

Between Two Worlds: How Seriously Engaged Consumers Support Global Businesses through Local Brand Communities

Track: Consumer Behaviour

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Abstract: Seriously engaged consumers create and manage online communities dedicated to brands or consumption activities, yet their activities remain under theorized. Drawing from institutional theory, we interpret longitudinal qualitative data on the trajectory of four seriously engaged consumers who created and manage a brand community for players of Microsoft's Xbox video-game consoles. Our findings highlight the boundary work these consumers enact to minimize tensions at the intersection between the domains of work and play throughout their trajectory as brand community managers. We also discuss how consumer-managed brand communities mediate the relationship between global businesses and consumers in local markets.

1. Introduction

Participation in online consumption communities has frequently been studied as a playful, hedonic activity consumers engage in (e.g. Kozinets 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Studies developed within the consumer culture tradition have also examined other positive outcomes of consumer engagement in consumption communities, demonstrating that even shifting, open, network-like engagement (Thomas, Price, and Schau 2013) can promote the creation of various types of value, reflected in social, consumption, and cultural resources (Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould 2009; Cova, Kozinets, and Shankar 2007; Cova 1997).

However, there are indications that consumers can engage with brand communities in a more serious manner (Wiertz and DeRuyter 2007; Jeppensen and Fredericksen 2006). In particular, those consumers involved in creating and/or managing brand communities tend to engage in this activity from a different stance than casual participants. As they engage in online communities over an extended period of time, these consumers are more likely to face their engagement not only as a playful instance or an end in itself, but as a means to achieve a desired identity or to achieve certain positions within a group (Grayson 1999; Taylor 2006).

Prior discussions of consumers' serious engagement in brand communities exist in consumer research, these studies mostly focus on consumer relationships to other community members (e.g. Kozinets 2002), and/or on community members' engagement with the brand or activity the community is centered on (e.g. DeValck, VanBruggen and Wierenga 2009; Cova and White 2011). We know little, for instance, about the efforts made by consumers in order to ascertain the

continuance and maintenance of their engagement with online consumption communities. Prior research has noted that when the number of participants in any given leisure activity increases, managing the activity becomes time consuming and requires that some participants make a central life activity of it or, at least, be willing to work in order to improve parts of it (Boulaire and Cova 2008; Stebbins 1998, 2007).

The serious leisure perspective, developed within sociology, helps substantiate understanding for why such form of serious engagement would be appealing to consumers. Serious leisure refers to “[t]he systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that is sufficiently substantial and interesting for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of its especial skills and knowledge” (Stebbins 1992, p. 3). In alignment with the paradoxical relationship of work and play in post-modernist societies (Firat and Venkatesh 1995), serious leisure is thought to replace work as a central life interest for some individuals.

In addition to being between the worlds of work and play, seriously engaged consumers occupy various other in-between spaces, such as the intersection between the fields of consumption and production. For brand communities centered on global brands, seriously engaged consumers are also situated in between global-level brand managers and local consumers. This multifaceted intersectional position may be challenging to seriously engaged consumers due to the potential tensions that may emerge from diverging goals and understandings between the intersecting fields.

In order to understand how seriously engaged consumers manage these boundaries, we undertake an extended qualitative study of PXB, the Brazilian community for players of Xbox, a global brand owned by Microsoft. In interpreting our data, we draw from the serious leisure perspective and from institutional theory, in particular its notions of institutional entrepreneurship (Maguire, Hardy, and Lawrence 2004, Lawrence and Philips 2004) and boundary work (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006, Ziestma and Lawrence 2010).

Our study contributes to the consumer research literature by extending understanding of consumer participation in brand communities through its focus on the consumer-entrepreneurs who create and run brand communities. We also contribute to studies of international marketing by describing the key role of these seriously engaged consumers and their brand communities as mediators of the relationship between global brands and local markets.

The following sections introduce current understandings of consumer engagement in brand communities; briefly review research on serious leisure, and introduce our theoretical framework based on institutional theory and the concept of boundary work. Next, we present our methods and research context, describe our findings, and discuss their implications for consumer research and for global companies interacting with local brand communities.

2. Consumer Engagement in Brand Communities

Although definitions abound and terminology varies (see Thomas, Price, and Schau, 2013 for a review), a brand or consumption community can be characterized as a specialized community based on social communications and relationships among a brand's consumers (DeValck, VanBruggen, and Wierenga 2009). As noted by Kozinets, "online communities form or manifest cultures, the learned beliefs, values and customs that serve to order, guide and direct the behavior of a particular society or group" (2010, p. 12).

Social interactions between community members profoundly influence customers' relationship with, and attitude towards the brand (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002). Consumer engagement with online consumption communities may vary from participating in a brand-managed consumption community (Cova and Pace 2006) to actually creating communities, where a specific interest on a brand, product, or activity can be shared with like-minded others. As characterized in consumer research, consumer engagement is an interactive process, which may emerge at different intensity levels over time, reflecting distinct states (Brodie et al., 2011a). Its consequences include consumer loyalty and satisfaction, consumer empowerment, connection and emotional bonding, trust and commitment (Brodie et al., 2011b).

