KEY ELEMENTS OF BUILDING AND DEVELOPING ONLINE COMMUNITIES

University of Strathclyde
Department of Marketing

Matthias Ennen

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Abstract

With the advent of the internet marketing has seen a reinvention of the idea of communities in the form of online communities. In the last decade online communities emerged that are centred around specific interests or hobbies, co-production, learning platforms, consumption and brands. Online communities present a new and innovative way for marketeers to tap into user feedback, create deeper relationships with consumers and supply personalised offerings. However creating and developing a virtual community can be an expensive and risky process. While many researchers have analysed independent elements that are important for community development, marketing science is still lacking research into how these elements work together to create successful communities.

The focus of the research project is to deepen the understanding of virtual communities and how they are created, developed and sustained. The dissertation develops a conceptual model for both the elements and processes involved and tests the model through the primary research. The research method uses unstructured interviews and critical incident technique with the creators of six virtual communities and 1-4 users of each community. All participants were encouraged to speak about their positive and negative

experiences and creators of virtual communities were asked to speak about their experiences with setting up and growing the virtual community.

A total of 19 interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed. All bar one element identified in the conceptual chapter were found during the interviews which gives the previously independently analysed elements further validation. Evidence for different stages in the development of communities was found, however the process is much more fluid than anticipated. This dissertation recommends that further research is carried out in the area of virtual community development.

Keywords: virtual communities, online communities, community life-cycle, elements of virtual communities

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Abbreviations

e.g.	for example (*abbr. of Latin 'exempli gratia'*)
etc.	etcetera
SoC	Sense of Community
SCI	Sense of Community Index
SOVC	Sense of Virtual Community
HU	Horizons Unlimited Community
RR	Real Rider Community
ABR	Adventure Bike Rider Community
ESR	Eat Sleep Ride Community
GO	Get On Community
BM	Bike Minds Community

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Post-modernism, the dominant paradigm of our time, tells us that communities are dead, that individuality is the key to happiness and that we are all expressing our individuality through consumption. However since the start of post-modernism in the 1950's we see a steady rise of communities making a comeback. We see communities centred around consumption and communities centred around new technology and media growing ever so strong. Community research speaks of re-tribilasation or e-tribilisation.

With the advent of the Internet these communities have been given another push. Never before has it been so easy to communicate with others about shared interests and beliefs (Hoffman et al. 1995) and never before had the online user so much buying power (Kucuk & Krishnamurthy 2006). This development has brought several new marketing tools to life. One that is particular popular and increasingly used is the idea of an online virtual community (Rheingold 1993).

Focus of the early use of the Internet was on information research and shopping, however the way users facilitate the Internet has changed dramatically over the last decade. Many users started to provide information themselves and are now running or contributing to blogs, podcasts, videos and wikis. A recent survey by PewInternet (Maeve & Brenner 2013) concludes that two-thirds of American adults are now a member of the social networking community Facebook.com. This number is more than likely to grow with the current move towards more interactive Internet technologies, also knows as Web 2.0.

Virtual communities have been adopted by marketeers in various business situations such as to increase sales, increase web traffic, brand building, wordofmouth and product support.

The term 'virtual community' was first used by Howard Rheingold in an article he wrote for "The Whole Earth Review" in 1987:

> *"Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace."*

Virtual communities give people a quick and convenient place to address their needs. Motivators why individuals participate in online communities are to find expert advice, to maintain or extend a social or professional network, to help others, to contribute to collective goals etc.

Today there are a multitude of different concepts of virtual communities employed on the Internet. Researchers have done extensive work on communities centred around specific interests and hobbies (Szmigin et al. 2005), around specific products or services, so called brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001), co-production and innovation (Auh et al. 2007; von Hippel 2001), open source communities (Casaló et al. 2010b) and learning environments (Swan 2002).

While many try to copy the success of Facebook, more and more smaller communities have established themselves in niche markets and have proven to be a successful marketing tool to gather information, enable collaboration and increase loyalty.

However creating and developing a community is a difficult and expensive piece of work if not done right. Simply creating a virtual platform is not enough – several factors for motivation and participation have to be

considered. Communities are not a solid unit, they evolve and grow and change over time. Literature stresses the importance to see virtual technologies as a tool to enable the growth of a community and not as the determinant.

If all the requirements are met online communities can grow over time from a constructed virtual space into a successful, lively community. The aim of this research study is to analyse how constructed virtual communities can positively develop over time and how the creators of communities can facilitate sustainability.

1.2 Research Focus

To develop a better understanding of the process of creating virtual communities the researcher has to take a step back and take in the bigger picture of virtual communities. Research up to this point has been very focused on using a case-study approach to determine elements of successful communities. The case-study approach has been very useful to analyse single elements however very little research has tried to gain a broader overview around all elements of virtual communities.

The only research found that looked at analysing all elements of communities in one work is Leimeister's series of studies (Leimeister et al. 2006, Leimeister et al. 2005; Leimeister and Krcmar 2004). However Leimeister's work needs to be tested as the elements used in this work are picked through a Delphi method and not naturally developed from speaking to creators and users of virtual communities. Additionally the literature research has found additional elements that are not mentioned in Leimeister's work. The question the research project tries to answer is what elements are important for the creation of virtual communities.

While all elements might be important for community creation it remains the question if all elements are equally important throughout the development of a virtual community. Communities develop and grow over time until they become self-sustainable. Existing research into virtual communities usually only mention the process of setting up a community in a side sentence and research into the process of community creation is very limited.

The only academic work on development of communities over time is Iriberri and Leroy's (2009) model on life-cycle stages for online communities. In their work Iriberri and Leroy gather existing research on community elements and try to assign the elements to communities. The work is purely theoretical and Iriberri and Leroy recommend that "further research should focus on the dynamic nature of online communities and test (…) if and how these factors interact to promote success" (pg. 11:25).

To gain a better understanding of both the elements and the processes for community creation and development the research project will use an exploratory approach for the primary research. Using unstructured interviews and critical incident technique will create results that have none of the methodological limitations of previous research methods such as case-studies.

1.3 Objectives

The focus of the work lies on the process of setting up a virtual community and the issues and questions that arise with the artificial creation of a community. The aim is to identify concepts of communities and community development and apply them to the new form of communities through in-depth interviews with the creators of such online communities.

Most crucial in the development of a virtual community is the start-up period in which the virtual community needs to produce enough spin to attract enough users to make it self-sustainable. What drives Internet users to participate in a virtual community, what makes them come back and what makes them recommend the community to others? These questions will be addressed in this piece of research.

The author seeks in this dissertation to achieve the following objectives:

- To analyse the elements involved in creating and developing an online community from the standpoint of the community creators and users.

- To analyse and understand the process of creating and developing a community from the standpoint of community creators.

1.4 Structure of Thesis

The introduction chapter 1 has set the research background and how the idea for the research project was developed..

Chapter 2 reviews the literature about virtual community elements. In a second part different models of creating and developing virtual communities are reviewed.

The third chapter gives a brief overview of the literature review before creating a conceptual model and formulating the research questions derived from the literature review.

In Chapter 4 the chosen research approach is presented followed by a brief presentation of the virtual communities. It then explains data collection and analysis.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the primary research for both research questions in detail.

Chapter 6 interprets the research findings and gives answers to research question 1 and 2.

The final section gives a brief overview on the background and findings before discussing the implications of the results in theoretical and managerial context.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Even though that community is one of the core concepts of sociology there is no agreed meaning for the term 'Community'. Community is a concept that has to be analysed with regards to its setting and time. The idea of community has been around for centuries and meaning has changed over time. Additionally community has to be analysed with regards to society. Both concepts are interlinked with each other and therefore it is important to understand how "community" has evolved as an idea over time.

2.2 Development

The concept of community originates like so many other modern theories from ancient Greece. Aristotle used the term to describe the way he saw the life in the city – the polis – as opposed to the tribal and social relations of rural areas. Life in the polis was centered around every day life issues, friendship and, and that is where it is fundamentally different to any other society, politics. For Aristotle community therefore has a very urban character with no essential difference between the social and the political. Involvement in politics was not confined to the state, but was conducted in everyday life in self-government by the citizens (Delanty 2010). The concept of the polis worked for the Greeks on a small, local and timely scale. The benefits of the polis, the immediacy of public life, meant that there was a particular high degree of exclusion from the community.

It was not long until the Romans broke with the Greek tradition and created the ideal of a world community, the Roman Empire as a universal community

based on territories and politics. However it was not until the arrival of Christianity that the Romans were able to transcend the ideal of a universal community across the political. Where in the polis community was constructed through the belonging to an in-group and shaping the society, Christian thought created a community through a spiritual bond, shaping a common utopia of a perfect community (Delanty 2010).

The community of Christian belief was there to stay and had a huge influence on the next 1000 years of history. The fact that this community of religious interest outlasted several states across country boundaries shows the influence and importance of communities. Over time the ideas of community, society and state drifted apart with community retaining the early idea of society, the direct connection with the individuals as opposed to organized realm of the state.

With the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Enlightenment community in its original form was finally in decline. According to Delanty (2010) the "disenchantment" of the community was facilitated through different factors:

- break-up of medieval guilds and co-operations
- commercialization of agriculture
- emergence of capitalism
- decline in autonomy of the cities following the rise of the modern, centralized state.

After the Middle Ages modernity entered history as a progressive force promising to liberate humankind from ignorance and irrationality. In the Enlightenment the idea of community became popular again, encapsulating the emerging world of society. "Community" referred to the more immediate

world of meaning, belonging and everyday life and was placed contrary to the distant, objective system of the state and autocracy that was so far removed from its people (Simmons 2009).

With the concept of community set against the established paradigm of absolutism the quest for the perfect society continued. One of the key drivers on the topic of community during this time was Rousseau. In his theories of political philosophy and the concept of the "general will" he represented the ideal of community. According to Rousseau community builds the foundation of politics, with the general will as the only genuine form of political organisation. However as the system of the state has destroyed the individuals political opportunities and political autonomy, political institutions cannot realize community.

On the other side of the debate is Hegel who argues that community can only be realized through a political form. While in Rousseau's viewpoint the society is intrinsically good and political system prevents it from building communities, Hegel sees modern life as harmful for society and his concept of "ethical life". Thus the state becomes the highest embodiment of ethical life since society alone cannot sustain itself (Delanty 2010). So while it is the role of politics to connect state and social it cannot succeed as the social is faulty and incomplete. Modernity itself cannot fully realize itself and a deeper level of community is needed.

The period after the waning of the Enlightenment sees a variety of some of the most influential political ideologies that all had community as a central ideal. The age of ideology, from about 1830 to 1989 sees liberalism, republicanism, conservatism, communism, socialism, anarchism, Zionism, fascism and nationalism come and go (Delanty 2010).

19th century ideologies describe community as an ideal, pictured in the utopia that all of these ideologies promise. Community plays the most important part in particular in communism and Marxism. Marx himself saw the community as urban, egalitarian and universalistic.

However especially the period after 1900 sees some drastic changes in the way communities are seen. Two main developments can be identified:

- The move from community as a mainly left ideal to a right-wing political current, creating anit-utopias. This move is seen in right-wing ideologies such as fascism and nationalism. Both Mussolini and Hitler promote the idea of a "national community" that is based on tribal values, history, exclusivity, masculinity, elites, racism,... all values that stand against the original idea of community.

- And finally new theories that try to overcome modernity itself and the problem of community in modern age.

The second half of the 20th century has seen the advent of unrestricted capitalism and liberalism which lived out very intensively the myth of the liberation of the individual. The individual has never been so free in his or her private and public choices as today, and never so alone and cut off from the spirit of community (Cova 1997). Post-modernism is one theory that supports the change in behaviour of the individual.

Post-modernism rejects the attempts of 'modernism' to impose order and coherence upon the chaos and fragmentation of society. Where modernism promoted order, control, certainty and hierarchy would ultimately archive the perfect society, post-modernism states that modernisms attempts to explain and control the world have failed. In post-modernism the world is characterized through disorder, chaos, ambiguity and anarchy, a state that

cannot be controlled by science (Brown 1993). Society in this world becomes more and more fragmented, with ethical viewpoints based on individual preference and identity and values changing with each opportunity. The individual dabbles in various viewpoints and wears different hats depending on what serves him best. The fragmented society is represented in the loss of commitment to a single common culture or institutional core (state, religion, politics,...).

Finally, the post-modern individual is freed from all restricting bonds of society and community. Individualism promotes his inner self and a society with an "anything-goes" attitude in which the individual does not want to, does not have to or cannot make deeper social connections. Consumption plays an important role in the post-modern world as its the main driver of self-evaluation and identity building.

For a long time the loss of community was believed to be liberating. Anonymity would set people free from what the community dictated and leave them to peruse whatever they wanted, expressing their individuality. The anonymity of city life is what drives individuals to search for membership in a community. As their immediate neighbourhood does not provide them with belonging, they search for it in other ways. Sheldon Wolin wrote 1960 about the wish of modern man to integrate with society. He writes that the "need to 'belong' and to experience satisfying relations with others can be fulfilled if he is able to 'identify' himself with an adequate group, one which will provide him with membership"[1].

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[1]Quoted by S.I. Benn in "Community as a social ideal"

Post-modernism describes a society that is based on pure individualism and anonymity. Community feelings have no place in a post-modern world yet we see a trend to more and more consumers searching for stronger bonds and communities (sports clubs, fandom, gyms, interest groups, brand fans,...).

While post-modernism explains the lack of big, wide-spanning communities there is a growing counter-argument within the literature that sees away from individualism. towards a search for more social bonds due to alienation (Simmons 2009). The growing number of small communities, gathering around common interests for social interaction has first been discussed by Maffesoli (1993). Since then several authors (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova, 1997; Dholakia et al., 2004; Cova and Pace, 2006; Cova et al., 2007) have analysed this phenomenon of "neo-tribes", groups that usually centre around consumption and brands.

This recent school of thought sees the comeback of communities to every day life and our wish to belong to a community. Meffesoli (1996) describes the neo-tribes as "inherently unstable, small-scale, affectual and not fixed by any of the established parameters of modern society". Neo-tribes are held together by a common interest, a shared emotion, a shared lifestyle or consumption practices.

The post-modern consumer actively seeks to build his identity through consumption, at the same time these products and service enable them to come part of a community or tribe. The individual is looking less in consumption for a direct means of giving meaning to life than for a means to form links with others in the context of one or several communities of reference which will give meaning to their life (Cova 1997).

2.3 Community and Society

To be able to discuss community one needs to define society and how it is different to the concept of community.

The term community originates from the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (2001) who distinguishes in his work "Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft", first published in 1887, between two types of human interaction: Society (Gesellschaft) and Community (Gemeinschaft).

2.3.1 Definition of Society

Contrary to community, the concept of society sees any group of people as fundamentally detached from another. They are individuals that remain in their personal space and are only out to maximize their own benefits. "Nobody wants to do anything for anyone else […] unless he gets something in return, […] only by getting something that seems better he can be persuaded to give up something good" (Tönnies 2001).

The only way participants of a society will develop a relationship is when it is beneficial for both parties to work together. However this relationship is then limited to a single aspect of his personality, related to this piece of work. Therefore the membership in a society is in its essence a contract with clear defined rights and duties, yet no member is fully part of the society as membership only requires part of his personality to be involved.

A good example for society is citizenship which has clear defined rights and duties however does not touch on the individual freedom.

2.3.2 Definition of Community

Community ("Gemeinschaft") describes a closer, almost family-like bond to a group of other individuals.

According to Tönnies (2004), Community stems from real organic life. In the original state there is a complete unity of human wills. This unity is the ultimate form of community, a centre of unity with which all further communities originate. All human wills are related to another through descent and kinship. Tönnies (Tönnies 2004; Tönnies 2001; Cahman 1995) names three main types of relationships:

The relationship between mother and child is the most natural, physical and rooted in pure instinct. The mother is responsible for the nurture and protection of the child but as the child grows up and these elements loose their necessity separation becomes more likely. After separation the relationship is reinforced by the family bond and by sharing memories of the joy they have given each other.

The relationship between man and woman as a couple which is based on the sexual instinct. However as sexual instinct does not make permanent co-habitation necessary this relationship has to be reinforced by other factors such as family, sharing household or possessions.

The strongest bond of these three relationships is the relationship between brother and sister. Even though the relationship is essentially on ties of blood there is no fundamental instinctive natural connection comparable to the connection between a mother and her child or sexual partners. Instinct takes a back role while memory plays the more important part in creating and maintaining emotional ties in the relationship between siblings. Additionally

the highest degree of similarity and abilities can be expected between siblings. (Tönnies 2001).

All these factors that sustain relationships are important when it comes to trying to understand community bonds. According to Tönnies there are three conceptional forms community can exist in: community of blood, community of place and community of spirit.

Community of blood is best described by kinship and the embodiment of kinship is the home. Here a community of blood lives under one roof, sharing possessions, responsibilities, duties and memories.

In the neighbourhood one experiences a community of place. Within the neighbourhood it is common to share work, organization and other forms of administration. The closeness of living and/or working together causes people to meet and get acquainted with each other. The community is sustained by fixed habits of getting together and shared customs.

While both community of blood and community of place are linked to physical proximity community of spirit is a "binding link on the level of conscious thought" and is formed independently of kinship and neighbourhood purely based on the free will. "Relationships between people as friends or comrades have nothing organic, no inner necessity about their character; they owe least to instinct and are less conditioned by habit than are neighbourly relationships" (Tönnies 2001). This makes community of spirit or friendship the strongest form of the concept of community.

Friendship is conditioned by and resulting from shared beliefs, ideas and goals which in turn creates their spiritual bond. It is most easily developed between people that share the same calling or craft.

Tönnies (2001) explains the concept of friendship on the example of a town. In a town anonymity prevails even amongst neighbours. The only relationship that can exist between the inhabitants of a town is friendship. These relationships form and foster through easy and frequent meetings which are not located in any specific place but "the comradeship of minds creates a kind of invisible location, a mystical city and meeting place which comes alive through the medium of artistic sympathy or creative purpose" (Tönnies 2001).

Friendship can best be compared to the relationship between siblings; friends are brothers in spirit. And just like the relationship between brother and sister is mostly based on memories, friendships are sustained through shared memories which in turn creates mutual trust and belief. Without self-evident ties to another, friendship is the most difficult relationship to maintain. Friends have to care for each other otherwise the mental connection between the two will fade (Tönnies 2001; Cahman 1995).

This last form of community will be used as central point of this dissertation. Hence community will now be used interchangeable for community of spirit.

Community	Society
Characteristics	
• Emotional, personal bond • Brother/Sister relationship, membership on the basis of origin • Membership includes all aspects of personality • Full solidarity with members • Emotional dependency • Social consensus • Shared beliefs, virtues, customs	• Rational bond • Citizen, formal member, contractual partner • Membership is limited to single aspects of personality, anonymity possible • Membership through (contractual) agreements, entry/exit possible • Contractual rights and duties
Examples	
• Family, Relatives • Ethnic or religious communities • Traditional, agrarian, feudal societies • States based on the idea of nation, religion, ethos	• Contracts • Organizational forms of states, democratic, industrial societies • Citizenship independent of personal identity

Table 1: Characteristics of community and society, based on Max Weber (Weber 2002; Cahman 1995)

2.4 Types of community

So much has been written on the concept of community that it is mere impossible to agree on one definition. Hillery (1955) analysed in his study the various definitions of 'Community' and found 94 different definitions by authors; a total of 16 concepts were employed by the definers.

On a first level Hillery divides existing definitions into generic and rural communities. His argument for including this type of community in a search for a generic community is a compromise to include existing definitions. Except for omitting some of the categories, the classification of the definitions of "rural community" duplicates that for the community in general.

Within all 94 definitions of community there is an extend of disagreement. Not all of the definitions can be correct; community cannot be all of the definitions in their entirety. However there in extend of agreement amongst the majority of definitions. Out of the 96 definitions, 69 agree that social interaction, area and a common tie or ties are commonly found in community life. Even when excluding definitions from studies that focused on rural communities, more than two-thirds if the definitions maintain that social interaction and area are to be considered in studying the community.

Hillery's study is of importance because it pooled all research on community up to this point and created a much more detailed classification of community. Most research up to today use Hillery's classification. Gusfield (1975) was the first to adopt this distinction between two main schools of communities. Communities are either location-based communities (such as neighbourhoods, cities, towns,...) or centred around a relation without the direct influence of a location. Such communities of interest are forming around hobbies, clubs, social topics or religion.

2.4.1 Communities of Place

Community of place refers to communities where members live or work in close proximity with each other such as a neighbourhood, a town or a workplace. Communities are naturally created out of a universal need to cooperate together to achieve certain goals.

However the simple fact that people live together does not guarantee for the existence of a community. Modern cities with anonymous neighbourhoods are the best example for this fact. Durkheim (1964) noted that communities are increasingly developed around interests and skills and less around location.

2.4.2 Communities of Interest

Communities of Interest are usually centred around a specific subject or common interest such as a hobby (cycling, fishing, football,...), a social interest (parenting, financial advice,...), a specific product or brand (cars, motorcycles, sportswear,...) or even can be based around a location (a restaurant, pub, bar, cinema,...).

People are so intensely involved in their common interest that it evolves into a 'brotherhood' with shared values, beliefs, rituals, etc. These bonds can be particularly well seen in groups which are 'extreme', whose values are at the fringe of society such as skydivers (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993) or motorcyclists (Schouten and McAlexander 1995).

As described by Hillery (1955) even for non-location based communities area or place plays an important part in the way the community functions. It acts as a meeting place for the community members and enables them to

establish relationships to each other. The definition of the word 'location' is here open to all kinds of actual or virtual places.

While research has focused on location based communities most researchers agree with McMillan and Chavis in the fact that results from location based research are equally valid for communities of interest. This has been confirmed through a study by Obst et. al. 2002b.

The focus of this thesis is the creation and development of virtual communities which can be classed as a community of interest rather than a community of place.

A good and modern example of a community of interest is a community that centres around a product or brand. These brand communities have become increasingly popular in a post-modern world. Even if consumers do not connect with others on basic location-based criteria or similar political ideas they have found other ways to feel connected to others.

As described through the idea of neo-tribalism, there is a trend of individuals to seek communities even within a post-modern society. The concept of ideals is scarce in a post-modern society so the consumer will turn to what he knows best, to what is significant to him and to what defines him: consumption.

Brand communities, either naturally developed or constructed through a firm, have been centre of many research projects (O'Guinn 1991; Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 2002).

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) defined a brand community as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social

relationships among users of a brand". Brand community consists of 3 distinct elements:

- Consciousness of kind
- Shared rituals and traditions
- A sense of moral responsibility

These elements are similar to the main elements of McMillan and Chavis (1986) concept of sense of community.

Brand communities are special in a way that the concept embraces post-modernism. According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) the post-modern consumer is aware of the constructed environment he is participating in and self-reflexive about issues of authenticity and identity. In their study they analysed a neighbourhood of different brand communities around car brands. In their findings they observe that "members know [the car] isn't the most important thing in their lives – not even close – but neither is it trivial. They know they share a social bond around a branded, mass-produced commodity, and believe it is reasonable to do so". Hence there is no less value in a community that organizes around commercial objects.

Brand communities therefore might very well represent the truest approximation to the ancient Greek notion of community, with both members and creators of the community shaping its structure and future in a "complex and fascinating dance of social construction" (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001).

2.5 Sense of Community

Due to the complexity of communities it is difficult to determine one single element that guarantees the success of a community. It would be dangerous to define success based on a single factor such as number of participants or revenue. It could be that most of the participants just join the community and then never come back because a specific requirement or need is not met. Similarly revenue gives a feedback on a specific point in time and does not indicate the health and loyalty of the community in comparison to a competitor.

Communities are determined by area, common ties and social interaction (Hillery, 1955) and literature suggests that any research on virtual communities will benefit from research on existing, physical communities (Rothaermel & Sugiyama, 2001).

When studying communities that are based on a common interest rather than a physical proximity the boundaries of these communities of interest become hard to define. Without the physical boundaries of a neighbourhood it becomes difficult to distinguish between the social group, the community behaviour and the feeling of being "a community" - a feeling that is called Sense of Community (SoC).

The term 'Sense of Community' has been coined by McMillan and Chavis who reviewed all research that had been done to that point on community and developed the first theory of community feeling which to date has remained the main theoretical concept and is most widely used and accepted by community researchers (Obst et. al . 2002a).

Sense of community is defined as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group and a shared faith the members needs will be me through their commitment to be together" (McMillan and Chavis, 1986, p 9).

Sense of Community is both a process and a concept. It has been studied and analysed for both place-based communities and communities of interest.

2.5.1 Elements of Sense of Community

Even though the study by McMillan and Chavis (1986) analysed a community of neighbours the concept of Sense of Community has been widely adopted and revised by other authors to explain communities (Casaló et. al. 2010; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001).

McMillan and Chavis suggested that there are four distinct elements that define a community: (1) membership, (2) influence, (3) integration and fulfilment of needs and (4) emotional connection.

Membership

Membership describes the feeling that someone is part of a group, one has invested part of oneself and has therefore a right to belong (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). To infer from this definition there must be a group of people that is member, and a group that is not. Membership therefore has clear **boundaries** that provide intimacy within the community (boundaries) and is the basis for trust (Markus et. Al. 2000; Greer, 2000; Phillips, 1996).

In communities boundaries can be created in different ways either direct through an physical membership or indirect through intangible elements such as language, dress, rituals, history, holidays etc. McMillan and Chavis (1986)

call this a **common symbol system**. An example within the motorcycle sector is the community of Harley Davidson motorcyclists. In the close-knit community of motorcyclists, members of the Harley Davidson community have created a subculture and clearly distinguish themselves from other motorcyclists through the use of certain symbols such as black leather jackets and specific rituals (Schouten & McAlexander 1995).

Boundaries also add to the topic of membership the pain of rejection (from membership) and the pride of acceptance in a community (as a member) which are strong sources of bonding within the community. As a result a accepted member will feel **emotional safety** from the intimacy of the in-group and a **sense of belonging and identification** with the group.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) argue that communities that require some sort of work or investment for the membership by overcoming the boundaries will have higher value for the member. This **personal investment** in the community creates pride in being a member and membership will become more meaningful.

Influence

Communities, by their very nature, influence on its members to achieve uniformity and conformity as this indicates the cohesiveness of the group. McMillan and Chavis (1986) make the case that within a close-knit community both, superficially contrary forces operate together concurrently (McLaughlin et. Al., 1995).

Integration and fulfilment of needs

It is in the human nature to search the membership of a group to fulfil a need. Therefore for a long-lasting community relationship it is important to maintain an inter-group relationship that is rewarding for the individual.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) identify several reinforcers for positive individual-group relationships such as:

- Status of membership

- Success of the community as a whole and in certain tasks

- Competence and capability of other members

While status and group success certainly are factors that retain positive inter-community atmosphere it is **competence** that makes members want to participate and mainly stay part of the community. Rappaport (2000) suggests that members of a community are attracted to communities that offer them a fulfilment of needs through special competence. He calls this a person-environment fit which is archived through a) the need the member is seeking and b) through a set of **shared values**. Research on communities (Jones 1997) has shown that within communities one can identify a set of similar needs, priorities, and goals among its members. McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggest that through collaborating a community can better satisfy these needs and goals.

Shared Emotional Connection

Shared emotions are basis for any strong community. Shared emotions are constructed through a shared history or through shared events which will result in stronger bonds within the community. McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002) analysed the influence of events on brand communities and

concluded that interpersonal bonds in communities can be strengthened by facilitating shared customer experiences.

These closer bonds are made through a variety of factors (McMillan & Chavis 1986):

- The more people interact the more likely they are to become close – contact hypothesis.

- The more positive the experience and interaction the greater the bond – quality of interaction.

- Success and closure in events strengthens the bond.

- The more important an event is for those involved, the greater is the bond for the community.

- Investment – either personal or physical investment in the community. The more time or energy the member invests in the community the stronger the emotional connection.

- The way either honour or humiliation is presented in front of the community has an effect on the attractiveness of the community for the individual.

- Members of communities might develop a "spiritual bond", describing a state of mind that is common in all members. Even though this is often referred to religious communities, all communities have the ability to develop a "spiritual bond".

Dynamics within and among the elements

According to McMillan and Chavis sub-elements of the four main elements (membership, influence, fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection) work together and create the four main elements that shape the community. Most sub-elements fit together in a "circular, self-reinforcing way" such as the common symbol system creates boundaries which then create a feeling of intimacy which will allow members to invest themselves personally.

To explain the dynamics among the four main elements McMillan and Chavis researched how the elements work amongst each other on the examples of the university, the neighbourhood, the youth gang and the kibbutz. While all these communities are build on the four elements, importance of the elements is different for every community. The elements build a framework for comparing and contrasting different communities.

McMillan and Chavis also highlight that Sense of Community is not a static feeling. Communities change over time through changing values and needs that are affected via the media, economy, professions, etc.

To summarize communities are based on four main elements which are developed through a set of sub-elements. Depending on the type of community these elements might have different weighting however strong communities are those that "offer members positive ways to interact, important events to share, ways to resolve them positively, opportunities to honour members, opportunities to invest in the communities and opportunities to experience a spiritual bond among members" (McMillan and Chavis 1986).

2.5.2 Sense of Community in Virtual Communities

Most research written on online communities do not mention research on traditional communities at all. Their factors for a successful community are very superficial and even those few exceptions that highlight the results of research undertaken on traditional community development do not make use of these factors in their analysis of online community development.

Spearheading the validation of McMillan and Chavis model is the research conducted by Obst et. al. (2002a, b and c). In a series of research papers Obst et. al. compare different scales of SoC, the difference between virtual communities to 'offline' communities and the influence of choice on various communities. McMillan and Chavis model of sense of community (SoC) has been widely recognized as leading theory to describe motivation and participation in traditional communities.

While most research using the SoC theory has targeted location-based communities, McMillan and Chavis (1986) themselves argue that their findings should be equally valid for communities of interest. Since the advent of the Internet several researchers have used McMillan and Chavis model and have taken it to the test for virtual communities. One of the first to run a series of research projects on SoC in an online community were Obst, Zinkiewicz and Smith (2002a). Their study focuses on a online community of interest of science fiction fans. They concluded that "...no significant differences emerged in the PSOC[2] [...] Thus, strong PSOC can exist in the absence of geographic proximity, even in the absence of regular face-to-face contact" (Obst et. al. 2002a).

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[2]PSOC = Psychological Sense of Community

2.5.3 Summary

Several theories can be applied to explain community success. Sense of Community by McMillan and Chavis is the most well-researched, most adopted and most tested theory. Subsequently other authors have adopted Sense of Community for the virtual world and Sense of Virtual Community is equally well tested and adopted.

Within this research Sense of Community is used as a leading theoretical framework on community success. Its four elements of membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection directly translate into factors that community creators should be aware of when creating a virtual community platform.

2.6 Virtual communities

With the advent of the internet virtual communities have become more and more the centre of a broad field of research (A. Armstrong & J. I. Hagel 1995; J. Hagel & A. G. Armstrong 1997; A. Armstrong & J. I. Hagel n.d.; Jenny Preece 2000; Jenny Preece 2001; Koh & Y. Kim 2004; Jan Marco Leimeister et al. 2006; Casaló et al. 2010a). The first use of the term *virtual community* appeared in a 1987 article written by Howard Rheingold for *The Whole Earth Review*.

The first virtual community are likely to have emerged from online bulletin boards The bulletin board 'The Well' is one of the earliest and extensively researched online communities (Reingold 1993, Smith 1992) – it still labels itself as the birthplace of the online community movement.

In *The Virtual Community* (1993), Rheingold expanded on his initial article and describes a virtual community "as a community of people sharing common interests, ideas, and feelings over the Internet or other collaborative networks" (p. 5) He goes on to describe that "virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace".

Rheingold always very poetically describes the virtual community as a community of interest or spirit, facilitating modern technology and using the online world as meeting place. However throughout the literature there are different attempts to categorize by different characteristics such as the location of the interaction (Virnoche & Marx 1997), the purpose of the community (Spaulding 2010; Lee & Cheung 2004; Krishnamurthy 2005) or the fulfilment of special customer needs (A. Armstrong & J. I. Hagel 1995).

This discordance can be seen when Fernback and Thompson (1995) stress the importance of a specific place for the existence of a virtual community. Virtual communities are "social relationships forged in cyberspace through repeated contact within a specified boundary of place". Similarly Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) view virtual communities as "mediated social spaces in the digital environment that allow groups to form and be sustained primarily through ongoing communication processes". Bagozzi and Dholakia's and Fernback and Thompson's definitions both encompasses both the process of creation of the community and the process of sustaining it while leaving it open to what technology is utilized and the size of the community.

On the other side Smith (1992) puts very little emphasis on the place itself and describes a virtual community as "a set of ongoing many-sided interactions that occur predominantly in an through computers linked via telecommunications networks".

Armstrong and Hagel (1997) on the other side focus on the commercial aspect and opportunities of virtual communities. The defined virtual communities as

> "groups of people with common interests and needs who come together online. Most are drawn by the opportunity to share a sense of community with like-minded strangers, regardless of where they live. But virtual communities are more than just a social phenomenon. What starts off as a group drawn together by common interests ends up as a group with critical mass of purchasing power, partly thanks to the fact that communities allow members to exchange information on such things as a product's price and quality. (p. 143)"

The issue with Armstrong and Hagels definition is that it does not encompass all types of virtual community such as communities of empathy or support.

Leimeister et. al. (2006) propose a multidisciplinary definition of virtual communities based on Preece's (2000) work:

> "A VC consists of people who interact together socially on a technical platform. The community is build on a common interest, a common problem, or a common task of its members that is pursued on the basis of implicit and explicit codes of behaviour. The technical platform enables and supports the community's interaction and help to build trust and a common feeling among the members" (Leimeister, Sidiras, Krcmar 2006, p. 279).

All these definitions share some basic elements necessary for communities such as the basic fulfilment of a need, a shared interest or goal. The next chapter will analyse the elements of virtual communities in more detail.

2.6.1 Elements of virtual communities

A wide variety of researchers and self-proclaimed writers have analysed the field of community design and published "how-to" guides of setting up an online community in only a few stages (Kawasaki 2006; Godwin 2006). However the process of creating, developing and sustaining a virtual community is very complex. This chapter is not meant to give a full and encompassing 'building manual' for successful online communities it rather attempts to highlight areas of interest, motivation and barriers for participation in virtual communities.

Ultimately any community creator would like to know the success elements of virtual community but especially with the term 'virtual community' describing various types of community it becomes increasingly difficult to determine 'success' factors. The wide range of different publications stems from the different focus each discipline has, different definitions and different categorization models for communities. It is therefore that publications mention various different determinants of community success (Koh et al. 2007; Leimeister & Krchmar 2004; Lin 2006).

Lin (2006) mentions 7 elements in total (Information quality, system quality, trust, social usefulness, sense of belonging, member satisfaction, member loyalty) while Leimeister, Sidiras and Krcmar (2006) list a total of 26 different success factors of virtual communities.

Most research on virtual community success tries to single out one or a few elements and analyse them in more details. Nonnecke and Preece (2000) analysed the specific value of inactive community members while Ginsburg and Weisband (2004) focused their research on the phenomenon of 'volunteerism' as an important element of online community success.

Jones (1997) focuses on the technology aspect of virtual communities and concludes that the form a virtual community takes on is dependent on the social context; the technology only acts as a method. The solution to this dilemma is to view technology as prerequisite for the development of certain virtual communities and not as their determinant (Fletcher 1995).

Creators and community managers should invest time into researching the target user and the social contexts. Then on the basis of this information the suitable technology and elements for the community should be chosen (Preece 2001). Each community is unique in its approach to addressing its purpose.

The following chapters will gather the elements of virtual communities found across the literature and is categorized into five 'themes': Technology, Business Model; Building Trust; Developing Memberbase and Community Involvement.

Technology

There are a number of prerequisites that are necessary for a virtual community to be able to be classed as a virtual space in line with Jones's (1997) minimal conditions for virtual settlements. These features include the ability to send and receive messages, message storage and filtering and media richness. Other elements include the **reliability and performance** of the platform

Key barriers to participation in online communities are access to the appropriate technology (PC, Internet,...), the appropriate skills and usability (Casaló et. al. 2010). With the boom of mobile technology and smartphone it is advisable to cater for those emerging technologies. Intentions to participate

in online communities can be reinforced through removing all technological barriers and improved usability which will increase the usefulness experienced by the members (they will have to invest less to fulfil their needs). Ease of use enhances the attitudes towards participating in the community (Casaló et. al. 2010). **Usability** includes all factors that define how members interact with technology and how technology can enable them to fulfil their needs in the virtual community. Usability is attained through elements such as easy page design and website architecture, page navigation, search functionalities etc. (Andrews et al. 2001). Additionally Leimeister and Sidiras (2004) recommend that users should be equipped with different options to **personalise** their experience within the online community (such as their own personal profile page or the layout of the community) and should be encouraged to use these features to make the community 'their own'.

One of the greatest problems in virtual communities is fading back or withdrawing from the community (Haythornthwaite et al. 2000, Johnson 2001) thus facilitating involvement and interaction is very important, especially in the early stages of the community development. This issue can somewhat be minimized through supportive scaffolding and technical support. '**Supportive scaffolding**' refers to the technical options used to support the virtual community. These options are usually self-help pages, FAQs or guidelines for new members placed in various prominent places.

In a study about online learning environments Ricketss, Wolfe, and Powers (2000) highlight that supportive scaffolding should not overload the students with too many additional links.

Business Model

Even though usability is a key part of community success it is not enough to merely put the technology in place. Technology is merely the 'house' to a 'home' (Jones 1997) and communities that focus too much on technology are bound to fail. Virtual communities are places to socialize and researchers and community organizers need to understand social interaction and need to design for sociability accordingly. Hence creators should have a clear understanding of the **purpose** of the community and share this purpose with existing and potential members (Maloney-Krichmar & Preece 2005; Leimeister et al. 2005; Algesheimer et al. 2005; Kim 2000). Iriberri and Leroy (2009) recommend to state the purpose on the community homepage so that new members can decide if they want to participate.

Communities will attract certain members depending on their specific needs. While a community can be very interesting for a specific target group, other users might find it not attractive at all. Specialized, niche communities are currently rising while the big established communities like Facebook that target all audiences start to decline (Warner 2013). This idea has been labelled '**focus**' by most researchers working on online community elements (Andrews et al. 2001; Armstrong & Hagel 1995; de Valck et al. 2009; Kozinets 1999). Focusing the development of the community with the user in mind is an important factor of community success .All functionalities and tools must be chosen with the user in mind (Dholakia et al 2004). This is especially important for organization-sponsored communities where the company has to make sure it fulfils the users needs and not its own. The evolution of those needs should be constantly analysed (Casaló et. al. 2010b). The strength of the identification with the virtual community is the degree to which an individual sees himself as part of the community. Perceived identification with

the community is the result of shared values amongst the community as described by McMillan & Chavis (1986) in their study about Sense of Community and perceived similarities with other community members and dissimilarities with non-members (Algesheimer et al. 2005).

Content is one of the main reasons for users to join a virtual community. Andrews et. al. (2001) analysed resistance to online interaction within a community of mid-life career changers. When asked what might increase their interest in joining an online community, the top choices involved access to specific people for topic related reasons and information about career alternatives and success stories. Creators of communities have to change their mindset when it comes to content for virtual communities. It is not enough to simply digitize existing content for the online audience; tailor-made content that aims towards the specific interests and challenges of the community member is necessary (Armstrong & Hagel 1995).

Content should also extend out of the community the same as advertising does. It will increase brand loyalty (member of the community will have seen this content before or even helped creating it) and will attract more members to the community. Community organisers should also have a strategy in place that defines the balance between organiser created content and user generated content.

One of the most important elements for the long term sustainability of online communities is the **revenue or funding model**. Even small, privately run virtual communities can quickly become very expensive due to server or maintenance costs. Hence community creators should always be aware of the revenue model of their online community. Unfortunately revenue has not been picked up by many authors of academic research on online communities. Armstrong and Hagel (1995) were the first to break with the

tradition of seeing virtual communities as purely sociological phenomenon and identified it as a business model. Today virtual communities are mostly socio-economic models. Community members that are drawn together by a common interest create an environment in which transactions take place and members contribute to creating value ((Hummel & Lechner 2002).

Ginsburg and Weisband (2004) analysed an internet chess club that runs a successful virtual community business. They highlight possible business models such as subscription based access, ad-hoc based model where members can buy i.e. premium content or advertisement based business models.

Building Trust

Trust is a key driver in communities and has been analysed by various researchers (Andrews 2002; Blanchard and Markus 2004; Hummel and Lechner 2002; Kim 2000; Koh and Kim 2000; Leimeister et al. 2005; Leimeister and Krcmar 2004). Those users that come to learn put trust in the community to provide the information and relevance of that information. Community members have to trust the other members that they are all working towards the same goal.

Trust is typically established through repeated interactions between trustor and trustee. The actors get to know each other and are able to predict what to expect, trust is established if this expectation is met.

Trust can also be established prior or outside of the virtual community. When the virtual community is based on some sort of existing social network the virtual community users know what to expect from each other. In a study Ardichivili et al. (2003) analysed that members of the Caterpillar community had already established relationships through the workplace and work within

the same organisational culture. This in turn improved participation and trust between members of the virtual community of practice (Ardichivili et al. 2003).

To establish this environment of interpersonal trust there are a number of elements that an online community can establish to facilitate the development of trust. Members usually choose to stay **anonymous** when participating in a virtual community (Hummel and Lechner 2002; Leimeister et al. 2005). Members of the communities typically have to create a detailed profile before they can participate and various private information is shared thus making **privacy protection** a key trust factor. Users trust the community provider to keep their information save and secure. However repeated problems with major networking site such as Facebook.com either when it comes to securing private information from a third party or using the private information in a non-agreed way has lead to more and more privacy, and trust concerns and have decelerated growth of these communities (Iriberri & Leroy 2009).

Trust also plays a vital role in the relationship between member and community provider. Business-organized communities have to be **transparent** about the purpose of the community and make no false claims as to who they are. This would negatively impact on 'trust' and could be the end of a community (Andrews 2002; Andrews et al. 2001). Leimeister and Sidiras (2004) highlight the importance of **neutrality** if the community creators decide to present offers to the community. The creators need to be transparent about the offer and remain neural when choosing and presenting these offers to the community. If the creators appear to present offers to the community that seemingly only benefit the creators it will negatively impact on the trust element.

Community operators can establish trust by clearly laid out guidelines. **Rules and policies** have a huge impact upon the creation and development of a community. The concept of rules has been well-researched for the virtual community (A. Armstrong & J. I. Hagel 1995; Blanchard & Markus 2004; Krishnamurthy 2005; Wilson & Peterson 2002) and have also been mentioned in McMillan and Chavis original work on Sense of Community (1986).

Ardichivili, Page, & Wentling (2003) analysed a virtual community of practice by the company Caterpillar and found that rules, norms and policies as expressed and lived in a organizational culture are beneficial for the development of community participation. Rules help to establish trust within the community users. Members can predict the actions and behaviour of other members even if they have never met them (McMillan and Chavis 1986) thus starting to trust the new member to follow a set of defined rules.

Rules and norms can also be identified for motivation – some members of the group will reach a status where their influence has gown and they be able to dictate and control rules and regulations. This would also be an indicator for a developing community of practice once members of the community start to control rules and norms or even expand on them. In an advanced stage community organizers should equip community members with tools to enforce group norms and rules. Community members will then, without moderator or administrator interference, point out those rules to each other (De Valck et al. 2009). As much as this is an indicator of an evolving community of practice it is also an opportunity for community organizers to facilitate the development.

Administration and moderation is one part of the supportive scaffolding that supports communities and creates trust between the member and the

platform. The role of administration and moderation will change over the development of the community. While administration will be heavily needed at the launch of the community (in the settlement phase) it will be contra productive when the aim is to achieve a community of practice. Palloff and Pratt (2001) talk about the importance of 'fine-tuning' discussions, a mentor or a moderator should act as a guide or facilitator, who leads a discussion in the right direction. However his role is far more wide-spread. The role of a moderator or coach is to open discussions about goals of the community and to evaluate if those goals were met (Rogers 2000). Koh and Kim (2004) speak about the same element and call it leaders' enthusiasm. A passionate leader helps to build relationships, cares for new members and motivates other members to be highly committed to the community activities.

According to Andrews et. al. (2001) non-members consider visiting an online community if it is associated with an entity they personally recognize as reputable. Those communities are also seen as more trustworthy and credible. This is also expressed by Kim (2000) who describes this phenomenon as '**trademark**'.

In summary time plays an important role in the development of trust. Trust is build and earned over time will eventually arise through "regular, honest and cooperative behaviour based on positive performance and truthful future guarantees for interaction" (Preece 2000). In a study by Andrews, Preece and Turoff (2001) the researchers analysed a set of participants of a mid-life career change community who although internet-savy, were not a member of an online community. Andrews et. al. discovered that 'lack of experience' was the main deferrer of participation. This lack of experience is directly linked to the inability to identify with whom they are communicating, the lack of privacy and a general presumption that others can not be trusted in electronic media of any kind.

Developing Memberbase

Communities only function with a number of participating members, which makes **attracting members** a key element of community building. Andrews et. al. (2001) asked the participants of their study about the general resistance to online interaction. Participants themselves suggested that the best way to learn about the community is from established and respected groups such as non-profit self help groups, professional organisations, universities and trade associations. Second most given answer to attracting new members was recommendations from friends or someone they know. One of the main motivations to participate in communities is the fulfilment of needs. Research (Casaló et. al. 2010) suggests that community administrators should promote the benefits of participating in the community to boost participation. Promoting the community externally will increase members perception that the community is popular and trendy which will boost status and reputation amongst members which in turn will attract new members (Casaló et. al. 2010). Ultimately the aim when attracting members is to reach **critical mass**, a point where member number and participation is self-sustaining. A popular example of reaching critical mass is the online platform reddit (www.reddit.com) which today has over 35 million active visitors. The founders confessed that in the start up of the community hundreds of fake accounts were used to give the appearance of popularity and to attract new members (Johnston 2012). Critical mass for online communities is still not a very well researched field but Jones and Rafaeli (2000) analysed the effect of critical mass and found that the upper limits of sustainable communication depend on the type of technology (Hiltz and Zhang 2003).

Even if there is a large number of members in an online community very often it can be observe that communities show no interaction and participation. There is a large body of research that analyses the **motivations to participate** in virtual communities (Ardichivili et al. 2003; Tonteri et al. 2011; Shao 2009). In their study from 2000 McLure & Faraj identify a variety of reasons from boosting self-esteem to altruistic and conformist considerations for individuals to participate and share knowledge in online communities. This is also supported by McMillan and Chavis study (1986) where the status of being a member coincides with the element of integration and fulfilment of needs. Tonteri et. al. (2011) focused on the individual level antecedents to comply existing research on community level. The focus was on the processes of reading and writing messages in an online communities. Reading messages is mainly driven by cognitive benefits such as obtaining knowledge but in a wider sense it helps the individual's status by becoming an expert. Fulfilling the wish to obtain knowledge and helping the individual to become an expert will in turn create a relationship between individual and the community as information source. Tonteri et. al. (2011) observed a high sense of community even in those individuals that only used the community to acquire knowledge. Participation in writing messages stems from anticipated benefits of both social and personal integration. Tonteri et. al. And Shao (2009) argue that producing content in a online community is driven by self-actualization and fulfilment of social-interaction needs.

In a study by Ardichivili et al. (2003) focusing on a professional community of practice the findings are that members of the community view their knowledge as a public good, belonging to the whole organization. In this setting members feel a motivation and moral obligation to 'give back' and

participate in the community. Ardichivili et al. (2003) link this willingness to share information with the very open and supportive cultural culture.

Individuals also can be reserved about participating and sharing in an online community. They fear criticism and inaccuracy. Users might feel that their information is not particularly interesting or relevant. This is where trust between members and trust towards the community as a unit becomes important. Within a community full of stranger the member tends to put his trust into the community as a whole rather than single members (Ardichivili et al. 2003). He trusts the community provider to establish a fair and open space for participation and to protect him from negative consequences.

There are a number of barriers to participation that will have a negative impact on overall motivation to participate in the community. Various researchers (Karau & Williams 1993; McLure & Faraj 2000) describe 'information hoarding' or 'social loafing' which describes the effect that individuals in a group purposefully withhold information. This is due to the additive nature of group tasks where the group output is greater than the individuals contribution. Individuals do not feel like their contribution is valued and will withhold contributions to the group. Social loafing can be reduced by ensuring that **individuals contributions** are noted and valued by providing some form of reward or punishment for participation or lack thereof (Nolan et al. 2007). This could be a point based system (+/-), the invitation to further group tasks or higher levels of influence or even (as a possible punishment) the exclusion from the community. Due to the competitive nature of online communities it is important to retain important members and the **loyalty of members** should be highlighted. Rewarding loyal members and contributors with special capabilities, badges, or positions within the community gives those members social recognition and status that other members aspire to achieve one day (Ginsburg and Weisband 2004; Andrews 2002).

Several authors (Schlosser 2005; Reingold 1993; A. Armstrong & J. I. Hagel 1995; J. Hagel & A. G. Armstrong 1997) mention the different levels of participation in an online community. According to literature the level of participation is expressed by the membership roles or stages. **Membership roles** reach from lurkers to sporadic contributors to active users. Nielsen (2006) proposes that member participation follows a "90-9-1" distribution, describing that 90% of users only read and observe but never contribute to the conversation (called Lurkers), 9% of members contribute from time to time and only 1% are active members that will participate in the community on a regular basis.

However this dichotomy is far too simple. It does not account for the development a user will undergo during his membership. Preece (2001) analysed the characteristics of lurkers and the reason why they choose not to participate and concluded that lurking is a common activity in online groups. Preece compares lurkers to the passivity of TV viewers and attaches a value to the membership of these non-participating users. Even if they never participate, they pure existence gives the community credit in terms of total member numbers (Preece 2000).

However most lurkers undergo a development and lurking is for most users the first step to becoming a full community member (Gunnarsson 1997). Members use lurking behaviour to learning the ways of the community by simply observing and listening to the community. Lurking can be an easy way of learning about the community and learning the technology behind the community without putting oneself at risk (Preece 2001). This is especially valid for support communities that have to focus on gaining the users trust in the first place.

For new members to any virtual community knowledge about the environment, other users and rules and regulations will accumulate over time. Users focus will change over time as well: While they might have entered the community to find information, later on participation in the community is more likely to be increasingly affiliative (De Valck et al. 2009).

Membership roles are therefore most likely a trajectory that changes over time and various researchers have developed more comprehensive membership models. Kim (2000) describes five membership roles based on increasing level of participation and power in the community while Kozinets (1999) developed four roles that are based on the interest of a member at a given time.

Community Involvement

Traditional definitions of online communities often make no mention of interactions outside of the virtual place. However members are likely to know each other in real world and use the virtual community for convenience or because they want to have a discussion on a platform that is open to other members. Especially with brand communities it becomes less and less appropriate to speak of either a offline or an online community (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001). Boundaries between online and offline activities disappear making the online community the place to organize **real-life events** and a place to reminisce and share photos and memories from the offline event. Wilson and Peterson (2002) call these types of communities "fluid communities". Members will meet face-to-face sometimes, other times the interactions are online.

(Blanchard & Markus 2004; Blanchard & Markus 2002a) have identified that virtual community members often use multiple communication methods including face-to-face meetings, telephone and email. Virtual and real life communities coexist and do impact on each other. Offline or real life interactions managed and organised for virtual community members have been researched and have been proven to increase consumer commitment (Casaló et. al. 2010b) and strengthen online sense of community as well (Koh & Y. Kim 2004; McMillan & Chavis 1986). Koh and Kim argue that offline meetings can complement the low social presence inherent in most computer-mediated environments and can strengthen the relationship building process of a virtual community. In offline meetings members can deepen relationships which will increase trust online as well.

For online focused communities real life events can be accompanied or supplemented by **online events** to achieve the same goals of building trust and creating a common history (Andrews et al. 2002, Williams and Cothrel 2000).

Real-live events directly translate to increased trust and participation within the community as those members that participated in the event will be able to share their experience online. Over time they translate into a set of shared events and tradition, a **common symbol system**. McMillan and Chavis (1986) were the first to identify a common symbol system for its importance as factor for the development of a sense of community. Its main purpose is to establish trust between members and between the individual member and the community platform or organisation behind the community. So called "trust-marks" (Durkin et al. 2003) and can take the form of formal badges, points or star ratings. Prime examples for these trust marks are Amazon or Ebay where trust between members is established by a percentage rating of positive interaction (buying/selling) experience compared to negative ones

(Kozinets 1999). This way trust even between unfamiliar members of the community can easily be established. Only those that are fully integrated in the community will be able to wear (badges, dress-code,...), celebrate (holidays, ceremonies, celebrations,...) or know (rituals, language,...) the symbol system. This way a common symbol system establishes boundaries to the outside of the community and creates a sense of belonging and security for those that are a member of the community (Schouten & McAlexander 1995).

A common symbol system translates to a virtual community in various ways. Key boundaries to participation is the membership which although more than often free to join, still holds a barrier to those who want to be a member. Sometimes membership is coupled to other prerequisites or qualifications, can be by invite-only or can be chargeable. Once inside the community members often use badges or stickers to show their membership or use a special language or acronyms. Over time the community will develop its own rituals based on past events. Those who have shared these events will be more accepted by other members (McMillan & Chavis 1986).

As already discussed membership roles can change over time as users get more and more involved in the community. One of the main motivators for community involvement can be either the search for knowledge or sharing knowledge – McMillan and Chavis (1986) cover this in the element of integration and fulfilment of needs. Therefore having a balance of those who search for knowledge and those who are willing to provide knowledge is necessary. Dholakia et al (2004) found in their research that information seekers only find the community useful if they find another user with the complementary motivation of providing that information. Hence communities need to find a balance between the various types of users so that the "purposive goals of most participants are achieved" (p. 259).

Wenger (1998) suggests that those who search for knowledge will feel 'in debt' and obliged to 'give back' to the community. The apprentice will go through a series of procedures or time before he has acquired enough information to actively participate in the community. The time invested into gathering the information and learning the ways of the community will in turn strengthen the relationship to other members. Members are more likely to stay with the community due to their investment. Therefore knowledge sharing becomes power and a way in which 'expert' members can exert influence. Expert members should be integrated more carefully into the community and given some key responsibilities. This **permeated control** will strengthen the bond between community and members and has been analysed by various researchers (Andrews et al. 2001, de Valck et al. 2009, Ginsburg and Weisband 2004, Kozinets 1999, Leimeister et al. 2004). McMillan and Chavis (1986) have identified influence as one of the four key elements of sense of community. Involving key members in the management of the community is an important element to sustainability. Ginsburg and Weisband (2004) describe this form of 'volunteerism' as the "key glue component to facilitate and orient members to access the tools best suited for their use patterns and attitudes" (pg. 8).

Once communities reach a certain number of users, participation can be hindered by the mass of users trying to interact at the same time. Key members are then often used to create and manage specific **subgroups** that divide the community into more manageable chunks (Williams and Cothrel 2000). Maloney-Krichmar and Preece (2005) analysed community dynamics in an online health community and concluded that "strong subgroup activity [is] a key factor in the stability and vitality of the community" (pg. 225). Subgroups have also been found by McMillan and Chavis (1986) in their study about the close-knit community of a kibbutz.

Finally, when it comes to further developing the community its the voice of the users that is most important. **Seeking feedback** is an easy and quick way to involve all kinds of members in the creation of the community. Influence on the community has been identified as one of the main elements of sense of community (Casaló et al. 2010A, 2010b; McMillan & Chavis 1986). Evolution of the virtual community platform should always be undertaken with focus on members needs (Kozinets 1999).

2.7 Stages in the development of virtual communities

Many successful communities from the early days of the Internet do still exist and thrive but others have failed to adopt and have consequently either ceased to exist (AOL) or are struggling (MySpace). One of the earliest virtual communities 'The Well' has developed over time from a single bulletin board and community to a range of communities and conferences. The positive development and growth of an online community can turn it into a multitude of virtual communities, an electronic village (Jones 1997; A. Armstrong & J. I. Hagel 1995).

When virtual communities develop there are certain key characteristics to observe:

- Numbers of members will increase
- Participation will increase
- Supportive scaffolding can decrease without decreasing participation
- Sustainability of community will increase
- Sense of Community will evolve

Little research has actually gone into finding out what triggers these events. The aim of the community designer is to use the existing technology to create a place that adheres to the interests of existing and potential members and covers all social needs.

Due to the complexity and variables of different types of virtual communities Leimeister et. al. (2006) suggests to focus on guidelines that can be adopted and influenced by community creators. Guidelines would help community creators to "decide the point in time in the life of the community when certain

design components are most relevant as opposed to others". The elements will need to be implemented at the right time to maximise their impact on the successful development of the community (Iriberri & Leroy 2009 pg. 11:2).

Design elements will be different depending whether the community is just starting up or at a mature stage.

For example Kim (2000) suggests nine general strategies for community design – i.e. giving the community a purpose – without giving a clear indication of how or in what order these principles should be applied. Palloff & Pratt (2001) see communities go through five stages of 'forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning'. Wenger et al. (2002) identified fives stages: potential, coalescing, maturing, stewardship and transformation.

Preece (2000) recommends a 3 staged model where "first to start the online community the gap between the familiar, comfortable and trusted face-to-face world and the new online world must be closed. Second to encourage early online interaction the online community capabilities must be introduced in a trust-building, non-threatening and nurturing manner. Third to move the online community into a self-sustaining mode, a balance between fact-finding (and problem solving) an empathetic support must be struck" (Preece 2000). Andrews (2002) proposes a similar three-stage model: starting the community, encouraging early online interaction and a self-sustaining interactive environment.

Preece's model takes into account the different development stages that a community will undergo over time. Community building strategies should not be static but should incorporate the differences over time when communities develop and should focus on the users needs in various stages of development. These stages should also include an initial inception stage before the actual set-up of the community. For example Andrews

(2001) jumps straight into the launch of the community without focusing on community prerequisites and potential members needs.

Malhotra et al. (1997) analysed the design and evolution of an online community of football fans over a period of 2 years and found a four stage model: inception, beginning of user involvement, interactivity and growth. Malhotra et al. concluded in their research that in order to motivate participation in online communities features must evolve according to members needs at each stage.

Squire and Johnson (2000) suggest that community creators and administrators should be aware of their changing audience and adjust their offerings accordingly. The constant development of communities leads to a development of language, customs, rituals, topics, membership levels over time.

Most of the literature found does only touch on the aspect of time when it comes to community development and success factors. In most articles the stages were mentioned in the discussion part of the research. Only very few studies have put the development of virtual communities in the focus of the work and "little effort has been made to document the online community development processes and provide guidelines to introduce success factors and design choices in an integrated and orderly way" (Iriberri and Leroy 2009, pg. 11:2).

One of the few studies that does analyse the process of the creating and developing virtual communities is Iriberri and Leroy's paper "Life-Cycle Perspective on Online Community Success" (2009). Iriberri and Leroy analysed a large number of articles on online community research (Andrews 2001; Blanchard & Markus 2002b; Blanchard 2008; Kim 2000; Koh & Y. Kim 2001; Leimeister & Krchmar 2004; Preece 2000; Preece 2001) and

developed their own comprehensive life cycle model based on the existing research. Iriberri and Leroy's model features five stages: inception, creation, growth, maturity and death. Their model is based on the widely adopted information systems life-cycle which gives the model further merit.

2.7.1 Virtual community life-cycles

This research project will adopt Iriberri and Leroy's 5 stage model for virtual community life-cycles. The benefit of this model is that it focuses on what (fulfil members needs) the system should do as opposed to how (technology) it does it. Even though Iriberri and Leroy's model does not incorporate all elements of virtual communities identified in the literature review the categorization in the five stages of virtual community development is very compelling.

"The nature of the life-cycle is not linear, but that in practice it is an iterative process. In an online community, the needs of users and management evolve along with the life-cycle stages of the community. Therefore developers need to understand the online community life-cycle and identify what users and management will need in each stage to develop the community and encourage participation" (pg. 11:13).
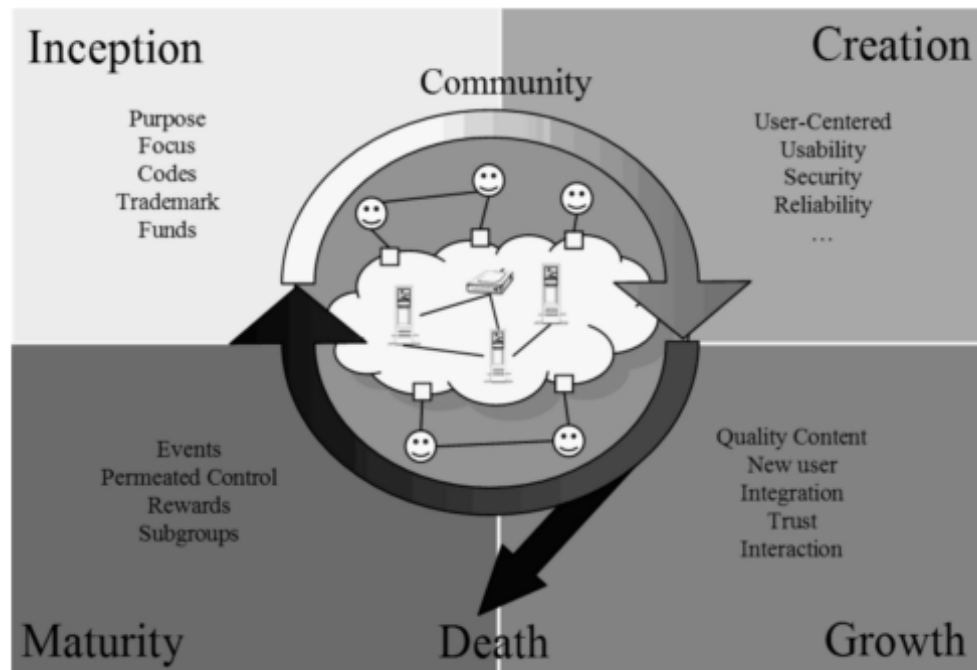
Illustration 1: Iriberri & Leroy, 2009

2.7.1.1 Iriberri and Leroy's life-cycle perspective on online communities

1. Inception Stage

In the inception stage the idea for a virtual community emerges. This can be either through individuals or groups that are looking to satisfy a need for information, support, recreation or relationships or in form of a business-idea that tries to monetise an identified need.

Inception describes the initial planning phase and includes factors that should be considered before even thinking about actually building the virtual community platform. Primarily the question for every community creator is

what the **purpose** of the community is. Purpose describes the reason for the existence of the community. Potential members should be able to identify the purpose of the community easily and in the case of organisation-sponsored communities the involvement of a backing company should be made clear on the homepage (Iriberri & Leroy 2009, Leimeister et al. 2005).

In the inception stage community organizers should **focus** on developing an in-depth understanding of the target user, his needs and the revenue model the community aims to achieve. Andrews et al. (2001) emphasizes that communities need to focus on its target audience. Wenger et al. (2002) also proposes to state the area of interest on the homepage to inform potential users of the focus of the community.

Before the community platform is created **codes of conduct** should be developed and set out. Codes of conduct include regulatory decision such as the age of members, the language used, conflict resolution etc. (Iriberri and Leroy 2009, Leimeister et Krcmar 2004, Preece 2000). For organisation-sponsored communities it is also important to set out who can advertise and how communication is moderated (Armstrong & Hagel 1995; Hagel & Armstrong 1997).

Armstrong and Hagel have put special emphasis on the inception phase as it is of high importance as any business organized virtual community will have deeper rooted business objectives linked to the development of a virtual community. These objectives can range from customer loyalty to feedback or product development to increased revenue. Even small, privately run communities need to think about the **revenue model**, as hosting costs can quickly become a burden as the community grows (Armstrong & Hagel 1995).

2. Creation Stage

The creation stage combines all factors that should be considered when choosing the **technology** and designing user interaction. Technology should be chosen to support the identified factors from the inception stage such as the targeted audience and the needs of the targeted members. Simply creating the platform for a virtual community does not guarantee the development of such.

In his paper Jones (1997) questions the viability of the term virtual community for all computer mediated communication. Rheingolds (1993) original definition raises many issues. His argument that "wherever computer mediated communication technology becomes available to people anywhere, they inevitably build communities with it" cannot be valid on the background of failing online 'communities'. Jones proposes the idea of a virtual settlement. Similar to the location-based community of a neighbourhood there a number of requirements that need to be fulfilled to establish a neighbourhood or place for individuals to meet. The mere existence of this space does not guarantee an automatic creation of a neighbourhood community. Similar to real-life neighbourhood, virtual communities are mainly places that might never evolve into real communities (Porter 2006).

This idea is also analysed by Harrison and Dourish (1996) who split up communities into 'space' (physical structure) and 'place' (socio-cultural structure). The space is like a house, and the concept and physical properties of a house does not make it a "home". The house is just an opportunity to fill it with life and make it a "home"; similar to the concept of virtual settlement (house) and virtual community (home). In order for the virtual settlement to qualify as a community it requires the presence of

belonging and attachment among the members, a sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Burroughs & Eby, 1998).

For any form of computer mediated communication (CMC) to be classed as virtual settlement Jones sets out a minimum set of conditions:

1. a minimum level of interactivity
2. a variety of communicators
3. a minimum level of sustained membership
4. a virtual common-public space where a significant portion of interactive computer mediated communication can occur.

These minimal conditions enables a better categorization of virtual settlements and to exclude single CMC technologies. An email list or a knowledge database will not be classed as virtual settlement because they lack the ability of interactivity with fellow subscribers. However single pieces of computer mediated technology can be combined to a virtual community. Unfortunately Jones idea of virtual settlement has not been adopted by many researchers and his model is still not tested on a bigger scale. While he manages to ring-fence virtual settlement off in comparison to standalone CMC tools, his idea is lacking a clear definition towards virtual communities.

When combining several settlement elements to a community platform the design of the community should be centred around the user and allow for an easy to use interface. Problems with navigating the community, may it be through a ill-designed interface or poor performance will frustrate the user and make him leave the community.

For initial members trust is the most important factor. As a new virtual community without a long history to look back on the community organizer should put much emphasis on trying to establish trust (Andrews, 2001;

Wenger & Snyder, 2000). As described in chapter 2.6.1 trust towards the community platform is established through different elements. A modern platform both in design and the software used shows a level of security that the user can trust in securing their private data. Additionally users themselves should have the ability to **secure private data** and the **ability to remain anonymous** to other users. Communities can also increase trust in the platform by being transparent about their aims and goal. **Identity persistence** helps to achieve trust as well. Even though members real-life identity remains anonymous all members can be identified by their usernames other members of the community will be able to recognize them and create a trail of history over time.

3. Growth Stage

In the growth phase the community will leave the initial phase of uncertainty and begin attracting a wider range of members. The community organiser should aim to attract new members that are different to the early adopters that have already joined the community.

New members will be attracted through a variety of reasons such as reputation (of the community) and content quality. New members will have a different mind-set and needs-profile than the initial members so the community organiser should always keep success factors from previous stages in mind.

At this point it is most likely that the community has already formed some form of shared history, roles and rituals. When new members are meant to be added to this stage it is important to make the integration as smooth as possible. Otherwise new members can feel discouraged and excluded from

the inner community. Pooling established members and having them act as guidance and patrons is a good way of improving integration. Offline events and meetings are another process of improving community building.

Growth will be slow at the start, scaffolding and encouraging interaction is necessary to make the community survive. A key concept to community growth is critical mass.

Critical mass describes the point where interaction has reached a point when enough members have created enough motivation and participation to attract more members and more participation. A virtuous cycle. Community adoption can be forecasted with the Bass diffusion model. It describes the process by which new products get adopted as an interaction between innovative early adopters and those who follow them.

4. Maturity Phase

Mature online communities have reached the point of critical mass and are self-sustained in terms of member influx and user-generated content. True sustainability is not achieved yet. Community organizers have still a lot of work to do.

Organisers should hand over tools or sub-forums to key members. This has two benefits: Key users will be rewarded for their loyalty and contributions and they will feel more valued by the community organizers. The other benefit is to decrease information overload. With the amount of members generating new content information overload will be reduced by creating sub-forums that focus on specific subtopics or are only available for specific users (i.e. split up by country or region).

Outside of these two key points organizers should focus on refreshing and reinventing the community through online events and offers. This gives the users a reason to stay with the community and visit it over and over again.

Iriberri and Leroy describe the maturity stage as a point where the critical mass is achieved and member generated content is created. At this point the researchers propose moving some responsibility over to users.

5. Failing Communities

Virtual communities can fail and die at any stage of the life cycle. There are several reasons for communities to fail. One major factor is that the motivations starting the inception phase have ceased to exist. Hence any community has to constantly reinvent itself and to stay in touch with its core members. In some cases, communities cease to exist because the need for the community has vanished (Wenger & Snyder 2000).

Generally the reason for a failing virtual community is the lack of one or more of the elements described in the previous chapter such as the lack of high-quality content and participation or the lack to establish trust between members and platform by not putting emphasis on security and anonymity.

2.7.1.2 Limitations of Iriberri and Leroy's model.

Iriberri and Leroy (2009) model of virtual community life cycle stages has some serious limitations in its current form. The model tries to connect all disconnected findings into a single life cycle model. To do so Iriberri and Leroy gather a large volume of findings and strategies around the topic of

virtual communities and try to create one set of guidelines based on the growth of communities and the needs to develop it further.

Iriberri and Leroy gather a total number of 1167 publications that use the term 'online community' or 'virtual community' across six major electronic databases from between 1993 to 2007. However after a selection process they only chose 32 total articles for further examination.

When determining the appropriate life cycle stages for each identified element Iriberri and Leroy (2009) simply followed the recommendations of other authors (Preece 2000; Kim 2000; Cothrel and Williams 1999) or their own 'gut instinct'. No attempt was made to test either the importance of the disconnected elements found or to test their place in the life cycle model.

Iriberri and Leroy (2009) conclude their research and agree that "existing research, although valuable, has produced 'snapshot views' of online communities. Future research should focus on the dynamic nature of online communities and test, for example, whether the order that we propose in which factors should be implemented leads to more or less success, and if and how these factors interact to promote success" (pg. 11:25).

Stage:	Element	Mentioned in:
Inception	Purpose	Maloney-Krichmar and Preece 2005; Andrews et. al. 2001; Kim 2000; Leimeister et. al. 2005; Algesheimer et al. 2005
	Focus	Andrews et. al. [2001]; Armstrong & Hagel 1995; de Valck et al. 2009; Kozinets 1999
	Rules, Norms and Policies	Leimeister and Krcmar 2004; Kim 2000; Preece 2000; Blanchard & Markus 2004; Krishnamurthy 2005; Wilson & Peterson 2002; Palloff & Pratt 2001
	Trademark	Kim [2000]
	Business Model	Leimeister and Krcmar 2004; Armstrong & Hagel 1995
Creation	User-centered design and evolution	Leimeister and Krcmar [2004]; Andrews [2001]; Andrews et al. [2001]; Kollock [1996];...
	Interface usability	Ginsburg and Weisband [2004]; Maloney-Krichmar and Preece [2005]; Preece [2000];...
	Security and privacy	Leimeister et al. [2005]; Leimeister and Krcmar [2003, 2004]; Andrews [2002];...
	Anonymity	Hummel and Lechner [2002]; Leimeister et al. [2005]
	Identity persistence	Hummel and Lechner [2002]; Kollock [1996]
	Reliability	Andrews et al. [2001]; Maloney-Krichmar and Preece [2005]
	Performance	Andrews et al. [2001]; Leimeister and Krcmar [2004]
Growth	Attracting members	Ginsburg and Weisband [2004]
	Growth management	Beenet et al. [2004]; Ludford et. al. [2004]
	Integration of new members	Maloney-Krichmar and Preece [2005]
	Up-to-date content	Brazelton and Gorry [2003]; Ginsburg and Weisband [2004]; Leimeister and Krcmar [2004]

	Content quality	Brazelton and Gorry [2003]; Sangwan [2005]; Tedjamuliaet et al. [2005]; Leimeister and Krcmar [2003, 2004];...
	Interaction support	Zhang and Hiltz [2003]
	Trust building	Zhang and Hiltz [2003]; Andrews et al. [2001]; Donath [1999]; Leimeister and Krcmar [2003];...
	Neutrality/non-partisan offers	Leimeister and Sidiras [2004]
	Reaching critical mass	Leimeister and Sidiras [2004]
	Transparency	Andrews [2002]; Andrews et al. [2001]; Leimeister et et al. [2005]
	Personalization of portal	Leimeister and Sidiras [2004]
	Personalization of offers	Leimeister and Sidiras [2004]
	Offline events and meetings	Andrews et al. [2001]; Kim [2000]; Cothrel and Williams [1999]
Maturity	Regular online events	Andrews et al. [2001]; Williams and Cothrel [2000]
	Sales and offers	Leimeister and Krcmar [2004]; Leimeister and Sidiras [2004]
	User tools	Andrews et al. [2001]; Zhang and Hiltz [2003]
	Permeated management and control	Ginsburg and Weisband [2004]; Maloney-Krichmar and Preece [2005]; Leimeister and Krcmar [2004]; Andrews et al [2001];...
	Recognition of contributions	Ginsburg and Weisband [2004]; Chan [2004]; Andrews [2001]; Beenet et al. [2004];...
	Subgroup management	Ginsburg and Weisband [2004]; Maloney-Krichmar and Preece [2005]; Leimeister and Krcmar [2003];...
	Recognition of loyalty	Ginsburg and Weisband [2004]; Andrews [2002]; Chan [2004];...
	Member satisfaction management	Leimeister and Sidiras [2004]; Cothrel and Williams [1999]

Table 2: Online community elements according to Iriberri & Leroy (2009) with references

3 Conceptual Chapter

3.1 Overview

The conceptual chapter should help to get a better overview of the findings of the literature research and present the key concepts and patterns that motivated the research.

Virtual communities play an important role in today's marketing however a clear definition has yet to be found. This is mostly due to the variety of types of virtual communities that are employed across health care, academia, sports or other general interests and businesses. Overarching theories such as 'Sense of Community' by McMillan and Chavis can be adopted for a virtual community and it has been shown that its elements are equally valid for the online environment.

While many aspects of online communities have by now been analysed, only a small number of research projects have focused on the process of creating a virtual community. Existing research on online communities in general often give implications for the process of setting up a virtual community but only very few articles were found that have the topic of community development at the centre of the study.

The development of successful online communities has two main areas of interest: The elements that are necessary to make the community successful and the process in which these elements are used to attract and retain users.

The elements of virtual communities presented in this dissertation have been collected from a wide range of literature. The most comprehensive research about virtual community elements has been conducted by Leimeister

(Leimeister and Krcmar 2004, Leimeister and Sidiras 2004) in a series of articles. In an initial workpaper Leimeister, Sidiras and Krcmar (2003) reviewed several studies on virtual communities and identified a set of 32 success factors. This set of success factors was reviewed using a Delphi study among 20 experts on virtual communities.

However an extensive literature review has revealed other elements not mentioned in Leimeister et. al. Elements that have been found spread across the literature, some under a different name, and have been condensed into the themes around community success. Themes and elements are listed in table 3.

	Element	Other Keywords	Found in:
Business Model	Purpose		Maloney-Krichmar and Preece 2005; Andrews et. al. 2001; Kim 2000; Leimeister et. al. 2005; Algesheimer et al. 2005
	Focus		Andrews et. al. [2001]; Armstrong & Hagel 1995; de Valck et al. 2009; Kozinets 1999
	Revenue	Business Model / Funding	Leimeister and Krcmar 2004; Armstrong & Hagel 1995
	Content	High Quality and Up-to-date Content	Brazelton and Gorry 2003; Ginsburg and Weisband 2004; Leimeister and Krcmar 2004; Tedjamuliaet et al. 2005; Armstrong & Hagel 1995

	Element	Other Keywords	Found in:
Technology	Usability	User-centred design + evolution	Ginsburg and Weisband 2004; Maloney-Krichmar and Preece 2005; Preece 2000; Ricketss et al. 2000; Johnson 2001; Jones 1997
	Reliability		Andrews et al. 2001; Maloney-Krichmar and Preece 2005
	Performance	Speed	Andrews et al. 2001; Leimeister and Krcmar 2004
	Supportive Scaffolding	Interaction Support, FAQs, Guidelines, Self-help Pages	Jones 1997; Zhang and Hiltz 2003; Palloff & Pratt 2001; Rogers 2000
	Personalisation	User settings	Leimeister and Sidiras 2004

	Element	Other Keywords	Found in:
Building Trust	Privacy	Security / Handling data professionally	Leimeister et al. 2005; Leimeister and Krcmar 2003, 2004; Andrews 2002
	Anonymity		Hummel and Lechner 2002; Leimeister et al. 2005
	Transparency	Neutrality	Andrews 2002; Andrews et al. 2001; Leimeister et et al. 2005; Leimeister and Sidiras 2004
	Code of	Rules and	Leimeister and Krcmar 2004; Kim 2000; Preece

	Conduct	Regulations	2000; Blanchard & Markus 2004; Krishnamurthy 2005; Wilson & Peterson 2002; Palloff & Pratt 2001
	Reputation	Trademark / Third Party Approval	Kim 2000
	Identity Persistence	Username and Information	Hummel and Lechner 2002; Kollock 1996
	Administration and Moderation	Leading conversations	Koh and Kim 2004;
	Leader's enthusiasm,		Koh and Kim 2004;
	Element	**Other Keywords**	**Found in:**
Developing Memberbase	Attracting Members	Advertising	Ginsburg and Weisband 2004; Casaló et al. 2010b
	Stimulating Participation	Motivation to Participate, Growth Management	Beenet et al. 2004; Ludford et. al. 2004; Wenger 1998; Blanchard & Markus 2002b; Blanchard & Markus 2004; Bateman et al. 2010
	Integrating New Members		Maloney-Krichmar and Preece 2005; Wenger 2001; Wenger & Snyder 2000
	Membership Roles		Kim 2000; Kozinets 1999; Wenger 1998; De Valck et al. 2009
	Member Reward System	Appreciation, Recognition of Contributions; Recognition of Loyalty	Ginsburg and Weisband 2004; Andrews 2001; Beenet et al. 2004; Wiertz & Ruyter 2007; Karau & Williams 1993; McLure & Faraj 2000; Nolan et al. 2007
	Reaching Critical Mass		Leimeister and Sidiras 2004
	Element	**Other Keywords**	**Found In:**
	Real-world Events	Traditions	Andrews et al. 2001; Kim 2000; Cothrel and Williams 1999; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Wilson & Peterson 2002; Blanchard & Markus 2004

Community Involvement	Online Events		Andrews et al. 2001; Williams and Cothrel 2000
	Feedback	Evolution with focus on members needs	Leimeister and Krcmar 2004; Andrews 2001; Andrews et al. 2001; Kollock 1996
	Common Symbol System		Blanchard & Markus 2004; McMillan and Chavis1986; Schouten and Mcalexander 1995
	Integration	Handing over responsibilities to members, Permeated control	Ginsburg and Weisband 2004; Maloney-Krichmar and Preece 2005; Leimeister and Krcmar 2004; Andrews et al 2001; De Valck et al. 2009; Kozinets 1999
	Subgroup Management	Subgroups / Subforums	Ginsburg and Weisband 2004; Maloney-Krichmar and Preece 2005; Leimeister and Krcmar 2003; Jones 1997; Johnson 2001; Blanchard & Markus 2004

Table 3: Elements of Virtual Communities

Literature suggests that communities not just start to exist from one day to the next but develop over time. As the community will develop, so does the need and importance for certain elements of virtual community change over time.

Some research on virtual communities propose implications for development however only one study was found that focused on the process of creating a virtual community. In this study Iriberri and Leroy (2009) searched six major electronic databases for articles on community success factors and to review research findings and present an integrated method to describe the lifecycle of online communities.

Their lifecycle model consists of five stages: Inception, Creation, Growth, Maturity and Death and is based on parts of other researchers such as Wenger (2002) and Andrews (2002). Iriberri and Leroy categorize identified elements of community success to the specific stages.

3.2 Need for further research

Existing knowledge identified in the literature review is focused on existing and successful virtual communities. The research does not encompass those communities that have not been successful and that have possibly ceased to exist at a very early stage. Research on successful communities tries to develop "how to" guides of how other communities should replicate and develop themselves along this model.

Most of the existing research has primarily used a case study approach and has produced "snapshot views" of successful online communities. As Johnson (2001) analysed in his study 13 case studies on virtual communities and summarizes that "no study reviewed approached the creation of a virtual community with a deliberate view towards a community of practice" (pg. 56).

The elements for successful online communities have been gathered from various studies that mostly only focused on one specific element or the synergies between very few elements per study. One of the few studies that took a broader approach is Leimeister et. al.'s study on success factors of virtual communities (2006). However not all elements found in the literature review are covered by Leimeister et al's study. Additional elements have been found and extend the list identified by Leimeister et. al.

One major limitation of Leimeister et al.'s study is that the primary research was conducted using an online survey in which participants where given a list of elements to choose from and were tasked to order them by importance. Hence the viability of participants answers is limited compared to what their answers would have been like when using open ended questions. Leimeister et al. (2006) acknowledge the limitations of the online survey and recommend that "the results should be researched in more detail" (pg. 295).

While giving a broad overview about the importance of certain elements in the conclusion chapter Leimeister et. al. fail to give any indication in which order the identified elements need to be employed in a developing online community.

The study by Iriberri and Leroy (2009) addresses this idea with a proposed sequence of elements at certain stages of development. However this life cycle model however has not been tested by the researchers. Iriberri and Leroy (2009) suggest that future research "should focus on the dynamic nature of online communities and test, for example, whether the order that we propose in which factors should be implemented leads to more or less success, and if and how these factors interact to promote success" (pg. 11:25).

Hence this research project focuses on validating existing concepts and existing knowledge in a new way. The research project will analyse the key elements of community building from the point of view of the creator of such communities and will compare their views to the user of the community who has not yet been analysed with regards to development of communities over time.

3.3 Research question

Of particular interest is the question how the individual and the organisation approach the process of creating and/or developing the community with regards to the different elements and stages of development. Research such as Leimeister et. al. (2006) needs to be reviewed in more detail and the findings from Iriberri and Leroy (2009) need to be proven in a study.

This research project was aimed to look at the reason and process for creating the community and how different community elements are viewed by

those that are in charge of community development. The literature research has identified a variety of different elements that are important for the success of virtual communities. However a full set of elements has rarely been analysed with regards to development over time.

Additional interest begs the question if community creators work towards a goal and if they have a clear plan of their community lifecycle.

Of special importance are the incidents that occurred along the way. Instead of learning from success the research searches to learn from mistakes and corrective action where applied.

Research question 1 (Rq1) was approached through in-depth interviews utilising a critical incident technique with those in charge of virtual communities and a number of members of the virtual community.

Also not a single study was found that analyses the effect of community development on users of the community. While most research highlights the fact that "features must evolve according to members' needs at each stage" (Iriberri & Leroy 2009) no study has analysed how users feel about the changes made.

Research question 2 (Rq2) was approached through the same in-depth interviews utilising critical incident technique.

3.4 Conceptual model

Very little research has yet analysed the importance of different elements and features of online communities. Leimeister et al. (2006) is the most in-depth study about the importance of elements of online communities however the limitations mentioned make the results of their study somewhat unreliable. In

this study the importance of certain elements will be approached again, using a different research approach and the elements identified in table 3.

Additionally features of online communities should evolve depending on a members' needs at a certain stage of the development of the community. That means that features can be categorized by stages in which this feature is of special importance. To test the research questions a conceptual model was produced.

Elements found in the literature review have been categorized according to Iriberri and Leroy's (2009) life-cycle model for virtual communities. The four stages in the development are Inception, Creation, Growth and Maturity. The categorization is based on the suggestions and implications of the specific authors of each element.

This categorization is based on the concept by Iriberri and Leroy and has not been tested yet. Both the life-cycle stages and the assigned elements will be addressed by the primary research. The research will chose a different approach to Leimeister et al. (2006) and will try to identify the process of creating an online community from the administrators and operators of 6 different online communities.

Critical incident technique will be used to identify both positive and negative incident during the creation and development of the communities. Such incidents will help to identify the move from one development stage to the next.

Inception	Creation	Growth	Maturity
Purpose	Technology (Usability / Reliability / Performance)	Attracting members, Reaching Critical Mass	Permeated management and control (get users involved)
Focus	Security and Privacy	Integration of new members	Recognition of contributions and loyalty
Codes of conduct	Anonymity	Up-to-date and high quality unique content	Subgroup Management
Funding and Revenue	Identity Persistence	Interaction support	Feedback and development
Reputation / Trademark	User-centred design and evolution	Off-line events and meetings	Online events
		Personalisation	Sales and offers
		Transparency / Neutrality	User tools
		Administration and Moderation	

Table 4: Condensed elements assigned to development stages

4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

A qualitative research approach was chosen to deepen the understanding of the research topic. The literature review has shown that even though there is a large body of research on community elements, only very few studies actually try to gather all deciding community factors. Research on the process of creating and sustaining a virtual community like Iriberri and Leroy's (2009) model of life-cycle stages is very theoretical.

Qualitative research aims to add a deeper understanding to an area. Instead of testing an hypothesis, qualitative research aims to provide data that ultimately will lead to the formation of a hypothesis (FitzGerald et al. 2008).

4.2 Critical Incident Technique

4.2.1 Rationale

This chapter presents a background on the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) and the use of it, followed by a description of how it will be used in this research project.

Critical incident technique (CIT) was chosen because it allows a fresh perspective on the topic of virtual community creation. It directly involves the creators and operators of virtual community as tries to gather knowledge from incidents, good or bad. CIT is similar to unstructured interviews and participant observations as they all search to 'get closer' to the subject (Bryman 1989).

Critical Incident Technique was first used by its creator John Flanagan in 1954 as part of the Aviation Psychology Program of the United States Air Force. Previous to Flanagan's involvement evaluation reports consisted mainly of stereotypes and generalisations. The CIT process Flanagan introduced helped to develop a focused methodology to produce an objective definition of effective or ineffective behaviours (FitzGerald et al. 2008).

CIT is described as "a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behaviour in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles" (Flanagan 1954, pg. 327).

The difference to existing observations and analysis was the focus on 'critical incidents' which decided on success or failure of aviation missions. The emphasis on events that made the difference between success and failure—the "critical incidents"—provided an objective rather than ambiguous list of requirements for the activity at hand (FitzGerald et al. 2008).

Flanagan (1954) continues to describe what a critical incident is:

"By an incident is meant any specifiable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical the incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects"

Due to the investigative nature CIT was quickly adopted by management and market research and since 1990 a vast number research projects have used critical incident technique due to its exploratory nature (Gremler 2004).

Critical Incident Technique involves a set of actions. Flanagan (1954) created a clearly defined and systematic research process which consist of five steps:

1. Identifying general aims

2. Establishing plans and specifications

3. Collecting the data

4. Analysing the data

5. Interpreting and reporting the results

In the first step, the research objective is outlined. Flanagan recommends that researchers should consults experts in the field to ensure that the aim is relevant. Through the literature review an expert status has been established and a gap in the literature has been identified. The research objective for the research project can be described through a 'functional description': The aim of this research is to identify the elements and processes of creating virtual communities from the point of creators and users alike.

The second step involves careful planning. The research has to be clear what situations will be observed and what method of data collection and data analysis will be used.

In a third step the data itself is collected. Critical incidents can be recorded through individual or group interviews, focus groups, questionnaires or record forms although the most commonly used form is the individual interview (FitzGerald et al. 2008). In this research project both creator data and user data is collected through unstructured interviews. Unstructured interviews have the benefit of being able to use probing to try and get get to the bottom of reported incidents. Often incidents might only be identified as such after intensive probing.

4.2.2 Selection of virtual communities

Initially 20 virtual communities were identified for the primary research. The communities were chosen for their different stages in the development of a virtual community. However all communities were catering for users with an interest in motorcycles or motorcycle related topics and based in either the United Kingdom or the United States of America. Out of these 20 virtual communities only 12 met the minimal requirements.

Business- or organisation-sponsored community
Need for revenue
Utilising a minimum of two communication channels

Table 5: Minimal requirements for participation

The 12 communities were contacted and the research requirements were discussed. Only 6 communities were still run by the original creator of the community or were willing to participate in the research.

For the analysis of community users the participants where either suggested from the community creators out of a pool of long-standing key users or where recruited directly through the community (a forum or social media message).

4.2.3 Portrait of virtual communities

For this research a total of six virtual motorcycle communities were analysed. Virtual communities play an important role within the wider motorcycle community and are a primary source of information that address the fulfilment of a certain need. Most online communities are created on an

on-demand basis by individuals, focusing either on a specific bike make or model (www.f650.co.uk) or a specific segment or target market of the motorcycle industry (www.adventurebikerider.com). Communities that are set up by organisations or set up to be monetised in the long run are still very rare.

The communities analysed in this research are have different approaches to managing their communities and are in different life-cycle stages in their development. While some are long-standing and very popular (Horizons Unlimited) others are just about to start up (BikeMinds).

HorizonsUnlimited.com

Horizons Unlimited is a virtual community centred around the topic of long-distance motorcycle travel. The website was established in 1997 by Grant and Susan Johnson, both motorcycle travellers themselves. The website consists of a wealth of information from travel books and gear advice to more specific information such as boarder crossings and technical advice. However the centre of the community is the Horizons Unlimited Bulletin Board, covering all kinds of topics in 85 sub-forums. Often motorcycle trips carry on over months or years and users spend a considerable amount of time researching and planning the trip beforehand and usually return to the forum after the trip to share their knowledge. Another huge driver of the community are the HU meetups. In 2013 a total of 18 meetups all around the world took place. These are organised and run by volunteers and give a real-world meeting place for HU members.

Approximate Members: 42,000 - Facebook Likes: 6000

AdventureBikeRider.com

Adventure Bike Rider is a fairly young community founded in 2010, but has shown strong growth over the last years. ABR is primarily a real-life magazine for Adventure Motorcycles and Motorcycle Travel and was launched into the booming market of adventure motorcycles. The website was launched to back up the magazine with online content and a forum which quickly developed into a popular community for adventure motorcyclists in the UK. Additionally to that the website offers users the ability to run their own blogs and write trip reports, organise events and share photos.

Approximate Members: 8300 - Facebook Likes: 3400

RealRider.com

Real Rider is a very new virtual community for motorcyclists in the UK that was launched in early 2013. The community consists of a Facebook-style social media platform where friends can update a status and comment on it. The website also consists of an events calendar and a route planner. The USP of Real Rider is a mobile phone app that connects the community to the handheld device. Users can record routes and share them with the community and use the app to alert an ambulance in case of a crash.

Approximate Members: 10,000 - Facebook Likes: 2200

EatSleepRide.com

Eat Sleep Ride, launched in 2013, is another new virtual community that has a similar style and approach to Facebook. In this social stream model the

user can add friends and create a variety of different content options such as ride reports, reviews, photos, videos and events. Similar to Real Rider, Eat Sleep Ride features a smartphone app that connects the user to the community when they are on the road. Users can access the community and record and submit new routes or use an emergency option to alert an ambulance in case of an accident.

Approximate Members: 8000- Facebook Likes: 3500

GetOn.com

Get On is a campaign backed by motorcycle manufacturers, dealers and other involved companies that aims to increase the number of motorcyclists in the UK. The campaign utilises a website that provides useful information for those that want to take up motorcycling and also includes a virtual community. The community features involve various blogs by users, an event calendar, photos and videos and a conversation forum. Get On also has a very active Facebook page.

Approximate Members: 400 - Facebook Likes: 5000

BikeMinds.com

Bike Minds is not so much a community yet as the idea of one. The plan is to create a virtual community that encompasses all types of motorcycle riders. The tagline is "Motorcyclists unite!". While the platform is created behind the scenes potential members are currently attracted through a static website and redirected to the Facebook page of Bike Minds. Since the start of the

process in March 2013 the community on the Facebook page has already grown to over 8000 users.

Approximate Members: 0 - Facebook Likes: 8500

	Creator	User 1	User 2	User 3
AdventureBikeRider.com	Alun	Alan	Ian	Andy
HorizonsUnlimited.com	Grant	Tiffany	Maria	Brian
BikeMinds.com	Malcolm	Marius	Joshua	
RealRider.com	Zoe	Rachel	Alan	Ian
EatSleepRide.com	Alex	Michael		
Geton.co.uk	Miles	Christo	Jamie	Sue

Table 6: All interviewees

4.2.4 Data analysis methods

The primary research is based on unstructured question which makes coding and content-analysis an important issue. Coding describes the process of interpreting solely textual answers. In this process data will be broken down, conceptualized, put together and presented in an understandable manner (Ghauri et al. 1995).

Flanagan (1954) outlines the method of data analysis in step 4 of the critical incident technique. Once data is collected it will need to be summarized and analysed. Developing a set of categories and sub-categories helps to quantify findings by making a simple count when the category is found. The process of developing these categories is 'inductive'; categories emerge from

the data analysis. During the analysis of single records new categories may emerge, triggering a redefinition and development of the categories and sub-categories. Larger categories may be divided or smaller categories combined (FitzGerald et al. 2008).

Respondent: (...)	
Interviewer: So you said you've taken a step back?	
Respondent: Yes, I feel I have to, because like I'm saying, I feel that my posts could influence discussions too much just because of people's perception of me. ==I also think, and I do think like this, that that forum is the community's forum. I might own it, but it's the community's forum, and I've always stuck very, very hard to not having commercial influences on there.==	PERMEATED CONTROL NEUTRALITY
Interviewer: Because that happens quite a lot.	
Respondent: I've turned down loads of business because as you can probably imagine, the forum is so busy and popular that people want to advertise on there. ==They want to promote commercial products on there and I've got to turn this down because this is the members' forum, they are part of the site. I can commercialise whatever I want on the other pages and quite rightly I should because if we don't make a profit, there is no ABR.==	NEUTRALITY BUSINESS MODEL

Table 7: Coding Example

4.2.5 Interpreting the data and limitations

In the last step of the critical incident technique the results of the data collection have to be interpreted and reported. To be generally applicable all research has to be tested against the three key issues: reliability, validity and representativeness (McNeill 1990, Bryman 1989). The findings have to be repeatable at any time, the data collected must represent a true picture of the world and the group of people must be representative of others.

Disadvantages of critical incident technique are that the definition of 'critical' remains very subjective. The researcher is very aware of this issue. Before the interview all participants where send a document that outlines the research topic and objectives, explains the process and goals of the critical incident approach and explains in detail what a 'critical incident' is.

CIT relies on the memory of participants, some incidents may have been forgotten. This is a valid limitation of CIT however if the incident was forgotten it might not have been critical after all. Probing was used to identify incidents.

Access to the suitable person also adds to the disadvantages as they might not be available any more. In virtual communities it can happen that the community creator has moved to a new position or company or that the community was created by a third-party before handed over to the company. To mitigate this limitation from initially 12 virtual communities only 6 communities where chosen where access to the original creator was still available.

Community creators might have their own agenda when being interviewed hence general issues with honesty and obedience are a limitation to the CIT approach. Creators might not want to discuss negative critical incidents

however in pre-interview communication the researcher highlighted the idea of 'learning from mistakes'. Additionally the researcher analysed the different communities before the interview and probing was used to discuss critical elements of their communities.

On top of the limitations that occur using the critical incident technique it is to mention that the qualitative researcher, even though determined to take the respondents viewpoint, can influence the interpretation of data and this process will never be purely objective (Bryman 1989). However according to FitzGerald et al. (2008) the original researcher is best poised to evaluate the data and report the results.

4.2.6 Summary of Chapter

This chapter explains the methods and tools used to conduct the primary research. A well-researched methodology and a pilot were used to reduce bias to a minimum and achieve reliability, validity and representativeness within the primary research. Nevertheless, limitations include the interpretation of interviews which is required due to the in-depth nature of the topic.

5 Research findings and data evaluation

5.1 Overview of findings

This chapter discusses the findings of the primary research and provides an evaluation of these findings.

In total 19 interviews were conducted with 6 different online communities. The operators and creators of all 6 communities were interviewed and additionally 1-4 users of each community were interviewed using an unstructured interview process and critical incident technique. Both operators and users where encouraged to speak about their positive and negative experiences with the community and to compare it to other communities they might be a member of.

The interviews were then fully transcribed and then coded using the categories and elements identified in the literature research. Additional elements were found that did not fit the pre-defined categories. These additional elements will receive special attention in this chapter. A total of 340 mentions of elements were recorded and are displayed in Illustration 2: Total elements from primary research.

Elements	Total	%
Content	37	10.9
Attracting Members	29	8.5
Focus	27	7.9
Openness / Spirit / Camaraderie	25	7.4
Purpose	22	6.5
Usability	21	6.2
Offline Events	21	6.2
Business Model	20	5.9
User-centred Design	16	4.7
Permeated Control	16	4.7
Moderation	16	4.7
Feedback and Development	14	4.1
Negativity / Trolls	10	2.9
Building up Trust	10	2.9
Interaction Support	6	1.8
Leaders Enthusiasm	5	1.5
User Tools	5	1.5
Discussing Informal Topics / Banter	4	1.2
Subgroups	3	0.9
Transparency	3	0.9
Recognition of Contributions	3	0.9
Self-policing Community	3	0.9
Codes of Conduct	3	0.9
Reaching Critical Mass	2	0.6
Obligation to 'Give Back'	2	0.6
Word of Mouth	2	0.6
Growth Management	2	0.6
Security / Spam / Hacks	2	0.6
Technology Access	2	0.6
Integrating New Members	2	0.6
Neutrality	2	0.6
Reputation	1	0.3
Staged Implementation of Features	1	0.3
Sales and Offers	1	0.3
Anonymity	1	0.3
Identity Persistence	1	0.3
	340	100

Illustration 2: Total elements from primary research

Out of the total elements mentioned the top 14 elements will be evaluated in more detail. These elements represent the major points of interest in the primary study and account for over 80% of total elements mentioned. The

remaining elements will be grouped together and findings of particular interest presented in 5.2.

5.1.1 Content

Content is the most often mentioned element throughout all interviews. Users are looking for unique and up-to-date information, knowledge and expertise that can only be accessed through this virtual community.

> *"Well, I found that looking for information, looking for advice, because there is some good resources there. So I joined the Get On website at the actual page" (Christo – GO).*

> *"Again, I used the website a lot because it's very much about knowledge and sharing that knowledge and when we were on the road, if you have a problem there would always be someone who could maybe recommend someone to help" (Maria – HU).*

Often this is the first motivator to participate and after users have received their information they feel an obligation to 'give back' which has been mentioned in two cases.

> *"I was very grateful for the HUBB because it has been absolutely essential. I don't think my trip would've been as good without them. (...) Going into South America and doing that, we used the website quite a lot and I felt I was taking a lot but I didn't give back much. So when we came back, they asked volunteers to do presentations so we did quite a few" (Maria – HU).*

When users were asked if they are members of other communities and what they preferred at those communities content was often mentioned. Users might see content in other communities that could be integrated into their primary community.

> *"I would be surprise if people who are on AdventureBikeRider.com aren't on ADVRider. ADVRider is fantastic for stories (ride reports),*

it's something that maybe AdventureBikeRider.com doesn't do very well" (…) I mean they've got a section of it but compared with particular ADVRider it's not that good. Certainly I think a lot of people could learn from ADVRider as in the storytelling side of it, it's a big massive part of that site. (Andy – ABR).

The initial drive to participate in a community comes down to this type of unique content, content or information that users can't find on another website.

"That's the whole key, right, making your site unique, and you're right, that does make it actually unique having these profiles. I actually feel proud to be I think the second one, right? I think I'm the second one in here which is pretty cool. Yes, that is a good aspect to it. I think there's got to, at some point be more of a uniqueness to it for it to really, really blow up and be a business forum"
(Josh – BM).

5.1.2 Focus

The influence of focus as an element is really strong. As found in the primary research users have the choice of a multitude of virtual communities for all kinds of topics and are usually a member of at least two virtual communities around the topic of motorcycling alone. While both Adventure Bike Rider and Horizons Unlimited are technically trying to attract the same user their actual user groups and user needs are very different because of the different focus the two communities take. Users are aware of these differences in focus and ultimately they pick and mix their communities depending on their own needs.

Maria, long term user of the virtual community Horizons Unlimited describes it as following:

> *"Lots of people are very grateful that they created that community because by creating that website, they created a community that wasn't there. It's about finding people that are like you that share your passion and before that, it's very difficult at work, even if I have friends who are bikers at work, it's a different view."*

One respondent describes his search for a virtual community that suits his needs as following:

> *Andy - ABR: (...) I've been interested in kind of adventure biking for the last ten years now. And initially used Horizon Unlimited and ADVRider which were both have different kind of uses, kind of Horizon's much more European based and ADVRider American based. AdventureBikeRider.com I found was much more British website. A lot of Scottish people involved in it as well. I've found it much more kind of normal down to earth rather than tales of trips to Mongolia and such. It's much more centred around Europe and achievable things for your average person.*
>
> *Interviewer: So it would be more towards what you were looking for?*
>
> *Respondent: More towards what I'm doing. I mean the other websites are certainly great for things that you'd like to at some point in your life.*

Focus is an important element that community creators have to keep in mind. When choosing a focus of the community it has to be kept in mind the size of the community.

> *"If there was a Yamaha forum I probably wouldn't even go on it to be honest with you. It's too broad. A nice niche group which is big enough, where there's quite a lot of discussion, but small enough where you can list – where you know the names of most of the regular posters and where you can get good discussions and good virtual friendships forming" (Christo - GO).*

While a too narrow focus might not attract enough users and therefore hinder participation a too broad focus might end up with too many members and

therefore takes away the opportunities to develop relationships to other members.

Ultimately the focus of a community cannot be too broad, trying to incorporate member groups that are to heterogeneous into one virtual community. Alun, creator of the Adventure Bike Rider community describes this issue based on his second print magazine Adventure Travel:

> *"With Adventure Travel, we're not going to have a forum on there, we're just going to have articles and encourage comments on there, on features and so on. The reason for that is Adventure Travel's a very, very broad subject matter. One issue with the magazine, we could have kayaking between New York and Chicago or we could have rock climbing in the Himalayas, so whilst it's a broad interest magazine, it's not really a community because the person who goes kayaking is not the same person who goes rock climbing. (…)* So whilst the magazine is of interest to people, it's a general interest magazine, its subject matter is so wide that you don't get a close knit community. So what are we going to do with the Adventure Travel on that is we're just going to encourage comments on specific features and things we're doing. We've decided to focus on different things in there, and it's going to be a different sort of website to Adventure Bike Rider" (Alun – ABR).

5.1.3 Attracting Members

Community creators try to attract as many influencers as possible in the early stages of the development and then hope to attract additional users through 'Word of Mouth', another element which has been mentioned by users.

The way communities can attract members is best described by Real Rider user Rachel as her journey to becoming a member encompasses all ways of attracting members found during the interviews:

"Well I found about it (the community) because my boyfriend actually bought a paper, it was in one of his papers and there was like a review about it and all that kind of stuff, and he said well it's a fiver's worth but it's worth it. So I was looking at the web page and the web page was showing it was for free, so I thought well for a freebie let's just try it out and see what happens and since then, I use it most days now. (…) I've got, most of my friends I'm trying to get involved in this system as well."

Another often mentioned way of attracting members to the community is offline ties. The online community Adventure Bike Rider is supported by a print magazine around the same topic.

Interviewer: Yes, so you would almost say that without the magazine, the community, the website would have taken a lot longer to take off?

Alun – ABR: Oh, without a doubt, Without. A. Doubt. If, I don't think it would have been as strong as it is because the magazine holds it all together in a way. The magazine gives people identity as well.

Horizons Unlimited has successfully established a network of worldwide meet-ups that not only strengthen the sense of community amongst the members but also attracts new members and gives them a first point of interaction with the community.

Other offline ties such as events or shows in which the community can present itself are used by Real Rider. Real Rider also uses exclusive offers that are only available to existing users to attract new members.

5.1.4 Usability

When users spoke about problems with the virtual communities very often simple usability problems were identified such as accessing important information.

"It's interesting that you mentioned Horizons Unlimited because I looked at that site but I find it so big and that I get – I do – I'm sure I could find the answers to what I – if I had any questions, but I almost get overwhelmed by the size of their website. Again, I don't – I've never had much experience with it, but you look at the website and then you go – you know you maybe do a search or something and you can't quite find what you want and then you start having to look a bit deeper and it is just so vast. And I think it's probably a very good resource, but I think it would be quite a lot of hard work to find out exactly what you needed to know because of the size of it" (Ian – ABR).

Given the importance of content and information as an element of virtual communities operators should make accessing information as easy as possible otherwise users will leave the community.

"When I go into a community and I cannot find something, I just leave, it's just like it's not for me. If you cannot find it, you tend to turn to somewhere else, that's the logical thing" (Miguel – BM)..

When talking about usability virtual communities are also compared to what is known. The virtual community Get On is running a community section on the website and also a very successful Facebook page that offers the community another place to interact. Jamie, a Get On member, prefers the Facebook page to the community on the Get On website:

"Personally I find using the Facebook page a lot easier and I think at the moment there's nothing really that I would want changed. It's easy for me to navigate and see clearly what's happening and what's being posted. Personally I am – I'm not PC illiterate but I do find going through all the forums sometimes a bit confusing and sometimes unhelpful trying to get the information I need where I can just post up on the Facebook page and I get instant replies from people that see it, or even Get On themselves" (Jamie - GO).

A similar incident is described by another member of the Get On community, Christo:

> *"I think the other thing as well is that Facebook has got quite a user friendly interface which other websites might not. I mean for instance the Get On website sometimes trying to put something simple up can take some time if you know what I mean. So that can be a bit of a pain" (Christo – GO).*

All interviewees are members of Facebook and are used to the way Facebook is set up as an online community. Virtual communities that have their own community platform are then compared to Facebook in terms of usability. Alan, member of the Real Rider community describes a such an incident:

> *"I don't know if you've been following lately about the Royal British Legion riders on Facebook, they have their own forum and they recently decided to close down their Facebook page. All hell was let loose because so many of them have said, we don't like the forum. Because you've got that instantaneous … if you like chat without having to log in via a web page to a forum. (…) People are happier using things like Facebook and Twitter than they are using forums" (Alan – RR).*

5.1.5 Openness / Spirit / Camaraderie

Interviewed users of virtual communities often mention positive incidents about the way they interact with the community. They often mention keywords like 'openness', 'friendliness', 'camaraderie' or 'pub atmosphere' to describe a general feeling of mutual understanding and a special bond amongst the members.

Adventure Bike Rider user Ian describes his experience after joining the virtual community as a newcomer to motorcycling:

"I never had a negative comment. I've had a tremendous amount of positive comments and I suppose I find that gratifying. I find it really helpful and gratifying because being an older rider I feel like I've got a catch up to do, and a lot of people look at me and think oh I must have been riding all my life and of course that's not true. So whilst a lot of the guys on the site have been riding for a great many years I haven't, but they've all been very, very open and willing and helpful in passing on information or tips or whatever" (Ian – ABR).

Another Adventure Bike Rider user, Andy, mentioned an incident regarding an offline meeting. The community had organised a local bike meet-up and ride-out and Andy was meant to go. Through bad weather the ride-out was cancelled however many of the users still met up just to "sit about chatting, having a few beers". Even though the main reason to meet up ceased (the ride-out) users still decided to meet up because of the sociability element of the community.

One particular comment by Get On member Christo indicates how important 'Openness' as an element can be for a community. Christo is a member of a different motorcycle forum as well (Fazer Owners Club) and feels deeply connected to this community:

"I mean when I go to the US next year on an industrial placement I probably won't get a Fazer because I want something that's sportier, but I'll probably stay a member I'll probably stay on there. Now I was on the Varadero forum and I think I looked at it twice since I sold my Varadero but that's because not enough happened on it. Fazer Owners Club on the other hand, because I've made so many friends through the Fazer Owners Club because there's such a esprit, such a good – what's the word I'm after, ambience, because there's such a good ambience there, I'm probably going to want to hang around for longer"
(Christo – GO).

In this instance the spirit in the community has replaced the initial attraction to the community (finding information) through building up a history and forming relationships with other members that he will continue his membership even though he will not have much connection to the actual focus of the community which is providing information for the owners of Fazer motorcycles.

Technically 'Openness / Spirit and Camaraderie' is not an element of community construction but an outcome of successful community design and is in the literature described as 'Sense of Community' (see chapter 2.5) but due to the frequency with which it was mentioned by both users and operators of virtual communities and its ranking as a very important driver it is highlighted here again.

5.1.6 Business Model

Business model as an element of virtual communities includes funding and monetisation of the community platform. Community operators most frequently talked about this element of virtual communities in their interviews.

> *"There's also the thing which a lot of people forget by the way is a website costs money and the busier the website the more it costs. (…) So there's a lot of costs with websites, and the only way you can recover those costs is through some sort of commercial operation. The obvious one is advertising"* (Alun - ABR).

'Business Model' is an element that has to be considered right from the start of the community. Operator Malcolm is currently launching a community called Bike Minds and his thoughts on revenue and monetisation at this very early stage of community development are very interesting:

> *"I'm treading very lightly in that area and really trying to think through how and when we introduce the commercial aspect, this vendor*

directory. Originally I thought that would be included at launch so we could try to monetise as quickly as possible. But I think that would be a mistake and I think it's important to build something that users enjoy for the sake of using first before we say, "Hey, you can find brands and buy stuff here, obviously we're making money." I think it's important to give users a platform to express themselves first" (Malcolm - BM)

Creators of communities agree that it is a balancing act between monetising the virtual community and still remaining 'neutral'. Over-advertising on a community can drive members away from the community. Alun, creator of Adventure Bike Rider explains the situation from his point of view:

"I've turned down loads of business because as you can probably imagine, the forum is so busy and popular that people want to advertise on there. They want to promote commercial products on there and I've got to turn this down because this is the members' forum, they are part of the site. I can commercialise whatever I want on the other pages and quite rightly I should because if we don't make a profit, there is no ABR" (Alun - ABR).

It is also interesting is to see that users understand the need for a revenue source as well; while it was not nearly as often mentioned as other elements it still was mentioned 6 times by users from different communities.

5.1.7 Purpose / Goal

Creators should have a clear purpose for their virtual community. For community operators this is defined by the goal that they envisage for their community. Alun, creator of the Adventure Bike Rider community saw a need for an inclusive motorcycling community around the topic of adventure type motorcycles.

"The other thing with the forum is, and this has been it for me from day one, it had to be an inclusive forum rather than exclusive. [...]

Whether you're only travelling through Calais or to Ullapool, or if you're going round the world, you are welcome" (ABR – Alun).

Horizons Unlimited user Brian describes his own experience about purpose:

"...it definitely is to be able to bang the drum, but I guess again, on internet sites, there's got to be some very – or maybe there hasn't. I guess you've got to feel there's a purpose to it. (...) If there's no clearly defined purpose as to what this online forum's about and why I should contribute, if there's no clear purpose then it's not going to work.

I'll give you an example. There's a bank here called Nordia bank and they've got 3,000 employees. They've got something called Nbook on their homepage of their Intranet and it was kind of a social thing, a social blogging thing. The marketing manager said to everyone, "Go and use Nbook, it's just Facebook but for the organisation," and no one posted to it for like six months or it got a few posts. Because it was too vague, the message was too vague. It's like what do I say, what's allowed, what's not allowed, what's relevant, what's not relevant?

Whereas if you've got a forum like I guess Horizons Unlimited, you gets posts here for all North American events or queries about the country, there's a clear defined purpose, but when it's too generic, that gets lost and people are afraid to post and it lacks interest" (Brian – HU).

As Brian mentions in this incident purpose also has an implication on the users. If the community operators do not clearly communicate what the community is about then users are left without any guidance how to use the community. This will then negatively influence participation.

Clearly communicating the purpose of a community can be achieved through a short paragraph of text or pictures. However operators should chose text and pictures carefully to communicate the correct message and not to

alienate potential members. Such an incident is recorded by user Miguel of the Bike Minds community:

> *"I love it, but my first impression of the community was that it was more here for other type of biker or perhaps because of the first two or three pictures or features that I saw were more like adventure types, ADV motorcycling guys.*

And Miguel continues:

> *(…) If you go into their website, they now have photographs of different styles of motorcycling on the front, that's indicating that they want to be pretty broad. Let's see how that goes"* (Miguel – BM).

Finding a purpose to the community also touches on the element of content as it is important to find a unique reason to attract users.

5.1.8 Offline Events

Offline events can be a real driver of participation and establish trust between single members and the community. Events can also be used to attract new members to the community and integrate them into existing structures.

Mentions of offline events have been found throughout all communities analysed in the research. A total of 21 times the element was recorded during interviews and the majority of those mentions were in the user interviews.

Out of the six communities the travel community Horizons Unlimited creates the most offline events throughout the year. Horizons Unlimited creator Grant explained the process how these real-life community meet-ups have developed quickly from a garden party to an essential element of the community with a total of 18 offline events all over the world:

> *"It's not just virtual because the cool part about the meetings is that you may have known somebody for years on the HUBB (Horizons*

Unlimited Bulletin Board) and then you come to a meeting and there they are and you get to sit down and talk to each other. That makes a really powerful connection, it really works well. The fact we've gone live as well as virtual has made a huge difference in the cohesiveness of the community. (...) It becomes very powerful and connected and everybody really does feel they're part of the tribe, the community, Horizons Unlimited travellers" (Grant - HU).

However these offline events do not necessarily need to be organised by the community operators. Other communities such as Adventure Bike Rider offers users the functionalities to host their own events without much input from the operators:

"This summer particularly I was heading down to the Stella Alpina Ralley in Italy. (…) So I basically mentioned (on the forum) I was going to go on my own and then I got a message from another member saying he was travelling on his own, so we ended up meeting up together and we travelled together for ten days. But also I'd had some information – some messages from another couple of members saying that they were going for the first time and wanting to do some of the trails, but they weren't very sure about it. And because I'd been before where I used to meet up and I kind of showed them the trails. (…)

The virtual community here provided the tools that enabled the interaction before and also after the event:

We've met together, yep. And a fellow traveller we're meeting up quite soon again. And the other fellas we are trying to swap photographs because my camera broke quite early into my trip. So I'm going to share photographs"
(Andy – ABR)..

5.1.9 User-centred design and evolution

User-centred design and evolution does not only include simple design elements of the virtual platform but especially in what way users interact with the platform and if the community evolves with the user in mind. This element does touch on usability but it also focuses on the intend to create a platform that is designed for the user and strives to improve the user – interface interaction.

Get On user Christo describes his negative experience with the online community:

> *"In terms of the communities I think if Get On was more – the problem is I hate to use the phrase because it is a bit of a cliché and it is easy to just sit my backside on the sofa and just moan, but I don't think the site is user-friendly enough. I mean it looks gorgeous from a developer point of view. I mean you can tell that someone's put a lot of time into making it look nice. But unfortunately from a user perspective and from an engineering perspective they've spent too much time on making it good for the developer and not enough time making it look good for the user. I mean there have been times when it takes me three page reloads to change my picture, three times to upload the picture and it doesn't blooming work" (Christo – GO).*

How user-centred design can be developed successfully has been recorded in the interview with Alun, creator of the Adventure Bike Rider community. A certain feature of the community allowed members to anonymously give positive or negative points for a contribution. This functionality was abused by other members in a way that can best be described as 'cyber-bullying'. Due to the anonymous nature of the vote it was not possible to use moderation to stop this form of abuse.

> *"We asked the forum members whether they wanted to keep it, I made people aware of what was going on and I believe the overall*

consensus was that it can be abused, it has been abused, it's open to abuse again. (…) We can't stop the abuse, so we took it off, and that was after it was opened up to forum members as well, we took it off.

Something like that is a big decision because you're never going to please all the people all the time, that's for sure. But it was another one where, my own personal feeling on it was yes, it was right to take it off as well, but if the members said we want to keep it on, I would have kept it on" (Alun – ABR).

In this instance the operator has prioritised the needs and wants of the user over the business.

5.1.10 Feedback and Development

Feedback and Development has been mentioned by both operators and users of virtual communities. Most communities actively seek feedback through online forms, specific forums or by encouraging users to email the community direct with their feedback.

"I mean sometimes Andrew emails me and says have you seen this latest thing? I said yeah, yeah, I've seen it, that works really good and all that kind of stuff. But before he emails me I've noticed something slightly different, and he's always mentioning if there's anything that you think needs changing or anything that you're not really happy with or if there's anything that you think needs alerting slightly then just let me know. So I talk to Andrew, well, as I say, on the emails quite regularly, so it's quite good really. I feel like I've got someone there watching and making sure that the app's running okay, so I feel like I'm part of their development, which is great" (Rachel – RR).

Several communities have adopted an approach from information technology called 'Agile Development'. This means implementing one piece of new features or codes at a time and testing the users reaction to it.

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5.1.11 Moderation

Moderation has been identified as a very important element to create a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. By actively moderating the community and enforcing the 'codes of conduct' in an early stage of the community life-cycle the operator is setting a tone that impacts on the founding members. The importance of this early intervention is highlighted by Alun from the Adventure Bike Rider community:

> *"There's so many websites out there where they're just pissing contests, and I always want to keep that out of there, and I think we've managed to do that to a great extent. I was stuck to that very rigidly in the beginning and I wouldn't tolerate these pissing contests, and I think what that's got on the forum now, there's generally, because that ethos has been in there, it's almost self-governing in that now". (Alun - ABR)*

However there are also negative aspects of moderation and it has to be considered what the impact of moderation is on interaction between users. Alun again describes his influence as a creator on the community:

> *"You've also got to get good moderators because I think the other thing I've seen is because I own it, I'm in a position where because I own the thing, my influence can be too big on posts, and I've seen this and that's why I've stepped back a bit from the forum. […] I'm still the same guy who was posting on there day one as I am now, but people's perception of me, and this is the key, is it has changed. Instead of it being sort of 'Alun who rides a motorbike', it's 'oh, he owns ABR'. […] So any post I put out there carries a bit more strength with people and I can offend people too easily" (Alun - ABR).*

By appointing independent moderators from amongst the users administrators and operators can involve users into the community processes and have more objective and more accepted voices that moderate the forum.

Adventure Bike Rider user Ian explains the same situation from his point of view:

> *Respondent: I was just going to say that I think there's probably a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes that we don't necessarily hear about from the crew at ABR, Alan and his staff and also from the moderators who just keep an eye on things and make sure that nobody gets – if somebody does make a comment or something or goes a little bit pear shaped, that they can step in fairly quickly. I don't think it's happened very often, I think it's probably happened once or twice, but I think that probably needs mentioning as well, that the hard work that goes on behind the scenes that you just don't hear about because it doesn't – everything runs fairly smoothly. (…) And that takes a fair amount of hard work and effort. And also to hold back from trying to always have a presence on the site. I mean they've created it and they get it up and running and they just let people get on with it, they're not always in there trying to control things or anything like that.*
>
> *Interviewer: Would that be something that's like almost would hinder your participation if the creators would like try and micromanagement everything?*
>
> *Respondent: Yeah, I think it would. I think that would become very obvious and I think a lot of people would get pretty negative about that. I think they'd get turned off it pretty quickly if that's what happened. But that doesn't seem to happen so it's not a problem.*

While the work of administrators and moderators is appreciated by the user their involvement should remain at a minimal level.

5.1.12 Permeated Control

Involving members into the community can extend past moderation. Several incidents were recorded where users were involved in organising information

(Maria -HU), redesigning the community website (Tiffany – HU) and even organising offline events around the world (Grant – HU).

> *"We spent a year and a half, I came back last October so I was in Brazil, I couldn't work, I didn't have a work permit because it's not easy to be a foreigner in Brazil and I contacted Grant because he needed help. He was building a database of travel books so I spent two weeks going through the entire database. I just wanted something to do and I'm always happy to help" (Maria – HU).*

Users that are involved in taking over these tasks do this free of charge and enjoy participating to the community. 'Giving back' to the community and the general camaraderie of the community are often mentioned cases of permeated control are recorded.

> *"Yes, everyone's always delighted when they can help, even if it's just a little thing. We all feel we get so much from it that any little thing we can do to give back, it's the least we can do" (Tiffany – HU).*

5.1.13 Building up Trust

Establishing trust within the community is an important element of community development as highlighted in the literature review. Trust has to be developed between the user and the business behind the community and also between users themselves. Building trust is technically not a direct element of community creation. It is indirectly created through several other elements such as 'Privacy', 'Transparency', 'Codes of Conduct' and 'Identity Persistence'. However 'trust' was often identified as a factor in the coding process and ranks high in the overall standing of community elements.

Trust between community members is build up over time when users create a history of participation in the community.

"I mean I suppose now I'm building up a little bit of a history but they've made it very easy to do that and if you end up being the butt of a few jokes then that's the sort of entry price you might say" (Ian – ABR).

Building up history in the community can only be achieved through the element of 'identity persistence'. Even though users are technically anonymous and are operating under a fictitious username, this username is what establishes a recognisable trail of participation:

"There's a couple of people whose names I'm beginning to recognise, but because there's just such a big volume of information and such a big discussion going on, it's hard to get really know people, hard to make friendships which is the advantage of a smaller community. And again it is the great advantage of having ride outs (offline events) because then you actually get to meet people in the flesh" (Christo – GO).

As user Christo identifies the ability to recognise other members by their username is closely linked to the size of the community and the volume of participation. Building stronger relationships and beginning to 'trust' other members can be facilitated through other elements such as 'offline events' where users can put a face to a (user)name and develop an additional relationship outside the virtual platform.

The ability to integrate other functionalities within the forum such as a private classifieds section heavily relies on the community's ability to promote trust among the members and among members and the community platform as this incident from Adventure Bike Rider user Ian shows:

Ian - ABR: "I bought my motorbike jacket off the XRV site and that was completely not knowing who the seller was or anything and other than the fact that he was a member of that site (…). I wouldn't – I don't think I'd worry about anything going wrong with the sale. I might worry about the size of a jacket not fitting me or something like

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that, but I wouldn't worry about somebody trying to sell me something in a dishonest way or anything like that.

Interviewer: And that's solely because they're a member of the same community.

Respondent: Well, it just seems to be a pretty self-policing community that's got a nice spirit to it. And that seems to work quite well" (Ian – ABR).

5.1.14 Negativity / Trolls

'Negativity' describes the feeling of not being welcomed or contributions not being appreciated in the community and can be introduced through a variety of issues such as a lack of identity persistence, weak ties between members due to a too large number of users (perceived anonymity), so called 'Trolls' or 'Pissing Contests' (I am better than you, you have no idea!), Spamming, Hackers, etc....

> *"I've never encouraged pissing contests and I don't want the website, the forum to become that. I think when you see forums go like that, that's when they're on the way down" (Alun – ABR).*

A large number of incidents have been recorded that involve a negative atmosphere or threatening answers in online communities. Users describe these incidents in much detail even after years and often seize to use the virtual community after such an incident occurs.

Get On member Jamie describes the element of 'negativity' and the likely results if he is confronted with it in an online community:

> *Respondent: The only thing I find negative is it tends to be more of the other people occasionally where you put something up thinking you're going to be of help to somebody and then you have somebody else who turns around and says you're a complete idiot, you don't know what you're doing sort of thing.(...) Sometimes it will*

just actually stop me wanting to post up help and things like that, but sometimes it's just stuff I let go over my head. And sometimes some people just the way they are I think I can't really be bothered if somebody's going to start putting rude comments up" (Jamie - GO).

As described before 'moderation' is a very important element to set out and control basic codes of conduct and to prevent 'negativity'. Jamie compares his negative experiences with the Get On community and describes his positive experience with the community and the importance of 'moderation' and 'openness' to tackle the issue with 'negativity':'

"I haven't found it to be with Get On, that's why I prefer using them because I found a lot with Kawasaki where I've put up a post or something and with some advice to somebody and I've found that you get a lot of hate comments about people saying oh, no you should do this, that's a stupid of you, you're damaging things, you're telling him how to ruin his bike. And you think, well, that's what I do and it was only advice, but I tend to find that with Get On, the people in the community that actually are a hell of a lot politer and there's next to no negative comments. So either Get On are quite quick to remove them and deal with them, or in general the people are just a hell of a lot politer" (Jamie – GO).

5.2 Other elements

The remaining elements were only recoded a few times during the interviews. One explanation is that these elements are more specific (such as 'identity persistence') or more technical than the previously described elements. Some of the following elements only appear in a certain development life-cycle and are therefore only mentioned by one community and not others.

5.2.1 Technology

Only one out of all interviewed users had issues accessing a community website. Andy from the Adventure Bike Rider community describes an incident where he would not be able to access the community platform from countries abroad. He mentioned that he had not even thought about contacting the community organisers about this issue.

Some users mentioned the issues with new technology such as mobile phone access to websites and also to specific mobile phone applications as two of the communities offer them to their members.

> *"The lads I ride with are between the ages of 25 and 60 and you'll find with a lot of them older than me is they don't use Smartphones. If they do use Smartphones, they haven't got a clue how to make the best of them and as a result, they know their way around Facebook but that's as good as it gets. They won't put any extra learning new platforms and quite a lot of the lads I ride with haven't got Real Rider and have absolutely no interest in it whatsoever. They've been riding for 30 years without it, why should they bother now" (Alan – RR).*

5.2.1.1 Identity Persistence

One very interesting incident regarding the importance of 'identity persistence' in an online community has been recorded when interviewing the creator of the Adventure Bike Rider community, Alun. and the anonymous rating system:

> *"The forum software came with a, it was like a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down type thing on there where you could vote people, give them a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down. That was being abused where there was a group of people, this only came to light on a certain thing but it was being abused. (…) There was a group of about three or four people who had done this and they had multiple personalities on there and there were giving multiple thumbs-up and multiple*

thumbs-down to each other and themselves, but also targeting individual members of the forum who were seeing their thumbs-up go down by about 20 things on a day and thinking, "What the hell have I done here?"

If somebody was posting stuff like that then it's there, you could see who's posting it up, you could see who was doing it, but these sort of thumbs-up and thumbs-down were anonymous. It's one of those things, it was open to abuse, it was being abused and we can't stop the abuse, so we took it off (...)"
(Alun – ABR).

All communities in the research are open to the public and only require an email address to join. Even though that users were very anonymous and free in the way that they can just open up another account this issue had not occurred when there was the perceived 'identity' of a username. Usernames create a sense of accountability for ones actions and also make it easier for moderators to control the discussion and potentially ban certain users from the discussion.

Identity persistence also helps users to identify other members and browse a history of their participation. Being able to recognise other members by means of identity persistence is needed to build up trust between members and create strong relationships with other members.

5.2.2 Leader's enthusiasm

'Leader's enthusiasm' is one element that has not been recorded throughout all interviews but has been recorded several times in interviews with the users of the travel community Horizons Unlimited. Horizons Unlimited is run by Grant and Susan Johnson, formerly motorcycle travellers themselves they created the online community to answer questions of fellow travellers. Since

then the community has developed to the most successful online community for motorcycle travel.

Horizons Unlimited members proposed the fact that the community is so successful because it's operators share a genuine passion for the focus of the community:

> *Interviewer: Do you think it's the reason why Horizons Unlimited is successful because they are authentic and did those travels themselves and are enthusiastic about it?*
>
> *Respondent: Definitely, genuine passion, their sincerity about the joys, challenges and adventures or motorbike travel and their willingness to share it and not be money making or money grabbing about it. It's a much warmer feeling than that, they say let's all share what we know and let's enhance everyone's enjoyment of this and maybe open a few people's eyes to what you can achieve if you've got a motorbike and the urge to travel (Tiffany - HU).*

Horizons Unlimited member Brian also highlights the fact that creators that are involved in the community have a much better grasp of the needs and wants of users:

> *"(…) They've honed it very well. I think it's very difficult to change it because again, you want to have a feeling of community and they do such a good job of that because they utterly believe it themselves and they've done it. They're not just business people that have been asked to set up a motorcycle travel site, they believe in what they're doing and they know what people want. They go to all the meetings so they get feedback, they're at the coalface of it so whatever they hear they can go bam, straight, implement it for the better" (…) (Brian – HU).*

5.2.3 Elements not mentioned

The only element that was not recorded during the interviews is 'Common Symbol System', which was highlighted through other studies in the literature review, first and foremost Sense of Community by McMillan and Chavis (1986).

Common Symbol System is a potential way a community can establish trust and recognition. Online communities often utilise a common symbol system such as points for participation or specific stickers or badges for special contributions or achievements or just generally indicate affiliation to the community.

Some of the communities analysed in the research offer a simple point system for contributions on their platform and the one community highlights founding members with a special badge however neither users nor creators mentioned anything close to a common symbol system in the interviews.

5.3 Comparison between Creators and Users

Users and operators show significant differences in the quantity in which elements were recorded during the interviews.

Operator Elements	%	%	User Elements
Business Model	10.8	14.2	Content
Content	8.3	10.8	Openness / Camaraderie
User-centred Design	8.3	9.5	Offline Events
Permeated Control	7.6	8.6	Focus
Focus	7.0	6.9	Attracting Members
Attracting Members	7.0	6.0	Purpose
Usability	7.0	5.6	Usability
Purpose	6.4	4.7	Moderation
Feedback and Development	5.1	4.7	Negativity / Trolls
Moderation	5.1	3.0	Building up Trust

Illustration 3: Differences between operators and users

For users the most mentioned element is content. Users are first and foremost attracted to a virtual community by the information, knowledge or content that the community can provide. In second place users often mention the atmosphere, openness and friendliness of a community. Several interviewed users describe positive incidents in which a community had a positive atmosphere and spirit but also negative experiences with virtual communities are recorded (and collected in the 'Negativity' category).

When interviewing operators and creators of virtual communities the most recorded element was 'Business Model'. Running a virtual community is a full-time job and operators need to monetise the community in some way. Operators also mentioned 'User-centred Design' and 'Permeated Control' frequently. Operators are opening up the community to feedback and change based on user needs. Most operators reported that they leverage users into

certain positions (Beta Testers, Moderators,…) that help run and develop the community.

While there are some elements that are evident and equally often mentioned for users and operators there are also clear differences in the elements. As illustration 3 shows users very often mentioned 'soft' elements such as 'Openness', 'Negativity' and 'Building up Trust' while for the operators more 'tangible' elements were recorded.

5.4 Evidence of different development stages in virtual communities

To answer research question 2 a variety of communities from different stages in their development were chosen.

Bike Minds, a new community platform based in the US, is just about to be created and has already attracted 8000 fans on their Facebook page. The communities Real Rider and Eat Sleep Ride have been founded in 2013 and have seen strong growth since their start. Adventure Bike Rider, Horizons Unlimited and Get On have been established for longer and have reached a mature stage of development.

Findings from operators and users were collected and mentions of elements are ranked by community. This allows the research project to take a deeper look into the differences in community life-cycle stages.

	Inception / Creation	Growth		Maturity		
Ranked	Bike Minds	Real Rider	Eat Sleep Ride	Adventure Bike Rider	Horizons Unlimited	Get On
1st	Purpose	Attracting Members	Attracting Members	Moderation	Content	Content
2nd	Content	Usability	Usability	Focus	Openness / Camaraderie	Focus
3rd	Attracting Members	Feedback and Development	User-centred Design	Offline Events	Permeated Control	Openness / Camaraderie
4th	Usability	Content	Interaction Support	Openness / Camaraderie	Purpose	Offline Events
5th	Business Model	Business Model	Focus	Content	Offline Events	Usability
6th	Openness / Camaraderie	Focus	Business Model	Business Model	Focus	User-centred Design
7th	User-centred Design	Building up Trust	Feedback and Development	Reputation	Leaders Enthusiasm	Business Model
8th	Offline Events	User-centred Design	Permeated Control	Attracting Members	Attracting Members	Negativity / Trolls
9th	Focus	Purpose	User Tools	Permeated Control	User-centred Design	Moderation
10th	Permeated Control	Growth Management	Content	Negativity / Trolls	Usability	Discussing Informal Topics

Illustration 4: Total elements mentions by stage of community life-cycle

5.4.1 Inception and Creation

The community in this stage was Bike Minds. Bike Minds is just starting up out of an idea. The platform has not yet been designed or launched. However the creators are already attracting users around the idea of an inclusive motorcycle community through a Facebook page.

At the point of the interview the community was still struggling to find the purpose. Malcolm, the operator behind the community, mentioned an incident in this very early stage of the community development. He quickly realised that his initial idea of a private motorcycle rental community would not be feasible but created a new idea out of the basis of the old:

> *"I started focusing on making this community that uses a bike profile and a rider profile to really kind of create essentially a digital toolset for motorcyclists to do all the things that we already do offline, just kind of enhance that experience, really kind of try to capture that passionate camaraderie that already exists on the road or between motorcyclists at a bike night, kind of meet up and kind of bring all that online in one easy to use platform" (Malcolm – BM).*

The importance of 'purpose' in this early stage of the community development is reflected by the number of times Malcolm mentioned this element during the interview. In illustration 4 'purpose' is ranked highest for this particular community.

Users also see this need of a clear purpose. In the current state, users looking for a clear defined purpose and statement what the goal of the community will be. Bike Minds user Miguel describes an incident in which he was looking for a clear purpose:

> *"I love it, but my first impression of the community was that it was more here for other type of biker or perhaps because of the first two*

or three pictures or features that I saw were more like adventure types, ADV motorcycling guys"
(Miguel – BM).

It is also important to highlight that 'business model' is only on the fifth place of total times mentioned during the interviews. Community operators should focus on finding a purpose to the community, the needs of the users and ways to attract them ('Content' and 'Attracting Members') and also making sure that users successfully interact with the community platform ('Usability'). Malcolm describes this situation himself:

"Originally I thought that would be included at launch so we could try to monetise as quickly as possible. But I think that would be a mistake and I think it's important to build something that users enjoy for the sake of using first before we say, "Hey, you can find brands and buy stuff here, obviously we're making money." I think it's important to give users a platform to express themselves first"
(Malcolm - BM).

5.4.2 Growth

In the growth category are two communities: Real Rider and Eat Sleep Rider. Real Rider and Eat Sleep Ride show a very similar pattern for the elements mentioned during interviews.

An initial observation is that 'purpose' for these communities is not an important element any more. The Real Rider community ranks this element in the top 10 while it was rarely mentioned in the other community. Virtual communities in the 'Growth' stage have defined their purpose and have now moved on to attracting members to the platform.

For both Real Rider and Eat Sleep Ride 'attracting members' was recorded the most often. At this very early stage of community development the

operators put strong emphasis on growing the number of members quickly. Communities attract members through traditional means of marketing. There is an even split between members mentioning that they became aware of the community through advertising and through word-of-mouth.

> *"Well I found about it because my boyfriend actually bought a paper, it was in one of his papers and there was like a review about it and all that kind of stuff, and he said well it's a fiver's worth but it's worth it. So I was looking at the web page and the web page was showing it was for free, so I thought well for a freebie let's just try it out and see what happens and since then, I use it most days now.*
> *So it kind of went on from there and I've got a few of my friends involved in it now, because I'm part of a motorbike group anyway, called Open Air Riders, in the local area, so they, a lot of people ask me about it and say is it worth it? And I just try to get loads of people on as much as I can"*
> *(Rachel – RR).*

Ultimately the community will need to attract influential users that then spread the word to their friends. Word-of-mouth had been mentioned by some of the interviewees alongside more traditional ways of attracting members such as advertising or offering privileges to first movers (Real Rider community).

Alun, creator of the Adventure Bike Rider community describes the growth stage for his community. The existence of the Adventure Bike Rider print magazine helps attracting community members and most ABR users interviewed said that they first heard about the community through the magazine.

> *"Then I thought okay, if I'm going to do this magazine, we're now in the internet age, I've got to have a website to go along with it. I put a forum on the website, this wasn't something I saw as seeing taking off just like that. I just put a forum on there because well, I suppose everybody else has got a forum, let's stick a forum on there. […]*

Then somebody else turned up on there, then about four other people turned up on there, and for a while it was just about four or five who were just chatting on there. So it wasn't anything big or anything, and then Adventure Bike Rider the magazine was ready to launch. I launched Adventure Bike Rider, and I think this is the crux of what happened. That Adventure Bike Rider hit that sweet spot."
(Alun – ABR)

Through the print magazine the creators have a powerful tool at their disposal to attract members. Adventure Bike Rider does not advertise the community. The importance of the element 'attracting members' in the Growth stage was therefore reduced for this specific community.

Community growth can quickly become an issue if the number of members grows to quickly and without moderation. Get On user Christo describes an incident from his experience:

"I was on a grammar group – several grammar groups – it's a group where we all enjoy speaking and writing good English and enjoy a good bitch about people who don't. On one of these groups, it kept growing and kept growing and until we finally capped 1000 members. And that's when the problems started, that's when we got the trolls and that's when we got – that's when fights started breaking out among well established members. In fact that's why I'm on about ten different sites because – about half of the people went off in a huff and made their own groups. (…) Basically the group on its own without the admin was absolutely fine because people would put up their own content, it was fine. The problem was that when people came up and started posting literally just posting offensive material for the sake of it" (Christo – GO).

An interesting observation is the high ranking of user-centred elements of communities in all three communities such as 'usability', 'feedback and development', 'permeated control' and 'user centred design'.

Community operators start involving members into the community involvement right from the outset. Influential members are involved to help attract other members or other stakeholders. Michael, member at the ESR community is not only a motorcyclists but also a potential advertiser, evaluating the platform.

Another way to gain user support is to involve members to harvest their feedback and start creating the communities with the user in the centre. The Real Rider community is a good example for this process as they heavily involve the users to test features and ask for feedback:

> *"I mean sometimes Andrew emails me and says have you seen this latest thing? I said yeah, yeah, I've seen it, that works really good and all that kind of stuff. But before he emails me I've noticed something slightly different, and he's always mentioning if there's anything that you think needs changing or anything that you're not really happy with or if there's anything that you think needs alerting slightly then just let me know. So I talk to Andrew, well, as I say, on the emails quite regularly, so it's quite good really. I feel like I've got someone there watching and making sure that the app's running okay, so I feel like I'm part of their development, which is great"* *(Rachel - RR).*

The aim of this high importance of feedback elements is to create a community right from the start that focuses on the user and his needs. The focus of the creators lies on creating a user-centered community with high usability.

5.4.3 Maturity

The Maturity group consists of the communities Adventure Bike Rider, Horizons Unlimited and Get On. All three communities have been established before 2010 and show similar patterns of elements mentioned during the

interviews. The communities show a strong focus on 'content', 'offline events' and 'openness / camaraderie'.

Both 'content' and 'offline events' give the users a reason to return to the community while 'openness / camaraderie' develops from strong 'offline events'. Grant, creator of the Horizons Unlimited community describes how the three elements interact with each other:

> *"It's not just virtual because the cool part about the meetings is that you may have known somebody for years on the hub and then you come to a meeting and there they are and you get to sit down and talk to each other. That makes a really powerful connection, it really works well. The fact we've gone live as well as virtual has made a huge difference in the cohesiveness of the community. Everybody knows each other, they've met, they've been to an event and maybe they're on a trip and halfway round the world, they're meeting again at another meeting somewhere else. Then they go home and they meet there at their home meeting. It becomes very powerful and connected and everybody really does feel they're part of the tribe, the community, Horizons Unlimited travellers"*
> *(Grant - HU).*

It is interesting to see that the elements 'openness / camaraderie' and 'offline events' are ranked very high for communities in the maturity stage while they are not mentioned at all in the growth stage. Additionally, finding the right balance between the formal and informal, between 'content' and 'openness', is really important:

> *"I think that your average biker is more likely to be a bike enthusiast so you've got the entire lifestyle thing as well. And so if you can find a good group that caters to that lifestyle, so not only information about your bike, but then a place where you can also have a chat, where you can bring the two together, – that's where you've got the basis for a really good community" (Christo – GO).*

While many elements have been identified in earlier stages of the community development some elements such as subgroups have a clear position in the later stages of community development. The only virtual community that mentioned and made use of subgroups was Horizons Unlimited, the longest-running and most popular community amongst the sample. Horizons Unlimited has been founded in 1997 and has to date over 40.000 members.

Subgroups are used to organise information and interaction. The forum alone has 86 sub-forums that split communication by specific topics, activity, location and by target group. Additionally the forum offers specific sub-forums for female users that is only accessible by female users. Another way of using subgroups to organise interaction is the so called HU sub-communities. So far over 700 regional communities exist in 109 countries. These communities are local 'chapters' of the big Horizons Unlimited community and offer places for regional users to interact.

It is also interesting to see that 'attracting members' has moved down on the list of elements mentioned. The communities have reached a state in which member growth is not as important any more.

6 Analysis and discussion

6.1 Introduction

The following chapter aims to analyse the findings of the primary research in order to answer the research questions.

6.2 Research question 1

Research question 1 aims at the elements of virtual communities. As identified in the literature review a large number of research has analysed single elements of virtual communities such as participation (Nonnecke and Preece 2001) or user tools (Kapoor et al. 2005). Only very few studies actually try to capture all elements of virtual communities. In a series of studies Leimeister (Leimeister et al. 2006, Leimeister et al. 2005, Leimeister 2004) tries to compile a list of all elements of virtual communities.

Even though Leimeister's list of community elements is very comprehensive, additional elements were found during the literature research. All elements were gathered and grouped into five categories of elements in the conceptual chapter (see table 8).

In the primary research all elements previously identified in the literature review were recorded during the interviews. It can be said that all elements identified in the literature review have a certain value to community creation. The only element not found through the interviews is the 'common symbol system' which describes the idea that groups have a common symbol system that helps them to identify each other.

Through an unbiased research approach the research project was able to validate the findings of the literature review and in particular Leimeister's findings. One key issue with the work of Leimeister is that research participant were given a list of elements and were asked to order the elements according to importance. This approach already introduces a bias to the research.

Technology	Business Model	Building Trust	Developing Memberbase	Community Involvement
Usability	Purpose	Privacy	Attracting Members	Offline Events
Reliability	Focus	Anonymity	Stimulating Participation	Feedback and Development
Performance	Revenue	Transparency	Integrating New Members	Common Symbol System
Supportive Scaffolding	Content	Code of Conduct	Membership Roles	Permeated Control
		Reputation	Member Reward System	Subgroup Management
		Identity Persistence	Reaching Critical Mass	
		Moderation		

Table 8: All elements by group

Additional elements were found that were not previously mentioned in the literature review. Some of these elements can be grouped in with other elements or are technically not an element that a creator can influence but rather the outcome of elements that the operator can influence to a certain extend (such as 'Building Trust' which is influenced by Identity Persistence, Moderation, Privacy, etc.). These 'soft' elements are of particular importance

for creating a successful virtual community. The importance of openness / friendliness and the negative influence of disturbing actions (Negativity) points towards what in the literature is described as Sense of Community (Blanchard and Markus 2004, Blanchard and Markus 2002, McMillan and Chavis 1986).

Sense of Community includes all mayor elements for community success in one framework and boils all elements down to the one most important measure of community success: The feeling that binds members within a community together. This community feeling measurement is called Sense of Community Index. Community creators should take on the Sense of Community framework and use the Sense of Community Index to test their online community for a positive SCI.

In the primary research some elements were ranked really low that previously were identified as very important. This includes most technical elements such as reliability, security and performance but also closely related elements such as anonymity and identity persistence. One explanation for the low ranking for these elements could be the advance in technology over the last decade. Websites are much more reliable and trimmed to cope with the performance required. Users on the other side are much more used to communicating online. The existence of a username is now widely adopted and the fact that most communities are based on or designed after existing and popular community platforms reduces the boundaries for participation.

Hence these elements have scored lower than previously thought, however they are still very much important for the development of a virtual community and should be considered when designing a community from the ground up.

The initial grouping of elements into five groups (Technology, Business Model, Building Trust, Developing Memberbase and Community involvement)

has proven to be applicable as almost all elements were found in the interviews.

Technology ⟷ Business Model

Community Involvement

Developing Memberbase

Building Trust
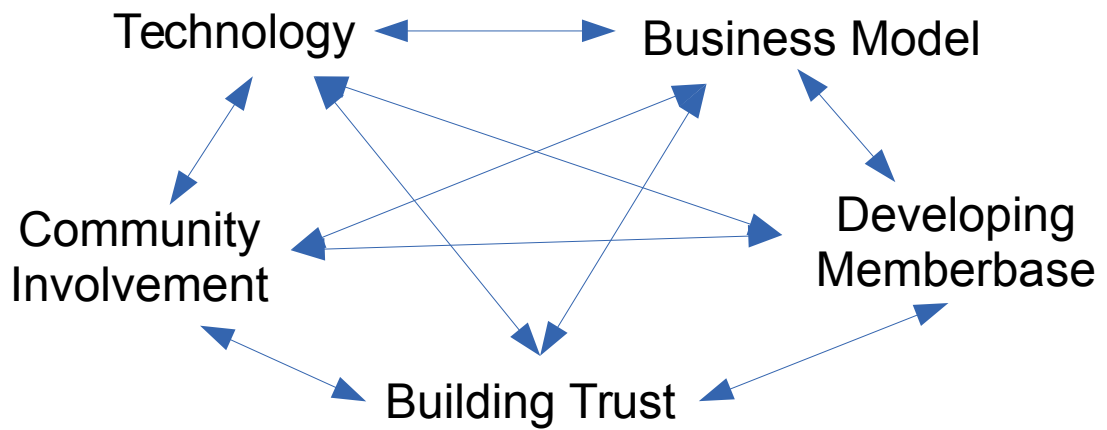
6.3 Research question 2

The aim of research question 2 was to further analyse the process of setting up and developing a virtual community over time. Research on the process of setting up an online community is virtually non-existent. While some studies touch on the process only one research work was found that focuses on virtual community life-cycles. This one work is Iriberri and Leroy's study from 2009.

As highlighted in the literature review Iriberri and Leroy's theoretical model of community life-cycles has a number of limitations. Iriberri and Leroy argue that their classification of elements is based on the original work however when these articles are actually examined there is no mentioning of life cycle stages. Elements within their model seem to be randomly placed in different life-cycle stages.

This research project tried to analyse life-cycle stages through a different approach- Being able to capture actual experiences of community operators with setting up communities has created a better understanding of the process and now can be compared to Iriberri and Leroy's theoretical model.

Inception	Creation	Growth	Maturity
Purpose	Technology (Usability / Reliability / Performance)	Attracting members, Reaching Critical Mass	Permeated management and control (get users involved)
Focus	Security and Privacy	Integration of new members	Recognition of contributions and loyalty
Codes of conduct	Anonymity	Up-to-date and high quality unique content	Subgroup Management
Funding and Revenue	Identity Persistence	Interaction support	Feedback and development
Reputation / Trademark	User-centred design and evolution	Off-line events and meetings	Online events
		Personalisation	Sales and offers
		Transparency / Neutrality	User tools
		Administration and Moderation	

Table 9: Iriberri and Leroy's model of life-cycle stages with elements

When comparing Iriberri and Leroy's model of life-cycle stages to the findings of the primary research it can be said that there is clear evidence of different life-cycle stages found in the interviews. As described in chapter 5.4 the six virtual communities show a very different distribution of elements and can be grouped into three life-cycle stages.

Bike Minds is a very new community that has yet to be actually created. The community is in between the life-cycle stages inception and creation. Focus of its creator Malcolm currently resides on finding a purpose and creation unique content for the community.

Real Rider and Eat Sleep Ride can be classed at being in the growth stage of community development. Both communities have recently been created and currently try to attract new members to build a critical mass while simultaneously focusing on developing the community according to users feedback and with the user in mind.

The remaining three communities have reached the maturity stage of development. Attracting new members is not in the focus any more; it's about high quality information and content and creating a special atmosphere in the community that makes the user revisit the community time and time again. Offline events are very important for all three communities.

It can be said that the findings of the primary research can be compared to the model of Iriberri and Leroy (2009) and that they show some form of coherence. However the theoretical model is too rigid when it comes to the elements used in each life-cycle stage.

As the findings have shown a focus on user-centred development of the platform through feedback and through getting users directly involved was found in the both the Real Rider and Eat Sleep Ride community. The

community operators focus on early interaction with the users to tailor the offerings of the community and its usability to the user. Contrary to the model these elements have been found in the earlier growth stage and have a bigger impact on the total community development than before thought.

Other elements such as 'subgroup management' and 'offline events' have a clearly defined point in the maturity stage. While the model by Iriberri and Leroy (2009) sees these elements placed offline events in the growth stage the primary research found these elements in the maturity stage. Community creators use offline events to create stronger relationships between community users.

Overall it can be said that elements are much more fluid than described in Iriberri and Leroy's model. Most elements are found across several stages with the importance of the element changing depending on what the primary requirements are for further development.

6.4 Summary

As the literature review has shown current research either focuses on analysing single elements or tries to determine a full set of elements that are universally valid for all types of community. While the former gives no practical advice how single elements work together in the development of communities, the latter fails to create a framework that is universally applicable.

In this research project it was shown that all elements of the literature research were replicated using an unbiased research approach. The suggested classification into five different groups of elements holds additional

value for future research. Each group consists of several elements and even if one of those elements is not applicable in a certain type of community this does not affect the overall validity of the class.

In a second research question the process of community development was analysed. Research on virtual community life-cycle is very limited and the only research work that has analysed the development of communities is Iriberri and Leroy's (2009) theoretical model on life-cycle stages. Through the primary research this research project was able to further explore the nature of community development. While the theoretical model holds some value the classification of different elements is to rigid to be applicable. Utilising the suggested category approach and analysing the relationships of the different categories through a full community life-cycle would help understanding the process of virtual community development.

7 Final conclusions and implications

This chapter concludes the research project. First, the background and findings of the research project are briefly summarised and the contributions from the primary research reviewed. The later part of this chapter discusses the implications for marketing science and marketing practice before a number of suggestions for future research are made.

7.1 Background and findings

So if you build it, will they come? The main question of this research project was to deepen the understanding of online community creation and development. The advent of the Internet and social media has created an environment in which users are eager to join and participate in online communities. The new tools that Web 2.0 brought to the hands of the public has made creating a virtual community platform a very simple task. So while marketers are jumping on the bandwagon of virtual communities it it still a very narrowly researched topic in marketing science. Most of the literature available are 'how to' books on virtual community creation.

Marketing science is still very much at the beginning of understanding virtual communities and the few research project that have looked deeper into virtual community creation base their research insights on the extensive research into real-life communities.

It was important get a better understanding of the elements and processes involved in the creation and development of virtual communities and to test some of the more popular studies to verify their findings. Some popular research projects found in the literature review such as Leimeister et al

(2005) analysing community elements or Iriberri and Leroy (2009) discussing community life-cycles had serious limitations or were purely theoretical models. To validate the findings of previous research a new research approach was chosen (chapter 4).

Critical incident technique helped users and creators to speak about their own experiences and talking about both positive and negative experiences was encouraged. Using unstructured interviews allowed a flexibility to the interviews and reduced interviewer bias to a minimum. This makes the findings more reliable than Leimeister et al's study (2005) in which the researchers provided the interviewees with a list of community elements to pick from.

The primary research (chapter 5) was able to validate most of the findings for elements of virtual communities from the literature review. However the primary research also identified that parts of the theoretical model for community life-cycle were not evident in the real-life environment. Suggestions to modify and improve the life-cycle stages were made.

7.2 Implications

The implications of the results of the research project for marketing science and practice are summarised below:

For marketing science

The research project has verified existing findings for research question 1 through a new and unbiased research approach. Almost all elements identified through the literature review were reproduced in the unstructured interviews with both operators and users using critical incident technique. The research also highlighted interesting differences between users and

creators of virtual communities. These differences were developed into recommendations for further research and should be further researched by marketing science.

The project also proposed a new idea of categorising community elements into five groups of elements: Technology, Business Model, Building Trust, Developing Memberbase and Community Involvement. The benefit of this grouping approach is that researchers do not need to identify each and every single element but can assume their existence as long as other elements from the same group have been identified. This approach would help generalising the research into virtual community elements. Marketing science should take this model forward and identify the relationships and synergies between the five element groups.

For research question 2 the project managed to identify issues with the existing theoretical model from the literature review. In Iriberri and Leroy's model (2009) the researchers seemed to have randomly inserted elements into different life-cycle stages. This research project has highlighted the issues with Iriberri and Leroy's model and proposes changes to the model. However marketing science will need to further research the process of virtual community development over time.

For marketing practice and management

Virtual communities are currently on top of the agenda for marketeers. Marketeers are looking for guidance through the process of setting up and running a virtual community and currently only find help in mostly non-academic articles and books.

Marketing research has mostly focused on single elements of virtual community success and failed to give management any practical advice or overview on the process of creating and developing virtual communities.

This project has helped to establish a better overview on the elements and processes involved by looking at both community creators and users. Creators should focus their attention on the users needs and wants and learn from the mistakes of others.

It also needs to be highlighted that many elements of virtual communities were under-represented in the primary research. Some 'traditional' elements such as privacy, codes of conduct and user tools scored very low in the analysis of the interviews. One explanation for this experience is that many factors of community success are already build-in into community packages and software and therefore not considered by either operators or users. The existence of so many online communities that use the same basic structure and features has made the consumers jaded with standard features. Nevertheless marketeers will have to keep those elements in mind when designing a community.

7.3 Limitations and recommendations for future research

As with most qualitative research there are limitations to the reliability and repeatability of the results. Unstructured interviews do not pretend to deliver generalisable results and the project did not aim to produce such findings. The aim of the research was rather to gain a better understanding of the elements and processes involved in creating and developing virtual communities.

The virtual communities involved in the research were carefully chosen and all target a specific user group, motorcyclists, to eliminate the influence of different user groups and different behaviours, preferences, needs etc. However even the user group motorcyclists can be split into different sub-groups such as adventure motorcyclists, racers, commuters etc.

The fact that the target group motorcyclists also has a very real life focus through their hobby might influence their experiences with the online community. Offline events were frequently discussed during the interviews and were found to be a very important part of virtual communities. This element would need to be verified by another study.

Chapter 6 highlighted the issues with existing research into life-cycle development and the theoretical model by Iriberri and Leroy (2009). Further research into life-cycle stages is necessary to gain a better knowledge of the process of setting up a virtual community. This research has delivered some in-depth insights however these findings would need to be verified. A quantitative study into community life-cycle stages would give a better overview on the general process of developing communities On the other side an action research approach could gain some further in-depth insights.

More generally speaking this research is based on the premise of a western culture and the western understanding of 'community'. Community is understood and lived very differently in other cultures which might make virtual communities not applicable in other cultures. As more and more marketing science research will focus on the topic of virtual communities there will be more research published analysing virtual communities in the background of a different culture. It would be interesting to analyse the differences between the findings.

7.4 Conclusion and final thoughts

The research project offers some valuable insight into the topic of virtual communities. Previous research on virtual community elements was very fragmented. After an extensive literature review the research project was able to identify the elements and then replicate them in unstructured interviews with users and operators. The project also proposes a new way of categorising elements into groups, simplifying the discussion around virtual community elements.

In a second research question the project looked at the existing research into the development of virtual communities over time and how operators can successfully evolve online communities. Only very few research projects have yet analysed this question and the research project has achieved some exploratory insights into this topic.

A success of the project would be if it would stimulate further research into the process of developing virtual communities and would look into the different life-cycle stages of community development.

What is left at this point is to answer the question that this research project posed: "If you build it, will they come?" And the answer has to be Yes. The project has shown that developing a community is not a dark art or a case of luck but rather the result of hard work and good research.

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Appendices

- Transcribed interviews:
    - ABR – Alan
    - ABR – Alun
    - ABR – Andy
    - ABR – Ian
    - BM – Josh
    - BM – Malcolm
    - BM – Miguel
    - ESR – Alex
    - ESR – Michael
    - GO – Christo
    - GO – Jamie
    - GO – Miles
    - HU – Brian
    - HU – Grant
    - HU – Maria
    - HU – Tiffany
    - RR – Alan
    - RR – Rachel
    - RR – Zoe

- Coding keywords

ABR - Andy

[Start of recorded material]

Respondent: Hello?

Interviewer: Hi, Andy, this is Matt from Scottoiler.

Respondent: Oh, hi, Matt, how're you doing?

Interviewer: I'm good, how're you?

Respondent: I'm good, yes.

Interviewer: It's actually quite nice weather outside, I thought you might be out on the bike.

Respondent: Tomorrow. Forecast wasn't great today so I kind of decided tomorrow. My son's quite keen to start motorbike racing, so we're kind of going to have a look.

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Respondent: So how can I be of help to you?

Interviewer: Thank you very much for helping me. Basically what I'm doing is I'm doing a part-time masters and the topic of this is online communities. I really wanted to include Adventure Bike Riding in that because I think it has a really good community spirit.

Respondent: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Is that what you feel as well?

Respondent: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah, so basically it's – I don't really have any interview questions where you have to rate between one and nine or something silly like that. It's just meant to be like a nice friendly chat. Basically if you could just tell me what your journey was to – why did you join ABR and what happened and things like that.

Respondent: Yeah. I mean it's been a very positive experience for me, ABR. I suppose to start at the beginning I've been interested in kind of adventure biking for the last ten years now. And initially used Horizon Unlimited and ADVRider which were, both have different kind of uses, kind of Horizon's much more European based and ADVRider American based. Adventure Bike Rider dot com I found was much more British website. A lot of Scottish people involved in it as well. I've found it much more kind of normal down to earth Rather than tales of trips to Mongolia and such. It's much more centred around Europe and achievable things for your average person.

Interviewer: So it would be more towards what you were looking for?

Respondent: More towards what I'm doing. I mean the other websites are certainly great for things that you'd like to at some point in your life do.

Interviewer: Yeah, tell me about it. I would like to do something like that as well.

Respondent:	Yes. I mean I've got some help and advice from it, I've purchased some things from members, but this summer particularly I was heading down to the Stella Alpina Ralley, have you heard of that?
Interviewer:	No.
Respondent:	Quite a lot of the members went there this year and last year. It's a big motorbike rally held in Italy, very close to the French border. And part of it is you ride up to the top of Colle del Sommeiller which is the highest road, it's more like a gravel trail than a road, in Europe, 2,009 metres or something like that. So I basically mentioned I was going to go on my own and then I got a message from another member saying he was travelling on his own, so we ended up meeting up together and we travelled together for ten days. But also I'd had some information – some messages from another couple of members saying that they were going for the first time and wanting to do some of the trails, but they weren't very sure about it. And because I'd been before where I used to meet up and I kind of showed them the trails.
Interviewer:	Okay, and so that was the first time you'd meet all of these members from the forum?
Respondent:	We've met together, yep. And a fellow traveller we're meeting up quite soon again. And the other fellas we are trying to swap photographs because my camera broke quite early into my trip. So I'm going to share photographs.
Interviewer:	That's good. So it was probably quite good to put a face to the name and the people you would normally only see in the forum.
Respondent:	Yeah. The whole forum is a very friendly, helpful forum. It's quite often people say it's a nice forum because it doesn't seem to have the aggressiveness of some of the forums.
Interviewer:	And why do you think that is?
Respondent:	I don't know. I don't know whether it's down to the moderators or what. Forums are things that I dip in and out of, I'm not addicted to them or I'm not constantly on them. I wouldn't call myself any sort of expert on these various forums. I do a bit of Facebook as well occasionally but not every five minutes like some people.
Interviewer:	And I suppose like everything motorbike related is happening on forums and not on Facebook.
Respondent:	Yes. I'm not a big Facebook user, so I don't really know much about how much of the motorcycle scene is now on Facebook.
Interviewer:	Yeah.
Respondent:	I find the forum very useful, very friendly, very helpful.
Interviewer:	I heard about Adventure Bike Rider through the magazine, but I don't know if that's the same for you or was that through another forum?
Respondent:	I also get the magazine as well, so I quite like – yeah, I think the magazine's good. The whole adventure bike riding scene is kind of come in almost so quickly. It has caught a lot of people out, even the bike manufacturers are kind of trying play catch up with it.
Interviewer:	Yeah. That's something that I kind of wondering in my head just in like the last what, four or five years, there must've been quite a lot of people coming to

	Adventure Bike Rider – like to adventure bike riding, but also to the forum, people that are new.
Respondent:	Yeah. I mean the whole thing, the whole term adventure bike riding, I was reading something last night. Some people will tell you, you have to be in outer Mongolia to be an adventure bike rider and others will tell you going to the northwest of Scotland's enough. It's just everybody's perception of it, so most people don't have – or can't take three or four months off to go travelling, or can't afford to do it.
Interviewer:	Yeah, I know. Tell me about it. It's the dilemma when you're young to have enough time but no money, but, yeah.
Respondent:	Exactly. I'm quite fortunate, I can get reasonable amount of time off. I take seven weeks off in the summer and that's me back from nine weeks off travelling. I mean it's – I suppose it's – well, one of the odd things about travelling this year there were actually very few countries I could access the website from.
Interviewer:	Really?
Respondent:	Yeah. I find it very odd.
Interviewer:	That's interesting. What, you could access anything else or was it just that website?
Respondent:	No, I could access – I took a notebook with me and I was able to access pretty well every website that I wanted to, but for some reason adventure bike rider dot com was very difficult. It was only when I got like back into Germany that I could access it.
Interviewer:	That's really interesting. Have you spoken to the site organisers about that?
Respondent:	No, I haven't. I only got back on Sunday
Interviewer:	Oh, okay.
Respondent:	So I'm kind of straight back to work on the Monday, so hopefully catch up.
Interviewer:	That's fair enough.
Respondent:	That's something I hadn't thought about is contacting the website organisers.
Interviewer:	I think what like – I know that I haven't spoken to Alan Davis yet who's the website organiser, but I know that he said they're doing quite a lot of work on the website at the moment, so it might be that.
Respondent:	Basically just come as forbidden which was really odd or whatever, I don't know. I'm not an IT person.
Interviewer:	That was like one of my questions that I have was if there's anything that you don't like about the adventure bike rider community or anything like – it's basically I'm looking like for things that didn't go the way you wanted it to or the way that you didn't expect it to go that way, like you just said with the website being not available in other countries, so that's really interesting.
Respondent:	That was more just a – because when you're travelling on your own, normally I wouldn't bother with a computer when I'm travelling, but when you're travelling on your own you kind of – it's handy to have that communication so you can – even just something to sit and read through at night sort of thing.

Interviewer:	And then in that situation you would go to adventure bike rider…
Respondent:	I'd go the site, yeah.
Interviewer:	Would you be looking for like hotel tips or maintenance tips or just…
Respondent:	Mostly – sometimes it is looking for maybe other people. Like I was trail riding for four days in Albania, it would've been quite nice to meet someone else. It's nice sometimes on your own but it's quite nice to have somebody with you just in case.
Interviewer:	Yeah.
Respondent:	I remember at one point when I got the bike stuck on a steep hill. A little bit too adventurous, it would've been nice to have somebody with you. But I mean just, to be honest the main reason is just maybe something to do in the evenings.
Interviewer:	At the start that you mentioned ADVRider and Horizons Unlimited because that's one of the other communities that I'm talking to.
Respondent:	Yeah. I would be surprise if people who are on Adventure Bike Rider dot com aren't on ADVRider. ADRider is fantastic for stories, it's something that maybe Adventure Bike Rider dot com doesn't do very well.
Interviewer:	Sorry, stories?
Respondent:	Stories, yes, the ride tales.
Interviewer:	So people posting after they did like a trip or something.
Respondent:	Some people post as they go along, others post when they come back. I mean some of the stories are quite fantastic, so – I mean I don't know if you've heard of people like Roger Kohlbach.
Interviewer:	I do – I've been – like to be honest my main two forums would be Adventure Bike Rider and Horizons Unlimited. I've not done much on ADV.
Respondent:	Yeah. I mean he's one of the great northern adventure riders at the minute, he's always pushing the boundaries. Stuff that I think most people find too hard. They like the dream for a Ewan and Charlie trip crossing the world but they would not want to do it day after day after day after day really hard going, especially most riders nowadays are probably in their forties and fifties. I'm now 51 and I find off-roading physically quite hard at the end of the day you know my body's hurting.
Interviewer:	Yeah. I did the off road school down in Wales and even with my young 28 years I was knackered after a heavy day.
Respondent:	Yeah. Which one did you do?
Interviewer:	The level one introduction.
Respondent:	Sorry, what's – there's various schools down there, was it the Yamaha one or the Honda one?
Interviewer:	The BMW one.
Respondent:	Oh, the BMW one, yeah. Because I've had the Yamaha one down in Wales, the Tenere experience.

Interviewer:	Have you been up to the one in Scotland yet?
Respondent:	I've not. I spoke with the guy running it up at Knockhill, the BMW Open Day.
Interviewer:	Yeah.
Respondent:	So I was chatting with him there and basically one of my – I mean for a weekend it's something like £450 or something like that which is an awful lot of money. And I kind of chatted with him to see if maybe they would open it up. If it would be cheaper for people with their own bikes. I mean when I did the one down in Wales the Tenere experience it was £500 weekend, but if you brought your own bike it was only £200.
Interviewer:	Oh, okay.
Respondent:	So that's what I did. If it was something like that, I'd be quite interested in because, yeah, don't get me wrong if money wouldn't be an issue quite happily go along but it is an awful lot of money for a weekend, especially when you've got the bike sitting there.
Interviewer:	Yeah. Might be something like to try and organise on the forum and then get other members involved and maybe get like a discount if enough people come in.
Respondent:	Mm-hm. Well, it's definitely something worth looking into and organising. One of the other events I went to was one of the members organised a trail ride through Galloway Forest that had been done for a couple of years unfortunately it didn't work out because of the snow we had at Easter. About a dozen of us went anyway and just sat about chatting, having a few beers.
Interviewer:	You still went up?
Respondent:	Some of us, probably 40 but at the end of the day only about a dozen turned up because the trail ride was cancelled.
Interviewer:	Well, I mean that's really interesting. So do you think that those members you've met in real life you have a different communication to or approach to on the forum?
Respondent:	Oh, yeah, absolutely, I mean even like meeting the guys when we did the tour, it's always nice. And there's actually a couple of guys that also did the forest ride. Yeah, it's always nice to meet people in the flesh and you get a chit-chat and you get a better idea of who you get on with and who's got a similar personality. You always run a risk with those you have not met before. But that worked out very well. To a certain extent it's about personality. I'm going to get along with most people.
Interviewer:	Yeah. It seems to be…
Respondent:	I mean Adventure Bike Riding you need an attitude of being quite chilled and not getting yourself uptight about things because when I came back from my trip there people ask 'Did you not have any problems?' And yeah, but you overcome them. It's part of it. Just get yourself wound up about it.
Interviewer:	Yeah. Exactly. It's not trying to plan everything out beforehand. Actually the problems are a part of the journey.
Respondent:	I do quite a lot of planning, but it's as much planning so that you don't end up somewhere and it turns out that there's actually something really good a few miles from where you were and you did not see it. So you do need some of that planning but you don't want to over plan either. And you also want to be flexible.

Interviewer:	Yeah.
Respondent:	When I was over in Turkey in 2009 and just sat at a petrol question locals always chat to you and you're like where should I go and they sent me to Nevsehir and it turned out Nevsehir is actually right next to Cappadocia which is kind of one of the big massive tourist places in Turkey.
Interviewer:	Yeah, I know of Cappadocia.
Respondent:	Yeah. So we ended up there for a few days and I'd never seen it if I hadn't sat chatting to the locals at a petrol station a few hundred miles away.
Interviewer:	That's nice. That's probably what you say it's like the part that adventure bike riding – Adventure Bike Rider is missing is this – them coming back and telling a story, your trip journey.
Respondent:	Yes. I mean they've got a section of it but compared with particular ADVRider it's not that good. Certainly I think a lot of people could learn from ADVRider as in the storytelling side of it, it's a big massive part of that site.
Interviewer:	And why do you think that ADVRider is so much better at that? Like what – is it just…
Respondent:	Well, Adventure Bike Rider, the whole set up of it seems to be very small. There are stories but they're like kind of I don't know a quarter of a page long. Whereas you go to ADVRider and then there are 200 posts. And it also attracts people who are very good at telling stories as well. There is obviously a skill in that.
Interviewer:	It's interesting because one of the things that I found in the literature was that for a community to grow and develop they should always be like the users should give feedback and then the – or the community should ask for feedback and then the community creators should take that feedback and try and like include it in the platform. Maybe that's something that Adventure Bike Rider is not very good at, like asking for feedback and then following up on the feedback.
Respondent:	Possibly. Yeah.
Interviewer:	I only really have one more question here and that's like one question that I've asked all the people I've talked to so I try to include that in every conversation which is what do you think are the most important elements or – or the most important element of a community?
Respondent:	I think friendliness.
Interviewer:	Sorry, say that again.
Respondent:	Friendliness. People are friendly. Some people are quite confrontational and I've got nothing against some banter or open discussion but it has to be done in a friendly way. One thing about all motorcyclist sites, motorcycling, it's such a friendly group of people. I think motorcyclists are the most friendly people ever. I've been in countries like Eastern Europe and if you have a problem just can't find somewhere and what you do is you stop the first motorcyclist and nine times out of ten they'll help you. I think motorcyclists are incredibly friendly people they will go the extra yard to help other riders out no matter what type of bike you ride or whatever.
Interviewer:	Yeah. Even though I've not been riding that long, I've felt that as well.

Respondent:	Yeah. The thing about all the kind of bike riders, all different sort of riders sportsbike riders and Harley riders, adventure riders are probably the group with the most vary, from around the world to 20 miles down the road.
Interviewer:	I mean this is – that's it from my side unless you have any questions for me?
Respondent:	Not at all. Good luck writing up your PhD.
Interviewer:	Thank you. I saw your message saying that you're right next to Milngavie.
Respondent:	I'm just ten minutes away.
Interviewer:	I would love to go out on the bike, but I think it's a weekend in front of the laptop trying to write up things.
Respondent:	No problem at all. Have a good weekend, Matt, don't work too hard.
Interviewer:	I'll try my best. Thank you.
Respondent:	No problem, bye now.
Interviewer:	Cheers, bye.

[End of recorded material]

[Start of recorded material]

Interviewer:	Hi there, is that Ian?
Respondent:	Hi.
Interviewer:	Hi, Ian, it's Matt from Scottoiler.
Respondent:	Hi, how're you doing?
Interviewer:	I'm good, how're you?
Respondent:	I'm fine. I just missed you – did you call the other day?
Interviewer:	Yeah, I did, a couple of days ago.
Respondent:	I just missed your call by about half a ring. I was outside working and I had my overalls on, and by the time I got to my phone I'd missed it.
Interviewer:	Do you got like ten minutes now or is it a bad time to call?
Respondent:	Aye, no, it's a good time, it's okay.
Interviewer:	Cool, thank you very much for agreeing to help me. It's very much appreciated.
Respondent:	Not a problem at all.
Interviewer:	I can tell you a bit about my research. I'm basically doing a part-time masters and I'm in a bit of a time dilemma. I've got like two months left to write it all up and finish my research and so basically the topic of my dissertation is virtual communities and how they are created. So I've been speaking to the creators of virtual communities and in the case of ABR speak to Alan and then – but then I also wanted to talk to some users to see what their perspective is on communities.
Respondent:	Right.
Interviewer:	So that's why we're here. And I know that you said in your message that you only got your licence 18 months but that you had good support from the site, so I was really interested to talk to you.
Respondent:	Yes. I've had really good support from – the two main sites that I use in connection with motorbikes are the ABR site and I have an Africa twin and the XRV which is the other designation for that bike you may not, I'm not sure how much you know about bikes.
Interviewer:	I am, I've got an F650.
Respondent:	Yeah, okay. Well, I have an Africa twin and the help from both those sites, the XRV site and the ABR site has just been unbelievably good.
Interviewer:	I was just curious, you got your licence and then you decided – and then how did you first hear about Adventure Bike Rider?

Respondent: I've got the – I must've found the magazine about the same time as I was learning and that was my connection to the site. And then I got onto the site and I'd sort of been involved in it just as a user I suppose ever since the beginning and so it's been quite interesting from that point of view.

Interviewer: Is it like – were you mostly – were the other members quite welcoming when you first joined?

Respondent: Very. I've never had a negative from dealing with them at all. I mean I know there's been – like any virtual community there's always the odd negative comment that gets by but I had – I mean I just couldn't say enough good things about – well, specifically ABR, but also the XRV site. Because I came into this fairly late, I mean I'm 61, so I didn't start riding until I was obviously I got my licence just before my 60th birthday and I don't know a great deal about it. But I've since met a few of the guys through – well, through both sites. They're kind of intermingled for me because many of the people who are on the XRV site are also on the ABR site and vice versa. And so I've met quite a few of those guys now and we've done some rides together and any time I've had a problem I've been able to go along to both sites, although obviously you're just concentrating on ABR.

But I never had a negative comment. I've had a tremendous amount of positive comments and I suppose I find that gratifying. I find it really helpful and gratifying because being an older rider I feel like I've got a catch up to do, and a lot of people look at me and think oh I must have been riding all my life and of course that's not true. So whilst a lot of the guys on the site have been riding for a great many years I haven't, but they've all been very, very open and willing and helpful in passing on information or tips or whatever.

Interviewer: I suppose that's the benefit of virtual communities is that you're just a user name, you're not – like no one can see you so no one really knows that you're only a rider for 18 months.

Respondent: Yeah, and well, I don't mind admitting that I don't know much about bikes and they still accepted me and they don't mind. They seem to I think really understand that the real connection is the feeling you get when you're riding a bike I guess. It's nice to meet them and put names to faces and I'll probably go down to the national meet which is in Cumbria next month and I'll probably do that. And then I'm going up to the Ullapool meet at the end of September.

Interviewer: So you're fully involved now.

Respondent: Well, yes, I mean I don't organise anything but I'm quite happy to participate and I've been – I mean this'll be my third trip up to Ullapool. The first year I did it on my 125 which took quite a bit of time and effort and I think – and I've done – there was a Galloway Forest ride as well which I can't remember if that was actually organised through XRV or ABR but I think there's so much intermingling that it's difficult to separate them. But I met some of the people on that ride and I had a small problem with the bike and even – I mean I'd hardly said I've got a small problem with my bike when we met at the campsite here that they just swarmed over the bike and they had the petrol tank off and they were all looking at it and just helping to find what the problem was. And I found that to be pretty much the attitude. If there's a problem they all just chip in and get it sorted and that's great.

So I think I got a bit more respect the second time I showed up at Ullapool on my Honda rather than on the little Yamaha, especially as people got fed up of riding behind me, and they still make the odd jokes about having to breathe in oil fumes. It's always a bit of a worry I suppose with a virtual community that when you actually meet the people you're never quite sure how it's going to be. But quite literally I've nothing but positive experiences the whole time.

Interviewer: Like after your first meet, after you had 125 then the jokes about the oil fumes they then transformed into the forum where people had like forum threads would say, "Oh, I remember that one time."

Respondent: Yeah. You get the odd – I mean I suppose now I'm building up a little bit of a history but they've made it very easy to do that and if you end up being the butt of a few jokes then that's the sort of entry price you might say. And generally they've all been pretty good guys. I mean there's some guys on there that I could easily become quite good friends with and I saw some of them just the other day when we had the re-run of the Galloway Forest ride and they came down and I went over and camped with them, just actually a mile or two from where I live. But just so I could experience that evening time with them after the ride and whereas the last few times they've done that ride I would come home, this time I decided to stay and, yeah, no, it was good fun.

Interviewer: That sounds good. I think – well, what I have found in the literature is that successful communities have this special spirit of likeminded people.

Respondent: Mmm. Yeah. I think that's pretty true. I mean obviously the bikes are the common theme, but there are other things on there that people will ask questions about that have nothing to do with bikes. But there's a tremendous amount of expertise in different areas, from the backgrounds, the varied backgrounds a lot of the members have, they're not just – they're not all bike mechanics or anything like that. Some of them work in insurance, some of them – you must've followed the site, you must've followed some of the threads.

Interviewer: Yeah, I do. I've met up with a couple of guys up here, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. I mean I could certainly put on – yeah, it just expands in all sorts of funny ways. There's a guy in Glasgow, MotoAl, Alan, and I've met him a couple of times now. He just puts out something, does anybody want to come and see this guy's garage, a guy that runs the university café. And you've got a garage full of motorbikes with interesting stories behind them. But it's also another coffee shop in Glasgow where if I'm ever up in Glasgow I can go and it's knock on effects like that that just expand I think and there's again you'll have seen just if anybody does have any kind of problems or questions they're quite open about asking and people are pretty quick about coming back with answers and helpful answers.

Interviewer: Do you think it's – so it's like the spirit of the people that makes the site so successful?

Respondent: I think so, yes, I mean any of those sites – I mean I suppose nothing would close those sites down quicker than getting people who would make negative comments. People go off that. I mean you must've been on sites as well where somebody will say something and somebody will take it the wrong way and over-react or something like that.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah.

Respondent: And I think you're right when you say that it's the overall spirit of the people involved, which is interesting. That maybe goes against slightly the stereotype of the average motorcyclist or the average non-motorcycling person has about people who ride motorcycles. I suppose to stereotype – haven't they just had to change the Oxford English dictionary definition of a biker?

Interviewer: I've seen the …

Respondent: There was something in the ABR about that, wasn't there?

Interviewer:	Yeah, and there was also like a poll or something where people say, yeah, like only 5% of bikers actually have tattoo and only 8% have a beard.
Respondent:	Well, I've got neither. A beard after a few days, but I certainly don't have a tattoo but I think maybe it's a bit late in my years for getting one of those.
Interviewer:	Maybe, once you have the bike a tattoo will follow. Actually it's quite interesting that you compare it to the Africa twin forum because everyone I've spoken to so far is at least a member of two or three motorcycle communities and it's a lot like you say, it's like almost one site is for your target group or target market, so adventure bike riding and the other one is maybe a forum or a platform specific to a bike.
Respondent:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	But I suppose you don't get these like events and ride-outs with the guys from the Africa twin forum?
Respondent:	Well, you do because there's a chap on both sites called Austin Winkler and he's organised quite a few things through the XRV site, but he also shows up at the ABR meetings as well. And he doesn't ride specifically a Honda bike, I think he's – I was going to say I think he's got a Yamaha, but no, it's not a Yamaha it's – I can't remember what it is but it's not specifically a Honda bike, so even though he doesn't ride that bike he's quite involved in that Honda website.
Interviewer:	Do you know why that's the case?
Respondent:	Either some of his friends were involved with it or he had a Honda at one point and joined in or there's definitely a lot of – as you were saying, a lot of the same people are involved in both websites. Now I've been a photographer for most of my life, but I'm not involved with photography virtual communities as much as I am with the motorbiking ones. I'm not sure why but it may be that I don't know, it maybe that the newness to me of the motorcycling has led me to ask a lot more questions and stuff and seek help from that site.
Interviewer:	But then what like if you would know I think maybe a couple of years down the line and you would consider yourself as an expert in motorcycles would you still be a member of that site?
Respondent:	I keep saying things like oh, I'm just a newbie to this, and then a lot of the guys will say things, nah, you've been around for a couple of years you can't claim that anymore. But I would certainly not – no, I doubt if I'll ever get to the stage where I could consider myself an expert in motorcycles. I think maybe I started a bit too late in life for that. But I mean there's certainly – I mean the resource that's there is – I can't speak too highly of it, I think it's fantastic and if I have a problem or even if you simply want information about a place you're thinking of going, you can just put a question up on the site and people will come back and usually end up giving you far more information than you need. But there's an openness there that is just very refreshing and incredibly helpful too.
Interviewer:	And I mean now that you have been a member to the site for a bit, do you feel like you want to give back to the communities to people that are new? You would help me now with my request so that was really nice.
Respondent:	Oh, yeah, if I can. I mean I still feel a neophyte in terms of motorcycles but if someone got on there and asked a question about photography or something that I did know something about I would certainly not hesitate to throw your ten cents worth in and stuff like that.

Interviewer: It's interesting because that's what I've found in the literature is this – is if you're a new member to a community and you come because you're looking for a specific question or for knowledge or trying to find some information then when you come back the next time you're quite happy to share that information that you have.

Respondent: Yeah. And there must be – I don't know if you've found this out in your research or not, but to a certain degree it dispels certain stereotyping and I suppose it challenges your thinking once in a while or your preconceptions when you finally meet people that you've been having great conversations with, and you think when you meet them, gosh, this is possibly somebody that I might not have spoken to if I hadn't known they'd got an interest in motorbikes. So you're meeting – I suppose one of the advantages of a virtual – to a degree anyway, is that you're meeting people and you're listening to what they say and possibly not judging them as quickly as we humans tend to do if you see somebody on the street and you think, oh, I don't think I want to talk to them, they don't look very interesting. Maybe it's me.

Interviewer: No, I totally agree with that, yeah.

Respondent: And you can – and sometimes it surprises you and you build up a certain respect for somebody's answers on the community or even their questions or anything like that. And you think oh, this guy really knows what he's talking about and all the rest of it. And then you meet them and it can sometimes be quite a surprise.

Interviewer: In both ways.

Respondent: Yeah. It's good. It's good from that point of view. I've been – I mean I'm looking forward – well, I say I'm looking forward to the next magazine, but I find the magazines are maybe getting to be a bit similar which is quite handy because I think the forum is quite different from that point of view. You can go on there and you can follow the threads you want to follow or you can pass them by I suppose. There's a thread on there right now about this new motorcycle from the British manufacturer, CCM, because it's a very lightweight bike. I mean it's a small engine, it's only a 450, but I've been following that with great interest because I find my bike quite heavy because I'm not muscle bound anymore. So that's been a great appeal and I've got a tremendous amount of information and feedback from the people that have been posting. And posting at great length about their test rides or their experiences with the motorbike or the people that they've had to deal with or anything like that, so it's a good help from that point of view as well if you want to find out anything about new bikes or whatever is out there on the market.

Interviewer: It's interesting because like I was just wondering like when you said like the magazines might not be that appealing anymore, it was almost like your route into the community but like I was just wondering about that, what if from like one day to the next day would decide that you now have to pay to access like instead of you buying the magazine, what if they would say, from now on it's – I don't even know what the magazine was, like £4 or something, you have to pay £4 a month to access the forum.

Respondent: That might cause a bit of a rebellion.

Interviewer: I can imagine.

Respondent: If it was an either or I'd probably go with the forum. I think just because they're able to cover many more subjects and you can probably get onto more quickly and more specifically about what you wanted to know than you sometimes get through the magazine. I think the magazine's going quite well, it certainly seems to have hit a gap in the market. And I mean my only concern is that as these things grow they then – I don't know whether they become a victim of their own success, but there's certainly a lot more advertising in the magazine and I suppose there

becomes a bit more predictability about the way it's laid out and the way the articles go and I just wonder why I suppose about how long it's going to be able to keep up its position.

Interviewer: It's interesting.

Respondent: I think the community would – I think the virtual community would just keep going. There's no – there's not much advertising in the virtual community, so you don't have to worry about that, you can…

Interviewer: But do you not think if there are too many users in the virtual community that could be bad as well?

Respondent: I think if they all respect each other and come in with that attitude and an attitude of giving as well as asking I think it would be all right. I've not been – I'm just trying to think if I've been involved with a virtual community that's got too many people in it. I don't think I have, so I'm not sure what that would be like. I am curious to see sometimes on the site that they have who is this week's top poster, so who's posted the most views and stuff like that. And it's obviously very important to a lot of people.

Interviewer: Yeah. I actually spoke to Al from [unintelligible 0:23:57] and he said he got like the same as you he got to the website through the magazine and he said he's now addicted to the forum, he goes on the forum like twice or three times a day and spends like two hours on the forum.

Respondent: Yeah. He's very good at posting up pictures. In fact I need to do a ride report and I need to do a ride report, but it's almost identical to one of the other ride reports that's just been up there. Some of the guys went down to Italy, if you've been following them, there's a chap called Africa Jim and his new wife and they got married and then they had their honeymoon trip going down through Europe to Italy going down to the Stella. And we were about a week after them, a week or ten days after them, but we did some of the same passes and it's quite funny reading – there's a friend of theirs, Steve, who's been doing the ride report. I've got to make sure that if I do mine that it's not just a repeat of his, although his main theme was the fact that this was Jim and Fiona's honeymoon that they were going on so it was…

Interviewer: So you're still going to post your bike report?

Respondent: Yeah. I still want to do that just because ours was probably a little different. They went down to Stella which is a fairly hardcore off-road ride up this mountain in northern Italy, whereas I went with a couple of mates who are actually – and they're not even members of the site. They have BMW road bikes and we stuck to the road mostly, well, pretty much exclusively actually.

Interviewer: And then their friend that wrote the report, he thought, oh, this might be something that the people at Adventure Bike Rider might like to read, is that what happened?

Respondent: The site seems to – everybody goes on about how much they all love photographs, so they're all – they all just love looking at other people's rides. And everybody can ride about them. I mean the one thing I always used to feel very conscious about was any time I dropped my bike which I'd say is happening less and less but still happens, was in learning that it happens to everybody and you feel a lot better about that because it's just comforting to know that somebody else has had the same experience that you've had. That's another good thing about the site as well is the fact you get that shared experience through people talking about it and being open enough to say that they did something stupid.

Interviewer:	Yeah. So is there anything you would like to see changed or anything that, yeah, anything that you would like to see changed on the community, on the forum?
Respondent:	I think they might grow into it. I think it's a bit difficult. They don't have a buy and sell section. They do on the XRV site, but they don't – and I know Alan's expressed concerns about that as to whether they might be liable for anything that went wrong or something like that. But it would be – I think if it was for members only it shouldn't be a problem. That might be where if it got too large it could become a problem because you would start to get some people coming in who would just use it as a trading site or something like that.
Interviewer:	Because I've posted something there about this guy hydro pack for sale.
Respondent:	Oh, I did see that. Maybe I've – oh, no, you're right, they do have it. They don't have a separate section, but I think people put individual posts up about if they've got something for sale.
Interviewer:	Yeah, exactly. You mean like if the site would sell something?
Respondent:	No, I'm thinking if they had – you know how along the top of the site they've got the forum and the log and reviews and ride reports and stuff like that. I was thinking if they could just group all the for sale stuff that members had, they could just put it into a section there so you could just go straight there, click on it and find out what's for sale rather than just people putting up individual posts.
Interviewer:	That's interesting because…
Respondent:	They're there, it's just a matter of keeping your eyes open. I'd forgotten that, so…
Interviewer:	I'm actually I'm always browsing the for sale section because there's always something nice, always a nice bike or something that you would love to have but can't afford.
Respondent:	Right. Well, I bought my – well, actually, no, I bought my motorbike jacket off the XRV site and that was completely not knowing who the seller was or anything and other than the fact that he was a member of that site and so I mean I think if I saw something that I wanted on the XRV site that was for sale by a member, I wouldn't – I don't think I'd worry about anything going wrong with the sale. I might worry about the size of a jacket not fitting me or something like that, but I wouldn't worry about somebody trying to sell me something in a dishonest way or anything like that.
Interviewer:	And that's solely because they're a member of the same community.
Respondent:	Well, it just seems to be a pretty self-policing community that's got a nice spirit to it. And that seems to work quite well.
Interviewer:	That's interesting.
Respondent:	Yeah. I mean I'm not sure what my entry into motorcycle riding would have been like if I hadn't come across those two websites in particular. Because I've had problems with the bike and I've been able to go onto the XRV website and I know it's not the ABR site but I'm quite sure I probably could've done it on the ABR site. Or they would've told me to go over to the XRV site and ask specifically there. And people have been – I mean I just – it's amazing the help that people give you is great, it's just fantastic. And I was able to solve my particular problem.
Interviewer:	So you would almost say that if you wouldn't have had that help…
Respondent:	It's very easy because of their openness.

Interviewer:	Yeah. And if you would've had like a negative start into motorcycling that could've meant that you might have stopped riding bikes?
Respondent:	Well, yeah. But even if those two sites – I don't know if they've been that bad, but if those two sites hadn't been there I would've felt much more alone, if you want to put it that way, in getting experience on the bike. It would've been a matter of just going out and I probably wouldn't be the rider I am today, if this doesn't sound a bit dramatic. I mean I wouldn't be the rider I am today without the help of that website because I've been to places where those guys have talked about – I've been with them, I've met them, I've bought stuff on their advice and I've been places that probably wouldn't have gone had I not been able to go with them. I probably might not have gone to those places for another year or so until I might have felt like I was good enough to go there. But I've been with them and they've been good enough to put up with me while I'm learning, so…
Interviewer:	That's great.
Respondent:	Caring I think is, yeah, spirit and the caring I think is great.
Interviewer:	I wonder really I've got one more question that kind of feeds into that would be what do you think is the most important element of a successful community?
Respondent:	I think that openness and honesty I think is what comes across as to why it's been successful. I think without that…
Interviewer:	From the actual creator, from the site, from the administrator side or?
Respondent:	No, I've met Alan a couple of times, but he stays pretty much in the background unless he's doing something very specific. I think it's just the openness and the honesty of the average person that's a member and that seems to be pretty widespread. They're all just a pretty good bunch of guys and girls, too. That's why it's been so successful. Because I think if you could imagine it, if you got put – if you put a question up there and you got put down by somebody who knew more than you did or somebody – I can't imagine the situation that would occur, but if somebody tried to steer you in the wrong direction or perhaps suggest you buy something that he had something to do with or something like that, that just doesn't seem to happen. I mean there's a lot of teasing and ribbing that goes on within the site, but that's usually because it's people who know each other and they're just joking around. I think there has to be that openness and honesty that's made it as good as it is.
Interviewer:	I agree with that, I think that's very true. Those are the questions that I have here.
Respondent:	I think there's also – sorry, I didn't – sorry. I was just going to say that I think there's probably a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes that we don't necessarily hear about from the crew at ABR, Alan and his staff and also from the moderators who just keep an eye on things and make sure that nobody gets – if somebody does make a comment or something or goes a little bit pear shaped, that they can step in fairly quickly. I don't think it's happened very often, I think it's probably happened once or twice, but I think that probably needs mentioning as well, that the hard work that goes on behind the scenes that you just don't hear about because it doesn't – everything runs fairly smoothly.
Interviewer:	Yeah, and the fact that you don't hear about it is probably a good thing because that means everything is going smooth.
Respondent:	I think so, yeah. And that takes a fair amount of hard work and effort, so. And also to hold back from trying to always have a presence on the site. I mean they've created it and they get it up and running and they just let people get on with it, they're not always in there trying to control things or anything like that.

Interviewer:	Would that be something that's like almost would hinder your participation if the creators would like try and micromanagement everything?
Respondent:	Yeah, I think it would. I think that would become very obvious and I think a lot of people would get pretty negative about that. I think they'd get turned off it pretty quickly if that's what happened. But that doesn't seem to happen so it's not a problem.
Interviewer:	I think they're doing a good job.
Respondent:	So you talked to everybody who's volunteered so far?
Interviewer:	I've talked to two other guys. I've not talked to Alan Davis yet, who's the creator – who runs the magazine. I've tried to get him on the phone a couple of times and he's been really, really busy and he said they were like updating the site like in the background, like you said nothing that you actually see but it's like things that need to be worked or happens in the background and he was really, really busy over the last couple of weeks. But I'm going to speak to him on Tuesday and it's going to be really interesting because with all the other communities I've spoken to the creators first and then to the users, but now with ABR it's actually the other way around, so it's actually really interesting because I can pick up on the things that you said and the other guys said.
Respondent:	Then you can ask them about it. That should give you a fairly rounded view on things.
Interviewer:	I've got six motorcycle communities in total and from all the different stages. From communities that have just started up or are starting up to ABR and a couple of communities, two communities over in the States.
Respondent:	Right.
Interviewer:	Yeah.
Respondent:	I've looked at some of their sites and they're quite helpful. They're very American though. I used to live in Canada so I can understand – but it's quite funny looking at some of the American sites, and they seem to be quite different than some of the British ones. I don't know if they're run differently. They're just very American and I think people – I'm not quite sure what it is, but they're definitely different. I'm not sure if they're quite so open and honest as the British one is, but…
Interviewer:	That's interesting. Because when I spoke to MotoAl and he said, yeah, he looked at like the things like ADVRider and Horizons Unlimited, but he didn't really want to join them and when he found Adventure Bike Rider it's the only community that he's a member of.
Respondent:	It's interesting that you mentioned Horizons Unlimited because I looked at that site but I find it so big and that I get – I do – I'm sure I could find the answers to what I – if I had any questions, but I almost get overwhelmed by the size of their website. Again, I don't – I've never had much experience with it, but you look at the website and then you go – you know you maybe do a search or something and you can't quite find what you want and then you start having to look a bit deeper and it is just so vast. And I think it's probably a very good resource, but I think it would be quite a lot of hard work to find out exactly what you needed to know because of the size of it.
Interviewer:	That's interesting. So you almost like you did a couple of searches and tried to find the information but then because it was too big you didn't go back there?

Respondent:	Yeah. It's a bit like when you do a search on Google and you get 1.2 million replies in half a nanosecond and you only ever look at the first couple of pages, if that. You don't go much beyond that. And I just wonder whether Horizons Unlimited is too big. Maybe it isn't, maybe I just haven't looked at it properly. It would be interesting to go back and look at it. When I'm on the web tonight, no doubt I will look at XRV and ABR and maybe Horizons Unlimited as well.
Interviewer:	It's interesting because…
Respondent:	I think a lot of people do – it's probably an extension of themselves, they probably do spend far more time on some of these websites than possibly they would like to admit.
Interviewer:	Or probably a lot more time than they would spend on the bike.
Respondent:	Well, yes. Well, I suppose that's also weather dependent over here as well.
Interviewer:	That's true. Yeah. That's interesting because one of the communities that I'm also talking to is Horizons Unlimited and I think what they're doing really well is they do like these meet ups everywhere. It's not the same extent as Adventure Bike Rider which is obviously more local in the UK, but they're doing – I think they're doing a lot of things right. But I was wondering how much – because I feel – I always feel like it's more American than – more targeted towards America rather than the UK.
Respondent:	Which Horizons Unlimited? I don't know. The founders were Canadian, weren't they? Or are Canadian. So whether that flavours things slightly I don't know.
Interviewer:	Well, it's interesting what you're saying that you're like – it just felt too big for you, that's really interesting.
Respondent:	It may be – yes, I mean that was my reaction and that may have been – it could've been from me maybe just not being familiar with enough with websites to sort of navigate my way around their site, but I think they're probably more – as you were saying, I think they're probably more worldwide oriented and because of that they have far more people and more information than the – they're quite specific I think in what they put up there.
Interviewer:	Well, that's I think when I spoke to them and spoke to people that use Horizons Unlimited, they all were saying it's because it's advanced information, you can find information about what shipping port in Kazakhstan would get it from there over the border and things like that, so obviously that's not – that might not be the focus of Adventure Bike Rider.
Respondent:	In a way it should be given the title, but I'm not quite sure if anybody's ever quite defined what an adventure bike rider is. I mean I think a lot of people tend to think it's a bike that looks like it could be ridden off road, laden down with lots of self-contained equipment I suppose. But I can find just going three or four miles down the road can be quite an adventure, so it covers a lot more. I think the Horizons Unlimited is probably a lot more specific and a bit more targeted towards people who are trying to do longer distance riding and that sort of thing. I don't know. What do you think about that?
Interviewer:	I think so too. And it's definitely what I've heard back from the users as well, it's almost they came to the website, to the Horizons Unlimited website first because they were planning some crazy trip around the world and that was the place they could find all this information. And then again this concept of they – that was their first time, so they learned all this information and then when they got back from their trip they went back on the forum to contribute to this pool of information and saying I've took this trip and what these guys suggested before I set off this is now

not possible anymore because this border has been closed but there's another border 100 miles down the road or something like that.

Respondent: Yeah. I think if I was going further afield I would – I would use them, I would go onto that site because I think the ABR site's really good for here and Europe, but not that many people seem to go much further than that. I don't see too many people on the ABR site who've done – you don't see them consistently on the site when they're travelling around the world or they've been around the world.

Interviewer: I suppose it's like a chicken and egg thing. If they're travelling around touring the world they might not – or they might be a member of ABR, but to find information to go around the world they might go somewhere else.

Respondent: That's true. But then there's also been instances when somebody will be abroad and they'll have a problem and they'll put up – they can get to a computer and they can put up a post saying look I'm in Slovakia and I've got a problem with my chain, anybody know anybody that could help me. And there's almost never been a problem in getting an answer. In fact there was I think – the opposite happened, there was a couple of European travellers who were over here, I think they might have been Swiss and they had a problem with – one of them had a problem with their bike and one of the other guys had met them and he'd put up a post on the site, and they were able to find the solution to whatever the problem was. And I think that's got to be one of the strengths of any kind of virtual community like that, that you can do that.

Interviewer: Do you think that Adventure Bike Rider as a community is going the right way?

Respondent: Yeah, I think so, I don't – yeah, I think so, I don't – I haven't noticed it going the wrong way, let's put it that way, so I think they must be doing something right, and I'm sure they're much more experienced about these things than I am. Yeah, I wouldn't change much about it.

Interviewer: Yeah, no, I mean that's already far more information than I had hoped to get. It's really interesting. It's nice to see how it all ties in with the literature as well.

Respondent: Yeah. No, that's good. Good. Are you going to post your thesis up on the website when you've done it?

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm sure I will do something like that, definitely giving like – I can definitely send you a copy or something or post the…

Respondent: Post it somewhere on so that – and post a link to it.

Interviewer: Yeah. So everyone can see it.

Respondent: That's one of the joys of the internet isn't it, you can do that?

Interviewer: Yeah it is. Sounds good.

Respondent: Right. Sounds like somebody coming up my driveway.

Interviewer: Good timing then.

Respondent: All right, if there's anything else you need just give us a call or you know my posts on the site.

Interviewer: Yeah, I will do that. Thank you very much, that was really good, thank you.

Respondent: Not a problem, Matt, you're quite welcome.

Interviewer: Have a good Sunday night. Cheers, thank you.

Respondent: Thanks, bye-bye.

Interviewer: Bye.

[End of recorded material]

[Start of recorded material]

Interviewer: Hi, Josh?

Respondent: Hey, Matt, how's it going?

Interviewer: Good, how are you?

Respondent: Good, I tried video call first but I guess video doesn't work, only audio.

Interviewer: Oh, I've never actually tried video calls...

Respondent: Oh, okay.

Interviewer: How are you doing?

Respondent: Good, just starting my day.

Interviewer: Yes, it's pretty early, it's 7:30.

Respondent: Yes, I get in at about 7:00, a little bit earlier sometimes.

Interviewer: Wow, that is crazy.

Respondent: Yes, it's a busy day. I work with hybrid vehicles actually so I do buses and trucks and yachts for Siemens, so for all North America I support all the hybrid business for Siemens.

Interviewer: Wow, I can imagine that's going to be quite busy!

Respondent: Yes. Actually in London I know we have an order for 600 buses, I think they're all hybrid buses, not electric.

Interviewer: Trying to get London a bit cleaner?

Respondent: Yes, right? It's a perfect application for it because it's very stop and go. The hybrids are much better or even batteries are much better than stop and go because you regenerate as you're braking...

Interviewer: Your job with Siemens explains your German signature.

Respondent: Yes, you saw that in my email, huh? A lot of my emails go to Germany so I just try to keep it good with those guys too.

Interviewer: Cool. Thank you very much for helping me, it's very much appreciated. I'm in the last phases of my Master's and I'm doing it part time so I've obviously lost track of time at some point and now I'm trying to cram everything in in the last two months and trying to somehow get something out of this.

Respondent: Okay!

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Interviewer: Yes, it's going to be a busy six weeks from now on.

Respondent: Yes, I know how that goes.

Interviewer: Basically, I'm writing my thesis about virtual communities and how they are created and grow, and I met Malcolm, the main guy behind BikeMinds at the Indianapolis motorcycle show and we got chatting and I was really interested in it because everything else you read on the academic front, it's always like successful communities and then they say, "Oh, yes, we've done this in the past and this in the past," but you never really read anything about starting up new communities and so this is why it was really interesting for me to talk to him.

                 But I didn't just want to talk to the creators of the community, I also wanted to talk to the users, to someone like yourself, so yes, that's how we ended up here.

Respondent: Sure.

Interviewer: Because BikeMinds is not really a community, I just wanted to know what attracted you or how you heard about it and what you expect from it?

Respondent: Yes, so Malcolm is actually a good friend of mine from college. I knew him more living in Atlanta together. We ride a lot and we go to racetracks and might do track days and stuff like that. I guess our relationship has been very motorcycle-centric for a long time, but I know when he went to New York to start a new company, he was doing a different company.

                 Right, the original attraction for me which is the whole website, or the whole idea has actually gone a different direction, but the original attraction was basically he was trying to do a motorcycle rental community. So like Napster but for motorcycles, so where you go to a new town, you want to rent a bike, you get on the community and then you can use somebody's bike. Almost like Airbnb, I don't know if you know what that is, but the same kind of concept, and it actually to me sounded like a great concept where I could rent my bike out. I have three motorcycles now, but I have enough motorcycles, right, and I wouldn't mind renting a couple of them out, and then if they really have success, then renting the rest out.

                 But I guess, I think it came down to an insurance thing. Like you said, it's so in its early stages that a lot of it was initially, honestly on my side because he's a buddy of mine and a motorcycle rider. So I'm liking it though, everything that I see, I get the posts in Facebook and I was featured actually as one of the riders for the riders' spots, and my friends are being featured at the rider spots, see all the guys you ride with, so It's pretty cool.

                 It's interesting to watch it grow and it's interesting to read about the different people and how they got into motorcycle riding, but then also as these quick posts, like he just put one up, and this is actually what reminded me this morning because I hadn't checked my Gmail for a while. I'm looking and I got a post and it was for a hill climb up in upstate New York and I'm from upstate New York and I saw it and I was like, "Ah, and I love hill climbs!" So I went into the thing and I'm looking through and looking through and I thought, "Oh, shit I'm supposed to make that phone call!" and it was like perfect timing because it was right at 7:30, so destined to happen, right?

                 So yes, so basically for me, I have a Triumph, I belong to a Triumph Facebook page, but just getting little posts like that and seeing what's going on, what's the

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latest for motorcycles, and some interesting stories, like there was one on, not a story but a photo for some racing in Japan, like two Stroke bikes and stuff like that.

Yes, right now, that's all it is for me though is really seeing all that kind of information which is really cool.

Interviewer: Is it because you've got featured in there as a writer and because you joined quite early, do you have like a different expectation or a different approach to it almost?

Respondent: Yes, I mean I think different from where it is today only because it seems in its infancy, it's at an early stage, but I think as the community grows, I mean you've got what, 8,000 likes, that's pretty good. I have my own hybrid website which, I don't know, it doesn't have that many, right? I know how hard it is to get that kind of an audience so it's definitely going the right way. What direction I'd like to see it go is a really tough decision, it's a tough call.

I like it the way it is right now, there's got to be a point of making money for him at some point, so I'm not sure how he's going to do that. Maybe more I guess maybe global news where, he's in New York, right, so it's easy for him to go to hill climb-ups in New York or something like that. But other things in the country and the U.S. and also in maybe Europe which make it much more difficult for him, but he can get more information that way.

But also, I don't know, maybe organising events like get-togethers, kind of like, okay, so we go to track days and I don't really belong to many of these web pages like ADVrider or any of that. I joined it just maybe to buy or sell something but I don't get into online communities very much. They take time and I have way too many hobbies. I have a stand up jet ski, so there'll be like my whole stand up jet ski community. I have a dual sport motorcycle, so there's that one, and I have race bikes so there's that one, and then I have a jeep so there's that one. It's like I can't belong to all these communities, right?

Mainly because it's Malcolm and it's a lot of people I know on there, I think some sort of get togethers, or he might even be doing that in New York already like for bike nights and stuff like that. Yes, I don't know...

Interviewer: It's because now that you are there and you've got your friends on there... If they wouldn't be your friends on there, if Malcolm wouldn't be a friend, you probably wouldn't know about it, right?

Respondent: I wouldn't, no. I don't think I would, honestly. I don't know how I would have ever found out about it, to tell you the truth. I think that's really how this all begins, word of mouth, like this friend says, "Oh, cool, and then he gets it through to his people and, you know? That's how it is.

Interviewer: I've spoken to a couple of other communities and some guys were saying, "I'm a member of this community and they have a webpage but they also have a Facebook page and I only go on the Facebook page because I don't want to be a member of another community."

Respondent: Right, that's the problem.

Interviewer: Yes. I'm really impressed, because when I first looked at the BikeMinds' Facebook page, they had something like 300 likes, and then literally over the last two weeks they've grown up to 8,000.

Respondent: Oh, wow, okay.

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Interviewer:	It might have something to do with these bike profiles because you don't really see them anywhere else. At Scottoiler, we have like a Facebook page, we've got it for two years and we've got 2,000 followers, nothing similar than that.
Respondent:	Wow. That's interesting. That's the whole key, right, making your site unique, and you're right, that does make it actually unique having these profiles. I actually feel proud to be I think the second one, right? I think I'm the second one in here which is pretty cool. Yes, that is a good aspect to it. I think there's got to, at some point be more of a uniqueness to it for it to really, really blow up and be a business forum.
Interviewer:	Like you say he has to make money out of this at some point.
Respondent:	Right, and that's just me looking out for my buddy, right?
Interviewer:	Especially with you, or probably everyone, I've got different hobbies, there's now a community for almost everything out there, so would there by anything that would tempt you to join yet another community?
Respondent:	The only way to think about that is how I've really become on the communities I'm on. Like ADVrider's a perfect example. Sometimes I need to buy and sell stuff, I don't think this is the venue for buying and selling or trading or whatever, or maybe it is. But I think if it can give me valuable input on local something, like I know our mutual friend Mario, you might even be talking to him, he's also featured on here with the yellow Ducati which I've actually ridden that, it's a 989 I think, it's an absolutely amazing bike. But he runs the European bike night here in Atlanta. I'm not sure if Malcolm's ever featured that or anything like that, but it'd be nice to know like a community events kind of thing, like what's around you, what day does it happen, that kind of thing. But again, to cover his audience, you got to cover the globe. It's almost impossible, right, like to cover everybody? You can't just say, "In Atlanta, Twain's does European bike night run by this guy." I don't know if that would be an advantage or not.
Interviewer:	That's what I kind of found is like you've got communities that are either specific on a bike make or a bike model or that are specific to an area.
Respondent:	Right. Yes.
Interviewer:	When I talked to him, he told me about his idea with the rental bikes and I thought that was a really good idea. That might be something that could, I know that he's having problems so maybe it's something that he should consider again too, because that could be something that is local but global as well.
Respondent:	The rental thing?
Interviewer:	Yes.
Respondent:	That would really be the unique thing. There's a couple of places out there that do it but nothing effective enough, I think, and maybe that's the ultimate goal for him eventually once he builds a community, then has a way to do it, but I really think he got tied up with insurance in some way or something but I'd love, because I travel a lot for work. I go to California, I go to Germany a lot too. I go to Nuremburg which is in Bavaria and you have the Franconia Swiss, the most beautiful mountains up there and these mountain road, and I looked into renting a bike and yes, I could do it and it was a little expensive and little bit a pain in the

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butt but I'd like to get it from somebody who's also a biker. Heck, maybe they can even ride with you, I don't know...

Interviewer: Show you the roads and everything.

Respondent: Right. Yes, you go to rent a bike and be like, "Hey man, you want to go for a spin with me?" That'd be pretty cool, and you could set that whole thing up before you go. That would really, really be a big advantage. But let's start in the United States when I go to California or wherever the heck I end up, I just want to take a bike for a day or something. If it's easy where I'm just like hey, I pick it up in the morning, leave my rental car or something, you know, pick it up in the morning and bring it to wherever I'm going or whatever I'm doing. I'd do that in a heartbeat.

Interviewer: So it's almost like the attraction to you would be something unique that you wouldn't find somewhere else?

Respondent: Right, exactly. His idea was there's like a point system where if you rent a bike out and it breaks, you're going to get low points, you can't just give somebody a crappy bike, but also if you break someone's bike, you get low points. So it's like, of course, no one's going to rent to you if you're like a negative rating rider. That, over time, you could build up a better reputation I guess in that sense. So yes, if you could figure a way to do that, that would be absolutely awesome.

Interviewer: Yes, I've got the same kind of problem like you for going on holiday somewhere and you really want to rent a motorbike but they're so bloody expensive. Last time what happened to me, I went over to Munich and wanted to hire a bike and they didn't give you any gear or a helmet or the one place had gear but not helmet and the other had helmet but no gear so it was a bit disappointing.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: It's difficult because BikeMinds doesn't exist so far, but the one question that I've asked everyone so far was what do you think is the most important element to make a community successful?

Respondent: I think we already talked about it, it's the unique angle, right? Finding something that everybody else doesn't have, that's it. It's a kind of a half-assed answer because it's to really answer, you've got to find something that separates you out. I'm in sales, right, so I have to come up with a compelling event for somebody to want my stuff. I have competitors, why take mine over anybody else's? Well, it's because I have better quality, I'm higher priced but I'm better quality. I'm Siemens, I have my reputation, you know what I mean?

So I relate that to pretty much everything in life. It's finding whatever that unique thing is, and interesting stories, it's pretty unique, especially focused around the motorcycle community, an interesting story or like these feature rider things. I think that's unique but is it unique enough to really take off? I don't know.

Interviewer: Yes, but like you said, with sales, you would also need someone like yourself that goes out and tells people that you exist or your product exists, so it's almost like it needs a unique selling point but you also need someone to go out there and tell people that your product exists.

Respondent: Right, that's exactly right, yes.

Interviewer: I've only had these couple of questions, and I'm not going to keep you much longer unless you have any questions to me?

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Respondent: No, that's good. It's interesting, I'd like to see the final product or whatever you come up with for your thing or if you need any help with anything else on it, feel free to get in touch with me and bounce anything off of me. I like that kind of stuff, it's pretty cool.

Interviewer: It is really interesting. Initially, I wanted to create a community for Scottoiler, for my company. I don't know if you know what we're doing, we're doing automatic chain lubrication systems for motorbikes...

Respondent: No, you said something about it. How does that work, what is that about?

Interviewer: You mount this product to your bike and you connect it to your bike and then it's automatic, so every time you start the engine it starts feeding oil to your rear sprocket, and there's only like one drop of oil every minute but it's enough to cover your chain maintenance so you don't need to lubricate your chain any more yourself. It extends the life of your chain and sprockets by up to seven times, it saves you money and saves you hassle. It's very popular over here in the UK and actually Germany's our biggest market and just trying to get into the U.S. but we're a really small company so it's...

                I'm actually looking at advertising and things like that and the advertising rates in the U.S. are incredible. I know it's a much bigger market but it's difficult for us.

Respondent: I'm getting technical questions here, is it a reservoir that you fill or is it taking it from engine oil?

Interviewer: It's a reservoir that you fill, we do two different versions, we do one version that connects to your engine vacuum so every time you start your engine it sucks up a little diaphragm and it's feeding the oil, and the other one is a pump system which is like your luxury system which comes with a handlebar display and shows you how much oil you have left and things like that.

                The main idea behind this is that with your spray lube, you spray it on and it's really tacky and sticky because it obviously has to stick to your chain, but that also means that when you ride around, all the dirt and grid from the road comes and sticks on top of that.

Respondent: Oh, yes!

Interviewer: It's not just a pain to get it off but also the movement of the chain basically grinds down the dirt and grit into a grinding paste and that's what actually eats up your chain and sprockets. So if you could get rid of this film of dirt and grit, you can actually extend the life of your chain and sprockets.

Respondent: Interesting. So what's your problem with, I know you say you're a small company but what's your issue with getting into the U.S. market? Is it finding distributors or, would you even go to the shops something like that or what?

Interviewer: Basically, I'm with the company for three years now. The first year and a half I was marketing assistant, we were two in the marketing team back then, and my former boss, he kind of wanted to get everything now, so he put a small distributor in place in the U.S. and then just left them alone and went on and put a distributor into France and a distributor into Australia and kind of left them all alone, so the U.S. distributor at some point just stopped ordering and kind of disappeared. Then for almost a year we didn't have any distribution in the States, and now over the last year we've focused more on the U.S. We now have three distributors in the U.S., three smaller distributors.

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We've got a website running and growing every year, and just things like I've had a couple of smaller adverts in the magazines and Motorcyclist and some of those magazines. We work with ALTRider, I don't know if you know them? They do adventure stuff. Online marketing and Reddit and forums and things like that are quite good for that. Because it's not just another sump guard or LED indicators or something, it's something that you actually have to tell people about and explain to them what it is.

But it's going fine. There's a motorbike show in Florida in a couple of months and we're going down. That's the best way because you meet people, you can show them the product, you can explain it to them, you've got a bit more time. Ultimately, the problem is getting it into dealers, getting dealers to stock it and explain it, to do it for us.

Respondent: Right. Do you have any competitors, anybody else that does the same thing?

Interviewer: Yes, we've got a few smaller competitors but our company has been going for 30 years, then there's always smaller people that try and do it themselves in their garage workshop or something like that. Because technically it is quite an easy system, you could just almost put like a Coke bottle or something on your bike and have like a little tube running down to your sprocket and press a button or something like that.

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: We've got a couple of competitors here in the UK, one bigger one in Germany. We used to have one in Canada called Chameleon Oiler, but they seem to have disappeared in the last couple of months. The motorbike market, especially over here, is shrinking every year, it's not really something when you have money to invest, you wouldn't invest it into a motorcycle business I would think.

Respondent: It's the same here, it's an expendable income and when the economy goes down, motorcycles are shut. Right, and you see shops closing everywhere and it's kind of depressing. I've been riding since I can remember, so motorcycles are just part of my life, but to see the whole industry go down, and it's a niche market really. Just like what I do, hybrid buses, pretty niche. I know how hard it is to break into, right?

Interviewer: Yes, I reckon you've got the same problem, you always have to explain to people what your product is.

Respondent: Right, oh, yes, big time.

Interviewer: You would think that the internet makes everything easier but actually, I don't know, I always feel like the U.S. is a bit younger when it comes to motorcycles rather than over here.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: So it's still a lot, like things here are still going, especially like the average age for a motorcyclist over here is like 48 or something like that, so it's still a lot to do with shows, with magazines, not so much online. Yes.

Respondent: That would make sense. Interesting. I was just looking in your email, I don't see a link to your webpage or anything. If you'd send that, I'd like to check it out actually, just to check out the product.

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Interviewer:	Yes, that's how we got featured on BikeMinds as well, a quick interview with me that I also sent you.
Respondent:	Actually I just found it, it's on the first email you sent of your Facebook and your webpage. Yes, I'll check it out.
Interviewer:	If you have any questions, just drop me an email. I think that's something we didn't really think about is in the UK and Germany everyone knows what these things are called, automatic chain oilers or motorcycle chain oilers. When you search for that, it should come up. We always think, over here everyone has heard about it or knows someone that has one, so when we went over to the States it's just a new mindset because people never heard about it and people might not know that they have a problem with chain maintenance.
	Like when we spoke to people in Indianapolis, people said, "I don't have that problem, my chain lasts 5,000 miles." I'm like, "What if I were to tell you that that's not really long, that you should have at least like 30,000 miles?" Like, "Oh, really?" With this product you could get like 40, 50, 60,000 miles. But it's interesting. It's really exciting and it gives me a chance to go over to the States now and then which is quite nice as well.
Respondent:	There you go. Very cool, I'm looking at it right, but yes, it's cool.
Interviewer:	I'm going to send you that link, it's about the technical explanation behind it.
Respondent:	Yes, that'd be cool.
Interviewer:	Thank you very much, it's really good, I'm trying to get most of this done before the end of this weekend and then start [Cross talk 0:27:38].
Respondent:	Great, good luck with that.
Interviewer:	Cheers! Yes, and have a good day.
Respondent:	Yes, you too. Talk to you later.
Interviewer:	All right, cheers, Josh.
Respondent:	Right, cheers.
Interviewer:	Bye.
Respondent:	Bye.

[End of recorded material]

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[Start of recorded material]

Respondent:	Hey, Matt.
Interviewer:	Hi, Malcolm. How're you doing?
Respondent:	I'm doing well, how're you?
Interviewer:	I'm good.
Respondent:	Can you hear me okay?
Interviewer:	Yeah, I can hear you fine.
Respondent:	Great. Are you in Scotland?
Interviewer:	Yeah. I actually like I'm going on holiday tomorrow so that was a good – just a short like weekend break, but going away so I'm quite happy to do all these interviews today. This is now my fourth interview today, so it's a long day. It's fine, it has been really interesting stuff so far, like I am so happy for all you and all the other guys to like let me see a bit of the inside of all these things because like if I'm totally honest I'm – I've signed up for this maters and when I first did it that was almost two years ago and the idea was to create a community, a virtual community for Scott Oiler, but then as soon as I looked into it there was basically not enough drive behind the topic for us and there was also no money to actually do anything, so the whole dissertation was in limbo for quite a while but I've put in quite a lot of work so really want to make it work last minute so to speak and, yeah, it's just my – I've got like this – well, I've got August to basically finish it, or finish the interviews and then September to write it up so it's on top of working 40 hours for Scott Oiler I've got this on top of it, so it's some busy time.
Respondent:	Sounds fun though.
Interviewer:	It is really interesting, yeah.
Respondent:	You mentioned that you wanted to set up a community for Scottoiler. I see that you're now selling through AltRider.
Interviewer:	Yeah. When we were at the Indianapolis show we met them, although we actually met them a couple of months before at the big bike show here in Europe and then met them again in Indianapolis and they are really nice guys so we just got talking to them and then they said, "We've got a couple of shops and it fits in with the adventure segment." Do you know much about them?
Respondent:	Yeah. I have some of their products on my bike, they make nice products. I've also – I just keep an eye on them. It's really impressive what they have accomplished, they have only been around about three years. I don't know, I think Touratech better be careful, they will give them a run for their money. I mean Touratech have been around 30 years and AltRider look like a serious contender.
Interviewer:	That's what they told us basically they said they've been around for three years in the US and actually in the US they have now over – they overtook Touratech.

Respondent:	The thing that came to mind when you were talking about the online community for Scott Oiler I was wondering if you're familiar with the online community that AltRider has?
Interviewer:	Yeah. I've seen that. I've not seen that much actually happening on it. I don't know how much they actually push their community. I know they do quite a lot of events, like offline events, meeting up, doing like sales stuff. I know they did something in Death Valley or somewhere and they do like ride outs and things like that.
Respondent:	Yeah. That was my view from the outside. Again, same as you, you can't really tell how much is going on with it, but I think my view of it was that it makes a nice marketing piece. It's like oh, these guys are doing something cool, but it didn't seem like it was getting lots of traction but that's not their real focus anyway.
Interviewer:	Yeah. Especially at the moment, the last time we met they were just – like they're now building up their European headquarters and trying to find good distributors in all the different countries which is enough work for them already. So I think they've got quite a lot of stuff on their plate at the moment.
Respondent:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	This is like the centre of this dissertation as well, like virtual communities can do so much for your brand. So I think it's quite clever in a way to maybe have it up there and maybe get a bit of traction and get the people involved there and buy product from them. But then on the other side a community that is not run well and not updated and not looked after might actually be more harmful than it's good.
Respondent:	That's a good point.
Interviewer:	I actually thought about like contacting them as well, but, yeah, because I didn't see that much happening on them and I'm actually like back and forth on emails with Eric and they have already so much stuff to do so I didn't really want to put another thing on top of them. But I might, because it is quite interesting especially now that we're talking about it and you've see it and just to maybe get an insight into how this community run as like a little side product and what their plans are.
Respondent:	Yeah. It would be interesting. Might be an interesting perspective for you mixing it in with those other communities that you're talking to if they're using it to sell product.
Interviewer:	Yeah. Put that down. Yeah. I mean I really wanted to get you into the dissertation because I find really, really interesting too that I have this opportunity to talk to you to someone that is just starting up a community. Because what you really read in these academic articles and these guidebooks is just like communities that have run for ages and ages, but all these articles they're basically missing out the very – what I think very crucial start up phase and the work before you even start a community and that is hardly ever addressed in all these articles, so I thought it was really good to talk to you.
Respondent:	Good. Well, hopefully I can offer you something of value. Since we are just getting started there's a lot of things that still remain to be seen with my project, but I'm happy to share anything that I've done so far and what my plans are for the future.
Interviewer:	And you will obviously get like my dissertation and findings and I hope that that can then help you as well.

Respondent:	Sounds really interesting and I'd love to read it. Just I would've been happy to help either way, but that's a nice bonus. I look forward to see that.
Interviewer:	Yeah, it's basically the nice thing about this research approach what my supervisor suggested is that it's just like a nice chat, so there's no questions or you have to rank from one to nine or something stupid like that, it's just basically a nice chat about how you – what your steps have been so far and what you see the process like and what you think are the important elements of communities. So maybe if you could just run me through what has happened so far and where your idea came from and things like that.
Respondent:	So some history. Basically I like to do adventure touring riding longer distances as long as time and money allows I go as far as I possibly can. So here in North America I've ridden almost every direction I can and a little over a year ago I was riding back from – I rode to Central America to Costa Rica and then came back. And on the way back, I call it helmet time, all that time you have while you're on a bike just to think and things.
Interviewer:	When your mind's just clear, yeah, I know what you mean.
Respondent:	So I'm thinking where am I going to ride next, and I was like oh, I've already ridden all the way through Canada and to the west coast. What I really want to do is ride northern Europe, I want to ride New Zealand and I was like it's hard to justify when you have an expensive bike here and it's hard to leave that sitting in a garage and go pay for a rental bike for $150 or $200 a day. So I start thinking about that and I was thinking maybe it would be nice to have a bartering community where you could earn credits, say I let somebody borrow my bike for a week and then I have 7 days' worth of credits to go to Europe and borrow somebody's bike. And so that was the original idea. As I dug into it I was working on the concept, I started on research and there were people who were into it and were actually really excited about it. Turned out there are some people doing something similar, not really a business, but kind of – it's basically just a network. It's a website that facilitates these kinds of exchanges but not a business. But then there's all these different hang ups with insurance and liability and stuff that we were trying to work around.
	But I was still really excited about the idea. So basically I was trying to answer these questions, it was like what would two people want to know about each other if I'm going to lend my bike to somebody I don't know or on the other hand I'm going to borrow a bike from somebody I don't know. I want to know everything I can about that bike if I'm going to be using this for touring I want to know it's been well taken care of, it's in good shape. But then if I'm lending a bike to somebody I want to know what experience do they have, what bike do they own at home, and all these things, what kinds of rides have they done.
	So I'm a designer and so I started building these kind of – start working out what this website would look like and essentially it became – there's two profiles. There was a profile of a bike and a profile of a rider and you want to kind of capture this person's history of either one. So then at the same time I'm kind of working through the legal issues and stuff, what kind of insurance I would need and stuff, and really just kept hitting a wall on that side. So I realise there are two profiles, a rider and a bike profile. You can actually do a lot of different things with these two pieces of information, connecting riders with other riders that ride the same bike, to find out technical information, to find local meet ups, find local service shops that work on my bike etc.
	So basically I decided like with all these opportunities why am I trying to chase this one opportunity that seems like it's tough to do, the bike swap kind of thing. So essentially I dropped that for now, I'd love to revisit it. I started focusing on making this community that uses a bike profile and a rider profile to really kind of

create essentially a digital toolset for motorcyclists to do all the things that we already do offline, just kind of enhance that experience, really kind of try to capture that passionate camaraderie that already exists on the road or between motorcyclists at a bike night, kind of meet up and kind of bring all that online in one easy to use platform.

Interviewer: Yeah, it is really interesting because you have at the moment is you either have a community about a certain bike model or you have a community about a certain place. But you basically bring the two together. So I ride an F650 in Scotland, so I don't really want to be a member of the F650 forum, I would also have to be a member of the Scotland forum because I'm not linked together at the moment.

Respondent: Makes sense. Also I spent a good amount of time like an adventure rider but it took a long time to learn my way around the site and that's just one. I mean there's all these forums that are really active but they're all – just the technology is so far behind, it's like 10 year old forum platforms that are really outdated. I feel like as a rider there's this incredible passion in the community, but I really feel like a lot of it's lost in the online world just because of these difficult to use forums and stuff. So I think it's time to essentially kind of modernise that and make something that really kind of captures what's already there.

Interviewer: That's interesting because like you see like a modern platform as your USP, as your driving purpose or focus of the community to give riders and you more modern platform.

Respondent: Absolutely. I think and that also comes back to what you're – like any business you have to focus on what you're good at. And I might not necessarily be the best – I might not necessarily be the best kind of marketer or writer but I know design, I know user experience and then I'm also pretty familiar with technology. And so I partnered with a good web developer and so I think those things are what we're going to use to set ourselves apart, design, feasibility and technology.

Interviewer: It's one of the interesting things that I find quite frustrating mainly working on the UK market is that in the UK you've got a really old – like average age of the motorbiker over here is 48 or something like that and then I'm quite a keen member of Reddit and their motorcycle forums and sub-forums, and I see how the market in the US is so much younger and more active and more enthusiastic, so it's quite interesting to see that difference in – yeah, like addressing this younger crowd and more active crowd.

Respondent: That's an interesting point you make. I'd be curious to know what the average of the motorcyclist is here in the US. I wouldn't be surprised if it's close to what it is there, maybe not 48, but it's probably close to it. But I don't think you can judge by Reddit. Reddit is a very young audience, so, yeah, take that with a grain of salt I guess.

Interviewer: It's just like if you sit here and it's raining again and you see pictures of guys riding in California, then that's – you just get a bit frustrated here.

Respondent: Yeah, I can see. I'm here in New York, January here and they're all riding in California. I mean that's a project that I'm working on that I really hope to be able to deliver, like – I met you at the tradeshow at Indianapolis and we went to that one and another tradeshow here in New York, the National Motorcycle Show. But we talked to all of the vendors and just like when I asked you, what would help you reach customers and stuff. And there were some things like the motorcycle manufacturers a couple of them mentioned to us like reaching that younger crowd because it's one thing to get somebody who's already riding to switch from Yamaha to Kawasaki or whatever, but it's a whole other thing to bring somebody new into the sport that wasn't in it before and especially that younger crowd

because like you mentioned the average age of motorcyclists is pretty old and it's aging, so it's loosing. It's not losing yet, they're going to start losing an audience.

So hopefully it's all having this modern platform and we plan to follow the web platform almost immediately with a nice well built mobile app, so hopefully these things will help strengthen that appeal to the younger audience that's kind of grown up with an iPhone in their hand and expects a certain level of refinement and usability.

Interviewer: Yeah. Like you mentioned like us as a smaller vendor or a smaller brand and then the big bike brands, is that like your revenue model is getting these guys in and like an advertising based model?

Respondent: Yeah. Well, a listing – I guess I'd call it a listing model. So we want to keep the platform ad free but also free for people to use. But one thing I think we have working for us as far as monetisation is that motorcyclists like to shop for gear and accessories. So when you want to shop you have the option there. We're planning to build a directory where essentially kind of a modern – I don't know if you call this the same thing in Scotland, but the Yellow Page, just where you click through to find the things that you're after. But because back to those two profiles, the profile of the rider which says I'm into adventure riding and touring. And then my bike profile which says I ride a 2008 Suzuki DR650, with these two pieces we can filter that vendor directory so that we can just show you products that you're specifically – that fit your interests and your bike. And so the revenue model is that vendors would pay to be placed. We would need to work these things out either monthly or annual subscription to be featured in that directory.

Interviewer: The one thing – like I've been only recently after you sent me the stories thing I followed your Facebook page and it's been incredible. I mean I can just press F5 and it adds like a couple of 'Likes 'every minute I think since yesterday when I joined it was at 350 and right now it's sitting on 1,112, so you've had 700 likes over – well, 800 likes over 24 hours.

Respondent: It's interesting that you noticed that. It's not all organics, it's not just people discovering it, some of it is. But just yesterday we started doing some paid placement on Facebook and the reaction to that has been amazing. So I don't know if you're familiar with any Facebook advertising but…

Interviewer: A bit. We've done a bit.

Respondent: You're not paying anybody to like it, you're just paying them to see your site and they decide whether or not they like it. But my last business was in product development. I had a line of travel accessories, bags and wallets and computer bags and things. And I designed all those and did the marketing on it and I first – and we used a lot of – so we had an e-commerce site and we used some online advertising and Facebook advertising and it was very – I mean it worked out well for us, we made money, essentially it wasn't a waste. We spent a lot of money on advertising but we made more on sales than we spent, so we came out ahead in the end. But not a whole lot. But I had some numbers in my head based on like what I had – these numbers on like how much it takes per new like on your Facebook page and stuff based on that last business. Well, I started advertising yesterday for the BikeMinds page because I wanted to get some content on there first and get it designed so it represented the brand before I did any of that. And then I started doing it yesterday and I was blown away by how well people reacted to it. A huge percentage of the people that saw the – that clicked on the ad were liking the page, much higher than with my last business. So just as it relates to an online community thing I think it is an interesting concept.

One it's easier, motorcyclists are more easily excited than people shopping for a messenger bag, that's kind of a no brainer. But also it kind of speaks to marketing

something that you are really passionate about even though I like design it's hard to sum up – it's hard to capture excitement for a bag. But motorcycling is something that any of us that are really into it, you have this passion for it, and it translates well, thus images and text, so I'm pretty excited about it. I hope that what we're seeing on Facebook is a foreshadowing for the experience – for the response we're going to get when we have our actual platform.

Interviewer: Yeah. I was talking to someone else earlier and mentioned you and your success on Facebook and I kind of almost feel like because you're starting off with this smaller group of people on Facebook which I reckon you will push then to the website somehow, you almost build – you build like brand enthusiasts right at the start.

Respondent: Yeah. That's the idea. So what we're – I'm actually working on an update for the website right now, it's just going to be a little more information on the page, but it'll still be about three or four months before we have an actual website. So the plan is to get that up and then, yeah, build a decent following on Facebook. We're also marketing on Instagram right now. So basically so that once we have an actual site we're not just opening a door and saying, "Hey, hello, do you want to…" already have people that know what's coming and have some momentum that we can roll right into the new platform.

Also we want to do beta testing, so this way on Facebook we can invite – say, hey, we're looking for – start off by saying we want 200 people to create a profile and test this. You're the only 200 that are going to be on the platform, all right, that's working, we've worked out these bugs, next all right everybody invite one friend, all right, we're up to 400, all right, working well, up to – everybody invite one more person, so having that Facebook following, a fan base will help us reach the people that are already excited about what we're doing.

Interviewer: That's a really like nice and clever way of doing it, yeah. I actually read all the rider profiles that you posted up which is like nowadays on Facebook if you actually read things and not just skim through things it is a rarity. I get so much crap on my Facebook feed but all these things were really interesting and I feel like that's maybe where – it's definitely where your community stands out already because it has more like a personal approach. I really like it, yeah.

Respondent: Thank you. I'm glad to hear somebody reads them. I'm glad to hear that. I think that's incredibly important in any business. Whether you're making chain oilers or making tables or whatever it is or online communities. You have to pick something that's going to stand out. And I don't know if you look back through the – further down our Facebook page, but in the beginning basically I started out by just saying, oh, I need a Facebook page. What are we going to put on there? Oh, motorcycle news. Just share things on there, any interesting news that I came across. But after we had some stuff on there I took a step back from it and looked at it and there's 100s of motorcycle related Facebook pages out there and almost all of them post motorcycle news. We're more about the community, we need something that's going to make us stand out, so it's like what can I do that's going to represent what we will be. And so it's really about the riders, the bikes and this community aspect. And so really kind of stripped out all that other stuff and decided to start doing these like profiles on either the riders or businesses that were interesting. So far I think it's – I'm glad it comes across to you anyway that it's strong and the reaction is like what you've seen on Facebook in the last day I think people are responding well to it.

Interviewer: That was actually the first time I know I've browsed further down on your site and I know what you mean. It's like – I mean we do that as well, we just post random bits and pieces and funny videos and things like that. But what really makes it stand out is this personal approach and this unique thing that I've not seen anywhere else.

Respondent:	Good. Excellent.
Interviewer:	I suppose, yeah, that's like – that's going to be the driver of your community, this personal approach.
Respondent:	Yeah. I hope so. So try to set the tone, let people know this is going to be a place where you can express yourself and share what it is you love about riding your bike or whatever it might be.
Interviewer:	One of the things that I have here on my little note and because you've kind of mentioned it before is like you said you did a bit of research but like how much research did you do before you decided to go down this route?
Respondent:	Well, yeah, I've been obsessed with motorcycles for almost 10 years already so I feel like I've come across a lot of websites and stuff, so it's not like – it's different from entering something you don't know about, like I already knew a lot about this space. But then I did start just searching for motor social networks and things, motorcycle social networks and talking – and just talking about as many friends and stuff as possible, saying, hey, what do you think and sometimes where somebody would be like, oh, have you ever heard of this, and actually I hadn't, I'd check it out and – but I guess that's where most of the – so the parts of my research involved just searching online, is there anything else out there like this? And there are maybe half a dozen social networks, but none really have gained any traction. They've been around a couple of years and have 500 users or 1,000 users or whatever it might be. And most of them are pretty weak, they look like they're off the shelf technology and just place ads all over the page as a revenue model.
	And, what else, and then I was talking to people, a lot of people on the landing page, bikeminds.com we have a survey on there, finding out what people like and I changed that survey a few times based on – I'd run it for a month or two and get people's feedback, so like, all right I've got the answers I need there and then adjust it to try and get feedback on a different area that I was trying to research. And then the last part is essentially what I was doing when I met you. I had worked out the concept in design and then took it to a couple of different tradeshows and just talked to as many people, both users and vendors and manufacturers as possible. That was the last part of the research I did.
Interviewer:	Through your survey have you like asked the users what they like and what they don't like about the other communities? I mean I'm now like I don't even – well, I'm – I think I'm in – obviously I've signed up to a few to check them out, but none of them have really like caught my attention or really made me come back that many times.
Respondent:	I have found some – maybe not specifically in the way that you asked it, what do you not like about them. But I guess indirectly, you know, asking people do you use these other communities and stuff and how do you find your information and how do you find this and looking at people's responses to those was – most people read magazines but only – I don't remember the exact number, but maybe 30 or 40% use the user forums and so it kind of becomes clear that where people enjoy getting their information from. Does that answer your question?
Interviewer:	It was more like I was just wondering that because it would be something that I almost would be interested in even if I would now have – I kind of want to do that with a couple of the communities that I'm talking to, to the other guys, I want to talk to maybe two or three of the key users – of users who have been in there and want to ask them what they think this community is better or worse than another community they may be a member of. I don't have any insight on that yet because I haven't done that part, but, yeah, it's an interesting thing because I suppose that's what you kind of want to do, you want to get the feedback from the customers and

then alter your website or your community so it matches with what the customer wants.

Respondent: Yeah, absolutely. I'm sure that things will change. I think the biggest mistake with any business is to think you know exactly what the customer wants, so we plan to like roll this out in small increments. Put something out there, like I mentioned before, get 200 people on there, hey, what do you think, I'm sure things will change. You think people are going to love this feature but they end up liking this other feature, so you change course a little bit. So it'll be exciting to see.

Interviewer: So you've got like a roadmap or something?

Respondent: Yeah. Exactly.

Interviewer: And then trying to get features out one by one.

Respondent: Yeah. Rather than – I don't know if you're familiar with the lean start-up methodology or Agile development. Are you familiar with them?

Interviewer: A bit at university, yeah.

Respondent: So essentially the gist of it is the biggest mistake you can make is locking yourself in a room and creating some product and waiting 'til it's perfect and polished to show it to the world. Basically it's better to create the MBP, the minimum buyable products, just do the bare minimum that you can to put it out there and see if people like it or not and chances are they won't like it and you need to adjust it and you go back, do it again, do it again until you put out something that really resonates with people.

I had a thought on what you were saying about what do people like and not like the communities or existing communities. I think existing communities there are social networks out there, motorcycle social networks but none with any traction to speak of. So what I think online motorcycle communities I think forums because those are the ones that actually have a decent user base. And I think without asking that question directly I have a pretty good handle on what people don't like about them, and it's the user experience. I see it from all the people, as a motorcyclist I've had plenty of times over the last ten years where I've had other friends who are like oh, I want to get into riding or I want to get into touring, give me some information and I'll send people to adventure rider. Inevitably they come back and they're like, I can't figure that damned site out, there's too much crap on that site. Can you just tell me where to go or send me a link to f-ing thing I need.

And most of those people never go back to the site, adventure rider's just one of them but plenty of them – there's forums, it's amazing how much useful information is on there. Anything you want to know is there, what size bearings are in a 2001 BMW 1100 GS, whatever it is. It's there. But finding it is the hard part. So I think that usability and lack of the real user experience I think is what people don't like about the existing communities.

Interviewer: It's interesting because in my like – the research that I have done so far, there's not much – that's why I'm basically it's my topic of the dissertation is this process of setting up a community because there is not much research been done on there, but it is like – basically the few things that I've found is this lifecycle model where you basically have an inception step and then you have a creation stage and in that creation stage there is things like all the things that you mentioned in there is like having a usability and having interfaced usability and user friendliness and stuff like that are all mentioned in there. And like you say I mean if you're not into bikes or if you're just starting up or if you're just – even just go on a new bike from a manufacturer that you didn't have before, these forums can probably be really, really threatening.

Respondent:	Yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. Matt, can you hang on one second, someone needs me for a second.
Interviewer:	Yeah. Sure.
Respondent:	Sorry about that.
Interviewer:	No worries.
Respondent:	The last sentence you were saying was about the…
Interviewer:	No, it's just interesting to see like these things – these thoughts that you have they are like – it's nice to see it – what I've found in the theory is actually then in practice as well, like usability and reliability, performance all these things that you probably wouldn't find in your box standard forum that someone just puts up there.
Respondent:	Yeah. A lot of the passion of the community is lost and obviously people have good intentions but the technology really hinders the user. And one other thought is that that's what people don't like about them, I feel like the people that actually do get into them and once you understand them and you get through that learning curve and you start – and you embrace it. I think what people do like, what I like about them is just that sense of being able to connect with people that have something in common and they're willing to help out, help somebody else. I've been on – I've posted things on Adventure Rider I was working on an electrical project on a bike and I posted a question there, I'm lost, I've got two wires hanging here and my bike doesn't work anymore can anybody help? And I get a post back that says, yeah, here's my number, call me, I'll walk you through it. I ended up picking up the phone and talking to somebody on the other side of the country who's like, 'all right, so are you in the garage? All right, take that wire, do that, do that, all right, cool, you should be all set now. Thanks, have a good day'. And that's – so there's this sense of camaraderie that is pretty amazing, just being part of a community. The only thing that you have in common is knowing that you're both part of this community, so if we can replace that, the negative aspects, which is the user interface and turn up that community aspect I think that the potential is huge.
Interviewer:	And you would make – I mean one of the – I can tell you that now, like one of the people that I'm talking to is Horizons Unlimited and they obviously do a really good job with creating that feeling but they're still on like a forum basically, it's just a forum, but they're still doing it. So I know that they might have a different approach to you, but you would say you create this feeling of community, you would create that through better usability and better overview and maybe an easier entrance to it.
Respondent:	Exactly. I think the community aspect already exists like on Horizons Unlimited and on Adventure Rider and any of these other forums, it's just that 80% of the people out there that would participate aren't participating because of that learning curve and the poor user experience. So they go on there, they try the site once, can't figure out where anything is and everyone on there speaks in those acronyms and it's intimidating for a new user. They post their first question and all these power users are like that's been asked a thousand times.
Interviewer:	I've seen those replies many times, yeah.
Respondent:	And so people never come back. So I just feel like it's a power of numbers, if community's already pretty amazing with just 20 or 30% of the motorcycling community on there, imagine what would happen if we made 50% of the motorcyclist were on this community.

Interviewer:	I suppose that's like you said the power users or like trying to get new members integrated into an existing community is probably the difficult part, yeah.
Respondent:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	I'm really excited what you have like what it's going to look like because it does sound like if you – this is probably one of the key problems of online communities, so I'm quite, yeah, it sounds really interesting what your plans are and it's like nice to see that you have that on the back of your mind or not even on the back of your mind, that you have it there and this is your central point that you want to address.
Respondent:	Yeah. And so really – so when I'm asked to describe it to different people we started building this thing for the motorcycling community because that's something I'm a part of, but we also realised that what we're building could apply to other niches, especially niche hobby groups. The most obvious thing would be other recreational vehicles, whether it's boats or planes or trucks or whatever. So I think that a more general description would be redefining the way niche hobby groups connect with each other and modernising the way niche hobby groups connect with each other. And motorcycling may be relatively small but worldwide all these other hobby groups its huge. Hopefully other people – if we find success in it, hopefully other people will follow suit or we might even be able to capitalise on that. That's why we're really working on building a solid technology foundation that we could reuse.
Interviewer:	It's interesting because I feel like if you look at communities at the moment you get the same features in almost of them, but if someone – if a community would come up with a new approach that would be very interesting to see. And like, yeah, like you said there's this seen it, try it and maybe failed model of a forum, a user profile and that's almost it. And maybe like a photo database or something like that.
Respondent:	Yeah. And then I think that by – we want to make this about the community aspect because I think that's really what's going to draw people to it. But also I think including smart phones considering the revenue model early on, but in a way that – but doing so in a way that doesn't distract from the community aspect but instead enables us to deliver that top quality – that top level user experience which other – I think that's the thing with all these forums like Horizons Unlimited and whoever else, they're – where they have an incredibly passionate following but most of those sites – not necessarily them, but most of these sites are – they weren't really set up as a business, so that's the thing which there's not much budget for custom software or anything. End up using these off the shelf forums.
Interviewer:	I totally agree with that, I think the whole like thinking about the business model right from the start is important, yeah. Did you like did you look into any other academic research or did you – well, yeah, you said you did the online research and you continue to do online research, but did you like look into these how to set up a community self guidebooks or did you do any academic research into academic articles?
Respondent:	Not really. I read a decent number of books. I read some different books on collaborative economy, collaborative consumption, some of that applied more to the motorcycle sharing site that I originally started with. So I guess the short answer is no, not specifically. I'm constantly reading articles that relate even slightly but I haven't done any actual academic research.
Interviewer:	I wouldn't even recommend it. They are quite difficult to read. I've just had to drag myself through them, they're not even – it's interesting because there's not like – I mean that's probably because it's academic research. It's not like really usable in your day to day work, it's all very fractured. There's no – very few articles that actually look at it from a broader perspective or from a business

perspective, it's all very much focused onto one specific element or one specific topic.

Respondent: But if you do come across any good papers, do let me know, because I would like to read them.

Interviewer: Sure. The only other thing I have on my little notepad here is like a generic question or what would you think are the most important elements for a successful and sustaining community?

Respondent: I think that's a simple one, it's the users.

Interviewer: The users, putting the users in the centre.

Respondent: Empowering the users, yeah. I think that without the users then nothing can exist. Beautiful platform, most impressive technology, a way for every advertiser and manufacturer ready to jump on board, but if you don't have the users it's not going to go anywhere.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: But maybe that's a little too vague.

Interviewer: No, no, that's – I agree with you, yeah. I mean there's all these like – totally agree with you. Yeah.

Respondent: But I guess the question is what's going to bring the users. And I think that might be – in my mind it's about giving users a unique – I mean an authentic voice. I'm treading – even though I'm launching this as a business, I'm treading very lightly in that area and really trying to think through how and when we introduce the commercial aspect, this vendor directory. Originally I thought that would be included at launch so we could try to monetise as quickly as possible. But I think that would be a mistake and I think it's important to build something that users enjoy for the sake of using first before we say, "Hey, you can find brands and buy stuff here, obviously we're making money." I think it's important to give users a platform to express themselves first.

Interviewer: Yeah, like we've seen recently on Facebook where they've started advertising and everyone then like complained. I can see like – well, one of the interviews I did earlier today was basically saying like a similar thing saying, oh, well, we are a platform and obviously we have to make money, but we highlight the fact where we do it and what we do and we're quite transparent in that act. And don't try to hide this in any way because one of their biggest competitors here in the UK which was an insurance company that started their own community and he basically said like this competitor community having like a similar model, similar features, they're not doing so well because they tried to be a bit covert and hide their business aspect, but obviously everyone knows that it is a community from – like paid from the insurance or based on the insurance everything that is on this community is taken with a slight pinch of salt because you never really know what their real business objective is.

Respondent: A couple of things I would add. I feel like I misspoke a little bit, a little while ago, I mentioned – we were talking about the revenue and about the other forums and stuff. I hope that we can even capture some of the passion that these other forums are able to do, but another part of our business is that – I don't think that we can replace the forums because there's something about – I mean it would be an enormous undertaking to say we're going to build a platform for all motorcyclists that replaces all the information that you have on the forums because there's hundreds of forums for every – one for every single bike and every single type of riding. And each of those has thousands and thousands of pages of information

that it would be such a huge undertaking to try and put that all in one site. So we're actually looking at a way to try and keep that in mind that we need to build something that kind of compliments those, that you can't replace those – there's always an advantage of being a smaller group with people who know exactly what you're talking, you know, that sort of relate to what you're talking about. So we're looking at ways to essentially kind of build something that compliments those.

Interviewer: Yeah. I mean I had – that was basically why we at Scott Oiler decided against a community because we were thinking about oh what could be our focus, what could be our purpose and it would be something along the lines of chain maintenance or something like that, but you would – for all technical aspects you would go into your forum of your specific model or make of bike and you would get that information there and you probably would get a lot more information there than we could ever have on community about chain maintenance if anyone is even interesting about becoming a member of another community that just basically deals with chain maintenance.

Respondent: Yeah. No. I guess in the end we all need to stick to what we're good at.

Interviewer: It's really interesting. It's good to get this like perspective from really early in this process because I can tell that you've put a lot of thought into it.

Respondent: Yeah. Suspense, wait and see if I was thinking the right things. I'm anxious to see that.

Interviewer: Sounds good. I've got the one thing in my email I need to ask you is if you would mind to be quoted in the dissertation or would you rather remain anonymous?

Respondent: No you can quote me.

Interviewer: Cool. Yeah. I mean that's it from my side unless you have any more questions.

Respondent: I don't think I do. It was good talking to you.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: If you have all the info you need on this, then one last thing on my business side. I was going to post your interview tomorrow. Your interview is great by the way.

Interviewer: I wasn't really – I read the one from what's his name in New York.

Respondent: Damian?

Interviewer: Yeah. And I felt like, oh, shit, his interview is really good and maybe I should ask you – maybe I could change some things in my interview or something like that, but I hope it's okay, I hope it's all right.

Respondent: You're welcome to if you want. I can actually send you the word document that shows all your answers and you can edit it if you like but you don't need to.

Interviewer: No, I think it's fine, I'd rather have it – yeah, so you're going to post it – well, yeah, tomorrow at some point, then I will just make sure that we maybe schedule it for the weekend so you've got a nice big push from the UK as well.

Respondent: Okay, yeah, I'll send you an email when I post it tomorrow. I was going to ask you, having seen Damien's interview. That was the first one, do you have any thoughts on ways to improve it and make it more interesting for users or more valuable for you as a business?

Interviewer:	No, not really. I'm just going to check one thing. One of the things that I have was like I thought that the user profiles could be a bit longer. I really like the style of the interview with Damien because it was not too long but it was quite long and it had quite a lot of really good information in there. While the ones with the users I could like read more of that and it's not like I'm going halfway through it and then think when does this end, it's…
Respondent:	Okay. And you're talking about like the full interview because what we do is we make the picture with a really short except on the left and then we put the full interview like in the caption and you saw the full interviews?
Interviewer:	Yeah, I just went back because I thought that, but I've, yeah, I've seen the picture and now I've – well, I've seen the interview before but, yeah, that's probably a problem with Facebook, right, that people only see the picture and not go onto the full description.
Respondent:	Well, it has a little link where it says click here, read more, see more. If you click on one of the images and then on the right side…
Interviewer:	Yeah, and then see more, yeah.
Respondent:	And then you get the full interview. So you think even that, even that extended view is still is – it could be longer?
Interviewer:	I don't know, I mean it comes down to are people happy to write a bit more or would there be something else that you could ask that might be quite interesting for people to read. But, no, it's really it's nit picking here because I think these interviews and the profiles are really good and I think it's a great way to drive people – to get people involved. I think it's an absolutely brilliant way. And to be honest I've even thought about not stealing it in the same way but doing something similar for Scott Oiler.
Respondent:	All right, that's fine. One thing you might notice is I wanted to keep the business profiles a little more casual. So you see those more polished layout with the user profiles?
Interviewer:	Yeah.
Respondent:	And then I felt like – I almost reused the same layout for the business ones, but then I realised is like – I don't know, it just felt too commercial, I wanted it to be a little more casual. Here's a couple of pictures and some interesting information rather than like – because I could probably make it look like an ad, like made it too polished.
Interviewer:	That's why I'm almost like when I – after I read Damien's interview I thought, oh, maybe my interview whatever I wrote was a bit too commercial, a bit too sounding a bit too much like an advert because, yeah, I really liked this idea of taking small brands and small businesses and presenting them rather than presenting some huge brand where you just read the marketing spiel from the marketing department. So I just hope that my interview is not too commercial or too editorial.
Respondent:	I don't think so, I thought it was very interesting to read.
Interviewer:	And I also thought that his business model was amazing because that didn't even – like I think it's a great idea and I think something like that could work over here as well, maybe not in Glasgow but in London something like that would definitely work.
Respondent:	Yeah. It's definitely a big city kind of thing.

Interviewer:	Are you part of the group? Do you have your bike parked there as well?
Respondent:	Yes, I do. A friend of mine discovered them, a friend that lived here – I just moved here last year. A friend of mine already kept his bike there, so I met Damien the first week I moved here and kept my bike there and now we've become friends. We've been riding together a lot.
Interviewer:	It felt really nice the kind of the idea to have bike benches and tools in this as part of this deal of storing your motorbike because it's a huge problem over here that you wouldn't have your own workshop because you couldn't – like you wouldn't – if you rent somewhere in the city you couldn't – yeah, you wouldn't have the opportunity to have a garage or something. So some people have a lock up where they keep their bike but they would still not have the necessary tools to actually do their own maintenance work, so I thought that was a really nice idea.
Respondent:	Yeah. It is. It's well used. Every time you go there, there's usually a few people in there working on their bikes, so, you can ask people their advice if you're doing a project and you can't figure it out, so it's really cool.
Interviewer:	Mm-hm. No, I mean I think it's a great idea. As long as you're happy with my interview I'm happy for you to post it tomorrow.
Respondent:	I am, I think it's going to be great.
Interviewer:	And I think in this time since we've started chatting you already had another ten likes, yeah.
Respondent:	I'm really excited, it's been good for everybody asking – I appreciate you taking the time to sort of write an interview and let me post it to the followers, so it's going to make it a lot easier to get other businesses onboard and give interesting content.
Interviewer:	I might follow up with a rider profile at some point when I have a good picture of me somewhere on the bike.
Respondent:	Yeah, please do. All right. It was great talking to you, Matt. So when are you back in the US? Are you doing the show – there's a show coming up in Orlando in October, do you know about that one?
Interviewer:	Yeah. One of the great things – I mean the Indianapolis show for us was a bit slow, well, it was slow for everyone, but one of the things that came out of it is that we have a new distributor that is starting up this week or next week the product has gone out in Pennsylvania, so he's already booked a stand at the show in Orlando, so he will be presenting Scott Oiler and we obviously think we might come over, one or two or three people just to give it – have more staff there and maybe bring over some marketing material, something like that. But we don't know yet because we've – well, I blew all our budget, or we blew all our budget on going to so many shows this year that we don't really have any money left in the shows budget or the international travel budget, so I have to go to my MD and convince her that this a really good idea and that we should definitely go and that I should stop over in New York again for an extended holiday like I did last time. I'm not sure – we'll see.
Respondent:	All right, well, keep me posted if you are coming. I don't know if I'll make it to the show, I'm going to see where we're at with our business, see if it makes sense. But if you're in the US any time, let me know.
Interviewer:	Yeah. Cool.
Respondent:	Okay.

Interviewer:	Definitely.
Respondent:	All right. Well, thanks again, I look forward to seeing how your project comes out.
Interviewer:	Yeah, probably a quick email tomorrow and then I'm off 'til next Thursday, so I'll catch up with you.
Respondent:	Okay, great, enjoy your time off.
Interviewer:	Okay, cheers.
Respondent:	All right, Matt, take care.
Interviewer:	Bye, Malcolm, bye.

[End of recorded material]

[Start of recorded material]

Interviewer: Hello, is that Miguel?

Respondent: Yes, it's Miguel, how you doing?

Interviewer: Hi, it's Matt from Scottoiler, how are you doing?

Respondent: I'm doing okay.

Interviewer: Good. Thank you very much for agreeing to help me, it's very much appreciated.

Respondent: Yes, no problem, man, whatever I can do, just let me know.

Interviewer: Cool. I can tell you a bit about my research. Basically I'm looking into online communities and I'm comparing a few. Well, BikeMinds or Malcolm, is one of them, I've met him at the Indianapolis show this year and got chatting to him and he told me about his ideas and I thought what's really interesting too, almost see it at a very early stage because usually what you only get in the literature is communities that are really successful and have hundreds of thousands of members. So it's quite an interesting thing to see BikeMinds and I wanted to look at it from the point of those that create communities but also those that join them and the users.

Respondent: Yes, of course.

Interviewer: I've got a few questions here but it's meant to be more like a friendly chat and I just wanted to know how you got aware of it and why you joined BikeMinds and what your involvement is.

Respondent: I'm a very active user of Instagram and I actually started to see these postings. Basically what I do is I hashtag motorcycle related tags to my photograph, and I guess the BikeMinds people may have seen one of these and click on it. I do long distance motorcycling and recently I was doing a cross-country, doing about 21 states in America across all the northern states from New York to California.

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent: When I was doing that, I started gaining a lot of motorcycle followers and then I guess BikeMinds clicked on one of these photos and started following as well. That's how I got aware of them, they basically found me, I didn't find them, and then of course once I started seeing what they were all about and I saw that they have...

                        Actually what happened, at the beginning I would start really, I was just focus on my trip and then at the very end of the trip, there was a really nice photographic friend of mine in Burbank in California where I'm actually standing with my fist up on the air like a sign of 'I made it safe', you know?

                        So I was very, very excited and he captured that moment and when he posted it, BikeMinds reach out to me and wrote me a little something saying like, "We are interested in using this photograph for a feature, would you be into that?" I was

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like, "Yes, sure, why not?" It's motorcycle, it's almost like a community. That's actually, based on that question and enquiring a little further, I Googled them, went to their Facebook page and all that, and started seeing that they're a new up-and-coming community and their ideas about...

Of course when you click on Facebook, they have their link of the website there. So when you go to the website, they explain a little bit about what they have in mind, and it seems they have the quality to pay attention to what I was doing and they wanted to do something about it, like a little feature or something. I was like, "Yes, of course, I would love to follow them as well, and now I follow them both in Instagram and in Facebook just to be part of, and they invited me to. So that's pretty much how I...

Interviewer: So it's almost because they came to you and were quite keen to work with you, that's why you got interested in them?

Respondent: Yes, exactly. They knock at the door first to making questions to make a featurette with one of my photos and then from there investigated a little bit more about it and then I find out that what they wanted to do... There is nothing really in there, it's just a website that says what the idea is, and then just that, and then for now in the Facebook they are doing all these little features like spots on riders and spotlights on rider and spotlights on street and their different bikes and things of that nature. I think they are trying to find their shape but that's how I see it.

Interviewer: I really like, when I was first talking to them, I saw these rider profiles and I thought that was quite an interesting thing because you don't really find that on other Facebook pages of communities. It seems to be something fairly unique to them.

Respondent: Yes, that's correct. I don't know exactly for how long or how effective it will be once like 10,000 riders join the group thing and how they are highlighting people. They will know better, but for me in that case it was very gratifying to see a community or a platform was paying attention to my rights. That to me was very gratifying and I was so humbled that there will actually be a little spot, one of those riders' profile on me.

Even though my first impression when I saw that it was like, I'm a Harley biker and not necessarily a brand, it's just the fact that it fits me and I love it very much and feel very comfortable with. Even though I've done many rides around the world with Beemers. I don't mind, I'm more of a rider than a biker. But the truth is I feel very comfortable with my Harley, I love it, but my first impression of the community was that it was more here for other type of biker or perhaps because of the first two or three pictures or features that I saw were more like adventure types, ADV motorcycling guys.

And then it was very surprising and very humbling to see that they actually took my picture and did those featurettes that they do with it.

Interviewer: Do you think that, I haven't seen your picture but I'm looking through a couple of pictures now but also I'm wondering, do you think they're going to be able to attract all kinds of bikers? As far as I know, there's nothing like a community for all kinds of bikers out there.

Respondent: That will be interesting and see how it moves, what kind of dynamics they can create to invoke, put everybody into the same pot. I think it's going to be interesting and if they pull it off, it will be amazing because most of the communities that you see out there are very, very specific. I can name you like, if

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you go to like the HD forums, God, they're very, very hardcore guys with tattoos and they just ride their Harleys.

Then if you to like Horizons Unlimited, it's mostly, yes, they are actually the closest to the most wide kind of thing. But if you see them they always say, like a good 80% of the thing is like a 1200GS, like a bunch of GS or Trans bikes and things of that nature, motorcycles of that style and those who like who get a little bit of a road and throw a tent.

So communities are there, they all seem to be very, very specific and it will be interesting if they can manage the way to put the interests of everybody into the same place. It happens to me like in my own personal view, I'm a long distance rider, I love the classic look and the feel of the ride on my Harley, yet I like to ride and camp.

Interviewer: You're not the typical Harley rider.

Respondent: Yes, exactly. So that's hard to, the community can appeal to the different riding styles. There are guys like lots of my friends are weekend riders, they just take those bikes on the weekend all shiny and shampooed and go for a spin around block and they show off and they are really loud and they feel happy to ride up here and then just back home, and that's fine for them in that respect it works well.

But for me it will be a very critical point, if they want to go that route, then how are they going to pull that off? Those expectations.

Interviewer: Especially when you said that, like your first experience was you looked at a couple of pictures and they were mainly adventure bike riders so it's almost like the first impression could turn people off straight away.

Respondent: Yes, in my head I was like yes, this might be an ADV community and I was like well, I might be interested to check it out here and there to see, look for new routes and look at the people who's doing long distance riding. Most of the long distance riders are outside of the whole American country, out of the United States, are AVD people. Even in Europe, most of the guys who just go and do the whole of Portugal, do the south of Spain and get into the Alps and stuff, they all have GSs, or what was that, the Ducati one...

Interviewer: The Multistrada?

Respondent: Yes, Multistradas and motorcycles of that nature, Yamaha, whatever, that came out and I don't know, it seems to me that that was something that I can discover, but not everybody is open to that. To me it's appealing because I love long distance and the story is that these people have said, also the blogs that I go and check out, they're AVD people and that is the story, that's what I'm at. But I recommend thats not everybody, actually, some have ricer burners and just want to see what is the next lead line that they can put to make it look more shiny and ridiculous. You know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yes, I know what you mean.

Respondent: So motorcycling is pretty open to many things so I don't know, to me I'm very curious to see if they can pull that off if they're going to go that route. If you go into their website, they now have photographs of different styles of motorcycling on the front, that's indicating that they want to be pretty broad. Let's see how that goes.

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Interviewer:	Yes, in the back of my mind I was thinking clearly someone else might have tried to attract all kinds of motorcyclists but yes, I agree with you, it's going to be really difficult.
Respondent:	Yes, you know how you see that too on magazines itself. There's really no magazine out there that covers even like Motorcycling World, Cycling World and all this stuff, they try, they pretend but it falls short because if I'm a Harley driver, not even a Harley driver, I found myself going yes, I'm a Harley driver who goes long distance. Oh, I found that magazine Road Runner, and Road Runner covers all manner of Harley Davidsons and Metrics, but then it's all about long distance riding, like where is the next place to go.
	It's a very specific magazine that carries what I want, I don't want to go and buy like Cycling World just to see 10 pages of one thing or like trial motorcycles, it means nothing to me.
	So that in a way, my personal feeling, I don't know, I'm not a marketing person or anything like that and I'm not pretending to me, but logic will say that you do have the same difficulty trying to appeal to everybody like that to make it effective.
Interviewer:	Yes, it's going to be one of the problems they're going to have, but I suppose because there is nothing out there they might just get enough involved. So you said that you're a member of the Harley Davidson communities and also Horizons Unlimited as well?
Respondent:	Yes, I use the web a lot for researching and seeing other stories to see how they applied my planning and again, most of the magazines I read are actually ADV. My favourite of course, I get the Hogg magazine from Harley but that's very biased, it's more like half of the magazine is trying to sell you another motorcycle. But then I also have, my favourite is Road Runner because it really covers my needs like the long distance riding and the classic touring bikes. But then the rest of the magazines really is ADB mag and I also read Adventure Bike Rider from Britain, which is fairly new, maybe a year or so, but it's a really amazing magazine, the way that they have it all structured. So I actually order from there, it costs me a little more but I get to read something that is really high quality.
	Then online I basically go for Horizons Unlimited. I went full on, I got their DVDs, I try to support their stuff in either the products that are out there that first of all because they help me, but also for the sake of helping the community itself. So I got the DVDs, I go there quite so often to see who's out there, crossing Alaska to Patagonia, and how they're doing and what's the time that they're doing it, where they're staying, all those tips are very, very useful for what I do.
	I go there prior to every trip. I've done Germany, I've done Portugal to Spain, Uruguay to Brazil, Mexico and cross country here, I want to ride through Canada.
Interviewer:	It sounds amazing, sounds great.
Respondent:	It's fun, it's what I really love to do. That's what motorcycling is to me. All these communities are the support on the preproduction of each of these trips even though most of the ones that I go, I pretty much go with just a very vague idea of the route, I try to surprise myself on a daily basis. Whenever there is a map, it's just now at night before it's late. I say okay, this is my average riding, like time on the saddle, so I make little circles on the map and I go okay, what will be the next road, if it's the ratio that I can cover as the next route, that's how I pretty much go on a daily basis.
Interviewer:	It sounds amazing.

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Respondent:	But prior to this trip, I used a vague idea of the directions and if there is major marks where I want to go and all the tracks are routes that people recommend or hotels or places to stay, even like food places.
Interviewer:	It's funny because one of the other communities I'm talking to is actually Horizons Unlimited and I've spoken to the founder of that.
Respondent:	Yes, that couple is amazing. I think they achieved something very unique. I think from all the things out there, I think that's the most complete of them all.
Interviewer:	Oh, wow, okay, that sounds good.
Respondent:	That's to my likes I guess, because the other communities are like forums and things of that nature. On this one, what I like about Horizons Unlimited is just like first, there's a heavy, heavy percentage on the attention of what I want which is long distance riders and the whole adventure thing. Independently of what kind of bike you are riding, they are really focused on the adventure and just going the distance and educating people and that's what I like. It's not just where people just go and just chat and sometimes insult themselves because someone is riding a scooter, you know?
	It just amazed me because you've got to go to these communities and I literally just snap at them because I have a good friend who is crossing the entire South America in a little scooter and he have ride more miles than any of these clowns with 1600cc motorcycles.
Interviewer:	Yes, that only ride it down to the post office or something.
Respondent:	Yes, that's what I'm saying, there's a lot of these guys. To each his own, I respect that but you've got to respect other people, especially if you're in the same community where we're striving for respect. What we view is like the lower fork, be on the side of one of these machines and what it means, this connection of whatever your life throws at you, just focusing so bad on that road that you are out of the zone. That's just a magic that you know it, I know it, and our communities, whatever communities regarding motorcycling should nurture this rather than create separations between this. I don't know, it still seems that there is a lot of it doesn't matter, there's always somebody with a hard head out there.
Interviewer:	Did that happen to you that you went to a community and then there were people actually insulting your friends or people on a scooter?
Respondent:	Well, I've seen it. I don't recall the exact reference but I have seen it and I've seen it like, what is that, Harley Davidson forum was one of them. I think it's in HD forums that I saw once a massive discussion, it turned out very insulting and everything regarding guys who ride Harleys and guys who ride Metric bikes and ride lookalikes.... If you are on a forum, you have to do be aware that you're exposing yourself to that, but then that's the kind of stuff that in my own personal view, this is 'Miguel's strictly speaking', that kind of pulls me out of it. I stopped going to those Harley stuff, even though that I love my Harley to death. Again, I'm a rider, not this kind of biker. I do have a couple of tattoos but I'm not out there for the looks, I'm out there for something else.
	I don't know, that's kind of like my point of view, that's why kind of like they throw me out of a community, the unnecessary confrontation on the basis of something that should be more unified that anything else. We should be discussing, all of us as motorcyclists, we should be discussing about how can we be seen more, how can we just protect, enforce a new law towards our codes, our

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cities or wherever we're living to, how can we add it into our, push our congressmen to create new laws that respect our line sharing or our disability or a particular lane for us or a motorcycle day or, I don't know, I'm just thinking right now, but you know what I mean. We should be more unified into –

Interviewer: Rather than split up into different target groups and brand...

Respondent: Exactly. Because that affects the guy who ride the scooter to the guy who rides the GS, all of us.

Interviewer: But would you then include bicycles as well?

Respondent: Yes, exactly. So I'm thinking then that's kind of what drives me, like I was saying about sometimes it's good. Yet on Horizons Unlimited, it seems to be it's quite something in those terms. Even when you go into the forums people are very respectful of sharing ideas, sharing places where you're going and things of that nature. I'm not that active into actual forums because all this, I don't want to expose myself to that, just for the same reasons that I'm riding a Harley.

But to me, to be honest, my main inspiration are that really old couple that have their motorcycle, vehicle in the world which is, I forgot their names but they're an Australian couple, they're really old, and they rode the whole world, pretty much every single country and former countries that don't even exist any more without a streetlight on a Harley Davidson. That is actually what is regarded as the record of most countries, the most travelled vehicle in the world, they have that record, that's a really nice... But for me that's an inspiration.

Interviewer: Yes, it is definitely. No, that sounds good and then you would almost say that if BikeMinds could create something similar to Horizons Unlimited but maybe for all kinds of riders and all kinds of bikes, that would be the ideal community?

Respondent: Yes, because I see something, there is something in BikeMinds, I think that they have, it's a hint of course, I cannot speak too loud about this, but it's a hint for what I'm seeing, that they have way better graphic design than Horizons Unlimited. Right now, Horizons Unlimited has a better website, about three years ago that was a complete -

Interviewer: Yes, I've seen the old website, it was pretty shocking.

Respondent: Yes, I don't know, they did it with Microsoft iWeb or one of those things, I don't know. Now it looks a little better but still, and I'm very particular about that, if I'm in a site, I don't want to get tired by looking at so many things. I want the experience but I want online to be light, especially if I'm going to spend an hour reading something. So I guess BikeMinds, if they have good taste and then if they start with something like what, I think to me, my own personal view I think Horizons Unlimited has the best structure. Because they're for educational so they've stuck to this from very early, to me it seems very complete.

Interviewer: Yes, I know what it's like. All the information that they have, especially if you go long distances, that's exactly what you need.

Respondent: Yes, exactly, they have it all there and it's under one roof really. So I think that's where my clients, my own personal opinion I think they should maybe... It's hard to get, you just go there and check it out, see what they're doing, why they're doing it, why it's working so well.

Interviewer: That kind of ties in with the only question that I have here on my little pad is what do you personally think is the most important element of a successful community?

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Respondent:	Well, to me is like well organised handy information, that you don't have to go like fetch for it like crazy, it's just so well organised, so clean it is like that the information is there. Whether you want stories, whether you want reviews on motorcycles, whether you want reviews on equipment, whether you want to find new roads either for the weekend or around your area or whatever, you just have to connect with people to just chat or whatever it is that you want to go and do, it's just so well organised but it's there, you know. Lots of information, very, very well organised. That to me just makes it...
	When I go into a community and I cannot find something, I just leave, it's just like it's not for me. If you cannot find it, you tend to turn to somewhere else, that's the logical thing.
Interviewer:	Yes, especially with so many communities competing, you can just go to another one.
Respondent:	Exactly. So, that for me, again it's just most amount of information with the best possible presentation.
Interviewer:	That's great. I've got tons of really good stuff from you, that was really, really helpful, thank you very much.
Respondent:	No, I'm glad that I could help.
Interviewer:	I don't know if you have any questions for me, otherwise I'm going to let you go and enjoy your evening?
Respondent:	Do you have any other questions?
Interviewer:	No, I've got everything here.
Respondent:	All right, great. Then, man, Matt, good luck with your research and I hope it doesn't drive you nuts!
Interviewer:	Thank you. I've got another six weeks and I'm going to need every single day of that so yes, thank you very much.
Respondent:	All right, my friend, take care then.
Interviewer:	Cheers. Thank you.
Respondent:	All right. Bye.
Interviewer:	Bye.

[End of recorded material]

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[Start of recorded material]

Interviewer:	Hi, Alex.
Respondent:	Hi.
Interviewer:	How are you doing?
Respondent:	I'm good, how are you?
Interviewer:	I'm good. First of all thank you a lot for like agreeing to have this little chat with me, this is very much appreciated.
Respondent:	Not a problem. Hopefully we can give you some answers that you will need. First of all maybe tell me a little bit about this project and what you're hoping to achieve and what the purpose of this is then.
Interviewer:	Basically what it is, it's a part-time masters degree that I signed up to do when I started with MPhil three years ago. And then as it is like I've worked a bit on it, the topic changed a couple of times during the course of the time. I really wanted to do a virtual community for Scottoiler but after looking into it that just felt like we didn't really have the grounds. I don't think that a community about chain maintenance would be all that successful to be honest.
Respondent:	Maybe not on its own, yeah, it's a little bit narrow focused isn't it? But that doesn't mean there isn't a community around it, it just means that it couldn't live on its own of course I think.
Interviewer:	One of the best things about Scottoiler is that our customers, those that use our product absolutely love it, so we've got like a really, really strong customer base and they're all really happy. It's really nice when you go to shows and people come to your stand to just talk to you or they see you talking to someone just to like a new customer, someone that doesn't know about the product and they just come and say buy one of these it's the best thing I ever bought for my motorbike, so that's really nice.
Respondent:	A friend of mine used to have one on his FZ6, he loved it. He couldn't understand how anyone could have a chain driven bike and not have one of this, but how any could drive a chain driven bike and not actually have one of these things. I've got to tell you in North America it is not a well known product.
Interviewer:	I know. It's basically something we're working on at the moment. I took over… I started the first two years or first one and a half years at Scottoiler was a marketing assistant and then when my boss left I basically took over the marketing side and I really like the last nine months have wanted to put a bit more effort into the US market. We went over to the Indianapolis show, we've signed up ALTRider, they sell our products now. We signed up direct to manufacturer, I don't know if you know them.
Respondent:	I don't know them personally, no.
Interviewer:	Yeah, they're a fairly new thing in the USA, they're like a new smaller distributor with only a couple of brands. And, yeah, signed up a new distributor, like a one person distributor slash technical support and shows and he's going to start within the next couple of weeks. Some product just went out to him. You know what it

is, we're like a small family run company, we don't have the massive marketing budget and if you compare the US advertising prices, North American advertising prices to the UK it's quite a big jump.

Respondent: Yeah, it is. It's a much bigger market of course than the UK, it's around about five times the size, but still it is – obviously with a new brand and a smaller budget it's very difficult to break through. If there's anything we can do to help in that regard too. I mean I personally have never used a Scottoiler but my wife has a Street Triple maybe do some product reviews around that and we'd love to try and do that for you.

Interviewer: Sounds good. I'm going to put that down. Going to get something out to you, yeah, sure, no problem.

Respondent: I've never used one myself and I currently have a shaft driven bike so I don't need to worry about it but the wife lubes her own chain, I always have to do it, so it's one less thing for me to worry about really.

Interviewer: Yeah, it is. I mean since I got bikes I always had a Scott oiler on my bike because that was my first pay cheque basically went to my first bike and then I realised I didn't have any money left for food or accommodation for that month so I had to call my parents again and ask them for a bit of money. And then they asked me, why do you need money, you just started a job. I'm like, well, I bought a bike. So that wasn't a pleasant conversation, but I never – I always had a Scott oiler but we did some testing last year comparing like spray lube versus a Scott oiler chain and I was the poor bastard that had to clean the bike after the spray lube.

Respondent: Yeah. You see like some of the people I know with chains. I do not envy you that job at all.

Interviewer: I mean I'm really excited about the US because it's like over here in the UK it's very much – motor biking is very much an older generation thing, so it's like average is something 48, 49. All our customers here are fairly old and it's all doom and gloom. Everyone just complains about the motorcycle market, but what I get from like North America is it's still – there's a lot of young people getting into it, it's really exciting. You get all the websites like yourselves, like you guys, and other websites coming up and having more like a more positive image to biking than it is over here.

Respondent: I don't know if you can tell from my accent but I actually grew up in the UK so I have a perspective on both sides of the Atlantic and first of all I've got to tell you that a lot of – the average age of the riders here is probably about the same. We do have a lot older riders in North America. It tends to be – whereas in the UK you can ride a bike pretty much year round. In the northern part of the continent, specifically where I live riding is a summer leisure activity. Like it's not a practical way of life for a lot of people here. If you head towards the south, like maybe Texas, California, Florida then you can get year round riding in, but even then the summer becomes very punishing, the temperature does get very, very hot there. I have a friend in LA who rides. He was telling me he was out in the Malibu Hill and up in the Malibu Hills it's kind of 22 degrees and they drop back down into the valley and all of a sudden it's hitting 42. So you can appreciate there's a huge kind of discrepancy there. But you're well correct in one thing is that we are seeing a big resurgence in a lot of younger people coming back – or coming into the industry for the first time. They tend to be favouring the smaller machines like the Honda CB350 seems to be the weapon of choice these days on the streets. You see a huge number of those around. I don't know whether Honda has started making them yet, I know they haven't, but it almost looks like they have.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent:	And it's great to see because you've got these guys – I mean like down the road from us you've got this new bike shop that's opened and it's run by a bunch of 20 somethings and they're very much into customising their own bike. And they're kind of – and I think younger guys than me and I don't particularly remember how it was in the sixties, but from what I hear people tell, they tell me that that's how it used to be. You'd buy a machine, you'd work on it yourself, you'd customise it yourself, so it's kind of almost like there's a return to that ethos and certainly at least in North America where we're seeing and there are some fantastic machines kind of showing up and coming around. The other big thing I think which is a good thing for you guys is that the touring marketing seems to be increasingly large. Now the Scottoiler is as I remember the product is one of those you can set it and forget it things, which if you want to go off on a couple of weeks riding around the Grand Canyon or points kind of around there, is a fantastic product because you fill it up, you turn it on, you let it go, you never have to worry about carrying that can of chain lube with you, you know, there's no like every morning getting up early, lubing the chain, you've got to warm it up, you've got to clean it up. All that's kind of gone, so the touring market I think is a fantastic growth area for you guys and that is definitely growing too.
Interviewer:	Yeah, it certainly it, yeah, you're right.
Respondent:	Sorry, I'm talking rather a lot. I believe you have some questions for me, Matt.
Interviewer:	No, it's fine. It's really interesting to get a bit more insight into the US market and things like that definitely help because it is – I mean, yeah, you say you've grown up here, you notice a good bit of a difference in like what you said with the temperature differences is one of the things that we are working on at the moment because it never happened for us over here in the UK you have your average temperature and it doesn't really change that much during the day and probably doesn't even change that much during the year. But it's like our original Scott oiler it's like a vacuum operated gravity system, so it actually flows faster when you come into summer and it will flow slower when you come into colder climates. So when we started selling Scottoilers in the US and the first couple of systems that went into California we saw exactly that problem, that people rode up to the mountain in the morning and the Scott oiler just stopped working because it got so cold. And then they came down mid afternoon down to the beach and it was so hot that it just sprayed oil all over the tyre. So we actually have like an electronic system that is a pump system so it always pumps the same amount of oil on the chain and that's actually a lot more popular in the US than the original one.
Respondent:	I can imagine. I know how the viscosity of lube changes and when you've got 20, 30 degrees variation, even in one day when you're riding up mountain and back down them, yeah, I can totally appreciate that'd be a problem, especially oil on the tyres too, that's never a fun thing is it? Those left hand turns get very hairy.
Interviewer:	Yeah, no, sorry, yeah, basically that's where it all came from. And after I realised that I wouldn't well then my boss left I got into the position as marketing manager and kind of looked into budgets and then realised that we would not like do our own community any time soon. We have our like fairly active Facebook community and that's all good but my – the topic of my dissertation then changed more towards how do other communities do it. And obviously then being approached by advertisers and things like that I would get a better insight into these communities and it was really interesting to see because I've got a few that are just starting up, a few that are really successful, and saw your website and I thought that was exactly what the kind of community that I wanted to build. I always felt like the ones that are out there lack this feature of planting out rides and basically meeting up for rides and having like a map approach to the whole idea. I always thought that was a really good idea and something that the motorcycle community definitely needed.

Respondent:	Sure. I mean thank you for that. It is definitely one of the things we felt was very important. Motorcycling is an activity where you go out by definition into the world and do something. So we knew that mapping, we knew that tools to help people find each other, location, were going to be an important thing for us. So we worked pretty hard and we do continue to work hard to make sure that is attractive, so we have a new version of the website coming shortly. You're going to see even a greater emphasis on those tools to make them more streamlined, to make them a little more transparent to give you a little more control over them.
Interviewer:	That's interesting. So how did you – why did you decide to do like a new version of the website?
Respondent:	Why did we decide to do that? Well, first of all the version of the website that's up there right now was – we refer to it as our beta site. So our product line is effectively we built a social CMS, content publishing system. We also then to demonstrate the usage of that built a website which is the motorcycle community Eat Sleep Ride dot com and we also built a mobile app which interfaces with the same API. So the website we refer to as out beta product. It was developed first of all, it helped us kind of understand and prove our own API with the express intent that we knew that the mobile app was going to be – I wouldn't say necessarily the marquee feature but probably more pertinent to how motorcyclists would want to relate to the community. Motorcycling, I'm out and about, well, I don't have my laptop with me, but I do have my phone. So the website as we have it today was really trying to understand and prove that concept. And we always had it in our minds that once we'd proved the concept and we need to go back and kind of pretty it up a little bit and look at some of the learnings we'd actually made from how people interacted with it, you know, especially things on the mobile site and just simplify it. So that's really been the driver behind why we've put the website together or we've had to redevelop the website. I wouldn't say we had to redevelop it, we just felt that the existing version had a few things that we weren't really happy with that we knew could be made better.
Interviewer:	It's interesting because that's the topic of my dissertation is basically – I've read so many articles and like these how to guides that you sometimes get, but it's not really clear like what are the important features or the important elements of a community but also what's not really described in the literature is the process of like basically from the first idea from what was the first idea sparked everything to like what are the business reasons over starting it up and creating a platform to attracting members and then growing it and then like you say you've – like you're almost like at the next step already where you had or have a site but then you develop it further and it's quite interesting to see this process.
Respondent:	Sure. I mean is there a specific question you want to ask me around that or maybe something I can help try and answer?
Interviewer:	If you could just run me through the process. It's really interesting, like the – how the first steps – like the first steps to grow a community to a self-sustainable state, that's the part that I'm very interested in because you often see communities that just fail because maybe something wasn't really that thought through at the very first stage of the community. So maybe if you could just run me through from like the very first point.
Respondent:	Okay, so basically so first of all I think the reason you haven't read the simplified version of this is that there isn't one. Community in essence is collecting people together and something on the web is collecting people together with the express intent of making them communicate with one another and share something that is inherently valuable. So there's a number of problems inherent in there. First of all is how to get people to actually contribute. I mean that is probably one of the hardest things you can achieve and to be frank we don't really have a specific set methodology I can tell you. I can't say we use this process or that process, but one

thing we did do was we actively went out and we engaged people, not just on our own platform but other platforms too. So obviously I mean to get people to engage with your own platform they have to know it's there. So we put a lot of work into our outreach through Facebook and Twitter and we've also then used that existing leverage as well by creating the ability to log into our own site through Facebook and Twitter and other communities to come. That kind of lowers the barrier that hopefully enables people to kind of look at it and say, "Okay, well, that's a really good article you've just posted on Facebook, I want to go and share my thoughts on it, and if you've got a Facebook login already well then it's just a couple of clicks and you're already signed in, right?"

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: So I think that's one of the key things is lowering that barrier to entry. And there's a lot of ways you can do that and that's just one of the ways we've chosen to do it. The other thing I believe that really does lower the barrier to entry is to make it hopefully as simple as possible to create and share something meaningful. So I think this is one of the reasons that Twitter really succeeded is to share something on Twitter you literally just have to have a thought and tape it out on your keyboard. You've got 140 characters, you literally can share one idea, you can't share the justification for it, and that in itself becomes a very simple thing to do. So one of the content types we created was this idea of status, just a thought. And the idea is – and you'll see that in this coming release is that we make it simple to share that onto other platforms too. So you've got to kind of provide for that quick interactivity, but we also knew that especially motorcyclists if you look at the number of blogs that are out there, you have to make it very simple for people to write longer form content too. A long form rich content as well. If you look at sites like Tumblr for example or to a slightly less of a degree WordPress, they make it very easy just to click on the link and start typing away and create a big story which you can make pretty rich by adding in your own pictures and videos and other things, right.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: So again we spent quite a bit of time on making sure that that is addressed but the one thing we keyed into that we think helps our community too is the ability to take any piece of content on the platform and reuse it as part of your own post. So for example if I created a racing platform, the cat and fiddle run in Derbyshire which is my own stomping ground, used to love that road before they put speed cameras in, but I can put that in and I could publish that as I went uphill last Saturday afternoon, had a great time, brilliant ride here are a couple of my pictures etc. etc. You could then take the route portion of that and click reuse next – when you're reading through the post and say I went up here on Sunday and it was the worst ride I've ever had in my life. Or you could take that and say nine other rides that other people have published and reuse them and create my top ten favourite rides in the UK or the best five roads in Europe or something like that. You could take that and say here's the last five rides that Alex published. He knows nothing about what makes a decent motorcycle road, here's my favourites. So it just really allows you to kind of take what people have done and releverage it in the best way. And this is the best way to create interactivity within a community. It's not getting people to create new content, it's getting them to talk about content that already exists. It's a lot easier to share an opinion than an original thought.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: Does that make sense?

Interviewer: Yeah, no, it's really interesting because it ties in with so much that I read in the literature.

Respondent:	We may very well have read the same articles then.
Interviewer:	So did you do quite a lot of – obviously you did research before you started but did you also look into academic articles?
Respondent:	You know I have looked into a couple of academic articles around this a very long time ago. The academic side of things, the web changes so quickly that academic articles can often be both hard to find – you've got to find something that's sort of very visionary and far reaching to find something of true value. They can often be out of date by the time they're written, but to be frank I didn't have a lot of time when I started working on this project, it was kind of – like most entrepreneurs, okay, I've got this idea, I have a reasonable focus on what I want to do, I'm influenced by what this site is doing and how I think this site should be doing something else, that's what I'm going to build. And you tend to look for articles that validate your point of view rather than change it.
Interviewer:	Yeah.
Respondent:	So a lot of the things that we've developed have been initially at least and the website that you see today I think that's a good idea. They were kind of top down decisions, very sort of Steve Jobs like decisions. This is what I want to do and this is what I'm going to build. But the new version of the website and I think this is another key aspect of running a successful community is you've got to ask for feedback. It's not just will you create a story for us or share your comments on this particular post, it's did you like doing that, was that easy, was it fun, did you derive any value from that, how can we make it better? And we do actively solicit members of our community, especially the more active ones, we'll reach out to them, we'll talk to them about we saw you, you posted that, that article on a motorcycle, you own that sports for 883 is there a reason you didn't add a picture to it? Was there a reason that you didn't add ten pictures to it or a video of you out riding it or an article about how to keep it in good shape.
Interviewer:	Mm-hm.
Respondent:	And through asking those questions we've got a lot of feedback on things we can improve and I think you're going to see a lot of that reflected in the next version as well. And I think that again another key – a key to any website these days is to try and involve reasonably rapidly but not to a massive degree over any one or two successive generations. It's a delicate balancing act to scare people away from what you currently have than to improve it. I mean sometimes – I mean Facebook had a great problem because they introduced Timelines, right? A lot of people hated Timelines and Facebook kind of rolled it out initially and people were switching back and eventually I think Facebook had just made that decision that you're going to have Timelines and we're going to force it on you and that's eventually what happened for people. It was for a long time there was a lot of backlash around that and I think that we're very cautious that we're a small community, if we offend a percentage of our users it's going to be much worse for us than if Facebook offended the same percentage.
Interviewer:	It's really interesting so you basically you do like small incremental updates or feature updates rather than one massive – well, although you say you've got a new website, a new version of the website coming up.
Respondent:	We generally try to make incremental changes. So I don't know how familiar you are with software methodologies in terms of software development methodologies, but there's a process called Agile and Agile is just this idea of pick three, four, five, six, whatever it is things, commit to them and release them quickly. So especially with the mobile app this is something we're trying to do. Some of those features tend to be fixes for issues that we've found inefficient. Something about the community uses the platform a different way we didn't anticipate, we have to

fix that. Some of it's feedback and observation, you know, we use a lot of Google Analytics for example. We can see if people are kind of clicking, here, here and here and then going back and doing something else, well, maybe they didn't understand that they could've done it more quickly a different way. So it's kind of bubbling things under the surface. The new website it doesn't really change I should say too much of the functionality it just organises it better and in a more consistent manner. So we make input fields a little bit bigger. We use – well, on the existing website today we do things like with the user interface, like if you fill one field out and something is related to it, well, then we'll fade that in to make it clear that there's a relationship between them.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: So we've done a lot more work on the visual language this time around. It looks cleaner, it looks simpler, but the same functionality is effectively there.

Interviewer: Yeah. Sorry I kind of lost my thought there for a second.

Respondent: No problem.

Interviewer: It's really interesting. So you said that you've got like more active users, so you have almost like user groups or you have like a couple of power users that you – that are like your driving force behind this?

Respondent: Yeah. I mean it's not something we've sat down and said let's create this group of users. It's something that's organically happened. You'll find that when you develop a social community it runs on the full spectrum of human experience. So at one end of the spectrum you'll have people that complain. It doesn't matter what you do they will complain about whatever you are doing. And even if you fix exactly what they're complaining about they'll still complain about it.

Interviewer: Yeah, I can imagine.

Respondent: So at the one end there are the people you quickly learn to tune out. You still listen to what you say but you take it with a much bigger grain of salt. At the other end of that spectrum, you get people that will send you emails saying, "You know what, I love this. I love what you're doing. I took this and I wrote this story the other day and I shared it with my friend and all of a sudden he's now out buying his first motorcycle and we're having a great time. By the way I had this little trouble with it and…" and then it evolves into a much deeper, richer conversation. You may do things to more deeply engage with them, like say, "Hey, I'm actually down in your neighbourhood in a couple of weeks because you're on tour or whatever, why don't we hook up for a beer." You make friendships which can be real or virtual, but it really does evolve into this strong relationship with a lot of your power users. And I think any good community will actually engender that as much as possible.

Interviewer: Something I read in the literature is like a next step or like a step of like develop communities is getting users involved, getting them to take over things like moderation or things like that, to basically capture that goodwill of the users and that voluntarism.

Respondent: Absolutely. And I think part of the reason for that is it's good for the company that creates it because it reduces the amount of people that you need to get the same job done. So it's kind of almost like outsourcing things, but at a more fundamental level it's far more powerful the community than it is for the company that owns it. And it's powerful for the community because all of a sudden the community itself is policing itself and I think that's the real strength in any community is that there are kind of these unwritten rules, there are these codes of conduct which may be

official or unofficial, but there's a sense of purposeship and ownership that belongs within the community itself.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: I mean one of the sites I'm sure you're familiar with these guys, but one of the sites I think has personally done a fantastic job of this is Reddit. I'm sure you're familiar with Reddit and I hear about 6% of the internet now uses that site. I mean I've been on that for about three years but I've seen that evolve and it does a really good job. It's ultra simple, it doesn't try and blind you with UI, it doesn't try and blind you with powerful tools or whatever. It allows people to contribute and makes it other people to say this is good, this is bad or let's get the hell out of here, right. And I think that again is a key feature for communities as they evolve, yeah.

Interviewer: It's almost like – I mean I really like the feature where you set your location and then you get like location specific information. I mean this is something that obviously made Reddit like really successful is these sub-forums so you can just have like a sub-forum.

Respondent: I think that's another feature too of communities as they grow is Facebook for example, I stopped using Facebook about I think three or four years ago now for the simple reason that it no longer reflected who I was. It reflected who I was in the sense that I could post what I'm doing to Facebook, but for people I'm friends with they're not interested for the most part if I go out on a four day dirt ride and come back all battered and bruised but smiling like an idiot, they're not interested in that, right. They may be interested in one of the pictures I've posted there, but that's it. In the same way that I'm not interested in looking at all the pictures of your ugly children. And Facebook has that problem, it has become this dumping ground of human interaction. It's become this garbage can of everything about everybody's life and I'm sorry I'm not interested in most people. I mean it's nice to say I'm on vacation or I had a kid, but that's as far as it goes. The people I want to interact with tend to be around topics of interest and Facebook isn't very good at doing that. You can create groups but we wanted to create a platform that was really the topic of interest for motorcyclists. You go to Eat Sleep Ride, that's what you're going to get, you're going to get motorcycles. And that's one of the reasons we refer to it now as we're all on this social publishing platform, there's a social magazine and it confuses some people because the word magazine of course has that connotation of paper and print and it comes out once a month we're a social magazine in the sense that we publish kind of what's new and what's fresh, but it's social because then there's everyone else. And the community has really evolved because of the branding and the people that are doing the contribution and the leads we've taken to understand that we're about motorcycles. And people understand that very strongly now.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. One thing that I notice on the site is obviously the absence of like what you usually get in your bog standard communities is a forum which is where most of the interaction takes place.

Respondent: Yeah. The platform itself was borne out of frustration with existing forums. So years ago – back – the story's very sort of long and complicated, but in a nutshell I had a company previously and it sold and I decided to take some time off and just ride a motorcycle. It was a stressful time for me coming out of that company and I wanted to get back to doing something I really loved. So as part of that process I basically went on a big tour, I mean not kind of your Charlie Boorman kind of thing, but reasonably far. I then wanted to write about it, I wanted to write about the bike I was riding, I wanted to write about the routes I was going on and I wanted people to kind of come back and contribute and share the same things that they were doing. So initially we looked at WordPress. Now WordPress at the time didn't have the social features, did a very terrible job of the mapping, but we built an initial version and it became basically a blog site, it started off as a blog site.

But we didn't like it, we found it too hard to work, it didn't do what we wanted to do so we started to customise it. Customisations weren't going to work for us so we took the brave decision to look at other platforms. We looked at Ning which is a social platform from the ground up. The big problem with Ning as a community is you do not own your data. If we wanted to go to a different platform we can't just take those users with us, they're tied to Ning. We can't take the content we've published with us, it's tied to Ning. So we didn't want that lock-in.

We looked at a bunch of others, you mentioned forums, forum were something else we also closely looked at, like could we – I mean we loved the way PHPB for example which is the classic forum allows you to find a topic and interact with it and sort of give your thoughts, but as we got into looking at forums more and more we realised that most forums are really only good for starting flame wars. A lot of it is pejorative name calling, right. Roughly half of what's on a forum is someone insulting someone else. And notwithstanding you get a lot of topics, a lot of posts and it can often be difficult to find something on a forum. And notwithstanding this is actually one of the academic papers I did read and I wish I could give you a citation for it, but it said that forums typically struggle when they evolve past a couple of thousands users…

Interviewer: Because you then run into too many users.

Respondent: Well, I think you run into a croft problem, right, all of a sudden the posts may or may not be relevant to you and PHP doesn't have the ability to kind of filter them or categorise them because there's no tagging, right, you have to write your own filters over them to do that. So again we've got a customisation problem. So looking at that we had these growth issues with forums, we had – sorry, scaling issues with forums, we had customisation problems with things like WordPress and ownership issues with things like Ning. We decided we wanted to build a platform that combined the best features with that and again we talk about this new version of the platform, but you're going to see a return to a little bit more focus on interactivity. So right now our comment model is pretty flat, we're going to do things that surface interactive topics a little better to users. So if you've commented on a post and someone else comments on it, that's effectively become a conversation. We want you to come back and understand the conversation's had some evolution and you might want to contribute to it some more. So that's I think one of the key areas we've going to be evolving in is to improve that conversational activity between users. To answer your question, forums don't scale well.

Interviewer: Okay, and that's why you decided against including a forum, or some form of forum into your platform?

Respondent: Well, we think done well, and I think this is where Facebook has done an amazingly good job of things, the post itself is the topic of conversation, but you don't need a forum to list those out, you don't need that sort of very rigid group, group, group kind of structure to organise them. You can make decisions about what that post is when it's made. And if it's an active or a visit conversation then users should see it. If it's not, then let it sink, let it die, and that's kind of…

Interviewer: It's almost like the Reddit idea.

Respondent: Almost, yeah. But instead of just allowing people to vote it up or vote it down which is the typical karma score on Reddit for allowing things to surface, we wanted it to be a more organic process.

Interviewer: I mean this is absolutely the biggest criticism about Reddit isn't it, it's like – sometimes you don't even get to the interesting part because it is somewhere lost in like a karma scam, yeah.

Respondent:	And the counter site to Reddit is I don't know if you've ever been to slash new, but if you've ever been to new, you have to do the equivalent or wading through large mounds of rubbish to find something worth interacting with.
Interviewer:	Yeah.
Respondent:	So I mean that's one thing we want to try and avoid, and it's a problem that every community is going to face as it grows is how do you deal with the relevancy issue. And that's really the other key point to communities that mature is maintaining relevancy. And I think to your point earlier about talking about power users that become moderators etc. etc. that's one way of dealing with that. There are others. You have temporal based relevancy, you have activity based relevancy, you have topic of interest relevancy. You may have geolocated relevancy which is one of the things we do actively want to include, but there's a number of ways you can make content relevant to whomever's reading it.
Interviewer:	One of the things that I've found quite interesting or like, yeah, it's probably you are the best person to ask is like if you – you obviously made at some point the decision to go with like an advertising based model rather than a subscription based model.
Respondent:	We did – well, we kind of have, yes, we kind of have. We actually really if you think about it have a somewhat hybrid model. The website itself is free and will be driven by advertising. Now, we also have the mobile app as well which we sell and does not contain ads, but we also have a subscription model built into the mobile app which is we sell the safety feature crash light, but that's sold on a year by year subscription basis.
Interviewer:	Okay. Because yeah that was something I read an article as well that like – I know I would like – most forums and most communities are like advertising based, but there were still like some examples of successful subscription based models. Obviously you have a harder time attracting members to them.
Respondent:	For sure. I think the only real subscription based models that truly work in my opinion are the dating communities. And even then the most successful dating community is absolutely free, Plenty of Fish. But I think something like the dating model there's a massively inherent human need to meet other people, people are prepared to pay for that. Other topics of interest – have you ever heard of a guy called Steve Rubel?
Interviewer:	No.
Respondent:	Okay, Steve Rubel if you can find him, if he still is around, is a very fascinating guy. He gave a talk a few years ago that influenced me greatly about something he called the T model. He said you can succeed by doing one of two things. You can either go very, very broad, you can offer a massive wide range of interests, know your customers very well, what activities they deal with so you can sell that. That's obviously the top bar in the T. The alternative is you can go very deep. You can build a community interest that's specialised, that knows your customer on a deep level. Because it's deep, because the interactivity is around very specific areas of activity it's also easier to sell that to advertisers without understanding a lot about your consumers. You tend to build a smaller community that way but your cost per user could be a lot more monetisable because it's a more – you're not doing broad advertising, you're doing very targeted advertising. So Steve Rubel if I have his name correct and I'm pretty sure it's RUBEL, very worth looking at.
Interviewer:	Sounds good.
Respondent:	He was one of the very early BC academics around social communities. So if you look to some of the academic work, I'm surprised you may not have found him,

but I also might have his name wrong, but if you look for the T model, like I say it was an idea that did influence me greatly.

Interviewer: Cool.

Respondent: Just to let you know I've actually got another call in a couple of minutes, so I don't know if you want to try wrap this up or if you've got any thing pertinent you need to ask still.

Interviewer: It's just basically two quick questions if that's okay. One was just I'm basically just stumbled across Eat Sleep Ride, it was more like because I was looking for communities, what do you do to attract members?

Respondent: Well, the website was recently – is basically still in its beta phase I should say. The mobile app is really when we started to reach out to our community. We've hesitated to try and spend money directly on advertising, at least web based advertising because we know that such a small percentage of the population is a motorcyclist. So instead what we've tried to do is engage with existing communities of interest, special interest groups, industry councils, things like that, and to also attend events where we know motorcyclists are. So when we go out for example, we'll tend to gravitate to areas where people ride because we're riding. And we tend to do very grass roots things like walk around with t-shirts, hand out fliers, and often we just sit down and talk with people and because we're a member of that community already we're identifying because we're in a leather jacket or carrying a crash helmet or getting off a bike people are willing to talk to us about it. So it's been a very sort of grass rooms campaign so far, but we will be expanding that when the new website goes live.

Interviewer: And the other one was just a more general question that I've asked all the other ones as well is basically what do you think are the most important features of a community?

Respondent: The users.

Interviewer: The users.

Respondent: I mean at the end of the day if your users aren't going to participate there isn't a community. So you have to keep your users happy, you have to give them a reason to come back, and you have to give them a reason to want to participate. They're the most fundamental aspects of any community.

Interviewer: Okay, cool. That's it. Thank you very much, Alex. I guess you're happy for me to be – that you're quoted in the dissertation or would you rather remain anonymous?

Respondent: I think I'm reasonably happy to be quoted. Obviously it would be very nice if you could maybe give me a sneak advance perhaps of anything that might be a little confrontational or controversial but I think I'm happy to be quoted, yeah.

Interviewer: No worries, you'll get that.

Respondent: Everyone knows who I am in this community and everyone knows that I'm one of the founders of this company so I can't really hide behind anything anyway. I don't think I've said anything that's going to offend anyone particularly or give away any sort of trade secrets.

Interviewer: That was really good, thank you very much.

Respondent:	You're more than welcome, Matt, it was great talking with you and good luck with the thesis. Do you know when it does come out I'd love to see a copy if that's okay.
Interviewer:	Yeah, sure, I've said that to Marina, I'm going to send that all over. That's basically what it is, like my time runs out at the end of September that's why it's all like a bit last minute. It was just because when I took over the job from my former boss it was just the last nine months have all been a bit hectic and then the dissertation got a bit into the background and now it's high time to get it over and done with.
Respondent:	I wrote my thesis in three weeks but only because I deleted it by accident. Matt, I've just got to ask you one question. I'm a huge fan of accents and there's definitely a curious accent you've got going on there. Can I say perhaps German?
Interviewer:	Yes, it is German, very good.
Respondent:	It is German. So which part of the UK are you in there because there's a colouring from there?
Interviewer:	I've been in Scotland for four years now, one year in Edinburgh and three years in Glasgow.
Respondent:	I was going to ask if it was Scottish as well. I didn't have the confidence. The German I was reasonably confident with, but the Scottish – every several words I can hear a little bit of it, but, okay, so that's great, no.
Interviewer:	Can't get rid of it.
Respondent:	You can't. That's a good thing too, don't barter, keep it.
Interviewer:	I'm not going to fake a Scottish accent. I've heard everything, I've heard like Scandinavian and northern Scotland apparently they have quite a soft accent as well, but, yeah, you're right, German.
Respondent:	Which part of Germany are you from?
Interviewer:	From Bonn.
Respondent:	That's right in the middle, right?
Interviewer:	It's like close to the border to Belgium and France, it's next to Cologne.
Respondent:	It's more northern than I thought, okay. I've only been to southern Germany but I found it a fantastic place, especially through some of the Harz mountain there's some beautiful riding there.
Interviewer:	Yeah, I studied in the Black Forest, that's – basically I grew up in Bonn and then studied in the Black Forest for three years and on my first day it's a tiny, tiny village, on my first day when we drove up there to put my stuff up there I had like a group of six or seven Porsches like chasing up the Black Forest roads and I knew, yeah, this is a good place to be. And actually just returned last night, that's why I'm still a little bit shattered, just returned last night from a weekend trip to Munich which is beautiful as well.
Respondent:	I hear. One place I really would love to visit is Berlin and I know that's kind of a long way from most of the rest of the German cities culturally and geographically but I hear it's a fantastic place these days.

Interviewer: Yeah, it is. Everyone from up here – at the moment it's really popular, so everyone from the UK is going to Berlin and everyone loves it and that obviously makes me quite happy as well.

Respondent: Excellent. Well, you know what I can only say I commiserate with you around the European championships and the world cup because you always do better than we do, but other than that great talking with you, Matt.

Interviewer: Yeah, cheers, Alex.

Respondent: Take care, have a great day, bye-bye now.

Interviewer: You too, bye.

[End of recorded material]

[Start of recorded material]

Interviewer:	Mike?
Respondent:	Hello?
Interviewer:	Hi, Mike, it's Matt from Scottoiler. Can you hear me?
Respondent:	You're breaking up pretty bad, let me try shutting down a couple of programmes that are running in the background on my computer.
Interviewer:	Okay. I can hear you.
Respondent:	Okay
Interviewer:	First of all, thank you very much for agreeing to help me, it's very much appreciated.
Respondent:	No problem.
Interviewer:	You're in the motorcycle industry as well?
Respondent:	Yeah, that's right.
Interviewer:	Oh, what is it, Go Ride Ontario, looks good.
Respondent:	Yeah. We do blogging basically for Ontario tourism on the subject of motorcycling.
Interviewer:	Looks good. Well, I'm up here in Scotland and, yeah, would love to come over one day and ride Canada and America.
Respondent:	There's some great roads here. I have never been to Scotland but there are some pretty good roads in North America.
Interviewer:	Let me just tell you a bit about my research. It's basically initially I wanted to create a community myself, a virtual community, but soon enough saw that there's not much – like especially for Scottoiler, it wouldn't really work to create a community. So then I looked at how do other communities, especially those who are just starting up, how do they – how are they created, what are the elements that they use, how do they attract users and how do they sustain over time. And one of the ones that I found really interesting was Eat Sleep Ride, because they have this cool feature with being able to track maps and things like that.
Respondent:	Right, yeah.
Interviewer:	And basically, yeah, so I've spoken to the guys from Eat Sleep Ride, and they've been really helpful and they have forward me your contact because I would like to know a bit more from the users' side as well, so like what does attract normal internet users to these communities, why do they join, what do they like, what do they not like. So maybe if you could just like run me quickly through how you became aware of it and what made you join Eat Sleep Ride.

Respondent:	It's interesting. I was friends with Marina I think through just Facebook and she told me that she was working on this project, probably a long pretty good long while ago, like maybe a year or more ago. And so initially I just joined to see what she was doing. To be perfectly honest I don't actually spend a ton of time on online communities related to motorcycling but I have spent some time on Eat Sleep Ride, and I guess, yeah, I mean useful – the useful aspect of it for me is finding new routes and I mean I'm approaching it as a business as well, so I'm looking for ways of getting my message a little bit further out using online communities like Eat Sleep Ride, so that's I guess my interest in it. I don't spent a ton of time on there right now, but I can definitely see the value of things like that.
	For Ontario specifically because we are marketing Ontario, I do spend a lot of time on forums related to Ontario. There's one for the city of Toronto and one of the city of Ottawa which obviously encompasses more than just the people who live in those cities. But one of the things that we've found in general with the online communities is that if you're not actually a member of it and you're just a corporate entity trying to present your product or your service they can be quite hostile to this. They don't like people sort of infiltrating and trying to hijack the message. So we spend most of our time actually just developing content and not so much time developing communities or even interacting with the communities, we just develop content and then hopefully the communities pick it up and share it. That's kind of our approach.
Interviewer:	That's really interesting because I can understand that this fine line between when people think that you're just trying to advertise yourself, that's when communities can become quite hostile, yeah.
Respondent:	Yeah. And it's we're in a sort of interesting place because we're not actually – we're not selling a tangible product, like we're not selling an oiling system for chains, we're selling an experience. And we're doing our best to make sure that the experience we are selling is one that they want to have and one that they actually want to learn about. It's just I've been called – the premier of Ontario used to be – his name was Dalton McGinty and I was on a forum and I said, "Oh, hey, here I put together this list of 20 roads that I really love in Ontario." And somebody said, "Why is this on an Ontario government blog?" I said, "Oh, because I work for the Ontario government doing blogging about motorcycle touring." And the guy called me, "McGinty's stooge," and a great big flame war erupted, so, yeah. That's the kind of thing we want to do. Not so much with Eat Sleep Ride. But Eat Sleep Ride's community is kind of in its nascent form I guess as it stands right now.
Interviewer:	Yeah, it is. It's interesting because like on the one side I reckon that Marina and the guys from Eat Sleep Ride that they kind of they really want you to be on there to basically seed the platform with your routes so that – I mean it's a win/win situation for both of you isn't it? It's just probably not trying to keep that fine line with the users. Were they quite keen to get you on board because of that, or was it because just like you say like a Facebook connection?
Respondent:	Well, in a sense we're in the – my company's in the luckiest position because our job is strictly to create content. And as you know this is what the web is hungry for, this is what everybody is looking for. The fact that you have a Facebook page with a million followers doesn't mean something unless you have something to post. So, yeah, I'm sure that they are quite eager for us to post off to their site. The difficulty we run into is just sort of resources because all of our contract with the government basically says build content, it doesn't say distribute content. And to do that well we find that it actually does take a good amount of thought and strategy and as far as Eat Sleep Ride is concerned we haven't yet seen the kind of avid audience there that we're really looking for. They definitely have an audience but we're not really sure how to use it to connect with them. Right now the province uses a very large US sort of blogging company called Motors Vertical

Scope and one of their sites is Motorcycle.com. We have no – we don't actually engage in the distribution of content there, they basically just send it on to this company and they put it on their website. And then again we use the forums because the forums are very geographically targeted and for us geography is almost a higher consideration than being an avid motorcyclist we're looking at attracting people from Detroit Michigan and Buffalo New York, from Montréal and Quebec, from Winnipeg and Manitoba. These are our key markets, so we're looking at targeting motorcyclists specifically there, rather than trying to position Ontario as a worldwide riding destination. I don't think we're really in the space where we currently can compete with like California or Spain or something like that, we're just not there. So I understand the mission that Eat Sleep Ride is on but it may not fit perfectly right now with what we're doing. So we don't spend a ton of time posting stories on Eat Sleep Ride. We've done some, but not a lot.

Interviewer: At the moment it's more like your traditional online forum, so your forum communities?

Respondent: You know that's where we find the most sort of activity from right now, just because it's all geographically motivated. It's consumers who are most likely to actually go through the fulfilment process.

Interviewer: Yeah. It's interesting because when I spoke to Eat Sleep Ride and in the UK they've just launched something similar called Real Rider, it's the same – it's exactly the same concept, it's more like your Facebook, social media stream rather than a forum, and both of the CTOs of these two communities said that they don't really want to have a forum, they don't want to go down that route of a forum, they rather want to go down the route of replicating a social media platform but only for motorcyclists.

Respondent: Yeah, it's – when they started working on it I thought like, wow, this is a huge, difficult undertaking. What I do see in those guys is the commitment to it. My job unfortunately is not to promote or work for Eat Sleep Ride so I can't – I can only spend a small amount of time there. I appreciate the work that's going into it and I think Alex is a talented developer but for us it's not a major part of how we're doing things. The other thing that I guess I should share with you is that the province, it's the government, so there's some very strict rules about how they can engage in social media communities. Forums are almost a different beast because they've been around for such a long time, that's kind of accepted. They understand how that works and there's rules and guidelines in place, but the government of Ontario has been very slow to define a really good set of standards for engaging consumers about travel and tourism on social media. And as a result we don't have a community that we can really call our own on Facebook. And Eat Sleep Ride's is just a bit broader than we're really interested in.

Interviewer: That's interesting because I have talked to someone in the UK here last night and he said he doesn't really see a future for like motorcycle – broad motorcycle communities because you already have things like Facebook. So he's a motorcyclist himself and he said that he would spend most of his time on Facebook organising his ride outs and meeting with other people because they're already there on Facebook.

Respondent: Well, I think this is really the crux of the matter. For us I should also add that my company wrote the digital strategy for Northern Ontario, so this is a very large geographic area within Ontario, it's twice the size of Texas, thousand and thousands of kilometres of roads and lots of routes that have been developed for this region for motorcycling, but I wrote the overall tourism digital strategy and our proposal to them was not really to create a lot of their own social media pages, they definitely should have them, but that the effort should go into attracting influential people to the region to talk about the region. And that is the way that we view the internet working is that it's the influencers who actually catalyse travel decisions

	and in your case that might catalyse purchase decisions. It's these individuals that really hold the power and it's not so much the networks or the technology.
Interviewer:	That's actually a really interesting point. I haven't really thought about that, but it is – it's almost like it's not important where you host or what you use to get those people that are really, really engaged to get them involved.
Respondent:	Yeah. And our whole strategy for Northern Ontario has been we have under a million dollar budget for content development there and so we're producing in the realm of a thousand to 1,500 pieces of content over the course of the year and each one is written by a different author who we vetted through just sort of looking at their social media profiles as an influential demographics, like fishermen, hunters and I guess I should say anglers is the correct term, and hunters and outdoors enthusiasts, camping people, hikers, canoers and kayakers, that kind of thing. So that's very much our approach and they share it on their social networks and that's how we get more eyeballs on our experiential product.
Interviewer:	So you almost have your own – you have a community of contacts that you then just give – you talk to them but then let them go out and post on whatever platform they're using.
Respondent:	Absolutely. We do ask that – so we also pay for their trips in many cases and we'll actually pay them for content at the end of the day. So while they're on a trip we're expecting that they're going to be posting stuff about the region on their social networks. And at the end of the trip they generally will create a short blog post for us, like three to five hundred words that we can then put on our website and say here's an actual testimonial from a real person but it's a little bit enhanced, we've spent some time to edit it and say where's the clickability factor here. Usually we talk through this with them beforehand, so that's it. And I mean, yeah, we do have a good relationship with a lot of these people so it is an informal kind of community, but our main focus is on getting to the people that they influence because we may not be able to directly engage with those people. We can put ads in magazines or on television and that's cool, that's interesting, but consumers are generally fairly sceptical of those kinds of ads these days. But when they see a friend or someone they trust going and having an experience and having a favourable experience that has much more of an impact on moving them towards a travel decision.
Interviewer:	That could be really interesting for us as well, for us as a product if we could build this database of like close contacts and grow it over time and almost do the same approach as you do.
Respondent:	That's pretty much it. I mean if I were to go one step further, I mean I'm not going to go into sales pitch mode yet because this is what we do as a business. But I will say that's some really good free information for you, but if you were just to start a blog on your own website and that had some sort of social aggregation component. So any time you comped somebody an oiling system or something like that and said, "Okay, you're going to go and do the Dakar with this oiler system on and we're going to throw $3,000 at you for sponsorship or whatever," forgive my naivety on the actual product side of things. And he goes off through the desert, at the end of the race he gets home a week later, he bangs out 300 words, your editor puts it on your blog, but you also asked him or his team while he was out there just to use a hash tag on any of the platforms, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram that's like ScottOiler or something like that. Then you can have your social media aggregator pulling in all of that content. So if a consumer lands on your blog and isn't convinced by one of these pretty great testimonials about your product basically in the form of a blog post, they might – something in the social media sort of churnings hear of stories might catch their eye. I think Harley Davidson they've got a website for their 110th anniversary and they've got a really kind of neat social aggregator working. They've gone and got the logo that says 110, but

within those numbers they've got this constantly rotating feed of pictures being pulled in from Twitter and Instagram that have been tagged with whatever their specific hash tag is for that event. And now the Facebook and Twitter and Instagram and YouTube are all kind of using the same hash tagging system, there's no reason why you can't pull from multiple platforms.

Interviewer: No, that's really interesting. I mean I'm happy for you to go into sales mode, but do you guys cover – this year for us it would be huge to – I mean we're pretty big in the UK and in Germany but the US would be massive for us and we're slowly working our way there, a small family owned company, but, yeah, the US would be a big one for us.

Respondent: To be honest it would be a big leap forward for us. We mostly – we work with the tourism and motorsports industries. We've gotten the Canadian motorcycle hall of fame, we used to work for a company called the Motorcyclists Confederation of Canada which I believe is the equivalent in Europe is FIM. But if you were willing to take a chance on a company like us who's kind of just getting started, but we're number two but we try harder kind of deal, we could definitely price something at a good price point for you so that you get the kind of results that you want and we can prove that we can do the job.

Interviewer: Which is one – can I have a look at your agency's website or something like that. What's that?

Respondent: It's the new business dot CA.

Interviewer: Cool. The US is a weird one for us. We still have a website in there that we control and we've grown that over the last two years now and well nine months – eight months ago we went over and signed up a distributor, so it's going to be like more – it's – what actually is happening in the US is a bit up in the air at the moment because we don't know what – he – or this distributor is meant to take over most of the advertising, so it would be a conversation that would need to happen with him and our MD as well. But it might be something interesting definitely, yeah.

Respondent: Well, think about it. I mean we're more than happy to put together a proposal, we do that stuff pretty much all month every month so. And I did take a look at your website and it's – I actually kind of was like, oh, I could buy one of these because I have a 650GS actually, a 2012.

Interviewer: I've got a 650GS as well.

Respondent: Oh, yeah?

Interviewer: Yeah. It's a beautiful bike.

Respondent: Oh, yeah, it's so much fun. I've been riding it for two years and I've put somewhere in the range of 15,000 to 20,000 kilometres on there, but we've got a pretty short riding season here. But the chain is definitely something that I just absolutely loathe because last year I was on the road for just under 12,000 kilometres before I got to a city that had a proper motorcycle dealership in it and I didn't bring any chain lube with me. It was a pretty grotesque affair by the time I finally pulled in. Yeah.

Interviewer: I can imagine, yeah. It's funny, yeah, you can go through a chain in a couple of thousand kilometres or we had customers with our systems that had – report back things like 60, 70, 80,000 miles is – we had one guy in Germany who's done 102,000 kilometres, so 80,000 miles on a set of chain and sprockets.

Respondent: Wow.

Interviewer:	Yeah, no, sounds good. I actually don't really have any like nailed down questions. This was really interesting, especially to hear like your business perspective on Eat Sleep Ride but also your own community. Do you think like because this is something that we are struggling at the moment because we're a small company, we've got all these social media channels, but maybe your approach almost like instead of running – well, obviously running our own social media channels but also having a database of brand angels that go out there and post on our site…
Respondent:	Absolutely. You'll actually – if you spend most of your day like I do reading a lot of blogs about social media promotion and SEO and all that kind of stuff, you'll see I think there is a terminology – there is a term for these type of people, these kind of brand enthusiasts. It's – the approach that we've taken with Ontario Tourism we've found – we're a little bit purists in terms of how we develop content. So we'll work very, very hard with the people who actually create the content to ride that fine line of making sure that the product is recognised but really putting the consumer's needs first. And we found that every time when we put those consumers' needs first and their wants first and how they sort of interact with the brand or the product we win every time. To the point where our [unintelligible 0:26:04] for motorcycling accounts for a quarter of all the traffic to the Ontario Tourism website.
Interviewer:	Wow.
Respondent:	And they've got 13 different tourism regions and each have their own blog, and then another 7 experiences that each have their own blog, and we're a quarter of the traffic. And they have another motorcycling site that's just a resource site, it's a static site, they spend about $200,000 a quarter in Google ad words and our motorcycle blog beats that for traffic. We spend no money on advertising, all we do is these really well curated testimonials about the product, riding in Ontario. But enough of a sales pitch, and I don't mean to bash Eat Sleep Ride either, it's just not really a huge fit for us. I do see the value of it, I think those guys are really hard workers, I think – totally off the record, Marina is an amazing sales person…
Interviewer:	No, it was from my point of view, like especially working in marketing and like covering a bit of social media and digital marketing as well, I always saw that because there are so many communities coming up now that this would be the next big thing, running communities for a brand. But you obviously then face the problem of getting people involved and I can see that with so many new motorcycle communities coming up. I think if you're a motorcyclist you maybe are involved in one, maybe two, maximum three of communities, but one I would think that most people only join one community or one forum and, yeah, I can see that this will be pretty hard for these guys.
Respondent:	Yeah. Whereas on Facebook, sure, let's say rider A [unintelligible 0:28:04] and looks at their post on Facebook or goes onto their website and looks at the newsfeed there, and that's great. They're probably going to see the most important and most viral content in those feeds, but they also – the average Facebook user has about 230 friends and each of those friends if they're a motorcyclist there's a good propensity that they're going to have motorcyclists as friends and when one of their friends posts something related to motorcycling, even if it's not this like perfectly engineered viral video, they're more likely to pay attention to and trust that than they would something that is kind of a little slicker. That's where our thinking is right now anyway.
Interviewer:	It's really interesting. Thank you very much for agreeing to help me. I will have a look at your website and see what I can come up with and maybe drop you another email and see what I can come up with a chain oiler for your F650.
Respondent:	That would be incredibly. You'd definitely get a lot of testimonials from me.

Interviewer:	Good. It's funny because I would say I get one out to you somehow. I don't know if you've read that on our website as well or how far that news has been travelled but we're actually an official BMW accessory for the F650GS and F800GS.
Respondent:	I saw that. That's pretty cool. That's a mark of distinction.
Interviewer:	I know, especially like we are here in Glasgow, we're 17 people, so we're actually a really small family owned company so working together with BMW was a huge thing for us and quite a steep learning curve to be honest.
Respondent:	Is it because of their sort of corporate structure or is it just their technical attention to detail?
Interviewer:	Well, it took us I think two years to actually come to the point where we were allowed to announce it and went into the shop, so there was a lot of technical details at the start, complying with their regulations and their systems and things like that. But at the moment it's mostly their corporate structure, whereas you have someone solely responsible for orders and someone solely responsible for marketing, and someone responsible for special accessories and then you never really know who to talk to and they seem to be sitting in different offices as well, so it makes it quite complicated to get things done.
Respondent:	Right. Yeah, it is nice to be small actually. I sometimes brush up against the bureaucracy with Ontario Tourism and it's staggering how they get anything done, I just don't know.
Interviewer:	Yeah.
Respondent:	Well, I did have an opportunity actually two weeks ago to ride the F800GT, I had it for two weeks, a press bike.
Interviewer:	Is that the belt driven one?
Respondent:	Yeah. I had such a blast on that bike. I couldn't even get used to driving the GS again after it, I was so used to carving the corners I got scared of floating through them. But, yeah, no chain on that one.
Interviewer:	I know. But I believe that's like when most of the time when I tell people about BMW they still say oh, but they don't have – they're all shaft driven, right? Not anymore. Thank you again and I'll be in touch.
Respondent:	Cool. If I was to put one thing on your radar right away there's a guy in Ontario who's actually doing this massive trip up to the Yukon and doing like a bunch of off-road stuff and I think he's riding a G650GS. And his name is Warren Milner and he used to be the head or one the top people at Honda Canada. He's got a huge amount of clout in the industry, people tend to follow him quite religiously. His name is Warren Milner…
Interviewer:	Is that when I Google him I find him or?
Respondent:	Yeah. You know what, I'll send you a link to his Facebook profile and you can add him and just say Mike Jacobs said I should follow you. I think he knows that people are going to be following him because he's doing this trip and he kind of announced it and said, "Hey, follow me on Facebook, I'm going to post one thing a day."
Interviewer:	Okay, sounds good.
Respondent:	He's just kind of a really need sort of an authoritative guy.

Interviewer:	That's the G650GS quite a nice bike that the off-road school here in Wales had one of them and I was puttering along through all the big puddles and up the big hills where the guys on the big 1200GSs would fall left and right and I would just like ploughing through everything. I would actually have two – we have a couple from Edinburgh that did the Trans America from Argentina up to Alaska and back through America and they've got Scottoiler systems on their bikes and I think they did 17,000 miles on their big single cylinder bikes all the way up to America through unpaved roads and had no problems at all. That was quite good. Maybe we still need to work a bit on like your approach and make them post a bit more and give us a nice feedback at the end. I think we're not very good at that yet.
Respondent:	I would say the number one simplest thing to do with anybody who's getting any kind of comp or deal or anything like that is just say, "Please when you post use our hash tag," and it paves the way for any kind of future stuff that you do with this because if you set up a social aggregator it will pull stuff from a year ago, two years ago. If you just said do hash tag Scottoiler and that's it, it's simple, it's one thing, they don't have to remember a Facebook page, a Twitter account, it's just one thing and it works on all the platforms.
Interviewer:	That's very good advice, very good free advice like you said.
Respondent:	Yeah. My business manager would probably kill me right now, but that's just kind of how I am unfortunately.
Interviewer:	Cool.
Respondent:	Okay.
Interviewer:	Thank you very much, Michael.
Respondent:	My pleasure, Matt.
Interviewer:	All right, talk to you soon.
Respondent:	Bye.
Interviewer:	Cheers.
Respondent:	Cheers.

[End of recorded material]

[Start of recorded material GO – Christo 1]

Interviewer: Hi, this is Matt from Scott Oiler, is that Christo?

Respondent: Hello, that's me.

Interviewer: How're you doing?

Respondent: I'm all right. Knackered after a long day at work but anyway you wanted to ask me a few questions about getting virtual communities, yeah?

Interviewer: Yeah, is now a good time or should I call back later?

Respondent: No, it's fine. I'm just trying to sort something out. No, please, fire away.

Interviewer: Yeah, thank you for helping me, it's very much appreciated. I'm in like the last stages of my masters dissertation and doing this part-time and there's always something coming in the way and then you kind of push it back.

Respondent: Are you a student?

Interviewer: No, I work as the marketing manager here. We're actually a fairly small company so there's just two of us working in marketing.

Respondent: When you said dissertation I assumed it was university related.

Interviewer: Yeah, no, it is or thesis or whatever you call it, yeah, it's a masters degree.

Respondent: I'm an engineering student at uni myself.

Interviewer: Cool, what do you do?

Respondent: Aeronautical engineering.

Interviewer: Yeah. Basically my dissertation is about virtual communities and I really liked the GetOn community because it seems to have like a really cool vibe. Or at least I like the idea of getting people into motorcycling and then keeping them on the ball so to speak.

Respondent: Agreed. To be completely honest, I don't know if this is going to help you or not, but I'm on the Get On community but I very, very rarely go on the site because I find it incredibly quiet. I find very little gets posted up there. The forums that – I'm on two Facebook pages, well possibly more, but I don't know. I get a lot of stuff from two very active Facebook pages. And in fact if you were getting an active community I would suggest that you started with something like Facebook and made sure you go (a) a large fan basis sand then put up regular content. The best – the pages that I see get a lot of traffic who are putting up content three or four times a day.

Interviewer: Yeah. It's interesting that you say that because that's kind of my – when I've looked into Get On that was my experience as well. I thought for a community that has such a strong value proposition, so like basically get the people in there through the Get On scheme they're not doing that much.

Respondent:	Yeah. To be honest I never actually did the Get On scheme, I just got into biking.
Interviewer:	And then how did you get on in Get On? How did you…
Respondent:	Well, I found that looking for information, looking for advice, because there is some good resources there. So I joined the Get On website at the actual page. I also joined the Facebook group and actually because to be honest no one ever uses the Facebook pages I actually won in one of the competitions. Not many people participate in them so this was a competition of the best bike and I just got a Fazer and I stuck a picture up there it wasn't even a good photo, it was taken on my phone, so you can imagine what the quality was like. I just caught it on the top of a hill looking up towards it with the light hitting it from behind and the picture quality wasn't great, the photo was okay but not that great and I won a balaclava.
Interviewer:	Yeah. That's good. They have – I was – just before I called you I spoke to someone else from the Get On community and he really liked the Facebook group, so I suppose it's like personal preference, how active is active enough.
Respondent:	Well, I'm on it, as I said. I mean there are two big groups that I'm on. One is the Two Wheel Tarmac Terrorists and that's huge and then the other one is Facebook Bikers and in fact it's quite interesting because two of them, two pages, have taken a rather different approach to how they manage their information. And it's like if you think of Facebook as a good way to go then I'd actually recommend that you look at those two groups TWTT and the Facebook Bikers' page because the TWTT, what you do is you post what you want to post on the page, but it's not made immediately visible to everyone. What happens is an admin that checks it and then repeats it. So that enables a certain amount of filtering. And the other one, Facebook Bikers, is just a question of first come first served. Personally I prefer the format of Facebook Bikers in that respect because it means that you get the posts more evenly spaced out throughout the day rather than just in a big chunk every couple of hours. But again that comes down to personal taste. Again you often get comments going over 100 posts regularly on those two groups so they're well frequented.
Interviewer:	That is pretty massive.
Respondent:	In terms of more specific communities, I was on the Varadero Owners club which is the bike I started out on. And then I joined the forum for that, now that was all right, but again a bit quiet. Not a bad forum to be honest to start off as a bike rider, there's lots of useful information on it. If you want to see an example of a really well oiled, really active forum, I recommend you look at the Yamaha Fazer Owners forum, which is www.foc-u.co.uk. I rode around in London so I was known as a LoFo. You can already get the general gist. I think our general levels of maturity. That site is a pure forum if you know what I mean. It's not a Facebook page.
Interviewer:	It's interesting because I'm looking at like six different communities and they all have like different approaches, so it's quite interesting and that's when you said – when you emailed and you said that, yeah, get on this it's a quieter one, that was fine. That's exactly what I was looking for. And also that you are a member of other communities, it's really interesting because then you can almost compare it to these ...
Respondent:	I do. I mean as an engineering student I have a habit of dissecting information because you have to take a logical approach to it. So I was actually thinking – I've been thinking the past couple of days since I got your email I've been thinking, right, what virtual communities I belong to, motorbiking and elsewhere. What can I communicate, what can I share, that sort of thing. And I've mainly focused on the motorbiking ones to be fair because that's all interest towards making a virtual community for Scott Oiler, right?

Interviewer:	No, that's how it all started off. When I started here I wanted to make a community and then I looked into and I kind of realised what you really need, you need good drive, you need something to bring people there and motivate their participation. And I don't think there's many people that would be interested in sharing hours of their life on the topic of chain maintenance.
Respondent:	If you don't mind me sort of – well, I won't tell you your own job, but put it this way if I was trying to set up a virtual community around a company like Scottoiler because I've not had, I've never had a Scottoiler on any of my bikes, well, any of my bikes. I haven't had a Scott Oiler on either of my bikes, but I have – but then again I am a freak when it comes to the chain, I check it on a weekly basis and clean it and oil it and actually it's pretty grubby at the moment so who am I to talk. But I know quite a few people who do have Scott oilers fitted and they do like them and they are – you've already got a good product. If you were doing a virtual community around Scott oiler I think that you should use the good quality product as a centrepiece for the group without making it the only focus of the group. If you look for instance at the Facebook Biker page half the page is on women's breasts. You think I'm joking don't you? I'm deadly serious.
Interviewer:	I'm looking through it right now, I haven't seen a single breast.
Respondent:	Really, are you on the right page? TWTT? Facebook.com/groups/martynclark1 that's the name of the group. Anyway there's – that's a miracle, no tits for once.
Interviewer:	I know what you mean. It seems there seems to be quite a huge part of the motorcycling community seems to be naked women.
Respondent:	Tits and beer basically.
Interviewer:	Before someone really looked into – you know how you name a product you should really check out what that all means in every language and things like that. And if you just Google lubetube it comes up with a porn streaming service, so it wasn't a very well chosen product name. It was quite funny because we could see in our website analytics that people would come to our website, like basically looking for something else but found our website and our product, possibly thought, oh, that well do and then one in ten bought one as well. I'm not really sure what they're doing with it.
Respondent:	I think the best thing of that is that one out of ten actually bought the product.
Interviewer:	The idea was there at the start but like I say we're a small company, we wouldn't really have enough – it could still be an idea to do something like that, but, yeah, no, my dissertation is just about the process of how do creators – so that's why – I'm basically I'm interviewing – I've spoken to Miles who's organised Get On and who's managing it and who's doing the community and then almost like compare it against what the users say about this community. And it's all about the process of setting it up and making something successful.
Respondent:	Are you only looking at – are you looking at several communities or are you just looking at Get On?
Interviewer:	No, I've got six communities. I don't know if you know it, it's – there's two of the like adventure bike communities, Adventure Bike Rider, they have a magazine as well.
Respondent:	I'm more of a road bike person.
Interviewer:	I don't know if you know Real Rider, they're a fairly new thing in the UK.

Respondent:	I've never heard of them. I presume you're looking at MCN because their Facebook and their website, they're very good. Community wise I'd say the Facebook page is better.
Interviewer:	It seems to be a common theme that. That's what lots of people say, they say – well the Facebook page is actually better or people say, "Oh, I prefer to go on the Facebook page because I'm on Facebook anyway and I've got my friends on Facebook." That's quite interesting because it's a common theme.
Respondent:	I think the other thing as well is that Facebook has got quite a user friendly interface which other websites might not. I mean for instance the Get On website sometimes trying to put something simple up can take some time if you know what I mean. So that can be a bit of a pain. There are exceptions and I would possibly suggest that things like products, things like specific pages are going to struggle more with the community being dwarfed by Facebook, by their own Facebook community. I think the exception is user specific forums. Because for instance the Fazer Owners Club which I've mentioned before - that one – I think I found the Facebook page once and I think it maybe had half a dozen posts on it in total, something like that. I really need to see if I can find the blasted thing again. I'm quite active on Facebook and I'm quite active in the club, so the fact that I need to actually go and look for a group to remind myself of its existence tells you how much I use that particular page.
Interviewer:	It seems to be the kind of thing. I used to have an F650 before I sold it and there are really good – they have really good forums for specific models or brands, but when it comes to more like general motorcycling it seems to be that there is no like a big motorcycling forum that encompasses all brands and bikes out there.
Respondent:	I'm trying to remember what it's called. I think there's something called Bike Chat Forums or Visordown… I think it's some kind of general biker forum. I do find it, but I found it by accident because I'm not actually on it.
Interviewer:	Yeah. Bike Chat Forum. I didn't even know that existed.
Respondent:	I think that's the one it's got a black and red helmet I think on the top. Something like that.
Interviewer:	It's got BCF with like a little speedo…
Respondent:	That's the one, I think. Then again I'm not on that one. f I get home for work, the first two tabs I'll open on FireFox are Facebook and the Fazer Owners Club, straight away it goes to those two. I think the sensible thing about the Fazer Owners Club if you take a good look at it, you'll see that it's not just about one model of Fazer, there's a parallel forum for the Fazer 1000 and the reason that one's – both forums are very well frequented, but people who I've talked to who are on both, because I've only got a Fazer 600 so I don't bother with the 1000 but people who frequent both say that the Fazer 1000 forum is absolutely brilliant if you're looking for very specific information on the Fazer 1000. But if you want more of a general view you go to the Fazer Owners Club because there's the naughty corner, there's a jokes section, there's a general roads section – a rant and rave and take the piss out of each other, that sort of thing.
Interviewer:	Do you think that's important to have something like that?
Respondent:	What?
Interviewer:	If you look at forums they all have these like a joke section and a general banter section and things like that.

Respondent:	Well, put it this way if you're going on the – if you want to make a forum a clinical place where it's only going to be very detailed information, don't put it in and don't get any visitors. If you want to have a community, if you want to have an area where basically – I think the Harley Davidsons they may be rubbish bikes, but what are Harley Davidson selling? They're not selling a motorcycle they're trying to sell a lifestyle. Generally to balding, middle aged, retired executives. Sorry, what wasn't profiling at all.
Interviewer:	They don't have chains so we don't like them either.
Respondent:	Good. But the thing is that – a lot of bikers that I speak to, but then again the Fazer Owners club we get all kinds. A lot of them are commuters, but in general this is true to forums and all that, because of the kind of vehicle it is, motorcycling does seem to attract a certain kind of person who tries to enjoy life to the full and who generally does throw themselves into the entire biker lifestyle, riding their bikes, coming back into forums and chatting about the bikes and modifying bikes. I mean if you go out into the car park with an equal amount of cars and bikes, if you can actually find one, I would bet £100 that there are over – well, maybe not over twice, but there are more – I would bet that most of the bikes have got after market parts on as compared to relatively few cars. Most cars are stock, bikes are tuned, bikes are tweaked. Why? Why aren't we happy with the stock cars. Who changes cars? Car enthusiasts. So I think that your average biker is more likely to be a bike enthusiast so you've got the entire lifestyle thing as well. And so if you can find a good group that caters to that lifestyle, so not only information about your bike, but then a place where you can also have a chat, where you can bring the two together, – that's where you've got the basis for a really good community.
Interviewer:	And do you think that Get On doesn't have that kind of that second element?
Respondent:	To be honest it does have a bit of it, but it's just too little of it. I don't really want to criticise Get On too much because it's . I find what they should do, if I was talking to the chap at Get On, I would say, "Look, you've got a great page, you've got a great idea, what you need to be putting up more content, you need to make it easier for the people to come along to comment, to discuss, maybe you should have a forum area, a more active forum area or try and get more traffic towards the forums on the Get On page. Because if I go onto Get On, it's not to look at the forum it's to look up information that's on a static page. What am I doing? I'm looking at information that is basically dead. I'm not actually bringing anything new in. Just looking at stuff. I think there just needs to be more – he needs to put up more content, make it more user friendly and broader as well. I mean the Get On message is all very well, but I mean I'm on – I passed my test a year ago or over a year ago. I passed my test about 13, 14 months ago now. So I think I updated my Get On profile to put a picture of my bike on there, but there's nothing else. The idea of Get On is almost to get you onto a motorcycle and then once you're on the motorcycle, what now?
Interviewer:	In that kind of sense it's almost flawed because it's like get on and go off and don't come back to us.
Respondent:	Yeah. I mean what would be – I mean again I'm trying to tell Miles his job, but what would be nice is if you have – well, my strange sense of humour's kicking in, they should have a sister page "Got on". What would be nice about Get On is to have greater – if they had a bigger area… Get On is a big bike rider, like me… biggish. If you were to go on Get On as a big bike rider it's only because you enjoy the riding and because you're likely to be the kind of person who's going to be nice 125 riders. Because a lot of the Facebook pages say "It's not a real bike unless it's over 1000cc". So if you know the kind of crowd I mean.
Interviewer:	Yeah.

Respondent:	I hope you're not one of them.
Interviewer:	I'm not. On my little 650.
Respondent:	Sorry, what bike you say?
Interviewer:	I've got a 650, an old F650.
Respondent:	Good that you didn't say a Bandid I would've hung up on you. The old rivalry between the Honda Hornet, the Fazer 600 and the Bandit. The Fazer's a better bike. I'm not prejudiced at all. In terms of the communities I think if Get On was more – the problem is I hate to use the phrase because it is a bit of a cliché and it is easy to just sit my backside on the sofa and just moan, but I don't think the site is user-friendly enough. I mean it looks gorgeous from a developer point of view. I mean you can tell that someone's put a lot of time into making it look nice. But unfortunately from a user perspective and from an engineering perspective they've spent too much time on making it good for the developer and not enough time making it look good for the user. I mean there have been times when it takes me three page reloads to change my picture, three times to upload the picture and it doesn't blooming work.
Interviewer:	That's really interesting. It's like basically like I will like talk to like the creators of these communities I'm working with, they will get like a little – like a copy of the dissertation and things like that, but it's not like – I'm not working with them to make their sites more successful or better. It's just basically I've got these all like different communities that I've got from communities that are just starting up and haven't even created their page yet, all the way to I think the most successful that I have is Horizons Unlimited which is like a huge, huge…
Respondent:	That's a bike magazine isn't it?
Interviewer:	No, it's like a – Horizons Unlimited is similar, it's like Adventure Bikes as well, but they are based in the US and they're huge in the US, they're not that big over here but they have become really successful and it's almost like trying to find out what makes these communities successful and I think that Get On could be more successful and I know because I spoke to some other Get On users and some of them say they really like it, but most of them say they like the – they almost have the same – they go through the website, find the information but then there's no community afterwards, after finding the information. Some of them go to Facebook and like the Facebook page, but that's almost it.
Respondent:	Even before the test it was great having the information there, but it would have been nicer for instance they had a discussion page about the – and links at the bottom, a discussion page where it would take you to – say for instance the Mod1 page is very good because it tells you in great detail about how every task. How hard would it be to just have a link at the bottom saying discussion so you could click on that link and it takes you to a forum where people have put up suggestions on how to improve – for instance my – first time I did my Mod1 I failed it because I put down during the figure of eight turn. Now, someone could just possibly have said you know by the way on the figure of eight turn or the turn in the road it helps a lot if you're just covering the back brake adding that little bit of friction on your back brake, just to help you to have better control. But the thing is stuff like that which is found out from riding the bike and riding specific models, you just don't get. Another thing for instance and I know I'm now beginning to really get up on my soapbox, sorry.
Interviewer:	That's the kind of stuff I'm looking for, yeah.
Respondent:	Another thing for instance is when you've got their bike search tool. If you actually go on their bike search tool what kind of bike is good for me.

Interviewer: I don't even know where that is.

Respondent: Well, there is – if you go onto the Get On page there is a tool somewhere, it's a bit of a bugger to find, but there is a tool somewhere where you answer half a dozen questions and it will come up with the kind of bike that's good for you. Now, that's a nice idea but then how about if in the subsections users are allowed to add their own model of motorcycle with a reason why it's so good in that class. For instance I've got a – well, I've mentioned about five times now, the Fazer and I don't think the Fazer is mentioned that much on the page and on the – if you go onto the page and look up the Varadera all the information is there from Honda, all the details there, but then there's nothing underneath from users saying, this is the stuff I had – or if there is stuff which I can't honestly remember – the layout is so terrible that you don't scroll down to look at it because it's just – because you feel you have to put on your size ten wellies. In terms of forums and things like that, if a task of finding information is going to be laborious then that's not going to go – in that community is going nowhere fast. On the other side of the coin, if it's light-hearted, if you get the chance to have a joke, you know, and if it's fast, you can have a lot of traffic. Say for instance – I mean someone for instance posted up – someone a couple of days ago posted up something about the brake light adjustment or the – sorry the brake lever adjustment saying how do you do this and I'd actually done it earlier that day. So all you need is a size 10 spanner, a size 12 spanner and whatever size spanner it requires to adjust the brake light switch. So I got back to him within about five minutes because I use the forum a lot, so he got back to me saying thanks. And then someone said "or just look in the Hayes manual". I think some replies later someone called him a knob, but that kind of friendly light-hearted spirit and that camaraderie. And I hate to say it but Get On is lacking in those.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Other people have – not on Get On, but on other like forum type communities, they've said that especially these kind of trolls and like flaming other users that that is the biggest problem.

Respondent: It's interesting. You do get a bit of that on any page. I mean for instance one chap who actually – I've actually met on one of the ride outs he got very uppity, in fact I was the cause of him getting uppity. A long story short, I had to spend an extra night in London because I was getting some new tyres and I wasn't able to – and the bike shop so they hadn't got my tyres in, so I had to wait an extra day and I'd already handed over the keys to the house I was letting. So I manage to – so I got in touch with one of my friends from the Fazer forum as well, and I was going to spend the night with him and just kipping on the floor of his flat. And just for a laugh the next morning he put a teabag on my forehead, took a photo and said Christo spent the night with me, I tea bagged him, lol. And then we had I think about 20 posts or even 30 posts long page of semi-sexual, possibly slightly homophobic jokes and remarks, all in complete jest.

Another mutual friend of mine was saying I'm staying in Exeter. I'm a bit worried about him so that was how it all started. And then a mutual friend of ours, of Paul his name in real life, a mutual friend of ours, said "Christo get yourself down to the clinic first thing in the morning, fell". That's the kind of light-hearted banter and spirit that happening in that forum.

And Simon got a big arsey, got a bit grumpy about this, but to be fair he got a lot of stick from the forum users, but he sorted himself out and we have – we've been more careful with our language around him subsequently. So in many of these cases if you let things run their course the bikers – the users will sort out bad members. I think what you're talking about though with trolling I think that's an unfortunate side effect of groups getting too big. Because I've been on a couple of communities – I'm going to sound like a right nerd for saying this. I was on a grammar group – several grammar groups – it's a group where we all enjoy speaking and writing good English and enjoy a good bitch about people who don't.

But anyway on one of these groups, the original one which I was on which was one of the original pages, it got – it kept growing and kept growing and until we finally capped 1000 members. And that's when the problems started, that's when we got the trolls and that's when we got – that's when fights started breaking out among well established members. In fact that's why I'm on about ten different sites because – about half of the people went off in a huff and made their own groups.

So there is that as well. I think on things like most forums rather than Facebook pages, and especially if they're centred around say Scottoiler for instance, just saying that because what you work for, I think there's less chance of people going off and making their own pages in a huff. But there is a chance to get trolls, there is a chance to have fights and that's when you need a good admin, you need a good moderator.

Interviewer: That's what I was about to ask, what did you do, what happened?

Respondent: Well, eventually the page… well all the regular members abandoned it and went off and formed half a dozen new pages. I think what's important – and the fact there was no active admin on that page didn't help.

Interviewer: Okay, so that could've helped to almost like – yeah, keep control of that.

Respondent: Basically the group on its own without the admin was absolutely fine because people would put up their own content, it was fine. The problem was that when people came up and started posting literally just posting offensive material for the sake of it. And this was the troll example for instance, that's when there was – that's when we all started abandoning – and I remember one case, a friend of mine – a couple of friends on Facebook, a chap called Cliff I chatted to quite a lot, he was a nice fellow, for some reason another friend of mine, a rather strange girl accused him of grooming her or something like that because they were quite young at the time, they started – and I think that one of – I think that she – I think the story was going round that she had got his Facebook account, blocked him and started a massive fight on the page because I had to wade in as a intermediate to try and put the handbags down and calm down. So in that kind of respect if it's going to be a big community then you do need moderation and you do need peacekeeping which is why the TWTT which is we will repost everything, post up, we will repost it, you then talk about the reposted material which is one way of doing it. And it works well for that page which is – it is quite popular, the page is anyway. I personally am not 100% keen on it mainly because I think it's going a bit over the top, but I can see why they're doing it if that makes sense.

Interviewer: This is what Miles said, that basically like catering for the community, moderating it, trying to attract members to grow…

Respondent: It's a fulltime job. No question about that.

Interviewer: How was that on the Fazer forum, are you like involved in the moderation or something?

Respondent: No, I'm not involved in it at all but that's because we don't have much moderation it, that's what – that's why – but then again we're not big a group and because we've all got such a common interest which is we all go to – most of us got to the Fazer club because there's something gone wrong with our bikes and we want to find out why. So we find the page, we then stick around because we like it after we've used it. I mean just to give you an idea there's – I think 953 members or something like that. But if you go onto the – if you look on the member list on the page there's about 100 pages of members and that's pages with just members on. If you search by post count though there's only about a dozen pages where there's a post count above zero and only maybe five pages where there's a post count above ten.

Interviewer:	So those are your active members then.
Respondent:	Yeah. I'm one of them. I've been on the site since October and just a couple of weeks ago I topped 1000 posts that I've put up on that forum now.
Interviewer:	That's pretty good.
Respondent:	Put it this way, I like to talk. I've got many nicknames on that forum.
Interviewer:	But all in a good spirit.
Respondent:	Yeah. But that's the thing. The advantage of a forum rather than Facebook because half the stuff that I joke about on the Fazer forum I would not dare to say on my Facebook page because it's too public. In the case of the Fazer forum, it's an insular – we're all there because we like Fazers and we're all mates. So it's got more of a mates down the pub kind of feel to it.
Interviewer:	Do you say that you go on ride outs, do you reckon you know some of the guys in person?
Respondent:	I've now met about – well more than a dozen, probably about 20 members now. The bloke I stayed with in London, I met him through a ride out. We having met on the forum, having chatted a lot, got on quite well on the forum we then met in real life, got on well in real life, went on quite a few ride outs together and met up, that sort of thing. And then when I was in a bit of a pickle with my tyres I didn't hesitate to say, "Pete, I'm in the shit, can I stay at yours tonight?"
Interviewer:	It does sound like a date.
Respondent:	Not you as well.
Interviewer:	I mean this is really nice because that's like what I have seen in the literature I have gone through it's like all this – if you – if a community spreads out from an online community into real life when people go on ride outs or when they meet for just a meet up or go down to the pub, that's when you kind of know…
Respondent:	That's really strong.
Interviewer:	That is a strong community, yeah.
Respondent:	Just an example the motorcycle news one to a certain extent which – well, I know I'm coming back to if you did one for Scott Oiler because I mean I reckon it's not – I don't think it's something you should completely rule out. I mean if nothing else any publicity is good publicity. I've seen for instance a couple of artists, for instance Meatloaf has a very active Facebook page where they put up a lot of stuff about Meatloaf and about his concerts and things like that. If for instance you were setting up a Scottoiler page, it might be an idea to say, "Hi, this week we're going to be at this meet, any of you coming," and then that starts a discussion. That's already got the ball rolling for a discussion because then that gives you a chance – for instance we'll be at the show in Peterborough in two weeks' time, stand XXX, drop in and say hi, you know.
Interviewer:	We actually do have a Facebook page and a Facebook community but it's more like – I don't know if you're a member of a couple of brands, it's more like we would post things with our people and then sometimes you come you get the one say, oh, yeah, Scott Oiler, best thing I've ever bought for my bike and things like that. I suppose that's what most kind of brands that – you still have more like a one way conversation.

Respondent:	Yeah. because you are a brand, that's to be expected. There are ways of promoting more traffic the other way, especially if you're trying to engage with your members. If you're just putting up information and you're just throwing information, it's like throwing paint balloons at a wall. At the end of it you're going to end up with a very pretty wall, but it's still a bloody wall. What I would say for instance we meet next week, anyone else there, you know that starts a discussion about that or even just putting up a discussion, so which bike meets would you like to see us at this year then? That then sparks of a conversation and if you can get an argument going then you know you're onto a long thread.
Interviewer:	Yeah.
Respondent:	The northern members are always taking the piss out of the southern members and vice versa with vengeance.
Interviewer:	That's a good – well, we definitely we will need to do a bit more and it's like it's been really interesting so far what I've heard from different communities and everyone has like a different approach but at the same time it all comes down to the same kind of elements.
Respondent:	That's the problem with managing people isn't it, because we're so complex, because our brain is so complex there's a million one little ways of getting to the same goal. That's why I'm an engineer. I like simple things.
Interviewer:	Yeah.
Respondent:	Too much luggage? Buy panniers? Panniers too small, get bigger panniers, panniers getting ridiculously oversized for bike, buy a trailer, haven't got a tow bar yet, oh bugger, buy tow bar, where the hell am I going to mount this thing, rethink tow bar, etc. etc. etc.
Interviewer:	Yeah, that's what they try to do with marketing but it never works.
Respondent:	Of course it's never going to work because that's too regimented. I mean we don't come in plastic packs. Things like Facebook for instance, you spend your entire day in a plastic pack at work. I mean I'm doing an absolutely crap job at the moment because you just find a job to pay for motorcycle next year in the US and for my – and things like insurance and stuff, so I'm doing an absolutely lousy job really. It's minimum wage, it's boring, it's repetitive, it's the works. So it's really nice at the end of the day, coming back to something like the forum where I'm a known character, where I'm allowed to express my personality. On the Facebook groups I'm me and sharing it with people that like talking about themselves, they like giving out their views, they like sitting on their fences. So if you come back from a day of being regimented, you don't want to come back to more of the same.
Interviewer:	Yeah. No, it's very true, yeah.
Respondent:	I don't know what your job is like.
Interviewer:	No, it's pretty good when you work actually in the motorcycle industry; you get to do a lot of fun stuff.
Respondent:	I've got a friend, again from the Fazer forum who works for Oxford Motorcycle Products, so actually I got to know him and he posted about a motorcycle journalist having been very rude about a pair of trousers that they'd obviously produced. He'd a come off on gravel. And you could see there was a lot of sliding damage to the textile trousers, but no stone had actually gone through the material, the material had stood up to the crash. And yet the journalist had said – had made – just pinned a note to the trousers saying these trousers have failed or something

like that, basically making a rude remark about the trousers without actually explaining in detail what he thought the problem was which would actually help.

Interviewer: It's a nightmare dealing with journalists because – yeah, they create a lot of sleepless nights about things like that. You never really know what they're going to do and what they're not going to do, it just seems to be very random.

Respondent: It's backwards sort of thing. They're really simple creatures, we should pity them. I think he was saying that he now had a bunch of spare XL trousers. I said the thing is my waterproofs leak and my genitals generally end up sitting up in a pool of cold water, any chance of snagging one of these for free? And then that sparked a discussion of whether a new generation of little Christos is such a good thing or whether it would be kinder to society to just let my personal appendages wither and die. We have been great friends.

Interviewer: Sounds good. I think I should get a Fazer sounds like a nice place to be.

Respondent: Well, put it this way, if you want a bike to be in a really active owners' club, you can't go wrong with a Fazer and you can't go wrong with the Fazer Owners Club, because it really is a good community.

Interviewer: Is it not one of those places where people just like, when someone asks a question it comes back with – this question has been asked several times use the search bar or something like that?

Respondent: You get that a few times, but to be honest because there's quite a lot of stuff that's posted up, there was a – because there's quite a lot of stuff posted up on the forum. I mean for instance you've probably seen the video, it's been doing the rounds. Have you seen that video of that chap with the Bandit trying to filter between two lorries and failing epically?

Interviewer: I've seen that, yeah. I don't know what he was thinking.

Respondent: The thing is that that for instance came up – that's been posted on the forum about four times I think. And I think the only mention of it was when Simon posted up and Liam said that's the third time it's come up – that's the third time it's been posted up this evening Simon, smiley face. Simon went, I didn't see it and to which Liam replies it's three posts down from yours on the general section, to which Simon just replied "Do more blind spot checks". And I think that was the end of the thread. But I think at the core it you've got a couple of nice guys then you shouldn't go far wrong, it's just a question of getting that core.

Interviewer: That's like one of the – I've got only really like one question written down here on my pad and that's the question that I've asked most people is what do you think is the most important element for a successful community?

Respondent: If you're having a community, I reckon you need to have a diversity of discussable subjects that are on the forum because you've got all the sub for it – all the sub sections in the forum, that's why we're quite active and why we've got all quite popular because we've got the ride outs, we've got the workshops. I need to post up later tonight asking if anyone else is meeting at Lumis café tomorrow evening and I already met a couple of forum members through mini meets down here. So I'd say a tangible link in between the virtual and the real. A core of relatively active members, so people who if you post something up are going to come onto that and there is that on the Fazer Owners Club these little groups of people and you get little rough cliques is the wrong word because we don't exclude people, but you do get little groups of people who are friends who will back each other up, take the piss out of each other more than others, that kind of thing. Because you effectively have these virtual and maybe even real life friendships then you get that on the forums as well. I hesitate to say moderation but that's because we're a

mostly unmoderated group because we're pretty self-moderating, we sort ourselves out most of the time which I'd say is the better way to go in the small group but not viable in the large group and you're going to get trolls.

Interviewer: That would be like almost the other thing, what if the forum would be the a general Yamaha forum, would that be too many? I mean we've spoken about size and you've had that experience before with like a thousand members. So if it would be a bigger forum for all Yamaha bikes.

Respondent: If there was a Yamaha forum I probably wouldn't even go on it to be honest with you. It's too broad. A nice niche group which is big enough, where there's quite a lot of discussion, but small enough where you can list – where you know the names of most of the regular posters and where you get good discussions and good virtual friendships forming. And in that respect I think that that's the advantage of the slightly smaller group. I mean for instance on the Facebook groups I'm on there are only a couple of people whom I chat to a lot on and that's because they've added me as friends and we've taken up conversations in personal messages rather than actually taking the Mickey out of each other on posts and in friends which is par for the course on the Fazer forum but then again that might be an interface thing as well.

Interviewer: I was just about to say that because the Facebook Bikers' Group is 11,000 people, so you can't really know every single one of them.

Respondent: Well, there are a couple of people – then again the thing is – 11,000 members, the member list is deceptive because you do get a lot of what I call dormitory people who basically like the page because they like Facebook, because they like biking because they like Facebook and then they forget completely about the page.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And so there's probably I would say probably only about 10% of that 1100 people actually post up on a regular basis. That's over 100 people already posting up on a regular basis and then commenting etc. etc. There's a couple of people whose names I'm beginning to recognise, but because there's just such a big volume of information and such a big discussion going on, it's hard to get really know people, hard to make friendships which is the advantage of a smaller community. And again it is the great advantage of having ride outs because then you actually get to meet people in the flesh. I mean there are some things I say to people on the Fazer forum that I only say because I've met them and I know that they won't mind me taking the piss out of them. I find that – well, form personal experience you find that you do talk differently to someone you've met than to someone you've only chatted to on Facebook. I mean I call Pete gay, I call him a knob. That's because we've met in person and we've got on well together and we all know it's tongue in cheek. I would go up to 'fargo' (forum member) and call a knob. Maybe that's because he's the forum administrator as well, but.

Interviewer: That's interesting. The one thing that just popped into my head was just like are you going to keep your membership with Get On, are you just going to keep that going or is that something that you would like – that's the thing with like virtual communities, I mean I don't even know how many virtual communities I'm a member of because I've forgot the login data or I don't even remember I'm a member of this.

Respondent: I've done that a lot of times. I think I've made half a dozen posts and then forgotten the password for it.

Interviewer: Or even forgotten the email address so you can't get the password back.

Respondent: I'm not that bad. I've only got two email addresses and one's only for porn, so.

Interviewer: Yeah, no, I think I've – I mean it was really interesting like the comparison between almost like you've got Get On is something that is not very active, so it's not a very active community and either way it doesn't have enough members – maybe that's the thing with Get On, it doesn't have enough members to actually be interesting.

Respondent: The thing with Get On is actually that you need to make the page interesting enough, having enough people, where it's going to start looking after itself if that makes sense. You do need a critical – I mean like in nuclear power and nuclear bombs, you do need a critical mass before things kick off. And until you get that critical number of people, active people on it, you're not going to go anywhere.

Interviewer: Yeah. No, it's interesting because like two communities that I'm looking at are just starting up and I think for them this concept of critical mass is really difficult, so they're working on attracting new members.

Respondent: Well, you do have to – I think the hardest part of any group is starting it up. But the thing is, if and when it gets big, when it gets big enough to where it can tide itself over, that's – then it's doing – then you do very well. I mean fargo, the forum administrator he probably only posts up I don't know a dozen times a week. So it's obvious that he's not bottle feeding that forum, he's not doing his best to keep it going and trying to generate traffic. The traffic's already there, it's self-generating. But the forum is an established forum, it's been going for years, it's swapped over from a different board. So you've got a number of – you've just got enough people there to really keep it ticking over at a comfortable pace. But in terms of the power of – and the strength of virtual communities though, I mean when I go to the US next year on an industrial placement I probably won't get a Fazer because I want something that's sportier, but I'll probably stay a member I'll probably stay on there. Now I was on the Varadero forum and I think I looked at it twice since I sold my Varadero but that's because not enough happened on it. Fazer Owners Club on the other hand, because I've made so many friends through the Fazer Owners Club because there's such a esprit, such a good – what's the word I'm after, ambience, because there's such a good ambience there, I'm probably going to want to hang around for longer.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And I'm actually seriously considering, already at this stage, in a year's time, when I come back to the UK, I'm already seriously considering getting another Fazer just so I can be on the Fazers owners' club…

Interviewer: Just so you can get involved in the, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah, get back involved, get into it. Now, when you've got a virtual community that's strong enough to influence your choice of motorcycle I think you're doing pretty well.

Interviewer: Yeah. No, that's right, that's pretty good. I mean is it not like if you go – I mean you could go and ride out just with another bike or if you do ride outs…

Respondent: I could. There's one chap – for instance who comes out to ride outs on a Speed Triple. So he's a odd one but he's not on a Fazer. No, I mean again I suppose it's a bit harder for me to talk about it from the aspect that you want to look at it because I'm a member and just a participant in active groups. I haven't actually been with a group since its birth, I haven't been with the group since before it was really, really popular and I haven't been – I wasn't instrumental in setting it up. But as a user I do use the forums a lot and hopefully I've been able to give you some useful information on them.

Interviewer: Definitely. It was really interesting. It's nice to see like all these things that I've read, seeing them tie up in real life.

Respondent: What just seeing patterns emerging in what various people have said, yeah?

Interviewer: Because you go through these – like I would almost say half of the communities that I'm looking at and when I talk to people they say oh, well, this community like it's not really a community, I don't really feel a connection with people and then speaking to someone like you, like it's all about this connection it's in the literature it's called sense of community and it has all these like elements to it attached and it's like really nice to see all these elements. So basically if you have – if you don't – if you know people outside of a virtual community and you actually meet them in real like this basically strengthens your sense of community and sense of community as a whole.

Respondent: Of course it does because if it's in the forum rather than being a case where you chat to avatars it becomes a case where you chat to – I mean for instance his real name's Mickey but on the forum it's Fireblade so rather than being a case where Mickey and I, where Fireblade and you have a discussion about what colour to paint his favourite wheel you're saying, ah, "Mickey is changing the rear wheels of his bike, there will be a screw up", have a bit of a natter about it. You've got more of a down the pub feel to it which encourages friends and chatting which is good to encourage socialising and therefore going to allow the community to grow.

Interviewer: No, it's really good. And just looking here and it's already over an hour. All the other people I've talked to so far was like 15 or 20 minutes. I don't want to steal your entire night.

Respondent: Don't worry about that.

Interviewer: That's good. It's interesting that you say that if you go away and like try to keep in touch with the community and things like that, that's really nice to hear, so you definitely have found your little place.

Respondent: Yes. Well, I think because again – because on the Varadero club but there wasn't that much – there was quite a lot of interesting stuff up there. There was a joke section, there was a general section. But now I think that was killed by a lack of users, there weren't enough posts up there every evening. I mean if I went on to the Varadero owners club or the Varadero forum, Varadero 125 forum to be pedantic and looked at the page at one point in the evening that would probably be all the new posts that evening. Whereas on the Fazer Owners Club I'm refreshing it fives times in the evening, five times – well, a couple of times an hour and there's all – almost always something new up there.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Either on a friend I follow, either on something else. I mean my inbox gets raped.

Interviewer: That's interesting because you could think that – like because you are on there all the time, if you would be someone or if you could think of another Fazer owner or a Varadero 125 owner that only goes on the internet once a week and then he goes on once a week on the Friday night he finds ten new posts in that one week he's quite happy because he only has ten new posts or has ten posts to read through and ten posts to reply to. But for you it would be too little. And then the other extreme if you would be on the Fazer forum, if you were to have 1000 posts on that Friday that he would have to go through and reply to.

Respondent: Well, he doesn't necessarily have to go on the forum. You can pick and mix. I mean for instance half the posts up there I'm not really bothering answering. Hang on, let me actually go onto my laptop. I just refreshed the forum and it's just

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completely changed. Right, okay, here we go, these are just the first five posts on the Fazer topics board. Mineral, semi-synthetic or fully synthetic for the machine, that's the third one down. How do change the tires in the Fazer 600 section. Fourth one down, gen one, front fairing and bits for sale I saw that earlier, but that's already gone. Cam chain replacement that's a long threat in the Fazer 600 section. And then Michelin tyre recall brackets not current in the Fazer 1000 section. I read that because I've got Michelins on my bike, but that's just the first five or six posts and I've got two pages of that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And some posts about events and ride outs as well. But you can see how diverse that is and that's just, you know. It is just – I mean that's just a – that's just a peak and all evening – then all evening and it's going to have that kind of diversity consistently.

Interviewer: Yeah. So it doesn't get boring.

Respondent: Yeah, I'm probably only going to look at a – I'm probably only going to look at a couple of those threads. I'm probably – well, I'm going to look at quite a few of those threads, I'm probably going to only answer about – well, you know what – I'll probably answer about or chat on about five to ten posts every evening. But then some of those are long recurring ones, like for instance what did you do with your Fazer today which I think is possibly on about its 30th page by now There you go, I just checked it, and I was right it's on it's 36th iteration or 36th page on this what did you do with your Fazer today thread, and that just gives you an idea that's 36 pages, that's 893 replies. So that's an ongoing one, so I probably add to that and reply to that myself.

Interviewer: And that's almost like if you say you've got maybe 900 active users that's like maybe every second user has actually replied to that.

Respondent: Yeah. Put it this way most of the active users have probably replied to it, so I'm just quoting forum usernames now. You get the general sort of idea. I think the reason that the Fazer owners club is so good and why it's got such a good following is (a) because it's diverse and (b) because it's got that regular influx from various posters and (c) and I think this maybe an important one, there's enough to talk about. Because that owners club that covers the existing and new models. So already before you start you're already looking at four, five different models of bike.

Interviewer: I suppose that's quite interesting because over time as the motorcycle models will change the community will change.

Respondent: Yeah. I mean for instance the MT-09 (new bike model) people were in two minds about it. I personally think it's ugly. Some people quite like it.

Interviewer: So who makes the decision?

Respondent: Well, it might be – well, personally I don't like it so I won't get one, but if it is actually called Fazer in the UK as the rumours suggest then we very well might add an MT-09 board to the forum which will bring in MT-09 users. Just yesterday funnily enough talking about the Fazer 150 and 125 which are Indian imports. So I think having enough to talk about is quite useful.

Interviewer: I've got nothing else on my little sheet of paper here unless you have any questions for me?

Respondent: No, not really apart from good luck with the dissertation and hope whatever I've – hope the – well, the over an hour of stuttered garbling is useful to you.

Interviewer: No, definitely, it was a lot, it was very helpful. I will have to go back and go through my notes and everything. I've got another month and a half and then I have to hand it in so it's going to be a busy month and a half, a lot of weekends sitting in front of the computer and things like that.

Respondent: Good luck with your dissertation and if you – if there are good patterns do drop an email because I do like seeing actual communities and so I think that – I agree with you, I think Get On has the potential to be a great community but it just needs to pull itself up a bit on a couple of fronts..

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay.

Respondent: Cool. Good luck with your dissertation.

Interviewer: Cheers, yeah. All right, have a good night.

Respondent: You too. Bye.

Interviewer: Bye.

[End of recorded material]

[Start of recorded material]

Interviewer:	Hi there, is that Jamie speaking?
Respondent:	It is indeed.
Interviewer:	Hi, Jamie, it's Matt from Scott Oiler.
Respondent:	Hiya.
Interviewer:	Hi, have you got like 10-15 minutes to talk about the Get On community?
Respondent:	Yeah, I've got plenty.
Interviewer:	Okay. Yeah, thank you first of all for agreeing to help me because it's very much appreciated. I'm in the last steps of my masters dissertation and as these things always happen, they creep up on you and now I've only got like another month and a half time, so, yeah, thank you very much.
Respondent:	You're welcome.
Interviewer:	Basically my dissertation is about online communities, virtual communities and because I work in the motorcycle industry and because there are so many interesting motorcycle communities I've chosen a couple and Get On is one of them because I thought they have like a really nice approach behind them, and obviously with the Get On scheme getting people into bikes, it just sounded like the perfect idea for a virtual community.
Respondent:	I think it's a great one because it was one of the reasons why I got into motorcycling.
Interviewer:	Is that true, is that how you got into it?
Respondent:	My wife's side of the family are keen motorcyclists and I've always wanted to do it and then the offer come up and a friend introduced me through Get On and did my CBT through that.
Interviewer:	And then consequently after the CBT joined the website.
Respondent:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	It's interesting because that's what I thought as well, you would do your CBT and then – did you share your experience online or something like that?
Respondent:	Yeah. The guys I done it with took pictures and that and I posted the picture to the website and on top of that then with the help of other people talking me through things to learn and mastering some other skills, learned those and moved on to passing my full bike test.
Interviewer:	Okay. And then so sorry so then these other people that you said that were on the course are they part of this online community as well?
Respondent:	Some of them were part of the online community. Some of them basically were just talking whilst doing our CBTs and DAS and they were saying, "Yeah. We've

done it through Get On because a friend recommended it." Because I think at the time they were actually doing a thing where they were selecting random people at the time who nominated someone to do a CBT would win a prize, so there was great initiative for somebody to get a friend involved and that's what happened with me. One of my friends got involved and I think he actually won something for it.

Interviewer: That's good. So you have been a member – so that was quite a while ago or was that quite recently?

Respondent: No, that's quite a while ago now, I've been riding for about five years.

Interviewer: Oh, good, what do you ride?

Respondent: Currently I'm on an ER6N, Kawasaki.

Interviewer: Nice. That was my test bike as well.

Respondent: I had the very old version, I had the ER5 which was – to be honest it was a bit terrible because the brakes were ridiculous on it.

Interviewer: That's exactly what you want when you start biking, having a bike that you don't – can't really have confidence in.

Respondent: Luckily though I persevered with it and got there in the end.

Interviewer: I find it amazing that even though it's been like five years that you've done this – that you're still a member, so do you still like actively participate?

Respondent: Yeah, when there's events going on that they've put up around the area I go to them and occasionally me and my friends will actually go down whenever – I think it was my friend actually at the time said to me they're doing an event up his way in London and asked me to come down, so I came down that way with them and did a ride around with a group of them.

Interviewer: I didn't even know that they did – I've spoke to Miles, but I didn't know that they did offline events as well. Is that like the shows and things like that?

Respondent: I think it's more of the people through the forums and that I've gotten to know arranging through people who are friends with GetOn on their Facebook page. He doesn't know this person but it says friends of GetOn and so he said he doesn't know many people from that area because he recently moved there, so he said do you want to come down and we'll go out for a ride with it. But he's said that other people are getting in contact with him, increases his experience and friends with motorcycles as well as mine.

Interviewer: That's good. So basically that's like the entire journey from like getting to know motorbikes to doing your full licence and then in the end like even then – sorry then passing on this knowledge and speaking to other people and getting them involved as well. Because that's one of the things that happened to me. I moved from Edinburgh to Glasgow and was kind of struggling to find people to ride up here.

Respondent: I definitely know that because of moving myself so many times.

Interviewer: One of the things that I found was that – and when I spoke to Miles or the guys from Get On, like he said basically that on the actual Get On website it's more like people come to get a bit of advice and then he said afterwards most people after the do their CBT or get involved with Get On they become friends on the Facebook page.

Respondent:	Yeah, because that was exactly the same for me. I haven't been on Facebook as long as I've been riding, but I've moved onto Facebook and a friend of mine said to me that Get On are on the – are on Facebook and they do some promo offers and things like that and information of events that are happening, so why don't you give them a like and see what it's like and that's what I've done. And I've actually had some people contact me through the GetOn page saying "I've seen you on Facebook that you're in that area the same as me, do you fancy going out for a ride" sort of thing.
Interviewer:	But you would also say that like your – most of your Get On interaction is through Facebook rather through their own site?
Respondent:	Yeah, I'd say more through Facebook.
Interviewer:	Do you think they could do anything different? I mean they have this like online forum on their website but it seems like they're quite happy with doing it all through Facebook.
Respondent:	Personally I find using the Facebook a lot easier and I think at the moment there's nothing really that I would want changed. It's easy for me to navigate and see clearly what's happening and what's being posted. Sometimes I find personally I am – I'm not PC illiterate but I do find going through all the forums sometimes a bit confusing and sometimes unhelpful trying to get the information I need where I can just post up on the Facebook page and I get instant replies from people that see it, or even Get On themselves.
Interviewer:	You said like other forums, so are you a member of like other online motorcycle communities?
Respondent:	I'm part of the local MAG group as well as the Kawasaki Riders' Club and Yamaha's Riders' Club as well.
Interviewer:	But they all – like it's not like there's any like – I mean do you use them for like your ride outs as well, or do you use them…
Respondent:	Yeah, I use them for ride outs. I don't so much the Yamaha now seeing as I've got ride of my Yamaha, but the Kawasaki one I use just as often and also offers me some discounts and various things with – well, Kawasaki various things like bags and labour and parts and stuff.
Interviewer:	That's interesting. I think I've spoken to one other person who mentioned that as well like if – like getting special offers and things like that on forums or Facebook pages is one of the reasons to join them.
Respondent:	Oh, yeah, definitely. Some of the promo codes that have come up with things and various things have caused me to be able to get gear, labour, even to the events incredibly cheap. I went to the BSB and I got cheap tickets to go there which were backstage paddock area, everything, nothing off limits.
Interviewer:	Cool.
Respondent:	Which was quite good. I really enjoyed it actually and to be honest if it weren't for that discount I probably wouldn't have gone.
Interviewer:	Sounds good. One of the things I have on here was there anything that you don't like about the Get On community or something that happened like a negative experience or something like that?
Respondent:	The only thing I find negative is it tends to be more of the other people occasionally where you put something up thinking you're going to be of help to

somebody and then you have somebody else who turns around and says you're a complete idiot, you don't know what you're doing sort of thing.

Interviewer: And then what happens usually?

Respondent: Usually sometimes it will just actually stop me wanting to post up help and things like that, but sometimes it's just stuff I let go over my head. And sometimes some people just the way they are I think I can't really be bothered if somebody's going to start putting rude comments up.

Interviewer: And then is it not like that that you get on people like interfere or something?

Respondent: I haven't found it to be with Get On, that's why I prefer using them because I found a lot with Kawasaki where I've put up a post or something and with some advice to somebody and I've found that you get a lot of hate comments about people saying oh, no you should do this, that's a stupid of you, you're damaging things, you're telling him how to ruin his bike. And you think, well, that's what I do and it was only advice, but I tend to find that with Get On, the people in the community that actually are a hell of a lot politer and there's next to no negative comments. So either Get On are quite quick to remove them and deal with them, or in general the people are just a hell of a lot politer.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Why do you think that is?

Respondent: I think well, personally I think Get On site's better because it's more open to a wider range of people. So it's not just the die hard fans of certain brands and you get everyone from all walks of life, all types of bikes, all types of experience. Actually, yeah, I was told that at one point but found out it was something different, but with the Kawasaki and the Yamaha, especially the Yamaha, I found a lot of people were just like, no, you're an idiot, you have no idea what you're doing, it's nothing to do with that. Even though I know I am correct because there's like one of the Yamaha issues I had was I had somebody put up saying their bike was overheating but for no reason. And it was on a bike and a model and a year that I actually owned and had exactly the same problem and I knew it was the butterfly valve. So that's what went for me and they were replaced and it went back to normal. I posted that and was told by two other people that I'm a complete inbred who knows nothing about mechanical or the Yamaha bikes.

Interviewer: Wow, that's like not even – that's, yeah, that's pretty serious. Did the guys on the Yamaha forum, did they moderate it or something like that or not do anything?

Respondent: To be honest the last I checked a few years ago, it's still up on the post.

Interviewer: Wow. That's something that really then like I mean that makes you stop using that community if they don't really care about people insulting other people like that.

Respondent: Yeah. That's the biggest thing. I find also if I'm reading every post and I see that somebody's been insulted down the line it stops me from going, well, actually all it's going to do is he's going to give me all that about how he knows it and I don't so I won't bother. But to be honest I don't find that with Get On, I find that it's a lot easier and everyone has their own views and opinions and they don't seem to overlap and say somebody's an idiot, that you should never do that. They say, okay, it's fine to do that with this certain type of chain, but not with these types of chains. I find more people are less likely to make you out to be an idiot and try and score one over you.

Interviewer: Yeah. No, that's interesting. Well, the only really question – there's one question that I ask all the people that I talk to and that would be what do you think is the most important element or trait in a successful community?

Respondent:	I think it's involving the community more which I personally feel that Get On do because I feel the things that they do, the offers they do, the information they put out there leads to more people communicating and getting together and acknowledging and spreading their knowledge to others. And personally that's what I look for when I join in a group. I look for the knowledge and people and see that they're actually bringing everyone together, they're not singling people out sort of thing. These are the procedures, these are the newcomers and things like that, it just brings everyone together from all walks of life and that's what I like.
Interviewer:	Yeah. As compared to these specialist Yamaha forums where they see themselves as experts – everyone sees themselves as an expert.
Respondent:	Yeah. They see themselves as gods and – but it's just really annoying because it was like I owned an R6 but it was an old R6, it was a 2002 model. And then you had all of the other people like, yeah, it's rubbish, this one's far better. And I've not had that issue on Get On, everyone was like, yeah, that's a really nice bike, it's comfortable. I just feel better and I feel like I use it more if I feel that everyone's working together sort of thing and I do feel that Get On are actually doing that, they're getting the community together. There's no negativity, there's always something – they're always trying to involve more people and help as many people as possible.
Interviewer:	That is nice to hear, yeah. That's good to hear. I mean this is – that's all the questions that I had unless you have any questions for me?
Respondent:	No, none whatsoever. Just glad I can be of help.
Interviewer:	Have you got a Scott oiler on your bike?
Respondent:	I would love to have one to be honest because I'm – the thing is I'm doing a lot of mileage now compared to what I used to because I live now out in a village further away and I actually at one stage lived in a town that was a good 50 miles away and my chain takes a battering because the only way to get to where I work is it's all back roads and A B roads so there's all the salt and everything. And actually it was funnily enough because I only – I saw a Get On post because I put in to find out information about Scott Oiler and because it was my father-in-law said to me have you thought about getting one, I used to have one on a bike ages ago, but I don't do the mileage anymore. So I went to the Get On page at the time and put Scott Oiler in and this post come up saying that if I was willing to help the guys. And I thought, well, find a bit more information out about Scott Oiler and help somebody out in the process from the community, I don't mind.
Interviewer:	Thank you very much. Very much appreciated. I'm only interviewing about 20 people, so the chances are quite high, I'll see what I can do.
Respondent:	Brilliant, thank you.
Interviewer:	All right, Jamie, I'll let you go, let you get on and, yeah, thank you again.
Respondent:	No, you're very welcome, I hope everything goes well for you.
Interviewer:	I know, I know, it's going to be a couple of stressful six weeks. I'm doing this part-time next to my work, so I'm now going home and going back to my desk and sitting in front of my laptop and read through articles and all that stuff. It's, yeah, it's not much fun, but has to be done.
Respondent:	It's got to be done.
Interviewer:	Yeah. All right.

Respondent: Brilliant.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you very much.

Respondent: No, you're welcome.

Interviewer: All right, speak to you soon.

Respondent: Speak to you soon.

Interviewer: Bye.

Respondent: Bye.

[End of recorded material]

[Start of recorded material GO – Miles 1]

Interviewer: Hi, is that Miles?

Respondent: It is, yeah.

Interviewer: Hi, this is Matt from Scott Oiler.

Respondent: Hi, Matt, how're you?

Interviewer: I'm good, how're you?

Respondent: I'm not bad at all, thank you.

Interviewer: Good. Well, yeah, first, thank you very much for helping me out, this is very much appreciated.

Respondent: It's all right.

Interviewer: Cool. Did you read my emails, did you have any questions or anything?

Respondent: No, it seems pretty straightforward.

Interviewer: Basically, it's quite nice because it's just like this – it's just meant to be like a nice little chat about Get On and about your community and how you did it because it's not like here's a question and answer from one to three or something like that, it's just meant to be like a nice chat. Like I said that's like the topic of my dissertation is how virtual communities are created and what others can learn from it, what yourself can learn from it as well.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: So maybe you can like lead me through like how it all started and what the process was and like basically starting off why you – or why Get On – how did it come to it?

Respondent: Well, Get On going right back to the beginning, Get On was created because the motorcycle industry recognised that the population of motorcyclists riding today was getting older and older. And obviously from the point of view of an industry, we an industry reliant on new customers and as our customers get older many of them decide not to continue riding. As such, we needed to address that particular issue and also to highlight in a younger audience all the benefits of motorcycling which they may be unaware of the increase in car usage and everybody wanting cars because they're more affordable etc. etc. etc. etc. So we had to get the message out there that bikes are good fun, that they're cheap, that they are easy to get on and ride and quicker through traffic and all of those other benefits. Now, knowing that we had to do those things to a younger audience it was fairly logically proposed that we do it predominantly through web based marketing and through the website itself. And the other thing that we recognised was the growth at that time and obviously continued in social media and communities that people were gathering information from peer groups.

                So we set up a site that could be the one stop shop hopefully that they could come to and ask questions etc. etc. And that was mainly because of the research we did prior to the event of launching the campaign that actually identified that most

non-riders are actually very, very, very nervous about going into a motorcycle dealership. They find that the whole experience is nerve wracking because it's all about big bikes…

Interviewer: And usually you've got like these dealerships that are quite scary.

Respondent: And outside the shops on a weekend are generally guys in leathers, proper what you consider real bikers haring around the local roads, the dealers tend to be very, very enthusiastic, but very enthusiastic for the big bikes, for the speed, it's about knee down, it's about racing, it's about all the things that excite you as a biker but which are as an irony all the things that terrify you as a non-rider. And it's only until you can get past that actually you don't have to ride a motorcycle like that, and actually the vast majority of motorcyclists don't ride like that but you won't ever notice them because they're just tootling along enjoying their bikes, doing their thing, not scaring anybody, not haring around villages and get out on the country lanes and just using their bike for work etc. and having fun. The impression of motorcyclists as Power Ranger clad lunatics riding bikes that do 300 miles an hour on the back wheel.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: So people generally who think it might be for them are often put off by the fact that the whole impression of motorcycling is pretty terrifying. So the website was designed in a way that would be pretty non-terrifying basically, very soft in its approach, no knee-down, no wheelies, no emphasis on racing or speed or anything, it's all about fun and freedom and cost savings and they are the things that are getting people onto bikes as a result of. If you wanted to ride a bike because you want to get a knee-down you don't need the Get On campaign because you've already decided that that level of excitement and risk is something you accepted and you'll do it anyway so you don't actually need us.

Interviewer: That's really interesting. So you've basically designed the website with the user in mind.

Respondent: Absolutely. And that's why we get a lot of criticism, well, have in the past, a lot of criticism from existing motorcyclists dealers and saying, "It's not exciting enough, it's really boring, why have you got an open face helmet as your log, nobody wears those." All the things that as a biker, of course you'll look at the website and say, "God, that's so dull. There's no excitement in there at all." No, there isn't. As a biker, there isn't. But you as a biker are not able to go back to a point in your life where you weren't a biker and take a look at that site with non-biker's eyes…

Interviewer: Seeing it through the customers' eyes, seeing it through the guys that are in the focus.

Respondent: Yeah. I've always said this to anybody who rides motorcycles and loves scaring people on the back of your motorcycles, "Well, you're doing us no favours." If you take someone out on the back of your motorcycle and you scare them, you are never going to get them to ride a motorcycle. If you take someone out there and show how fun it can be and get them coming off the bike going, "Oh, my god, that was brilliant," as opposed to, "Oh, my god, I nearly shit myself." Then you've got a chance of getting them to be a motorcyclist. But you scare someone and that's it, you put them off for life. And the visual aspect of that on the site is exactly that. And the open face helmet is simply because it's retro, retro is cool and open face is non-threatening which why the police have front-flip helmets as soon as they stop you, they flip the front up so you can see their faces, it doesn't threat you. People are threatened by bikers in full face lids and dark visors, end of story.

Interviewer: That's actually really, really interesting.

Respondent:	We want to move totally away from that, to make it a very softly, softly approach, ignoring existing bikers altogether and going after the elements of riding that would make it appealing to non-riders.
Interviewer:	Have you don anything to get the dealers and the bikers on board?
Respondent:	We have tried on numerous occasions on many, many, many occasions. Unfortunately there are very few companies who even originally supported the Get On campaign and the support of the Get On campaign was a matter of a few hundred pounds for most companies. We had various people take us up on the opportunity to promote their businesses to the users we have here. We don't have all the manufacturers on board, Triumph and Ducati have never supported the campaign. In my personal opinion extremely short-sighted as to the benefit to them as a brand of the campaign. In we haven't even had some of the smaller brands who arguably are making more benefit because of the campaign they've not supported the campaign. And unfortunately for us, the motorcycle industry is very, very, very short-term thinking. There is no long-term commitment to the industry.
Interviewer:	You've got dealers and wholesalers complaining about reducing motorcycle numbers but they're not really doing anything against it.
Respondent:	The results from the campaign that we've had literally from day one show that if we can get somebody – for every hundred people I can get to book and take a free ride, I know that immediately 35 of them will come to do a CBT or a further training course, 35% immediate conversion to becoming a biker. And of the remainder only 8% say "I tried it, it's still not for me, sorry, but thanks". That's in essence there is a 92% potential conversion from non-rider to rider.
Interviewer:	I think it's a great model. I'm a biker myself, so it's really interesting what you say about the website, but I have friends who obviously when you're talk to them they're interested in bikes and then I point them towards the Get On scheme and then towards your website and I have some friends who took – exactly like you say who took the free course and then instantly said, "Oh, I really want to do the CBT, I really want to get a bike."
Respondent:	That's the thing because biking – to me biking was always about the sense of freedom. When you were a four year old kid and you suddenly had your stabilisers taken off your bike and you realised that you could ride your pushbike and suddenly you could go anywhere as a four year old your sense of freedom – I've seen it in my kids recently, my kids are young, their eyes just open up and you can see it in their face, I can go anywhere, I can cycle around the world. That is the – and riding a motorcycle is like that, it's that first moment where you change into second gear and go, Christ, that wasn't difficult, I can go further, I can ride it, this thing's not difficult to ride, I can ride this. All of a sudden – and you see it. You watch them at the NEC and you watch them on training pads up and down the country and you see them. They get on the bike and they look white or grey and they're sweating and they're nervous and they're really, really unsure and within five or ten minutes they are grinning like Cheshire cats, they are laughing out loud, they're riding around the pad and they get off hopping up and down. And it is that sense of you've just got to give it a go. And once you've done that the biggest realisation is it's no as difficult as I thought it was going to be. And that's always a big one is get someone to go it's really difficult, yeah, but try it and you will find it's not. And then when they try it and find it's not, then it becomes not difficult and scary, it becomes easy and a whole load of fun. And that's why we have such a massive conversion rate, it's just a shame like I said that the industry doesn't actually recognise the long-term benefits of keeping this going. And we are struggling for funding, there's no doubt about it. Our funding has more than halved.
Interviewer:	Was that the original – the funding model was to go through the manufacturer?

Respondent:	The original funding model was that the manufacturers would pay us £5 and £10 depending on the size of the bike, so 125cc and below they'd pay us a fiver. Above 125cc they'd pay us a tenner and that's on every single bike registered in the UK that they sold as a new machine. If they sold 10,000 125s in a year they would send us 10,000 times £5. And the dealers would pay exactly the same and the manufacturer would invoice the dealer and the dealer would pay it through manufacture invoice. The original scheme was set up and its original target was to create 10,000 motorcyclists and creating a motorcyclist, the measurement of that was have you done a CBT? If you have done a CBT you are now legally entitled to ride a motorcycle, therefore you are considered a motorcyclist.
Interviewer:	Yeah.
Respondent:	We did that by some 50% or more in our first three years. So we over-achieved on creating motorcyclists. The problem that the campaign has suffered is that because the industry is so short-sighted, they turned round after three years and said, "Ah, but we need to sell more new motorcycles." Right. Well, we're not seeing new motorcycle sales coming from Get On. And we know that 48% of all sales to people who've bought a motorcycle and again the immediate conversion to that was about 23%, so about a quarter of everybody who took a free ride bought a motorcycle straightaway. And again the vast majority who didn't buy straightaway were saying I'm going to in X number of months, whatever. So potentially they were going to buy. But 50% of them were buying private second hand bikes. And of those who were buying through a dealer only a quarter – only half of the dealer sales, so a quarter of total sales were new bikes.
Interviewer:	I see, okay.
Respondent:	So every 100 people buying a motorcycle, only 25 were buying a new motorcycle from the dealer. So the manufacturers said we've got to look at changing that. And unfortunately that's something that we can't affect because people buying their first motorcycle…
Interviewer:	Yeah. Exactly, you buy a used motorbike, yeah.
Respondent:	Yeah, you're probably buying a used one to see – and one of the biggest issues of the manufacturer and I've said this for years now when I was working in the industry – my background is I worked as Yamaha's marketing manager for eight years and previous to that was at Suzuki and after Yamaha before I set up my own agency I was at Aprilia and Piaggio group for two years. So I've been in the industry for 10, 12 years now. And I've always said the one thing that is stopping you selling more new 125s is you don't offer anybody an opportunity to test ride one. You can test ride a big bike 'til they're coming out of your ears, go to the NEC and test ride big bikes 'til they're coming out of your ears. But if you have a CBT and you wanted to buy a brand new motorcycle because that's – you've got money, they're not crazy money. Are you going to throw four and a half grand or three and a half or even two and a half grand at a motorcycle that you've never ridden? I would argue probably in most cases no, you're not. And actually if the NEC allowed people on a CBT to have a demo ride on a 125cc bike I think they'd be inundated with requests. And I think if dealers got off their backsides and said to people, "Yeah, okay, come and try a 125 at our place, we've got five here of all different styles, come and try one. You've got a CBT, come along, you can go out with our instructor, it's like a lesson, borrow our bike, off you go."
Interviewer:	I mean this is not really related to the community but why do you think the dealers is that insurance reasons or?
Respondent:	Insurance isn't a problem because I think if they linked up with a training school, run it as a training session, a post-CBT evaluation you would have insurance for that, wouldn't be a problem at all. You do CBTs for people and they haven't even

got a CBT. You can insure them on that. Insurance is not an issue. The issue is that dealers are reluctant to engage in a small bike audience and are solely concentrating on big bike sales and that's just a historical thing because that's all dealers really understand. It's a shame but that is the fact.

Interviewer: So do you see like a change in your revenue model, so it's now changing more towards like advertising or?

Respondent: We have had to – we are adding advertising onto the site and we will be going ahead with the first advertiser very shortly. If you look on the site today we launched last – well, this week we launched a new Snapchat offer system on the website and that is now on the home page. We've got Infinity Motorcycles advertising on there, showing all their offers there. And that's a cost sharing, we're working with an affiliate to Infinity, sharing some of the revenue. And as I said we will be having banner advertising across the top of the site very shortly. And we've had to do that, although again this is – it's this age old thing of talking to agencies who run advertising for big brands like Honda for instance, we don't have enough volume for them to be interested in us. They're looking at sites that have 30,000 hits a day. We're getting 30,000 hits a month. What they fail to understand because they don't understand the website is that 30,000 people coming onto our website are all, every single one of them, potential new riders.

Interviewer: They're already qualified.

Respondent: The value in them is massive compared to an average FHM.com only probably 5% of their entire audience is likely to be interested in a motorcycle, whereas our audience 100% of them are. So, again, getting the industry to see the benefit in the audience has been an uphill struggle. The industry – the industry is very, very, in my personal opinion, very backwards in its approach to marketing. They don't see long-term value, they don't look at customer communication strategy, they don't look at retention and strategy. It's all about new bike sales and if we can steal 1% of Suzuki this year, great, because we know that next year they've got a new bike out and they'll steal that 1% back off us. They don't – I don't think, they don't look at it from a right, how can we get this person onto a Yamaha, Suzuki or whatever and then keep them on Yamaha, Suzuki for the rest of their lives. Like the car industry, the motorbike industry is not looking at that.

The car market is much more advanced in its CRM programmes and its communication strategies etc. etc. It's a completely different ballgame. But, yeah, that's the bike market got to work with, so we're doing everything we can to try and engage them, but they're a very cynical bunch and they're very short-term which is not what the campaign's about, the campaign's about the long-term stability of the industry. And trying to convince them of that is pushing water.

Interviewer: One of the things when I looked through the website and obviously I'm working with Scott Oiler for the last three years and I've followed your Get On campaign. One of the things that I kind of had in the back of my mind, and that was one of the reasons why I wanted to talk to you was obviously you've got Get On, but then how do you keep like – do you keep the people coming back to you because like you say they are interested in bikes, then getting into bikes and then you don't really want to lose them after you get into bikes.

Respondent: Well, we're a bit of an odd situation for us as a website because actually we have – if I look at the Google analytics currently we are looking at an 80% new visitor rate for the last 30 days. And if I go back any amount of time it'll be the same. It's always roughly that. yeah, 79.6 going back to September last year. So once someone's come onto our website and been introduced to motorcycle in a soft and friendly way, who then go and do a free ride and then go and do their CBT or DAS or have their minds changed, have their motorcycle switch in their brains flicked on, they don't actually have to come back to us ever, because our job is to flip that

switch in their head. Once they've done that actually our site – there's not a lot on our site that they need to look at. Yes, we have the bike directory, yes, we have routes to licence, yes, we have dealer locators, yes, we have news, yes, we have a community blah, blah, blah. They may come back and ask questions on the community, they may not. Once they've seen our site and had their switch turned on, they then have the confidence to go into a dealer and then all of a sudden they're not a new rider. They're somebody who's got a little bit of confidence and doesn't feel like they're going to get the piss taken out of them in a showroom. In which case we're not – whilst we still engage with them and there's a community email that goes out twice a month. We engage on Facebook etc. We don't necessarily need to be talking to them all the time, because once they're in the industry then our job is done. We feed them into the industry, the industry then should pick them up and look after them.

Interviewer: So almost like you attract the users or the – you attract the average Joe towards motorcycling and then almost like handing them over into respective communities like you would give them…

Respondent: It's like a dating service really.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: We are a dating service for the motorcycling industry. We are introducing non-riders to brands who are looking for potential new riders. That's what we do, we're an introduction portal. And once you've introduce, you know what, go off, get married, have kids, do what you like, we're done, our job is over.

Interviewer: Would you not want these guys that that successfully done your course and have come to that stage, would you not want them to then recommend your programme to the next person?

Respondent: Absolutely. And we do. And we always – whenever they've done their free ride we always ask them to post a comment on Facebook or to share their story with us via the website etc. And we have an over 70% response rate to the surveys that we send out, so we have a very strong response rate to those because once people are in it then they want to talk about it. And actually the contact centre says sometimes they daren't phone people because they're stuck on the phone for half an hour people are so excited about the fact that they've suddenly discovered motorcycling, you can't get them off the phone, which is fabulous, but we don't have the resource to be able to have half hour chats with everybody that comes through the system, it would be lovely if we could. So, yeah, we try and engage them and say to them if you've had a ride and you've enjoyed it and you've had fun and you want to go forward, for goodness' sake tell all your friends about it, make sure everybody knows, post it on Facebook, share a picture of you on your bike on Facebook with all your friends. And we do try and encourage them to do that and a lot of them do, we get a lot of comments through Twitter and stuff like that that we see coming though saying "Thanks for the free ride etc. I've had a great time". So we do try and engage but once that's gone through then there's less engagement for us other than if they come in and ask questions on the community and again it's me that answers all of those, so when the questions come through I get them direct onto my phone and then we just answer them and engage with them in that way, so whether it be training schools in the UK or my free ride saying "I can't wait to do my CBT. That's fantastic, that's someone saying I've done my free ride, it was brilliant, I'm now going to be a biker". Job done.

So the community is a reasonable size. We've grown – the Facebook community in particular I've worked hard at growing that. Although a lot of the people on the Facebook community I feel because they're slightly older are probably existing bikers, but I want them to be part of our community because I want them to reach out to their friends. Because a lot of the posts that we do we'd actually promote

through them to their friends and that means that if they have got a friend who's got a question they've got a point of contact that they know is a biker that they can potentially ask the question of. So we do quite a lot on that.

And we've grown that, I took that over about 2500 people just over a year ago now having been going for two years and I've nearly doubled it in size to just under 5000 now which is I think we're doing reasonably well, yeah, 4971 now we're at. And we do – I change the graphic on the front page, I change those quite regularly. I post stories about things that are interesting in motorcycling and that sort of thing.

Interviewer: I can understand that because obviously you then have – those guys that went through your system or just liked the Get On campaign and for them and for yourself Facebook is obviously better because they can share it with people that are interested in it.

Respondent: Yeah. Absolutely. And it's interesting the posts that get a lot of comment. We had one – where was the one that we had that was ridiculous? It was a story about – some research that was done that said motorcyclists are – here we are, riding a motorcycle makes you smarter, some research that showed that if you rode a motorcycle you were likely to be more intelligent because riding a motorcycle makes you – you use more of your brain than driving a car, therefore actually it has a long-term beneficial effect on your brain function. And we had nearly 300 shares on that one story and that went out to nearly 30,000 people, so it was ridiculous. We paid for some of the reach but only a third of it. The rest of it was organic through sharing.

Interviewer: 300 shares is massive. I'm quite happy when we get like double digits on our Facebook page.

Respondent: Normally, we'll get less than ten on a new post, but on some of the good ones, whether it be – the best we can normally hope for is in 20s or 30s. That particular story because it had a resonance with everybody I think, that was shared by a huge number of people.

Interviewer: So this for you would not be like almost the Facebook community is a lot more – is a lot better for you rather than the community on your site?

Respondent: Yeah, definitely is. The most shares, we had 317,000 people with one of our posts which was about a guy – a driver's guide for bikers and it was something that the council had done. And it was just an image and it was just giving drivers a bit of background about motorcyclists and that went properly mental. We had 5,800 shares of that.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah, I see it here, I just scrolled down your page.

Respondent: 317,000 people saw the post, it just went huge. What they didn't see which was a bit disappointing was a biker's guide to drivers doing exactly the same as the driver's guide to bikers but telling bikers a little bit more about what they should be considering for car drivers. And that only got seen by 10,000 people although it was shared 126 times. And that was a bit of an odd one because we got quite a lot of comments in the biker's guide for drivers saying, oh, god, you're a bunch of morons, you should be looking out for car drivers as well. And I had to say a couple of times, well, actually there is a post that is exactly that. And we do recognise completely that motorcyclists could do more to make car drivers feel a little more comfortable when they're around. And so we had done it in both directions. So it's one of those things that you have to balance out what's going to be good and what's not going to be good. The link that Being stuck in traffic I thought was quite an interesting story but that only got shared by one person. I just thought if you're a biker riding to work on a bike why would you not share that with your car driving friends? I thought that would go really well and it didn't get

shared at all. Got absolutely nothing which was a bit disappointing. We test everything to see what can be done and how we can get it out there. But, yeah, the Facebook community tends to be more bikers, existing bikers sharing stuff with their non-biking friends which is fine. And some of them have come to the campaign and some of them haven't.

Interviewer: So almost like if you like when I get that right, so you would say that the community on your website is more for those that want to get into biking, and the community on Facebook is more for those that are already in biking?

Respondent: My gut feel looking at the profile of the likes on Facebook for us definitely that, yeah. I think our most popular age group on Facebook is 35 to 44 and I know that that is going to be the sort of thing that shows that these people are actually existing bikers to me anyway. So looking at the people, yeah, 30% of our fans are women, our profile of men is 17% in the 45-54 range, whereas the majority of bookings for Get On are under 34. I know that what we're looking at on Facebook are people who've engaged with Get On because because they are motorcyclists looking for a potential motorcyclists fan page and they are already bikers. So that's how I know we're there. We're still doing more to push becoming a fan on Facebook with people who are free rides to try and get them to engage more.

Interviewer: That's really interesting. That does make sense as well. Like you say after they've done their course and after they've become a biker they kind of they don't really have a reason to go back to the website, but if you push them to Facebook then they have a community where they can talk to people that might have done the same course.

Respondent: That's basically where we are with it, so it's sort of – it's a – the website is great. If they want to come back and look up the routes to licence if they've just done their CBT they know it's all there. But actually most people if they're on the website find out about licensing, find out they can do a free ride, book their free ride, job done, then they're off and they're into the industry, they don't generally come back to us. The vast majority of visits are under 10 seconds which is enough time just about to read the basics on the page that you want them to. If you look at new visitors are on average looking at 2.66 pages and on the site for just over two minutes, so they're certainly engaging. The returning visitor is on the site for nearly four minutes and nearly three and a half pages viewed. So if we get them to return then they're really engaging and they're really looking around.

Interviewer: So almost like the first time they come because they've read about Get On somewhere and then they might go away and then come back and then actually like even maybe go down to book it or go to find where the nearest station is, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. Exactly. If you go past three visits very few people turn up. Most people are – you're looking at 10% of those who visit the site look at two pages, and the rest of it once and look at one. So it's then the pages they'll look at generally speaking will be the what's it all about page, that's the page we guide people to mostly. So they'll go directly to that almost in every instance.

Interviewer: No, that's really interesting. I've just got like one of the questions that I had like just to cover that as well is like obviously there are different like communities out there, so what would you think are like the most important elements of communities to create a successful community?

Respondent: What we've done for creating a community that we think has been successful is twofold really. One, it's relevant engagement. To me there is no – I'd rather not post something if it was just nonsense. Personally I think what we've seen that has worked best has been anything that is slightly quirky but relevant. So we get quite a lot of interest in the concept bikes that we post up on Facebook particularly. A lot of comments come back in when we show a new concept that we've found

online or something like that. That tends to get quite a good engagement. And that's from the Facebook point of view. From the community point of view actually on the website, I would say it would be almost definitely a case of timely response. Communities need almost – it's almost a chat kind of thing which is why almost 24 hours a day but not quite the community is managed through my iPhone and if anybody posts a question on it I list that answer as soon as I can through the phone because they're possibly looking at the website – if you look at the time that people are looking at the website, we know that they are – they're looking at it mostly afternoon time and early evening and I know that if I don't have – if I'm not there at those times, answering the questions that potentially we could lose them. And so we always try and make sure that we answer questions even to the point where if I go away on holiday, if I can't answer the questions if I'm away, then I've got somebody I know who I can count on to answer them. So it is a case of – it's also a case of knowledge as well because when the other company were managing the community before I took over, because they're not motorcyclists they weren't always answering questions in a way that was clear – I answer questions as a biker for 20 years.

Interviewer: I know that problem, yeah.

Respondent: As a motorcyclist, you know. And sometimes they were – one post for instance was what's the fastest you've been on a motorcycle and I was like, oh, my god, no, that's the whole thing you don't want to be talking about. So I straightaway had to rip that down. Luckily not many people saw it before it got taken down, but not really understanding the audience is a real no-no.

Interviewer: Because like it was managed through an agency or something before?

Respondent: Originally because there was so much work going on, I was employed as the campaign director and I managed – I looked after everything from the campaign's point of view. Now because the funding has dropped there's not as much work going through external agencies, my company has taken over the social media management, the press management and the website updating and that sort of thing. So we now manage that in-house as opposed to farming it out to outsourced people. And actually it's worked better. I think communities and social marketing we've learnt that if it's not run in-house it's not going to work because no one knows your business as well as you know it yourself and I think that comes across very quickly in any engagement, so that was always a big one.

Interviewer: I mean I can totally understand that because it's the same for me – it's the same with everything, like I don't want to give out the communities or our Google ad words or something like that to an agency because the website text or things like that because I know that they don't have the background knowledge and it's happened before where then links would just not presented in the right way.

Respondent: Exactly. Absolutely. It's one of those things that you really need to manage it – the best way of managing it in-house.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And that makes sure that you are constantly looking at the right way to manage the information that's out there and the responses etc. etc.

Interviewer: So do you got any like – have you got almost like a lifecycle for your community or things you want to change?

Respondent: At the moment there's lots of things I'd like to change on the website and on the campaign generally. Unfortunately at the moment because of budgets none of it is changing. So there's always things that we'd like to do and we have constantly changed and updated the website and the way we do things. But right now because

of the way the money is everything sort of comes to a halt a bit and is just sort of ticking over. And it's not too bad because our audience is so new all the time, actually not refreshing the web content every two days isn't actually a huge issue for us because people might not see the homepage change on their second visit. The vast majority of them won't make a third visit anyway, so it's not the be all and end all for us. If we had a community that was coming back two or three times a month then absolutely we'd have to spend a lot more money in creating news stories etc. upon the website that made sure when they came back they were further engaged. We're lucky in the sense that we don't have to do that as much in this point in time.

Facebook is slightly different, we do try and post at least two or three per week and preferably four a week. But again if there's no story it might just be that the home page, the cover picture gets changed, or we throw a concept bike up there and that's enough for us just to make sure people know we're still alive and still doing stuff.

Interviewer: That's similar to what we do, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. That's pretty much where we are with that.

Interviewer: I was wondering like obviously I don't know if you have thought about things like doing like an annual Get On reunion or things like that where people come together or I don't know.

Respondent: Say that again, you dropped out. Have we thought about doing what?

Interviewer: Like doing something like an annual Get On reunion meeting or things like that?

Respondent: We haven't at this moment but we do offer free tickets to anybody who's done a free ride to go along to the NEC show.

Interviewer: Okay, so that's almost like an extra incentive to do the show.

Respondent: They don't know about it at the time, it's not something that we want to advertise, come and do a free ride if they're a biker just to get their free ticket, but we do offer everybody a free ticket when they…

Interviewer: And then are you going to have a stand at the NEC so they come and meet you?

Respondent: We don't have a stand as such, but we do have a show area where you can come and have a go if that's what you want to do.

Interviewer: I know what you mean.

Respondent: There's a large area where they can come and have a go if they haven't already. We don't tend to have people come back and have a picture taken with us. Something that is definitely worth to consider and see what we might be able to do from that point of view.

Interviewer: Because it's one of these – like I mean that's just the whole point of this research, it's not so much academic because I'm not an academic, I don't really like the academic world that much, but I've talked to another interesting community in the States who are just starting up and what they're doing is they feature rider profiles. So they basically write like a – have the users email in a bit of a story about themselves, how long they've been riding, what they've done, what is their dream bike, and a picture of themselves, and then they post these things on Facebook and get quite a good response on them.

Respondent:	That's something we can certainly look at doing. We're always looking at ways we can further engage in getting the community to talk about stuff. In fact I've just clicked on something that I'll share on our page on your website, the American cop riding round the cones which is – I'm just watching it now, it's pretty incredible, and that's the sort of thing that would definitely get engagement because it's perfectly relevant. One of the things that new riders always worry about is whether or not they're actually able to ride their bikes, can they do it well enough. Have they got control? It's one of those things you think, well, this guy's showing you what control is all about, then have a look at it and see what he does, but it's one of those messages in kind, kind of things isn't it?

But, yeah, no, a reunion, yeah, it's possible. One of the things we're looking to manufacturers this year is if they can ask new rider, have they come through Get On, did they start riding via a Get On free ride, particularly if they're buying 125s, we're interested to find out from that point of view. And that was a couple of years ago when one of the manufacturers asked the question, a good proportion of people had been riding for less than three years and that's one of the things that I think shocked people was the number of years people had been riding. It wasn't always 10, 15 years, some of them were – had been riding for very, very little time. |
Interviewer:	That's what we see for Scottoiler, I can tell you that it's like we see quite a lot of people coming into biking quite late, like late 30s, early 40s and then that's the kind of customer group that grows for us at the moment. Because they come into biking, usually it's like husband and wife or like boyfriend and girlfriend taking up biking together and then buying the same bike and then buying a Scott oiler at the same time.
Respondent:	Yeah, exactly. We see a lot of couples coming through and we've had in the past a number of people who've come through as couples saying, yeah, I started on Get On and I brought my girlfriend or my wife. And last year in fact we had a couple who were – I think she was 79 and he was 86 or something coming for their free ride. Bloody hell, absolutely, come along. Pretty incredible, so we'll see what we'll get this year, but it certainly was pretty impressive. We had them up on the community straightaway just to show what it was that you could do, it was quite something.
Interviewer:	I don't want to keep you any longer. I think I only said like 40 minutes and now it's an hour already, so I don't want to keep you from your normal work. But it was really interesting like because it is this idea of learning from experience, so things like you said like working with an external agency, there's plenty of stuff that I can use, that's great.
Respondent:	Yeah. Good, well, I'm glad. If you need any more information I'd be more than happy to.
Interviewer:	The only other thing apparently I need to ask from the university from is if you're happy to be quoted in the dissertation or if you want to remain anonymous?
Respondent:	No, I'm more than happy with that, that's not a problem at all.
Interviewer:	Cool. That's great. That's it so far, I've got like another three interviews today that I need to go through.
Respondent:	Okay, excellent.
Interviewer:	I'll send you an email or something tomorrow.
Respondent:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	Cool.

Respondent: Okey-doke, no problem at all.

Interviewer: All right, cheers, Miles.

Respondent: Thanks a lot, take care, talk to you soon.

Interviewer: Thank you, bye.

Respondent: Bye.

[End of recorded material]

[Start of recorded material]

Interviewer:	Hi, Brian, this is Matt from Scottoiler.
Respondent:	Oh, hi, Matt, how you doing?
Interviewer:	I'm good, how are you?
Respondent:	Not bad, I'm just going to move over to a place I might get better reception because this building that I'm in at the moment is not so good sometimes, so if it cuts out, just give us a call back.
Interviewer:	All right, it might be us as well, because our connection gets really spotty.
Respondent:	All right, fair enough. Where are you based?
Interviewer:	In Glasgow.
Respondent:	Oh, right, it's from Glasgow to Copenhagen. We're kind of on the same level I think, aren't we?
Interviewer:	Yes, you guys might be a bit lower.
Respondent:	Oh, brilliant! So how's it all going on the study, have you gleaned some good information from people?
Interviewer:	Yes, I actually have. It's really interesting. This is my Master's study but in my Bachelor's study I just used questionnaires and it's actually so much more interesting to do interviews or just have a chat, and you get so much interesting information out of it and even most of all like these situations where it's like okay, and then someone will say, "Oh, by the way, I maybe should mention that I do this and this and this and this," and then you suddenly have like another half an hour to talk about things because it's so interesting.

Yes, so it's going well but I'm doing this part time so I've kind of lost track of time and I now have six weeks left to finish this. |
Respondent:	Wow, okay, well, good luck with it.
Interviewer:	Thank you. Definitely very much appreciated, you taking the time to speak to me. I'm trying to finish this part by the end of the August.
Respondent:	I'm very happy to do it, Grant's brilliant and if he asks for help I'll always help him out. So yes, shoot, what would you like to know?
Interviewer:	Basically, my dissertation is about the process of setting up and creating and growing online communities. Because what I found was things like there's not much literature about that out there where there is your typical self-guide books and things like that, but the academic research that you could find is mostly based on case studies of really successful communities and obviously they don't' really show the things that might have failed because they are successful. So I'm talking to communities of all kinds of sizes and levels and stages, and I would think that Horizons Unlimited is probably the biggest and most successful community I'm talking to.

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Respondent: Interesting.

Interviewer: I'm talking to creators of communities but I've also wanted to talk to long time users or really involved users and see what their opinion is and see how these two things combine. Then obviously when you wrote back that you were involved in your own community as well, that was quite interesting because then I would get like both use...

Respondent: Yes, it was an interesting time. I was the internet manager here for some time and it is, this is all about the internal community. Like I said, we had about 400 people out there around the world, consultants that needed to exchange ideas and information and knowledge, and email really wasn't cutting it.

                   We had some really basic tools on our intranet and everyone had access to email but we had a problem in the fact that people on customer sites doing work and the only connection they had was email and back to the office. So that was a bit of an issue, we didn't have any kind of good social tools.

                   So I was asked to create something, and we've got this SharePoint installation here. I don't know if you're familiar with that, Microsoft SharePoint?

Interviewer: Yes, it rings a bell.

Respondent: It's kind of an internet platform, well, the one we've got is. So that was a forum, a discussion group and I thought if I set it up, if I tell a few big cheeses around the world that they need to start using this, then it would be a success, and it wasn't. It wasn't a success at all, no one used it. I'd post a few things and I got a few other people to post a few things and just telling people to use it just wasn't cutting it.

                   Some months went by and I had to tweak it again and have a look at it and I had a real good look as to why someone should come to a forum and, "What's in it for me?" Why would anyone post something? People are happy to post questions but they're not so happy to spend time answering questions for people.

                   So I had to go around, hold meetings with these leaders and their people to say, "Why don't you do it?" A number of things that came up were people say, "Yes, But what's in it for me?" Obviously it was things like, "Well, you're going to get recognition. You've got a tremendous amount of knowledge in your head, Mr Consultant. Get things out there and get recognition, get recognised. You'd be seen as the man really in this particular knowledge are." You know, coming out with all these kinds of little arguments to use here and why.

                   I came up with a mantra, I read it somewhere, 'email is a place where knowledge goes to die', and it was a very simple thing to show to people, but I needed to have this really simple message and a very small diagram on what happens when people email each other all the time, and you know your stuff. If you've got a question and you give it to me, I answer it to you, we're the only beneficiaries of that, and the organisation never gets the benefit from having the knowledge in our conversation. Whereas when you have a forum, everyone gets the benefit, everything gets to see it.

                   So I had to come up with a phrase "The organisation has a memory", and I'd say, "If you continue to use email, you're giving the organisation dementia at this time. But it had to be really simple messages like this so people could understand it otherwise they're like, "You know what, I miss my email."

                   Then, after the managers got it and after I pointed at them and said, "You're allowing your people to waste company money by using email," then they got it. I kind of put a firework up their backside and the more people talked to about this,

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the more they had to do something, because otherwise they were seen as being inefficient. That was kind of it really.

Interviewer: You got the managers involved and then the managers handed down towards their employees?

Respondent: Yes, it was a combination of that and actually getting involved and saying, "Look, you invite me to your next group meeting where I will talk to you, the manager, and your people underneath you." Because I knew that when I initially sold the managers this message, the message became blurred when they told their people. So it had to come from the subject matter aspect myself for people to get the correct message and to actually feel that this is coming from a good place, not just from a manager who manages people who may not know so much about collaboration. Well, maybe they should, but they don't.

So I had to get my hands dirty and actually convince the troops that this was necessary for them to benefit from. People say, "Why should I contribute to this?" I'm like, "How many times do you get the same question during the course of a quarter or something, and you've got to spend time answering the same question over and over and over again." This happens a lot in organisations be the knowledge is disseminated via email. Many people have the same questions to certain managers.

I said, "You know what, if somebody asked the question once on a forum, you answer it once, and then if anyone asks you for the same question, you say go and search the forum, the answer's on there." They like that because again, it fills the people's kind of... It just made sense, it was the simple messages that I felt that they were missing from the managers and reasons to do this, and you've just got to appeal to the human being. We're all lazy to some extent, so when you say you answered the question once, you'd never have to answer it again, people like that.

Interviewer: Do you think that's why people join community as well, so that they find something that might make their life easier?

Respondent: In some regards, yes, but on internet communities, I think it's a lot about prestige, isn't it, and kind of being seen as the experts. People like to, it's nice, people like to beat a test, "Oh, I know this," you get praise for it... People like the rewards and recognition. Maybe you read as well that in organisations, when it comes to forums and stuff, financial rewards for being the top poster of the month don't cut it, it's recognition that cuts it with people, that makes it worthwhile, reward or a t-shirt maybe is great or something silly like that, but actual financial rewards are not the motivators in organisations to get people to contribute. It's definitely about the recognition. You know what we're talking about, you've been in it for some time.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: It really works here.

Interviewer: That's good. That was one of the questions that I had in my little notepad here was they're all working with your company, so it's an internal forum for the employees of your company?

Respondent: That's right, yes. But they're still people.

Interviewer: Yes, but it was more towards how do you attract people? Like in your sense you had to attract them in the way that you had to attract them to participate, so yes, that's definitely, it's important.

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Respondent:	Yes, it definitely is to be able to bang the drum, but I guess again, on internet sites, there's got to be some very – or maybe there hasn't. I guess you've got to feel there's a purpose to it. Purposeful collaboration is something that people talk about quite a lot when I talk to other people involved in this. If there's no clearly defined purpose as to what this online forum's about and why I should contribute, if there's no clear purpose then it's not going to work.
	I'll give you an example. There's a bank here called Nordia bank and they've got 3,000 employees. They've got something called Nbook on their homepage of their intranet and it was kind of a social thing, a social blogging thing. The marketing manager said to everyone, "Go and use Nbook, it's just Facebook but for the organisation," and no one posted to it for like six months or it got a few posts. Because it was too vague, the message was too vague. It's like what do I say, what's allowed, what's not allowed, what's relevant, what's not relevant?
	Whereas if you've got a forum like I guess Horizons Unlimited, you gets posts here for all North American events or queries about the country, there's a clear defined purpose, but when it's too generic, that gets lost and people are afraid to post and it lacks interest.
Interviewer:	You said in your email that you're now launching the client forum?
Respondent:	Yes, we're trying to launch it, we're trying to get people interested in it. Again, it's about maturing the management and getting them to understand the point of this. A lot of people are old school thinkers here, old school markets and old school communications, so it is a bit of a struggle but we'll get there in the end. They'll understand, they just need to have the messages clear in their head that we need to have a shared understanding of what we're trying to achieve.
Interviewer:	Yes. Sorry, to go back to Horizons Unlimited, could you maybe talk about how you first heard about it and then why you joined and how you, like your story with Horizons Unlimited?
Respondent:	I did a trip from North America to South America and I was going to do it with a friend of mine, a South African chum, and he dropped out and I... what now? He travelled quite a bit and he recommended the forum, so I went on and I just wanted to talk to other people about it really, about my fears potentially, I wanted to go there and have the people say it's going to be okay.
	I think about everything that I wrote, I just wanted a pat on the head from the people and to say it's actually going to be okay, you're going to survive. I think people on a search for knowledge for reassurance and to know that they're going to have a happy event when they go out into the world on their bike and they're not going to get killed. For me, it was as simple as that and to ensure you're going to have the best time possible. It's just a fantastic resource and I met up with a number of people and one of the people I met, a girl called Mary, she now is a lifelong friend I've made and she's the godmother of one of my sons.
	I made some great and it's just a fantastic life changing website I think. If you're in the business of wanting to change a life or put it into a new direction, then this is a website that can do that, it's pretty nuts, but you've got to want to take the leap and make the change and pull yourself out of the support networks you've got in your homeland.
Interviewer:	Especially with your experience of starting your own community, do you think Horizons Unlimited are doing a good job?
Respondent:	They're doing a great job, and you can see that because they've matured their site and they've streamlined it and they've got a lot of feedback over the years and they keep improving it all the time, and it's very easy to get around. Yes, I think it's

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superb and that's why they're the number one motorcycle travel site on the planet. They've honed it very well. I think it's very difficult to change it because again, you want to have a feeling of community and they do such a good job of that because they utterly believe it themselves and they've done it. They're not just businesspeople that have been asked to set up a motorcycle travel site, they believe in what they're doing and they know what people want. They go to all the meetings so they get feedback, they're at the coalface of it so whatever they hear they can go bam, straight, implement it for the better.

Interviewer: Do you think that's why they're so successful is their own involvement and enthusiasm?

Respondent: Yes. Absolutely, and you can feel that in the text on the pages. It leaps out and they truly believe it's a great thing that they do, and it is. It must be great to be them, you know? It's wonderful when you do a 9 to 5 job and to be out there. Of course there's a lot of hard work involved in it.

Interviewer: I totally agree. I think from all the communities that I'm talking to, they are the most successful.

Respondent: Yes, they're very good. It would be so different if a business was running this, if there was a CEO, it'd be very different message I feel. So yes, you get that homemade feel of quality there and not such a corporate 'we're in it for the money' word and content. It's good, it's really good, and very reasonable prices. Whatever they charge, it's very strangely reasonable, so that's the other reason why I feel it's good.

It's like I used to go to a jazz club in London called Ronnie Scott's, and when Ronnie Scott was the owner it was very cheap, he got fantastic people coming in playing, international acts, it was brilliant. I went as a student, I loved it, and it was like, "How could you do it so cheaply?" It's because he loved it, and then he died and then they tripled the prices overnight as someone bought the club and it lost all the soul. All the soul just bled out of that place and it was obviously a business and not a place where you listened to music.

But I think it's very important that, for some things, the people that run it are the people that know it intimately.

Interviewer: I've got one question here on my little pad that I've asked everyone so far and it kind of ties in with what we've just been talking about, but what do you think is the most important element to make a community successful?

Respondent: The first thing I thought about was authenticity, to feel that it was authentic, that people that came there were genuine. I'm going to go back to purpose, I'm going to say that the most important aspect of this was that there's a purpose and this thing lives and breathes and that you feel like you're contributing. Yes, purposeful collaboration, it's a very powerful thing to say you know what, this has got a purpose, this community, and that it's not just going to die, it's not a fad, that it's actually going to live on. Yes, purpose.

Interviewer: No, I agree with you because that's one of the things that I've found in the literature as well. It is actually the very first thing when you think about a community that you should consider because it drives everything else, and if there's no purpose behind it, then a community is doomed to fail.

Respondent: Yes, absolutely. Yes, purpose, I know that.

Interviewer: I don't really have any other questions. It was really interesting to hear about your own problems with attracting them, because it is one of the key points. You can have the best community, you can make a beautiful website but if you can't attract

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	members to it, it will always be really difficult. Like you said, when you were first there, you had this platform and no one contributed and then you had to attract the members. That was really interesting.
Respondent:	Yes, it just boils down to three things for me. The whole process boils down to people have to understand what you're talking about and only then can they give the next phase which was then they can believe what you're talking about. Then after that, then they can commit to it, then they can become a habit. Like emails a habit, we all know how to use it but getting people to come off the crack which is corporate email is quite a big leap. So there needs to be some time to educate them onto why they should do it.
	I think this applies to everyone that's working these days or studying these days, life seems to be much about the interruptions because we're always interrupted in our daily lives and therefore we're always being asked to change, and people have got change fatigue. It's like, "God, don't ask me to use this, don't ask me to do that, to change it, I'm just surviving just doing what I'm doing now, don't ask me for all these bloody changes."
	So you get people to then read something and say, "Oh, I've got this great new collaboration system," people just look at you like you're an idiot, "Don't ask me to change what I know." So they had to understand, and I think that's where a lot of things go wrong, especially with social and organisations. People don't get it, because the education has not been given to them as to why it's going to help them. I'm all about that these days, education.
	So you're doing a dissertation, is it, a report on this whole social...
Interviewer:	It's a part time Master's dissertation, yes.
Respondent:	Are you going to publish it, will it be available somewhere, I'd be very interested in reading it if it's published or available?
Interviewer:	Yes, I will definitely send you a copy. I said that to all the creators as well. I've got like, as it is with dissertations, you start writing and then your supervisor said, "You don't need to include this and this and this," so I've got tons of really good material.
	Like you said, there's a spirit of community, there's actually quite a lot of research on that which I have only brushed on in my dissertation, but I've got a couple of more things so I can just send you quite a lot of stuff. I'm hoping to finish this at the end of September.
Respondent:	It'll be fantastic. I'll look forward to reading that. It's a wonderful area you're researching. There's many disciplines involved with the psychology to technology, right, it's fascinating, so I'll be very interested in reading it.
Interviewer:	Yes, it is really interesting and I think I've only brushed the surface of it, but it is really interesting, that's why I chose it when I started it.
Respondent:	Fantastic.
Interviewer:	Did you do any research, any academic, did you read any papers or something before you started your community?
Respondent:	Yes, I read a bunch, there's a couple of reports that stick out in my mind which, you know yourself there's just tons of stuff out there and it really is about cutting through the chaff. There's a great report done by Deloitte which really spoke to me which I'll be very happy to forward on to you now if you're keen?

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Interviewer: Yes, that sounds good.

Respondent: Probably more so than any report I've read, this one seemed to make sense and seemed to, it appealed to me anyway and to my organisation. So let me flick that on, let me find that and flick it on to you.

Interviewer: That would be great, thank you.

Respondent: Yes, no worries, no problem.

Interviewer: But I'd better get back to the desk, I can see the boss is looking at me from the corner of his eye!

Respondent: Thank you very much, Brian, that was really good, really helpful.

Interviewer: You're very welcome and hey, stay in touch and who knows, you could be leading, I don't know, the next [S.L. Yanow 0:26:53] or the next big thing, right? It all starts here.

Respondent: I hope so.

Interviewer: Okay, mate. I'll flick on that report to you shortly.

Respondent: Thanks, thank you very much. Cool. Have a good day.

Interviewer: Cheers, mate, good luck, and you. Bye.

Respondent: Bye.

[End of recorded material]

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HU - Grant

[Start of recorded material]

Interviewer: Thanks a lot for helping me out, this is really appreciated.

Respondent: No worries, we can do that, we can take care of things!

Interviewer: I don't know if you've any question. I'm doing a Masters degree and I've spent a lot of time on the research and now it's coming to an end of the time that I have available. So I'm looking to conduct these interviews, just to learn a bit about Horizons Unlimited. I know a bit but I would like to learn a bit more. The nice thing about this research approach that my supervisor suggested is that it's just a nice chat. There's no questions you have to rank between one and nine or something silly like that, it's just a nice chat. The topic of my dissertation is what is the process and what are the elements of successful online communities and of all the ones I'm interviewing, yours is probably the most successful.

Respondent: Good.

Interviewer: If you could just run me through a bit of the history of Horizons Unlimited and how you came to setting it up, that'd be great.

Respondent: It's a little tricky but we've been on Compuserve since 1986, before your time, you know what Compuserve was?

Interviewer: Is that the predecessor of the Internet?

Respondent: It was one of several. Compuserve and somebody else, I can't remember who they are and they had their own Internets effectively. So if you were on Compuserve, you could send an email to someone else on Compuserve pretty easily but sending an email to somebody on some other system, that was another football game. That was a major pain in the ass. Most people ended up with multiple accounts. We were in Costa Rica, for instance, and sent the very first email ever from Costa Rica in the head office of the big man from Costa Rica telecomms. We'd been trying to connect to Compuserve in Costa Rica and there was theoretically a number you could do it with but we couldn't get through and nobody would let us connect a computer to it. This is in the days when you had a large chunk of hardware twice the size of a Smartphone that you strapped onto a handset for a telephone. When people saw us doing that, they freaked so we ended up in the office of the big guy from Costa Rica telecomms, very fascinated. We sent the first email and received several emails at the time and he was absolutely blown away. So that was kind of cool.

Interviewer: Was that when you were with Horizons Unlimited?

Respondent: In a way, yes. We have a picture from 1987 when we were in Mexico, horizontes ilimitados, and that means Horizons Unlimited in Spanish since we were heading for South America and Central America, we just did it in Spanish but it was a concept right from 1986 when we first started thinking about the whole idea.

Interviewer: Very forward thinking back then. Was it just to keep up with friends and family?

Respondent: Yeah, that was it. My mother was doing our accounting and paperwork at this end and we sent her an email and she scanned me accounts. In those days, everything was paper so she would scan in the document and email it to us and we'd say do this with it. We'd actually sign stuff on the computer, send it back. We had an image of our signature which we just pushed on, you get it back, it's signed. She'd print it off, send it away and off it went so it worked out really well. We had the first Toshiba laptop in Canada, which is what we were using for travelling with so that's where it all started.

In 1997, we were in Ushuaia for Christmas waiting for the boat to take us to Antarctica. We had about a week to wait and Compuserve made an announcement that you can have a web page. What's a web page?! We worked it all out and put the first web page up which was HorizonsUnlimited.compuserve.com at the time so that went live and very quickly as soon as we got back to Canada six months later, we figured out how to get it onto the Internet and Horizons Unlimited was live. Even within that six months from when it first went out into the world Christmas 1997, by the time we got back, all kinds of people had found this and were asking us questions, wanting to know what was going on, how do you do this and how do you get through Africa, what should I take for the bike.

It became obvious pretty quick that I was going to be answering the same questions a million times so I thought I'd better do a bulletin board here so people can share this information and somebody else can answer these questions and once it's been done, you can find it. So a newsletter and bulletin board started in 1998, away it went and it was very quickly getting very busy. The website was originally supposed to be the rough draft of the book. I still haven't written the book, the website's taken over and we've been very busy ever since!

Interviewer: It is an amazing story. You obviously didn't plan to make it a business but at some point it must've developed into a business.

Respondent: It was just full time all the time, go go go and Susan was working so even if it didn't make any money, we still had enough to live on. We just thought let's see where this goes and kept running it. It was pretty obvious fairly quickly there was some money to be made here but how much, we weren't sure. We're still not sure! But it's ok, it's coming along. We're still very much in the basement, in the ground floor of all this stuff, the whole adventure touring thing has grown. The real problem as always is how to monetise a website so that's why we like advertisers.

Interviewer: Was that initially your idea to go with advertisers instead of doing something like a subscription or charging people to access your information?

Respondent: We never really thought the subscription model was going to work. Everything we saw and read everywhere was subscription isn't going to work because you've got somebody who comes to the website, "This looks interesting. Oh, it costs me how much to join just to find out if there's anything I want? No." They're just not going to apply. If we were Microsoft and had a subscription site then yeah, or the London Times, I know what I'm going to get but I've never heard of you. There's no way. We always thought the whole point and focus of the whole thing was for travellers to help each other and the original thinking was it would be a part time job for me. I would spend a year getting it rolling, get some traffic, then I could ease off and I wouldn't have to do much.

Interviewer: So you mean the travellers would almost take over most of the work?

Respondent: Yeah, and they did but the maintenance of all that is a staggering amount of work. Even today, there's two of us put in 60 hours a week each on average. We have a couple of helpers that do various bits and pieces. All of our events have a local organiser that does the bulk of the local work. We do the back end, create the web page, run the payments through and take care of registration and overall logistics. But organised the local people to get behind it and make sure the local stuff is going to happen and deal with the venue on the day, make sure there's going to be chairs and toilets etc. Without that, it'd be impossible to run 18 meetings this year.

Interviewer: I didn't realise there was that many.

Respondent: Yeah, we've got places as far afield as Kirgizstan, three in Australia, five in North America, several in Europe and the UK, Ireland. There's talk of Turkey, we just did one in Montenegro which we didn't go to. We don't go to the far flung ones. There's

Interviewer:	talk of South Africa for next year, we've got a new one in France this year, India next year.
Interviewer:	Whereabouts in India?
Respondent:	Bangalore.
Interviewer:	What I get from the website and these meet-ups, I'm an adventure bike rider. I would love to go out and travel the world and follow your example and I feel like it's really nice with these events that you create an atmosphere, a group of people that know each other and as soon as they mention Horizons Unlimited, everyone knows about it. It's really impressive.
Respondent:	The number of people that've been driving along the Ban Road in Siberia and meet another motorcycle and there's an HU sticker on it, immediately, "You're so and so, I know you!" A lot of the people are coming to the meetings, at least 50 percent of every meeting are complete newbies. They have no idea, they don't know anything, they heard there was a rally, they didn't know what it was really and they come wondering what it is. Are all these guys crazy, am I crazy for thinking about this adventure travel stuff and they come and they're blown away, the number of new friends they make and the connections, it's amazing. Then they end up going to another meeting on their trip. They plan their trips around where and when the meetings are as best they can. We'd like to have 100 meetings around the world, just as long as we didn't have to do all the work! So people could go from meeting to meeting and they'd meet each other all along the way, it's fantastic. We've got one in Argentina.
Interviewer:	Is it in Ushuaia at Christmas?
Respondent:	There's one in Christmas, that's a loose one that nobody organises. We do one in Viedma, Argentina which is just north of Ushuaia about three weeks north to be exact, first week of December is when the formal meeting is in Viedma and everybody just arrives for Ushuaia. But most of the people have already been to the Viedma one. It's another connection and new people and there's always something funny happening.
Interviewer:	I suppose the website was there before the meetings.
Respondent:	Oh yeah.
Interviewer:	Was it just like someone suggesting a meet up?
Respondent:	We were living in the UK in 2001 and for various family reasons, we ended up moving back to Canada and we told everybody on the website – and don't forget, this is only a website that's been going for three years now, not very long – we've got to move back to Canada so we're going to have a party in our backyard if anybody wants to come, thinking we'd have 20 people at best. And almost 50 people came, some from as far away as Norway, came down for the weekend! So we ended up taking over the neighbour's backyard as well as ours! Everybody had a great time, it was wonderful. There were some people at that event, Glyn Roberts was one and Chris Scott and they said, "Got to do this again next year." "Yeah, ok, go right ahead, we're not going to be here."
	So they found a pub that had a field in the back and had the second Horizons Unlimited meeting and it's just gone from there. And that's just local guys, "We want to do this," so you find a location and everybody pays for their own food and takes their own beer, just be here. Of course, it grew from there and pretty quickly we had 300 people and we had to get considerably more formal. So now it's a full on event, a couple of people probably 50 percent of the year for them is spent on just organising the UK meeting, it's a big deal.

Interviewer: The first time I saw Horizons Unlimited was still the old design where it was just a bulletin board. It has come a long way and it's now looking really nice and snazzy and has a lot of really nicely organised information. Was that something you always wanted to do, to change the website or put more emphasis on information?

Respondent: That's an interesting thing because when you saw it, it wasn't just a bulletin board. It was pretty much as it is now, just not as obvious. The other information pages, the shipping database has been going since 2002, border crossing information 2002/3, it's all been there, it just wasn't as easy to find. People would just go straight to the hub and then there was no obvious way to get to anywhere else. There was a menu on the left but who looks at that, it's invisible. But the left hand menu that led to the rest of the site was always there, right from the very beginning. The redesign has made it much more obvious and easier to find stuff and easier to enter and create other stuff. We're running a major content management system now which is tied into the bulletin board. So with this content management system called Drupal we can do just about anything, it's just a matter of time and energy to create new stuff. We've got a bunch of stuff in the pipeline we're working on now, several things are halfway through.

Interviewer: That's interesting because obviously the topic of the dissertation is the development. You constantly develop your ideas and have new ideas and have things in the pipeline.

Respondent: Yeah, a lot of things in line! You just have to figure out what people need and want and sometimes they don't even know what they want until you show it to them and then they've got to have it. Think of Facebook, who had any interest in Facebook or anything like it before Facebook arrived? You didn't even know you wanted it but now it's there, you do so same thing. The shipping data base is a classic example. People were always asking on the bulletin board, how do I ship out of here and how do I ship out of there? Which meant this could be a lot better organised and you could actually find it if there was a database and entry system, a place where people could put stuff in that's organised so you can find starting from a location and going to a location. So we created a shipping database and it's used heavily, it's amazing how many people use it. There's over 800 now shipments in there, from just about anywhere to anywhere.

Interviewer: So that's taking feedback from the forum?

Respondent: No, nothing to do with the forum at all. This is a straight form that people enter the information directly into. If I went to the forum and took various people's meandering conversational 'I did this and that' and tried to put it into a straightforward form, I would go insane and I'd be here 77 hours a day. But you give them a form, they can fill it in. Anybody can fill in the blanks, it's not hard, whereas if you have a big sheet of paper in front of you, people are very bad at putting down the important things in some semblance of organisation. So if you give them a form, it's easy. That's my basic philosophy throughout.

Interviewer: I obviously see other forums and everyone always speaks really highly of the hub. Did you think your website would be as successful as it is without the forum or the bulletin board?

Respondent: No, it'd be useless without the forum, you've got to have it. It's the conversation and being able to ask anything at all that gets conversations going and people can find just about anything they want. It's all there. There are certain things that make sense to be in the database like the shipping data base, for instance, border crossings and other things. We've got a country information system coming so you can find out anything you want to know about a country and it'll connect to shipping, border crossings, places to stay, where all the repair shops are, that'll be all connected on that system. However, if you're trying to find out something right now, I'm in so and so, I've got a problem and need to deal with it, I need to figure out how to cross the border because it's just been closed, I've got a problem of some kind, then the bulletin board is the place where all conversation starts. That's where people have casual conversations. We've got a forum specifically for casual conversations on anything. People ask, how do you afford

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to go round the world? How do you get it together so you can go and do the big trips, all kinds of conversations.

Interviewer: That's usually your members talking to each other without you having to put in …

Respondent: I spend almost no time on the board at all. In the beginning, sure, I was answering questions all the time and making things go. I think I've made about 3000 posts and two thirds of those were by 2003 so in the last ten years, I've done 1000 posts.

Interviewer: That's your users stepping in, the ones you've taught about the process and who then went away and travelled. They came back and passed on their knowledge.

Respondent: Yeah. Chris Pride is an example. He came to that very first travellers' meeting in 2001 and he's now been around the world and he goes on some major trip every year. He's a schoolteacher so he gets ten weeks' holiday a year and he's a moderator on the forum so he passed on information, keeps things in line. He's probably got more posts than I have.

Interviewer: That's the one you talked about at the start, your helpers have almost all been recruited through the bulletin board.

Respondent: Yeah. If you're on the board enough, you either are just a busy user but if you've got some brains and capability of dealing with people and solving some problems and you're always a voice of reason, then we recruit you as a moderator. The whackos seem to be ones that are always getting carried away, they're the ones that need moderating! We've had to ban a few people. Sometimes you get someone who's basically a troll and that's all there is to it, a pain in the ass, you've got to get rid of them. One of the big things we've seen for many years now is that smaller forums can easily disappear if they let the trolls win. If you don't keep them in line and keep the forum a pleasant place to be without a lot of spam or people picking fights effectively, then everybody just leaves. Why would you hang around a place? Thing about your local pub, if it turned into a place that every time you went there, there was a fight, would you go there all the time? I don't think so, it's not worth it.

Interviewer: You've conquered that by banning these people?

Respondent: Yeah, you have to. You don't want to and there's only three or four people we've ever banned. At least a couple of them are people that walk up to me and shake my hand and say, "Hi, how're you doing, how's it going, how's the website?" and they're friendly and things are fine. One of them I even correspond with on a semi regular basis but I just can't have him on the forum because he always says something that's going to start a fight. It's not worth it and he knows that. He admits it so you just have to keep on top of it. If you don't keep that control, you end up losing control completely and as soon as you do that, you're dead.

Interviewer: Would you say this is one of the stumbling blocks, the issues that you had with the community?

Respondent: It's a real pain in the ass and you always feel really bad having to slap people. If somebody does something naughty, you try and teach them the error of their ways and it can be really difficult. Some people say, "Ok, I get it, you're right, I'll watch myself in the future," and they do and they're fine. Other people just don't get it. Part of the problem always is some people aren't very good at communicating at all ever but if you're in a pub sitting across from somebody, a drink in your hand and you're having a conversation, you can make a smart ass comment with a smile and a wave of your drink and people are ok with it. If you do it online using exactly the same words but without that body language and eye to eye connection, it doesn't go over at all. People get really pissed and you've got a fight.

And some people never figure out how to phrase things so that when they're throwing something out to start a conversation or they're making a smart comment that they expect a smart ass remark back to and it's all done, they don't get that you can't do that online easily, not without very careful phrasing. And a lot of people don't have the education to do it. It's difficult.

Interviewer: When I signed up for our account, you said you had quite a lot of problems with spam.

Respondent: You would not believe. The spam has always been a pain in the ass and as long as we had the system where somebody could sign up and then immediately they're activated automatically and they can then start posting, we were slapping down two or three spammers a day every day. That was a pain but it was bearable and it was simple, then everything worked, people were able to post right away and that was fine. But then it got automated and there was a point there where one morning I looked at it and 300 people had signed up that night. What? We normally have 20 or 30 a day but 300 overnight? Something wrong here and a ton of spam. Very quickly I said we've got to do something about this and it was happening three days in a row, they were just coming in steadily, every 15 seconds there would be another sign up. It was all automated and it was all crap. So I cleaned all that up and put in a system where somebody has to go through the cache and answer a question of some kind and then respond to an email where they prove to me by writing me something sensible that says you're a real person, you're not a bot and you're not a spammer.

Interviewer: Did you get any feedback from your users at that time when the board got hit with the spam? Did they complain?

Respondent: No. When you're logged in, you'll see there's a red card/yellow card icon on each post and you know what that means? You know what a red card is?

Interviewer: You mean on the left?

Respondent: It's actually on the right, a little card. Are you logged in? Go to any post and it says two weeks ago or one day ago and then there's a number, then there's a yellow card and a red card, add an infraction. Oh, you don't see that, sorry, you see the one beside it.

Interviewer: I see the little triangle.

Respondent: Yes, you see the little triangle, sorry! What I see and what a moderator sees and what a user sees and what a not logged in user sees are all different. You've got a triangle and if you hover over it, it says 'report post.' The red card/yellow card we as moderators and admin see and that's 'add an infraction' so I can put an infraction and give someone some points, you're being naughty, smarten up. Or the user can get the triangle and report the post. We got a lot of those, which is why I actually first found it because I opened up my mail and reported posts kept flying in. The users are very good about reporting spam posts, problem posts, saying, "This guy's getting out of line, needs reining in." So the users are self policing or police other users because they don't want to see crap either.

Interviewer: I suppose that was almost a positive thing because your users saw you dealing with the spam but you had your users reporting the problem.

Respondent: Yeah, it's a community. Carla King, who's an American writer who's travelled around the world and done some major stuff, she came finally to a meeting. I'd been corresponding with her for years and she came to a California meeting and she said, "I've met my tribe."

Interviewer: That's really nice because that's one of those things I read in the literature, this idea of a virtual tribe.

Respondent: Absolutely. It's not just virtual because the cool part about the meetings is that you may have known somebody for years on the hub and then you come to a meeting and there they are and you get to sit down and talk to each other. That makes a really powerful connection, it really works well. The fact we've gone live as well as virtual has made a huge difference in the cohesiveness of the community. Everybody knows each other, they've met, they've been to an event and maybe they're on a trip and halfway round the world, they're meeting again at another meeting somewhere else. Then they go home and they meet there at their home meeting. It becomes very powerful and connected and everybody really does feel they're part of the tribe, the community, Horizons Unlimited travellers.

Interviewer: You would say new members are primarily introduced through these kind of meetings?

Respondent: No, not at all. Generally they find the website and say, "There's an event near me, I think I'd better go see that," or they're talking to a traveller in a restaurant. They meet them at the gas station, Horizons Unlimited, what's that, where do I found out about all this travel stuff. We get referrals all the time, "I was talking to somebody and they said I've got to come to Horizons Unlimited," the place to be and they sign up and come to a meeting and away we go. Lots of times they never do get to a meeting because with 18 meetings around the world, you'd think that'd be enough but there could easily be 100 and it still wouldn't be enough.

Interviewer: I would've loved to have gone this year but it didn't work out, maybe next year.

Respondent: You need to schedule it for yourself, not just from a business point of view. Once you get there, you really understand it because it does make a huge difference in getting the feeling. You go to your average motorcycle rally, the BMF show etc, forget everything that you think about what a motorcycle event is, throw it out. This is different and you don't understand that until you get there. No day pass, for instance. Why no day pass? Because if you're just coming in for the day, you don't get it. It's not a show, it's not something where you drop in for the day, it's some place where you come and you stay and you become part of the event.

Interviewer: You don't leave at night when the lights go out.

Respondent: Those that do miss a lot. Stand around the fire, a drink in your hand and relax and chat to people. You wake up in the morning with everybody else, go to breakfast with everybody else and it's a very different thing.

Interviewer: One of the things you said right at the start is you can see this massive rise in adventure motorcycling.

Respondent: We've been watching it very closely for a long time because that is us.

Interviewer: You obviously also get competitors coming in and other sites coming in, like ADV Rider.

Respondent: ADV Rider is different and their name says that it's rider, they go for weekend rides. The big thing is where I went on the weekend and our guys, where did I go last year? How long did I go for, spending a lot more time long term, long distance travelling. And there are people for whom travel is a lifestyle, a way of life. For adventure travellers as opposed to adventure riders out for a weekend ride, it's quite a different state of mind. They may go for an adventure ride every weekend when they're at home but at heart, they're travellers and that's the difference.

Interviewer: It was interesting when I looked at the hub meeting, the pictures, you get a lot of the 4 x 4 guys and cyclists now joining in. Did they come to you? So far, you have quite a restricted niche community but if you get all these other guys in, was that a move you made or did they come to the forum? How did that happen?

Respondent:	We didn't chase it at all. The four wheel drivers have been coming to us for a long time for the same kind of information as the motorcycle guys want - where do I get gas, where's the repair shop, how do I get across the border with a vehicle. So they've been coming to us for years, right from the beginning they found us because we were the original and only overland travel website for years. There was nothing else, so the four wheel drivers found us. We've had a four wheel drive forum since year dot and it's grown. They've been coming to various meetings, especially the UK meeting, in their four wheel drives. 2003 was probably the first four wheel drives and they've always been there and they've always been welcomed. You've got lots of motorcycle guys saying, "Yeah, I've got a four wheel drive at home, I take the wife and kids and I take the four wheel drive and when I go by myself, I go on the bike." There's guys that say, "I'm getting a little old and I can see the day's going to come when I can't ride any more or it's just too hard, four wheel drive, great." We've got one guy who went around the world on his motorcycle, met a girl on the way, ended up getting married, had a kid and last I heard they were in Africa in a four wheel drive! Still one of us.
Interviewer:	I suppose it's the same mindset.
Respondent:	Yeah, it's all the same thinking so we made it more explicit this last year for the hub UK and made it clear the four wheel guys and the bicycles are welcome. They always have been but we've never said it, so now we've decided we might as well say it. They're interested, they want to come. We hate it when somebody says, "I've only got a four wheel drive, I don't think I'd be welcome." Sure, course you are, you're a traveller.
Interviewer:	I personally have seen cycle trips coming up a lot more often in the last year or two, like people have seen a friend through Facebook saying, "I'm travelling from here to there and I'm doing this epic trip over six or 12 months." Do you think that's a new thing or was that back then?
Respondent:	I think it's been going all along. We know people have been going around the world on bicycles for a long time. On our first trip in 1987 in Guatemala, we met a Brit who was cycling from Ushuaia heading north and he'd been on the road already for a year on an ordinary pushbike, nothing fancy about it at all. That was before the days of mountain bike and he was out on this racer style bicycle because that's what you rode on the gravel roads of Guatemala. They've always been out there.
Interviewer:	That's pretty impressive!
Respondent:	Oh yeah, he was a little crazy!
Interviewer:	The only question I have here is what do you think are the main important elements of a successful sustaining community?
Respondent:	I don't know! That's a very hard question. Everything is kind of obvious to me. You've got to keep track, keep people under control without feeling like they're being controlled. You need to make sure it's a welcome place so people don't feel like they can't do and be themselves and relax and be comfortable. You need to facilitate communication between everybody and the personal meetings at the events is a very important component. The fact that everybody is flexible.

Have you sent the community section? On the mega menu, connect and contact a community, bottom left. This is still in the old system, we haven't updated this design yet. If you want to contact your community, you're travelling, read the bit in blue, "I am Joe Bloggs, here's what I'm doing." So you send a message to somebody, you're in the middle of nowhere, you need help, you need a tyre, you need to find a repair shop or you're just passing through and you want to visit and meet people, that's fine too. You can meet somebody in something like 750 communities around the world now. |

Interviewer: So it's almost like sub communities, communities within the Horizons Unlimited community.

Respondent: Absolutely. You're in Edinburgh, there's an Edinburgh community which has 20 or 30 people in it and anybody at any time can say, "Let's have a barbecue, let's go for a ride, let's have a get together. There's a traveller from India passing through, let's have an evening and we can talk to him about his travels and meet this guy that's doing this strange thing and have a good time. Or we can get together and plan our next trip." Or, "I want to plan my next trip, I want some ideas from you guys, you've been where I want to go." Basically a local little community that's part of the overall community.

Interviewer: That's pretty cool, I didn't know that.

Respondent: I'm trying to get people to connect Everybody really needs to go through those menus and read and they would get a really good idea of just the wide breadth of stuff that's there. The people that use the communities love it. Lots of them are very active. A London community regularly has something going on, Melbourne has something going on pretty frequently and the people that use the communities when they're travelling, I can think of one guy who said to me, "The best part of travelling around the world is the people we met through the communities." He was blown away at how friendly, generous and helpful they were. You can imagine, you're from Edinburgh and you're in South America or in Turkestan and you meet the local guy that started the community there and the various people in the community. There may only be two people in the community, it's a little town in the middle of nowhere but they're just dying to meet you, they think you're the best thing that's happened to them in six months! It's fantastic.

We don't see it as much any more but if we'd arrived in some small town in South America and said, "I'm going to visit and just want to say hi to people," they'd meet you at the entrance to the town and the TV crew from the local TV station would be there, do an interview with you, this wonderful traveller from God knows where is coming through and coming to our little town, this is wonderful! They love it and there'd be a big party. It happens less now because there's so many more than there used to be but you still have the welcome, it's still there. People really want to welcome people to their country and show off their country, "We have a wonderful place, we hope you enjoy it," it's great. And the really cool part is when they hit the road, they can come to your community.

Interviewer: They can come back and see you, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah, it's fantastic. You can imagine if you went to South America and met somebody in their little town and then three years later, he's on the road and he comes to your town, what a welcome he'd get. So it's all part of growing the community and connections.

Interviewer: This idea of sub groups or sub communities is something I've found in the literature as well, where they would say this is like a sign of an advanced community because the community gets so big, you should try to sub group it into smaller communities. It looks a lot like what I've read, it's really impressive.

Respondent: It seems to be working. We're going to take it to another step this winter, we've got lots of ideas in mind about how we're going to connect the communities into the bulletin board system and make it a little easier and so they can have their own mini Facebook pages, as it were, for each of the communities and grow them that way. It's a lot more connection and easier for people rather than having to write down something on a form, they can be more connected with it. People can see what's happening, it makes it a lot more open than it is right now. The technology marches on, more capability coming to us all the time.

Interviewer:	It's obviously a huge part of online communities, the whole technology side but I feel you guys are doing a really good job and sitting on top and making the best out of it definitely.
Respondent:	We're trying. We're not as fast as we'd like to be because everything takes time and the budget isn't there because we don't have hundreds of thousands of dollars in advertising coming in so we can pay people to do this stuff, it's all just us. If we were in a technology website or something different, there'd be more income than the motorcycle world. There's a limited amount of money available.
Interviewer:	It's interesting you say that because I talked to another community here in the UK earlier today and they almost produced a platform that is a bit too advanced. They found their average user is between 40 and 60 and their platform's from the ground up, coded new platform so the users are not really aware of what they're doing. They would probably rather have something that they're used to.
Respondent:	Yeah, change is very difficult. When you change something, it's amazing how people say, "I don't like it."
Interviewer:	Have you had that from your users?
Respondent:	Every time we change anything, we get bitching and complaining! "I like it the way it was. Why did you change it? This is dumb!" We get that all the time, it's constant, any time you change anything at all. But then six months later the same guy will say, "You were right, it's better, I just have to get used to it." People don't like change but you get them used to it, don't make too many changes at once, try and keep the basic concepts and procedures and ways of doing things the same and they're ok. You can only change so much at once. Being aware of that problem with people and preparing for it and dealing with it in advance, letting them know it's going to happen, that there's going to be a change and why you're making it is very important. If they see a change, they immediately do not understand what to do. If their mouse hand doesn't just go zap, click because it's not there any more, they're uncomfortable immediately. So there has to be a reason for making the change. You have to tell them, "We're making this change because …" Then they say, "Ok, there's a reason for it, makes sense, I can go along with that," and then they're ok but if they don't understand why, they don't like it.

When we did the complete redesign, the design was available to see and we invited all kinds of feedback and we had people on a design team. We had 50 people join the design team for feedback and comments, anybody that wanted to could have a look at what the new design was going to look like so everybody was prepared for it, they knew what it was going to be. They knew why we were doing it, we explained it all and they got it and we rolled it out and they still complained. There were still people, "I don't like it." "Well, you've had the opportunity to comment on it for six months and if you didn't like it, you should've said so!" But it's a much better design so people came around and now everybody loves it, so it's fine. |
| Interviewer: | I can totally understand that. I think it's a really good process involving the members into these kind of things. I reckon you always have to deal with the occasional people because you can't make it right for everyone. |
| Respondent: | No, never, but you have to understand our community isn't the 40s to 60s, it's the 16 to 80s. We have everybody. We've got a guy 80 years old currently riding around in India on TVR 125. He's doing fine, he's having a good time. He visits and he goes to the meeting and we've got 16 year olds that are just getting their licence, ready to do some travelling, they think this is really cool. The range of users we have is huge. We definitely have a preponderance of the 40+, those people that have the money for doing something big but there's a lot of 20 year olds that want to do something big because they're out of uni, they've had three years work, they want a break. They've got enough money set aside and off they want to go and that's fine. So there's quite a range |

of people we have to deal with. Some people get all the new fancy technology instantly and others, they're having trouble using a mouse!

Interviewer: We know that just too well here because when we get a support request, we often still have to ask on the phone if they have access to the Internet so we can send them pictures.

Respondent: We've got those. We've got people who tell us that they use our website and that's the only reason they use the Internet at all. Because on our website, they can find out what they want, otherwise they wouldn't touch it, don't want to go near it. That's a problem for support, yes.

Interviewer: You've answered more than I had imagined. It's been really good, really interesting.

Respondent: Glad to help. Anything you get that's useful information to us like this sub community thing, we've just done it, I had no idea it was the accepted thing to do.

Interviewer: The theory behind that is that when you reach a certain amount of members, it can happen that communities grow too big so there's this sweet spot, you can't have too few members because then you don't have this critical mass of people participating. But there's also the spot on the other end which means too many conversations, too many people so if you're your average user that goes onto the community maybe twice a week and in between these two days, there are more posts than can be read in an hour or two, that's when you then get almost alienated from your own community because it has suddenly grown too far.

The other interesting thing when you said you've got members from 16 to 80 is this whole idea of, "This is my community and I want to know as many people as I want." There's a huge part of growing a member base that makes communities sustainable but at the same time, growth has to be managed because if you get too many people too quickly, you end up alienating your normal users, your long term users. The best thing about hub and Horizons Unlimited is this whole idea of offline meetings where people can meet each other and build another layer of trust between the people that they usually only meet on the Internet. That's why I really wanted to include you in this dissertation and wanted to talk to you because I find it amazing and I think it's so valuable for the community that you do these meetings and you have people meeting up.

It's all in the dissertation but if you've now asked, I can tell you things like usually from these meetings in the dissertation they're called traditions because you start … people come to your meeting, then go online and talk about this meeting they've been to so they create a rapport with other users and create a tradition. It is really interesting to see this in practice in your community.

Respondent: Good to know we figured that out!

Interviewer: Did you do any research into community building when you built … ?

Respondent: No, nothing at all. I know I should have but I just never did.

Interviewer: I don't know if you should've because I've read so many of these 'how to' guides and they're not really helpful. On the other end of the spectrum, you have the academic papers that are just not readable and not really applicable. You've done a really good job.

Respondent: Thank you.

Interviewer: You both have done a really good job.

Respondent:	Well, we've been working at it for a long time and we do what feels right, what would make us happy. Probably the number one thing in our heads always is what makes the people that are coming to our website enjoy it and feel good about it and want to come back. Users come first.
Interviewer:	I suppose the fact you guys are so close to your target has helped a lot because like you said, you think about what would I have needed, what would have made my life easier when I was on the road, things like that.
Respondent:	Absolutely. We've had people say to us, "How did you travel before Horizons Unlimited?"
Interviewer:	How was that even possible, yeah!
Respondent:	There is just so much available now. When we left there was absolutely nothing. We knew Ted Simon had ridden around the world, that was literally the only person we knew who'd been round the world on a motorcycle. You think in the UK information would've been limited then but you have no idea how far the back end of nowhere in Canada is. The motorcycle information and stuff, the motorcycle world in Canada compared to the UK is probably one percent of what you've got. So in 1987 when I said I want to ride around the world on a motorcycle, everybody I knew, and these are serious motorcyclists who do all kinds of stuff, they thought I was nuts. Nobody thought there was any sense in doing that, that was ridiculous. It was just not part of the thinking at all, crazy, and there was no equipment, nothing whatsoever. The whole bike was handmade. A friend of mine had a shop and just did it, whereas in the UK even then you could buy all kinds of stuff. It's even easier now whereas still in Canada here, it's shockingly bad, there's so little. It was quite different and it's come a long way, it's so much easier now, it's amazing to us.
Interviewer:	The one thing on my informed consent sheet was, would you mind being quoted in the dissertation or would you rather remain anonymous?
Respondent:	No, that's fine. One question you could answer for me is how do you get advertisers to understand the strength and power of a community like HU and why they really need to be advertising on our site? That's the big question I have.
Interviewer:	For you, our advert on Horizons Unlimited has been incredibly successful.
Respondent:	Send me a quote on that, I want that!
Interviewer:	Yeah, you can have that because over the last nine months, we have our big advertising deals with magazine advertising but I really wanted to have a budget. I did set a budget aside to test out new magazines and new methods so whenever we had a smaller magazine or one we hadn't worked with contacting us, I would always tell them, "Make us a good deal on online advertising either in your email or a banner on your home page or a competition on your home page where we can track the open rates and success rates and after we've done that, then I will decide if I will next year advertise with you guys and put more money in." All bar Horizons Unlimited have not worked out. You would spend £100 for a two week or one month banner advertising and you would get five clicks, ten clicks, 20 clicks so that's incredibly low click through rates or high costs for one click. We've done a deal because we went through to the Indianapolis show in the US and we had a banner on motorcyclists and that only got us maybe 20 or 30 clicks on one of the most popular websites in the US, so it hasn't really worked out.

The last time I checked, that was only three or four weeks into the banner campaign with you guys, we already had 124 clicks after a week or two. Especially with you guys being the biggest player in the adventure bike market, I think you could easily fly that flag and say, "We're the biggest and the best, we have the best information, here are a couple of case studies. Here are some companies that have advertised with us and |

have these click through rates and these success rates." Just showing them and they will see that and compare it to what they've done before.

Respondent: That would be good. If you could write something up for me that I could use like that. Are you aware that Susan and I are both the world's worst marketers?! We're absolutely terrible at it. We know it. We've had no training in it, it's not our core competency. We would really like to have a marketer work for us on a commission basis, so anything at all that you want to throw our way and have time for, we would really appreciate it.

Interviewer: That's really interesting.

Respondent: So if you're looking for some work as a marketer, on 100 percent commission!

Interviewer: I'm definitely going to think about that, thank you very much! I think you've got a brilliant website and a brilliant place that really targets its audience. The targeted audience alone is worth so much money. AT the moment, is it more that brands come to you to advertise or do you reach out? You've got Touratech.

Respondent: They've been with us a long time, we're good friends with the guys at Touratech.

Interviewer: That's probably the one big brand that I can immediately recognise.

Respondent: Edelweiss as well.

Interviewer: Yeah, I've just seen that up here.

Respondent: They're a pretty big player, they don't advertise much on the Internet at all but they're also extremely happy with the results they've had from us and have renewed twice now and absolutely no doubt they're going to be renewing again. They came to us. As to who goes to who, it's 99 percent people come to us. We do virtually no going out and looking and chasing people. I may talk to somebody who's an obvious advertiser and I'll explain what we are but I do very little of that. We were just at the BMW national rally and I talked to half a dozen people who either didn't know about us or knew about us but really hadn't got off their butts, and I think we're going to have some new advertisers out of that.

But primarily, we get two or three a week sending us an email saying, "We'd like to advertise with you." The problem is most of them are too small, small tour companies is probably the biggie. They find our website very fast because you Google motorcycle travel, we're number one and have been since about 2001. They find us quickly, take a look at the website and are blown away usually and want to advertise but as soon as I say it's $400 a month for something, "I was hoping for $5 a month or free." No, I'm sorry! We have ad spots they can do for $50 a month and they can do $100 a year for a banner ad on the links page under tour companies, we've got a fair number of those. But the serious bigger advertisers are the ones that elude us. We're not good marketers. You should be advertising with us – duh, or try and convince them.

We were at BMW at the factory in 2004/5/6 and ended up talking to one of the guys in the advertising department. He said to me, "Internet. Yeah, we're looking at that." I don't think they've done anything since! They have their own BMW World website and they try and grow a community on it and try and get people to come to it but it's a joke. I was just on a special website for the UK yesterday. I could not believe what joke that was. They have a bulletin board, "Ask your question," and they'll try and connect you up with other answers and there's two questions, that's it.

Interviewer: It's funny you say that because the BMW community, I don't know if it's the same one but that's what sparked my interest in this topic because I was looking at this BMW community two and a half years ago. It was a beautiful design but there was no content and no participation. There's nothing going on there so it must've been just chucking

some money at something without having an actual plan or without then following through with it.

Respondent: Or an understanding of what it needs. When they were doing that, we were talking to the guys in the US about that who were the ones behind it and pushing for it. We said, "You should be connecting and advertising with us to promote your community if that's what you really want to do but we already have a community for adventure travellers and you're trying to push the GS." And they had no interest, none. They created this joke and wasted hundreds of thousands of dollars on it. If they'd given us one percent of that, they'd have been ahead of the game overall. But try and convince them, that's where I need somebody who really understands and can connect with these guys and go in and say, "This is what you need to do and this is why." He understands it and talks in terms they understand, marketing speak. I don't talk that!

Interviewer: Those horrible marketeers! Let me have a look at that. I'll put something together for you to help you out and we can just see where we take it from there.

Respondent: Anything we can do to work with you guys, to help promote your product, I think it's a great product and more people should be using it. We're happy to help you guys there and if you want to increase your advertising, of course we're delighted! On a personal basis, if you wanted to do some marketing with us, talk to us, we're very happy to do that.

Interviewer: I'll look into it and come up with some kind of plan.   The one reason I wanted to do a couple of interviews today was because I'm away on holiday tomorrow till next Thursday. I'll drop you a quick email tomorrow but I'm going to be away so if you don't hear anything from me in the next couple of days, that's because I'm on a mini break.

Respondent: Nice, you need those once in a while!

Interviewer: Thank you very much again. I'm not a super keen academic myself. I find reading academic papers quite a lot of work but it's nice to see that these things then are actually reflected into the real world.

Respondent: It's good when theory meets up with fact and they actually coincide somewhat.

Interviewer: I'll drop you an email tomorrow. Thank you.

[End of recorded material]

[Start of recorded material]

Interviewer: It's Matt from Scottoiler. Thank you very much for agreeing to help me out with this, it's very much appreciated.

Respondent: That's all right, if I can help.

Interviewer: My research is about virtual communities. I work full time for Scottoiler, I don't know if you know them. At the start of my research, I wanted to create a virtual community for Scottoiler but then quickly realised that wouldn't be feasible and looked at other communities and what they're doing. Now in total I'm looking at six different communities and how they were created, what did people do when they started off, how did they attract members and where they're going in the future. I've spoken to Grant from Horizons Unlimited and I'm an adventure motorcyclist in my heart, I really would like to do some crazy trips like you've done so it was natural to talk to them. I've asked him if he would know a couple of his users of Horizons Unlimited so I could talk to them and get their view, the users' view so here we are. I don't really have written down questions where you need to answer from one to nine or something silly like that, it's meant to be a nice chat about what brought you to become a Horizons Unlimited user.

Respondent: That's many years ago! I started thinking about doing a motorcycle trip and many years ago, in 2003/4, we went to Peru backpacking with my husband and saw a British bike in a hotel and it had a British number plate. We never got to speak with the guy because by the time we came from wherever, he was gone so I have no clue who it was. I had my suspicions but I don't know, definitely a guy. When we came back, I really wanted to take a year travelling and I had bosses, I had motorbike so I started to think maybe we could do a gap year motorcycling instead of backpacking.

I liked South America and I presented the idea to my husband, he agreed on condition that you do everything, you prepare the trip. I was having a very miserable time at work and I started researching on the Internet and one of my ex bosses who went for a gap year as well came back and he told me, "I met a guy when I was travelling in South America and he was motorcycling around the world and he has a website," and he found the website of the guy. So I read the blog and then I started doing more research and came across the Horizons Unlimited website. I started reading the posts and I thought, "Wow, I'm not just a weirdo, a lot of people are like me!" And that was more the feeling, that all of a sudden I found a place that felt like home, that people could relate to my ideas, my passion.

And because I was preparing the trip, I used that website a lot. I registered with them and once I started preparing the trip, which bike, what medication. Once you start going into details, you end up with thousands of questions and every time you have an answer, it opens to more questions. So I started putting lots of posts, reading lots of blogs and asking lots of questions and a lot of people answered. The website for that was amazing because there was a lot of knowledge and people were very keen to share that knowledge and make suggestions. That became quite implicated into that and then they organise the meetings I started going there.

So we wait a couple of years before going to South America and I took notes, spoke with lots of people. I did a lot of research and I got a lot out of that. When we came back to South America, we travelled for a year. Again, I used the website a lot because it's very much about knowledge and sharing that knowledge and when we were on the road, if you have a problem there would always be someone who could maybe recommend someone to help. I had lots of questions doing the trip and you can use the community pages but essentially, you're always going to have someone who's been ahead of you two or three weeks before who knows that border crossing and someone

can tell you if the border is open, if there is a road or the state of the road. So it was very useful for that.

I had a lot of mechanical problems and again it was very specific information, where can I find the best guy who can do something about them. We made the mistake of travelling with BMW that won't happen again! I broke down a lot and then I had my motorbike stolen in Brazil. Again, I used the community and that was an amazing response, I've never seen that. I sent emails to the local community, the local community sent that to the local motorcycle clubs and I had emails from everywhere in Brazil. People were coming, saying they were watching the border, things like that.

So I was very grateful for the hub because it has been absolutely essential. I don't think my trip would've been as good without them. It would've been much more difficult to get off the ground because we had never done anything like that with my husband. The furthest we went with the motorbike was to go to a Horizons Unlimited meeting in Portugal which was two weeks on the bike, it's an easy life in Europe. Going into South America and doing that, we used the website quite a lot and I felt I was taking a lot but I didn't give back much. So when we came back, they asked volunteers to do presentations so we did quite a few.

Someone suggested within the forum, can we have one of the forums dedicated to women's things so that we can openly discuss women's issues like contraception or whatever. Then Grant set it up and asked me and another girl if we wanted to be the moderators and obviously I agreed with that. I've been trying to answer questions as well because we're trying to give back what we took away. It's a bit of Karma, you take but you have to give back somehow at some point, that's how it feels within that community. As a community of bikers, it's very special compared to other clubs where they go racing. You can have idiots like everywhere but it's a very good community and people are really trying to help.

Then I went away, my husband was off to open an office in Brazil so we left in June 2011. We spent a year and a half, I came back last October so I was in Brazil, I couldn't work, I didn't have a work permit because it's not easy to be a foreigner in Brazil and I contacted Grant because he needed help. He was building a database of travel books so I spent two weeks going through the entire database. I just wanted something to do and I'm always happy to help. They're very good people, I don't know if you met them, but they're really nice people, very inspiring. Lots of people are very grateful that they created that community because by creating that website, they created a community that wasn't there. It's about finding people that are like you that share your passion and before that, it's very difficult at work, even if I have friends who are bikers at work, it's a different view.

99 percent of the people, we are like a catalyst, taking a bike, going the other end of the world. You don't book a hotel, you don't book anything, you have just a complete adventure. It's very, very rare people who do that and finding a community where nobody tells you, "Are you completely mad, you want to travel on a motorbike alone?" You are going to be killed, to be raped, they're going to rob you, etc. You are completely an alien and finding a community where you can spend hours talking about which tyre you should take or the value of taking a Scottoiler on your bike. I'm happy to spend hours on stupid details like that because actually they are not that stupid When you're in the middle of nowhere with your bike, you don't want to break down, you don't want to fall off and break your bike or get injuries. You need to survive, you need bring camping gear, it's a lot of things like that. You have threads for everything, which tent to take, which sleeping bag, do you take panniers, do you take aluminium boxes etc. So you find a lot of information and people share a lot. The attraction is that there are not many people like us so it's nice to find a community where you feel…

Interviewer: Has a special feeling.

Respondent:	Yeah. It could be any sort of community, people who are passionate to backpack maybe would be on a foreign backpack site because they have a passion for … for us, it's motorcycle travelling and it's adventure motorcycle travelling and there are not many people doing that. Maybe a little bit more since Ewan McGregor did those trips but they just inspire people to buy BMW I'm not sure if they inspire people to really travel.
Interviewer:	No, they're not, they've only got to have it in the garage and go about 100 miles on the weekend. Have you seen the community change since Ewan McGregor and Charlie Boorman?
Respondent:	It's raised the profile because when I was preparing the trip, I watched a video on the TV and I got the book because I was curious about the details. But it was very different the way they did it because obviously they had a lot of assistance all the way and it was quite funny. We're going to go to Russia next year, all those things about putting money in your passport, it's ridiculous, this is just a TV show. You can't really take much out of that if you prepare a trip but it was entertaining. I don't know if that changed much. Maybe more people decided that's something they want to do. The community has been growing and growing but it has been slow. The first time I went to one of the meetings in the UK must have been 2004/5 and there weren't that many people, it felt quite intimate. Now I've been this year, it's huge.
Interviewer:	Is it too big?
Respondent:	You don't feel there are that many people but it's changing a bit, everything changes. I'm still using the resources. I know about South America but now I want to motorcycle next year in Mongolia and again, we're going to use the resources of the hub from people who have been there. There are a few people who are quite famous in the hub. There's a guy who's an expert about Russia and he always puts very good input and valuable information in the hub. So it's a community that's going to stick around, taking and giving.
Interviewer:	That's one of the things I read in the literature, what happens when a community gets too big. I know Grant has been working on these local communities where you can email a local community but I thought maybe because you've been a member for so long, you have seen the change over time, how more and more people came to it. But you don't see a problem with that, with more people being a member of Horizons Unlimited?
Respondent:	Not really. It's quite worldwide. The community in the UK is very big, it's the biggest. The meeting this year they had 700 people but if you go to the meeting in Portugal, you'll have probably 30 people. When we did the one in Argentina it was 25 people but only travellers and mainly Germans, lots of Germans seems to be common round the world. The local communities can be quite small. The one in the UK is huge but worldwide, it's really nice to have people from all over the world because they have specific information for the country and that's what you want when you are doing research. You want to know what's happening in such and such country, what's the situation, what's the state of the roads and it can change all the time so you need up to date information.
Interviewer:	I know you've met Grant and Susan, do you think they're responsible for the success of the community because they're so motivated and enthusiastic?
Respondent:	I think so. And there was a guy at the same time who was starting to create a website, I heard about him, I can't remember his name. But he was trying to make money out of it by making people pay or you would get information but you would have to pay. For Susan and Grant, they started the website because they wanted to share and have a community of people like them really. I don't think it was about a business at the time because it was costing them money and I think running the machine etc. And they rely a lot on many volunteers.

Interviewer:	You're probably one of those, you've come from someone who went to the website to find information and then when you came back, you started sharing information and got more and more involved. I think that's really cool.
Respondent:	Yeah, but it's just a nice community. I'm not as active as before because I'm busy at work but I still keep an eye. The women's forum is not very active but again, we just have to keep an eye, it's not hard work. It's just nice. When they have the meetings, we usually try to have them here. This year, we were going to volunteer but then we had a disaster with our dog who was very ill. Usually we try to volunteer, it's just nice. I like to be at the gate with the bikers when they arrive and you tell them where to go, what to do. It's a good opportunity to meet the people. You end up quite a few people and it's nice to be the navigator there.
Interviewer:	I really wanted to go this year with work but we couldn't make it because we're quite a small company so we couldn't get enough staff together to go down there. Maybe next year.
Respondent:	You should definitely go. This year, I've never seen so many vendors, it's becoming really huge. I didn't go the year before because we were in Brazil but this year it was huge. The grounds, you feel like there is a big crowd. There were lots of interesting vendors and I'm sure they will do very good business. I was happy to see CCM, what's the British company doing motorbikes?
Interviewer:	Yeah, CCM.
Respondent:	They were there with a new model and taking feedback from people so that was quite cool, taking suggestions. There's definitely a bit of a gap in the marketing firm of a travel bike that would be lighter and smaller. I'm not going with BMW and for Mongolia what we're going to do because there is no medium bike between the 125 and the 650, you have nothing and what exists in the market, the 250 trail bikes, the fuel tank is too small, the bike is too tall. I'm small, my husband is big so we're going go with … again, discussions in the hub and looking at what people feed back on bikes. We're going to go with a couple little 125 Yamaha and small for Mongolia is going to be the best choice.
Interviewer:	Are you sure you don't want to go with a massive kitted out 1200 GS?
Respondent:	Jesus, no, I've driven that. I've done it with a 650 GS and never again, never!
Interviewer:	Are you a member of other motorcycle communities outside of hub or Horizons Unlimited?
Respondent:	ADV Riders but I rarely go there. It's very different, there is a lot of bragging. It's a very different spirit. The hub is really very specific about people enquiring, asking questions, trying to find information. There is not much chit chat, it's usually about bikes, travel or how you can afford to go travelling, things that don't feature anywhere else. While in the American website, the spirit is very different. It's not as relaxed and friendly. The feel is very different. The Americans are really nice, we went last year to the US with a couple of motorbikes and spent three weeks in Colorado and they're really nice, very friendly. But on the forum, the spirit is very different. So I could use it for specific things about the US maybe but usually I go first to the hub. I'm part of the Versys forum because I have Versys so that's really specific about what can I fit in my Versys.
Interviewer:	Almost like the Horizons Unlimited forum is for your travels and then you've got another forum for technical things?
Respondent:	For technical bits I would probably ask in the Versys forum. But if you put things about travelling, people don't react. You feel like an alien. My husband put it in a way

that's very funny because we came back from South America and we thought it was life changing when we did that trip. Coming back, you go back and meet your friends and after five minutes, their eyes glaze over and that's it, they're not really interested. For us, it was the biggest thing in our lives and something we wanted to talk about but we have zero interest about babies and sheets. My husband told me you did the same thing when they were talking about their kids and I said that's true. If it's a passion, you have to find people who have that same passion and it's difficult to find. Even with the motorcycle communities. Because the Americans are mainly ADVriders. There's not that many who go travelling who do that stuff.

Interviewer: It's more like they'd go off road or something?

Respondent: Maybe, it's very different I find.

Interviewer: I spoke to another guy in another community this morning and they were saying they don't really like the community they're a member of and they do most of their things over Facebook because he's already a member of Facebook. He's got his motorcycle friends on Facebook and talks to them on Facebook. It's just something I was thinking Horizons Unlimited was there before Facebook but maybe Facebook has a bit of competition to Horizons Unlimited?

Respondent: I don't think so, no. It can't because of all the information and the way you want to reach everyone sometimes to ask questions. If you're starting to go on a trip, you're going to say how the specification would ask for advice if I want to motorcycle from London to Vladivostok. It's very difficult to get all the knowledge unless you have a big community. And a big community, you would have it through the firm not through Facebook. I'm not very fond of Facebook anyway! I could be spied on!

Interviewer: The only other question I have, do you think Horizons Unlimited is going in the right direction, they're going to do well in the future?

Respondent: They're extending more and more with the 4 x 4 community and the bicycles but they started quite a few years and this year they had lots of 4 x 4 people coming. Before that, they were much less but most of the questions of the people travelling round the world on a 4 x 4 are going to be the same, as long as they're not specific to your vehicle, it's the same thing – documents, paperwork, surviving on the road. Obviously in a car you can lock yourself inside the car so you have more safety than if you're on two wheels but lots of things are quite similar. As long as the community remains the same and 4 x 4 people maybe are different, I don't know. If we become more a 4 x 4 and bike website, that will change things.

Interviewer: I don't hope that's going to happen, I hope Horizons Unlimited is going to remain the mainly motorcycle travel website.

Respondent: I hope as well, it should be. But you look at the hub itself, you just have a few forums that are 4 x 4 and the rest are bikes. A lot of the forums are not specific to something but as long as the spirit remains and I think the spirit is kept safe to Grant and Susan. Once they stop doing that because they will get old, things might change. Last year, he had cancer, he's much better now.

Interviewer: Then it would be a question of what would happen with Horizons Unlimited.

Respondent: Exactly, what will happen with the firm and the website, I don't know. That would be a shame if the whole thing is shut down.

Interviewer: Let's hope that's not going to happen.

Respondent: I hope not, I hope people will step up but it is a massive commitment for whoever takes over.

Interviewer: That's what they said to me as well, they don't make any money out of this. It's because they are retired they can afford to spend all this time working on it.

Respondent: And for many years, Susan was working but Grant had to spend all the time looking after the website. It is a lot of work, it's a big commitment. I don't think they ever did it for the money but I think they get a lot from the communities and also a lot of respect. They're very good people, they created a good community and I think it's because of the spirit they had creating that website. And as long as they keep that same spirit, it will be fine. I hope!

Interviewer: That's great. Unless you have any questions for me?

Respondent: No, not really. Good luck with your studies.

Interviewer: I've got till the end of September so I need to finish all my interviews till the end of August and then I've got one month to write it all up. I work full time 9 to 5 and have to do this evenings and sometimes when you come home after a long day, the last thing you want to do is sit down again and write. But it's really interesting and it's really nice to write about something I really like as well.

Respondent: Makes it easier I suppose but it's a lot of work. Good luck.

Interviewer: And good luck with your travels and if you need anything from Scottoiler just write me an email.

Respondent: Ok, thank you!

[End of recorded material]

[Start of recorded material]

Interviewer: This is Matt from Scottoiler about the Horizons Unlimited community.

Respondent: Hi Matt. This is a good time because we're probably going out to the beach in a bit so you've got good time. How are you anyway and well done tracking me down.

Interviewer: Good, how are you?

Respondent: I'm very well.

Interviewer: Going to the beach, that sounds nice, I'm stuck here in Glasgow in the pouring rain!

Respondent: I'm the other end of the country, I live at Land's End.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for agreeing to help me.

Respondent: You're welcome.

Interviewer: You said you're going on a big trip soon?

Respondent: I go on fairly big trips as often as I can and in four weeks time I'm off to Madagascar for three months.

Interviewer: With the bike or without the bike?

Respondent: For the first time, it's a bike trip but without my bike because it's just too expensive to ship it out there, it's going to be thousands. More money that what my bike's worth and although generally I'm quite happy to ship my bike to different places, that's because that country is the gateway to a whole new continent or a whole series of new countries. But because Madagascar is an island nation, I'm paying all that money to ship it to the island and then off the island and even to get it to and from the African mainland is very expensive as well. Plus in the past I've ridden and travelled the length of the African east coast so there'd be nothing new on that. So for once, I'm flying there, then I'm buying a bike and travelling around on that for three months, then selling it as I leave.

Interviewer: Sounds amazing, very jealous!

Respondent: Yes, looking forward to it.

Interviewer: I'll tell you a bit what I'm doing. I'm doing my Masters dissertation and I'm doing that on virtual communities. I've been working with Grant for some time now and he was kind enough to agree to help me and I've spoken to him for quite a long time. It's really interesting what he has been saying. Then I want to compare what the creators of these communities to what the users say. In my mind, Horizons Unlimited is a really successful community so that's obviously down to the creators but also down to the users as well.

Respondent: Yeah, the way they've created it has been quite unique in a way because it's so open and welcoming that even – I say even! – people with four wheels use it.

Interviewer: I've got a few questions here but not like an interview where you should rank something between one and nine. I just wanted to ask you from the start, how you got aware of Horizons Unlimited and why you joined and what happened from then on.

Respondent: That's a really good point, how did I become aware of it? I know Horizon started the same year I went off on my first motorbike trip, that was in 1997 or at least I think

that's when it started. That first motorbike trip, to my mind that was when things changed, 1997/8 and that's when more people started using the Internet. I'd never ever used a computer for the Internet up until then and my first trip, my friend and I just decided one day, let's go to India, let's go by motorbike. We didn't have licences or bikes, we couldn't ride at all.

So we went out for five days' training, got our licences and then told people, "We're going to India on a motorbike, going to take one between us because we don't have much money and it's simpler if you've only got the one bike." We started looking round, bought a second-hand BMW R80GS and then two months later, just took off with it. I'm unlike quite a lot of other people where they get the pleasure out of the planning and research and looking ahead to it all, whereas I do tend to be a bit more spontaneous maybe.

Interviewer: It sounds quite spontaneous, yeah!

Respondent: I know that's when they were setting up Horizons but I only found that out a few years later. We set off without any Internet at all and as time went on, we got an email address. I think we'd reached Pakistan or maybe India itself when we found out about this email stuff and Becky got an email address because her stepdad had a compute and knew how to send emails. So where did Horizons come into my understanding? It must have been a year or so after that, who introduced me? Is this a bit of a crap answer if I just have to say, I have no idea.

Interviewer: That's ok. I suppose it just happened because you were so immersed in that culture anyway.

Respondent: Yeah, like osmosis, the awareness trickled through because I was away on that trip for two and a half years so it was 2000 by the time I got back, we didn't stop. I was certainly on Horizons by 2002 because that's when I went off on another big trip, so some time between 2000 and 2002 I must've had someone show me or tell me about it.

Interviewer: In 2002 you were using it to find information or … ?

Respondent: Yeah, and to blog about my trip so that was an Americas trip from Alaska down to Tierra del Fuego and that was a solo one. My friend had met the man of her dreams and gone off to settle down and I still had itchy feet and wanted to explore by motorbike.

Interviewer: Damn those boyfriends!

Respondent: Exactly! Shipped the bike over to North America, got up to Deadhorse Alaska and then rode all the way down to Tierra del Fuego and then up the Atlantic coastline of South America. It got a bit longer than it should've been but that was 14 months on the road solo. I was blogging about it then and asking questions, things like the Panama gap or the Darien Gap in the Panama where, "Ok then, folks, I need to ship out of Panama city, who are the best people to approach?" so it was the practical side of things like that. Also raising an awareness of who else is around, there's someone else in Guatemala, maybe we can meet up for a drink or something.

Interviewer: Did you meet up with them?

Respondent: Yeah. There was an American guy and a German guy somewhere in Guatemala. I had a friend with me for Central America so for about four weeks, I had a friend travelling with me and we stopped in Guatemala to go to Spanish school, brush up on our languages. When you're stopped somewhere, it's so much easier to make contact with others and make arrangements so that's where Horizons came in then. We made contact with others, met up with them, shared stories and then you get the recommendations. I remember one of those guys said, "There's a really nice friendly

hostel in Panama," and told us how to find it and gave us the website for it before we headed south.

Interviewer: And since then, you've been a member of Horizons Unlimited?

Respondent: Oh yes. I came back from that trip and gave a talk. I got back in 2003, was that my first Horizon meeting, might've been. I think it was through another virtual community which would be the GS Club UK, I don't know if you've ever heard of that one.

Interviewer: I know about them, yeah.

Respondent: I think it's through them that I became aware of Horizons actually, thinking about it.

Interviewer: Were there people there saying if you have this question, go over to Horizons Unlimited?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's interesting. So it's more like the members than the community owners saying, "Here, you can go there and for this information you can go over here."

Respondent: Yeah. A couple of members said, "You're really into your travelling, have you seen this resource, have a look at these people," and it totally was kindred spirits. It's how Grant and Susan not sell the idea as such but, "There'll be people who'll make you feel at home because you want to jump on a motorbike and go to Timbuktu or Outer Mongolia." And not be faced with 'Oh my God, that's crazy, how on earth could you manage that?' Definitely it's the kindred spirits and people who won't think you're mad for what you're planning on doing.

Interviewer: I reckon you've met Grant and Susan a couple of times.

Respondent: Yes, I have. They've given me a lot of support over the years. I met them at meetings originally, then I stayed at their house a couple of times over in Canada.

Interviewer: Do you think it's the reason why Horizons Unlimited is successful because they are authentic and did those travels themselves and are enthusiastic about it?

Respondent: Definitely, genuine passion, their sincerity about the joys, challenges and adventures or motorbike travel and their willingness to share it and not be money making or money grabbing about it. It's a much warmer feeling than that, they say let's all share what we know and let's enhance everyone's enjoyment of this and maybe open a few people's eyes to what you can achieve if you've got a motorbike and the urge to travel.

Interviewer: I think the first time I joined Horizons Unlimited, it was still the old website and now it looks great.

Respondent: That's another knock on, people I've stayed with in other places in the world, one of them was Los Angeles and that was Evren and Ergen and Evren is a woman who designs for New Look.

Interviewer: She's a Horizons Unlimited member as well?

Respondent: Not exactly. Their husband – they've now split up and it might be because of motorbike travel but don't tell anyone else I said that – is a motorbike traveller and it was him who got very much involved with Horizons. They're both graphic designers and he's the one who designs the DVD covers and that kind of thing. She's very good at website design so he persuaded her to help with the redesign of the website. It's quite interesting really, she's got a slight interest in motorbikes but it's mainly through her husband that she's got a small dirt bike and wanted to go out riding. Since then, they divorced and I don't think she's got any plans to do any more motorbike stuff.

Interviewer:	When I spoke to Grant and Susan, they said they started running it as a bit of a side project, then Grant did it full time and Susan was still working. But obviously quite a bit of work going into it and also quite expensive. It's probably quite good to have these connections.
Respondent:	Definitely, they put out the word sometimes to say, "Right, do we have anyone with such and such skills who can help us to do X, Y, Z," and then hopefully they do get a response.
Interviewer:	I didn't know that, is that through the forum or is it for more involved members like yourself?
Respondent:	I think they do it in an open way through the forum. They might do it quite area specific as well, for example, they needed someone who could go and interview Ted Simon in Northern California and this is when they themselves were living in England. So they put out the word for anyone in California who could go and interview Ted Simon and film it. It was to a six point camera so it didn't involve a cameraman. They asked a specific area community if anyone had those skills and willingness to do it.
Interviewer:	So the community gets involved and I suppose everyone's quite happy to help.
Respondent:	Yes, everyone's always delighted when they can help, even if it's just a little thing. We all feel we get so much from it that any little thing we can do to give back, it's the least we can do.
Interviewer:	You said in your email you're active in several other online communities.
Respondent:	Yeah, ADV Rider which you must know about. It's very American dominated and I mainly got involved on that one because my motorbike ended up in America on the way home from Mongolia. When I left Mongolia, instead of turning left to come home, I turned right because I thought I'd go to Vladivostok, I might as well reach the Pacific Ocean. I'd set off from the Atlantic. Anyway, the bike ended up in North America so then I joined ADV Rider through meeting other travellers on the road who were raving about this website and I had a look. Very North American dominant and I'd saved up some more money so I could get my bike home. I was about to fly back to America and ride across the States so I thought it would be useful for me to be on such an American dominated one so I started doing a ride report on that.

Just because life's like that sometimes, I ended up going back twice more to North America before I managed to get my bike home last year. I hate to say this, there's a bigger following for the ride reports that they do on there. Even my three months around North America, nothing very exotic, and that was 60,000 views and lots of people chipping in making comments. |
| Interviewer: | Why do you think that is, people like the ride report because you're the second person that's said that? |
| Respondent: | I've got no idea what they're doing so well on ADV Rider. It's definitely a much higher percentage of armchair travellers on ADV Rider whereas people say Horizons Unlimited is those who are definitely out there and doing it. ADV Rider is those who are sitting back watching, commenting and keeping tabs, just looking at what's going on rather than actively going on or even actively planning. They're a very vocal group as well. That was also about promoting my own profile so last year I managed to go back to North America for three months and do a speaking tour about my travels. That was through various contacts, some of them Horizons Unlimited ones, quite a few of them ADV Rider as well as personal friends that I'd met over the years. It was a three month trip that paid for itself and I managed to ship my bike home finally from the States. |

Part of that was through the power of using the online communities to raise my profile and say, "I'm going to be giving a talk at such and such dealership next week in Louisiana. The week after that I'll be in Texas …" It's not necessarily about me thinking I want everyone to know who I am, the reason I do that is to let people know it's not just blokes doing it and that someone who doesn't really know what she's doing and when she started off could barely ride and you don't need pots of money either. And these days, my bike's 22 years old now, it's the same bike we set off with originally, Becky and I, the bike's called Thelma. So I've still got Thelma and I still use her for all my travels, apart from Madagascar. This is a bike I bought second-hand 15 years ago for £3000 and it's still going so it's about letting people know there are alternatives to doing the big bucks, high price bike and being some big guy who can take care of himself and take care of his bike! That's how a lot of people see it so it's raising awareness. As far as I see it, if you've got the urge to do anything, you can achieve anything that you want.

Interviewer: I spoke to a fellow Horizons Unlimited user, Maria, and she's travelling around and she runs the women's only forum on Horizons Unlimited, I don't know if you're involved with that as well?

Respondent: Yes. I don't know if I know her. I know so many of the names and then I think, do I know that person personally.

Interviewer: You maybe know her forum name or something like that, I don't know her forum name but it might be more common to know. At the start, you mentioned the new four wheel community of Horizons Unlimited. I was just wondering if that's something you see as positive or negative? I reckon it's the same mindset but maybe it's still a bit different to Horizons Unlimited?

Respondent: I think there are some people who if you're not on a motorbike, we don't want to know you. There are a few people with that sort of attitude but as far as I'm concerned, if someone's interested in travel or got the urge to travel, it doesn't matter how they undertake it or do it. We've got very much shared common ground, this curiosity about places that are far away and this desire to go and see these places and experience them. I know for some people it's more about a journey such as I'm going to cross from here to there. Or for others, it's about, "I want to go and see such and such." When I wanted to go and see Mongolia, I had a fantastic time on the journey there and hadn't realised how much I would enjoy that as well. For me it was about the destination originally, so there's different reasons we travel but I very much feel four wheels, two wheels, bicycles … I was going to say people who are hitch-hiking but that's a bit different as well.

I think there's space for all of us and it can only be a plus. What happens is those who maybe started off doing motorcycle travel, they have kids or life changes and they decide, "Let's go in a Land Rover next time." Certainly for quite a number of years before we were so openly embracing the four wheel people, I'd meet people somewhere in the Kalahari, some guy in his Toyota Landcruiser thing and he'd be extolling the virtues of Horizons Unlimited saying, "They're the best information, the best on practical information about border crossings, visas, customs and all the rest of it. They do the best on that out of any of the forums." Some people did feel they were coming in the back door a bit and lurking and learning because they were four wheels rather than two.

Interviewer: I've not been that long with Horizons Unlimited but I suppose at some point they made a decision to open it up for four wheelers as well?

Respondent: That's it, yeah. Then they started opening it up and the cyclists have said the same thing when I've come across cyclists in the past. But I think we were more open towards cyclists before we were to the four wheelers.

Interviewer: Because it's two wheels.

Respondent:	Yeah, I always liken it to the Animal Farm thing where it was four feet good, two feet bad and we're just like two wheels good, four wheels bad! It's really naughty of me to say that but I do it in a very tongue in cheek way, I don't think that at all, I just do it to tease the Land Rover drivers.
Interviewer:	That's something I've found in the literature. On the one side I can understand that at the start it was all about the two wheelers, the motorcycles, but this different idea of welcoming new members. Can you remember any bad experiences or anything about when four wheelers were either lurking before or started joining the community?
Respondent:	No, I don't think I can. I've got some friends who've only ever been four wheelers and they set off in 2009 and they were very openly on Horizon saying, "We're doing our Land Rover trip." They've only ever felt welcomed. I've never been aware of there being anything seriously negative.
Interviewer:	That's good. I suppose it's in the Horizons spirit as well to be open.
Respondent:	That's it, we're all travellers together and we all need to help each other.
Interviewer:	Was there anything outside of that, anything negative about the community or something that happened in the past that you didn't like?
Respondent:	Sometimes it would be the same whatever the forum, whether it's a travel one or not, something can be said online and it can get interpreted in different ways and then twisted. Before you know it, you're thinking that's not the original meaning. I don't think I've ever on Horizons but something on YouTube where there's a BMW video made of me and they had a microphone attached to me and I talked for three days, no script, just talked about my travels, my life and my lifestyle. Some of the comments that are then made, because one of the things I was saying, a lot of people dream about travel and maybe especially motorbike travel for some and I feel really lucky I get to achieve my dreams. I get to travel by motorbike and what I went on to say is I can achieve that because that's what I prioritise in my life, dream of a place, think I want to go there, go on my motorbike, I'll save up my money and go and do it. But that bit got edited out so it just said I'm really lucky I get to achieve my dreams.

Then there was a bit of a backlash with people saying, "Some rich bitch, BMW rider, she gets to do all this," and it was like no actually, I'm just like any other traveller. You save up your money, you work hard and when you travel, you travel cheaply. I'm quite frugal and that's how I achieve it. I had someone saying, "I bet she's got a trust fund behind her," and it's like, oh yeah! So that's some of the negatives you can get. There's always going to be people who are trying to put you down and when you're out there in a public forum, it's much easier for people to take potshots and try and shoot you down. |
Interviewer:	If you send me a link to your video, that'd be quite interesting because I've got that dream as well, going off at some point and going travelling.
Respondent:	Definitely worth it. I will send you that, it's automatically on my emails anyway, except I usually delete it. It's usually on the bit at the bottom. I get a bit shy about sending it out sometimes but I'll send you an email with the link to it and you can have a look. But if you Google my name, it sometimes comes up. I feel like I haven't been very helpful and I don't know how much you're doing about online communities but I'm quite an active member of couchsurfer.com.
Interviewer:	I've got six motorcycle communities but that's mostly just because I'm working in the motorcycle industry so what's the easiest for me to get hold of. But it's always interesting to hear because everyone I talk to is a member of a handful of communities or at least two or three. A couple of the guys I'm talking to off Adventure Bike Rider, I don't know if you know them, this is the UK magazine.

Respondent: Yes, have you been talking to James Owens or Sarah Jane, Emily Jane?

Interviewer: Everyone is a member of one or two and everyone on the Adventure bike riding scene is a member of at least Horizons Unlimited and ADV Rider, then maybe a couple of others. I suppose you use couchsurfing.com for when you're on the road?

Respondent: Yeah, but I've ended up hosting far more than I've used it which has been fun. Quite often I'll have people looking at my profile on it and saying, "You're a motorcyclist, I'm coming down on my motorbike." One weekend I had three Italian motorcyclists come and stay. That's the sort of thing I love. Where I live is fairly remote, it's not on the way into anywhere so I love having visitors. I sound like such a sad lonely person but I live in a shared house anyway and I love having people down and getting people from overseas where you can learn so much more about them and where they come from.

Interviewer: The one question I've asked everyone so far is what do you think is the most important element of making a community successful?

Respondent: What works for me with Horizons Unlimited and I'd say that's incredibly successful is the fact that it is a genuine passion on Grant and Susan's behalf about the subject, motorcycle travel, seeing the world, getting out of your comfort zone and trying something new. It's a genuine sharing of that passion and enjoyment.

Interviewer: You mean from the creator of the community, if the creator is really passionate?

Respondent: Yeah, because that infects those who join or take part in the community and you're naturally going to be absorbing it and reflecting it and it grows from there.

Interviewer: Do you think that might be the problem with other communities that are not successful, that there's no-one passionate behind that? Maybe it's just something to make money.

Respondent: Yeah, it could be and the UK GS, they've had various splits over the years. