membership. It is a method that enables the actions of members to happen through the employment of text.

Language accomplishes different things within the community: it is firstly, as mentioned above, a communication and interaction tool. Secondly, it is used to negotiate and express ordinary membership. The distinct way of how language is employed, allows acceptance or rejection of ordinary membership. Hence, a specific manner of using language has to be embodied and continuously exercised, in order to constantly display ordinary membership. When it comes to language use, it is easy to think of common sense. But it is exactly this shared and common sense for the use of language in this particular brand community, which is embodied in ordinary membership.

Besides the content, there is a detectable pattern of how text is structured in members' posts. Commonly, a thread firstly starts with an informal greeting and general information about the member and personal background. If the message is a follow-up or reply to another member, this member is greeted with, if available, his first name instead of his nickname. Secondly, content is provided in form of answering or raising a question, or discussing whichever issue. Personal opinions are explicated. Last, an ending commonly entails one poetic or humoristic sentence related to Nikon or photography. Additionally, members oftentimes list their Nikon gear in brackets at the very end.

Generally, our data shows that language used in this community is informal, personal, and very warm in tone. This is due to not using abusive or rude language. Further, a certain "chatter-language" – short forms of words – does occur only to a limited extend. "BTW" and "LOL" are quite commonly used and stand for "by the way" and "laughing out loud". However, we experienced, that the threads actually sound like conversations.

Throughout our data, the use of emoticons in posted comments is vast. Emoticons can set the tone of a message and indicate the mood of members. How the emoticons are used however is different according to the language and conversation in a particular thread. A good example being, that it is evident that members use a smiley to conceal a possible sour tone. This is easily understood as most of the more offensive and negative messages end in a smiley. Our belief is that this is done to keep the tone of the conversations friendly and could also be a member's way to cover up the negative. Emoticons serve here as a substitute for facial expressions and indicate the mood of the writer. They are to ensure that a comment is not mistaken as an assault, in case the writer meant it with "a blinking eye".

Irony is welcome in this community. Irony surrounding the NAS – Nikon Acquisition Syndrome – is repeatedly followed up by members. An illustration of the ironic undertone towards NAS is the advertisement for the Image doctors' semi-monthly Podcast:

*"Doc, how can i cure my NAS?" – "Take two images and call us in the morning"*

This general ironic stance is also found in the use of particular words. As an example of this we take the Nikonian Trevor, who is ironically asking others for help concerning his NAS.

Trevor: *"give me five good reasons why i should \*NOT\* buy the nikkor 85 f/1.4 i've been lusting after?!?!? seriously, camera gear is worse than crack!"*

He refers to camera gear being "worse than crack" a funny way of explaining to what extent the gear acquisition has taken over his life. We also see parallels to the religious language described by Muniz and Schau (2005), however profoundly different. The common drug theme and metaphor of being a junkie is expressed here through "lusting after", "crack" and the answers Trevor received:



Brian: “ [...] if you buy it, you will no longer lust after it, and that will set you free.”

Willy: “Only if it causes you to neglect a need or prior commitment. (Eating for instance). If not for that, there's probably no good reason \*NOT\* to buy it at all.”

In another thread we found:

Jake: “ [...] I also have a sign that reads ( NAS ) I DO NOT NEED ANYTHING! next to my computer at work and at home 😊 .”

The metaphor and the funny and humoristic way members deal with this irony is distinctive and they continuously invent new expressions on the basis of the drug theme. Bringing up this topic frequently is in our opinion without any serious intentions. However, it shows the negotiation and expression of ordinary membership. Being new to this community, one has to know what NAS means, as it is mostly not explicated and thus an in-group code that has to be learned and understood. Once understood, the understanding is constantly demonstrated, without saying the actual words, but by inventing new parallels and using drug-jargon.

An individual having NAS, gives the community one possible typical member trait. The opposite trait is an individual who neglects NAS, which also can be found easily. Here, we suggest the formation of groups within the community (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001), continuously expressed through language.

Additionally, Nikonians have their own photography jargon, which consists of professional banter with the usage of codes:

Harry: “The "earlier" versions of the TC-14E will work with your 70-200 AFS. As 4 of my 5 Nikkors are AFS(3 of which I put the converter on), I can assure you that they do work without any delays to the AFS”.

This language use however is predominantly found on the Nikon product forums or the general forums. The tone for these forums is more professional and therewith come these codes and photography language. Newbies or amateurs may not understand these photography codes. The code practice may also indicate the members’ knowledge of photography, which, possibly unintentional, leaves amateurs or newbies out.

Cashman (2005) describes a division between the “we code” or the in-group, and the “they code” or out-group. Language usage by members is a membership categorization device; it is a resource used by speakers to ascribe and accept or reject membership in groups, the negotiation of which constitutes practical social action (Cashman, 2005). Just as language preference serves as a device with which speakers may categorize themselves it also serves as a device with which speakers may categorize others, ascribing membership (Cashman, 2005). An example of this being the language used by certain members when discussing an image, the language used will differ in difficulty, depending on whom the member is messaging with.

The use of language creates a social structure within the community. Further, conversational structure, here language preference, constitutes and accepts social structure, which is here membership (Cashman, 2005).

Speakers may use language varieties that do not naturally belong to them to claim membership or rejecting affiliation with other members (Cashman, 2005). Nikonians are using language, codes and photography jargon as an indication for membership and the

belonging to a particular group of membership. We suggest that forming groups within the community (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) is a way of creating and shaping the community. These actions are part of the ordinary membership as it is evident throughout our data. Hence, language is capable of firstly, negotiating membership and secondly negotiating a particular kind of membership, as affiliated to a special group within the community.

## 6.2.2 The use of photographs

Nikonians use photographs as a communication tool, mostly in connection to text. Images are posted by members in different forums for different reasons. Since Nikonians is a site dedicated to photography there are several activities that the members can take part in. Images posted then become available to all members who motivate and tip each other on the image.

The pattern of conversation revolves around the use of techniques that have been or could be used. The photographs act as a medium for members to learn more about photography as well as an invitation for socialising and interacting. It is about vision, images, photography and identity. Photographs concretize lived experience (Schroeder, 2002) because it allows Nikonians to create a picture of who they are and what they are capable of producing (in photography). Photographs can help to confirm their lives and personality (Schroeder, 2002) building up a consciousness of kind (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) within the community. A good example is that members post pictures of their family and others reciprocate this action, as a way for people to get to know each other and socialise. We see this as a part of ordinary membership as these actions and behaviours are perceived as "natural". However, later we shall see the problems involved with posting images.

Actions surrounding the topic of photographs allow the achievement of the community through what we see as rituals (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) as members share pictures and comment on and discuss them as a natural part of the happening community.

The photographs also provide the informational aspect (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) of this site as members are able to learn from these images both about the Nikon brand and photography techniques. Images are used in informational forums as well as in competitions, teaching members how to take better photographs (part of the technical aspect of the community).

The more basic replies and motivational aspects (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001, McAlexander, 2002) that happen when a photograph is posted is also a part of ordinary membership behaviour as it has been observed as a pattern throughout the site. Even though these basic replies seem like a simple way to make the community happen each activity builds up a network of activities resulting in an interactive and living community. However, it must be noted that at times the responses are long and informational, which then could part of Community Citizenship Behaviour.

Throughout the site the photographs form the Nikon brand experience as they are a major part of the actions that are occurring online. They aid the members in attaining a feel of the Nikon brand and how it can be used. Being able to teach the members about the brand and photography enhances the members' experience of both the brand and the community. Again being a normal membership action due to the fact that it is a natural part of the community as (all) members are a part of it.

## 6.2.3 Interaction

In order to keep the community alive, members have to interact regularly (Jones, 1995; Amine and Sitz, 2004). Here, we explored what kinds of interactions are processed. We suggest the kinds of basic interactions being (1) helping behaviour and sharing of information, (2) motivating each other, and (3) socialising and emotional support. These are the basic forms of interactions we found in our data, and we suggest that they to belong to ordinary membership. Without interaction, members could not negotiate ordinary membership. These basic forms of interaction can be expected from an ordinary member and are “natural” and more unknowingly embodied.

### 6.2.3.1 Helping

Helping behaviour and sharing of information mostly concerns “*specific information on a technique or location*” and “*difficult questions*”. Furthermore, Nikonians state that this community is “*a great place to learn*”, which indicates that helping each other is processed continuously, as learning is the result of cumulated help and is a central means to fulfill the communal goal (Maloney-Krichmar and Preece, 2005) of developing photographic skills. They represent actions known as “*assisting in the use of the brand*” (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). These mutual actions and interactions are strongly related to information sharing. Helping and information sharing are oftentimes perceived as the main benefits of this community and result in personal reward – improving knowledge and skills. Further, established members help individuals who are new to this community in integrating and educating them.

Interestingly, this basic helping behaviour serves in its aggregation as a method to retain members, who are potentially leaving this community. In order to demonstrate this, we take advantage of one of our experiments, which demonstrates firstly the helping behaviour and secondly, its function for member retention. In the following example, the researchers act as the fictive character Greg. We attempted to construct a delicate situation of a new Nikon-owner, who is unsatisfied and not really committed. Greg is technically seen a member of this community, however he explains his intention of switching to the competitor, which should make him an alert potential exit case.

Greg:           “ **Please help**  
*Hello everybody I am a new german Nikonian, since my Dad just gave me his old, but still very fresh Nikon. I don\*t really know what type it is, but it's black so far 😊. Here is the thing: My girlfriend and I went on this holiday trip to the sea. We really burned some film and when we got back, we compared our pictures. MY EGO WAS SHATTERED!! Her pictures turned out much better - clearer more colourful and so on. and she has a CANON! its an EOS. But i have the better glass, so now I am actually really disappointed and i am really thinking about trading my Nikon against such a canon. I mean, man we really used the same film, motives and methods. unbelievable. I am not really attached to the Nikon, so what do you guys think I should do now? Greg”*

The intention for this was that Nikonians should come to realize that Greg could be worth saving, as he is already an expressing himself as an actual Nikonian. The intention was to stimulate efforts for saving Greg. Using typical community language and behaviour, such as a short introduction and some personal background – here about the father – was to foster members’ efforts as the thread was intended to be taken seriously. We attempted to build up a contradiction by acting conventional with language and codes on the surface, and on the other hand gradually dissent and differ from typical member behaviour in terms the content of the statement.

Considering our experience, not knowing the exact camera type and name of the Nikon, but very well doing so for the Canon is a bit of a sin. Furthermore, Greg claims that he is not really attached to the Nikon and possibly wants to trade it against the rival product, which can be seen as something members should not even think of. From our experience, this statement was likely to stimulate reaction, as it deals with the competitor and we invited others to follow up by ending with an open question. Members often discuss and believe in the high quality of older Nikon equipment, stating that it is very well possible to take “*great images with the first Nikon ever made*”. Hence, the reason for not liking Nikon is likely not to be found in the simple fact that it is older than the Canon. Again, the intention here was to reveal the methods used for member retention. In the following, we display Greg’s message and some selected replies:

Florian: *“Hi Greg, welcome to Nikonians. It's really very difficult to say what might have gone wrong without some more details. I'm assuming you had prints made, and it's quite likely the variation between print runs could account for the difference. Or there may be something faulty with your camera. Why don't you try out her Canon and see if you're getting consistent results? Also, check against the results your dad was getting. Or maybe she's just a better photographer 😊 and here at Nikonians we can help you get better as well.”*

Yoko: *“Shoot slides and see if you still get the same thing. A pack of Kodak Elite Chrome should do the trick.”*

Carl: *“Hello Greg, maybe the nikon was not set properly, like Florian said without more info we do not know. What speed film, was it dated or outdated. So much could be wrong.”*

Ron: *“Hi Greg. I am fairly new to photography [...] Anyway, you said that there were differences in the pictures between the two of you. What were they? Were your soft and hers sharper? Was the color sharper, brighter? Did your pictures look darker or lighter than hers? [...] The more we know about the type of criteria you are using to say your pictures were worse than hers, the better we can identify and help you prove or disprove your little contest.”*

Greg has initiated a friendly, helpful and vital discussion and the first comment was received less than ten minutes after posting it, whereat all the above presented answers took place within five hours – reflecting the vitality of interaction.

First, members involve Greg into the discussion about the problem. The follow-ups of Nikonians in helping Greg are generally characterized by providing information and also requesting more information from Greg. These reflect actions of helping behaviour. He is asked for more information several times, whilst members give the impression that the problem can be solved. They are apparently willing to take actions, such as explaining and error finding but their hands are tied without further specific information. Although the problem can obviously not be solved here, a number of members join the conversation actively providing their suggestions, which mirrors the communal altruism.

The request for more information and the amount of independent and different suggestions reflects the community’s knowledge power in terms of photography and thus its ability of problem solving, as stated by Florian, the community “*can help you get better as well*”. Hence, we interpret these actions – requesting information, providing suggestions and educating about the community – as an unconscious method to show the power and usefulness of the community. This is to convince Greg by presenting the strengths and the benefits of Nikonians.org. The action of Ron is known from commercials, where a person originally using a competitor’s brand has been convinced and is now committed. In welcoming Greg and offering help with his Nikon, they simply overrun his wish to switch to a competitor.

Members do not perceive Greg as a hopeless case, although he does not seem attached to the Nikon brand and has had a disappointing experience. They join the discussion and offer their help. In the aggregate, these actions paint a fairly representative picture of their community in Greg's mind, and let him hence experience the sense of their community in terms of willingness to help, which should convince him to stay – naturally, switching to Canon would mean to leave this community.

### 6.2.3.2 Motivation

Comments like “*great picture, looking forward to your next one!*” and “*thank you for your contribution, keep posting*” “*That's a very cool shot! I really like the reflections of the clouds in the water....excellent. 😊*” are examples of the continuous motivation of one another.

### 6.2.3.3 Socializing and emotional support

Interaction of ordinary membership furthermore includes socialising. Here, ordinary members eagerly exchange (personal) information and stories of a more shallow kind. These actions are also in some way related to information sharing, however we interpret them to have a more socialising effect, than delivering Nikon-relevant information. One of our experiments is a good example of as our main purpose here was to get an answer from anyone in the community. The researchers act under the pseudonym and username “sunshine” and posted a nonsense statement in the Nikonian Café forum. Our intention was to test how uninteresting and how far from Nikon comments are allowed. Diet coke as the topic was chosen by accident and seemed to be appropriate. It proved to be successful as we received 31 responses that included information about Diet Coke, Pepsi, personal stories and discussion amongst other members. Although it was us who started the thread, it shows how members take the opportunity to discuss also topics not related to Nikon. Simply put, they simply converse and interact, as demonstrated in the selections below:

- Sunshine:        *“sweets for my sweet  
Hello fellow Nikonians! 😊 I am a frequent Diet Coke drinker and have been wondering about why Coke changed the artificial sweetener in it!? It tastes totally different and makes the whole experience different! Any of you feel the same? "A day without diet Coke is like a day without a Nikon" FM3a (silver), EM, D50.”*
- Sid:                *“I drink decaffeinated Diet Coke, and haven't really noticed. It's probably due to health and/or cost issues [...] When I was in Cozumel, they sold a Light Coke that tasted like real non-diet Coke. It was excellent. When I queried Coke, they said it wouldn't sell in the USA, because we wouldn't accept it [...].”*
- Ian:                *“I like my Coca Cola classic. It tastes just like when I first had it as a kid. My favourite soft drink, Diet Coke has a funny after taste for me. I guess I like the real and original thing. "a day without classic coke is like a day with no pictures with a Nikon" In other words, why settle for less?”*
- Simon:            *“I can't seriously believe any adults like Coke or Cola or even Pepsi for that matter. I do however enjoy Marmite on toast for breakfast (veggie-mite to some).”*

An intriguing finding here is that we actually received personal information and opinions about the subject. This may be taken for granted, but the responses we got show the almost “natural” answering of questions and “natural” interaction. Under a quite “uninteresting” topic, members still make an attempt to socialize, even though it has little to do with Nikon or photography. Interestingly, these conversations are oftentimes shifted towards Nikon. An

example is a thread dealing with a parcel service and a wrongly delivered package – containing a bag of popcorn. Immediately members discuss, what would happen if a Nikon were sent to the wrong person. We believe, this reflects the status of the brand as a divine entity (Cova, 1997).

Similar to research on other online communities, we observed actions that provide emotional support (Maloney-Krichmar and Preece, 2005; Navarrette, 2006). The following selected statements are response to a message informing about Andy’s upcoming surgery:

Philip: *“You’ll pull through just fine, Andy. Hang in there, and we’ll be thinking of you.”*

Will: *“Hope you’re right as rain quickly Andy. Maybe you’ll have an attractive nurse so can practice your studio work. 😊 I’ll be thinking of you and will pray that everything goes well. Best wishes.”*

Members express their commiseration and sympathize with their fellow Nikonian, guided by moral responsibility. They attempt to reduce his fear and try to raise his emotional confidence through their words and the use of emoticons and humour. Interestingly, many statements contain the word “we”, where speakers articulate wishes and thoughts on behalf of all Nikonians, reflecting consciousness of kind. Statements like these can be found throughout the community and we believe they show rather regular behaviour – similar to sending a postcard to a colleague who is in the hospital. Commonly, these statements consist of few sentences with rather general and almost standardized content.

All forms of interactions are conducive to the happening of the brand community. Whether or not they are perceived as Nikon-relevant, they are what keeps the community alive and offer a possibility to display membership and reflect sense of moral responsibility and consciousness of kind.

In conclusion, these basic forms of behaviour negotiate ordinary membership. They are naturally embodied forms of interactions, something members just do (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001).

#### 6.2.4 Playing by the rules – practicing custody of rules

As members interact, they have to follow certain rules (Amine and Sitz, 2004). Rules are a crucial part of this brand community, and messages that are concerned with rules can be found easily. Frequently, members request and ask for rules, remind on and enforce rules, design and establish rules, and question and challenge rules. Rules are woven into the community network and seemingly embrace every action. Interestingly, there is no rule-bible or any other form of explicated and documented rules, other than terms and conditions of using this site. Rules appear to be more implicit and resonating in actions. They are embodied in ordinary membership. The following meta-comment of Colin demonstrates the importance of rules:

Colin: *“There are over 40,000 members here at Nikonians, from 120 nations and territories. They come from all parts of the world, all walks of life. They come for all different reasons. And all are welcome, so long as they play by the rules.”*

It comes out that “playing by the rules” is a central condition for being welcome in this brand community (Amine and Sitz, 2004). Ordinary membership then requires “playing by the rules”. In other words, rule-breaking behaviour can make the difference of whether or not



membership is accepted by others. Given the facts of implicit rules on the one hand, and the importance to play by the rules in order to express and show membership on the other hand, one should not be too amazed about the high frequency of messages dealing with rules.

An interesting example of how community members deal with rules is provided from a discussion in the “Nikonian Ladies” forum, a relatively new forum. The following interaction is triggered by a question from a female Nikonian posted in the Ladies’ forum:

- Linda: *“I feel a bit dumb asking, but all my searches have only confused me. What is the difference in a rangefinder and an SLR? Can someone explain in simple terms? Thanks!”*
- Arnold: *“If a mere male may intrude into the ladies' domain... An SLR [explains the difference]”*
- Steven: *“There might be a reason this question was posted in the Ladies Forum. How about giving it at least an hour to see if any ladies respond?”*
- Mike: *“Steven, good point. I have often wondered if this forum is "off-limits" to men. Could someone please let us know if it is unacceptable for men to post here or answer questions. If it is off-limits to men, should we then have a "Nikonian Men's" Forum?”*
- Linda: *“No offense to the men at all, but I didn't honestly know where to post this question. I do know that the other ladies here are usually able to answer any question you have, so I put it here. I don't know what the rules are, if any, but I certainly appreciate the explanation so far. Thanks!”*
- Tom: *“Sorry ladies for butting in, but Arnold forgot to mention that some SLRs, [Specifying Arnold’s explanation]”*
- Eva: *“So much for a women's forum, huh?” 😊*
- Tom: *“I apologize for having stuck my nose in, just thought that you should have a proper answer to your question. I shall never do it again because of the above response. Again I'm sorry.”*
- Carmen: *“oh bummer, seeing how much action there is going on on this particular forum, it's great you guys bother to stick you nose in and give an answer. Thanks for that. (And what is it with this girls' lockerroom thing anyway? I thought boys were supposed to be welcome? Or maybe it's just me and my bad upbringing 🙄🙄🙄🙄 ).”*

A vital discussion about rangefinders follows, before Jacqueline is picking up the issue of men posting in the Ladies forum again:

- Jacqueline: *“ BTW, about this gender specific forum, since it doesn't require one to be a female to read but it does to post, it's useful when we women [...].”*

In general, this conversation demonstrates firstly, that members request rules, and secondly, that they are capable of developing their own rules. Understanding rules as something achieved, continuously actualised, and dynamic, rather than externally presented and just followed by social actors, is a central part of ethnomethodological thoughts.

The notion of the Nikonian Ladies forum is seemingly unclear for some Nikonians. Arnold is entering the forum and provides an explanation to a technological question, because he understands the information sharing in this community as superior and superficial to gender. However he shows awareness that his action has striking potential to the ladies. Here, his tone is slightly ironic. This is also evident in Steven’s comment, which reminds Arnold on the notion of the Ladies’ forum. However, Steven also implicitly expresses his own rule that, according to him, men have to wait and see if any females answer the question. Then, men

were allowed to jump in, if no answer is provided within a reasonable amount of time. Again, the use of a friendly emoticon relativises his statement and is to hinder this comment as an offence.

Mike on the other hand explicitly asks for a rule: *“Could someone please let us know if it is unacceptable for men to post here or answer questions”*. This request demonstrates that as a basic assumption a rule definitely exists and that Nikonians are willing to keep the rule, however, playing by the rules is hard without having an explicit rule here. Linda is hitting it: *“I don't know what the rules are”*. Members request that “someone”, whoever that is, should now establish or explain the rule rather than coming to a solution together in a dialogue. Here, the general confusion hinders the establishment of a rule, which could be simply seen as due to the assumption that a rule already exists, or that nobody feels to have the right establishing it. This may be especially the case for men, who possibly do not want to penetrate the Ladies’ forum by bringing forward a rule. On the other hand, Tom’s interference shows that he understands the Nikonian Ladies forum as being for Ladies only. He is aware of breaking this rule by posting here and apologizes *“Sorry ladies for butting in”* and after the subsequent comment from Eva *“I apologize for having stuck my nose in”* and *“again I'm sorry”*. He too understands correct information as superior to gender and his slightly exaggerated humbleness shows that, from his perspective, Eva offended him.

Finally, Carmen and Jacqueline intermedate, whereby in Carmen’s opinion men are nevertheless welcome. Jacqueline explains the notion and reason of the Ladies’ forum and also explicates the rule: *“it doesn't require one to be a female to read but it does to post”*. Here, she establishes the rule for the Ladies’ forum. Carmen and Jaqueline show conscientiousness, which means they do not make a federal case out of small potatoes (Organ, 1988). Some time later, the rule is again explicated.

Timothy: *“This is a forum for all female Nikonians. Ladies only please. For easy-going discussions no matter gender, try The Café.”*

Max: *“I guess if a thread is posted HERE (and not in the Cafe or the numerous other forums) it means that opinions from other WOMEN photographers are sought, even though the questions themselves may be very general and applicable to all. So come on, guys, how about respecting this "space"? 😊”*

Jeremy: *“This forum is for topics and content of the ladies' choice and is their sole and exclusive domain. Now let's act like Gentlemen and leave the ladies to their interests and privacy in this small corner of the Nikonian Universe. 😊”*

Here, members call for sanity and rule custody. These actions aim to function as reminding others to stick to the rule (Amine and Sitz, 2004). Interestingly, the rule is now more closely defined as by Jacqueline in the first place, which highlights the dynamics of rules.

Our findings suggest that members are not only concerned about if a statement has been made in a wrong forum, although this is frequently the case, but there also seem to be implicit rules about behaviour of novices. The following example is an extract of the Diet Coke experiment introduced above. The number of posts is attached to sunshine’s username, and hence she is likely to be perceived as new to this community. Besides the socialising effect, sunshine got the following response:



Timmy: *“Forgive my cynicism, but why would someone make a brand new account on a Nikon discussion site solely for the purpose of starting a thread about the merits of Coke? I'm trying to place that familiar signature about the silver FM3a too ... hrrm ... 😊”*

Besides the fact, that we felt almost “caught in the act”, this message contains an implicit rule. In order to learn about an implicit rule, the best way is to break it (Coulon, 1995), which we did here unknowingly. Timmy’s speculation about sunshine’s true identity – e.g. researcher, professional market researcher for Coca Cola – is not of interest here. Obviously, there is the implicit rule, that novices should not initiate non-photography discussions as their first act in the community. Regardless of the importance of this rule in terms of content, it shows that rules are firstly implicit, and secondly, are not the same for all members, as sunshine’s comment did not strike other participants of this discussion. The fact that the coke discussion continues after this incident disqualifies the argument of other members having simply overlooked that this is sunshine’s first message.

Seemingly, Colin’s message, which we used as the introduction example, is more an ideological statement about rules. Rules are not easily lived-out in the real life of the brand community. Just play by the rules and you are welcome – sounds easy, but it is not. Further, these examples show that members talk about rules, bringing the rules from the background to the foreground, which is crucial for establishing and changing rules.

These conversations about rules emerge, when a member feels or assumes that a rule has been broken. Here, instead of abandoning the rule-breaking member, they offer conversation, which helps both new and established members to learn about the implicit rules and develop their ordinary membership. Interestingly, custody of rules occurs even if the rule is not clear, as members have the basic assumption of an existing rule. The fact that rules are implicit highlights their dynamics, since invisible rules are likely to be broken, consequently come to the foreground and are thus possibly changed more often.

An extreme form of rule custody is editing. Nikonian team members have the option to edit threads whereby a note informing that a message has been edited appears. Here, a hierarchical structure comes to the foreground, as few members have more power than others. The most severe form of editing is deleting a message. In that case only the note is visible, that a post has been deleted. According to the two founders of the community, this is done to help the community being a friendly and family-like place, by abandoning rudeness and excessive offence. There may also be an information control system, deleting or changing threads that contain undesired information. Our knowledge about that is however limited as we only can see that a message has been deleted. Here, it becomes true what Colin said. If members do not play by the rules of friendliness, they are not welcome. This rule is explicit and not arguable. It has to be accepted and embodied in ordinary membership. Nevertheless, the practice of editing is continuously a theme throughout the page. One message accused the moderators of sitting on a “*high horse of yours*”:

Harold: *“Thank goodness we have a high-horse here! Otherwise, Nikonians would be like some other forums with constant flaming, vulgar language and hurt feelings.”*

Moderators want to hinder these mentioned “*hurt feelings*” also in the images forums, where members can post their photographs and get feedback from others. Here, it says members should give “*positive critique*”. However, considering the following statement, moderators have a quite tolerant understanding of “*positive critique*”:

Miranda: *“I too agree with the comment that the term “Positive Critique” somewhat hinders honest critique. But that happens only when one visits the forum for the first time, once inside so many ‘negative’ comments that are stated in a constructive manner can be seen. After all one can say..... “That’s a blood pathetic shot, day after day you post these horrendously overexposed shots and I don’t know why the heck you keep on shooting” OR “Sorry, but that doesn’t work for me. All the images you have posted during the last few days seemed overexposed. Continuously shooting like this won’t take you anywhere, unless you work on your basic technique” From my experience I can say even the most conservative moderator would not find the second approach to be that offensive. (Of course I can be wrong)”*

This statement mirrors Miranda’s experience and it tells us that the rule of „positive critique“ only leads to an act of editing or even deleting if an extreme case of violence occurs.

Members learn to live with the rules, and “play” with them. It is rather “playing with the rules” than “playing by the rules”, as rules can be established, changed and enforced by members themselves. They also test – like Miranda – how far they can go. In this community, rules provide a dynamic frame in which the actions have to be situated. Actions that exceed the threshold (Amine and Sitz, 2004) are sanctioned with editing and deleting.

All actions that are concerned with “playing by the rules” or “playing with the rules” are conducive to the social order and stability of the brand community. These actions influence and shape the community towards the desired organized and friendly place. “Playing with the rules” and especially “playing by the rules” are expected from ordinary members. Achieving ordinary membership and negotiating it to others means to be concerned about rules. Hence, it is not surprising that members are frightened to break rules and frequently request that “someone” explicates the rule. The mere request for rules displays the embodiment of the importance of rules and belongs to ordinary membership. In conclusion, rules do not only serve to set the boundaries of the community (Amine and Sitz, 2004), they also serve as a crucial part of the constant negotiation of ordinary membership. The mere incident of bringing rules to discussion is a method that negotiates membership. Then this method serves also to create and shape the community in terms of rules, as rules may be dynamically changed over time. Further, it may maintain the status quo as well, in case of rule custody.

## 6.2.5 Standing up for

Nikonians defend and protect their community against hazards, critique and negative comments of various kinds. They “stand up for” for three entities: (1) fellow Nikonians, (2) the two founders and owners of the site, and (3) the Nikon brand. These can be viewed as the main three entities that constitute the Nikon brand community and hence, by defending them, Nikonians defend their community. These actions reflect moral responsibility and commitment to the community. Standing up for the community and its three entities is an opportunity of negotiating membership – it shows that members care about the community.

### 6.2.5.1 Standing up for other members

In the following, we present two examples of members standing up for fellow members. Björn is new in this community and as he explains, he wants to get to know females; therefore he is posting in the Nikonian Ladies forum. Björn is not familiar with any rules and practices in the community and does not know about the rule concerning men in the Nikonian Ladies forum.

Björn: ***“Females??????***  
*I am a MALE professional photographer from Denmark. I am writing in FEMALES forum because I want contact with female-photographers from all over the world. ALSO amateurs! Contact me at: [webpage]”*

André: *“Hi Björn, and welcome to Nikonians. It might help if you state why you want to have contact with female photographers.”*

What is interesting here is that André immediately asks Björn to specify the reasons why he is looking for contact with females. His “help”, as he puts it, may not be interpreted as such, since not even five minutes lie in between the messages. If Björn’s post would remain unresponded for a while, André’s post could indeed be a true assistance for Björn.

Considering our experiences, Björn’s way of introducing himself into the community is pretty unusual. The facts that Björn posts ***“Females??????”*** and is looking for contact with female photographers ***“ALSO amateurs!”*** while being a professional photographer, could have been understood by André as having a sexual ulterior motive. We interpret André’s response or “assistance” more as having the underlying motive of protecting fellow Nikonian Ladies from a potential threat of a person, which could possibly have a sexual purpose. We are aware that we are skating on thin ice here, nevertheless we maintain our interpretation due to our experiences in the community and repeated checking and rechecking of this interpretation. In rechecking this interpretation, we found no evidence of a similar example, where any member is immediately asked for *reasons* of why contact is desired, although novices are frequently asked to share more about themselves, which is common in integrating novices.

In another thread, Francis touches upon a legitimacy issue (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001), meaning he differentiates between people using Nikon for the right or wrong reason. Additionally, he offends frequent posters.

Francis: ***“Are frequent posters lazy photographers?”***  
*[...]people who hang out in photo forums are armchair phogographers. [...]He says the shooters are too busy to be posting. He thinks that a lot of people are obsessed with equipment and the aquisition of such. [...]*  
*I was on a whale watch cruise [...] [and] [...] noticed one guy with a hugh Nikon digital something and a massive lense resting on his belly from a strap. This guy would now and then fiddle with the thing but never ever saw him shoot anything. - it was like he has a status symbol or something. [...] I almost asked him "What the gear for?" So, I wonder if a lot of people hanging out here are here because their too lazy to shoot and just want to rant about equipment and junk like that. [...]. No offense but equipment is the least important thing in making a great photo.You can make great images with the first Nikon ever made.[...] Francis”*

His message starts a vital conversation and many Nikonians respond. A selection of responds demonstrating the general tone is presented here:

Colin: *“ [...] I think people post in forums like this for a whole range of reasons. Some are gear-freaks who love the machinery - nothing wrong with that. Some are beginners looking for help. [...] Or just enjoy a chat with like-minded people. Some are trolls. You can't generalise about this. There are over 40,000 members here at Nikonians, from 120 nations and territories. They come from all parts of the world, all walks of life. They come for all different reasons. And all are welcome, so long as they play by the rules.”*

George: *“ Oh, I'm sure that a lot of 'photographers' have loads of gear and shoot rarely...but to paint a picture of Nikonians as a bunch of armchair photographers...? Shame on you 😊 [...] Besides, does it really matter if a lot of people just buy and collect gear - or sit around with cameras they don't use?”*

Joey: “ We have some very busy individuals here that take the time to drop by and "give back" by helping those that are just learning or have difficult questions. [...], many [...] take time out of their busy schedules to schmooze with friends and help newbies and beginners and other advanced amateurs, and not JUST "armchair professionals" as your friend said [...].”

Francis’ question “Are frequent posters lazy photographers?” is inherently an insult and gives an offence to those who indeed post frequently. Who likes to be labelled lazy? He offends the community itself, as it is based on frequent and vital interaction and therefore frequent postings are necessary. The fact that he touches upon the NAS, an especially sensitive, appreciated and gladly discussed topic for those members, who like to play with it, amplifies his insult.

As illustrated, Nikonians post statements that defend the persons – the frequent posters, equipment lovers and non-24/7 photographers – offended by Francis. Many statements include the confession of being oneself a sometimes lazy or “armchair photographer” and reasons for this are explained quite extensively. Here, members defend themselves by providing reasons for that. Interesting however is how Nikonians defend certain behaviour and lifestyles of their fellow Nikonians like Colin and Clint do, which illustrates a consciousness of kind (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). They have a broad picture of the imagined community and its members and request tolerance but make the contribution of explaining to others that it is not a legitimacy (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001) issue as there is no way to be a “real” Nikonian – anyone is welcome.

In this case, members firstly defend fellow Nikonians and then themselves and the general community. We argue that these actions are part of ordinary membership as it is a result of the consciousness of kind that the members show through their actions. As for the relevance of these actions in the community’s achievement they contribute to the protection of other members by explaining and make it clear what is tolerated within the community. Standing up for fellow Nikonians – like standing up for a friend – may be expected from ordinary members and displays the bond, commitment and belonging to the community.

#### 6.2.5.2 Standing up for the two founders/owners

In the following, it is demonstrated, how the founders of the community are defended and protected. Brewster labelled his thread “*Scandal*” and is clearly extremely unhappy that 9 months of Nikonians’ posts have been lost. Considering the normal tone of conversations, Brewster’s comment is extremely negative, expressed by “heads should roll” and causes several reactions.

Brewster: “*Scandal*  
[...] It is scandalous that over 9 months of Nikonians posts have been lost. A site of this size should be backed up on a regular basis. It is inconceivable that 9 months of backups are "bad". [...] relying on a mirrored system is putting all ones eggs in one basket; and not very smart. Where is the membership income going if not to maintain this site? [...].”

He challenges the owners by asking “Where is the membership income going if not to maintain this site?” which in our interpretation is an insult to the owners of the site as they spend a lot of time and effort running it.

Daniel: “People are human and they make mistakes [...] It is a family here and a wealth of info [...]”.

In general, members react conscientiously: *“People are human and they make mistakes”*. This is an action that they do not have to do to be a part of the community but it does not require a high degree of effort either. It is of relevance as it is a part of maintaining the community and keeping it friendly. In another thread, Ross is starting a discussion about the changed advertising placements on the site.

- Ross:            *” Hate new ad placement  
FWIW, I find the new ad on the left-hand-side of the Conferences page really distracting. Why not stick to top and bottom for ads so the display doesn't get crushed horizontally.”*
- Dave:            *”[...] in fact it [the advertisement] annoys more than it being efficient. but, it's all about making money! [...]”*

It appears that profit making is a delicate topic, as many Nikonians perceive Dave’s comment *“it's all about making money!”* as displeasing. Although many members have met the two founders face-to-face, they haunt the community as a myth, as not all Nikonians have had this pleasure. Nikonians are very thankful for founding this community, and hence they protect them against negative accuses, such as making profit with the site. An interesting aspect here is that members keep defending even after the moderator’s statement saying there is no profit. It appears nevertheless to be important for some, which shows that the two founders are a valuable entity, which has to be stood up for.

- Moderator:     *“ The most important thing for people to realize is that this is not a money-making business. It's a labor of love started by  $F_1$  and  $F_2$  [the two founders] out of their own pockets and run substantially by volunteers during their free time. [...]”*
- Ryan:            *“ [...] As one of the people who [...] sat [...] by  $F_1$  and  $F_2$  as they discussed adding advertisements as a necessity to keeping Nikonians alive, I don't think that any of us can truly understand the sacrifices that our founders make in terms of time and effort to make Nikonians what it is. I could tell from the tone of their voices and expressions that they were INCREDIBLY uncomfortable with the idea of placing advertisements on Nikonians. If any of you were there, you know what I'm talking about... [...]”*
- Chandler:        *“ They certainly have put a lot of work towards Nikonians and deserve any benefits they may get. It has been stated that this is not the case though but then again, what does it really matter? [...]”*
- Bobby:            *“ As far as  $F_1$  and  $F_2$  making money, who cares if they do. They put a lot of work into creating and runing this site (along with all the moderators) and if they make some money then so be it. [...]”*

The conversation shifts towards a discussion about having advertising on the site in general and the reasons why this could be. These comments are basic posts to prove a point and again show sense of moral responsibility and consciousness of kind. The moral responsibility factor is evident as the members are sharing information that protects the founders. As for the achievement of the community, these actions provide small but meaningful effort towards again, keeping the community friendly.

### 6.2.5.3 Standing up for the brand

After we finished the observation period, we experienced that members strongly agree on their brand Nikon. However, we could not observe messages that are concerned with defending Nikon. The reason for this may simply be found in the fact, that members admire their brand (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001) and switching to a competitor is basically not a big theme. We suspected that members would defend their brand due to their positive attitude

towards it and also considering the role it plays in this community. We believe that the defending of the brand belongs to ordinary membership, as it displays commitment and in essence defines this community. However, we had to construct data in order to explore, how the brand is defended. Here, we use the experiment introduced earlier, where we acted under the pseudonym “Greg”, a newbie, who is not attached to Nikon and explains his thoughts of trading his Nikon against a Canon, which involves the undertone of Canon being better than Nikon. After Greg has explained how displeased he is with his Nikon, he received the following, selected responses:

Anthony: *“Welcome Greg! Perhaps the meter in your "old" Nikon needs adjusting. Or maybe the shutter. Or your lenses are dirty. Or they have fungus. Before you generalize and assume that the competition is better, get your Nikon gear checked out and serviced properly. If you and your friend were using the same film with similar quality lenses, there is no reason why brand X should look better than brand Y. Once you have eliminated the possibility of technical issues, the rest is up to the photographer. Cheers.”*

Ulf: [replying to “trading it against such brand X”]:  
*“Canon make some excellent cameras, that is true. But before you abandon Nikon, why not check out the F6 (probably the ultimate film camera), or the F100 and F5, both of which are available used at very good prices these days.”*

Interestingly members assume that Greg is a poor photographer, the Nikon is in bad condition, or the camera was not set properly – the tone of an unfair competition of a possibly wrong handled or simply broken Nikon with a Canon rises. They hence do not follow us into our trap and do not explicitly argue for Nikon as the better camera, they contrariwise acknowledge that Canons are indeed good cameras, but they argue in an implicit manner. Simply put, members do not see the cause for minor quality pictures in the Nikon itself. Here, they inherently defend their brand in a liberal and tolerant manner. Members do not argue for their brand in terms of technology or product quality. We assume they simply like it. Thus, they respect different opinions; however we believe they feel uncomfortable with an unfair competition. Defending the brand is here handled tolerantly and more educational, which is inconsistent with the findings of Amine and Sitz (2004), who observed quite radical oppositional brand loyalty (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001)

In conclusion, the method of “standing up for” serves as an action that negotiates commitment in the community and ordinary membership. The handling of this method is quite complex, as conflicts are not welcome. Hence, ordinary membership delivers the familiarity of the general tone and the premise to avoid open conflicts, which may then be displayed in the method of standing up.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## Community Citizenship Behaviour

In this chapter, we present the concept Community Citizenship Behaviour (CCB). First, we develop and explain the concept more generally and show how it differs to ordinary membership, before we display and discuss CCB at the Nikonian brand community.

### 7.1 CCB vs. Ordinary Membership

In the following, we accentuate our reasoning and thoughts on a more abstract level, without going into detail of our observation material, which will be displayed and discussed subsequent to this section.

Our findings suggest that certain observed behaviour by community members is, from an overall perspective, in some way related to the well-known sociological concept of organizational citizenship behaviour (Smith et al., 1983; Organ, 1988, 1990; Organ, and Konovsky, 1989; Williams and Anderson, 1991; MacKenzie et al., 1991, 1993; Schnake, 1991; Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1994; Podsakoff et al., 1997; Gebert, 2004). However, the background, perspective, and particular findings of this study differ quite profoundly from those corresponding to OCB. Therefore, we attempt to advance the concept of Community Citizenship Behaviour by drawing inspiration from the basic suggestions of OCB. First, we provide a very brief insight into OCB before we develop further thoughts. At this point we focus more on the main idea of OCB, rather than entering the discussion in more detail.

OCB is of relevance for this study, as it is generally concerned with actions of individuals, more precisely actions of individuals in an organization. OCB is defined as “ individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (Organ, 1988, p.4). The main idea of OCB describes an employee’s extra-role behaviour (Gebert, 2004) exceeding the required and contracted working effort, which results in a surplus for the organization (Organ, 1988), whereat this extra effort is rather intrinsically than extrinsically motivated. This means, employees do not behave in this beneficial manner for reasons of personal reward (Podsakoff, 1997; Gebert, 2004), however they potentially profit from the further existence of the organization (Organ, 1988).

At least four dimensions of OCB are recognized, all of which more generally entail effort and commitment to the community of an organization (Podsakoff et al., 1997; Gebert, 2004). The more recent development and discussion of OCB in literature aims to the accurate measurement and evaluation of an employee’s degree of OCB by managers where the individual is the unit of analysis (e.g. McKenzie et al., 1991, 1993).

We believe that OCB holds promising and interesting thoughts. In advancing Community Citizenship Behaviour, we were once again guided by the ethnomethodological perspective, which provides an intersection to OCB by focusing on actions. Here, in contrast to the more recent understanding of OCB, we do not recognize an individual as the unit of analysis.

Although we investigated actions taken by individuals, we viewed these actions more as part of a whole and in aggregation (Organ, 1988).

Generally, we propose Community Citizenship Behaviour as describing aggregate efforts and behaviour of ordinary members that are conducive to solving the social problem of the brand community. Here, we aim to distinguish between rather ordinary efforts in applying methods for the creation and sustaining of the reality of brand community that come with ordinary membership, and more advanced behaviour (CCB) exceeding these ordinary efforts, yet on the basis of ordinary membership. Ordinary membership provides social actors with the communal ethnomethods necessary, in order to express and show membership. Actions of CCB go beyond those actions that can be expected from ordinary membership.

The general transferability of OCB to community is limited, as the background of studying members of a brand community differs to researching employees of an organization. Thus, one has to recognize CCB more as something of its own right and not as a linear transfer. Nevertheless, there are parallels:

As for the parallel of a contract, the distinction between technical membership and ordinary membership is crucial. Technical membership allows the creation of an account and requires the understanding of terms and conditions to use this website. Upgrades of technical memberships need a formal contract in form of payment and allow the unlocking of certain gadgets or server space. We argue that ordinary membership, however, is more based on an emotional contract. Although certain member effort is not explicitly contracted, and hence always discretionary, ordinary membership requires the continuous display of certain behaviour, which is implicitly agreed on to be necessary for membership. Hence, there is required effort that comes with membership. The employment and the ordinary membership are then the parallel here.

As for the personal reward, the community per se seems to be the benefit of CCB. However, this study does not investigate “why” actors behave, but “how” actors behave. The strong focus of CCB on behaviour entails the advantage that previous research on brand community, which conceptualises more the psychological dimensions such as *moral responsibility* and *consciousness of kind* and the more sociological dimension of *shared rituals and traditions* (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001), is considered and inherently related to CCB as well. These may be seen as the underlying motives, or reasons, which not only produce action and guide action (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001) of ordinary membership, but of CCB as well. Hence, we suggest CCB to be intrinsically motivated.

The term citizenship is used as an attempt to point to a small but delicate difference to ordinary membership. Citizens “live” in a certain environment and act as if they “feel at home” and integrated. Citizenship aims to express the high familiarity of the social surrounding of the community and its communal methods, while putting great effort and commitment into the community. We also suggest that citizenship expresses the aspect of aggregation of action and points to the community more as a whole. Most importantly, this aims to point to CCB as member behaviour, serving more the community per se as evident in traditional forms of community (Cova, 1997).

In conclusion, we suggest CCB to be more conducive to the achievement of this brand community than ordinary membership. Nevertheless, CCB builds on ordinary membership, but goes beyond what can be expected from a member and exceeds the mere negotiation of



ordinary membership. We argue that CCB is based on higher levels of consciousness of kind, sense of moral responsibility (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001), and a higher level of commitment than ordinary membership. This commitment can be so strong, that one member is even willing to leave the community in order to change or improve it. Ordinary membership entails actions that are more or less unknowingly and unconsciously embodied. CCB on the other hand entails actions that explicitly serve the community, and we suspect these actions to be more knowingly processed. These complex actions reflect much deeper thoughts concerned with the community per se and the imagination of other members.

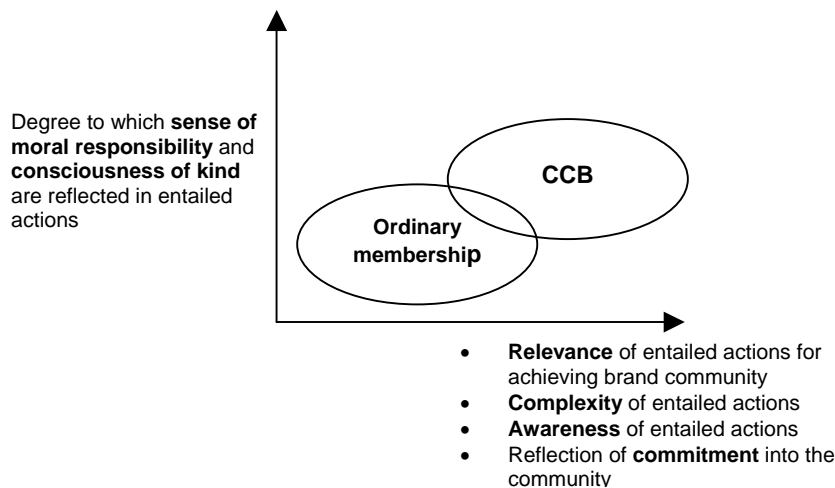


Figure 2: CCB vs. Ordinary membership

As for the intersection, we attempt to indicate the interrelation, degrees in between, and the premise of membership for CCB. The junction between ordinary membership and CCB is blurry and fluent. Further, it is important to understand, that CCB is not afflicted to a specific individual, and instead categorizes a type of aggregated behaviour. Here, it differs to the distinction made by Amine and Sitz (2004), as their suggested “hardcore” members do not necessarily show CCB only because they interact frequently. CCB describes an aggregate behaviour, whereat we merely look at actions, not at the average frequency of engagement of one particular member. For us, a member has no history, personality or individual engagement profile. It is not of relevance for us, how often and how regularly a member has to interact in order to be labelled as a “hardcore” member. CCB is in its aggregate conducive to the constant achievement of brand community, no matter who engages in that way.

## 7.2 CCB at Nikonians

In this section we show the actions and behavioural patterns of community citizenship behaviour. In the following, we present first, community development initiatives, second, social drivers, and third member acquisition.

### 7.2.1 Community development initiatives

Community development initiatives are actions and proposals with the purpose of improving the community and change it for the better. Here, members actively make independent

suggestions for advancing certain facets or aspects of the community. Caleb suggests to add a “rumours” forum to the structure, a forum where every time members “*think new equipment is about to be launched/announced, people can post their wild fantasies there, such as new lenses,D3X,D300 ...*”.

However, he is told that wild speculations are not welcome in this community, even if they would all be limited to one forum, so that the “*cancer could be controlled to one location and not spread throughout*”. Nevertheless, Caleb continues arguing and posts even more suggestions that could possibly improve the community:

Caleb: *“But why not? What's so criminal having "RUMORS" forum in NIKON PRODUCTS? Not a lot of effort to moderate. And - move all rumor threads from other forums there. Including everything from D200 dated earlier then December, 15. At the same time, some forums are nearly dead: AUTOFOCUS can be easily joined with N80 as CONSUMER AF FILM CAMERAS; F100 - with F4/5/6 as PROFESSIONAL AF FILM CAMERAS; and MF SLRs & RFs can be renamed as OTHER FILM CAMERAS to cover film P&S currently discriminated.”*

Besides his suggestion of clustering certain forums, he provides ideas of how to name the forums. We experienced, that members like Caleb keep on arguing for their suggestions of improving the structure of forums or requests of new forums and do not give up easily.

Furthermore, we found that members are also involved in discussions dealing with a more general improvement of the community. One issue here touches a diversity aspect. At Nikonians, both lay and professional photographers come together, but when it comes to the posting of photographs or corresponding feedback, there seem to be certain problems:

Mark: *“Why don't more members publish photos?  
I've been wandering around various forums and it seems to me that not many of us "amateurs" post our photos. Some forums seem to revolve around a limited number of "Professionals" who enjoy publishing their works. They set very high standards. This can be a bit intimidating and I've felt my photos are not good enough to post in those forums, so I don't publish. Sometimes I wish more people would publish so that we can all enjoy and share our experiences and ask for advice. We now have over 40,000 members, so I reckon it would be great if more people would publish in the various forums and make this place a place for everyone to enjoy and learn. What do others think? Cheers,”*

Mark is concerned that hobbyists do not publish their photographs because they may be discouraged by the high standards of professionals, like he apparently is. He does not come up with a concrete solution or suggestion, but with a concrete problem. Stating this message is an attempt of initiating a solution in a dialogue, as he explicitly asks for the opinion of others. Being aware of this problematic, shows that Mark is able to put himself in the position of fellow Nikonians with similar photography skills and reflects the notion of the imagined other of the community liberated view (Anderson, 1983). By putting his concerns to the agenda, he is trying to change the current condition of this community regarding the practice of publishing photos towards something more beneficial for all members. The subgroup of the highly skilled photographers is not accessible for all members and they seem to dominate the photo posting sections. Without explicitly denigrating these facts, he stimulates a conversation that could possibly lead to a change of the current state.

We believe, this is behaviour is exceeding behaviour that is concerned with showing and displaying ordinary membership. Actions concerned with the development of the community reflect high commitment to the community and its members, as these actions represent the attempts of changing the community towards a more beneficial condition not only for personal reasons, but also for other members. Here, the familiarity to the community provided by ordinary membership serves the imagination of the unmet other, which has possibly

similar problems. These actions may be based on personal preferences or wishes, but we experienced that these community development initiatives embrace suggestions of changes towards a more beneficial condition of the community for “all” members. These actions are motivated by a high degree of sense of moral responsibility (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001), as members feel the duty or obligation to the community as a whole and to other members. These methods of taking initiatives, whether in form of a concrete suggestion or in form of raising a problem, are in the aggregate what shapes and improves the community.

## 7.2.2 Social drivers

Beside the socialising actions attached to ordinary membership, we observed actions that drive social interaction more actively. We observed interaction stimulants and social support, both of which reflect that they are more or less knowingly processed.

### 7.2.2.1 Interaction stimulants

The posting of shallow and non-photography related issues and questions, is a phenomenon that appears consistent over time in the community. We call such postings interaction stimulants, as we interpret them to have the purpose of keeping the flow going and represent a high socialising effort. Interaction stimulants are more related to mere sociality than to actual information around photography and they may, or may not, include Nikon related topics in the first instance. Postings or comments of that kind simply have an interaction stimulating effect, they are actions that invite other members to react and interact.

The stimulants are open questions and often very forward and almost entail a compulsory request to reply. These stimulants are mostly revealing their purpose of acquaintance by explicitly mentioning it. Here is an example of an interaction stimulant.

Francis: “ *So what do you do for a living? part III*  
*The original So what do you do for a living? thread numbered 99 responses (and is available in the archives) and Part 2 had over 100 so to save everyone from scrolling, I have started Part 3. This question pops up from time to time and is a great way for all the members to get to know one another and foster a sense of community. So I thought I'd bring the question up again: What do you do for a living? Again, thanks to all who have responded, to those who have yet to respond, we hope you do. Let's get to know one another a bit better. 😊* ”

Other examples include topics such as the favourite music instrument or games like “Which Movie Star Are You?”, where members can take part to find out which movie star fits their personality. These kinds of stimulants remind us of typical group behaviour such as small talk at parties or get-to-know games and obtain a vast amount of replies, which indicates their appreciation. The stimulating members are aware of the acquaintance effect and post these texts on purpose aiming to maintain interaction and foster the sense of community, while the stimulated members were explicitly educated about it. Interaction stimulants describe a conscious and discretionary socialising effort, exceeding the more unknowing actions of socialising of ordinary membership. They explicitly aim to foster the sense of community, whereby the posting members serve the community in maintaining interaction and care about the community.

### 7.2.2.2 Social support

Besides actions of emotional support attached to ordinary membership, we observed a kind of support that is more connected to the concept of social support. Social support is related to

subjective well-being (Kahn et al., 2003), meaning not only physical health but also cognitive (Karademas, 2006). Items such as “life is very good” or “satisfied with many things in my life” (Hills and Argyle, 2001) indicate well-being, whereas items such as “does it ever happen to you that people are warm and affectionate towards you?”, “does it ever happen to you that people sympathize with you?”, or “does it ever happen to you that people are willing to lend you a friendly ear?” (Doeglas et al., 1996) are used for measuring social support. We believe, they serve as a good demonstration here of what is meant by well-being and social support.

We observed various actions and interactions of members concerned with social support for fellow Nikonians and their well-being. These actions reflect much more depth than the support actions as ascribed to ordinary membership. Here, members listen to the concerns of a fellow member and provide more than what we see as standardized support:

- Bobo: *“Must I flush this fish b/c is from my EX-girl?”  
Hello, My current gf [girlfriend] ask me to throw away all my ex-girlfriends stuff~~ Some are painting and craft, I really dont want to but have to~ One of the item is a pet fish, had been with me for sometime now, dont want to flush it~ just want to express it... byebye fish.”*
- Johnny: *“(Is this off-topic in the Cafe?!? Is there a definition somewhere? I couldn't find one. I'm going to respond, but I'd appreciate hearing the guidelines here...) Get rid of the 8x10 of the ex next to the bed? That's a very reasonable request. One would wonder why it's still there in the first place. Get rid of every single trace of a previous relationship, someone who I've shared my life with, respect, and helped make me who I am today, simply to satisfy my girlfriend's insecurity? That's "bye bye girl".”*
- Hennes: *“To keep stuff from your previous girlfriend, signals a memory that doesn't want to go away, therefore threatens her future with you and puts a shadow of doubt in your judgment. More importantly, it casts a shadow in the reason of why she is your girlfriend. Is it because of her being wonderful for you? Or just an attempt to fill a felt vacuum? Her request is justified and should be considered a non-trivial test to you and your feelings. Show contrition for possible offenses and be expedite in the riddance of any physical signs of ties to your past but more importantly, of any animistic ties. If you really care for your new girlfriend, don't make comparisons, even in your mind. Look back only to learn lessons. Drive your relationship with your new girlfriend as if were the car of an Italian racer, whose first act when mjumping in is to get rid of the rear mirror. It only distracts you from looking ahead. Oh, as for the fish, don't even joke about flushing it, it will only tell her about your hurt and of a non humanitarian inclination. Donate it.”*

Besides some very humorous and ironic suggestions such as frying the fish, messages show, that the private problem of Bobo is taken seriously. Members lend their ears and spend time and effort into helping Bobo out of his situation. Hennes’s message serves as a good demonstration of how members attempt to share their experiences of life and their own relationships and give true advices. This behaviour of listening and helping reminds us on counselling. Here, we believe members act on another level of sense of moral responsibility as shown in emotional support.

Social support should not be mistaken as support in terms of content. It does not mean supporting the specific position of the supported member of who is correct. Social support is provided by the efforts of members in taking time and thinking about the personal situation of an other member, explaining personal views and give advice in order to enhance the well-being of a fellow Nikonian. In lending a friendly ear in a warm and affectionate manner, Nikonians provide social support. Here, personal benefits for the counsellor are not obvious for us.

We observed voluntary actions of socialising specifically aiming to another member's well-being. These actions are related to moral responsibility and consciousness of kind (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Members seemingly feel related to like-minded yet distressed fellow Nikonians and morally responsible for them. These efforts are conducive to the perception of the brand community as a warm, heartily and friendly place, which allows members to lean on in times of distress. These actions shape the happening of the brand community towards a friendly and positive happening (Amine and Sitz, 2004) and exceed helping behaviour as expected from ordinary membership. Members feel the deep duty and obligation to help. Most importantly, through lending a friendly ear and sharing experiences, social relations are created or deepened. Taking care of members in terms of more private and personal matters enriches the Nikon and photography based community horizon.

### 7.2.3 member acquisition

From an ethnomethodological view, the acquisition of members is a communal problem. Here, we observed and stimulated behaviour, that in our opinion exceeds the expectations of ordinary membership.

Julez: *“When I find someone with a Nikon camera, the first thing I do is ask if they belong to Nikonians.com and if they don't, I hand them a card and tell them to check out the site to meet friendly, helpful members from all over the world, and I invite them to drop by and look around the different forums.”*

This message tells us, that the problem of member acquisition is handled proactively. Julez stated earlier in his message, that he has created a number of business cards of the Nikonian brand community himself, which is what he means here by mentioning “a card”. Although not all members create business cards on their own, there is an ongoing discussion about creating an official Nikonian card, due to the request of a great deal of members for the purpose of acquisition. Interestingly, the stage of attempts of acquisition is seemingly solely in the offline world. The actions described by Julez seem very structured and deliberate, however not too importunate. He tries to get potential freshmen interested in the community by describing it positively and invites them to visit the community, without wringing a definite commitment. We argue that this method is proactive, viral and fairly liberal. Stepping up to promising and relevant persons – naturally having a Nikon – we argue that this behaviour goes beyond a word-of-mouth acquisition, which may be expected to happen through ordinary membership and its entailed commitment. These efforts and methods here go beyond “telling a friend” and are of relevance for the happening of the brand community, as they aim to solve the problem of acquisition.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## Framing the discussion

This chapter is an attempt to frame the findings and their meanings for the happening of this brand community, whereby we use a “wide-angle lens”.

Here, we present the two main features of this online brand community. Further, we attempt to reflect on this study and its findings. We also show what we believe are the main contributions of this thesis. Additionally, we provide possible implications and give ideas for further research very briefly.

### 8.1 Summary of results

This study regards brand community as a social problem to be solved. Here, we view at brand community and its happening as something that has to be constantly achieved by its members, rather than taking the phenomenon for granted, or understanding it as given externally. The spatial independence of brand communities (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001), especially enabled through the medium Internet (Thomsen et al., 1998), led us to focus this study on the online brand community Nikonians.org. In order to answer the question of “how does a brand community happen?” we investigated behaviour in the Nikonian brand community.

In general, we suggest that the Nikonian brand community happens by means of the three types of behaviour (1) Lurking, (2) Ordinary Membership, and (3) Community Citizenship Behaviour. These three categories can be separated by the characteristics of their entailed actions, which differ in (i) relevance for solving the social problem; (ii) complexity; (iii) awareness; (iv) reflection of level of commitment; and (v), reflection of consciousness of kind and moral responsibility (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Although Lurking represents the weakest specifications, it is conducive to the happening of the online brand community. However, it does not involve active engagement into the life of the community and describes more “natural” Internet behaviour. We focused on the two main concepts of Ordinary Membership and CCB, both of which entail active engagement in the community, and are thus more conducive to the happening of the brand community than Lurking.

Ordinary Membership describes “natural” behaviour of individuals, who constantly negotiate membership, which is continuously challenged and thus continuously reproduced. At Nikonians, ordinary membership entails the *use of language*, the *use of photographs*, *playing by the rules*, *standing up* for three entities of their community, and *basic interactions* in form of helping behaviour and sharing of information, motivating each other and socialising and emotional support.

Community Citizenship Behaviour describes behaviour that exceeds this notion of negotiating ordinary membership and entails actions, interactions and procedures that are more concerned with serving the community per se and go beyond what can be expected from a member. Although this type of membership can be compared with what others have referred to as “hardcore” members (Amine and Sitz, 2004), the unit of analysis is here the aggregate behaviour, not the individual. At Nikonians, CCB involves *community development initiatives*, *social drivers*, and *member acquisition*.

In the aggregate, all three categories of behaviour are conducive to the constant achievement of the online brand community – increasing from Lurking to CCB. These three types of behaviour show how the community is continuously created and maintained by its members through actions. They also explain how members contribute to the constant achievement of the community in different ways. It is the members’ efforts and contributions to the community in the form of interaction that lets the community happen. In this way we have found ethnomethods and behaviour that in the aggregate lead to the constant achievement of the brand community.

## 8.2 achieving the two main features

We propose that the observed actions, interactions and procedures in form of whether lurking, ordinary membership or community citizenship behaviour contribute to the continuous achievement of two main perceivably stable features (Coulon, 1995) of this brand community: (1) practical usefulness, and (2) the social link. These two features are main themes in this community and can be seen as the main modules or building blocks for achieving the brand community in general. The behaviour attached to ordinary membership and CCB are from an overall perspective concerned with creating and maintaining these features over time. The following graphics provides an overview:

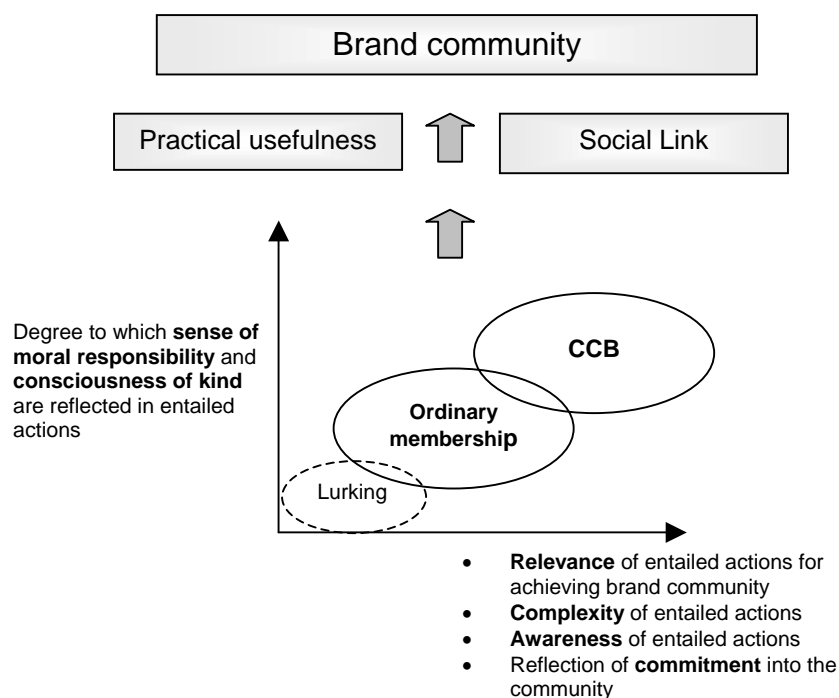


Figure 3: Achieving the two main features and brand community

### 8.1.1 Practical usefulness

The aspect of *practical usefulness* of the Nikonian community embraces all information in terms of Nikon and Photography available for members and is an explicit goal (Maloney-Krichmar and Preece, 2005) of this community. Practical usefulness has to be solved and achieved through member interaction. Here, helping behaviour and the sharing of information

are most crucial to fulfil this goal, whereby we have the impression of a mutual relationship of requesting help/information and offering help/information.

The use of language and photographs is of particular importance here as this enables the members to communicate, interact and hence result in the happening of the community – without textual language and the posted images the community would be non-existent. Additionally, the aspects of rules (Amine and Sitz, 2004) also have great weight, as playing by the rules ensures order in the forum layout and thus enhances practical usefulness. Furthermore, they are guidelines of how members should share knowledge – namely by the use of friendly language. Rules do not only shape this feature, they are also conducive to maintain it. The example of the rule of solely using “positive critique” in the Images discussion forum is a good demonstration. By abandoning “negative critique”, this rule is to ensure that no offence of sensibilities occurs – which would be a circumstance likely leading to the denial of posting Images again. Here, the practical usefulness of this image-sharing forum lies in “*inspiration*” and “*learning*”. Simply put this means: no images – no practical usefulness. Thus, rules serve in a way to create and maintain the practical usefulness of this community.

Besides, we observed community citizenship behaviour, which is explicitly concerned with the improvement of practical usefulness. From an overall perspective, behaviour of lurking, ordinary membership and CCB are conducive to achieve the feature of practical usefulness of this particular online brand community.

The range and intensity of the practical usefulness should be demonstrated by the following statement:

Chloe: *“I just received written confirmation of my acceptance to go and study photography in [city] ... what I wanted to do was thank all those on Nikonians who have helped, encouraged and inspired me along the way. I have learned so much around here from reading and getting advice from top photographers who give so freely of their time. Ultimately it was the inspiring images from the likes of [names] and others that made me think 'they learned, I can too' and this was probably the deciding factor to go after my dream. I was told Nikonians was a special place for photographers and all I can do is reiterate the assertion and offer my heartfelt thanks.”*

Here, the community actually helped Chloe in deciding to pursue her dream – studying photography – and assisted her in improving her photography skills. Her experience as a member on Nikonians may have changed her life.

### 8.1.2 The social link

A social link may be reached (Amine and Sitz, 2004) and is the second main feature of this brand community. We are interested in how the social link is achieved. The social link is provided through member interaction. It has to be achieved actively. At this point we carefully do not claim that all interactions result in a universal social linking of members. However, we believe that some observed interactions hold potential to reach the social link. Consider the following example:

Alexander: *“New York City  
Dear friends, I live and work overseas in [city]. (2 years +). Everytime I am watching TV, and see NYC, I get this strong carving to go. If I can fit it in my next travel I will go. I so want to go*



*and explore this city and really burn some film. Those who live in New York, I have to say I am in awe of you[...]Right now I am searching for a cool book on NYC [...] Does anyone else feel the same way I do, to go to a particular city and just hand out for a while exploring and shooting film?"*

Members like Alexander may be seen as reflecting the deeply rooted quest for the social link (Cova, 1997). During a vital interaction with many members involved, Alexander and Ronaldo discover to live close to each other.

Ronaldo: *"Hey! My office is in front of Swiss Hotel. We are really neighbors. The address is: [gives detailed address and phone number] It would be nice if we can meet and maybe even join in a photo "safari" some day. Regards, Ronaldo."*

Alexander: *"Ronaldo, Yeah lets do that "Safari" trip! I know where you are. Have you been up to [city]? Or should we go to the Historica area or get out of the city. I would like to go see the area of where they are constructing the new airport some time, but shooting in the Historical would be great too, I need some fresh photos. Maybe we can switch lenes [lenses]. I have a F3HP with a 28mm F2.8 and a 24mm F2.8 I will call you next week."*

Here, the interaction stimulated by Alexander leads first to online interaction with many members and is then taken one step further as it probably results in a face-to-face interaction with Ronaldo. Exchanges such as this indicate that online encounters are more than a one-time encounter and that people form relationships (Thomsen et al., 1998, Amine and Sitz, 2004) and social linkage even resulting in offline exchange, which is quite common at Nikonians (Amine and Sitz, 2004). The revealing of Ronaldo's work address reflects trust and is consistent with Thomsen et al. (1998), who shows how self-disclosure and intimacy occur in online communities.

Online interactions like this have been described as socialising and are part of ordinary membership. In aggregation, the socialising behaviour leads to the creation of sets of relationships, a main constituent of community (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Amine and Sitz, 2004; Mc Alexander and Schouten, 2005), and may also result in the social link. Put simply: social relations and social linkage are actively stimulated and achieved by members. We believe, that due to consciousness of kind, the social link is more likely to be achieved, as personal ties are more likely to be created.

It is our contention that a great deal of interactions in this community lead to the social link, more precisely a network of social linkage. Here, we observed that behaviour of ordinary membership such as socialising, helping and information exchange, and posting of images has potential for achieving the social link. Photographs offer a social link as they cause interaction between members and they get to know each other through the photographs, involved with the more personal aspect (Thomsen et al., 1998).

Furthermore, we believe that CCB in form of social drivers holds increased potential due to the depth and personal aspects of interaction.

The more personal aspect of interaction, meaning the non-brand information in conversations, has only been touched on in brand community literature (Thomsen et al., 1998; Amine and Sitz, 2004). We argue that the personal aspects evident in interactions, such as sharing of life experience or giving advice, enhance the potential of social linking and could make the social link possibly more intense.

Interestingly, we experienced that most messages are furnished with bits of personal information, as expected from ordinary membership. We believe that this circumstance is conducive to building social relationships and the social link. Our main point here is that, yes, it is a brand community, but yes, one main theme is the social link detached from the pure admiring of a particular brand.

## 8.2 Finale

### 8.2.1 A dissenting perspective

We have applied a new perspective of looking at brand communities – an ethnomethodological perspective. Unlike prior research, which investigated how brand communities emerge (Amine and Sitz, 2004), we applied an explicit, consequent and wholesome ethnomethodological perspective. We looked at brand community as being a social problem and considered every single action as a contribution to the achievement of brand community, however categorized in three types of behaviour.

We propose that a brand community happens through lurking, ordinary membership and community citizenship behaviour, concerned with different degrees of creating and maintaining the brand community. The introduction of these concepts is an attempt to illustrate how the community is achieved as a result of aggregated behaviour. The existence of sets of social relations, a prerequisite for communality (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Amine and Sitz, 2004; McAlexander et al., 2002), may then be viewed as the outcome of interactions.

### 8.2.2 Reflections

In general, this study is strongly connected to common sense. It shows that members put different kinds of efforts into achieving brand community, something that has been taken for granted in previous literature. The methods we revealed belong to natural human behaviour, however they are applied here for solving a particular social problem.

We want to highlight the fact of low generalizability of this study. That is, the specific actions and concrete behaviour of members found in this community may differ in other online brand communities. Although the three categories of behaviour were developed through researching one particular online brand community, they may nevertheless have broader implications.

We also want to underline our interpretative task in distinguishing between ordinary membership (lurking) and CCB. These concepts are strongly connected to one another and their distinction is a result of our interpretation.

In the final stages of this thesis, we strongly believe that a brand community is something dynamic (McAlexander et al., 2002), something continuously challenged, and something that has to be continuously solved. The online brand community must be capable of self-management (Amine and Sitz, 2004). We argue that solving brand community is an ongoing active process, whereat this process of attempting to solve it negotiates its existence through

ethnomethods of ordinary membership and community citizenship behaviour. Thus, a brand community exists, because individuals attempt to solve it.

Before conducting this research we believed – on the basis of existing literature – that individuals seemed to have great interest in this new form of community, as they emerge independent from marketers. At the end of this study, we are even more convinced, as the interest here lies particularly in the constant achievement of practical usefulness and the opportunity to reach the social link.

The reason for the relatively high status of the feature practical usefulness may simply be found in the fact that photo cameras and related equipment as well as photography per se are highly complex. It may be this complexity that drives the vitality of observed behaviour of both ordinary membership and CCB. Hence, we believe that this energetic behaviour is generalized to efforts of sociality, which are in turn conducive for reaching the social link. We argue that the earlier mentioned two faces of this community are responsible for the observed vital efforts of socialising: the more the community emphasizes “cold facts” and information, the more the desire for sociality grows.

As for the “reality” of this brand community, it is interesting to point at Nikon cameras as an “offline product” and photography as an “offline activity”, whereat the community is an online community. This divergence between the natural environment of the product and its entailed activities, and the natural space of the community may be responsible for the mixture of online and offline activities – such as the workshops and member acquisition – and furthermore, the regularity of offline meetings and offline social links. We believe that this fusion of online and offline makes the phenomenon of this community more “real” for its members (Amine and Sitz, 2004).

We believe this study has several small but evident contributions. We are aware that we are not the first ones who were guided by ethnomethodological thoughts (Amine and Sitz, 2004), however, we advanced an *explicit, consequent and wholesome ethnomethodological perspective* on brand community, which we perceive as a contribution. The understanding of brand community as a social problem and something that has to be achieved differs to prior research and enters the concept of brand community more deeply and more specifically. This perspective is more related to human interest than marketer interest.

The proposed method of *constitutive netnography* can be seen as a practical methodological contribution. The specific problems entailed in researching on the Internet with an ethnomethodological perspective are displayed and discussed and may stimulate further research using this approach. Here, the ethical concerns about data construction via experiments instead of the more commonly used interviews may promote *ethical discussions* and the possible development of ethical norms especially for experimenting on the net, while focusing solely on actions.

We use basic ethnomethodological thoughts for shaping the notion of membership in brand community, in particular *ordinary membership*. The term “member” has been used in previous studies self-evident, without explicitly explaining its notion.

We bring forward the concept of *community citizenship behaviour*, a concept focusing on behaviour and that could be developed over time by further research. The fact, that the concept of organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) is discussed for about twenty years

now, may point to the possible difficulty inherent to the roughly comparable concept of CCB. Further research could make efforts in developing, and measuring this concept not only for brand communities, but also for communities in general. We believe, CCB as presented here holds fruitful thoughts that need to be re-thought and criticized in order to advance a possibly more valid and improved concept of CCB, also considering the thoughts of “hardcore” members (Amine and Sitz, 2004).

We argue that using combined information of brand communities and general online communities as the basis for the sense-making process is an innovative advance. It connects what has been known in both fields in one thesis with the rather specific ethnomethodological perspective. We suggest that further research in the field of online brand community should embrace even more what is known about online communities in general, as we found conspicuous similarities between these two forms of communities.

Further, this study explicates the role and importance of *rules* and their dynamics in an online brand community. In explicating common sense, it shows that rules are a crucial means for self-managing the community (Amine and Sitz, 2004). However, unlike prior research, we were interested in how rules happen, and go thus one step further. Here, we did not only display the process of rule development, we also did show the relevance of rules for negotiating ordinary membership. We also presented how rules in turn continuously create and maintain the brand community, and are thus conducive to its constant happening, even after the community emerged.

This thesis points to the circumstance that an online brand community may offer the *social link*, which can be perceived as the personal reward and motivation for actions happening in an online brand community. Similarly, practical usefulness is accomplished and results in personal rewards. These two features may have the power to change lives of members and we thus suggest that they are “real”.

To conclude from an overall perspective, this thesis approaches brand community in a new way. It goes beyond the mere description of the social phenomenon of a brand community by exploring how the social phenomenon per se is constantly achieved in terms of its creation and maintenance. We believe that we have illustrated that this online brand community happens through voluntary actions of lurking, ordinary membership or CCB, has benefits for its members in form of practical usefulness and the social link, and most importantly that members themselves are capable of and willing to continuously achieving the community.

Overall, this study is positioned one step backwards to the mere description of the phenomenon of brand community and one step forward to research concerned with the founding steps of a brand community. It relates and links to both fields, whilst explicitly advancing the ethnomethodological perspective. Further studies may concentrate and focus on more particular aspects of this view on brand community, such as Lurking.

The understanding of the social problem of brand community, the importance of rules and social aspects, and the independence of marketer support may have managerial implications for marketers. Here, marketers may derive conclusions for building brand community, or sustaining existent brand communities. Specific implications and practical advice are however hard to derive from this study, as it describes a highly contextual state of one online brand community, which has undergone a long process of growth. On the other hand, it proofed to

be successful with over 40.000 members worldwide and may hence serve as a model for emerging, marketer created online brand communities.

We argue that it is especially important for marketers to understand the linking value of these communities, *based* on shared admiration of a particular brand. This may be important in case a company attempts to establish a brand-owned community. We experienced, that the brand per se and brand loyalty is important to Nikonians (Amine and Sitz, 2004), they are however handled quite tolerantly. Thus, marketers should aim for achieving a balance between emphasizing the main social features of a brand community and highlighting the brand, instead of merely stressing the brand.

Here, companies should also recognize the dynamic aspects of rules, and that members are capable of establishing and enforcing rules themselves, without explicit guidelines. Members do not only play by the rules, they play with the rules. Furthermore, excessive editing is oftentimes perceived as negative. We suggest hence, that brand-owned communities should be managed more tolerantly and allow the dynamic of rules.

Further, this community shows that members are thankful and willing to stand up for the entities of the community, which could possibly be beneficial for the founding company in terms of loyalty and also member/customer acquisition. Especially behaviour of CCB brings us to suggest, that members like to have influence on “their” community, which should be acknowledged in marketing practice. We believe hence, this study serves as a demonstration, that the balance of power between marketers and consumers of online communities is shifted towards consumers (Kozinets, 1999), as members of this community are not dependent on engagement of marketers in terms of constantly achieving brand community. The ethnomethodological perspective on brand community may involve a better understanding of the social processes within a brand community. This can be of importance, as marketers who seek alliances with these communities should first understand them (Kozinets, 1999). As for the Nikonian brand community, we feel however, that an intruding of marketers, such as actively shifting brand meanings (Kozinets, 1999), goes not along with the sense of this community. Members perceive the community as a “*family*”, something they are related to and that they achieve. They would never “sell their family”, as we experienced that “*making money*” and “*commerce*” are oftentimes perceived as negative. Hence, in contradiction to Amine and Sitz (2004) who mean marketers should ally themselves with “hardcore” members and see the brand community as an information source – we believe that marketers who are keen on consumer segment information or long lasting relationships with heavy and loyal users, should be very sensitive (Kozinets, 1999) to using this site for marketing purposes at all.

### 8.2.3 A second piece in the puzzle

We advanced an *explicit, consequent and wholesome ethnomethodological perspective* on brand community, which connects to prior research that is more implicitly guided by an ethnomethodological view (Amine and Sitz, 2004). We believe we have found some fruitful new aspects and a way of looking at things that seem to happen “naturally”, and hope that this can be used as a springboard and inspiration for other, perhaps more tangible and enduring research. We hope that this study delivers the next piece of the new puzzle and offers thoughts for further pieces to connect to build the puzzle of an ethnomethodological brand community.

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#### Internet Resources:

[www.nikonians.org](http://www.nikonians.org)

[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

[www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)

# Appendix

## Experiment 1

Forum URL: <http://www.nikonians.org/cgi-bin/dcforum/dcboard.cgi>

Forum Name: New Members

### #0, please help

Posted by TNT on 25-Apr-06 at 12:14 PM

Hello everybody I am a new german Nikonian, since my Dad just gave me his old, but still very fresh Nikon. I don\*t really know what type it is, but it's black so far 😊.  
Here is the thing: My girlfriend and I went on this holiday trip to the sea. We really burned some film and when we got back, we compared our pictures. MY EGO WAS SHATTERED!! Her pictures turned out much better - clearer more colourful and so on. and she has a CANON! its an EOS. But i have the better glass, so now I am actually really disappointed and i am really thinking about trading my Nikon against such a canon. I mean, man we really used the same film, motives and methods. unbelievable. I am not really attached to the Nikon, so what do you guys think I should do now?

Greg

---

### #1, RE: please help

Posted by [name] on 25-Apr-06 at 12:40 PM

In response to message #0

LAST EDITED ON 25-Apr-06 AT 12:40 PM (GMT 1)

Hi Greg, welcome to Nikonians.

It's really very difficult to say what might have gone wrong without some more details. I'm assuming you had prints made, and it's quite likely the variation between print runs could account for the difference. Or there may be something faulty with your camera. Why don't you try out her Canon and see if you're getting consistent results? Also, check against the results your dad was getting.

Or maybe she's just a better photographer 😊 and here at Nikonians we can help you get better as well.

---

### #2, RE: please help

Posted by TNT on 25-Apr-06 at 01:01 PM

In response to message #1

First of all, thanks for your speedy reply 😊.

I have to say that the pictures which I took are quality wise the same as the ones my dad took. After all, my girlfriend is the beginner here, as I have been shooting for quite a while (with the same camera when it belonged to my Dad). He is has a very good eye for photo opportunities and he also taught me a lot of things about how to use it. The pictures my girlfriend took are not better motive wise but merely quality wise!! I know

that the Canon is better, since I also took a few shoots with it, since we didn't want to switch glass all the time. I personally don't think that there is something wrong with the Nikon, as the difference is not outrageously high, but still, man, it's not as good as the Canon!!

She has been owning the Canon only for a couple of weeks, and now she is laughing at me, HELP.

Greg

---

**#3, RE: please help**

Posted by [name] on 25-Apr-06 at 02:06 PM

In response to message #2

Shoot slides and see if you still get the same thing.

A pack of Kodak Elite Chrome should do the trick.

---

**#4, RE: please help**

Posted by [name] on 25-Apr-06 at 02:07 PM

In response to message #2

Hello Greg, maybe the Nikon was not set properly, like [name] said without more info we do not know. What speed film, was it dated or outdated. So much could be wrong.

---

**#5, RE: please help**

Posted by TNT on 25-Apr-06 at 02:37 PM

In response to message #4

Thanks fellows!

I think I am hitting for my photo store now and buy this elite chrome.

Will see if it makes a difference. BTW the films were also good and fresh KODAKS, not outdated and both the Nikon and Canon had the same films.

Thanks for your support!

Greg

---

**#6, RE: please help**

Posted by [name] on 25-Apr-06 at 03:29 PM

In response to message #0

Welcome Greg!

Perhaps the meter in your "old" Nikon needs adjusting. Or maybe the shutter. Or your lenses are dirty. Or they have fungus. Before you generalize and assume that the competition is better, get your Nikon gear checked out and serviced properly.

If you and your friend were using the same film with similar quality lenses, there is no reason why brand X should look better than brand Y. Once you have eliminated the possibility of technical issues, the rest is up to the photographer.

Cheers.

---

**#7, RE: please help**

Posted by TNT on 25-Apr-06 at 05:14 PM

In response to message #6

Thanks sooo much for all your support here. 😊

Maybe all of you are right;) Thanks for helping me out. I really want to show my girlfriend, that old Nikons are better than new Canons, but I fizzled in the first instance quite miserable. It may take some time, but I will have a look at all the technical stuff and also consider some professional help. Hopefully you are right;). But after all, I only wanna take some good pics and if the Nikon is not working out, I eventually might trade it against such brand X. no offense meant, but I was deeply impressed by the quality.

Thanks for your precious support!!! 😊  
Greg

---

**#8, RE: please help**

Posted by [name] on 25-Apr-06 at 05:23 PM

In response to message #7

>I eventually might trade it against such brand  
>X. no offense meant, but I was deeply impressed by the  
>quality.

Canon make some excellent cameras, that is true. But before you abandon Nikon, why not check out the F6 (probably the ultimate film camera), or the F100 and F5, both of which are available used at very good prices these days.

---

**#9, RE: please help**

Posted by [name] on 25-Apr-06 at 06:34 PM

In response to message #8

Hi Greg. I am fairly new to photography - at least to where I am creating a shot rather than clicking away with a point-n-shoot. I have had a Minolta film SLR for a few years trying to learn more about how to take better pictures before I rush into any big purchases.

Anyway, you said that there were differences in the pictures between the two of you. What were they?

Were your soft and hers sharper? Was the color sharper, brighter? Did your pictures look darler or lighter than hers? etc...

The more we know about the type of criteria you are using to say your pictures were worse than hers, the better we can identify and help you prove or disprove your little contest.

[name] - newbie post to follow...

---

**#10, RE: please help**

Posted by [name] on 25-Apr-06 at 09:17 PM

In response to message #0

Welcome to Nikonians, [name]

Visit also the [German Cafe](#)

---

**#11, RE: please help**

Posted by [moderator name] on 26-Apr-06 at 07:20 AM

In response to message #0

Welcome to our community.  
For starters try to identify your camera. We'll help you from there.

---

**#12, RE: please help**

Posted by TNT on 01-May-06 at 12:27 PM

In response to message #11

Hello everybody!

Good news: I went to the friend of mine who is employed in this photo store and asked if he could have a professional look at the camera and to identify the problem(s). 2 days later I went there again and he said that the camera is basically in an overall bad condition. he mentioned several things he could indeed repair, like there was -like you said- a shutter issue (btw it was a N60 ? or so, approximately 7 years old) and the lenses were "foul" or wrotten inside he said. I can imagine that, since my Dad was using it quite extensively in the wilderness of Norway, where he was taking a lot of shots of waterfalls. the climate there is also very moist sometimes and he was only with a tent. Is it true that cameras and lenses get wrotten?