Brodie and colleagues (2011b) noted that consumer engagement in online brand communities involves specific interactive experiences between consumers and the brand, and among community members. Their findings highlight that consumer engagement is a context-dependent, multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral dimensions. It is also relevant to consider the three basic types of drivers that motivate consumer engagement in online brand communities (Wirtz et al. 2013): brand-related (brand identification and brand's symbolic function), social (social benefits and social identity), and functional (functional benefits, uncertainty avoidance, information quality and monetary and explicit normative incentives). Some of these drivers suggest that the consumer engagement with online consumption communities may be closely related to the engagement of individuals with a serious leisure activity.

2.1 Serious Leisure and Consumer Engagement

Overall, the serious leisure perspective has problematized the rigid binary of work and leisure, as well as challenged the hedonistic constructions of leisure by identifying negative outcomes and costs associated with it (Raisborough 1999; Kjølørød 2009). This perspective has also considered deferred gratification in leisure pursuits, and the envisioning of leisure as not necessarily fun, which allows researchers to "escape the conceptual burdens of enjoyment, freedom and celebrations of choice" (Gillespie, Leffler, and Lerner 2005, p. 286) when investigating consumption activities.

Serious leisure differs from casual and project-based leisure. For people who have little work or no work at all, as well as for those who find their jobs too unsubstantial to invest positive emotional, physical, and intellectual energy on, serious leisure seems to act as a non-remunerated substitute for work, propelling the development of a leisure lifestyle

(Stebbins 2001, 2007). For the unemployed or retired, serious leisure may be the only option to develop a central life interest (Dubin 1992). Indeed, Schau, Gilly, and Wonfinbarger found that the number of Americans who prefer leisure to work has been increasing exponentially over the decades, and the availability of attractive leisure opportunities can be related to the flowering of a “retirement lifestyle” (2009, p. 257).

In addition to offering opportunities for identity development, serious leisure also contributes to community formation and to the societal integration of individuals (Stebbins 2001). As a substitute for work, it offers a unique opportunity for people to connect with a network of like-minded individuals and become part of a vibrant social world which usually includes important strangers, local and national organizations, audiences, spectators, admirers, and onlookers.

Despite its benefits, serious leisure requires significant efforts. Participants are expected to increasingly develop the skills, knowledge, and acquire the resources necessary to progress and become an expert in a serious leisure activity, eventually building a career on it (Stebbins 1992). They also need to persevere in face of adversities such as fatigue, anxiety, embarrassment, and fear, facing dislikes that require significant adjustments as participants attempt to avoid certain features of a serious leisure activity. These efforts, adjustments, and costs could be considered the “dark side” of consumer engagement in serious leisure activities, and our study will be particularly attentive to their manifestations.

In sum, what the serious leisure perspective demonstrates is that the distinction between work and play is much more multifaceted and flexible than the compartmentalized, oppositional relation currently discussed in the consumption community literature. As Stanley Parker, author of influent sociological texts on work and leisure, has once observed, “[t]he case in favour of an integration between work and leisure turns out to be mainly a critique of what various forms of differentiation have failed to achieve. This is perhaps unavoidable at the present stage of social development. We have no set of social institutions and corresponding cultural patterns which represent in daily life an integration of work and leisure – we have, at most, the behaviour and attitudes of a comparative few individuals sharing certain patterns of living which indicate what integration could be” (Parker, 1983, p.119). Since Parker’s reflection, the literature in leisure studies and associate fields has produced enough developments to allow for a more refined understanding of the relationships between work and leisure (Ravenscroft and Gilchrist 2009, Waring 2008, Rojek 2000). We draw on those understandings and complement them with concepts from institutional theory as we explore the contemporary context of brand communities, in which boundaries between consumers’ work and non-work activities have become increasingly blurred.

2.2 Institutional theory, institutional entrepreneurship, and boundary work

The perspective of institutional theory, as advanced in organization studies, examines the taken for granted, resilient aspects of social structure (Greenwood et al. 2008). It considers the processes by which structures, including

schemes, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behavior (Scott, 2013). Different themes addressed by institutional theorists explain how these elements are created, diffused, adopted, and adapted over space and time; and how they fall into decline and disuse (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). From this perspective, markets can be understood as institutional fields in that they comprise “a set of institutions, including practices, understanding, and rules; and a network of organizations” (Lawrence and Phillips 2004, 692).

