

Chapter 1

Social Entrepreneurship, Smart Brands, and Epic Social Learning Networks: Content, Community, and Communication

Stavroula Kalogeras

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5028-0413>

School of Business, University of Plymouth, UK

ABSTRACT

This study explores how brand cultures can become learning communities and highlights how social networking sites can emerge as social learning platforms by way of content, conversations, and community. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the concept of learning content in online social learning networks that are initiated by a commercial enterprise to provide a competitive advantage while at the same time providing social good. The proposed framework builds a bridge between the organization and the consumer, takes into account Generation Z, and looks at self-development and knowledge consumption as the key benefit. The work considers transmedia storytelling which has emerged in marketing to expand the brand story. The concept of transmedia learning networks and brand-consumer value-competitiveness model is proposed to show the value proposition of knowledge consumption. The work embraces learning communities, introduces the theory of conversationism, and encourages participation and conversation on a global scale.

INTRODUCTION

A social entrepreneur is a pioneer in innovation, acting as a change agents to improve approaches and create value that benefit humanity. A social purpose business is important because it provides a framework for businesses to find their own success by helping others and to help change society in a sustainable way. “Social entrepreneurship is an approach by individuals, groups, start-up companies or entrepreneurs, in which they develop, fund and implement solutions to social, cultural, or environmental

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issues” (PBS Organization). The ability to think differently, adapt to a world which changes rapidly, to find innovative solutions and engage with a large community to change society in a sustainable way is a characteristic of a social enterprise.

This paper explores the notion of learning cultures where social status, values, and activities are centered on the consumption of knowledge. It does not focus on a consumer culture that is defined as a culture where social status, values, and activities are centered on the consumption of commodities and services. In a consumer culture, a large part of what people do, and what people value is subjected around their consumption of material goods. Today, organizations are tasked with providing social good and smart brands are organizations that answer the call to benefit society. These firms make an effort to create positive change in society through their initiatives. Smart brands, in addition to selling products or services, offer knowledge consumption via digital media platforms. The platforms may be existing social media platforms, learning management systems, or some combination of newly developed or traditional forms. The space of communication is widening to create meaning-making potential by way of social conversations and social learning networks. Learning is a social act, and through conversation and social interaction among participants, learning can be achieved. Furthermore, collaboration has been associated with retention and comprehension, and social networking sites and interactive experiences encourage emotional engagement that can lead to deeper connections with the brand.

Social learning is learning that takes place through social interaction between peers. The theory of social learning contends that people learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modeling. The theory has often been called a bridge between behaviorist and cognitive learning theories because it encompasses attention, memory, and motivation (Bandura, 1977). Basically, social learning involves the participation of others. To be considered social the process must demonstrate that a change in understanding has taken place in the individuals involved; demonstrate that this change goes beyond the individual and becomes situated within wider social units or communities of practice; and occur through social interactions and processes between actors within a social network (Reed et al., 2010).

The paper looks at social learning that is initiated by a commercial organization on digital media platforms. The primary aim of this study is to introduce the concept of social learning in an online context that is initiated by a commercial enterprise. The interdisciplinary research considers: (1) The relationship between social networks and social learning cross culturally, (2) The prospect of value creation via content, community, collaboration, and conversation, (3) The requirements of Generation Z, (4) The opportunity for self-development and knowledge consumption by way of transmedia touchpoints, (5) The use of social networks by brands to increase value and competitiveness for the brand and the consumer, (6) The theory of conversationism. There are many components to the interdisciplinary study that need consideration when moving from theory to practice.

The following section contains the literature review and is organized around the following themes: Brand culture and meaning-making, Generation Z, Smart brands, The spaces in-between and unitive experiences, collective consciousness, brand identity and holistic branding, brand competitiveness and customer value, and the conclusion. Based on the theoretical framework derived is a brand-consumer value- competitiveness proposition. The work concludes by discussion, and identifying a promising direction for research and practice in the future.

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