Anyway, I decided to get myself the D50 and as I read something about the NAS, I think I know have it!! 😊 feels good and the camera is absolutely my thing. Being digital, It makes a lot of things easier. Thus, i should not have problems with winning my competition with my girl now...

Thanks to you all for the support!!!

Greg  
(D50 in black)

## Experiment 2:

Forum URL: <http://www.nikonians.org/cgi-bin/dcforum/dcboard.cgi>

Forum Name: Nikonians Café

### #0, sweets for my sweet

Posted by sunshine on 25-Apr-06 at 12:40 PM

LAST EDITED ON 25-Apr-06 AT 01:50 PM (GMT 1) by owl (admin)

Hello fellow Nikonians! 😊

I am a frequent Diet Coke drinker and have been wondering about why Coke changed the artificial sweetener in it!? It tastes totally different and makes the whole experience totally different!

Any of you feel the same?

\*sunshine\*

"A day without diet Coke is like a day without a Nikon"

FM3a (silver), EM, D50

---

### #1, RE: sweets for my sweet

Posted by [name] on 25-Apr-06 at 12:56 PM

In response to message #0

LAST EDITED ON 25-Apr-06 AT 01:52 PM (GMT 1) by owl (admin)

I drink decaffeinated Diet Coke, and haven't really noticed. It's probably due to health and/or cost issues.

They dropped cane sugar from the "Real Thing" in 1984, and it hasn't been real since!

Maybe I need to switch to Big K and save some bucks, since the product isn't particularly superior.

When I was in Cozumel, they sold a Light Coke that tasted like real non-diet Coke. It was excellent. When I queried Coke, they said it wouldn't sell in the USA, because we wouldn't accept it.

Our Diet Coke wouldn't sell in Mexico, and "Light Coke" probably costs more to produce. We're duped.

---

### #2, RE: sweets for my sweet

Posted by sunshine on 25-Apr-06 at 01:07 PM

In response to message #1

Hi [name],



Thanks for your story! I have never actually thought of contacting coke about any queries, good idea! 😊

Why decaffeinated colke though? there is no sugar and no caffeine!? what are the benefits? isn't water then a better choice, healthwise?

\*sunshine\*

---

**#3, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 25-Apr-06 at 01:09 PM

In response to message #2

Lite Coke is Coke C2 in the US 1/2 the sugar and 1/2 the carbs not bad but I really like the Coke Zero. [name]

---

**#5, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 25-Apr-06 at 01:40 PM

In response to message #3

>Lite Coke is Coke C2 in the US 1/2 the sugar and 1/2 the

>carbs not bad but I really like the Coke Zero. [name]

Coke C2? I have not seen this. I didn't like Coke Zero, but maybe I should give it another chance. I didn't like Diet Coke at first either.

---

**#6, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 25-Apr-06 at 05:15 PM

In response to message #3

Coke2 uses splenda, which from what I've heard, isn't getting a very warm reception in other parts of the world. When I heard that, I decided it is probably best to just avoid splenda.

---

**#4, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 25-Apr-06 at 01:37 PM

In response to message #2

>Why decaffeinated colke though? there is no sugar and no

>caffeine!? what are the benefits? isn't water then a better

>choice, healthwise?

LOL. Probably the flavour and carbonation of the soft drink is enjoyable, and I do drink a lot of ice water.

---

**#7, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 25-Apr-06 at 08:57 PM

In response to message #4

I had no idea you were supposed to drink the stuff, I use it predominantly for removing lime scale and cleaning chrome.

---

**#9, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 26-Apr-06 at 01:14 AM

In response to message #7

LAST EDITED ON 26-Apr-06 AT 01:15 AM (GMT 1)

>I had no idea you were supposed to drink the stuff, I use it  
>predominantly for removing lime scale and cleaning chrome.

LOL.. Coke or water? Let's see, Coke is only gold for cleaning purposes and W.C. Fields never drank water : "Ah water, never touch the stuff. You know what fish do in it".

Guess I need to dig out the Jägermeister.

---

**#11, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 26-Apr-06 at 06:04 AM  
In response to message #9

>  
>Guess I need to dig out the Jägermeister.

What's a yaygermister?

---

**#13, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 26-Apr-06 at 10:21 AM  
In response to message #11

>  
>>  
>>Guess I need to dig out the Jägermeister.  
>  
>What's a yaygermister?

A wonderful German, licorice flavored liqueur.

---

**#14, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by TNT on 26-Apr-06 at 11:21 AM  
In response to message #13  
[name], I agree!

Jägermeister is a lovely little thing and the best served ice cold!  
Roughly translated it means something like "the master of hunting" or so.  
Will see if I have one in my fridge now...  
Greg

---

**#16, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by sunshine on 26-Apr-06 at 11:27 AM  
In response to message #14  
Greg,

Could we please keep this topic about Coke - a non-alcoholic beverage for those of us who don't drink! thanks, appreciate it 😊

---

**#17, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by TNT on 26-Apr-06 at 11:35 AM

In response to message #16

YO!

So you say I'm a drinker? 😊

All these rules, man I am PSYCHED, pure rule terror 😞

maybe it could help if i say I mix my Jägermeister with diet-coke? 🤔

If not, sorry, I will never interfere again!

da Greg

---

**#18, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 26-Apr-06 at 01:08 PM

In response to message #14

>[name], I agree!

>

>Jägermeister is a lovely little thing and the best served

>ice cold!

>Roughly translated it means something like "the master of

>hunting" or so.

>Will see if I have one in my fridge now...

>Greg

Genau! It is usually in my fridge a long time. I might get it out once every 3 months, but absence makes it sooooo much better.

---

**#8, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 25-Apr-06 at 11:02 PM

In response to message #0

I only drink either Cherry Coke, Black Cherry Coke, or the Vanilla Cherry Coke. Any other type I use for cleaning grease stains out of my work clothes when I am working on the car or removing corrosion from battery terminals.

---

**#10, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 26-Apr-06 at 06:00 AM

In response to message #0

I like my Coca Cola classic. It tastes just like when I first had it as a kid. My favorite soft drink, Diet Coke has a funny after taste for me. I guess I like the real and original thing.

"a day without classic coke is like a day with no pictures with a Nikon"

In other words, why settle for less?

[name]

---

**#12, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 26-Apr-06 at 10:18 AM

In response to message #10

>I like my Coca Cola classic. It tastes just like when I

>first had it as a kid.

Then you were surely a kid sometime after 1984, 'cause it doesn't even taste remotely like it did when they used cane sugar!

---

**#15, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by sunshine on 26-Apr-06 at 11:24 AM

In response to message #10

Hey [name]!

I saw you "stole" and changed my quote....haha!

I appreciate your opinion, I actually do like the original Coke too, especially when it is in a glass flask, ice cold on a hot day! But for me Diet Coke has given me my own memories...you share it with friends, have it as a treat and so on....and it tastes so good!



Maybe we should get some good shots of Coke drinkers? from all over the world? that would be cool!

Diet Coke rules!!! 😊

---

**#19, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 26-Apr-06 at 01:28 PM

In response to message #15

LAST EDITED ON 26-Apr-06 AT 01:30 PM (GMT 1)

>I appreciate your opinion, I actually do like the original  
>Coke too

You can't get original Coke anymore, but you can get Coke Classic that uses artificial sweeteners in lieu of cane sugar. It was a very clever Coke marketing move actually. They offered New Coke for a long while to "match the taste of Pepsi" which was dominating non-restaurant sales. When consumers balked, they started to sell the new krap and called it Coke Classic, hoping no one would notice the difference after Coke's absence. By and large, it has worked, but I remember the difference!

I prefer Pepsi to Coke, but I prefer Diet Coke to Diet Pepsi.

edited to replace c-rap with krap.

---

**#20, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 26-Apr-06 at 01:37 PM

In response to message #19

They use corn syrup as a sweetener in Coke Classic. Fructose extracted from corn is no more "artificial" than sucrose extracted from sugar cane. Different, yes; artificial, no.

I think they may still use sucrose in their syrup product (what restaurants use) because it tastes the same to me. Or maybe my taste memory is defective. The bottled/canned stuff is different, although I still prefer it to Pepsi.

---

**#23, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 26-Apr-06 at 02:37 PM

In response to message #20

>They use corn syrup as a sweetener in Coke Classic. Fructose  
>extracted from corn is no more "artificial" than sucrose  
>extracted from sugar cane. Different, yes; artificial, no.  
>

Oh yes, you are technically correct, but there is no comparison between the sucrose in vegetables and sugar. The old labels read sugar, and it tasted like sugar. The big difference in Coke Classic is replacing "sugar" with "sucrose". Those two forms of glucose taste much different to me.

---

**#21, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by sunshine on 26-Apr-06 at 01:49 PM

In response to message #19

>I prefer Pepsi to Coke, but I prefer Diet Coke to Diet Pepsi.

That's strange. I prefer Coke either way. Perhaps you like the Diet Coke better than the Diet Pepsi because the diet Pepsi is outrageously sweet and artificial? 😊

---

**#22, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 26-Apr-06 at 02:22 PM

In response to message #21

I can't seriously believe any adults like Coke or Cola or even Pepsi for that matter. I do however enjoy Marmite on toast for breakfast (veggie-mite to some).

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**#24, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 26-Apr-06 at 02:42 PM

In response to message #21

>  
>That's strange. I prefer Coke either way. Perhaps you like  
>the Diet Coke better than the Diet Pepsi because the diet  
>Pepsi is outrageously sweet and artificial? 😊

Actually, now that my taste buds are more mature, it boils down to this:

1. Diet Coke is not as sweet as Diet Pepsi, so I like it more.
2. Pepsi is sweeter than Coke Classic, but Coke Classic's syrup is too thick. Drinking the latter is almost like drinking pancake syrup to me, so I opt for sweeter instead.

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**#25, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 27-Apr-06 at 09:44 PM

In response to message #0

LAST EDITED ON 27-Apr-06 AT 09:53 PM (GMT 1)

Forgive my cynicism, but why would someone make a brand new account on a Nikon discussion site solely for the purpose of starting a thread about the merits of Coke?

I'm trying to place that familiar signature about the silver FM3a too ... hrrm ... 😊

(edit: typo)

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**#26, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 27-Apr-06 at 11:15 PM

In response to message #25

>Forgive my cynicism, but why would someone make a brand new

>account on a Nikon discussion site solely for the purpose of

>starting a thread about the merits of Coke?

>

Because this is the cafe' where anything goes?

---

**#27, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by sunshine on 28-Apr-06 at 08:42 AM

In response to message #25

Perhaps just my way of getting to know people!?

Sorry if that's the wrong way to be a member here! 😊

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**#28, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 28-Apr-06 at 07:13 PM

In response to message #27

>Perhaps just my way of getting to know people!?

>

>Sorry if that's the wrong way to be a member here! 😊

Heh, that's right! Getting to know people is a good thing! WE all bring something to the forums and yes 'anything' goes in the 'cafe'

As for the diet coke. Cant' help you, I just took up diet coke about two years ago. Tastes the same to me. 😊

Cheers, [name]

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**#30, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by sunshine on 28-Apr-06 at 08:56 PM

In response to message #28

Thanx [name]

I'm just hangin' out getting to know this community and my own camera before i start posting my Nikon related questions...hehe!

Have a good one!

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**#29, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 28-Apr-06 at 07:43 PM

In response to message #27

No right or wrong way to be a member (unless offence is cause, of course) I'm just a

cynical old sort 😊

It just struck me as an odd first-post from an ex-lurker - the taste benefits of Coke instead of some meandering question regarding ultra-sharp lenses or the evil grip of overwhelming NAS like mine probably were ... hehe 😊

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**#31, RE: sweets for my sweet**

Posted by [name] on 30-Apr-06 at 10:24 PM

In response to message #29

LAST EDITED ON 30-Apr-06 AT 10:25 PM (GMT 1)

You yung 'uns don't even remember the days when Coke had coca leaves in it, real vanilla, had less sweetner and used sugar instead of high fructose corn syrup.

Personally I have no fondness for the unreal "real" thing. I find that the better quality imitations are so close to the "real" drink as makes no difference to me.

I've also tried "healthy" alternative Cokes made with "natural" ingredients which, although expensive in comparison, are much more interesting on the pallette.