A research agenda for collaborative consumer engagement and research methods

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Executive Summary

The Marketplace of Conversations—Our markets are talking, are we listening?

- The array of online tools that encourage collective intelligence and support collaboration grow and become an important part of the everyday lives of consumers—and by extension an integral part of brand awareness, brand loyalty, and consumer research.

- The people that compose our markets are engaging in conversations about our businesses and products. This is happening with and without us.

- In today’s conversational economy, it is about communities and leveraging these communities to build stronger consumer relationships and garner better consumer research.

The Internet Evolves—The evolution reveals revolution...

- ‘Information-transfer’ phase in the mid-1990s where much of the same information found offline was simply moved online. Characterized by ‘push’ tactics such as pop-ups and static web pages filled with brochure-like information. As marketers, we told them.

- By 2000, the ‘commercial’ phase was well under way. Marketers transformed their information-based sites into places to purchase products and services. Characterized by consumer feedback systems and traffic analysis. As marketers, we asked them what they thought of what we told them and sold them.

- About 2003, entered its ‘networking’ phase prompted by the proliferation of social software tools. Characterized by social interaction, self-expression, communication, and community building. Now they’ve started telling each other and we don’t have to simply be bystanders.
Networked markets are tired of business-as-usual market speak; they crave genuine conversation and engagement in the process of creation. If we don’t give it to them, they will move on—but not before letting everyone in their network know how we failed them.

Implications for Marketing—Oh the tangled Web 2.0 we weave...

- The opportunity to read/write brought with it new consumer segments, brands, products, channels of distribution, media options, and most notably the opportunity to glean more complete insights into what makes consumers tick.

- Web 2.0 refers to the new generation of tools and services that allow private individuals to publish and collaborate such as blogs, podcasts, mashups, RSS feeds, tagging, bookmarking, social networking sites, and wikis.

- In response, marketers must begin the move away from the conventional marketing mix strategies that have for decades worked in a traditional media environment.

- The traditional 5 P’s can be re-evaluated to reflect the impact of social media on the way consumers interact with brands and products.

- Along with these changes in the traditional marketing mix must come equally new and inventive ways of collecting and analyzing consumer research, much of which is still experimental and ‘fuzzy’.

New Market Research Methodologies—Into the great wide open...

- An unavoidable result of operating in the new media revolution is being willing to relinquish top-down control and to experiment with the unknown.

- Leveraging social networks and social media takes savvy, nimble marketing management and a culture of outreach, social interaction, and effective use of research and experimentation.

- Harnessing social computing tools and understanding social networks allows us to build new types of research communities in which respondents interact not only with researchers and clients but, most interestingly, with each other.

- Market research has been flawed in that it has been largely individualistic in nature, removing people from their true nature which exists in give-and-take groups and communities.

- Combined with social network analysis methodologies and the latest advances in spatial statistical analysis, we can more discriminately deal with issues of where, who, and when individuals interact with a message or a product.
• This also means we can shift from studying individuals to communities as we try and understand how consumers interact with and assign their own unique meanings to our brands.

• In this modality, research insight is just as likely to be derived from the interactions among people as it is from formal survey-type questioning of individuals that characterizes traditional market research methodologies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online Participatory Research Panels—Enter the wiki…</th>
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• A wiki is a permission-based web page or site that allows users to add content, add links, and modify existing content via an easy-to-use browser-based interface. Wikis enable site visitors to add their own content and build, in an additive fashion, upon the content created by others.

• Wikis free writers from the burden of mastering HTML editing and file-transfer protocol before they can publish on the Web. Instead, wikis use a very simple, text-based markup to format page text and graphic content.

• The properties of wiki platform make it easy to track activities such as the viewing, reading, adding, and editing of content, changes to content over time, the most active contributors, as well as the opportunity to recruit specific users for more focused research projects.

• When done right, wikis can drive key metrics that online marketers labor to achieve including increased page views, a higher level of consumer engagement, and higher rates of user contributions.

• Provides passive market intelligence gathering—listening to the dialog and analyzing the content added by consumers can alert companies to possible future trends or to competitor offerings.

• Provides active market research gathering—researchers enter the discussion and conduct focused surveys or discrete experiments that approximate field tests that can provide metrics of, for example, consumer price elasticity, preference for product features, or message effectiveness.

• Wiki sites offer companies the opportunity to encourage and perhaps employ user-generated content. User-generated content can serve multiple purposes as a market intelligence tool, a competitive intelligence tool, as forums for advertising, and as a platform for consumer interaction.

