Value Creation:
Comparative Netnographic Study of Two NBA Online Communities

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ABSTRACT

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This study focuses on two online communities of a commercial basketball league, the National Basketball Association (NBA). Specifically, this study explores the value creation and online consumption behaviors of their online community members. Since little research had been conducted on sports online communities, this study can be an exploratory work in this field and beneficial to future research. This study applies Netnography as a research method to examine community members’ postings in two forums www.reddit.com/r/nba/ and bbs.hupu.com/all-nba. The first forum is the most popular NBA online community in North America, while the second forum is widely used by online community members in mainland China. Findings in this study presents similarities and differences between value creation of two online communities and offers deeper understanding of online communities and their users in North America and China. Besides, managerial implications are provided for practitioners in online business and marketing with focus on sports industry.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of modern technology, especially the internet, people no longer suffer the constrains of time and space and are able to freely communicate and interact with others anywhere and anytime (Anderson, 2005). Online communities, as a virtual community which enables those who share the same interest to get together, are regarded as an alternative to real life in many aspects, such as recreation, socialization, and communication (Seraj, 2012). When people participate and experience in the online communities, different kinds of values such as functional value, social value and experiential value are created (Sicilia and Palazon, 2008). Seraj (2012) also argued that cultural value, social value, and intellectual value are created during participants’ activities in online communities.

However, previous studies about value creation in online community tend to focus on one single site and certain product categories, such as niche products (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001, McAlexander et al., 2002) and convenience products (Sicilia and Palazon, 2008). For example, Rothaermel and Sugiyama (2001) conducted a study on TimeZone.com, which is an online community devoted to wristwatch enthusiasts and hobbyists; Seraj (2012) chose Airliners.net as a research site to explore value creation in online community of airline industry; Cova and Pace (2006) studied the brand Nutella to analyze the power that an online brand community exerts over a brand of a mass-marketed convenience product. Unlike the above studies, this study intends to conduct a comparative research on two online forums of the NBA.

Sports is a major recreational activity in modern lives, and basketball is one of the most popular
sports around the world. Among the basketball leagues in different countries, NBA is the most popular and influential one (Larmer, 2005). It has fans not only in the United States, but also in other countries, especially China, which has a large population of basketball fans (Meng and Wei, 2009).

The two chosen research sites are Reddit NBA forum (www.reddit.com/r/nba/) and Hupu China NBA forum (bbs.hupu.com/all-nba). Both forums provide content and submissions which are all user-generated and mainly focus on the NBA. These two forums offer ideas and perspectives of members from different cultural contexts on the NBA, providing a large amount of daily submissions by users. Every submission on these two sites is created by users, while other users can interact with and respond to these postings. Reddit NBA forum is a popular English language NBA forum with its users mainly from North America (reddit.com site info 2015) while Hupu China NBA forum, using Chinese as its main language, is the most visited NBA forum in China (hoopchina.com site info 2016).

The research questions this study intends to address are:

(1) What values are created in these two NBA forums (e.g. functional, social, intellectual and cultural values - Sicilia and Palazon, 2008; Seraj, 2012)?

(2) In terms of general content and activities, what are the similarities and differences between the two NBA online brand communities? (e.g. the nature of postings; forum rules and regulations; and the role of commercialism)

(3) In terms of values, what are the similarities and differences between the two NBA online brand communities?
(4) What are the theoretical and managerial implications?

In terms of methodology, this study adopts netnography (Kozinets, 1999, 2010) as the research method. Netnography, as a qualitative research method, “uses computer-mediated communications as a source of data to arrive at the ethnographic understanding and representation of a cultural or communal phenomenon” (Kozinets, 2010, p 60). Employing netnography can offer better understanding of the interaction and communication of online community participants.

The finding chapter first presents the comparison of the nature of two forums, identifying the similarities in the aspects of “nature of postings and categories of postings”, “home page structure”, “rules and regulations for the forums”, and “nature of forum members”. On the other hand, since two forums are based on different cultural contexts, differences exist in terms of primary language used and users’ ethnicity, the level of regulations, and commercialism. Then three values, functional value, social value and entertainment value, are identified via postings selected from two forums. Functional value is frequently shown in postings regarding information, advice, and expertise in certain topics. Social value is embedded in postings concerning friendship, experience, and common interests. And entertainment value is reflected in postings about fun game sharing, and the discussion on game playing skills and experience.

This study provides both theoretical and managerial contributions. In terms of academic contribution, as there are few comparative studies on online brand communities in the sports industry, this study addresses the gap in this research field. Furthermore, this study explores
value creation in online communities in two different cultural contexts (North America and China), which can be valuable for further research about online brand community in these two cultures. In terms of managerial contribution, findings in this study will help relevant companies and marketers to navigate their business directions, to design their business plans and strategies. Also, this study will inspire the global brands to utilize online community as a platform to improve their influence, enhancing the customer’s involvement and brand loyalty.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review initially demonstrates the previous research on traditional and online communities, followed by the illustration of relevant key concepts, definitions and models of both offline and online brand community in the existing works. In the next section, exploring deeper into online brand community, it examines the studies on online brand community, which have been conducted in different perspectives. Specifically, there are three sub-sections. First, it explores the relationship studies in online brand community, introducing how online brand community participants communicate and interact with each other; second, studies relating to the reasons of why online brand community users participate in the community are discussed; third, sub-section is about studies relating to value creation in online brand community, aiming to investigate what values are created and how they are created.

2.1 ONLINE COMMUNITIES AND ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITIES

Generally speaking, communities can be classified as traditional communities and online communities. With the involvement of certain brands, communities can be categorized as traditional brand communities and online brand communities.

2.1.1 TRADITIONAL AND ONLINE COMMUNITIES

In previous research, there are many definitions of community. To¨nnies (1912), a pioneer researcher in community study, believed that communities were defined as a group of people who interrelated with each other in time and space. These people gather together and rely on
each other, “developing specific interaction patterns guided by socially constructed rules and norms” (Anderson, 2005, p 40). Rothaermel and Sugiyama (2001) described community as a phenomenon in which a group of people regularly meet and have activities based on certain common interests. These definitions help to better understand the definitions of traditional community and online community.

Traditional communities are constrained by location. Without internet and modern transportations, people who share common interests tend to meet and interact with those who they can physically reach (Anderson, 2005). However, with the evolution of modern technology, especially the advent of internet, people no longer suffer from time and space constrains. Instead, they can communicate, interact and exchange information freely with others who share the same interests, which promotes the development of online communities (Hagel & Armstrong, 1997). This argument was also supported by Rheingold (1993, p. 7), who defined online communities as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyber-space.” Dholakia et al. (2004) defined the online community as a specialized, geographically dispersed community based on a structured and dynamic network of relationships among people who share a common interest. Furthermore, the social factors of online community have been explored and studied. Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002, p. 3) emphasized the interaction process as “mediated social spaces in the digital environment that allow groups to form and be sustained primarily through ongoing communication process.” Simmons (2008) insisted that online communities perform as a virtual glue for people to have a sense of belonging to certain groups. Also, according to Seraj (2012, p. 210), “social factors such as the evolving
needs for individuals to build relationships and belong to communities urge them to gather online and participate in such networks.” For these reasons, traditional communities had gradually been replaced by online/virtual communities (Dholakia et al., 2004). Other researchers explored online communities in different aspects. For instance, Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) emphasized the financial benefits of online communities. They believed that the communication, interaction and information exchanges within online communities can generate countless valuable information, which can be utilized to make financial profits by online communities’ owners. In terms of marketing subject, as online communities are related to certain brands, online brand community gradually drew the attention of academic researchers. The next section will deliver key concepts on brand community and online brand community.

2.1.2 BRAND COMMUNITIES AND ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITIES

This section will provide key concepts and definitions on brand community, models of brand relationship in customer-brand context, and online brand community.

A brand community is defined as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412). Specifically, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) adopted ethnography methods, such as data collection analysis and interviews, to identify three core markers of brand community: consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility. To be precise, consciousness of kind, as the first and most important marker of brand community, refers to the intrinsic connection that participants feel towards one another and the collective sense of
difference from those who are not in the community (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006). Rituals and traditions can be understood as group norms. The third marker, moral responsibility, represents a sense of obligation to the community and to other individual participants (Sicilia and Palazon, 2008). Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) also proposed the customer-customer-brand triad model (see Figure 2.1), indicating that there are two kinds of relationships: the relationship between brand and customer and the relationship between community participants. Sicilia and Palazon (2008) insisted that brand community is unlikely to be effective and successful with the relationship between community participants. As a matter of fact, there are the connections between customers and brand, but the connections between customers are tighter and stronger.

![Figure 2.1: Customer-Customer-Brand Triad Model](image)

Source: Muniz and O’Guinn (2001, p. 413)

McAlexander et al. (2002) extended the customer-customer-brand triad model (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001) by incorporating the relationship between customers and product and the relationship between customers and company, proposing the customer-centric model (see Figure 2.2). According to this model, brand community improves customer identification and cultivates
the customers to have stronger corporate feelings (McAlexander et al., 2002; Hoppe et al., 2007).

Figure 2.2: Customer-centric model of brand community

Source: McAlexander et al. (2002, p. 39)

Other studies have had different research focuses. By studying convenient product Nutella’s brand community, Cova and Pace (2006) argued that a brand community is a group of participants who share a common interest in a certain brand and develop a parallel social universe which can differential itself from the others by its own values, rituals, myths, vocabulary and hierarchy. During the interaction and communication with other people in the brand community, participants gradually know more about this brand and tend to have a stronger sense of belonging, which can be vital for the enhancement of customer loyalty (Hoppe et al., 2007; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001).

The rise of internet led to new opportunities and challenges for modern brands and customers
(Lee et al., 2011). A growing number of studies explore what online brand community is and how to utilize online brand community to improve business performance and achieve business goals (Cove and Pace, 2006; Brown et al., 2007; Seraj, 2012). Although there is not a consensus on the definition of online brand community, researchers have made some attempts. For instance, Sicilia and Palazon (2008, p. 257) defined online brand community as “a group of individuals with common interests in a brand who communicate each other electronically in a platform provided by the company which supports the brand.” De Valck et al. (2009, p. 185) defined online brand community to be “a specialized, non-geographically bound online community, based on social communications and relationships among a brand’s consumers.”

