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Interaction between brand communities and a brand owner.

The effect on community members' perception of a brand.

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Abstract

Purpose The aim of the paper is to improve the understanding of effects caused by involvement of brand community members in communication with a brand owning company.

The research has been conducted in Moscow, Russia. It examines brand values associated with Audi by Audi Club Moscow members, and those ones perceived by non-community members, and beside this, the degree of involvement in communication with the company of both.

Research Method Numerous in-depth interviews have been processed among brand community members, people outside the community and the Audi AG employees.

Results Through the analysis of primary data it was found that thanks to active communication with Audi brand community members associate with the brand values, similar to the brand holder's ones. However, people outside the community, who do not actively communicate with the company, have the tendency to perceive brand values, controversial to brand owner's ones.

Research limitations/implications Due to the time and resources limits only one Audi brand community was chosen to represent Russia's market. The investigation of communication channels between a brand and brand communities could be the direction of further studies.

Practical implications The results of the study might have value for practical implementation in business; they could be used for building up and managing communication between a company and brand communities.

Originality/value This study supplies the contribution to the existing literature and companies' managers disclosing a field not analyzed before

Keywords Audi, brand, brand community, brand values, communication, loyalty, Russian automobile market.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

For a long period of time the majority of consumer goods markets have been saturated with the products of more or less similar functionality, hence consumers distinct one product from another one by brand, trademark and design. The distinctive essence of the brand is not new, farmers in Ancient times used brands in order to distinguish cattle of one owner from the others. However, brands have never been so influential as they currently are. International brands unite people (users or supporters of branded products) in different countries demonstrating its trans-border nature.

What does the brand mean for consumers? The brand is wider than label, it comes with its image and associated values, it brings its own story and feeling that a customer, purchasing a product of a particular brand, shares this story and **values** (Aaker, 2002). These associations and feelings about a brand form the basis of consumer choice. At the same time customers are becoming more resistant to conventional mass marketing advertising and they make a decision to buy being affected by opinions of other buyers, they prefer to listen to other brand-interested users. Due to the development of the Internet and social media people could easily unite in communities (formal or informal), share information and experience and spread their perception of a brand. This raised the relatively new phenomenon in consumer marketing – **brand community**, which unites people (not necessarily purchasers) with the same interest in a particular brand. These brand loyalists are bounded by consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions and moral responsibility, who have the feeling that a brand belongs to them (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001).

Brand communities are becoming more influential which resulted in the impact they might have on a brand. The case of Burberry could be an appropriate illustration. The luxury clothing brand had been suffering from identification problems for several years before 2005. The brand and its famous beige check fabric became an essential element of clothes among the “chav”, which could be described as “disruptive youth sub-culture, epitomized by loutish behavior, a penchant for ostentatious jewelry”¹. Being a brand community, the “chav” consumers brought new values to the brand that spread in the UK quickly. The target audience of the brand – wealthy middle-aged customers – did not accept “new identification” of Burberry and did not want to be associated with the “chav” sub-culture, thus they started refusing to purchase products, which lead to a significant drop in sales. Finally, the company had to work tough to distance themselves from the “chav” sub-culture and restore their image.

¹ Blackberry’s reputation & the London riots, 2011 (Inspiring Innovations).

1.2. Problem statement

The necessity of building up and managing the relationships with brand communities comes with the **problem**, since there is considerable lack of research in the field. The studies have been done so far are focused mainly on internal aspects of brand communities, such as the precise definition, the structure, the hierarchy, while external aspects of brand communities, particularly, relationships with a brand owner and third parties, remain mostly unstudied. Moreover, managers in charge of marketing and branding are not certain about the effects caused by the interaction with brand community members. The **purpose of the research** is to improve the understanding of effects caused by involvement of brand community members in communication with a brand owner.

Generally, the target of communication with brand community members for a company is to provide relevant information about a brand and form correct brand image. The provision of correct brand values² eliminates threats to brand image connected with possible wrong perception of a brand. Being lead users, brand community members spread the values that they associate with a brand among a wider audience of potential customers that makes transmitting of correct brand values to brand communities beneficial to a company. In case of international brands the task of communicating brand values is becoming even more challenging for a company since it has to communicate consistent values to brand community members in different countries. That's why a company needs to develop personified approach to markets, which are different from the home one. The general question of the research is:

Does the involvement of brand community members in communication with a brand owning company cause the transferring of correct brand values?

1.3. Outline

The empirical part of the research involves analyzing of primary data collected through in-depth interviews. 10 members of Audi Club Moscow have been interviewed in order to study which brand values they associate with the brand and determine how they communicate with the company. Besides this, 20 people outside the community have been interviewed to find out the perception of the brand in the society. Representatives of Audi Russia have also been involved in the research in order to describe what brand values the company communicates in the Russia's market and how it manages relationships with brand community. Then the comparison analysis of the Audi brand values has been conducted to compare both the community and non-community members' perception of the brand to the values which the company is committed to.

² Here and further in the text: "correct" or "actual" brand values mean the values, a company is committed to in-fact and wants to deliver them to its employees and customers.

2. Literature review

This chapter introduces the relevant literature review on the theme. Firstly, the paper presents the importance and meaning of brand values and its' alignment with customer's loyalty. Secondly, the theme about brand community is developed. Then it reveals how brand owner and brand communities interact mutually and, finally, underlines the connections between customer's loyalty and perception of a brand.

The reason to select this particular literature enables to dig deeper on the research area concepts and get a broader view on the brand and brand loyalty, brand values, the brand community, non-community members³, representatives' perspective and communication channels in order to form the relevant conceptual framework. The **general concepts** to be used in the study are *brand community, brand values, communicational channels and loyalty*. Brand community is the place where members exchange the important information about a brand and have a “relatively strong degree of commitment” to a brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Brand and brand values, being a core stone of the community, play the essential role in daily life. Advocating these values brand community members interact with non-community members and brand owners while in different ways influencing the clients' loyalty and knowledge about a brand. Information is transmitted through variety of internal and external communication channels.

2.1. Brand and brand values

Brand associations arise through perceptions and experiences in the clients' mind. It has become a lifestyle (Basaran et al., 2011) and does not reflect only the logo what shows “functional value of the product” (Schembri, 2009). The *definition of brand* associates with the collection of meanings in heads and hearts about product or service. The following illustrations of well-known brands as Apple, BMW, Prada, Nike and etc. reveals the brand as a symbol of status and “iconic symbolism” (Schembri, 2009). Brand stands as the origin through which buyers discuss and interact. The core messages brand communicates are “why” and “what”. Brand answers the questions as: why companies try to achieve what drives the clients with complete desire; why brand is reliable, affordable and flexible to meet consumers' needs (Belk, 1988; Ramaswamy, 2008). Moreover, what the audience perceives about company's product or service and what organizations try to report in this way (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Fournier, 1998; Holt, 2002)?

³ Here and further in the text by non-community members the authors mean all consumers who do not belong to a brand community.

Branding, essentially, is the way how the ownership of brand is managed, experiences and perceptions are controlled. Most commonly, it is about morals, values, vision, goals, strengths and weaknesses, direction, plans and strategy thus attracts customers (Kay, 2006; Klink, 2003). They have believes in the things what organization is doing thus builds trust, love and connection with a brand. People care about a brand and they tell others about it: how they enjoyed the service and meals in London Ritz or the Hilton Moscow hotels, if they are satisfied with an Audi car and etc. This way a consistent loyal customers' base could be built. Nowadays, companies offer a wide range of analogous products as cellphones, cameras and etc. with similar features. At the end of the day a client chooses what he/she can trust, what is true of perception. What does branding do? It stands for three fundamental things: differentiates the product or service from the others in the same category; it adds value to clients and helps to connect them as well in much deeper and most sustainable way. In the process of branding firms seek to make potential clients curious of their brand thus *builds emotional and physical experience in buyers' perception*.

Brand values are essential in any organization both from the internal and external perspective. From internal perspective values are defined as the basis where an organization does business. From external aspect, values become meaningful and provide added value for a company. For example, quality as a value, it is a perceived benefit to a customer. Brand values, therefore, become the basis of an organization in terms of differentiation. From the customer's point of view, he/she is looking for the brand values compatible with the own, personal ones. Values differ from each individual and are formed from childhood, parents, on the own lives, colleagues and etc. Virgin could exemplify this. Richard Branson (Virgin, 2012), the owner of the company, associates the brand with quality, innovation, value for money, fun and sensitive challenge. These are customer values and core values that Virgin is going to do in the future. Recently, more and more organizations are making brand values more as focus point of all business: both for external and internal customers. Internally, a brand can be strengthened through a company's employees (Ind, 2007). There are cases when managers assume that their work ends by putting efforts on advertisements and/or public relationships and managing departments. However, buyers form the impression about a product or service from responses of company's employees. As an example, customers are interested to purchase a particular computer brand and looking for the information in commercials. They check press reviews and interact with company's employees what is their overall perception of computer manufacturers (Levy, 1999). As a result, such internal or external communication gives the marketplace a swift sense of failure or success. The knowledge sharing causes snowball effect that stimulates consumerism and generates ideas omnivorously (Wu & Fang,

2010). The knowledge about a brand unites consumers and encourages “consumer to consumer” interaction by belonging to the group of brand admirers, called brand community.

2.2 Brand community

Authors Kanuk & Schiffman (2004) mark out five types of groups, which have echo to buyers’ performance and approach. They are as following: 1) friendship groups; 2) shopping groups; 3) work groups; 4) virtual or brand communities; and 5) consumer action groups. In this research paper the brand community group is in focus. **Brand community** is the group of passionate influencers who communicate about the specific brand potential customers and influence to drop in customers together into a trusted relationship with a particular brand. Brand media allows a company to extend brand messages and interact in a conversational manner creating access, making influence and reaching rewards.

There is a considerable discussion in scientific society concerning *brand community definition*. Muniz & O’Guinn (2001) describe brand community as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of brand”. Authors as Andersen (2005), Dholakia et al. (2004), McAlexander et al. (2002) point out that brand community is specialized because it arises around a branded product or service. Moreover, brand community members share responsibility and brand consumption consciousness, rituals and traditions within the brand, being engaged in variety of activities, which maintains continuity of brand community (McAlexander et al., 2002). Loewenfeld (2005) writes also about “we” sense, which brand community members feel, and thanks to it a community keeps distance from others. Summarizing the different authors’ opinions it can be asserted that brand community definition covers not only the community members interest in a particular brand, but also the feeling of belonging, thus indicates similar behavior, perception and recognition of common values.

Brand loyalists’ groups can be based on ethnicity (Baker et al., 2003), gender (Kates & Shaw-Garlock, 1999) or nationality (O’Donohoe, 2001). Consumers belong to such groups mainly due to four reasons to gain: cognitive learning benefits, personal integrative benefits, social integrative benefits and hedonic benefits (Nambisan & Baron, 2007). *Cognitive or educational reasons* give more accurate and clear feedback from novice to expert about brand values, products and services. Community members discuss and share interpretative opinions receiving the latest news about car models, company business strategies or management decisions (Brown et al., 2007). Thus knowledge acquired in brand community about a brand could be treated “as learning mechanism” (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Wu & Fang, 2010). *Social integrative benefits* are received by

belonging to a community and by communication with people having the same interests. The Harley-Davidson community members feel like in brotherhood being in the community without excluding gender or age (Schembri, 2009). Furthermore, belonging to such a classless group incorporates attending parties, hanging out with different occupation people with similar mindsets and building a network (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Personal *integrative benefits* enable to seek status and reputation for customers. *Hedonic benefits* are related with pleasure to buy and consume.

What keeps customers united in such communities? Firstly, it is the vibrancy and dialogue. Members feel to be a part of cultural team since they share passion to a brand and are engaged in relationships. Secondly, brand members share their views about a brand with other members, they bring to a community updates and news, this way becoming committed to a group (Brownlie & Hewer, 2007; McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schembri, 2009). Brand community members can be called “brand evangelists” and they talk about a brand to other people so much not because they are paid but because they love what they do. Conforming to Fredberg (2009), brand community is involved in “a symbiotic relationship between firms and their customers”. This cooperation means mutually beneficial relationships to survive and encourage each other. Furthermore, analyzing the most effective ways of such communications the organization can acquire value from community discussions.

As technologies and innovations are becoming more powerful nowadays, brand communities have the tendency to be created online. A registered online community member has different rights and authorizations such as space for a personal profile, the eligibility to invite and accept new members to a community, albums for pictures and etc. In this way loyal consumers interact with each other, contact other owners of the same product, who can spread the word of mouth, contact with manufacturers and sellers in order to get complete information (Levy, 1999; Evans, 1994).

2.3. Communication

Through different kinds of **communication channels**, using which companies, brand communities and customers spread and receive information about brands, products and services. There are different ways to deliver a message to consumers and brand communities: magazines, newspapers, radio, TV, websites, blogs, face-to-face, social media, word of mouth and etc. (Basaran et al., 2011; Wu & Fang, 2010; Olson, 2008). Each channel has different effectiveness to reach users. Moreover, the channels mentioned above perform different functions including generating awareness, bringing knowledge, delivering trial and etc. (Young, 2010).

Communication is an essential element in brand building, however, branding covers much more than simply providing brand values to consumers (Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling, 2006). Knowledge exchange about goods and services between brand community members and a brand enables to strengthen long-term relationship with a brand. The research papers (Muniz & Schau, 2007) shows that “consumer-driven communications were more effective in attracting new users for this brand than were the official corporate campaigns”. Furthermore, consumers promote a brand and spread free advertising about a brand image and brand values to keep brand culture alive (Basaran et al., 2011). Communication in brand community can be defined in the directions: customer - customer; customer - brand; customer - company; customer - product (Fournier & Lee, 2009). For example, Audi brand community members communicate inside the community by meeting each other and through the Internet (social media). These communication channels enable to keep in touch and find solutions to the problems.

There are cases where brand values perceived by brand community do not necessary match the ones which a company is actually committed to. It happens when customers or brand community members dislike the brand causing the “anti-brand content”, for instance, mentioned above Burberry case (Economist, 2011). The result is the damaged brand name and the image which is not easy to restore. Such information can be easily spread via the Internet and shared with community members as well as current and potential customers. Furthermore, active participation in the community enables to reject the product change (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). A strong brand community of Saab was against the producer’s decision to modify the model “9000”. It can be as a threat to a marketer. Finally, strong and active community may strengthen brand marginality and affect brand loyalty, awareness, associations and perceived quality.

2.4. Consumer’s loyalty

“Brand loyalty is one of the many advantages of creating positive brand image and of having brand equity” – Keller et al. writes, (2008). Companies try to award loyal customers giving them a discounts, accumulating values (miles, points) and specific privileges (elite statuses in Hilton Honors, AIRFRANCE FlyingBlue and etc.). According to product and service rate of usage, customers can be divided into 3 categories: heavy users, medium users and light users (Kanuk & Schiffman, 2004). Following the recent studies, companies usually target at the group of heavy users who are more socially active and creative in comparison to the other segmented groups. For example, frequent travelers who are enthusiastic about spending holidays abroad are deeply involved and could tell a lot about travelling (Ind, 2008). The illustration discloses the awareness about a product or service and tendency to purchase and consume it.

The customer's perception of a brand is closely related with **customer's loyalty**. The interaction between consumers and marketers is a key object which influences loyalty. Brand loyalty offers a useful way to examine the interplay between the consumer's relationships with a brand and brand community (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001). It reveals triadic consumer-brand-consumer relationships. A trust can be a powerful antecedent of customer's loyalty (Jones et al., 2000; Ganesan, 1994; Ganesh et al., 2000) specifically when loyalty is treated as a relational notion (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). The relevant literature unveils that the loyalty can be studied as two-way concept (Rundle-Thiele, 2006; East et al., 2006). Siemieniako et al. (2012) points out. "This concept implies that companies should demonstrate loyalty towards customers if they expect customer loyalty in return". From the customers' viewpoint they want to receive exactly what is promised (Gronroos, 2008). This reveals that loyalty is the dynamic phenomenon which can be sustained through company and customer interactions (Dick & Basu, 1994; Oliver, 1999; Rosenbom et al., 2005; Raju et al., 2009; Ahluwalia, 2000).

Keller (2008) reveals that "the strongest affirmation of brand loyalty is when customers are willing to invest their time, energy, money or other resources in a brand beyond those expended during purchase or consumption". These types of customers are united into brand communities who make opinions about a brand for wider auditory of customers. (Gustafsson, 2008). Thus, brands that have strong brand communities are more superior to the ones which do not have them (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Moreover, "there is a definite feeling among marketers that if you want to build up loyalty to your brand, your product has to have an active social life" (Nordin, 2001). However, a brand can always experiment the risk of how to manage such a community.

Loyal customers naturally spread word of mouth, WOM (Kucuk & Krishnamurthy, 2007; Keller et al., 2008). Word of Mouth & internet (2011) research reveals that WOM communications still most commonly occur face-to-face (93%) and are 50 times more effective than advertising (Gitomer, 1998), thus influence buyers' decisions. In this case consumers are not just passive recipients (Fuller & Matzlek, 2007; Kucuk & Krishnamurthy, 2007), moreover, they are powerful gossippers actively announcing feedbacks about goods and services for others, thus creating economic value. Corporate stories, created by brand communities, can have influence in strengthening or destroying the brand image. Organizations should keep an eye on the consumers who dislike the brand and disclaim the authentic brand values. That is why companies need to create brand identity and correct meaning of brand performance and associations related to the brand.

Non-community and brand community members

Authors Algesheimer et al., (2005), McAlexander et al., (2002), Fournier, (1998) declare that brand community and non-community members have *different perception of a brand*. The customer's interest in a brand leads and contributes to the connections with brand community members (Fournier, 1998; McAlexander et al., 2002). Firstly, customers are attracted by the brand's functional and symbolic gain. Furthermore, "a harmonious relationship with the brand can lead consumers to seek out and interact with like-minded purchasers who share their enthusiasm (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Moreover, speed of getting useful information about the brand is more effective and efficient in brand community in comparison with single consumer. Brand community members receive valuable information much quicker than single customers and community activists do not need to relay on traditional forms of media, as they know updates directly from each other (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006). Thus such interactions unify community and bring more market power. For brand owners' representatives it serves as a free marketing tool, as communities stimulate to recognize innovative branding opportunities and put this into practice (Holt, 2002). Communication with brand community members and people outside community asserts with repeated interactions with a brand owner thus strengthen the ties between a brand and consumers. Furthermore, the use of interactive media (the Internet, emails and social media) made these two-way relationships even more pervasive and high-powered. Fournier's (1998) research presents that consumers tend to have relationships with brands that are similar to human relationships which are based on social background.