• This approach to engaging with the consumer in a specified online environment can be called a networked online panel—a research community or participatory panel in which the lines that historically distanced researchers from participants are blurred in favor of creating and sustaining authentic relationships and surrendering some control over the research process.
• Similar to anthropological participant observation and other similar qualitative techniques. Online it has been coined netnography.

Summary—All good things must come to an end. Or not....

• Journey from the evolution of the Internet to the widespread acceptance of social media tools and their impact on the way consumers engage with brands, with marketing messages, and with each other.

• In essence, there is not much new here because the overall objective of marketing remains the same: to get and keep customers.

• This objective will never waver—the Internet has simply introduced new and different supporting tools. And as the supporting tools change, so must our investigative methods.

• The beauty of the media revolution is that it has increased the number and variety of consumers who are ready, willing, and able to tell us everything we need and want to know. We just have to authentically engage them.

• Wiki sites are just one platform to accomplish this engagement. The properties of wikis—their collaborative nature and ease of use—offer unique and clearly underutilized opportunities to engage the consumer and to precisely track and analyze the varied kinds of interactions supported by this software.
The Marketplace of Conversations

The beating heart of the Internet is its ability to facilitate authentic conversations and to foster our social connections. This statement has never been truer than it is today as the array of tools that encourage collective intelligence and support collaboration grow and become an important part of the everyday lives of consumers—and by extension an integral part of brand awareness, brand loyalty, and consumer research. “A powerful global conversation has begun...as a direct result, markets are getting smarter—and getting smarter faster than most companies”, (p. 1). The people who compose our markets are discovering and inventing new ways to converse. And they’re talking to each other about our businesses and our products in very human voices. This is not just hype or the next temporary fad. These conversations are happening, with or without the permission or the participation of marketing departments.

Every industry is feeling the impact of the new conversational economy and it is altering the way marketing is executed. Today, it is all about community and leveraging these communities to build relationships and gather consumer intelligence. Given this environment, the focus must begin moving from short term conversion to long term, authentic conversations and true consumer engagement. The results should be substantially better and more importantly, dramatically more sustainable.

The Internet Evolves
When the Internet finally evolved from a medium used by only the most technically able to a medium that could intuitively be used by the masses, it progressed through several distinct phases. Explicitly recognizing these stages aids marketers in realizing that we are truly experiencing a revolution and we must be on board or be left at the station.

The Internet has evolved from an ‘information-transfer’ phase in the mid-1990s where much of the same information found offline was simply moved online. This phase is characterized by ‘push’ tactics such as pop-ups and static web pages filled with brochure-like information. By 2000, the ‘commercial’ phase was well under way. Marketers transformed their information-based sites into places to purchase products and services. In order to garner consumer insights, most companies elicited consumer feedback during these interactions and (hopefully) used this feedback to improve consumer relations and encourage loyalty. Some early methods of capturing consumer behavior, mainly collected via traffic analysis, were also developed. While marketers have long understood the implications of word-of-mouth for their products and services, consumers were soon going to fully embrace the power of their own voices.

Beginning around 2003 and prompted by the proliferation of social software tools, the Internet entered its ‘networking’ phase in which its primary use became a platform for social interaction, self-expression, communication, and community building both commercial and personal. The conversations happening online arise from the intrinsic human need to create connections based on shared interests. If
this activity sounds familiar, it is because it is exactly what takes place between
people offline. However, when it happens online it is not constrained by
geographical happenstance, it occurs at breakneck speed, and it allows us to have a
front row seat.

Looking at these phases from a marketing point of view—at first we told
them (marketers pushed messages to consumers), in the next phase we asked them
what they thought of what we told them and sold them (marketers asked for
consumer feedback), and now in the new media revolution they started telling each
other (consumers started their own dialogue). Consumers have become co-
participants rather than simply targets for marketing. They are not just pushed
content to, they are invited to pull that content when, where, and if they want.
The increasing use of various forms of social media lies at the core of this next
generation of Internet activity. Consumers tell each other who they are, what they
love, and what they hate. And they want to tell us.