In summary, this section outlines the key concepts and definitions on brand community and online brand community, which are fundamental for conducting online community study.

2.2 EXISTING RESEARCH STUDIES FOR ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITIES

Previous studies on online brand community offered various focuses (Fournier, 1998; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Sicilia and Palazon, 2008; McAlexander et al., 2002). This section presents some key concepts derived from those studies about online brand community. These are studies of relationships in online brand community, why participants engage in online brand community, and value creation in online brand community.
2.2.1 RELATIONSHIPS IN ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITIES

Fournier (1998), a well-known researcher in brand relationship, conducted three in-depth case studies in her research to explore the validity of relationship propositions within the consumer and brand context. Specifically, Fournier outlined three relationship propositions: (1) brand can perform as a viable relationship partner; (2) “consumer-brand relationship is valid at the level of lived experience”; (3) “consumer-brand relationship can be specified in many ways using a rich conceptual vocabulary that is both theoretically and managerially useful” (1998, p. 344). Fournier’s study also proposed a framework to characterize and understand different types of consumer-brand relationships. Inspired by Fournier’s research, other researchers attempted to further explore the relationships in brand community.

Many research studies present relationships in online brand community as one of the important elements of online brand community research. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) proposed the customer-customer-brand triad model, emphasizing the existence of relationships among community participants. This model indicates that apart from relationship between customer and brand, relationships between customers play a important role in communities. Sicilia and Palazon (2008) argued that without those relationships, an online brand community cannot be successful. Based on their research, by communicating and interacting with other participants, people in the online brand community tend to have a tighter and stronger feeling of connection towards each other than towards the brand. By investigating Harley Davidson and Jeep brand communities, McAlexander et al. (2002) extended Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) customer-customer-brand triad model and proposed a customer-centric model by incorporating two more relationships: the relationship between customer and product, and the relationship between customer and marketer.
According to this model, brand communities “enhance customer identification with the brand and foster the development of a strong corporate feeling” (Sicilia and Palazon, 2008, p. 256). Online brand communities can be regarded as vital platforms for customers’ communication and for companies to better market their brands and to cultivate brand loyalty (Sicilia and Palazon, 2008; Seraj, 2012).

In conclusion, this section has surveyed some previous research on relationships in online brand communities and highlighted the fundamental models such as customer-customer-brand triad model (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001) and customer-centric model (McAlexander et al., 2002) in this sub-field. The next section offers research studies that examine the motivations why people participate in the online brand community.

2.2.2 MOTIVATIONS OF PARTICIPANTS IN ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITIES

Previous research indicates there are various reasons for people to participate in online brand communities (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006). Most of these reasons reflect of personal needs and pursuits, such as socializing with others, obtaining information and expressing personal feelings (Sicilia and Palazon, 2008). Studying the motivation of participants is necessary for understanding online brand communities.

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) suggested eleven distinct factors that motivates people to participate in an online brand community: (1) concern for other participants; (2) contribution to the company; (3) social benefits; (4) exertion of power; (5) economic benefits; (6) advice seeking; (7)
self-improvement; (8) redress seeking convenience; (9) positive feeling expression; (10) venting of negative emotions; (11) and devotion to the community. Among all these factors, they believed that social benefits are the most important factor to get participants engaged in online brand community. Other researchers who investigate the motivation of online brand community participants propose similar ideas. Preece (2001) insisted that sociability and usability are two main factors that drive people engaged in online brand community. Precisely, sociability includes policy, purpose and people factors while usability is the combination of information design, social support and navigation. Ridings and Gefen (2004) also believed that social support is one of the main factors that drive people to spend time online with other users. Apart from social support, their conclusion included friendship, information exchange, and recreation as the other motivations. Exploring the motivation in a relationship base perspective, Langerak et al. (2003) argued that participant’s involvement in online brand communities was affected by satisfaction with the relationships with other participants and the community operator. Close relationships with other users and community organizer, and pleasant participating experience, tend to keep participants to stay in the communities. In another study on satisfaction of online community participants, Cheung and Lee (2009) outlined self-discovery, purposive values, social enhancement, entertainment value and inter-personal connectivity maintenance as the major factors to influence people’s online community engagement.

In summary, this section offers the key factors which motivate people to get involved in online brand communities. Based on their research findings, it can be concluded that social needs and desires are one of the most influential motivation for people to engage in online communities.
2.2.3 VALUE CREATION IN ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITIES

Value creation is a vital question in online brand community studies and draws academic’s attention for constant researches (Seraj, 2012). This section offers several propositions on value creation in online brand community in the existing researches. This section will also introduce the definition of value and place the definition in the context of online brand community.

According to Zeithaml (1988, p. 14), value is “the consumer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given.” Sicilia and Palazon (2008) believed that users can obtain functional value, social value and experiential value during online community engagement. To be specific, functional value, also known as purposive value which was defined by Dholakia et al. (2004, p. 243) as “the value derived from accomplished some pre-determined instrumental purpose”. It can be obtained by online brand community participants when they receive information, expertise and advices on their topics of interest from the site or other participants (Sicilia and Palazon, 2008). Simultaneously, through communication and interaction, functional value creation increases web site traffic and enhances brand loyalty (Mathwick et al., 2007). Social value, including friendship, self-esteem, social enhancement, emotional support and social status, is created via social activities in online brand communities (Sicilia and Palazon, 2008). Participants with similar common interests, experiences and problems are likely to interact with each other in social activities, which satisfy their social desire and build interpersonal connectivity (Dholakia et al., 2004). Lastly, entertainment value derives from engagement and interaction in joyful and entertaining online activities with other users (Dholakia et al., 2004). Sicilia and Palazon (2008, p. 266) concluded that “virtual communities
are not valuable mainly for their informational value, but they may be even more valuable for the social support and entertainment options they offer”. Functional value, social value and entertainment value are identified as important part for online community research.

Other researchers proposed different ideas about perceived value creation in online brand communities. Seraj (2012) adopted netnography to investigate Airliners.net, an online aviation community with large daily visits and devoted participants, in order to explore how values are created in online brand community. She argued that intellectual value, social value and cultural value are created in the online brand community (see Figure 2.3). To be precise, intellectual value is created through “co-creation of knowledge” (Seraj, 2012, p. 213) and high quality contents, which are generated by participants. In Airliners.net, the intellectual value is co-created by users who range from professional experts to enthusiastic aviation fans. As previously explained, social value is created through the interaction and communication of online brand community users (Dholakia et al., 2004; Sicilia and Palazon, 2008). Seraj (2012) insisted that in online brand communities, users are motivated to interact with other users, not the machine or the site. The interaction and communication with each other tend to gradually build stronger bonds among online brand community users, which often leads to loyalty towards the community. Finally, in terms of the creation of culture value, Schein (1984, p. 4) argued that “culture is a set of values, ideas, meanings and symbols that help individual communicate, interpret and evaluate as members of a society and gives a sense of identity and understanding of acceptable behavior in that society.” The interaction and engagement of users shape the online culture (Goi, 2009). In other words, through the co-creation of quality content and communication, the culture norms of online brand communities are formed (Dholakia et al.,
Along with community traditions, rituals and policies, these culture norms shape the online communities. Within the community, cultural exchange constitutes the most complex and strong bonds (Deighton and Kornfeld, 2009).

**Figure 2.3: Characteristics that bring perceived online community value**

Source: Seraj (2012, p. 213)

In examining value creation in online brand communities, previous researchers conducted studies in different research contexts. Sicilia and Palazon (2008) explored the Spanish Coca-Cola online community. Seraj (2012) investigated Airliners.net, where participants need to pay membership fees, to understand what values are created in the online brand community and how they foster the community to be successful and sustainable. As a crucial element in online brand community study, value creation still needs further research in different contexts, for example, in the sports industry.
In conclusion, this section provides the understanding of value creation in online brand community in existing research. Functional value, social value, experiential value, intellectual value and cultural value have been identified.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section first introduces netnography as the research methodology of this study. Then, two research sites, Reddit NBA forum and Hupu NBA forum, are presented. Finally, the criteria of research sites selection are explained.

3.1 NETNOGRAPHY

This study adopts netnography (Kozinets, 1999, 2002, 2010), a qualitative research method, to examine the value creation in two chosen forums. Generally speaking, quantitative research employs mathematical and computational methods to investigate actual phenomena (Bonoma, 1985). On the other hand, qualitative research examines various social settings and people who are involved in these settings (Berg, 2009). According to Berg (2009, p. 8), qualitative research explores how “human arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of this surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles and so forth.” Since this research focuses on value creation in two online brand communities within different cultural contexts, a qualitative research method is more appropriate for research about online community.

As an online research method that originates from ethnography (Langer and Beckman, 2005), netnography is often employed to examine social interaction in online brand communities (Kozinets, 2002). According to Kozinets (2010, p. 60), netnography “uses computer-mediated communications as a source of data to arrive at the ethnographic understanding and representation of a cultural or communal phenomenon.” In addition, netnography is “faster,
simpler and less expensive than traditional ethnography” (Kozinets, 2002, p. 61). Therefore, netnography is employed in this study for value creation in two NBA forums.

3.2 RESEARCH SITES

The two online forums of the NBA selected for this study are Reddit NBA forum (www.reddit.com/r/nba/) (see Appendix 1) and Hupu NBA forum (bbs.hupu.com/all-nba) (see Appendix 2). Both forums provide content and submissions that are all user-generated and mainly focus on NBA.

3.2.1 REDDIT WEBSITE

The Reddit website, founded by Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian in 2005, is an American social news, content rating and discussion website. According to the statistics provided by reddit.com, this website had nearly 542 million monthly visitors, ranking as the fourth most visited website in United States and ninth in the world (reddit.com site info 2017). In 2015, Reddit had 82.54 billion page views, 73.15 million submissions, 725.85 million comments, and 6.89 billion upvotes from its registered members (reddit.com site info 2015). In this online community, content entries are classified by point of interest, called "subreddits". Subreddit topics include gamings, news, science, books, music, fitness, movies, food, image-sharing, and many other areas. Users of this website, who normally call themselves “redditors”, can easily register as a member for free without an email address, and post direct links or text and picture contents. Each submission can be voted by the other registered redditors. The redditors can vote up or down for each submission to determine the position of the submission. The submission
with most up-voted shows up in the front page and is more likely to be noticed by the other redditors. Other redditors can comment on the submissions and respond back and forth. The comments can also be up-voted or down-voted, following the same principle that the most up-voted comments tend to be on the top of the comments.

**Reddit NBA Forum:** The most popular submissions (up-voted ones), concerning news or discussion about teams or specific players will stay in the general front page. The submission can also be sorted into several categories, such as “latest” (the latest postings), “increasing upvotes” (postings with increasing upvotes in recently days), “controversial” (highly attractive postings with both many upvotes and downvotes) and “highly recommended” (previous verified postings that are regarded as classic ones). On the top of the page, there are each teams’ logo, which redditors can click and directly go to that team’s page. In each team’s section, the submissions are mainly about this team. It is much easier for redditors to find and discuss their interested topics with others who share similar preference. For example, in the team page of Golden State Warriors (GSW), which was the champion last season and currently the most popular team, the background picture on the top of the page shows all warrior players’ jerseys in the locker room, indicating the team slogan “strength in numbers”(see Appendix 3). Below the picture lies the daily posting about the team’s latest news, new player recruitment and discussions about the team’s dynamic (see Appendix 4).
3.2.2 HUPU WEBSITE

The Hupu website, founded by Hang Cheng in 2004, is the one of the most popular sports websites in China, providing updated news in a wide range of sport games including basketball, soccer, baseball, golf and Formula One racing (see Appendix 5). In 2004, Hupu was just a basketball website whose users mainly focused on receiving NBA news. With governmental policy support and several rounds of financing, Hupu gradually grew faster and reported news not only about basketball but also some other games. In the meantime, Hupu also developed its NBA forum and online shopping platform, aiming to attract more users and increase revenue.

Hupu China NBA Forum: Hupu NBA forum, as a section of the Hupu website, is the most popular and visited NBA forum in mainland China (Hupu site info, 2017), providing an interaction, communication and discussion platform for NBA fans. It is free of charge to register as a member, but users are required to provide a telephone number and an email address. During the registration, users have to choose their favorite team/teams and topics such as game results, star player stories and skills improvement advice. Based on the users’ preference, relevant postings tend to show up in front page so that users are less likely to spend a long time on searching. In this online community, all the postings are provided by users, while other users can click in and respond (see Appendix 6). If the postings are regarded worthy of recommending, other users can click the “like” button, then the postings with most “likes” are likely to stay in the front page and be in the top positions. Users can respond on the postings and forward the postings to other social network channels (see Appendix 7). In Hupu NBA forum, every team has its own page where fans can aggregate and communicate. Besides, even though this is NBA
forum, there are also some sections that focus on personal basketball skill improvement, game tactics and amateur basketball game organizations.

3.3 RESEARCH SITES SELECTION CRITERIA

This section will offer the criteria of research site selection. According to Kozinets (2010, p. 89), there are six criteria to select the appropriate research sites, which are: (1) “Relevant, they relate to your research focus and questions”; (2) “Active, they have recent and regular communications”; (3) “Interactive, they have a flow of communications between participants”; (4) “Substantial, they have a critical mass of communicators and an energetic feel”; (5) “Heterogeneous, they have a number of different participants”; and (6) “Data-rich, offering more detailed or descriptively rich data”.

Reddit forum meets the research site selection criteria. Although there are many popular NBA forums in North America, such as Real GM (forums.realgm.com), insidehoops (insidehoops.com/forum) and prosportsdaily (forums.prosportsdaily.com), Reddit forum is the most popular one, which has 1,043,549 subscribers (Reddit site info, 2018). Among these subscribers, some are basketball professionals such as professional sports columnists, professional basketball critics and NBA players and practitioners whose career is mainly connected to professional basketball context and NBA. For example, Sam Smith and Brian Geltzeiler are two professionals who regularly create postings on Reddit. Apart from the experts, the majority of users just basketball fans who possess certain level of basketball related knowledge and have experienced in playing non-professional basketball games. They are passionate about NBA and are willing to share their knowledge and experience with other
basketball fans. Reddit forum also has a large amount of daily submissions that are all created by its users. For instance, there were 89 new postings on March 1st, 2018 (Reddit site info, 2018). In Reddit forum, users can upvote or downvote the postings and respond back and forth in each posting. Following is an example of posting which had 3090 upvotes and 705 responses.

**Thread Title:** Cavaliers and Warriors have the same problem – they just don’t care! (Posted by Deivias on Oct 30th, 2017) (https://www.reddit.com/r/nba/comments/79o6x9/the_cavaliers_and_warriors_have_the_same_problem/)

**Postings/Replies within this thread:**

“Neither team is going to play well until after Christmas when they get a reminder of the task at hand.” - Bear4188

“I think they realize that as long as they're in the top 4 teams, it doesn't really matter because they're just more talented than the other teams. This is especially true for the Cavs. The Magic and Pistons are nice and all, but let's not kid ourselves that the East is a cakewalk of bad teams.” – Tigerrra

The postings in Reddit forum are listed based on their popularities. Normally, postings in the front pages are the ones which have been upvoted the most by a large amount of users, the discussion and debate in the response area shows different opinions and perspectives, indicating the users’ engagement and involvement. Following example is a posting with 6774 upvotes, which had been placed on the top of the homepage on March 24th, 2018.

**Thread Title:** Klay Thompson has been significantly better than his season averages on March 20th throughout his career.

Furthermore, postings in this forum include updated NBA news, basketball game tactics discussion and skill improvement suggestions. Following are some examples of thread titles.

Thread Title 1: Here is the All-Star game players list in 2018. Posted by KKKoo3

Thread Title 2: Some suggestions to improve your shooting skills, you can be the next Stephen Curry! Posted by CoachKEER
Hupu forum also meets the criteria of research site selection. As one of the most popular NBA forum in mainland China, Hupu has an average of 1.6 million daily visits and an average of 800 daily submissions, which are all created by its users (Hupu site info 2016). In Hupu forum, users in this online community can click the “like” button to support the postings and respond back and forth in each posting, following is an example of posting with 52,585 views, 547 likes, and 714 replies.

**Thread Title:** We are lucky to have Stephen Curry and Kyrie Irving in our time. (Posted by 静易墨 on Jan 29th, 2018)  
(https://bbs.hupu.com/21306615.html)

**Postings/Replies within this thread:**
“This game is so brilliant, hope to see both compete in the final.” - Contrary 执

“Thank you for your analysis, it is much more clear now to me.” - Monster028

The postings in Reddit forum are listed based on their popularities. The most supported postings tend to stay in the front page, the discussion and debate in the response area shows different opinions and perspectives, indicating the users’ engagement and involvement. Following is a posting with 3902 “likes”, which had been placed on top of the homepage on Feb 25th, 2018.

**Thread Title:** How Lebron James follows Michael Jordan's legendary? (Posted by 蒲宫音 on Feb 25th, 2018)

Moreover, postings in Hupu include updated NBA news, basketball game tactics discussions, skill improvement suggestions and amateur basketball matches in various cities in China.
3.4 DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Data collection in netnography is to investigate the communication within members of a culture or community (Kozinets, 2010). According to Kozinets (2010, p. 95), the communication entails “relevant involvement, engagement, contact, interaction, communion, relation, collaboration and connection with community members – not with a website, server, or a keyboard, but with the people on the other end.”

The data collected in this study were directly downloaded from the two selected research sites (Reddit forum and Hupu forum). Since there is a large amount of postings and threads overtime in both forums, the study focus is within a period of last six months from October 2017 to March 2018. The rationale for this time period is because NBA 2017-2018 regular season begins in October 2017. During the regular season, more postings are created, and forum members actively interact and communicate with each other. Therefore, data in this period is suitable for exploring the nature and structure of the forums, and the value creation in the forums. By scanning the thread titles, most number of postings within the threads which potentially cover value creation were assessed via looking through the contents. If value creation is included, the threads were downloaded and categorized into these data set: functional value, social value, and entertainment value in both forums. Similar data collection process was used for both Reddit forum and Hupu forum.

Content analysis was used when analyzing the content of postings. As a widely used qualitative research technique, content analysis is to interpret the meanings from the content of text data and, hence, adhere to the naturalistic paradigm (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The postings were
examined under three values (functional value, social value, and entertainment value) in the two forums. Postings that reflect each value were analyzed respectively. Each posting was assessed in terms of thread title, content, and replies and comments by the other members. Then the comparison of postings from the two forums was conducted, identifying the similarities and differences of value creation in the two forums.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter will first demonstrate the comparison of the nature of the two forums, specifying the similarities and differences of the two forums in terms of the forum structure, the nature of postings, forum rules and regulations, and the nature of forum members. Then how functional value, social value, and entertainment value are created and reflected in postings from two forums will be presented.

4.1 COMPARISON OF THE NATURE OF THE TWO FORUMS (REDDIT FORUM AND HUPU FORUM)

This section will compare and contrast the nature, and specifically, the structure of and membership in the two NBA forums (Reddit forum and Hupu forum). This study found some similarities as well as some differences and these will be presented next.

4.1.1 SIMILARITIES OF THE TWO FORUMS

There are some similarities between two forums in terms of “homepage categories for postings”, nature of postings, “rules and regulations for the forums”, and “nature of forum members”.

**Homepage categories for postings**: Both forums are free active platforms for their members to generate postings about NBA related topics and issues. In the postings, members can interact and communicate with others by replying and responding to certain questions or clicking
“like/upvote” buttons to support the postings. In both forums, postings are classified into several categories. In the Reddit forum, there are “hot”, “new”, “controversial”, “top”, and “rising”. Specifically, “hot” includes postings which have certain amount of upvotes. “New” includes postings which are created within that week. “Controversial” contains postings with certain amount of both upvotes and downvotes. “Top” contains postings which have constant replies and upvotes. “Rising” includes postings which are created after a week and receive increasing upvotes. While in the Hupu forum, there are “hot”, “new”, “controversial”, “main street”, and “more” categories. In terms of “hot”, “new”, and “controversial”, it is similar to the categories in Reddit forum. “Main street” have postings discussing basketball sneakers and basketball-related products. “More” include postings which are not closely relevant to basketball. Therefore, it can be concluded that posting categories in both forums are more or less similar.