One relatively recent development within institutional theory is the emergence of a focus on institutional entrepreneurship. Institutional entrepreneurship refers to “the activities of actors who have an interest in particular institutional arrangements and who leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing ones” (Maguire, Hardy, and Lawrence 2004, p. 657). Interest in institutional entrepreneurship has grown among scholars who examine both how motivated actors can initiate changes in a field, and how other actors may effectively resist changes when they perceive their interests are served by institutional continuity. In some cases actors are dissatisfied with the status quo, and that is what motivates them to change the field they operate in to obtain certain kinds of advantages (Lawrence and Philips, 2004). In other cases, actors will engage in institutional entrepreneurship motivated by a desire for social change (Maguire and Hardy, 2006; Creed, Scully, and Austin, 2002; Rao 1998). In all cases, institutional entrepreneurs seek to change the status quo deliberately and to alter institutions in ways that serve their interests.

The literature to date has helped to identify enabling conditions for attempts at institutional entrepreneurship. These include field level factors such as precipitating crises and conflict (Greenwood et al., 2002); the degree of heterogeneity and institutionalization of organizations in a given field (Hardy and Maguire, 2008; Dorado, 2005); and factors relating to the actors’ social skills (Fligstein 1997) and social positions in a field (Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013; Haveman and Rao, 1997; Rao et al., 2000). One position said to be favorable to institutional entrepreneurship is the boundary between two intersecting fields (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006). Actors who are situated at the boundary of two intersecting fields may engage in work to stabilize the two intersecting fields, or to promote change in one or both fields. That is, they engage in “boundary work” (Ziestma and Lawrence 2010).

Ziestma and Lawrence identify three types of boundary work: (1) “establishing boundaries to protect autonomy, prestige, and control of resources”; (2) connecting cross-boundary actors through the creation of artifacts and the enactment of processes that facilitate coordination between these actors, and (3) boundary breaching through framing and resource mobilization so as to facilitate openness between fields. In other words, consumers who engage in boundary work may attempt to reinforce the boundaries between different fields so as to separate them; to connect actors across fields despite the boundaries, further intersecting these fields; or to erode the boundaries between different fields. Different types of boundary work will be undertaken depending on the intentions of the actors, that is, depending on whether these institutional

entrepreneurs wish to integrate and stabilize two intersecting fields, or to promote change in one (or both) of them. Having introduced our theoretical background, we follow to describe our study of the Xbox community and its seriously engaged consumers.

3. Method

Our involvement with this study's context, the Xbox consumer community, is characterized by long-term immersion. Throughout nine years (2006-2014), the first author observed, participated in, and collected data from two large online communities dedicated to Xbox, one managed by consumers and one managed by Microsoft. This process can be categorized as netnographic observation (Kozinets 2010).

Although both communities are in Portuguese they reached global relevance among Xbox players, as evidenced during fieldwork. Further fieldwork was conducted that centered on the consumer-managed brand community, whereby the first author attended three offline events organized by this community, and personally interviewed the three consumers who founded the community, several of its moderators, and other community members. Follow-up interviews were conducted on Skype with the community founders over the years to keep track of community developments. The most recent interviews were conducted with two of the founders and a new community manager (previously a moderator) in July 2013, after the community transitioned to a new online platform and changed its name from Portalxbox to PXB. These interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes, and were audio and/or video recorded.

To complement data gathered through observation, participation, and interviews, we have also collected online archival data on the online community discussion forums, Facebook groups, specialized websites, and media outlets that covered game related news and developments. Apart from these archival data, our dataset include 3 hours of interviews recorded over Skype and 10 hours of videotaped interviews that generated over 200 pages of single-spaced transcribed text. These data cover the development of the consumer-managed community from its launch in October 2005 (as Portalxbox) to the evolution of its current form as PXB. Therefore, one of the main richness of our dataset is that the developments of the community were not only reported to the authors, but lived by one of them, as the observation process was continued throughout different moments of the community history. This in-depth knowledge allows us to properly analyze the trajectory of seriously engaged consumers within the consumption community. As we present our data in the following section, all names were exchanged by pseudonyms to preserve informants' anonymity.

4. Findings

Our findings are results of the interplay between seriously engaged consumers, a global brand, and an evolving

scenario in the video-game industry in Brazil. In order to better depict the unfolding of this interplay, we present our results in four sections: the first introduces the video-game market in Brazil; the second introduces four seriously engaged consumers as our key informants; the third reports on the creation of an online consumption community for Brazilian Xbox players, and, finally we evidence the boundary work of seriously engaged consumers.

4.1 The institutional field: The video-game market in Brazil

The trajectory of the online community investigated is strongly related with the history of videogames, and to the introduction of videogames to the Brazilian market. The video game industry began in the 1970s, in North America (Lipson and Brain, 2009). In its first development phases, this industry was characterized by low performance consoles, until 1974, when Sears pushed the market forward by releasing the Atari Pong. In 1977, the popular Atari Video Computer System was released. This Atari was the first video-game console of most Brazilian gamers.

For a long time, Brazilian gamers relied on piracy and illegal imports to access games. Although the Atari was launched in 1977, it was only in 1983 that it was officially released in Brazil. During this six-year gap, several illegal imports of consoles and games were made. For many years Brazil suffered from this delay. The Nintendo Entertainment System was released in Japan in 1983 and in Brazil in 1993. Its direct competitor, Master System, was released in Japan in 1985 and in Brazil in 1989. Super NES was released in 1990 in Japan and in 1993 in Brazil and its competitor, the Mega Drive, in 1988 in Japan and in 1990 in Brazil. At that time, piracy was not an issue since the gamer still needed the original cartridges to be able to play. Therefore, although the videogames were not being officially sold in Brazil, the majority of the games and consoles brought into Brazil were actually produced by the Nintendo and Sega, and informally imported by consumers who travelled abroad. In the next generation of videogames, that scenario would change considerably.

Although Nintendo launched a video game console that had a processor with twice the capacity of its competitors', Panasonic (3DO) and Sony (Playstation) entered in the market with the innovative CD-based videogames. These consoles became immediately popular in Brazil, where a new (and original) Nintendo 64 cartridge was sold for US\$100 and a pirate 3DO or Playstation CD was sold for US\$7. It is important to consider this price gap from the perspective of the average middle-class Brazilian teenager – who composed the core market for video games 18 years ago. For them, the tradeoff was between buying one game for Nintendo 64 versus 14 “pirated” games for 3DO or Panasonic. Their choice was clear, and this boosted the piracy culture in the country.

The culture of piracy was then established and carried on to the next generation of game consoles that arrived in the market in 2000-2001, when Sony released its Playstation 2, and Microsoft entered the video game market by releasing the first Xbox. Playstation 2 was officially released with a 2 year delay in Brazil. The first Xbox, however, has never been

officially released in the Brazilian market. Consumers bought Xbox consoles abroad, and usually played with pirate CDs, because there were very few original games in the market and original games for the Xbox were about 18 times more expensive than a pirated game.

Nintendo came back as an industry's major player in the following generation of consoles, with the launching of Wii. At around the same time, Sony released the Playstation 3 and Microsoft released the Xbox 360. By then, while Wii games could be pirated, Playstation 3 had the majority of titles released in Blu-ray, making the production of pirate copies almost as expensive as the original games. At the time, Microsoft also figured out how to prevent piracy for Xbox360: when a user played pirated games or altered their consoles, Microsoft would no longer allow that console to connect to Live, the online network where users could play live against each other, enhancing the Xbox gaming experience. This generation is strongly marked by the increased online connectivity among gamers.

Only in the end of 2011, Microsoft began producing consoles in Brazil. The decision is justified by Cristina Palmaka (Silva, 2011), channel director for the Microsoft consumer: "We believe in the potential of the Brazilian market and we have a long way ahead of us". It is clear that Microsoft had started to change its perspective regarding the Brazilian consumer and its piracy culture. Finally, between 2012 and 2013, the current generation of games was launched. The main players in the market remained the same: Nintendo (Wii U), Microsoft (Xbox One) and Sony (Playstation 4). The future of these consoles is yet to be told.

4.2 The Seriously Engaged Consumers: Our Main Characters

Among the consumers we interacted with during fieldwork, four can be clearly singled out as seriously engaged consumers. These consumers were responsible for founding and managing the brand community devoted to Microsoft's Xbox console. We briefly trace the profile for each of these consumers below.

MrAx is a 45 year-old medical doctor considered the main figure in the community, being responsible for having fostered it through its development. MrAx described his first role in the community as "public relations". In this capacity, he was responsible for connecting people and keeping the spirit of the community alive. Nowadays, MrAx plays a leading role in the social responsibility projects performed by the community. In the description of team members available on the PXB website, MrAx is referred to by the moniker "The General" and as "the big philosophical mentor of the national gamer community, one of the PXB founders". His personal motto is said to be "No pain, no Gain". A few years into his engagement with the Xbox community, MrAx was invited by Microsoft Corporation to become one of Brazil's few Microsoft MVPs (most valuable professional). The MVP title is awarded by Microsoft to "community leaders who actively

share their high-quality, real-world deep technical expertise with the community and with Microsoft [and] are committed to helping others get the most out of their experience with Microsoft products and technologies” (Microsoft 2014).

DH is a 41 year-old IT entrepreneur whose first role in the community was that of “commercial director”, although he acted in several management tasks using his previous professional experience in administration and his gaming know-how as gamer. On the PxB website, DH is described as a “successful entrepreneur”, and as a person who has gaming in his DNA. Community manager since the beginning of Portalxbox, DH is also described as a “romantic guy” and an easy person to relate with, bringing softness to the community. His description also mentions that he is “always in a good mood and is optimistic, having helped to create Brazil’s national gamer scenario”.

Dicco, the member whose leaving motivates a platform switch for the community, is a 38 year-old IT Technician. Dicco acted as the main supporter for technology and database for the Portalxbox community. As the other administrators describe him, he was the “technological mentor and the machine behind Portalxbox” (MrAx, Interview). Alongside MrAx and DH, Dicco was one of the three founders of Portalxbox, and a supporter of its early culture against piracy.