While the technology makes this possible, the question remains: Are we
prepared to listen? The Internet is no longer simply a conduit for our advertising
copy and markets are no longer comprised of passive spectators waiting to receive
the next marketing message. Networked markets demand more from us.
Networked markets are tired of business-as-usual market speak; they crave
genuine conversation and engagement in the process of creation. If we don’t give
it to them, they will move on—but not before letting everyone in their network
know how we failed them.
**Implications for Marketing**

The Internet used to be, for the average consumer, a read-only environment; however, it has irreversibly evolved into a read/write environment resulting in an explosive growth in the power of the consumer. With this explosion came new consumer segments, brands, products, channels of distribution, media options, and most notably for our purposes the opportunity to glean more complete insights into what makes consumers tick. The savviest marketers realize the benefits that can be gleaned by not only listening in on the conversations, but also by participating in and influencing them when appropriate and possible 2.

As coined by O’Reilly Media, *Web 2.0* is the nomenclature referring to the new generation of tools and services that allow private individuals to publish and collaborate in ways previously available only to corporations with large budgets or dedicated web enthusiasts 3. Blogs, podcasts, mashups, RSS feeds, tagging, bookmarking, social networking sites, and wikis are just some of the products and tools consumers use to organize and share their conversations, ideas, and creations (user-generated content). *Web 2.0* does not refer to a single piece of software but instead to the use of multiple modes of computer-mediated communication that can result in collaborative generation of content, user empowerment, and ultimately community formation. Essentially, these applications support the realization of the following core concepts 2:
• Connections occur in multiple ways including one-to-one (e.g. email/IM), one-to-many (e.g. blogs/websites), many-to-many (e.g. wikis)

• As such, new media forms are not just variations on traditional media. They are different and need to be managed and used differently

• All data and content can be manipulated by anyone at any point; the web is no longer merely a retrieval system

• Opportunities for exchanging ideas and the degree of sharing can be richer in terms of participation, content, and distribution as media formats move beyond simple text

• Markets are fragmented into many new segments defined by non-traditional variables

• Information wants to be free

• The consumer is driving the bus

• Content is created collaboratively

• Brands are personalized

So what do these core concepts mean for marketers? Simply put, marketers must begin the move away from conventional thinking and action that has for decades worked in a traditional media environment. Yahoo data on brand advocacy suggest that the online experience is forever altering the purchase behavior of consumers, so it is wise to consider these changes. Segmentation and fragmentation take on new meanings since the advent of Web 2.0 tools and the fervor with which people of all ages have integrated these technologies into their lives.
Early editions of Philip Kotler's *Marketing Management*, written in the pre-Internet days and for traditional media, identified the well-known 5 P’s that form the basis for the marketing mix that drives most marketing plans. Market researcher Estes-Green’s suggests that given the new media environment, a new set of marketing strategies has emerged. Building on her ideas, we can overlay the original 5 P’s with new ways of approaching product awareness and brand positioning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Marketing Mix Cross Market Strategies</th>
<th>Web 2.0 Marketing Mix Mass Customization/Adaptation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>Content in Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>Conversations and Viral Diffusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Path</td>
<td>Connectivity via Community Networks</td>
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<td>Uniform Pricing</td>
<td>Price Discrimination/Incentivization</td>
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<td>Uniform Packaging/Branding</td>
<td>Co-Branding/Personalization</td>
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<td><strong>Push</strong></td>
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Products are now being framed in terms of the content available to describe them online and the context in which consumers acquire that information. Consumers find their own conversations and their own research more relevant than the ‘interruptive’ messages sent via traditional media such as television, radio,
or magazines. Products need to adopt themselves to ever narrowing and distancing niches, as just in time and mass customization is becoming more and more the norm. Promotion is forever connected to consumer reviews and is more often, out of our direct control, being taken over by consumers who enjoy creating and sharing their user-generated content. Consumers can become, for better or for worse, evangelists and crusaders. They can summon brands from the dead with gushing blog reviews or they can sink them on a whim via YouTube viral videos and nasty online posts. Pricing and Packaging are highly transparent in a Web 2.0 environment. Consumers have fast and easy access to pricing options via comparative tools. At the same time, continuous adaptation to users’ distinct lifestyles, for example their regions or their age differences, allow greater price discrimination. Collaboration on elements of packaging has been a highly effective way to engage consumers who have shown their willingness to be a part of the process. Consumers as brand managers are facts of life in a Web 2.0 world. Can marketing company afford to fall behind on these trends? Director of marketing for Ask.com addresses this point quite nicely:

Right now, not leveraging social media is no more damaging than not adopting widgets or mobile. All of these technologies just provide additional lenses into our consumers...What will happen is that there will be companies that figure out how to leverage it better than others. And when the scales tip, they will have the advantage, and greatly so. It is still an experimental medium for most clients, but it will grow as they understand the nuances. And it is in the nuances of digital media that breakthrough work arrives that we can all leverage. Start looking for an agency that understands the social media nuances and specializes in this space, for there will be no more profound change to the consumer conversation in the next decade. Media is about to shatter. Are you ready for it?
There are many examples of companies successfully using social media tools to foster consumer engagement, build brand awareness, and to develop, refine, and launch products and services as part of a larger marketing plan. Consumer behavior research has repeatedly shown that people retain more from an experience and have a deeper connection with a product or organization when they have longer and more meaningful interaction with that product or organization. Nike allows users to design their own sports shoes. Purina invites users to share their dog stories and pictures and actively fosters connections between consumers. Volkswagen allows users to customize their cars with colors, styles, and later allows the consumer to crash them online. Dell allows users to design their own laptops in Second Life and then offers them the opportunity to purchase their custom design. Mars offers an online game in which users can design their own M & M’s by selecting colors, messages, or names to appear on them and then customize the packaging. While these efforts are clearly offered to foster brand awareness, loyalty, and engagement, these kinds of activities are ripe opportunities to gather consumer insights.

Along with these changes in the traditional marketing mix must come equally new and inventive ways of collecting and analyzing consumer research. Market researchers are still grappling with ways to fully exploit the unique research opportunities afforded by social media tools. This point was particularly salient for me as I conducted a full search of the most prominent market research
journals. While there was some research about using social media as a marketing tool, very little information about using social media tools as a research methodology could be found. It is time to attempt to fill this gap.

**New Market Research Methodologies**

As previously stated, utilizing social media as a research methodology is still in its infancy and is still somewhat fuzzy. ‘Fuzzy’ is a term that scares most corporations. An unavoidable result of operating in the new media revolution is being willing to relinquish top-down control and to experiment with the unknown. Leveraging social networks and social media takes savvy, nimble marketing management and a culture of outreach, social interaction, and effective use of research and experimentation. Partnerships between social media researchers and market researchers offer fertile ground for both to grow and learn.

The key effect of Web 2.0 tools is the social product resulting from the ease of sharing, cooperating, participating, collaborating, and co-creating. Understanding, and quite simply experimenting with, the ways in which the social product of Web 2.0 tools intersects with market research possibilities is essential. The opportunity for market researchers to observe these transparent social interactions will greatly benefit us in our understanding of the role of advertising and marketing in the dissemination of ideas. Harnessing social computing tools and understanding social networks allows us to build new types of research
communities in which respondents interact not only with researchers and clients but, most interestingly, with each other. Market research scholars Cooke & Buckley summarize this approach succinctly:

The opportunity for market researchers is that we can utilize these new social networks, and the open source social computing tools from which they are built, to extend the boundaries of our research offerings. These social communities open up new arenas for us to assist our clients in idea generation, concept testing, product development, brand launches, marketing communications, and customer experiences. (p. 276).

Indeed, Earls concludes that market research has thus far been flawed as we have studied people by talking to them individually or by forcing them into temporary group situations far removed from the context of our true nature, which exists in self-selected, give-and-take groups and communities. Marketers don’t generally adopt a ‘community’ view of their market. They tend to focus on the wants and characteristics of their target market segments, with target market segments being composed of individuals aggregated statistically. Also, much of the segmentation effort is one-way. Marketers attempt to gauge consumer tastes using various research techniques, then aim their promotions at their target segments. Consumer reactions are monitored, but the information flow is far less and is of lower quality than the kind that ‘open talk among friends’ generates. Certainly this type of conversation is more authentic and organic than what is gathered in a sterile focus group setting. Social computing and social media provides us with the medium and the tools to address these shortcomings. Combined with social network analysis methodologies and the latest advances in
spatial statistical analysis, we can more discriminately deal with issues of where, who, and when individuals interact with a message or a product. This means we can shift from studying individuals to communities as we try and understand how consumers interact with and assign their own unique meanings to our brands.

Communities historically have these key elements: sustained social interaction, identities, shared attributes and interests, shared values (community standards), and a proscribed geographical area. The Internet offers a new definition of ‘geographical area’ because it has no geographical boundaries. Yet the ‘space’ a particular online community occupies is still very real—and more importantly, it very often overlaps with a ‘real’ space of some consequence. In the end, the denizens of these virtual spaces have a actual existence in the here and now that cannot be completely erased by the virtual experience. Social software facilitates ‘bottom-up’ community development in which “membership is voluntary, reputations are earned by winning the trust of other members, and the community’s mission and governance is defined by the community members themselves.” 5 (p. 279). In this modality, research insight is just as likely to be derived from the interactions among people as it is from formal survey-type questioning of individuals that characterizes traditional market research methodologies. Enter the wiki...

**Online Participatory Research Panels and the Wiki**

A wiki is a permission-based web page or site that allows users to add content, add links, and modify existing content via an easy-to-use browser-based
interface. Wikis enable site visitors to add their own content and build, in an additive fashion, upon the content created by others. Some have described wikis as a blog on steroids. Wikis free writers from the burden of mastering HTML editing and file-transfer protocol before they can publish on the Web. Instead, wikis use a very simple, text-based markup to format page text and graphic content. Wikis provide a platform that merges the benefits of traditional business tools like email, directories, and searches with available Web 2.0 technologies like RSS, blogs, podcasts, forums, and tagging. The properties of wiki platform make it easy to track activities such as the viewing, reading, adding, and editing of content, changes to content over time, the most active contributors, as well as the opportunity to recruit specific users for more focused research projects. When done right, wikis can drive key metrics that online marketers labor to achieve including increased page views, a higher level of consumer engagement, and higher rates of user contributions.

Most importantly, wikis provide a platform through which consumers and researchers can interact with each other, collaborate, and build community. The interaction that occurs within a wiki site presents an unprecedented opportunity for both passive market intelligence and active market research. Listening to the dialog and analyzing the content added by consumers can alert companies to possible future trends or to competitor offerings—market intelligence. Researchers can also enter the discussion and conduct focused surveys or conduct discrete experiments that approximate field tests that can provide metrics of, for
example, consumer price elasticity, preference for product features, or message effectiveness—active market research. Group mental processes, collective perceptions, and interpersonal influence can also be assessed via wiki interaction. In addition, wiki sites offer companies the opportunity to encourage and perhaps employ user-generated content. User-generated content can serve multiple purposes as a market intelligence tool, a competitive intelligence tool, as forums for advertising, and as a platform for consumer interaction. Wikis can support the opportunity for us to observe their interactions with our content and research process as well as their interactions with their own content and with each other.

This new approach to engaging with the consumer in a specified online environment can be called a networked online panel—a research community or participatory panel in which the lines that historically distanced researchers from participants are blurred in favor of creating and sustaining authentic relationships and surrendering some control over the research process. According to Cooke and Buckley, the researcher “...moves from being a measurer of attitudes and behaviors to being a partner in the voyage of discovery with the panel members and the client” (p. 282). These new settings may be novel for the market researcher but they are not entirely foreign to the social scientist. What we have here are variations of the field or naturalistic experiment, where individuals are observed in a situation very close to real life. This is combined, under certain circumstances, with the method adopted by historically by anthropologists—namely participant observation.
Participant observation has also been carried out by market researchers, albeit this methodology is time consuming and expensive when conducted face-to-face. Kozinets\textsuperscript{10} coined the term netnography to describe the process of conducting ethnography and other similar qualitative research processes online rather than in person. While a wiki is by no means the only way to carry out this process, a wiki site seems to offer the kinds of features that could streamline this process. By viewing the changing content offerings and the interactions that take place between consumers online, we are in effect observing them in their realistic setting. There are varying degrees to which the researcher/marketer is involved in this process, either through using a wiki or through another social media method. You can observe interactions between consumers without their knowledge, such as tracking and analyzing their dialogue in the blogosphere. You can create a static web site revolving around your product or service and give consumers the ability to initiate dialogue with each other and to potentially create a sense of community. You can also create a wiki site that allows consumers a great deal of freedom to engage in the content creation and editing and monitor these organic changes over time. You can engage in these processes as much or as little as is appropriate for a particular product or brand. The point is, the variations on this research approach are almost endless—thus so are the opportunities.

A good example of a community built around a brand is Reebok’s recently launched Run Easy. This site allows users to create profiles, communicate on message boards, share workout music, upload their favorite run in their cities, play
videos and other activities that create a community of users who love to run. By providing a site that helps runners connect and share stories, Reebok has already amassed over 18,097 members, 200 runs, and 50 discussion boards since its launch in late 2007. Most notably, Reebok will be able to mine this data to help structure local marketing programs and understand what runners care about. While this site does not employ the wiki platform, it is a good example of the kind of consumer engagement that is possible online. The wiki platform is simple and easy and it gives consumers even more freedom to be part of the content-creation process, as well as offering the researcher the kind of tools that can more easily track and analyze interactions. In addition to creating a site that attracts brand lovers, a wiki site (or a portion of the larger wiki community) could also be used on a smaller scale to conduct novel research methodologies.

**Wiki-based market research activity: a possible scenario**

Suppose we need to investigate the nuances of the social and communicative interactions involved in the process of distributing and consuming a specific branded product. For example, let us consider a beer brand. Also, suppose that our goal is to identify the two sets of information: a) perceptions associated with the brand and b) the communicative opportunities emerging during social interactions between consumers and the brand promoters. A set of activities can be created through a wiki by which a targeted panel would be invited to participate in investigating both issues. However, the recruitment and participation, as the activities themselves, will be quite different from the typical
procedures utilized for market research. Panel participants will be recruited from a series of intact groups via snowballing. The goal is to create early interaction groups that would have a good chance to create vivacious interactions as soon as invited to participate in the wiki activity. The activities will be prospective and game-like. For example, participants will be invited to construct online stories that capture their understanding of a specific brand. To make this more specific, a possible work scenario might include the following invitation to collaboration, delivered to the participants after recruiting:

“For the past xxx years XXX beer has been associated with blue collar single, males. We think that our beer can do better. We are inviting you to participate in a fun game. Imagine our beer is in fact a person. We would like you to help us give her a make-over. We will propose a list of characteristics for this brand as it appears right now. We would like you to come up your own list, in the column to the right, which will enumerate the characteristics that would counter the ones in the first list, in such a way that the new brand “personality” that emerges reflects a new, improved drink. The fun part is that you are not the only one working on this project. There are other XXX individuals involved in this game. They are free to add, delete or change anything you do. As you are, in fact, allowed to add, change or edit anything they do. The point is that you are part of a community of users, who are tasked to come up with the list of characteristics as a group. In case there are significant differences between
you and the other participants, you can either keep deleting and adding your version of the brand identity, or you can negotiate with the other members on the main characteristics that you might find as a group desirable and common. Discussions can take place via the “talk” page of the proposed activity.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present Characteristics</th>
<th>After Make Over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Body:</strong></td>
<td>wispy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temperament:</strong></td>
<td>mellow, fiery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wit:</strong></td>
<td>Slow, slow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complexion:</strong></td>
<td>Deep tan, Light brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social skills:</strong></td>
<td>none, it hits you after one glass, Subtle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since this is just an example, the characteristics are more or less random and the exercise made-up. However, this can give a flavor for how the interaction can be structured. In terms of analysis, all information contributed by any user can be parsed for relevant concepts, for over-time changes, and vocabulary emphasis. The story can also be analyzed as a whole, both thematically, in terms of the concepts and ideas it generates, or along other dimensions (richness, specificity, depth, etc.). In addition, users can be invited to fill out brief surveys before and after the exercise to measure degree of involvement with the brand, personal preferences,
and social-psychological characteristics. The point of such an exercise is to foster collaboration between consumers, encourage creativity and engagement, all the while gathering brand intelligence.

**Summary**

This research paper took you on a journey from the evolution of the Internet to the widespread acceptance of social media tools and their impact on the way consumers engage with brands, with marketing messages, and with each other. In essence, there is not much new here because the overall objective of marketing remains the same: *to get and keep customers*. This objective will never waver—the Internet has simply introduced new and different supporting tools. And as the supporting tools change, so must our investigative methods. Market research is the foundation of figuring out how to get and keep customers. The beauty of the media revolution is that it has increased the number and variety of consumers who are ready, willing, and able to tell us everything we need and want to know. We just have to authentically engage them. Wiki sites are just one platform to accomplish this engagement. The properties of wikis—their collaborative nature and ease of use—offer unique and clearly underutilized opportunities to engage the consumer and to precisely track and analyze the varied kinds of interactions supported by this software.

**References**

Here is the list of references I directly used/quoted in the writing of this white paper. I have conducted abundant research on this topic and have compiled ample resources on each topic covered here. So please don’t hesitate to ask me if you would like additional references or resources to review.
Thank you for taking the time to meet with us and to read this research paper.