The key point of interactions of brand community and non-community members with a brand is *relationships* established between them. Relationships according to Goffman, E. (1959) can be divided into economic and social ones. Authors, as Clark & Mills (1993) and Clark et al. (1986) characterized them as exchange and communal ones. *Exchange relationships* can be interpreted as those in which one part expects to gain a comparable benefit from the other one (Kotler, 1986). On the contrary, the core point for *communal relationships* is mutual support and understanding. Exchange relationships occur between non-community members and a brand holding company while communal relationships spring up among brand community members. Summing up, people in a brand community receive social and communal benefits while non-community members are more interested on the monetary value (Batson et al., 1978; O'Malley & Lester, 1983). As a result people are more willing to help when they are in social relationships (as this helps to strengthen bonds at a group level (Swaminathan et al., 2007; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). This is not the case in exchange relationships (Williamson, 1975). Dimitriadis & Papista (2012) accent that socialization benefits are the core stone for long-term consumer-brand relationships. This leads to

brand loyalty and customer satisfaction (Wang et al., 2002; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Fournier, 1994). Purchasers who have obligation to brand communities tend to be fiercely loyal (Rose, 2012). Langerak et al. (2003) points out that the more participation in brand community leads to higher degree of engagement “turning visitors into members, members into contributors and contributors into evangelists”.

The brand owners' perspective

Relevant marketing literature adverts the significance of the long-term and mutually beneficial communication where both customers and a brand owner have the interest in providing more satisfying exchange. Research by Fleming & Asplund (2007) denotes that engaged customers generate 1,7 times more income than ordinary customers, while having involved employees and engaged customers gain of 3.4 times revenue than the norm. Furthermore, paying more attention on interaction with company's employees by motivating them and talking about brand values is a specific and important field for marketers as it forms brand image outside the company.

Encouraging the customer's commitment to a brand is the only way to enhance brand loyalty and therefore “the best measure of current and future performance“ (Rose, 2012). As a result, brand companies creating and energizing customers higher liability could gain higher profits and improve business objectives. According to Ghuneim's typology (Rose, 2012) the most engaged buyers are bound by social relationships and belong to brand community. Moreover, they can contribute with valuable suggestions how to enrich the quality of offering. The consumers' antagonism toward aggressive direct marketing programs and waning interest of advertising campaigns leads to enlarged buyers' market power thus makes marketers more interested in managing, fostering and coordinating brand communities, where both sides can interact with one another (Algesheimer et al., 2005; McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander & Schouten, 1995). Three behavioral points why representatives are interested in brand communities can be defined (Algesheimer et al., 2005):

- communities unite people who are heavily interested in a brand and willing to share their interest currently and in the future;
- person's willingness to advocate about the brand community for non-community members;
- customer's level of involvement.

From a company representatives' angle, intentions with brand communities are crucial to maintain a brand community and customer engagement with a brand and deliver the correct brand values and to get feedback in order to attain goals and to develop effective marketing projects.

2.5. The prerequisites for the further theoretical development

As it was mentioned before there is a lack of empirical studies of aspects of communication between a brand and brand community. The question “How to tighten the relationships between brand, brand communities and the potential customers and to manage them in proper way” remains doubtful, while delivering correct brand values has gained crucial importance. Since brand community members are highly knowledgeable about a brand and brand values and, in comparison with non-community members, they have more market power to make decisions than just ordinary customers. Brand community members are connected by social relationships that are more tight and based on shared admiration of a brand, which is the central axis of the community. On the contrary, the exchange relationships, grounded mostly on economical part of the deal, exist between non-community members and a brand. As a result brand community members are motivated to spread more widely information about their favourite brand and brand values in comparison with non-community members. This brings special status for brand communities, making them “lead consumers”, who could spread their perception (correct or incorrect) of a brand among consumers in general. Thus brand communities could be useful marketing tool for a brand owning company while at the same time they might damage the image of a brand.

Loyalty is a foundation for a brand and consumers interactions. Customer’s loyalty affects his/her perception of a brand. Loyal customers have more knowledge about a brand and tend to seek direct connections with a brand owner. This opens opportunities for a brand holding company to promote brand values straight to consumers and to interact with them much more actively in comparison with customers, who are not very loyal to a brand (Jones et al., 2000; Ganesh et al., 2000). Participation in a brand community brings members social, hedonic and personal benefits, such as joy and fun, valuable knowledge, new friends with the same interests, possibility of leadership, etc. These benefits strengthen social ties in a community, which makes knowledge sharing (about a brand and brand values) more ease and common. In this way members receive information from each other and spread it inside and outside community. Knowledge sharing allows brand community members to complement and correct their knowledge about a brand, thus it is not the same among non-community members (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). Since members receive personal benefits being engaged in a community and due to their interest in a brand, they have higher degree of loyalty to a brand in comparison with the ones who are not engaged with a community.

Concluding, brand community members, being more loyal to a brand, tend to be in direct communication with a brand holding company and share knowledge about a brand. In contrast non-

community members are less loyal and they do not tend to get in touch with a brand holding company, they have limited interest in a brand and knowledge about it. Which effect might the involvement in communication with a brand owning company have on the values which community members and non-community members associate with a brand? Then, based on the reviewed literature in the field, it is possible to formulate assumptions relating the possible effects of involvement in communication with a brand holder.

Assumption 1

Due to difference in involvement in communication with a brand owning company the set of values that brand community members associate with the brand differs from the set of values, associated with a brand by non-community members.

Assumption 2

Due to involvement in communication with a brand owning company brand community members associate with a brand the values that are principally match those which is a brand actually committed to.

Assumption 3

Due to weak involvement in communication with a brand owning company non-community members have lack of knowledge about a brand that might result in association with a brand the values, which do not match or contradict those which is a brand committed to in-fact.

The further investigation is aimed to explore previously unknown issue in the context of brand communities, particularly the possible effects of the involvement brand community members in interaction with a brand holding company.

3. Method

In this chapter the review of the method for conducting the empirical part of the study is given. The qualitative method of in-depth interviews has been chosen and the reasoning of the choice is provided. The description of the sample, operationalization of values and reflections about problems is presented.

In order to obtain the information which is necessary to answer the research question the three series of in-depth interviews and collection of secondary data have been conducted. The survey among Audi Club Moscow members involved 10 participants and was held in Moscow, Russia on 21.03.2012-02.04.2012 in order to collect the primary data for further analysis and determination the values which community members associate with the brand and the degree of involvement of club members in communication with Audi. The collection of secondary data concerning the Audi brand image published in open sources has been conducted. Then Audi Russia representatives have also been interviewed in order to make it clear which brand values Audi promotes in the Russia's market and how they manage relationships with brand communities. The interviews were held in Moscow on 08.04.2012. The survey among 20 people outside the brand community was carried out in Moscow on 26.04.2012-28.04.2012 and it was aimed at gathering the initial data, analysis of which allows depicting the perception of the brand among non-community members. The Audi AG profile and detailed overview of Russia's automobile market and the Audi Club Moscow can be found in Appendix A.

3.1. Method of gathering information

The method of in-depth interviews was chosen as the most suitable for gathering reliable information for the study as it allows acquiring qualitative data concerning the feelings and perspectives on the Audi brand. Through open-ended questions a respondent is able to express him/herself freely with no strict frameworks of a question; minor participation of an interviewer works for this purpose as well (Kvale, 1996). Another important reason for an in-depth interview choice is its flexibility and possibility to change questions in the process of interviewing responding to an interviewee's answers and reactions. In-depth interviews are usually carried out personally, which allows recording not only verbal information a respondent provides, but also his/her non-verbal behavior representing personal reflection to the questions. As a result, the method provides both answers to the stated questions and enough background data that helps to interpret the answers, understand the interviewees' motives and where his/her feelings came from (Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I. S., 2004).

3.2. Sample

The *Audi brand* has been chosen for several reasons. Audi is a strong international brand with developed values and thousands brand community members and fans around the world. Audi AG (the owner of Audi brand) is a German automobile manufacturer, which sells cars in 117 countries⁴. This means it has to deal with brand communities in 117 national markets and its experience in the field seems to be particularly valuable for the research. The major markets of the company are Germany, the US, the UK, France, Italy and “young” markets of China, Russia, Eastern Europe and Gulf Region, which are growing faster than traditional and tending to become leading in sales. Deliveries in Russia rose by 23,3% in 2010 and Audi sold 18510 cars. This makes Russia a key market for the company so that Audi has to pay particular attention to its brand positioning there.

Preliminarily the information about the Audi brand and its components was gathered through the Audi official website⁵, where commitment of the company to several values is reported and the brand image is described. Then it was considered that there might be a significant difference between the officially declared brand image and values and which company’s employees believe in fact and communicate to consumers. Therefore Audi Russia representatives were then interviewed and asked to describe the company’s brand image and brand values. The particular employees, PR and Marketing managers, were targeted, since the image of the company in Russia’ market depends on their decisions according to their duties. PR manager is responsible for promoting the Audi brand in Russia and relationships with third parties. Marketing manager is in charge of customer relations, market research and advertising. They both are also involved in relationships with brand communities (Audi clubs across the country), since the latter have an impact of the areas of responsibilities of managers. The applied “two-sourced” approach allowed to determine the Audi brand image in Russia more accurate and thereby increase reliability of the study.

The *Russia’s automobile market* is traditionally different from the Audi home market (Germany and EU). First of all, the wide premium segment is of the key characteristics of the market. It counted for 25% of new cars sales in 2011, showing 41% rise by 2010⁶. Another key difference of the Russian market is related to the customers and their requirements. As Jürgen Sauer, the CEO of Mercedes-Benz Russland, reveals, Russian clients prefer more expensive models and versions; they pay attention to technical details, innovations and improvements and usually buy lots of them while in Europe customers tend to order only necessary options. Customers care about a brand and carefully choose it since it is very common in Russia to associate belongings with the owner. The

⁴ This and following paragraphs: Audi AG (2012); Audi official website

⁵ Four rings, the Audi story, 2009; Audi official website

⁶ Jürgen Sauer, Mercedes-Benz Russland CEO, interview 02.2012

possession of a premium brand car indicates a status (Schembri, 2009). Thus Audi AG cannot just apply in Russia the same approach to managing relationships with brand communities that is applicable to the EU markets. That is why the experience of the international brand in the country, which differs significantly from the home market, is of a special interest to the research.

Audi Club Moscow is an informal organization of Audi car drivers. They are really focused on the brand. Most of them are familiar with the history of the company and the model range development. The members follow the news and updates on research and production of Audi, discuss them and exchange their opinions. The general target of participation is to share experience and receive new knowledge, which could be useful for own cars (Brownlie & Hewer, 2007; McAlexander et al., 2002; Nabisan & Baron, 2007). The club is well known in Russia among people interested in cars. Some of the members have published articles in local automobile magazines; others have blogs, where they share their experience in Audi cars. The members attend regular meetings organized by Audi to receive some useful information from the company's employees and give feedback. Club members are people of different age, professional background, social status and interests and the only thing they are united by is the Audi brand (Baker et al., 2003; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002). That meets the requirements of the brand community definition and makes the club appropriate for the research.

The authors have to admit that the club is geographically limited (includes only drivers from Moscow), while on-line community (Audi drivers web-board, for instance) could represent the whole country. However, real community was considered as the most suitable since it is impossible to define whether web board participants form a brand community or just share useful information. Moreover, it is important for the study to gather a wide range of information through in-depth interviews that is unreachable within the web community. Furthermore, Moscow counted for 67% of Audi sales in Russia in 2010⁷, which means that the Moscow market could represent the country.

All of 10 interviewed club members were men, which represents the actual gender structure of the community, as there are just a few women for nearly sixty men. The club members from different age and occupancy groups were selected for interviewing in order to increase representation and reliability of the results. The selection was based on the data provided by senior club member, who estimated approximate number of participants of particular age and occupancy. The average length of an interview with the Audi Club Moscow members lasted for 43 minutes (27 as the minimum

⁷ Calculated on the data, provided by Audi Russia (Sales in Russia, 2011)

and 64 as the maximum). The age and occupancy performance is presented in Tables 3.1. and 3.2. respectively.

Table 3.1.

Age group	Number/Percentage of participants
21-26	2 / 20%
26-35	4 / 40%
36-45	3 / 30%
46+	1 / 10%

Table 3.2.

Occupancy	Number/Percentage of participants
Student	2 / 20%
Entrepreneur	1 / 10%
Manager	5 / 50%
Employee	2 / 20%

In order to test the brand perception outside the community a set of 20 interviewees has been randomly chosen. Not belonging to the Audi brand community was the general criteria, and in terms of higher representation a wider range of sex, age and occupancy performance was presented. Since all interviewed community members were from Moscow interviewees outside the community resided in Russia's capitol as well. 12 out of them were men and 8 were women, 13 of them owed cars of different producers while 7 did not. The average length of an interview was much shorter, 16 minutes, which could be explained by the lack of personal experience with Audi products and the lack of interest in the brand. The age and occupancy performance is presented in Tables 3.3. and 3.4. respectively.

Table 3.3.

Age group	Number/Percentage of participants
18-20	2 / 10%
21-25	3 / 15%
26-30	2 / 10%
31-35	3 / 15%
36-40	2 / 10%
41-50	4 / 20%
51-60	3 / 15%
60+	1 / 5%

Table 3.4.

Occupancy	Number/Percentage of participants
Student	2 / 10%
Entrepreneur	3 / 15%
Employee	4 / 20%
Manager	2 / 10%
Artist	2 / 10%
Retired	1 / 5%
Self-employed	4 / 20%
Unemployed	2 / 10%

3.3. Operationalization of values

The interviews consisted of a facesheet, three open-ended questions for brand community members, one "yes/no" question and two open-ended questions for people outside the community. The process of an interview was recorded in the Interview sheet with additional notes about non-verbal expressions of respondents. The interview with Audi employees was conducted in a slightly different way. The interviewees were asked several open-ended questions concerning the brand values which Audi is committed to and the relationships with brand communities.

Facesheet

It contains basic information about the respondent and the interview: 1) date and place of the interview; 2) start and finish time of the interview; 3) name of the interviewee (could be real or nickname, up to a respondent) and name of the interviewer; 4) demographic data (sex, age, occupancy).

Questions for community members

1. Can you tell about your Audi car?

The first question is aimed at receiving background information, the interviewee's own experience with an Audi automobile since all the community members are Audi drivers. It is important to collect such kind of information since feeling of particular brand values is affected by the general perception. The information could be gathered with specifying questions: Is your current car the first Audi for you? How long have you had it? Are you satisfied with a car (quality, design, customer service)? Why have you chosen an Audi car?

2. What do you feel about the Audi brand?

In order to obtain the data related with the values that respondents associate with the brand they were asked to describe their personal feelings and thoughts about the brand. The respondents were not limited in the way of expression, so the wide range of primary data was collected. The question above could be supported with additional ones: What does Audi mean to you? How can you characterize the brand? What do you think the brand image of Audi in the market is?

3. How do you interact with Audi and where do you get the information about the company and its products?

It is necessary to determine the degree of the involvement of a respondent in communication with the company and the channels used for such kind of interaction. The supporting questions: Do you have any kind of a regular contacts with the company (meetings with a dealer, visits to their website or the Facebook page)? How can you characterize this/these contact/contacts? Have you got any new or interesting information?

Questions for people outside the community

1. Are you familiar with the Audi brand?

The first question is rather technical but it needs to be asked to define if a respondent is familiar with the brand. Otherwise, asking further questions is of no sense and the interview should be finished.

2. What do you feel about the Audi brand?

The question is aimed at collecting the primary data that, having been analyzed, represent the values which the interviewees associate with the brand. Since the respondents have a low interest in the brand (or no interest at all) the range of specifying questions is limited: What do you think about the brand and its products? What is the main impression of the brand/products for you?

3. Have you ever been in contact with Audi? Where do you receive information about the brand or its products from?

The question is placed in order to determine how much people outside the community are involved in communication with Audi.

The analysis of the data collected in the interviews will allow the researcher to determine:

1. which brand values are associated with the Audi brand by brand community members;
2. which brand values are associated with the Audi brand by non-community members;
3. which brand values Audi is committed to and whether there are any differences between company-wide reported image and values expressed by representatives in Russia;
4. whether brand community members are involved in communication with the company (and characterize the involvement);
5. whether people outside the community are involved in communication with the company (and characterize the involvement).

3.4. Critical review of the research method and reliability of the study

The researchers believe that the chosen method and applied approach to gathering primary and secondary information contributed to reliability of the study. Nonetheless the authors have to acknowledge several weaknesses of the research method. First of all, the method of in-depth interviews is traditionally of high costs and conducting of interviews takes a lot of time, since they must be held face-to-face with a respondent (comparing to questionnaire, for instance). This leads to a limited number of participants, which might affect reliability of the research. The authors have tried to eliminate this threat by the selection of a subject of study and a sample. Thus the largest Audi brand community in Russia, located in Moscow (the city/market counts 67% of Audi sales in Russia), was chosen for the study and 10 participants of different age and occupation were selected. Concerning representatives of Audi Russia, employees who are directly responsible for communicating the brand image and values in the market were interviewed. Among people outside the community the number of interviewees was doubled and the range of sex, age and occupancy performance was widened to increase representation.

Secondly, through the series of in-depth interviews soft data of different kind was gathered: opinions, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, officially declared positions, etc. It lacks of structure and normally mathematical methods or models are not applicable for the analysis of soft data (Silverman, 2006). Instead of this all the data must be generalized to some extent, categorized and interpreted, which causes several difficulties (especially considering large volume of information). Since the information is non-standardized, the categorization of the primary data takes a lot of time. The researches had to divide all the information from an interview for thematized pieces and then evaluate an each peace of information, bearing in mind context of an interviewee's speech. Another problem of generalization is ambiguous information, which could be categorized differently. The interpretation of the data was also accompanied by complications. It was necessary to take into account non-verbal information, which was received during an interview alongside with verbal. Some interviews contained controversial pieces of information, when an actual respondent's opinion (feeling) was difficult to determine.

Thirdly, the method foresees gathering primary data from persons, so that there is usually risk a respondent might not answer with exactly what he/she feel and think (due to desire to "show off" in front of an interviewer or friends or other reasons). Attempting to regard the risk (as far as possible) the researchers conducted all interviews personally face-to-face (to eliminate impact of other community members), respondents gave their answers anonymously and an interviewee and a respondent were not familiar with each other prior to an interview.

Alongside with gathering primary information secondary data was also obtained where it was possible in order to receive more reliable results.

4. Analysis

The chapter presents the analysis of the data gathered through interviews and collected in the Internet. The first stage of the analysis is aimed at the determination of the brand values. The second step is devoted to establishing the degree of involvement of brand community members and non-community members in communication with the brand owner. Thirdly, the comparison analysis of the values that the brand community members and people outside the community associate with the brand and the values, which the company is committed, has been conducted.

4.1. Audi brand values

The perspective of the company

According to the officially released company's position⁸ Audi brand values describe the principles that direct company's managers and employees in their business. Since the introduction of the first upper market model in 1960-s *modern technologies and innovations, ultimate quality and reliability, comfort and design* have become the major brand values. It is reported that *customers' satisfaction* has always been and remain the first priority for the company. Audi, being *premium cars manufacturer*, pays particular attention to *safety of automobiles and high quality of service*, which it provides to customers. It seeks to provide clients with *good value for money* and aspires to be recognized as *sporty* brand. These values are declared as an essential part of the Audi brand. The firm communicates these values to consumers generally in commercial messages, but also through other channels (participation in special events like race is aimed to show how brand is sporty, for instance).

In the interview with Audi Russia representatives they were firstly asked to tell what brand values mean for employees and customers. "The values – things associated with our brand, things we and our clients believe in, these values keep the "spirit" of Audi", PR manager says. They both argued that declared values are "guiding principles" for Audi employees around the World and Audi is committed to the similar values in all markets. However, PR manager regretted that despite the same brand values, the image of the brand could vary from market to market, and Russia is a challenge in these terms "Yes, we aspire to communicate the actual brand values and show consumers, not only our clients, who we are. But brand image is complicated thing which is affected by many factors. Some of these factor have regional, local character". This is a task for

⁸ Four rings, the Audi story, 2009; Audi official website

regional Audi AG divisions to provide employees and customers with company's actual brand values in order to form a correct brand image.

When asked for describing of the Audi brand values, they began to talk about quality, which demonstrates that quality is on the top of values in-fact. PR manager points out "This is a good example how our team work together, how employees unite around brand values. Quality is our ultimate value. We all work on it: engineers and designers, mechanics, factory workers. I do work on quality, because my task is to tell consumers about superior quality of our product". This reveals that employees understand the importance of the values and build business processes around them. "Quality is a complex value. Our client would never consider a good-looking and non-reliable car as of proper quality. He/she would never be satisfied with safe, but outdated technologically car", Marketing managers explains, stressing that all the values (quality, high safety standards, reliability, etc.) are integrated. The representatives also highlighted that the company hires thousands of scientists, engineers, designers and artists with the only target of developing the newest technologies and innovations. Audi invest a significant part of revenue in R&D to deliver its customers an innovative product.

Audi stands for the segment of premium and luxury automobiles "This is again shows how our values are integrated. Being premium brand we must be in front of the progress. We must produce high quality cars and provide proper service", Marketing manager points out. Prestigious image targets on top businessmen, artists and celebrities "The company is glad to nurture automobile image and to propose our products to the high-profile people who drive Audi", PR manager adds. The managers stressed that Audi is working constantly to provide customers with modern vehicles of a contemporary, smart and stylish design, which resulted in the recognition of Audi as World Car and World Design of the year 2007.

Customers' satisfaction was named the final target of the company by Marketing manager "The things we are paying attention such as design, precise engineering and manufacturing of the vehicles, careful choice of the fabric and wooden parts for the interior, are core brand values that encourage the customer to love them and come back". She also underlined that the values grew up from customer's needs and expectations about products, which shows the company actually aims on customer satisfaction. Audi focuses on providing a high quality service before and after purchase. Russian clients have very high requirements for service level and Audi dealers in Russia are listed at top positions in Audi internal rating of the quality of service. Another aspect of customer satisfaction is good quality/price ratio, proposing customers "the best possible value for money".

A wide range of automobiles are being produced by Audi currently (from small A1 to executive A8 or full-size SUV Q7) was explained as an implementation of the strategy of producing comfortable cars for life and joy “We want to offer our clients wide range of automobiles that will suit their needs in different occasions. Each client can chose a car that will allow him to feel comfortable. It is also why we take care about wide opportunities for personification of our cars”, Marketing manager explains. Audi has been producing sport versions of its models for a while, but over the last decade the company has been focusing on developing sport cars, responding to consumers’ request. R-series has been introduced as a result of this work and Audi strengthened its reputation as a producer of sporty cars. This demonstrates that the company in fact aspires to meet customers’ needs and expectations.

Concluding, the representatives of Audi Russia described in details and with examples from their practice the brand values that are similar to officially declared by the company. They revealed, the values are integrated and work all together for customers’ satisfaction. Among the values that are applied locally in Russia there were no controversial or additional to company-wide declared values, moreover the representatives pointed out that the brand values are consistent and the company communicates the same values in all markets. This contributed to the study, creating a reliable picture of what brand values fulfill the Audi brand, i.e. what values the company communicates to its consumers. The united list of the Audi brand values is presented in Table B1 (Appendix B). The values were united in several groups, which correspond to groups of brand values, expressed by the community members, which is described further.

The perspective of the brand community

The data for analysis and determination of values, which Audi Club Moscow members associate with the brand, was mainly gathered through the answers to the second question of the interviews (“What do you feel about the Audi brand?”), although if a respondent mentioned any piece related to the brand values information in any other stage of an interview, it was involved in analysis. Later on, the data have been analyzed and the results are presented in Table B2 (Appendix B). The analysis was conducted in several steps that are described further.

Among all, the things that respondents said about their Audi brand feelings, five themes (groups) were identified: 1) Quality oriented values; 2) Price and market-positioning values; 3) Brand image values; 4) Product-based values; 5) Technological values. Any value, mentioned by a respondent, was included in one of the themes as an item with 1 point (count). Then the designation of several items in each theme was carried out, based on the meaning. For instance, items “Modern brand”,

“Contemporary brand” and “Audi is always up to date” were unified as “Modern” and placed in “Brand image values” group. The designation was made with considerable generalization (foreseeing that respondents expressed feeling of the same brand values in different words) and correction of non-verbal signs, recorded by the interviewer. Finally, brand values, mentioned in each theme, were included in Table B2 (Appendix B), apart from those that were mentioned only once (these reasons are mainly very personal).

The designation allowed to have a look at the values that the brand fulfills according to the community members’ feelings. The group “*Brand image values*” is the most numerous one and includes 6 values. It corresponds to the basic characteristics of the Russia’s market, proving that the image of a brand is crucially important for customers. Two of the respondents explained they purchased a car directly by brand image. One of them described that he had seen irresponsible drivers in Moscow since childhood, who were rude to each other and to pedestrians, however, he had almost never seen Audi cars involved in such occasions, which gave him a feeling that the Audi drivers are committed to responsible and polite driving. It forms the vision that all Audi drivers build a wide community and follow certain “unpublished” rules. Another one, the owner of an expensive Audi R8 sportcar, explained that he had been looking for a sport car, as his second car, but he did not want to buy Lamborghini or Ferrari, as these brands have the reputation of being posh and luxurious in Russia “I didn’t want to show off, I just needed a car, which would allow me to race. Audi R8 was an optimal choice, with better characteristics than Lamborghini, and, moreover, it’s sustainable and reliable brand”.

The group “*Price and market positioning*” includes 5 brand values and three of the values were mentioned by the minority of the interviewed club members, which represents various feelings in this category. In contrast, all 3 values in the group “*Quality oriented values*” are shared by the majority of the interview participants and, moreover, “Good quality” and “Safety” were mentioned by all the respondents and are the widest spread among the brand community’ members. This indicates that Audi’s commitment to ultimate quality is fully comprehended by the brand community members. Most of the values, included in the group “*Product-based values*”, are shared by the majority of respondents as well. The fifth group, “*Technological values*”, includes only two values, and the opinions of the club members distributed paradoxically; 8 of them considered the brand “Innovative”, while only 2 said that Audi develops the newest technologies in the industry.

Having finished with the designation it was possible to count how many times each brand value included in the table was mentioned, in order to determine the most-mentioned ones. Next to

“*Good quality*” and “*Safety*”, two values with score 8 (“*Modern*” and “*Innovative*”) and three ones which earned 7 points (“*Premium brand*”, “*Adult brand*”, “*Comfortable cars*”) are. Five values were declared by 6 survey’s participants (“*Reliability*”, “*Good quality/price ratio*”, “*Reasonable choice*”, “*Brand for successful people*”, “*Sporty*”). The Audi brand was considered “*Sustainable*” by 5 respondents. The other six values have got from 2 to 4 points. Since the current stage of the research is aimed at determining the perception of the brand among brand community members, only the values associated with the brand accepted by more than half of the interviewed club members, could be representative. Hence 12 of all the mentioned values meet the criteria and were included in the resulting table.

The perspective of non-community members

A similar approach to the primary data analysis has been applied to the survey outside the brand community. The respondents were asked to explain how they feel about the Audi brand. Then, based on interviews records the most often mentioned values have been defined. The range of values is significantly narrower than in the case with brand community members, since people outside the community do not care about the brand so much. In terms of unification and reliability for comparison analysis the values have been united in similar five groups that were previously determined. The results of the analysis are presented in Table B3 (Appendix B).

Firstly, it is necessary to mention that all 20 respondents, who do not belong to Audi community, answered that they are familiar with the Audi brand (have heard about or seen the product, or experienced it), which illustrates that the brand is well known in Russia. Concerning participants’ feelings about the brand, they mentioned, that Audi automobiles are often used by bureaucrats and business executives, so 19 people called Audi *premium* and *expensive* brand. The majority of participants pointed out that possessing an Audi car aspires to emphasize the status of the owner, thus it does not seem to most of them that Audi provides good value for money “Japanese cars are not worse than German. Toyota and Nissan, for instance, produce automobiles of even better quality and reliability, and 30-50% cheaper in the same categories, so I see that I pay only for the brand Audi or BMW. It’s a waste of money”. 16 and 14 participants have admitted the *high quality* and *reliability* of Audi cars respectively, but they do not consider it a substantial advantage of the brand, as they compare it with Japanese brands and conclude again that there is no significant difference, thus 13 of them called Audi cars *overpriced* and 14 claimed that the product is *not good value for money*. Describing brand image of Audi in Russia, respondents stressed that Audi is the symbol of *prestige* and *luxury*, *poshness* and the tendency to “*show off*” “I see a lot of very young guys and girls, driving extremely expensive cars in Moscow: Audi, Mercedes, Land Rover. I do not

understand why they need to show off at their age”. At the same time some of the contributors mentioned they like commercials of Audi, as they show that the brand is *smart* and *innovative* “The commercials were good, they were really stylish and progressive. So it gave me a feeling that Audi is a modern brand”. Nobody, besides one person, knew that Audi produces sport cars “Sport cars? No, Audi is not Ferrari, It’s for CEO-s, not for racers”, therefore only 4 respondents counted Audi as a sporty brand.

Overall 9 values, associated with the brand by non-community members have been named by more than half of the respondents “Good quality”, “Reliability”, “Premium and luxury brand”, “Posh”, “Overpriced”, “Not good value for money”, “Modern”, “Comfortable”, “Innovative”.

4.2. Communication

Audi Russia PR manager confirmed in the interview that Audi Russia, and Audi AG in general, understands the importance of interaction with brand communities, since the company could benefit from gathering need-related information from lead-users. The necessity of managing relationships with brand communities in order to avoid any brand damage, is highly comprehensible in the company as well. Following the united policy of Audi AG, its Russian division involves community members in communication. Representatives of the company participate in discussions at web-boards, the company organizes special events for real community members: presentations and seminars that describe new technologies, models and improvements. Audi executives and engineers usually take part in these meetings to provide community members with proper information and obtain feedback in order to strengthen two-ways communication. Sport cars purchasers receive a certificate for free admittance to Audi racing school. Social networks are highly involved in maintaining communication (Facebook, Google+, vkontakte.ru, Youtube channels, blogs), since they allow getting in touch with community members easily and quickly. These communication channels were mentioned in the previous researches by authors Basaran et al. (2011); Wu & Fang (2010); Olson, (2008).

In terms of gathering information, concerning relationships between Audi and brand community members, respondents were asked to describe their contacts with the company or its official representatives (dealers). Under a similar approach to the primary data analysis three groups of communication channels were determined: 1) Dealer-related channels; 2) Direct interaction with Audi Russia; 3) Mass media. The respondents mentioned particular cases of contact with the company (i.e. regular maintenance of a car), and then each case was assigned to one of three groups (with 1 point counting). The following designation of the mentioned cases of contact allowed

calculation of them in each group. All the mentioned cases of communication have been then included in Table C1 (Appendix C), besides those that were mentioned only once.

As a result 20 different cases of communication between community members and the company have been mentioned more than once, and 12 of them have been mentioned by more than half respondents. Thus, from the table, Audi Club Moscow members *interact with dealers* on a regular basis. The majority of community members meets with dealers during regular maintenance of their automobiles and receive price and promotion related information from dealers' employees, using the service of a personal manager, so 4 of 7 mentioned cases of contacts in the group "*Dealer-related channels*" have 6 and more points. Moreover 4 respondents described relationship with a personal manager, assigned by the dealer, as "friendship". At the same time the respondents mentioned a wide range of channels of *direct interaction* with the company, all in all 8 different cases of communication and 4 of them were mentioned by more than half of the survey's participants. Club members attend new model presentations and value the opportunity to talk to Audi executives thus disclose brand and community interaction (Fournier & Lee, 2009). *Modern channels* play a significant role in the direct communication between the company and community members, therefore 9 of them visit Audi webpage from time to time, 7 – check Facebook page and 4 – communicate via it. Several brand community members confirmed that they are (or have ever been) in more specialized and closer interaction with Audi: 4 participated in seminars, the same number of respondents attended Audi racing school. Overall, personal contacts (with dealers or Audi representatives) were characterized by respondents as the most trustful ones, forming long-term relationships. It is necessary to introduce an adjustment related to group "*Mass media*". Despite of the fact that 4 of 5 cases in this category have been mentioned by 8-10 respondents, mass media commercials could not be considered as communication of full value. Firstly, commercials foresee only one-way communication and community members could not be heard by the company through this channel (Baishakhi, 2011; Seib, 2007). Secondly, most of the interviewed members regretted that they do not count commercials as a reliable source of information (due to general perception of advertisement). They trust more WOM (Fuller & Matzlek, 2007; Gitomer, 1998; Kucuk & Krishnamurthy, 2007). They mostly receive only price and promotion-related information from commercial messages.

As it was pointed above, 12 out of all 20 mentioned cases of communication have 6 points and more, meaning that more than half of club members have ever been in contact with the company in 12 and more different ways, furthermore three of interviewed club members reported 16 various cases of communication, one – 15 and three – 14. Considering this it is possible to make a

conclusion that the interviewed brand community's members are *involved in communication* with the company or its official representatives and the communication could be characterized as *intensive*, since the majority of the club members have contacts with the company on *regular basis* through *different channels*.

Non-community members were also asked to describe their contacts with Audi. Commercials were named as the only channel of communication by 14 out of 20 survey participants, while the other respondents had ever communicated with the company or its representatives. Four respondents confirmed their contacts with Audi dealers. One of them, an Audi owner, interacts with the dealer on regular basis, serving her car, others had visited Audi dealers prior to purchase their current automobiles for test-drive and information. Three respondents were involved in direct interaction with the company. They reported visits of Audi website from time to time to check prices and promotions, moreover, one of them has contacted Audi Russia via Facebook. This shows that modern channels of communication are of particular importance in direct communication between the company and non-community members (Basaran et al., 2011; Wu & Fang, 2010; Olson, 2008).

Summarizing, the three-quarters of respondents have never been in contact with Audi (aside from commercials) and most of them have never tried to contact the company due to lack of interest in its products. This means that the majority of people outside the brand community are *not involved in communication* with the brand owning company.

4.3. Comparison analysis

Since the actual Audi brand values, values expressed by brand community and non-community members, have been united in similar groups it is possible to conduct comparison analysis.

The most of values, which Audi Club Moscow members associate with the brand, correspond to values, which the company is actually committed to (Table D1, Appendix D). In the group "Quality oriented values" all three included values correspond with each other, which indicates that Audi has fully delivered these values to the club members. The similar result is in the group "Product-based values". Among "Brand image values" brand community members stated three values that correspond to the company's ones, while they added to the brand their own value of "Adult brand". The value "Stylish" is not transmitted to the club members in this group. Despite the fact that Audi is focusing on providing a high quality service, the community members do not feel this as a value of the brand, so only two of four values in the group "Price and market positioning values" have been properly delivered to the brand community members and they also do not consider the brand

as luxurious. In the group “Technological values” the community members claimed that they consider the brand innovative, which matches the Audi’ values, while the company stands for developing the newest technologies also, which is not recognized by the club members. As it is seen from the analysis that values associated by the club’s members *principally correspond* to the values, Audi is committed to. More important, there are no controversial values, which indicate that the vision of the brand, which club’s members have, is equal to the actual brand image. *The brand community members have correct perception of the brand and associate it with the values, Audi in fact stand for.*

By analogy, the comparison analysis of non-community members’ perception of the brand has been carried out (Table D2, Appendix D). The analysis shows that people outside the brand community identify Audi as a premium brand and as a producer of reliable automobiles of proper quality, which corresponds to the values, the company is actually committed to. They also consider the brand modern, comfortable and innovative. While most of Audi core values (especially in groups “Brand image values” and “Price and market positioning values”) are not recognized by respondents. Moreover, the survey participants called the Audi product overpriced and not good value for money, which is opposite to the value, Audi stand for. The people outside the community also brought to the brand new values, such as “Posh” and “Overpriced”, which could not be accepted in the frameworks of the Audi brand image, the company is aimed at. Summarizing, the people outside the brand community, participated in the study, expressed their perception of the brand that is partially correspond with the actual brand image, moreover, they added to the brand some controversial and opposite values. It demonstrates that the Audi brand values have not been delivered properly to non-community members in Russia’s market, which caused *wrong perception of the brand and association with it controversial values.*

As it was previously found (4.2.) the brand community members are involved in active communication with Audi, the brand owner, and the people outside the community do not communicate with the company at all (or minority of them barely do it). Both Audi brand community members and interviewed non-community members reside in Moscow, Russia. They are people of different age groups, education and occupations, so there is no other sign that unites the brand community members or people outside the community and could explain the difference in their perception of the brand, than the **involvement of them in active communication with the brand owner.**

Conclusion

The propose of this study was to find out what effects involvement of brand community members in communication with a brand owner might have on community members' perception of a brand. Through the analysis of empirical data which was collected in frameworks of the research it was found that the values associated with Audi by the club members correspond to the values which Audi is actually committed to. In contrast, the non-community members associate the brand with the other controversial and even opposite values, which indicates that the wrong perception of the brand is common outside the community. Meanwhile it was also determined that the Audi Club Moscow members are involved in the active communication with the company and/or its official representatives, while the majority of the people outside the community, in turn, have never been in contact with Audi. The mentioned findings allow formulating the resulting statements:

- 1. The brand community members, being involved in the intense interaction with a brand owning company, associate with the brand a set of values that significantly differs from the values, associated with the brand by non-community members, who are not involved in the communication with a brand owner.*
- 2. Due to the involvement in the intense two-way interaction with a brand owner through different channels the brand community members form the correct brand image and associate with the brand values that principally match those to which the brand is committed to in-fact.*
- 3. The non-community members are not involved in the communication with a brand owner, so that they form their perception of the brand, having lack of reliable information. It might result in different effects, such as incorrect perception of the brand or the association incorrect brand values with it.*

Besides general results, additional conclusion concerning the communication channels could be made. Personal contacts with a brand owner or its official representatives were described as the most trustful and contributing to building long-term relationships. The importance of social media for both community and non-community members in direct communication was disclosed as well.

By the empirical findings the research complement theoretical assumptions concerning possible effects of the engaging brand community members in communication with a brand owner. The results contribute to the existent studies in the field of the brand communities by improving understanding of the effects caused by the involvement of brand community members in communication with a brand owner. In a broader perspective, the study endeavor to extend the understanding of the brand community and non-community members' interactions with the brand

holding company and how this influences all parties. The authors believe that the papers contribute to ongoing debate in Consumer marketing concerning the concept of the brand community and have encouraging perspectives of further investigations in the area of the external expects of brand communities. The research also performs comparison analysis of the brand community and non-community members in the context of interaction with third parties that has never been conducted previously. By revealing the effects of intense communication between a brand and brand community members the research adds value to the concepts of the customer loyalty and the brand concepts as well as relationship marketing, branding and consumer-company identification areas.

Several ways of further investigations in the field might be drawn. Conducting of the similar studies in the markets of the other countries in the key regions has particular value for the theory contribution, since this will allow to generalize the findings and to develop unified practical implications. The application of the ethnographic method could also add value to a further research, as it implies deepening in the field and might bring some more interesting insights about the relationships of communities with a brand (Scehmbri, 2009). The direction of the communication channels between the brand and the brand community members is of a special interest, as it could identify the effects caused by communication through a particular channel and this might have great practical implementation. The research could find practical implementation. Being certain about the effects, managers could build and manage relationships with brand communities in a better, more effective way, involving them in active communication through various channels in order to communicate them directly reliable information about a brand and its values.

Limitations

The empirical research contains several limitations that should be noticed. Due to the time and resources limit only one brand community has been investigated, while the reasoning of consideration Audi Club Moscow as the appropriate for the study is provided in chapter 3.2. All participants of the survey (within and outside the community) reside in Moscow, geographically limited territory, however, it is credible for this research, since Moscow generates 67% of Audi sales in Russia (3.2.). Moreover, as the majority of the club members are men, it could be adjusted more carefully if gender influences the brand values answers (at the same time the sample represent actual gender structure of Audi Club Moscow). The research has been conducted in the Russia's automobile market with the involvement of premium brand. It was previously mentioned that the market is characterized by specific particularities and customers have special requirements and tastes (3.2.). Therefore the results (and possible practical implementations) of the research are relevant to this particular market or other markets that have similar characteristics.

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Audi AG Profile

Audi AG is a German automobile manufacturer and technology developer. It was founded in 1909 and has been owned by the Volkswagen group since 1966, representing the premium segment within the group. Despite the integration with other VW group brands, Audi develops its own solutions for a customer in design, comfort and safety. Moreover, all technological innovations come firstly to Audi models and then are spread into other brands. Since the introduction of the first upper market model in the 1960-s modern technologies and innovations, ultimate quality and reliability, comfort and design have become the major brand values. The company has been aimed at the maximal satisfaction of customers with the quality of the product and service (pre and post purchase), which means that Audi has been targeting the relationship with clients as a priority for almost 50 years.

In 2010 Audi, using its production facilities in Germany, Hungary, Belgium, China, India and Brazil, manufactured 1,143 million cars (23,4% more than previous year here in following figures) and 1,648 million engines (19,1% more), reported revenue in €35,4 billion (18,8% increase) and €2,63 billion profit after tax (95,2% increase). According to the 2010 Annual report 76,6% of deliveries were made outside Germany and 23,4% in Germany. The home market is traditionally the most important for Audi along with others principal markets with deliveries of more than 100,000 units annually (US, UK, France, Italy). The "young" markets of China, Russia, Eastern Europe and Gulf Region are growing faster than traditional and tending to become leading in sales. As it is reported in 2010 Audi remains in a position of the previous year in its home market with market share 7,8% and shows a rise of 6,5% in deliveries in Western Europe (10,2% for the UK, 9,5% for France). Meanwhile deliveries in China and Russia rose by 43,4% and 23,3% and Audi sold 18510 cars in Russian in 2010. According to the forecast by 2020 Russian market will have reached 110,000 deliveries level. The company has been focusing on strengthening its positions in Chinese and Russian markets, as they demonstrate potential for further development⁹.

⁹ All figures in the paragraph are from Audi AG Annual Report 2010: <http://www.audi.de>

Russia's automobile market

Russia's market is characterized with intense competition and several features, which differ it significantly from European or other emerging markets. Most of the international car brands are presented in Russia along with local producers of budget models. The Russian Government supports local manufacturers by introduction of import tariff (makes imported cars 20-70% more expensive) and providing subsidy for a purchase of a car made in Russia¹⁰. In order to avoid these barriers several foreign producers (Ford, Nissan, Toyota, BMW, VW) have launched local factories over the last decade. Based on the experience they had gained in others emerging markets (Turkey, Brazil, Mexico), they were aimed at assembling budget, compact and economy cars, as the customers in this segment are the most price sensitive. Later they switched the segment and introduced production of business and premium cars at Russian facilities. This represents one of the Russia's market most important characteristics – wide premium segment. Despite the crisis the market has been showing annual growth of 26% over the last 10 years, thus premium segment grew even faster than others and in 2011 it counted 25% of new car sales, showing 41% rise to 2010. Overall 2,65 million of new cars were sold in 2011, 667,000 of which were business, premium and luxury models (united in premium segment). Audi, Mercedes, BMW, Lexus, Toyota and Land Rover are major players in the segment¹¹.

Another key difference of the Russia's market is related to customers and their requirements. According to the characteristics, given by Jürgen Sauer, the regional director of Mercedes in Russia, local customers prefer more expensive models and versions. The average price of a car sold in Russia is 47% higher than in Europe. Russian clients pay attention to technical details, innovations, improvements and usually buy lots of them, while it's common in Europe or others emerging markets to order only necessary options. Personification of a purchased cars is crucially important also, most of sold car are equipped with individual design inside, while outside Russians prefer to paint cars in basic colors (black, white, red, deep blue). Customers take care about a brand and carefully choose it, since it's very common in Russia to associate belongings with an owner, thus a brand image and values of a car is usually associated with a driver. They are very sensitive to a service level (Mercedes Russian dealers are rated as the best in terms of quality in the internal rating of the company) and are aimed at long-term relationship with a company, producer of a car. Russians like feeling of participation and generally appreciate communication with a company (invitation to parties organized by dealers or so) and value gifts, even though they are not worth much¹².

¹⁰ <http://www.minprom.gov.ru/special/utilization>

¹¹ Association of European Business in Russia: <http://www.aebrus.ru>

¹² Jürgen Sauer, Mercedes-Benz Russland CEO: <http://rbctv.rbc.ru/archive/sphere>

Audi Club Moscow

It is an informal organization of Audi car drivers, a racing club to some extent. The community consists primarily of the men of different age (the range from 22 to 49), while there are several women participating actively too. Basically they own premium cars of the brand (A8, S8, A6, S6, S4, TT, RS). The passion for "four rings" unites these people. They are really concerned about the brand; most of them are familiar with the history of the company and model range development. The members follow the news and updates on research and production of Audi, discuss them and express their opinions, often critically ("I'm sad they decided to introduce this. It's not Audi itself. VW forced them to do it just to make more money"), which shows they feel themselves involved in Audi. The general target of participation is to share experience and receive new knowledge, which could be useful for their own cars. The club members make some technical or just design improvements in their cars for better performance, then they tell the others what have been done, or just ask for further advice from more experienced drivers. They share experience of driving, teach each other how to drive more accurately in different situations (mostly extreme). Another important aspect of participation is fun, members feel themselves comfortably, they like to talk to people they have similarities with.

There are no strict rules of joining or participating (it is free) in the club. Mostly newcomers are invited by friends, already involved in the community. This makes the community quite close, but still available for joining (as an applicant could just contact one of members in social networks and receive an invitation). The community doesn't have mandatory meetings or events. Normally members meet every 2nd Saturday in Moscow, firstly at former airport territory (to use ex-runways as a track), race not for a competition, but for fun and sharing driving experience, then they move to a restaurant or bar to have dinner and discuss "current issues". Some of the members, active participants, take part in each meeting, but most of the drivers come from time to time. Usually no more than 15-20 club members come to a meeting, while the club counts not less than 60 participants. As there is no organized structure, there is not formed and clear hierarchy as well. Like in any community newcomers are treated cautiously (since most of them leave the community after the first meeting), though the long-term participants are respected. There is no responsible person in charge for meeting organization, members know that it normally starts at 16.00 during summertime and 13.00 in winters; the community has its page on Facebook, where the members leave their suggestions about a restaurant/bar for the next meeting. This page is the main channel of communication among members besides meetings.

The club is well known in Russia among people, interested in cars. Some of the members published several articles in local automobile magazines; others have blogs, where they share experience of the community about Audi cars, driving and improvements. After the first publications Audi AG Russia invited club members to the first meeting where they appreciated the community and popularization of the Audi brand, members in fact work for. Then meetings came to regular basis; Audi staff of different fields (Engineering, Design, Marketing) participate to provide information for community members and gather input from leading users.

As a distinctive sign of the club membership drivers use Audi horse (the first logo of the brand). Normally it is silver and shining, but members order this logo of dark bronze color and dull. They put it near a registration number at a rear trunk (on the left). The logo is small (approx. 7 cm x 4 cm) and most of the people even do not notice it, in fact members agree that the logo is not aimed at showing off, it is for themselves only, not for others.

Table B1. The Audi brand values, described by Audi employees

1. Quality oriented values

Ultimate quality

Highest safety standards

Reliability

2. Price and market-positioning values

Premium brand

Luxury brand

Good quality/price ratio

High quality service

3. Brand image values

Perfectionism (aiming on success)

Modern/Contemporary

Smart

Stylish

4. Product-based values

Comfortable cars

Sporty

5. Technological values

Newest technologies

Innovations

Core value: Customer satisfaction

Table B2. Audi brand values according to brand community members**Part 1** (respondents 1-5)

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5
Age	23	28	37	21	29
Occupancy	Student	Manager	Employee	Student	Manager
Current Car	Audi R8	Audi Q7	Audi A6	Audi A4	Audi S6
1. Quality oriented values					
Good quality/German production	10	1	1	1	1
Reliability	6		1	1	1
Safety	10	1	1	1	1
Premium brand	7		1	1	1
Business cars (for executives)	4		1		
Good quality/price ratio	6	1	1	1	1
High-class service	2		1		
Luxury and Fancy	3			1	
Group 3. Brand image values					
Modern	8	1		1	1
Trendy	3	1		1	
Sustainable	5		1		1
Reasonable choice	6	1		1	1
Adult brand (not for teenagers)	7		1	1	1
Brand for successful people	6		1	1	1
Group 4. Product-based values					
Sporty	6	1		1	1
Comfortable cars	7		1	1	1
Good for racing	4	1			1
Group 5. Technological values					
Innovative	8	1	1	1	1
Newest technologies in the industry	2			1	1

Table B2. Audi brand values according to brand community members**Part 2** (respondents 5-10)

Respondent	6	7	8	9	10
Age	62	27	33	40	36
Occupancy	Manager	Employee	Manager	Entrepr	Manager
Current Car	Audi A8	Audi TT	Audi A8	Audi S5	Audi A7
1. Quality oriented values					
Good quality/German production	1	1	1	1	1
Reliability			1	1	1
Safety	1	1	1	1	1
2. Price and market positioning values					
Premium brand		1	1	1	1
Business cars (for executives)	1		1		1
Good quality/price ratio	1		1		
High-class service		1			
Luxury and Fancy		1			1
Group 3. Brand image values					
Modern		1	1	1	1
Trendy		1			
Sustainable	1		1		1
Reasonable choice	1		1		1
Adult brand (not for teenagers)	1		1	1	1
Brand for successful people		1		1	1
Group 4. Product-based values					
Sporty		1		1	1
Comfortable cars	1	1	1		1
Good for racing		1		1	
Group 5. Technological values					
Innovative		1	1	1	1
Newest technologies in the industry					

Table B3. Audi brand values according to people outside the brand community**Part 1** (respondents 1-10)

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Age	45	52	33	42	62	46	29	27	20	24
Occupancy	Employee	Artist	Employee	Self-empl	Retired	Manager	Unemployed	Entrepreneur	Student	Employee
Current Car	Audi	No car	No car	Chevrolet	Lada	Mazda	No car	Renault	Subaru	Peugeot
1. Quality oriented values										
Good quality	16	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1
Reliability	14	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
2. Price and market positioning values										
Premium and luxury brand	19	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Posh and "show off"	14			1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Overpriced	13			1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Not good value for money	14			1	1	1	1	1	1	1
3. Brand image values										
Modern	15	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1
Reasonable choice	3	1								1
4. Product-based values										
Sporty	4	1					1			1
Comfortable	17	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1
5. Technological values										
Innovative	12	1	1		1		1		1	

Table B3. Audi brand values according to people outside the brand community**Part 2** (respondents 11-20)

Respondent	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Age	39	32	47	32	23	39	55	52	24	18
Occupancy	Employee	Manager	Entrepreneur	Self-empl	Employee	Self-empl	Unemployed	Entrepreneur	Self-empl	Student
Current Car	No car	Mercedes	No car	KIA	Nissan	BMW	No car	Toyota	No car	Citroen
1. Quality oriented values										
Good quality	1	1	1	1	1		1		1	1
Reliability	1		1	1	1		1		1	1
2. Price and market positioning values										
Premium and luxury brand	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1
Posh and "show off"	1		1	1	1			1		1
Overpriced	1			1	1		1	1		1
Not good value for money	1			1	1		1	1	1	1
3. Brand image values										
Modern	1	1		1	1	1		1		1
Reasonable choice		1								
4. Product-based values										
Sporty		1								
Comfortable	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1
5. Technological values										
Innovative	1	1	1		1		1	1	1	

Table C1. Characteristics of contacts between Audi and brand community members**Part 1** (respondents 1-5)

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5
Age	23	28	37	21	29
Occupancy	Student	Manager	Employee	Student	Manager
Current Car	Audi R8	Audi Q7	Audi A6	Audi A4	AudiS6
1. Dealer-related channels					
Regular maintenance of a car	8	1	1	1	1
Gather info about new models	3		1		
Gather price info (offers, propositions)	7		1	1	1
Gather technological info (extra options, improvements)	5	1	1	1	
Personal service	7	1	1	1	1
"Friendship" with a manager	4			1	1
Participation in dealer's events (parties)	6		1	1	1
2. Direct interaction with Audi Russia					
Participation in new models presentations/parties	7		1	1	1
Participation in seminars and meetings	4		1		1
Opportunity to talk to Audi Russia executives and employees	6		1		1
Attendance of Audi racing school	4	1			1
Receiving printed materials, provided by Audi Ru	4			1	1
Occasionally reading Audi Russia website	9	1	1	1	1
Visiting Audi Russia Facebook page	7	1	1	1	1
Communicating via Facebook page	4		1	1	1
3. Mass media					
have seen TV-commercials	3			1	1
have seen Internet-commercials	8	1	1	1	1
have seen printed commercials (magazines)	9		1	1	1
have seen outdoor commercials	10	1	1	1	1
have listened to radio commercials	9	1	1	1	1
	9	16	16	10	16

Table C1. Characteristics of contacts between Audi and brand community members**Part 2** (respondents 6-10)

Respondent	6	7	8	9	10
Age	62	27	33	40	36
Occupancy	Manager	Employee	Manager	Entrepreneur	Manager
Current Car	Audi A8	Audi TT	Audi A8	Audi S5	Audi A7
1. Dealer-related channels					
Regular maintenance of a car		1		1	1
Gather info about new models	1				1
Gather price info (offers, propositions)		1		1	1
Gather technological info (extra options, improvements)				1	1
Personal service		1		1	1
"Friendship" with a manager				1	1
Participation in dealer's events (parties)		1		1	
2. Direct interaction with Audi Russia					
Participation in new models presentations/parties		1	1	1	1
Participation in seminars and meetings				1	1
Opportunity to talk to Audi Russia executives and employees		1	1	1	1
Attendance of Audi racing school		1		1	
Receiving printed materials, provided by Audi Ru	1		1		
Occasionally reading Audi Russia website	1	1	1	1	1
Visiting Audi Russia Facebook page		1			1
Communicating via Facebook page		1			
3. Mass media					
have seen TV-commercials			1		
have seen Internet-commercials	1	1			1
have seen printed commercials (magazines)	1	1	1	1	1
have seen outdoor commercials	1	1	1	1	1
have listened to radio commercials		1	1	1	1
	6	14	8	14	15

Table D1. The comparison analysis of Audi brand values expressed by the brand community members and described by Audi AG Russia

Audi AG values	v	Brand community members' values
1. Quality oriented values		
Ultimate quality	v	Good quality/German production
Highest safety standards	v	Safety
Reliability	v	Reliability
2. Price and market positioning values		
Premium brand	v	Premium brand
Luxury brand		
Good quality/price ratio	v	Good quality/price ratio
High quality service		
Group 3. Brand image values		
Modern/Contemporary	v	Modern
Smart	v	Reasonable choice
		Adult brand (not for teenagers)
Perfectionism	v	Brand for successful people
Stylish		
Group 4. Product-based values		
Sporty	v	Sporty
Comfortable cars	v	Comfortable cars
Group 5. Technological values		
Innovative	v	Innovative
Newest technologies		

Table D2. The comparison analysis of Audi brand values expressed by people outside the brand community members and described by Audi AG Russia

Audi AG values	X	Perception in the society
1. Quality oriented values		
Ultimate quality	V	Good quality
Highest safety standards		
Reliability	V	Reliability
2. Price and market positioning values		
Premium brand	V	Premium and expensive brand
Luxury brand		
Good quality/price ratio	X	Not good value for money
High quality service		
		Posh and "show off"
		Overpriced
Group 3. Brand image values		
Modern/Contemporary	V	Modern
Smart		
Perfectionism		
Stylish		
Group 4. Product-based values		
Sporty		
Comfortable cars	V	Comfortable
Group 5. Technological values		
Innovative	V	Innovative
Newest technologies		