# Community Strategic Relationship of the Organizations with their Environment and Marketing

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*Abstract:* The purpose of this study is to define the community strategic relationship of the organizations with their environment and marketing as an approach, method and tool to use in strategic marketing that address communities. This approach to marketing and the organization relationship comes from a previous analysis of relationship marketing, and try to solve its deficiencies. In the study, it is used a theoretic-conceptual method with some elements of case analysis in a theoretical manner. Three propositions are stated and discussed to determine the uniqueness of the concept and its usefulness. A definition of relationship of the organizations with their environment and marketing is provided. Next, community concepts and strategies are described. Still next, differences with corporate social responsibility, corporation-community involvement, social-community marketing and shared value are pointed out. Finally, statements claiming the relevance of this approach are listed. The conclusion is that relationship of the organizations with their environment and marketing can be a good approach in those cases aimed to promote development of both, the corporation and the community, but it requires an extensive use of community concepts and strategies.

*Key-Words:* Marketing, community, relationship, development, strategy.

## 1 Introduction

There is a growing interest in introducing the concept of community in corporation operations and language. Globalization and extended and international markets make it a need to understand how to conduct the interactions with different communities.

This is not only the results of a social and humanistic interest in the state of development and social problems of the communities but also a viewpoint that supports the corporation-community links.

Social responsibility [1, 2] community-corporation involvement [3], social marketing [4] social programs [5, 6], or shared value [7], are all of them, concepts that lead to community-corporation relationship.

One of the latest developments in marketing is relationship marketing, which consist on the activities of attraction, construction and maintaining relationships with clients [8, 9], and where human dimension is crucial [10]. However there are several issues, regarding this type of relationship, that deserve attention, and that also lead to community strategies.

Despite it is of undoubtedly importance, relationship marketing has to confront the fact that it is nearly impossible to have a relationship with each customer that goes further than a social-commercial relation [11]. In this sense, the emotional bonds to attain in relationship marketing are no more than pecuniary-prescriptive emotions. However, dimensions such as trust, vision, dreams, satisfaction and loyalty, among others [9, 12, 13, 14], do create bonds that endure along the time and result in lasting relationships.

Accordingly, it was proposed that to benefit from the different marketing strategic and create lasting emotional bonds with as many individuals as possible, it would be worthy to use a community based strategy [11]. The goal of this strategy is the development of both the community and the corporation, and it consists on the use of community concepts and strategies along with marketing techniques.

## 2 Problem Formulation

According to the aforementioned, the purpose of the study was to analyze the usefulness of a community strategic relationship, as a marketing strategy that introduces community concepts and strategies to foster emotional corporation-community bonds, loyalty and development of the community and the organization.

To accomplish this, the analysis uses a theoretical-conceptual viewpoint and, also, it takes the community strategic relationship and marketing as a theoretical case, trying to determine how effective its application could be in marketing operations.

The theoretical-conceptual analysis used an explicative logic, identifying relations, differences and links between concepts. It also provides some cause-effect type interpretations of the use of community concepts and strategies.

The case analysis approach provides a structure to the analysis by stating and testing some propositions [15, 16]. It is not an empirical case analysis, because the case is a conceptual topic, and it does not comprise all of the features of an empirical case analysis, but only the logical propositions and the associated explanations. However, following the logic of the case analysis method is helpful in guiding the analysis and discussion, and that is why it is used here.

According to this mixed theoretical-conceptual-case approach, three propositions are stated:

1. Community concepts and strategies are appropriate to use in the community strategic relationship with the environment and marketing.

2. Community approach exists in different strategic areas or strategic marketing but they do not use proper community concepts and strategies.

3. The use of community concepts and strategies would lead to a more effective marketing solution.

The analysis that follows discusses these three statements.

# 3 Problem Solution

Let us start by providing a definition of what community strategic relationship and marketing is. It is a way of relationship comprising community concepts and strategies, along with marketing methods, in which organizations address communities of strategic interest, to promote the development of the communities and organizations.

In this definition, it must be clear that organizations must have a strong belief in that the development of the communities is also its own development; in other words, an organization develops as long as the community develops too.

This definition has some issues of interest, such as:

a) It is a strategic relationship; i.e. it is not social responsibility and it does not intent to provide humanitarian help or assistance to communities,

because other organization activities are aimed to that.

b) It comprises a strong trustiness in the capabilities and potential for development that communities have.

c) Organizations strongly believe that they are part of those communities and not external agents; they are members of the communities.

d) The destiny of the organizations is linked to that of the communities; development is a community concept and not an individualistic action.

e) There must be a concept, or several concepts, of community and community strategies, to guarantee that a community strategic relationship is properly applied to the marketing operations of the companies.

Regarding point e), companies identify community concepts and strategies that are useful in a specific context. Therefore, companies must have a repertoire of concepts and strategies that fit to every community they relate with.

Based on this principles and definition, community strategic relationship and marketing will be analyzed and compared to other concepts, along with logic for using it.

## 3.1. Community concepts and strategies are appropriate to use in the community strategic relationship with the environment and marketing.

Community strategic relationship and marketing must use the concepts and strategies of community to be congruent with its definition.

In this sense, a community is a socio-geographic ecosystem, and historical group with interactions, networks, groups and subgroups [17, 18, p. 6]. All these groups have the same objective as a community [19]; besides, the community comprises affection, the commitment of all of his members to values, norms and the development of symbolic processes such as meanings and culture [20].

Other characteristics are achievement, aggression, optimism, hard work, government, competitiveness, risk, uncertainty avoidance, individualism or collectivism, power distance, control of the environment and equity [21].

It means that a community is not simple a geographical location, but an ecosystem encompassing many objective and subjective characteristics. Organizations can not address them with just a focus on infrastructure or economic issues.

Beside, companies cannot mistake the use of

networks in the community to maintain their legal or social status with a community approach, because the former is part of the social activities of the companies, but the latter is a real interest in the development of the community. Both of them require attention.

Strategies are another important issue in the community strategic relationship and marketing. This demands that organizations properly use the community action that meets their requirements and those of the community. If the company is a real member in the community both requirements will be nearly the same.

Many strategies are available to address the community [11, 22, 23]. Most of them are imported from the social, health and community field [see 24]; however, marketing is not foreign to community concepts. They are widely used in the Internet, for example [25].

The main communities strategies are listed in [11] and [22 23]. They are community development, critical awareness and reflection, building community identity, political and legislative actions, culturally relevant practice spontaneous associations of neighbors, colleagues or groups with a specific interest in a topic, leadership in communities, empowerment and critical reflection [11], grassroots organizations [26], coalitions [27], or coalitions along with spontaneous union, joining organizations or based on community [28] and research on quality of life issues [29].

Other types of community strategies are community development and building, to encourage communications and express desires [30], community development program by which the population participate in planning and sharing information [31], community development projects, to address standards of living, culture, history, institutions, environment, government, economics and technology [32], learning community to involve individuals to explore opportunities and facilities, volunteering and community-based action [33], community of practice with interaction, reflection and meta-reflection, communication and discussions [34], working community with volunteer programs to grow professionally [33], development of social capital, creating relationships, awareness, trust, reciprocity and cooperation [35], and a specific use of empowerment and critical reflection that can help in understanding and coping with real life conditions [36].

Given the amount of strategies, it is not surprising that differences exist not only between regions but also between communities with different psycho-cultural characteristics. These strategies

were created to address many different conditions, so those conditions exist in many communities.

Moreover, usually, marketing encompass short runs, many models and changes [37], what is consistent with all the aforementioned strategies. This can encourage the use of multiple and adapting community strategies along with the many forms and techniques than marketing has.

It is not possible to build a community relationship without knowing who is involved. A community is not just a name; it is a concept and specific forms of interactions exist that allow for creating a relationship between corporations and communities. These forms are useful in several fields and also they must be in marketing.

It is also impossible to cooperate with a community, or even helping it out, unknowing the type of community it is. For this, community concepts and strategies are a need and they are appropriate to use in the community strategic relationship with the environment and marketing.

## 3.2. Community language exists in several topics related to strategic marketing, but they do not use proper community concepts and strategies

Some topics relate to community in a programmatic but very intuitive way, they are: a) Corporate social responsibility, b) community-corporation involvement, c) social and community marketing, and e) shared value, among others. Next, they will be review in the following paragraphs.

### 3.2.1 Corporate social responsibility and community strategic relationship and marketing

Corporate social responsability, as a concept, developed long time ago [see 38] and consists on the idea that organizations have more responsibilities than legal obligations [39]. Organizations must have relationships with many groups in society, such as government, employees, communities and others, in a social responsible manner [40]. Accordingly, they need to promote a solidarity and cooperative image in these groups and the population.

In spite of the fact that social responsibility certainly aims to community, it is difficult to see what the community really is for a corporation in a specific location. Moreover, community can be the neighborhood surrounding the facilities of the organization, or the entire country where company is located; however, both of them lack a proper definition, it is not required from the viewpoint of corporate social responsibility.

Besides, the concept of community, in corporate social responsibility, involves, in many occasions,

vulnerability and social and economic deprivation conditions. In this sense, companies come to fill some gaps that governments are unable to fill. Therefore, governments could be transferring some of their social responsibilities to companies [1].

However, the concept of social responsibility does not stick to a concept of community. It seems not to need it and therefore it does not use it.

Community strategic relationship with the environment and marketing is community based, and identifying the community concept that fit a community is the starting point of the process. In this way, horizontal cooperation substitute the verticality of the corporate social responsibility; community is not only helped out but also consulted, taken into account, and asked to participate in the decision making.

Finally, the development of the community, in community strategic relationship with the environment and marketing, does not involve deprivation and vulnerable conditions, or a deficit of any type in the community, but taking the community to the highest possible performance and benefits in that moment.

Given these differences, it is also clear that corporate social responsibility is not using community concepts and strategies to lead their actions for the community. It is a need-based approach, which results in benefits for the community. However, it lacks the analysis that social intervention in the community requires; conceptual analysis encompassing a concept of community and determining the requirements for a proper community interventions is a need in the community strategic relationship with the environment and marketing.

Properly addressing the community needs designing actions that rely not only in infrastructure, employment or deprivation relief, but also empowerment, community identity building or even community building. These would help to the development of the community and the sustainability of the organization.

### 3.2.2 Corporate-community involvement and community strategic relationship and marketing

Corporate-community involvement means a greater commitment with the community than in social responsibility, but it still is in the hearth of corporate social responsibility. It is a relation between the company and the communities, to promote programs of interest of both of them, involving impact, operations and relationships with many groups in the community [3].

Corporate-community involvement is taking a great role in marketing operations [41] and adds value to the firm [41, p. 1]. It is part of corporate-community investment, which also comprises discretionary philanthropy, community partnerships and strategic community investments [42, p. 6]. Corporate-community investment is a business involvement with the community, in which companies operate, to promote social initiatives and meet needs [42, p. 5].

In this sense, corporation-community involvement participates of many of the characteristics that corporate social responsibility has. Also, it promotes the need-based approach and makes the community the objective of the corporative actions. However, the strategic component of the corporation-community involvement, make it a little different to social responsibility; the organization actions are not only a mode of helping out the community but also a strategic design. Besides, it also admits a form of community partnership, mainly in the investment operations.

It is a step ahead to fully integrate community into the business, but it still lacks opportunities to have the vision of the community as part of the business core. The main deficit in this sense is that it comes from an assistance viewpoint, and not from a strategic viewpoint to promote growth.

Development is not only in economic conditions but also in cultural conditions and belief system which is much more difficult to change. Accordingly, the community concepts and strategies must be present in the community actions of the organizations with a strategic viewpoint to promote endurable changes.

In corporate-community involvement, the community concept still has some naïve reminiscence of a utopic community. However, organizations are able to adapt to this condition and manage to operate creating value and benefits.

In spite of this, corporation-community involvement is not fully using the community concepts or strategies, because of its specific approach.

### 3.2.3 Social and community marketing and community strategic relationship with the environment and marketing.

Social and community marketing is intended to foster sustainable behavior [6] and the theory of social action helps in creating community brand [43].

However, analysis of communities is still made by the operational elements and characteristics of individuals related to the intention to purchase, in

virtual communities [44], where advertising is aimed to meet their needs [45].

Marketing campaigns makes an extensive use of virtual communities, where connectivity is significantly replacing the concept of community. Therefore, old traditional marketing style is transferred to new ways of interaction. The segmentation by psychographics or sociographics characteristics are now replaced by connectivity, mode of access, likes, or preferences in the web material

Organizations also help in the social changes, promoting better life styles [46] and, actually, welfare is a main component in social marketing actions [47]. Social marketing also aims to the elimination of barriers in social programs [5, 6].

Therefore the interest in social welfare and better quality of life is a characteristic of the social and community marketing. Nevertheless, there are links between marketing, cultural attributes, leadership, community spirit and economic development [48]. Besides, coalitions use community-based social marketing to promote policy change [49] and some type of development. Nevertheless, despite these efforts made to include community strategies into social-community marketing, it still is not common.

Social and community marketing is also intended to foster sustainable behavior, by using community-based social operations, and a psychological approach [6], and the use of images help to promote the community, in a type of community marketing [50], providing with a mixture of psychological and communities concepts that increase possibilities but, in some way reduces the importance of the community concepts.

According to the aforementioned, social and community marketing is in good conditions to introduce the community concepts and strategies, and, in some occasions, it does. However, it is not systematic, and in many other occasions, its actions lack what its foundations are. Expectations are that community marketing would make an extensive use of the concepts and strategies of community in this field, but this seems to be a consequence of the orientation of the researcher more than a programmatic principle.

This is not the case in the relationship of the organizations with the environment and marketing where the principles of the community are a requirement. They include the identification of the community, in a deep sense, and the community strategies to apply. That is a difference with social-community marketing.

### 3.2.4 Shared value and community strategic relationship with the environment and marketing.

Shared value is a strategic component intended to benefit community and companies. The concept is defined as policies and operating practices that enhance competitiveness and advance the socio-economic conditions of the communities [7]. Shared value creation focuses on identifying and expanding the connections between social and economic progress.

This concept assumes a societal and economic progress simultaneously, by companies reconceiving products and markets, productivity, and also promoting local cluster development and the same time that benefit themselves (Porter & Kramer, 2011). However, it is not fully incorporate in a comprehensive analytical framework [51].

Actually, shared value tries to combine the benefits of the company with attention to the needs of the community. In this sense, it has a focus on the needs, in the same manner that previous efforts and concepts, such as social responsibility or corporation-community involvement, but also a focus on the market needs. It is a type of administrative actions that have impact on the value chain. Besides, it is also aimed to the competitiveness of the company, but reconciled with local cluster development.

However, this is not surprising, as clusters are essential in the new economics of competition [52]. So this approach is an extension of the competitive view, but with a greater use of local resources. At the same time, the impact of the creation of shared value on the value chain, consist on a redesigning of the operations of the company for a better use of the resources. Internalizing externalities is costly to companies, so they have to create new methods to reduce added costs.

The idea of shared value does not imply a concept of community nor a community strategy; it is a strong belief in the capacities of the organizations to promote socio-economic development while they growth. It is a great improvement in the social role of companies in the communities, but it is not a reflection about the type of community or community strategy to apply. The community provides a kind of continuous feedback on the operations of the company, but strategies are mainly business strategies.

In this sense, the relationship of the organizations with the environment and marketing proposal starts with the position of the company in the community. To identify this, it is necessary to define the type of

community, or even if it exists, and then to define goals and community strategies. The difference with shared value relies also in that it does not put an emphasis in the competitive view. Competition is important, but community is not at the service of the competition, but goals must be determined to both, company and community.

### 3.3. The use of community concepts and strategies would lead to a more effective marketing solution.

Some arguments support the view that the use of community concepts and strategies would lead to more effective marketing solutions, and that the community strategic relationship of the organizations with the environment and marketing leads to a proper application of this principle.

First, it is not possible to have a relationship with a community, unknowing the type of community it is.

Second, it is not possible to create solutions for a community without knowing the problems (not only the needs) it has; and this implies to become a member of that community.

Third, it is not possible to get into a community, or become a member of that community, without using tools that are focused on community actions.

Finally, to overcome these barriers, the community concepts and strategies are a need in marketing solutions and in the relationship of the organizations with the community.

## 4 Conclusion

Based on the previous discussion, it seems to be clear that this approach could be of interest in the application of marketing strategies to communities.

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