Raphael is a 25 year-old graphic designer “for fun, passion and profession” according to his description on the PxB website. Raphael joined the community at the age of 18, as a moderator in Portalxbox. He has been a gamer since the Super Nintendo (1990s) and participated in other gaming communities at the time. As his profile on PxB states, Raphael was “rescued from the obscurity of the national gamer forum, to add to this wonderful team, serving for years as a moderator of Portalxbox”. In the community current stage as PxB, Raphael was invited to join the administrators team, where now is responsible for developing content and technology support for the community.

4.3 The creation of an online consumption community for Brazilian Xbox players

MrAx recalls that, in the early 2000’s, he used to spend a lot of time in an online forum for Xbox players called Brasil Xbox, of which he was a moderator. In 2004, that forum had been hacked and all archived information was lost. That was when MrAx, DH and Dicco saw an opportunity to create their own Xbox fan community, and to make its launching coincide with the launching of Xbox 360. As DH reports:

“There was a previous forum in which we exchanged information... it was called Brasil Xbox... Overnight it was hacked and ceased to exist. So, our incentive to create our website was a feeling of having become orphans” (DH, Interview, July, 2013)

At Brasil Xbox, members discussed everything game-related, weather it was legal or not. In an interview in 2009, DH recalls that he phoned MrAx as soon as he learned that the forum ended, suggesting that they should create a new

website, but one that supported “what was right and that could have an impact and cause a difference” in the gaming business in Brazil. As MrAx recounts, before launching their own website, the three consumer-entrepreneurs offered a partnership to the managers of Brasil Xbox.

“We decided to talk to the owners of Brasil Xbox. Perhaps they would like to do a partnership, that way we wouldn’t start from scratch. They said no, that there was no future there and when we said that we wanted a website that was against piracy, they laughed at us.” (MrAx, Interview, July, 2013)

It is important to consider that, at this point in the community history, the main reason that made these three friends a laughing stock in the eyes of the owners of Brasil Xbox was the same reason that made them so unique in a scenario such as the Brazilian gaming community: their commitment to fighting piracy in the Brazilian video game market. They supported the idea that, if a player wants to play a game, he should play original games in an unaltered console.

After Brasil Xbox ceased to exist, DH, MrAx and Dicco advanced the project of creating an online environment in which they could meet and exchange information with other consumers who shared their stance against piracy. By the end of 2005, they launched their own brand community for Xbox players, and called it Portalxbox:

“Dicco was the technological mentor and I was the philosophical mentor. Dicco invested loads of his time. He manually created all the system. We also invested much time logged on, to supervise, because for every person who got it right, we had 10 people who got it wrong. So we needed to moderate and bring people to moderate with us. So, sort of saying, we defined our goals and the moderators made sure that they were followed” (MrAx, Interview, July 2013).

The environment created by the three founders and a few early moderators was rich in high-quality discussions about the game and entertainment technology. The rich content started to attract a large number of users for the online community. Interviews with the three partners at the community’s most popular stage reveal their excitement about the community development, as the following quotes illustrate:

“So much of what we even thought it was utopia is now here. Here’s three [people] who thought it was not going to last a year. We joked, and for us it was really a joke, it was simply a hobby, to have a place for the three of us” (DH, Interview, September, 2009).

The launching of Portalxbox coincided with the release of Xbox 360 in Brazil – Microsoft’s first release of a console in the country, which finally enabled players to buy original games at local stores. To Microsoft, having like-minded people working towards protecting their console against piracy was a good thing. Although Portalxbox was not affiliated to Microsoft Brasil, it was at that time that the company offered to host annual meetings for community members at the Microsoft headquarters in São Paulo.

Portalxbox grew steadily and strong and became the biggest community for a gaming system run and moderated by

users in the world, larger than Microsoft's own online community. The consumer-managed community became a strong supporter against piracy, which affected directly the sales of original games and, consequently, decreased the numbers of informal businesses that pirated games and hacked Microsoft's consoles for several years.

In early 2013, Portalxbox was shut down due to technical and administrative difficulties faced by the founding members. A few months later, a new website for the community, PXB was launched, which is currently active and growing (as of October 2014). The next section of the findings reports on the trajectory of this evolving consumer-managed brand community and its changing role as it intertwines with the history of the four seriously engaged consumers: MrAx, DH, Dicco and Raphael.

4.4 The Boundary Work of Seriously Engaged Consumers

Although the engagement of each of the four key informants with the community varies and their trajectories as institutional entrepreneurs have its own peculiarities, some themes cut across these individual differences. Observing the qualities of serious leisure (Stebbins 2007), and analyzing the data in light of institutional theories of boundary work, we organize our findings around the main boundary these consumers occupy at different instances throughout their extended engagement with the brand community: that between the domains of work and play. Considering this boundary, we explain seriously engaged consumers' goals and the type of boundary work they engage in.

Between work and play

As they describe their engagement with the online consumption community, our informants employ terms that make that trajectory resemble a career path, and highlight the tensions of being at the intersection between two worlds: that of play, and that of work. Raphael, for instance, when recalling his early years participating in the community as a forum moderator, reports on activities that are similar to those of an intern:

“I remember that, since I was the youngest there, I was always quiet to listen to what they were planning for the community ... at the time they were creating the rules and all that... and I didn't know much to have an opinion on the issue, so I was just observing, mainly. ...they were older and I was trying to learn something.” (Raphael, Interview, July, 2013)

Even though his tone and words convey a pleasurable engagement with the community, his position as the community forums moderator situates Raphael at the boundary between work and play. It was his dedicated engagement with the community that led him to the moderation tasks. He recalls the early times as ones of “a lot of free time” when he “would stay on the forums all afternoon after school, reading and posting.”

The latent tension between spending time playing videogames and leisurely interacting with other community

members, and the requirements of his moderation tasks is heightened when Raphael completes high school and starts an undergraduate degree in Design. He then demonstrates the strategic goal of integrating work and play, and engages in boundary work to build connections across these two domains.

“I started to align two things that I really like – videogame and design – I did what I liked, and I actually looked for things to do on the community. I wanted to develop my work inside the community, I wanted to help with my work. I wanted to work, to do things at the Portal ... to the point that when I was looking for jobs, internships at that time, a lot of stuff in my portfolio was things I had created for the Portal.” (Raphael, Interview, July, 2013)

When Portalxbox started to decline, a topic was created on the forums to brainstorm on what should be done, and someone suggested starting a new website. Raphael recounts how he saw this as an opportunity to leverage his skills and advance his leisure career. In that report, Raphael further explains his strategy for continuing to connect work and play by assuming a design-related position within the community: *“They had the idea to renovate the brand and create a new website. That was my big break. My work would be to put into place the new path that MrAx envisioned. The biggest problem is that I am a designer and I didn’t know a lot about programming.”* (Raphael, Interview, July, 2013)

Despite feeling underprepared for certain aspects of the task, Raphael seized the opportunity. The community founders intend to offer Raphael a salary in the future. Currently, the community designer is earning a share of the products sold through e-commerce links advertised on PXB. In parallel to his work at PXB, Raphael is also formally employed as a designer in another company. Through this contractual formalization, what initially was a playful engagement with the community crystallized into work (Stebbins 2009), and Raphael was able to connect work and play despite the problematic boundaries between these two domains.

Just before shutting down, in the beginning of 2013, Portalxbox had 130,000 active users. At that stage, the description of the team on the community website illustrated the efforts for keeping up with the community: *“Maintaining a website like PortalXbox is extremely gratifying, but it is no easy task. There is a great team behind the pages you read, and they are working hard to bring you information and content of quality”* (Portalxbox 2011). In the two years that followed the posting of that description, PortalXbox, as it was, would cease to exist.

In interviews, all three founding members report that during all these years of engagement with the community, they faced several problems and dilemmas, which resulted in transforming what was a “fun thing to do” into “responsibility.” Even though all three founding members kept other paid jobs in parallel to their engagement with the community, they dedicated a lot of time to administering the community – sometimes as much as to their paid jobs. Moreover, they had to fund the community, usually doing so with their own money (“there wasn’t a month when we wouldn’t spend at least US\$500 each on the community [MrAx, interview, 2013]). They also had to invest effort, time, and

money in acquiring the new skills they needed to build and support the IT functions, and above all, they used their free time to develop the community – not to the leisurely task of playing videogames.

The key reason for the closure of Portalxbox, however, was the fact that one of the three community founders – Dicco, who was in charge with the programming for the online platform hosting the community – decided that he would no longer manage the tasks of being an administrator for the community. With no other manager having equivalent IT skills, the website started to suffer from technological issues and eventually had to be shut down.

For Dicco, work and play were additionally intertwined because his professional formation and paid work as in IT, the same function he fulfilled within the Xbox community. Experiencing heightened tension at this boundary space, Dicco decided to separate work and play by erecting a boundary between these two domains. In 2009 Dicco still seemed pretty motivated about the community future, more than that, he seemed motivated about the business itself, the possibility of extending his IT experience, and the other guys' community management experience, through a real profitable business:

“We reached a level of maturity in management that is very good, an experience that would be, perhaps, a pity not to use in other online communities...This is a nice situation that we have, because it's like, we've been train's passengers, we have already been the drivers, and I think we're increasingly going to be the owners of the railroad.” (Dicco, Interview, September, 2009)

The efforts required moving this step ahead, and the personal evolving life tasks that requires more involvement as the guys got older adults, are the ones that eventually led to him ending his serious engagement with the community. According to the other administrators, Dicco had the “key for the machinery house”, but, after some professional and personal reorganization in this life, Portalxbox was no longer a priority for him, in the professional or personal point of view. As he left the community, Dicco left the boundary space at the intersection between work and play.

