

Brand communities as communal prosumers.

The case of VW brand communities.

Alvin Toffler's term *prosumer* targets activities in an "invisible economy" which produce goods and services beyond markets. Working on so-called *brand communities*¹ it turned out that prosumers and prosuming play an important role in these communities, however in recent contributions to brand communities the prosumer is hardly recognized. In the case of VW brand communities, "prosuming" is highly relevant. Many of the activities in these brand communities are in fact about "keeping the cars alive", maintaining, repairing and restoring classic cars. Members of brand communities around classic cars aren't just consumers or admirers of a brand (as the definition by Muniz and O'Guinn suggests), but prosumers who construct a meaningful context between consumption and production which is (1) collectively produced and (2) embedded in a larger frame of reference which Hallay, Hellman and Raabe (2008) call "brand culture".

For members of VW brand communities it seems to be appealing that maintaining classic cars is expedient in ecological as well as in economic terms. They construct an economically reasonable DIY narrative despite of the real costs that come with the "hobby". They also construct a particular ideology of consumption with which they separate themselves from the consumption mainstream and which gives meaning to their interest in classic cars. This is especially true where the communities feel abandoned by the marketer as with the VW Transporter T3 ("Bulli") or the VW Golf MK1. The socially constructed context of prosuming, which consists of activities, norms, values and narratives in relation to brand, product, marketer and community is the subject of this paper.

¹ According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001: 412) a brand community is a „a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand“.