**The nature of postings:** The nature of postings is also similar for the two forums as in the homepage, postings are listed based on their popularity. The most popular and discussed postings tend to stay on the top of the page. Besides, each NBA team has its own sub-section and team page where its fans can get together and interact with other peers who support the same team and players. In the Reddit forum, team section links are represented by team logos. The Reddit NBA forum logo is the in the middle, while teams in western region are on the left and teams in the eastern region are on the right (see Figure 4.1). In the Hupu forum, team section links are shown as literal words (see Figure 4.2).
Sources and Regulations of Forums: Both forums have rules and regulations, so that inappropriate pictures, website links and comments may be removed or deleted. Specifically, in the Reddit forum, there are rules and regulations on “posts/submissions”, “comments”, “self-promotion”, “miscellaneous” and “daily discussion thread” (https://www.reddit.com/r/nba/wiki/rules). Each section has sub-sections, specifying suggestions and prohibitions. For instance, any information or pictures relating to porn will be deleted immediately. The deleted information is shown as “the comment is deleted”. In the Hupu forum, there are also rules and regulations for posting contents, comments and communication, and penalties for inappropriate information (https://bbs.hupu.com/995321.html). For example,
scolding and insulting certain teams, players, or other users will be deleted immediately. Deleted information is shown as “the information is deleted because it is inappropriate and against forum rules, which may jeopardize the harmony of community.” Along with information being deleted, the user may be banned from posting and commenting for a certain period of time, depending on the severity of deleted information.

**Nature of Forum members:** Nature of forum members are similar in both communities. Members of both online communities are not just limited to ordinary basketball fans and enthusiasts, but also sports columnists, experts, sports product marketers are also participants of both forums. For instance, in the Reddit forum, Sam Smith and Ken Berger are two NBA columnists who regularly write some articles analyzing certain games or reporting some events. While in the Hupu forum, Qun Su and Yi Yang, two Chinese basketball columnists, are active users in Hupu. They not only create postings to illustrate their points of view but also interact with other users.

Generally speaking, these professionals and some elite enthusiasts create more high quality contents than other ordinary members. The high quality contents usually attract more views and replies. But the majority of the users, also known as “lurkers”, just follow the themes and view postings without responding and replying, rarely making any contribution to the online community (Nonnecke et al., 2004).
4.1.2 DIFFERENCES OF THE TWO FORUMS

There are some differences between the two forums in terms of “primary language used and user’s ethnicity”, “the level of regulations” and “the role of commercialism (shopping/online retail and advertising)”.

**Primary Language Used and Users’ Ethnicity**: Different cultural elements influence these two forums. With English as its main language, the Reddit forum has postings in English and its members are from all over the world (mainly in North America), which makes its atmosphere a bit more global. Members normally tend to focus on basketball related issues and embrace others who have different opinions. Even in the finale period, when two teams are competing for the championship, fans of the two teams are unlikely to insult or attack others. Instead, most of them focus on the games and give credit for both teams’ players. The Hupu forum uses Chinese as its main language and its members are from mainland China. It seems that the majority of members are influenced by Chinese culture. Their opinions and comments tend to be less inclusive. It is not rare to see that disagreements on certain issues turn into online quarrels or fights. The comments from Hupu members display Chinese people’s pride and patriotism. It seems that the growth of China as a strong nation has resulted in patriotism. For example, some members suggest to other members to buy domestic brands of basketball shoes rather than foreign brands, such as NIKE and Adidas. This is a posting written by a Hupu user, with 50727 views and 377 replies (https://bbs.hupu.com/16802252.html).

The quality of domestic brand products has improved dramatically in recently years. It is time to support our domestic brands, like Li Ning, Anta, and Peak
instead of being blindly loyal to Nike and Adidas. Take some actions to make Chinese brands better!

This example does not necessarily represent the majority of users’ preference, but it shows that some people really support domestic brand because of their patriotism.

The Level of Regulations: Although the two forums have a set of rules and regulations, the regulation level is different. In Reddit, rules and regulation are not highly emphasized. They have been placed on the top of the page as a guideline. During the time period of this study, the forum regulators seldom deleted comments or pictures, unless they are offensive and against the forum regulations. But in Hupu, rules and regulations are highly emphasized and the postings and statements are highly regulated. There is a team of regulators who constantly monitor the new postings and replies. Any comments, pictures and website links which are regarded to be inappropriate will be delete immediately. For instance, in the Golden State Warriors’ team page, if insulting comments on the team or players were posted, then they will be deleted immediately because they may potentially damage the atmosphere of the forum. The members who post the inappropriate information will also be banned for a certain period of time. It seems there is a strong influence from the state controlled political culture.

The Role of Commercialism (Shopping and Advertising): To be precise, there is no shopping section nor advertisements appeared in the Reddit NBA forum. However, the Hupu forum offered advertisements (i) at the top of the page and (ii) within right side columns (see Figure 4.3). Also, Hupu has its own shopping platform, which sells products ranging from sports equipment, electronic devises to fashion accessories and food (see Figure 4.4). Similar to other
online shopping platforms, such as Amazon and EBay, Hupu’s shopping platform allows its users to make purchases online and pay electronically. It can be concluded that Hupu emphasizes its commercial features, attempting to maximize its profits in a variety of ways.

Figure 4.3: Hupu forum advertisement at top of the page and right column

Source: Hupu NBA forum
4.2 VALUE CREATION

This study explores the evidence of functional value, social value and entertainment value within two online communities of basketball fans: Reddit forum and Hupu forum.

Functional value, also regarded as purposive value, is “the value derived from accomplished some pre-determined instrumental purpose” (Dholakia et al., 2004, p. 244). Precisely, functional value is created via “co-creation of knowledge and the quality of user-generated content” (Seraj, 2012, p. 213) regarding advice, information and expertise in certain areas (Sicilia and Palazon, 2008). Social value is reflected via interaction and connection among users in online community.
Sicilia and Palazon (2008, p. 259) believed that “virtual community implies a social activity between groups of people interacting online, which delivers the consumer value of interpersonal connectivity”. They also pointed out that social value is reflected in postings regarding “friendship, emotional support, self-esteem, social status and social enhancement” (Sicilia and Palazon, 2008, p. 259). Entertainment value “stem from fun and relaxation through playing or otherwise interacting with others” (Sicilia and Palazon, 2008, p. 259). Two themes which demonstrate entertainment value in online community postings are fun game sharing and game playing experience/perspectives. Fun game sharing is that users who recommend the games they like to other users who are likely to enjoy the game. When playing and sharing the fun game, users may “enjoy and show a high interest and involvement with other people, and feel a sense of time distortion during their common interaction (Sicilia and Palazon, 2008, p. 259).

The following sections presented how these three values are found to be reflected in the postings within the two forums, Reddit forum and Hupu forum.

**4.2.1 EVIDENCE OF VALUE CREATION IN REDDIT FORUM**

All three values, functional value, social value and entertainment value are found in Reddit forum.

**4.2.1.1 FUNCTIONAL VALUE IN REDDIT FORUM**

In Reddit forum, functional value can be found in postings regarding basketball terms and tactics, NBA rules and business contracts, and other basketball related topics. These postings are all
created by forum members. The forum members who create the postings can be classified into two categories: peer users and experts. Specifically, peer users are just basketball fans who possess certain level of basketball related knowledge and have experienced in playing non-professional basketball games. They are passionate about NBA and are willing to share their knowledge and experience with other basketball fans. On the other hand, experts are basketball professionals such as professional sports columnists, professional basketball critics and NBA players and practitioners whose career is mainly connected to professional basketball context and NBA. Their postings, when compared to postings created by peer users, tend to be of higher quality and tend to attract stronger attention and responses from other online members.

This study found many threads and their related postings that offer functional value for this online community. Following are some examples of thread titles that tend to indicate how functional value is reflected in postings created by peer users and experts.

Thread Title 1: Which NBA team/franchise has the best player development and culture? Posted by JetLee

Thread title 2: Where do the current Cavaliers and Warriors place in terms of the most talented/deep NBA rosters of all time? Posted by Curry31

Thread Title 3: If the Warriors' offensive system is a "Golden Democracy" and the Cavaliers' offensive system is a "Two-Crowned Monarchy", what would be the names for the rest of the leagues offensive systems? Posted by QWEE2

Thread title 1 concerns the information on player development and team culture among NBA teams. Thread title 2 leads to a discussion about two NBA teams, Golden State Warriors and Cleveland Cavaliers’ history places when comparing to other previous excellent teams. Thread
title 3 is a brainstorming question requiring to use several words as a term to summarize each team’s feature.

Furthermore, two threads with their respective postings are provided below as examples to highlight how the functional values are being created. The first example relates to the thread initiated by one peer user (regular member) and the second example relates to the thread initiated by one professional member.

Example One: Thread initiated by one peer user (babygrenade) and its related postings

This thread is about business endorsement contract and is created and shared by one of the peer users.

**Thread Title:** NBA player Allen Iverson signed a lifetime endorsement contract with Reebok in 2001 that would pay him $800,000 a year until he reaches age 55 to where he would then receive a final lump sum payment of $32,000,000. (Posted by babygrenade on Nov 7th, 2017) (https://www.reddit.com/r/todayilearned/comments/7bfmbj/til_nba_player_allen_iverson_signed_a_lifetime/)

**Postings within this thread:**

“Why not just get the payment up front?” – Mario

“A couple reasons: First, the time value of money. Essentially, a dollar today is worth more than a dollar in 10 years because (1) of opportunity to invest that dollar and grow it over those 10 years and (2) inflation. This can generally be calculated though and was probably built into the deal. Second, it's more likely you'll actually get the money if you get it up front. There's always a chance a company will go under or declare bankruptcy before all your payments are due.” – babygrenade

“By doing this, Reebok saves some money for itself and lower its risk while for Allen Iverson who does not have the awareness of wealth management, it ensures him to constantly have cash flow to spend.” - babygrenade

“Good explanation, now I get it, thank you for your answer.” – Mario
This is a thread created by one of the peer users concerning NBA player Allen Iverson’s business endorsement contract with sports company Reebok. It provides information about business endorsement contract. The creator explained the rationale of this unique business endorsement contract and why it is a win-win situation for both endorser and sponsor. Thus, this is one evidence of how functional value was created by peer users.