In contrast to the boundary work activities enacted by Raphael and Dicco, who attempted, respectively, to further intersect and to completely separate work and play, MrAx and DH engage in efforts to breach the boundaries between these two domains. MrAx remains strongly engaged with the community despite the increasing costs of this engagement. It is MrAx who undertook the initiative to launch the new website, and to rebrand it PXB once Portalxbox had to be shut down. In further exploring the reasons for his continued engagement despite the tensions between work and play he reports experiencing, we uncovered some deeper motivations held by MrAx.

One of the reasons that motivated MrAx to start and continue his serious engagement with the Xbox community is his belief that he could, somehow, change the view of other consumers and make them understand that piracy is wrong. In this sense, his continued engagement with the community and his efforts to keep it a “piracy free” space are instrumental. MrAx feels he can instill principles, moral and ethical values on people through his management of the online consumption

community. In this sense, it is possible to affirm that MrAx has been working to erase the boundaries between play and work by intentionally transforming his playful activities into a domain of work. This transformation is guided by personal values that MrAx spouses, and are based on three main premises that he described in informal conversation with one of the authors: differentiating between interests and priorities, his passion for dealing with people and technology, and his beliefs that something can be done to guide the new generations of gamers and young consumers towards fair play, fighting against piracy and helping each other (Research notes). These premises are implied in all of the social projects managed by MrAx since Portalxbox was created. For MrAx, interests change, but priorities do not. MrAx defines his priority as “touching people”, so the community, as Portalxbox in the beginning and PxB now, have always been a medium for him to manifest this priority through an interest in games and activism against piracy. The following quotes illustrate that:

“I have never done that for someone else to think I’m cool, or to be accepted, or for people to like me... no, no... I don’t do that for self-promotion, I do it to feel better, I must do it to believe in something” (MrAx, Interview, July 2013).

“I was always in love with technology, despite my formal education in biological sciences. My father worked for a telephone company, [he] always dealt with technology, and I was always passionate about it. By that time, if I said: ‘I want to be to get a Technology degree at the University...’ (pauses) I would never have said that, [because] at that time there was medicine, law and engineering, and that was it. I was always dedicated to medicine, but I always had this other vein. Nowadays things are broader, technology gives you opportunities to build a career, but these didn’t exist by that time. But that stuck to me, and with the [beginning of Portalxbox] I could realize this other part of me that had been dormant.” (MrAx, Interview, July 2013).

While the effacement of boundaries between work and play has a positive, identity-integrating character for MrAx, this boundary work does not assume the same character for DH. Even though he has maintained his serious engagement with the community since its founding, DH ponders:

“At the beginning it was a group of friends, it was like our ‘club’. A little club of 20, 50 people, that we managed to be friends with. When the community grew and it became 10, 20, 30, 40 thousand people, you can’t keep up with it. So at the beginning we were very participative, we liked to be there, to post [on the forums]. Today – I will be honest with you – the least I am there, the better, because the load got too heavy.” (DH, Interview, July 2013)

DH refers to his distancing from participating regularly in the community as increasing demands by other members shift the discussion from pleasurable gaming-related topics to administrative issues, which he characterizes as “headaches” and “pure pressure.” He further considers:

“You start to get tired, your priorities change. Today the community demands too much from us, psychologically, financially, it demands decisions, and suck it up to users who think that the administrators left their job undone... things

that really hurt. [My engagement with the community] doesn't give me only joy, it gives me a lot of sorrow too, just like any company. This ends up becoming a company. I have two consoles here at home, if I buy a new game, it takes me two or three months just to put it into the console.... We start to get tired of this."

By reducing to the maximum his leisurely participation in the community, DH feels that his gamer identity has been left aside, and that partiality of engagement creates tension for him. He notes: "PXB undermined a lot of my will to play, which was what I liked to do." In order to solve that tension, he seems to be working on approximating work and play and thinks of ways to efface the boundaries between these two currently conflicting domains:

"The community has ceased being leisure for me long time ago. Today it is just work. The only thing I hope for is that it becomes pleasurable work again, do you understand? Because it has ceased being leisure a long time ago..."

This will never become a business, a profitable business. The industry in Brazil has evolved a lot, of course, it is much better than it was years ago, thank God. But this is a very promiscuous industry, a very promiscuous environment. (...) and here it is not like in the US where gamers, where video games, are a first world industry that generates millions of dollars, here is still not like that. It will be, but it still isn't. So it won't turn into a profitable business."

Finally, when inquired about what motivates him to continue to be engaged with the community despite all these challenges, PH reflects about the achievements of the community through time, and declares: "*Profit as accomplishments, not financial profit, far from it, the opposite actually.*"

6. Discussion

Our findings have highlighted the different types of boundary work that seriously engaged consumers enact in order to cope with tension that arises at the intersections between the domains of work and play. We now move to discussing how these findings extend understanding of the role of online communities managed by seriously engaged consumers as mediators between global brands and local markets. We follow to address other implications of our findings for research on online consumption communities, and serious leisure studies.

Our findings are congruent with Stebbins (1992) suggestion of the application of the concept of "careers," an essentially work-related term, to serious leisure. Our study is one of the first which we are aware of, to investigate the fuzzy boundaries between leisure and work in consumer-managed online communities. The struggle of seriously engaged consumers to work the boundary between the domains of work and play is situated at the intersection between two institutional fields: that comprised by a global company (Microsoft), and the local Brazilian market for games. As we followed the development of Portalxbox/PXB, we also tracked the relationships between the online community and the company responsible for producing Xbox consoles and games.

Our longitudinal investigation of local video-game players as well as Microsoft's activities in Brazil, indicates the company did not seem to have a proper strategy in place to deal with the emerging video-game consumption phenomena that aroused in Brazil middle of the last decade. In particular, because this movement was led by empowered consumers who took control of their interaction with the brand and, surprisingly, decided to align efforts with Microsoft, becoming a strong local partner in the fight against piracy

Having a consumer-led brand community emerging in Brazil to become one of the biggest and most organized online communities for Xbox users in the world was certainly a good, yet completely unexpected surprise to Microsoft. At the onset of the brand community, Microsoft's headquarters in Brazil were not prepared to deal with the rapidly increasing popularity of Portalxbox. In 2006, when we initiated fieldwork, Portalxbox already had eight forum moderators and a huge community of registered and active fans (about 130 thousand). At that time, Microsoft's official brand community, Xbox Brasil, had only three moderators, all young employees, and no data about the number of members. These findings suggest that there was a gap between the professional approach to management of Portalxbox and the rather casual and on-the-go approach adopted by Microsoft at the time to manage its Brazilian brand community. Xbox fans flocked to Portalxbox because it had better content, more members (resulting in network effect [Fiedler and Sarstedt 2010]), and higher engagement of administrators on the forums. In that sense, the mere existence of Portalxbox benefited Microsoft's entry in the Brazilian market by providing consumers with a quality space for product and activity related discussions, one which the company incurred in no cost to maintain. In addition, the online community led by seriously engaged consumers was always based on principles that supported the successful entry of Microsoft in the Brazilian market, which was riddled with game piracy:

"By the end of 2005 we started Portalxbox, we started with a small forum that transformed everything. It made history in Brazil. It started with friends e grew up. The launching of games in Brazil [by Microsoft] came, and then the online platform [Xbox Live] and Portalxbox had a fundamental role in all that, we embraced the idea, we mobilized the community. We transformed and incorporated a number of users that Microsoft now can say it has in Brazil. In his way, we found out that evil [i.e. piracy] just wins when goodness retracts (...)" (MrAx, Interview, July 2013).

It is not only in the perception of seriously engaged consumers that Portalxbox played a key role in connecting the global company to the local market. Xbox fans also attest to the relevance of the community for the Brazilian market:

"I am from Manaus, and I came to the V National Forum...PortalXbox is fundamental for the gamer industry in the country. I've met people from all over the country here, and it has been amazing. Microsoft deserves kudos, they are showing to the whole country what is this industry that should keep growing in the country." (Gamer, in video produced by Jogae.tv, 2013)

Of note, in his declaration during the national gaming event organized by Portalxbox, the gamer conflates the efforts made by the community and those made by Microsoft to advance the local videogame industry in Brazil. This and other manifestations included in our dataset illustrate perceptions that Portalxbox and Microsoft are aligned in their goals of improving the local market and moving the videogame industry forward, in a way that benefits not only the company, but also Brazilian Xbox fans.

In spite of having aligned goals, we can notice that, in MrAx. view, the relationship between the community and Microsoft could be significantly stronger: "*We used the Microsoft headquarters and they provided us with some support, but this support was mainly logistic. Microsoft is not a company that has partners, it was never actually our partner. A partnership never existed. Yet it was something like: you are the good guys, you fostered our brand and without you, this never would have happened. And that's the reality. If the Portalxbox didn't exist, this could have happened? This even could have happened, but not with the same finesse... the product wouldn't be so highly appraised. Microsoft managed to get the Xbox in this level and one of the pillars, in Brazil, was the portal, which is the biggest community in Portuguese language of the whole world.*" (MrAx. Interview, 2013)

As MrAx mentions, the growing of the Portalxbox was always exponential: they were an oasis amidst a huge desert. The other communities had mostly pre-adolescent as members, and a lot of the discussions in alternative forums were about piracy, while the rules at Portalxbox were clearly set to ban members who initiated such discussions. On the downside, we can infer that - for seriously engaged consumers - being involved with a community such as theirs, over a long period made these consumers feel as if there were more costs than benefits in such relationship.

In sum, our findings suggest that the relevance of local brand communities for global businesses can be significant: they understand local consumers better, may promote engagement among fans, test and develop new initiatives, feed back into global strategies, and advance values and practices that are aligned with those of the brand. However, it should be noted that, although the brand continues to derive several benefits from the existence of consumer-managed communities, it lacks control over the community unless it offers extended support to its seriously engaged consumers. We recommend future research to expand on these aspects to improve understanding of how global brands and local communities relate.

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