Example Two: Thread created by an expert member and its related postings

This thread comprised of frequently asked questions about Toronto Raptors’ salary cap in the off-season period and responses from an expert member.

**Thread Title:** FAQ regarding the Raptors’ salary cap situation headed into the offseason
(https://www.reddit.com/r/torontoraptors/comments/6be6r/faq_regarding_the_raptors_salary_cap_situation/)

**FAQ**

**Question #1:** What will the NBA salary cap be in 2017-18?
The NBA salary cap will be $101 million in 2017-18

**Question #2:** What will the NBA luxury tax threshold be in 2017-18?
The NBA luxury tax threshold will be $121 million in 2017-18.

**Question #3:** How much money in active contracts do the Raptors currently owe going into 2017-18?
The Raptors owe roughly $79.5 million to their actively contracted players in 2017-18. However, they will still be above the salary cap heading into the NBA offseason. (See questions 5, 6 and 7)

**Question #4:** I've heard the salary cap in the NBA is a soft cap. What does that mean?
It means that NBA teams are able to go above the salary cap to sign players ONLY IF they use something called an exception. There are multiple different exceptions that teams can use to go above the cap. The most important exception for the Raptors this offseason will be the Larry Bird exception. (Posted by Sam Smith on October 13th, 2017)

**Postings/Replies within this thread:**
“This is one of the best posts ever written on this subreddit. You answered each question in a logical flow and in a way that makes sense. I went from having zero understanding of cap holds to understanding them with much more clarity and confidence. Kudos to you fan! And thank you for helping me become a more knowledgeable fan!” - nationofcool83

“How do salary dumps work? I don't understand how you can trade for picks when salaries have to match. Do you mind explaining it?” - travortz

“There are 4 ways a salary dump can work:

• Using the "Traded Player Exception"
Let’s say you trade to capped out teams and take back less money provided the size of the contracts are close enough together.

• Trading into cap room
Fairly self-explanatory. A team can take on any amount of salary in a trade as long as they are less than $100 000 over the cap after the trade completes.

• Trading into a trade exception (different from the traded player exception)
When a team makes a trade where they have more outgoing salary than incoming salary they get something called a trade exception. The size of the exception is based on the difference in salary in the original trade. For example, last summer the Atlanta Hawks traded Jeff Teague to the Indiana Pacers for the 12th pick in the draft, taking no salary back. Teague was owed 8 million dollars when he was traded so the Hawks got a 8 million dollar trade exception. If the Hawks had acquired a player earning 2 million dollars in that trade instead of the pick then they would have gotten a 6-million-dollar trade exception.

Trade exceptions allow to go above the cap and take on additional salary in trades equal or less than the exception. So, for example, Atlanta could take on all of Cory Joseph's 7.6-million-dollar contract, even if they were above the cap, by using the Jeff Teague trade exception. Afterwards they would still have a 0.4 million-dollar trade exception left. Trade exceptions go away a year after the initial trade is made.

• Trading for a non-guaranteed contract
Teams can trade contracts that are non-guaranteed for the upcoming season during the offseason. For example, Ramon Session's 6-million-dollar contract is non-guaranteed for 2017-18. The Hornets can trade Sessions for a player making up to 9.1 million dollars this offseason, even though they are over the cap. The team acquiring Sessions can then release him without owing him any money, effectively cutting up to 9.1 million dollars from their payroll.” – Replied by Sam Smith
This thread was created by one of the NBA columnists Sam Smith. He analyzed Toronto Raptor’s business strategies under NBA’s new salary rules. In this example, one can see how the functional value was created through postings within this thread. Sam Smith offered relevant information and insights to other community members. He responded to other questions raised by other members as well. Evidence indicates that members were satisfied with his professional explanations.

4.2.1.2 SOCIAL VALUE IN REDETT FORUM

In Reddit forum, social value is embedded in postings concerning friendship, emotional support, common interests on certain issues, such as teams or particular players. During the engagement in the forum, members interact and communicate with each other, gradually building friendships. The interaction and communication not only enhance the relationships among users but also lead to a tighter bond between the users and online communities. Friendships and emotional support, is one of the major themes that reflect social value in online brand communities. Users may create postings to share their experience and excitements with other friends from online communities.

This study found many threads and their related postings that offer social value for this online community. Following are some examples of thread titles that tend to indicate how social value is reflected in postings.

Thread title 1: Chinese Lakers fans, I'm just retire Kobe's jersey at home!

Thread title 2: Going to my first Warriors game against the Spurs this Saturday.
Thread title 1 shows a fan has his own way of celebrating Kobe Bryant’s jersey retirement and wants to share it with other Chinese Laker fans. Thread title 2 is a fan of Golden State Warriors who will be watching a live game for the first time in the Oracle Center, expressing his excitements with other Warriors fans in the forum.

Furthermore, two threads with their respective postings are provided below as examples to highlight how the social values are being created.

**Example One: Social Value indicating friendships and emotional support**

This thread offers evidence of how friendships were formed and emotional support were provided.

*Thread Title:* Going to my first Warriors game against the Spurs this Saturday.

([https://www.reddit.com/r/warriors/comments/7vhbtk/going_to_my_first_warriors_game_against_the_spurs/](https://www.reddit.com/r/warriors/comments/7vhbtk/going_to_my_first_warriors_game_against_the_spurs/))

Hello fellow Warriors fans. I am a fan of Warriors for several years. It is the first time for me to watch their live! I cannot express how excited I am at this moment and I really want to share it with you all. I will be attending my first Warriors game this Saturday and I would get some advice. First, I will be driving to the Arena and am wondering how early most people prefer to get to the stadium before the game starts. I am also curious if there are any must go to vendors that sell interesting or funny things. I know sometimes fans get free things like T-shirts or bobble heads for certain games. Is there any slated giveaway for the Spurs game? Is there anything that goes on that I may not know about and I should look into, or do you have any advice/tips for a first timer? Thanks for reading my post, excited to see our boys in action! (Posted by Nalicar on Feb 5th, 2018)

*Postings/Replies within this thread:*
I really admire you! No matter what time you get there try to park close to the exit. You may have to walk a little further to get to the main building entrance, but when you get ready to leave after the game you will be glad you don't have to sit in traffic as long. And you cannot bring a backpack into Oracle and it goes without saying that you shouldn't leave it visible in your car either. I am not completely sure about the purses. I've seen people straight up to be told to turn around or leave their bag outside when they've come from Bart and have nowhere to put it. There is no bag check. Have a great time there!” - American_Non-Voter

“I know how it feels, my friend. It reminds me my first time watching live games. Doors open 90 minutes before tip-off. So if you want to see the players warming-up and shooting around and all the pre-game stuff, try to arrive early. There is in-n-out across the freeway from Oracle or get something good in downtown Oakland. Because you cannot take food or drinks into the Oracle. Therefore, fill up beforehand because the prices are crazy. Sometimes I park at the Bart station and walk to the stadium, but make sure you have nothing visible in your car. Give-aways are listed on the warriors’ website.” - FightTheWorm

This posting is created by a GSW’s fan who is going to watch his first live game in GSW’s home stadium Oracle Center. He is so exciting about this experience and want to share it with other friends from Reddit forum. Other users reply to express their admirations and emotional feelings. Besides, they also give him some practical suggestions on parking, food and beverage, and gift-taking as friends.

Example Two: Common interest in certain team and players

Common interest in certain team and players is also a major theme that drive users to socialise with others. It is natural for users who are fond of the same team or players to aggregate and exchange their opinions. The following example shows the statistics of game between GSW and Denver Nuggets that lead to a heated discussion among GSW fans about the team’s recent performance, morale, and tactics. During this process, social value is created.

*Thread Title:* Golden State Warriors (41-12) fall to the Denver Nuggets (28-25), 108-115 (Posted by Perksoftthesewalls on Feb 4th, 2018)
Postings/Replies within this thread:

“GSW had more than 3 terrible games. I was saying this the other day. They ranked 26th in defense the entire month of January. Then people are telling me there's nothing to be concerned about. One thing I know is this - championship teams do not have to flip a switch. They have excellent habits. Great defense comes from habits. It's ingrained.” - southwycke75344

“Agreed. Playing terrible defense creates BAD habits that will come to light when players get tired in the playoffs. They need to be reinforcing good habits all season. We fans should not be too optimistic.” – gugu408

“Exactly, their morale seems somehow affected. I do not feel the desire of winning the game they used to have in the last two season. Besides, their tactics should be changed in the third quarter. I am glad that to know you guys who have the vision and independently thinking. Let’s follow each other to have more in-depth discussions.” - Thorrr

This posting demonstrates that when GSW is in a downturn, its fans exchange their points of view on discussing what causes this downturn and what GSW should do to get rid of it. In their communication, it is obvious that the user “Thorrr” are satisfied to see other users’ comments that analyze this topic in visionary perspectives. He also wants them to follow each other so that they can create a chat group for further discussions. A sense of trust, sharing, and inspiring is developed during their interaction, and along with the creation of social value.

This section presents how social value is reflected in Reddit forum. Friendship and emotional support, and common interest on certain team and players are two themes which lead to users’ interaction and communication. Next section will present entertainment value in Reddit forum.
4.2.1.3 ENTERTAINMENT VALUE IN REDDIT FORUM

In Reddit forum, NBA is not the only topic for users. Since the forum is where users spend their spare time for leisure, many users are willing to share some fun game they play, and share their game playing experience or skills. Entertainment value is reflected in themes regarding fun game sharing, and game playing skills and experience.

This study found threads and their related postings that offer entertainment value for this online community. Following are some examples of thread titles that tend to indicate how entertainment value is reflected in postings.

Thread Title 1: Defense of the Ancients 2 is my favorite video game!
Thread Title 2: What is your favorite NBA video game ever made?

Thread title 1 indicates a users sharing his favorite video game Defense of the Ancients 2 with his explanation and experience. Thread title 2 is a user consulting other users on their favorite NBA video game.

Furthermore, two threads with their respective postings are provided below as examples to highlight how the entertainment values are being created.

Example One: Fun game sharing

This example shows one user who share his favorite video game to other users.

Thread Title: Defense of the Ancients 2 is my favorite video game (https://www.reddit.com/r/DotA2/comments/4q5a76/defense_of_the_ancients_2_is_my_favorite_video/)
“It is a free-to-play game created and maintained by the Valve Corporation, which is headquartered in Bellevue, Washington and ruled by the legendary Gabe Logan Newell. Defense of the Ancients 2 (DotA2) is a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) in which each of ten players (two teams of five players each) take control of ten heroes to do battle and fulfill objectives on a roughly-symmetrical playing field. The game is routinely praised for being unforgivingly strategic and nearly impossible to master. Players seeking any level of success must be nimble of hand, cunning of mind, and, perhaps most importantly, completely void of human emotion: when two warriors lock eyes on the battlefield, be they the armor-clad Dragon Knight, the enigmatic Juggernaut, the unrelenting Bloodseeker, or the mischievous faerie-dragon Puck, all mercy must be put aside. The best teams do not only destroy their opponents, though that is an important part: the best teams humiliate their enemies, casting them down like broken-winged birds into the loser’s pit of shame amidst an unceasing stream of ridicule and scorn. In a sense it is not a battle of heroes: it is a battle of egos where the most resilient emerges the victor.” (Posted by Bradley Dec 27th, 2017)

**Postings/Replies in this thread:**

“I’m a big fan of DotA2, which platform do you play? Are you good? Let’s team up! We can talk about how to play this game in a better way.” – Nevermore

“Glad to find DotA fans in NBA forum, we must have many common interests. Let’s play together and make some friends.” – Forevermist

“Thanks for you sharing, I have never tried it before but I will give it a shot.” – CSItony

Creator of this posting shared his favorite video game “Defense of the Ancients 2” to other users and explained what this game is about why it worth playing. Those who have played this game before intend to play with the posting creator, while other users who have never tried it are willing to play. Thus one can see the entertainment value being created in this thread.

**Example Two: Sharing game experience or relevant skills for the game**
This example is where one member shares her game playing experience with other forum users and that resulted in entertainment value for the forum.

**Thread Title:** Finding the tower in the Faron region is maybe the best video game experience I’ve ever had. ([https://www.reddit.com/r/Breath_of_the_Wild/comments/7dt64a/finding_the_tower_in_the_faron_region_is_maybe/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Breath_of_the_Wild/comments/7dt64a/finding_the_tower_in_the_faron_region_is_maybe/))

My husband and I have been playing through this game together, which has been an interesting experience because we both have such different styles and strategies. But I guess it works because we balance each other out. Last night we decided it was time to move on to a new region (the day prior we had recovered our first memory and gotten the hero’s tunic from Impa). We decide to go to the large area just southwest from East Necluda, where we had been exploring and messeng around in Hateno, and find the tower, thinking that surely we could see it from a high vantage point. Simple, right? But what followed can only be described as the biggest sense of wonderment/ excitement/ confusion/ frustration I have probably ever had in a game. This game totally outdoes itself at every turn. Moving slowly over the terrain and watching it turn into a rain forest, stumbling across (another!) huge sleeping goblin, seeing a huge flying serpent circling a mountain off in the distance, accidentally finding sunken treasures, getting up close to the serpent to find it is electrified and the music associated with it is just absolutely beautiful and perfect (we didn’t do anything with the dragon, btw... we were too scared and overwhelmed :p) meeting the Rito bard for the first time in the midst of a lightning storm, and then finally finding the tower, only to find it guarded by a super fun and frenzied baddie... damn it was all so amazing! I think my favorite thing about this game is just this sense of wonderment you get from exploring and stumbling across things you never could have expected. Playing this game has been my favorite gaming experience of all time! (Posted by Cthurmannr on Nov 18th, 2017)

**Postings/Replies to this Thread:**
“Thanks for sharing your story. After reading how they designed the game with this philosophy in mind, of unveiling things slowly to the player, I really began to notice it too. Glad to hear you and your partner are experiencing it together.”  
– HervPrometheus

“I agree that seeing things in the distance and discovering things while trying to get there is one of the best parts of this game. And Breath of the Wild has done thus better than any game to date, in my opinion. Sure the game has some quest markers, but exploration is largely driven by what you see and what interests you, unlike some other open world games where you get distracted by the world while following a quest marker. This was an awesome story. I wish I could go back and experience the game all over again!” - clayHead152
This thread captures how one member shares her game playing experience with other forum users. She also explains why this game is so fascinating in her perspective and the joy she has when she plays with her husband. Other users who play this game reply to her, illustrating their game playing experience. In the dialogue, they also discuss how to play this game in different ways so that they may have better experience and sense of satisfactory. Overall, this thread captures the creation of entertainment value.

4.2.2 EVIDENCE OF VALUE CREATION IN HUPU FORUM

All three values, functional value, social value and entertainment value are also found in Hupu forum.

4.2.2.1 FUNCTIONAL VALUE IN HUPU FORUM

In Hupu forum, functional value can be found in postings regarding NBA rules regulations, player trades and business contracts, and other basketball related topics. These postings are all created by forum members. There are two kinds of posting creators: peer users and experts. To be precise, peer users are basketball fans who possess certain level of basketball related knowledge and have experienced in playing non-professional basketball games. They are passionate about NBA and are willing to share their knowledge and experience with other basketball fans. On the other hand, experts are basketball professionals such as professional sports columnists, professional basketball critics and NBA players and practitioners whose career is mainly connected to professional basketball context and NBA. Their postings, when compared
to postings created by peer users, tend to be of higher quality and tend to attract stronger attention and responses from other online members. This study found threads and their related postings that offer functional value for this online community. Following are some examples of thread titles that tend to indicate how functional value is reflected in postings.

**Thread Title 1:** Why did change the All-star voting system?

**Thread Title 2:** How Lebron James follows Michael Jordan's legendary?

Thread title 1 is an users asking the rationale of NBA’s new All-star voting system. Thread title 2 leads to a discussion on comparing two excellent players Lebron James and Michael Jordan.

Following are some details of two examples demonstrating how functional value exists in the postings.

**Example One: Information regarding MVP player selection**

This thread example offers information of how MVP is selected every year and thus offers functional value to other members.

**Thread Title:** How is the NBA most valuable player (MVP) selected every year?  
(https://bbs.hupu.com/21252990.html)

In every season, there are so many excellent players, how does the NBA league select a MVP from these players? (Posted by Chenxiaoxiao on Jan 9th, 2018)

**Postings/Replies within this thread:**

“A MVP must be excellent in some aspects, such as statistics in scoring, rebound, assist; team wins; leadership; make his teammates better; have deep influence. Also, it is voted by head coaches, media practitioners and basketball experts each with certain weight of percentage respectively.” - 休城梦想

“Thank you for your explanation, I did not expect that it would be so complicated”. - 帝江龍
This posting was created by a peer user who wanted to know how the MVP is selected each year and answered by other peer user who know the rules and procedures. Although it is not an official explanation, it is clear enough for the public fans to know about this issue.

Example Two: Game Reviews

**Thread Title:** Warriors’ strength, Cavaliers’ weakness, no more Season 4 for Warriors against Cavaliers (https://bbs.hupu.com/21208347.html)

After watching the game, some key points about both teams should be emphasized. Warriors did a great job in four aspects: (1) transition; (2) defense switch; (3) rebound protection; (4) concentration. While Cavaliers had the same problem that bothered them since the beginning of this season: defense and protection of the rim. (Posted by Yi Yang on Feb 18th, 2018)

In this thread, the creator (Yi Yang) reviews the game between Golden State Warriors and Cleveland Cavaliers (these two teams met each other in past three years’ NBA finals) and analyzes what are the Warriors’ strength comparing to Cavaliers’ weakness and how Warriors beat Cavaliers from a professional perspective.

**Postings/Replies within this thread:**

“Excellent analysis! Before I read your work I am still confused about some of the arrangement from both teams’ head coach. Now I got the answer, keep writing these analyses, looking forward to see it.” – Primary School Curry

“As a Golden State Warrior fan, I used to focus on the superstars’ highlight performance but fail to pay attention to the team’s tactics and strategies. Your analysis enlightens me to perceive the game in a different angle, I really appreciate that.” – Glorious Zhang

This posting was written by a famous Chinese basketball columnist Yi Yang. After watching the game between Golden State Warriors and Cleveland Cavaliers (two teams played in the finale last season), he analyzed the strength and weakness of two teams and the tactics of both team in
a professional perspective. Other members are inspired and benefit from his analysis, expecting to see more of his interpretation of games.

4.2.2.2 SOCIAL VALUE IN HUPU FORUM

In Hupu forum, social value is embedded in postings concerning friendship, emotional support, common interests on certain issues, such as teams or particular players. Friendships were built among users during their interaction and communication in the forum. The interaction and communication not only enhance the relationships among users but also lead to a tighter bond between the users and online communities.

This study found threads and their related postings that offer social value for this online community. Following are some examples of thread titles that tend to indicate how social value is reflected in postings.

Thread Title 1: Congratulation to Kevin Durant (Golden State Warriors) who got the most votes from other players in the all-star vote.

Thread Title 2: Our Role players, Our Golden State Warriors.

Thread title 1 is when Kevin Durant was voted to be an all-star player, an user showing his congratulation. Thread title 2 is a posting written in the Golden State Warriors team section, demonstrating the contributions and efforts of the Warriors’ role players.

Following two examples indicate in details of how postings offered social values to community members.
Example One: Social Value of friendship and emotional support

This example is about one Cavalier fan creating social value among his peers.

**Thread Title:** The Cavaliers kept losing games, as a fan I feel terrible and just want to talk to other fans in Cavaliers’ section. (Posted by Dee2012 on Jan 6th, 2018)
(https://bbs.hupu.com/21373007.html)

**Postings/Replies within this Thread:**

“Things happen, we all have good times and bad times, but cheer up! Cavaliers will be better in the later games.” - 苹果酱

“Be faithful on our Cavaliers! Ups and downs is normal, try to think about the something positive!” - 为了明天的自己

“Forget about their lost and get some distraction, when they win, let's celebrate together in this forum, you will never walk along.” - a1191889863

This posting is created by a Cavalier fan to express his negative feeling when Cavaliers experienced a downturn. He also wants to talk to other Cavaliers’ fans to get some emotional support. While other fans try to console him, telling him to think positively and focus on the bright side. The emotional support helps users on venting of negative emotions and satisfy their social needs. It also facilitates the building of friendships.

Social value is also embedded in postings regarding to certain players that are commonly interested by users. The following example is about Kobe Bryant’s jersey retirement, which leads to the reaction of Kobe’s fans.

Example Two: Social Value expressed through common interest in certain team or players

This example two is about Kobe Bryant’s jersey retirement ceremony, accompanying with tributes to his glorious achievements and career.
Thread Title: Legend’s retirement. Los Angeles’ legendary player Kobe Bryant jersey was retired during the halftime of game with Golden State Warriors. (Posted by 奔跑不止 on Dec 19th, 2017) (https://bbs.hupu.com/20997084.html)

Postings/Replies within this Thread:
“Kobe tries to keep smiling, I feel so joyful, it helps me to recall all my memory. This is life and my eyes are wet.” - 回来了

“Salute to the legend, his spirit will not fade away.” - 2 号小石匠

“Kobe smiles but I cried. There will not be another Kobe and we will not be young again. I guess all the Kobe fans will think the same. Thank you, Kobe.” - 便士福尔茨

This posting is created by a Kobe’s fan to celebrate Kobe’s jersey retirement. As one of the most popular NBA player, Kobe’s achievements and highlight performance are the memory of many basketball fans. His jersey retirement ceremony reminds the fans’ memory of countless joyful moments when they watched his games. Many Kobe’s fans express their feelings and emotions in by replying this posting as a farewell to Kobe’s NBA career.

This section demonstrates how social value is reflected in postings in Hupu forum. Next section will present the reflection of entertainment value in Hupu forum.

4.2.2.3 ENTERTAINMENT VALUE IN HUPU FORUM

As a platform where users spend their time for leisure, besides NBA topics and issues, Hupu forum also includes discussions about entertainments, such as fun game sharing, and video games playing skills and experience. Entertainment value is reflected in themes concerning fun
game sharing, and game playing skills and experience. This study found threads and their related postings that offer social value for this online community. Following are some examples of thread titles that tend to indicate how entertainment value is reflected in postings.

Thread Title 1: NBA live or NBA 2K series, which one do you prefer? Posted by AK4747

Thread Title 2: Fellow basketball friend, I want some recommendations on new interesting games. Posted by Kobefans499

Thread title 1 is a question asking other users’ preference between NBA live and NBA 2k series. Thread title 2 shows a user who want to get some recommendation about new games.

Following two examples indicate in details how postings offered entertainment values to community members

Example One: Fun game sharing

**Thread Title:** Basketball fans, here is a game for you!  
([https://bbs.hupu.com/20787932.html](https://bbs.hupu.com/20787932.html))  
As a basketball fan, I have tried some NBA mobile phone games but most of them were terrible, but there is one called "NBA LIVE MOBILE" gave me a great game experience and I want to share it with you. (Posted by BBasketLI on Nov 24th, 2017)

**Postings/Replies within this thread:**
“Thank you for sharing, I check the screen shots and description, it looks attractive, may I will give it a shot.” - 好想学跳舞

“Agree with you, comparing to other mobile NBA games, this one is way much better, I hope there are more people to play this game and we can share our experience.” - 神笔马良
The creator of this posting has tried many basketball games and found that the game “NBA LIVE MOBILE” is the only excellent one. So he high recommended to other forums users who like playing NBA games. Some users take his advice and play this game, replying that it is indeed a good game and they also have a pleasure experience.

**Example Two: Game playing experience/perspectives**

**Thread Title:** Game skill sharing: how to use an excellent center in a fast pace game.  
([https://bbs.hupu.com/21251116.html](https://bbs.hupu.com/21251116.html))

“In NBA video game 2K18, because the game pace is very fast, it is hard to use a talent center. In this posting I will share some of my skills to overcome this problem.” The posting creator then explains what to do in the game in detail with both literal description and GIF pictures. (Posted by nba2k on Jan 22th, 2018)

**Postings/Replies within this thread:**

“Thank you very much for sharing this! It bothers me for a long time. We can add each other to share more experience about this game.” – 高圆圆

“The explanation is precious and GIF picture is clear, there should be more postings like this to be created so that everyone can benefit.” – 千与千寻

This posting is written by a NBA game 2K18 player. Because it is difficult to use a center (a position in NBA video game) in 2K18, the creator shares his skill and perspective on this part to other users who are bothered by this question. It quickly draws the attention by other users who want to master this skill. Via this sharing of playing skill, users are likely to have a better satisfactory experience on this game. Entertainment value is created during this process.

### 4.3 **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

In conclusion, this finding chapter first presents the comparison of the nature of two forums, identifying the similarities in the aspects of “nature of postings and categories of postings”,
“home page structure”, “rules and regulations for the forums”, and “nature of forum members”. On the other hand, since two forums are based on different cultural contexts, differences exist in terms of primary language used and users’ ethnicity, the level of regulations, and commercialism. And the commercialism is the most obvious distinction between two forums because Reddit forum does not have any advertisement or commercial elements, while Hupu forum places its advertisements at the top of the page and within right side columns. Besides, Hupu also has its own online shopping platform to emphasize its commercialism and increase its revenue.

Then three values, functional value, social value and entertainment value, are identified via postings selected from two forums. Functional value is frequently shown in postings regarding information, advice, and expertise in certain topics. These postings are created by either peer users who are ordinary forum members, or experts who have the expertise in the relevant field. Social value is embedded in postings concerning friendship, experience, and common interests. Social value is created during the interaction and communication among users who have common interests on certain teams and players, or seeking friendships and emotional support. Lastly, entertainment value is reflected in postings about fun game sharing, and the discussion on game playing skills and experience.
In the next chapter, the comparison of value creation in two forums will be presented. Also, the theoretical and managerial contributions will be demonstrated, following by the limitation of this study and future research directions.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter will first discuss the comparison of the structure and nature of two forums, and the comparison of value creation in two forums, followed by the theoretical and conceptual contributions. Then, limitations will be presented. And finally, future research directions will be offered.

5.1 DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

In this section, the comparison of the structure and nature of two forums will be discussed. Also, the discussions on similarities and differences of value creation in two forums will be offered.

5.1.1 COMPARISON OF THE STRUCTURE AND NATURE OF THE TWO FORUMS

As NBA is the major theme for both forums, there are some similarities between both forums. To be specific, two forums have similar homepage categories for postings, such as “hot”, “new”, and “controversial”. These categories provide users with easy access to the kinds of postings they want to view, which improves the users’ experience. In terms of the nature of postings, the two forums have the similar mechanism that postings are listed based on their popularity. The most popular and discussed postings tend to stay on the top of the page. Besides the homepage, both forums have team page sections for each team’ fans to aggregate. In administrating and
operating aspect, both forums have their rules and regulations to maintain a positive environment for their users. In appropriate information in the postings will be deleted.

On the other hand, since the two forums are based in different cultural contexts. Differences exist in the following aspects. Firstly, the primary language used is different. Reddit forum use English as its main language, while in Hupu forum, Chinese is the major language. Secondly, the level of regulations is different. In Reddit, rules and regulation are not highly emphasized. The forum regulators seldom deleted comments or pictures. But in Hupu forum, rules and regulations are highly emphasized and the postings and statements are highly regulated. Lastly, there is no shopping section nor advertisements appeared in the Reddit NBA forum, while Hupu forum has not only advertisements placing in the homepages but also its own shopping platform which selling a variety kinds of products.

5.1.2 COMPARISON OF VALUE CREATION IN THE TWO FORUMS

This section will compare and contrast the value creation in the two NBA forums (Reddit forum and Hupu forum). Some similarities as well as some differences will be offered next.

5.1.2.1 SIMILARITIES OF VALUE CREATION IN THE TWO FORUMS

The finding chapter indicated that functional value, social value, and entertainment value are reflected in the postings from both Reddit forum and Hupu forum. There are some similarities on value creation in these two forums.
Functional value, as the most frequently shown value, is created in the postings regarding basketball terms and tactics, NBA rules and business contracts, and other basketball related topics in both forums. The findings of this study agree with the definitions and statements from some previous research. Dholakia et al. (2004, p. 243) defined functional value as “the value derived from accomplished some pre-determined instrumental purpose”. Sicilia and Palazon (2008) believed that functional value can be obtained by receiving information, expertise, and advices from either the site or other participants. This study has also found the evidence that users obtain the functional value by reading the postings, or interacting and communicating with other users to share and exchange information and knowledge under certain threads. In both forums, the threads are created by either peer users or experts. Peer users are just basketball fans who possess certain level of basketball related knowledge and have experienced in playing non-professional basketball games. They are passionate about NBA and are willing to share their knowledge and experience with other basketball fans. While experts are basketball professionals such as professional sports columnists, professional basketball critics and NBA players and practitioners whose career is mainly connected to professional basketball context and NBA.

Social value is embedded in postings concerning friendship, emotional support, common interests on certain issues, such as teams or particular players. In previous study, Seraj (2012) insisted that in online brand communities, users are motivated to interact with other users, not the machine or the site. The interaction and communication with each other tend to gradually build stronger bonds among online brand community users. In both forums, users build friendships during their interaction and communication. As the friendships become stronger, they may seek emotional supports from other users. Also, the common interests in certain teams or players
naturally lead to the aggregation of users, further enhancing their interaction. In both forum, fans of certain teams tend to get together in their team section to talk about the recent dynamics of their team and players, tactics, and other relevant issues. Besides, in some cases, fans of same team treat each other as family. For instance, fans of Golden State Warriors call themselves “Dubs”, and believe they are part of the “Dub family”.

Entertainment value is reflected in postings regarding fun game sharing, and game playing skills and experience. Previous research identified that entertainment value derives from engagement and interaction in joyful and entertaining online activities with other users (Dholakia et al., 2004), and entertainment elements make online communities more valuable for their users (Sicilia and Palazon, 2008). In both forums, users not only share basketball-related games, but also other fun games, which they have tried and had satisfied and joyful experiences. For instance, some users recommend Defense of the Ancients 2, a team game which players can either play with their friends or make new friends during the game. Besides fun game sharing, the sharing of game playing skills and experience is another theme in the creation of entertainment value. To be precise, NBA live and NBA 2K series are the two most popular basketball video games. Many skilled players share their experience and techniques by creating postings or replying other’s postings in both forums.

5.1.2.2 DIFFERENCES OF VALUE CREATION IN THE TWO FORUMS

Since Reddit forum is the most popular basketball forum in North America, while Hupu forum is widely used in mainland China, different cultural contexts lead to differences on value creation in these two forums.
In terms of functional value, users in Reddit forum are more interested in tactics and other professional knowledge. While users in Hupu forum tend to be more concerned about information regarding improving their practical skills. To be specific, postings with more views and responses are normally shown in the top of the homepage. In Reddit forum, tactic introduction and post-game analysis regularly stay on the top of the homepage, indicating users are highly interested in these topics. Also, threads written by experts tend to draw the attention of other users. In Hupu forum, threads on how to improve practical basketball skills tend to stay in the homepage, which indicates that users of Hupu forum also focus on the practical aspects.

For social value, differences exist in users’ supporting teams. In NBA, there are 29 teams located in different cities in United States and one team located in Toronto, Canada. Since most users in Reddit forum live in North America, they tend to support their home teams. For instance, fans who live in Canada are likely to support Toronto Raptors because it is the only NBA team in Canada. Besides, since fans who support their home team are likely to live in the same city, they have more common topics and experience when comparing to users who live in the other cities. Therefore, they may build tighter friendships or even become friends in reality. In Hupu forum, most fans support the winning teams. The majority of users in Hupu are fans of Golden State Warriors and Cleveland Cavaliers. Being regarded as the best teams in the league, these two teams competed for the championship in last three years.

For entertainment value, users of two forums have different focus on video game categories. To be precise, users in Reddit forum share a variety kinds of games, from pet raising games to role play games. Entertaining and joyful experience is the measurement for game sharing. While in
Hupu forum, users only focus on basketball-related games, such as NBA live and NBA 2K series. They tend to pursue the depth of these games, discussing how to make more achievements and finish difficult tasks.

This section presented the comparison of value creation in both forums, specifying the similarities and differences on the reflection of functional value, social value, and entertainment value in Reddit forum and Hupu forum, respectively. Next section will present both the theoretical and managerial contributions of this study.

5.2 CONTRIBUTIONS

In this section, the theoretical and managerial contributions of this study are offered.

5.2.1 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Value creation is a vital area for studying online brand community. This study employs netnography to explore value creation in two online NBA forums, offering insights on value creation in online brand community in different contexts.

First and foremost, this study presents findings that corroborate the findings of Sicilia and Palazon’s (2008) and Seraj’s (2012) research. In Sicilia and Palazon’s (2008) research, by studying Coca-Cola Spanish online community, functional value, social value, and entertainment value were detected and explored. Seraj (2012) conducted a research in an online aviation community and proposed that intellectual value, social value, and cultural value were created in
this community. She also emphasized that these three values play a vital role for the success of this online community.

Via investigating Reddit forum and Hupu forum, functional value, social value, and entertainment value were found and discussed. Functional value is the most commonly observed value in both forums, reflected in postings regarding information, advice, and expertise on basketball. Social value is embedded in postings concerning friendship, emotional support, common interests on certain issues, such as teams or particular players. Entertainment value is reflected in postings regarding fun game sharing, and game playing skills and experience.

Secondly, this study extends previous research, and explores value creation in basketball online communities. Since there is little research on value creation that had been conducted in sports online communities, this study fills the research gap. The findings demonstrate that functional value, social value, and entertainment value are created in basketball online communities.

Lastly, in previous research, Jawecki et al. (2001) conducted a study on the impact of cultural differences on creative process and innovation creation in online communities. By exploring English- and Chinese speaking online sneaker communities, they investigated consumer behavior in innovation development and motivations of online users to participate in innovative creation process. This study is a comparative research by selecting two research sites that represent users from two different cultural contexts. Reddit forum is the most popular NBA in North America, while Hupu forum is widely used by users in mainland China. The similarities and differences of value creation in two forums are offered and discussed. This study offered the
importance of contextual elements (e.g., North America vs. China) in understanding the online communities.

5.2.2 MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study provides managerial implications for marketers, and online community administrators. For marketers and online community administrators, it is of vital importance to know the value creation in online brand communities. The online community administrators should strive to maintain a positive environment for users to interact and communicate with other users. Also, a harmonious atmosphere should be guaranteed so that users can have a great experience.

For other online communities, advertisements may not be the only channel for revenue generating. Hupu forum has shown that, with a large number of loyal and stable users, online community can establish their own shopping platform, or collaborating with other online shopping platform to generate revenue.

The findings of this study demonstrate the preferences and consumer behavior patterns of users in two forums. Marketers who plan to promote relevant products or service can deliver information to their target users by placing advertisements or create postings. For online community users in different cultural contexts, marketers should have different business strategies and focuses.
5.3 LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations in this study. Firstly, only two research sites are selected. Although Reddit forum (North America) and Hupu forum (mainland China) are the most popular forums in their own regions respectively, they may not fully represent all forums and their users in these two research contexts.

Secondly, since both forums have a large amount of postings, the threads selected in findings are within the last six months (from October 2017 to March 2018). In other words, postings before September 2017 are not assessed in this study. Therefore, there may be some postings which are more appropriate to reflect value creation in both forums.

Lastly, this study focuses on basketball, specifically NBA, as its research area. Since different sports have their own features and uniqueness, findings and results of this study may not be fully applied to other sports.

5.4 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

As value creation is a vital part in online brand community studies, future research may explore how functional value, social value, and entertainment value are created in other sports. And besides these three value, whether there is any other value created in online brand communities. In this case, more generalizable insights on value creation in online brand communities may be concluded. Furthermore, comparative studies can be conducted by selecting two different cultures or countries to examine the differences of consumer behavior.
REFERENCES


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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Reddit Forum Homepage
Appendix 2: Hupu Forum Homepage
Appendix 3: Golden State Warriors’ teampage on Reddit Forum
Appendix 4: One Thread with Responses in Reddit GSW Section

Kevin Durant is currently leading the league in blocks (14) and turnovers (19). Submitted 18 hours ago by thewayoftoday


Also guess who is leading our team in steals right now? Zaza with three. Early season stats are funny

Really? I swear I saw Draymond get 3 steals against the Grizz alone.

My bad, Draymond also has three. Still tied for 1st

He's bringing the ball out a lot and I don't really like it, keep the ball in Steph and dreys hands unless you're goin coast to coast KD
Appendix 5: Hupu Website Homepage
Appendix 6: One Thread on Hupu Forum

虎扑10月23日讯 雷霆坐镇主场迎战森林狼，首节比赛雷霆外线手感冰冷，他们这一节11个进球里有9个是通过冲击篮下打成的。缺少外线的球员，雷霆在进攻端遇到的阻力更大，而森林狼则凭借着外线三分球抢占先机。威金斯和吉昂在第一节中三分帮助森林狼以28-23取得5分领先，次节雷霆在外线终于找回手感，费尔顿和威少相继命中三分，雷霆进攻端的表现相当出色，不过防守端依旧无法限制森林狼的反击。吉布森最后时刻命中一记三分，森林狼以61-54领先雷霆7分。易边再战，雷霆这一节多次追近比分但均被森林狼重新拉开，末节森林狼依靠着巴特勒和吉布森的进球建立起两位数的领先，三节结束时森林狼88-75将分差拉大至13分。末节雷霆背水一战发动绝地反击，雷霆替补阵容相继命中三分送出一波12-2的攻势将分差追至3分，随后威少一人独砍15分，凭借最后一个关键三分帮助球队成功扳平比分。最后时刻双方都打进致命进球，安东尼关键三分帮助雷霆反超比分，但是威金斯最后时刻快下直接干拔三分完成绝杀。最终，凭借威金斯的致命进球，森林狼115-113力克雷霆拿下胜利。

森林狼数据：卡尔-安东尼-唐斯27分12个篮板；吉米-巴特勒15分6个篮板6次助攻；安德鲁-威金斯27分7个篮板4次助攻；杰夫-蒂格19分9次助攻6个篮板；泰-吉布森11分10个篮板。

雷霆数据：拉塞尔-威斯布鲁克31分10次助攻5个篮板；卡梅罗-安东尼23分2次助攻2个篮板；保罗-乔治14分6个篮板8次助攻4次抢断；史蒂文-亚当斯17分13个篮板2次封盖；雷蒙德-费尔顿12分2次助攻。

[伤病名单]

森林狼：贾斯廷-巴顿足部受伤。

雷霆：全员健康。
Appendix 7: Posting Responses in Hupu Forum

这些回帖亮了

资深菜鸟文 2017-10-23 09:24 发表了 (2850)
准绝杀后再极限压哨反绝杀！！！
真TM刺激啊......

墨水骑士湖隐 2017-10-23 09:25 发表了 (2122)
NBA现在编剧业务能力太差了
这剧情也太浮夸了

我爱masami 2017-10-23 09:28 发表了 (2856)
引用1楼 @打酱油de麦 发表的:
甜瓜绝杀！！！！！维金斯反绝杀！！！！！！！
PS:连续两次罚球三不沾？我上我也行~
不仅我行。
我隔壁下象棋的大爷，楼下跳广场舞的大妈也行~

别他妈吹了，万一你进了呢
来自虎扑iPhone客户端

xpgnmis 2017-10-23 09:27 发表了 (1320)
引用13楼 @Paracleto 发表的:
威少接管第四节，甜瓜准绝杀，维金斯反绝杀！！！这样的比赛请再来八十场！！！
PS:狼队这回又是领先10+进入第四节，最后被迫平被反超的时候我以为熟悉的节奏又来了，结果维金斯在没暂停的情况下后场运球大号三分绝杀！难道狼四崩已经不复存在？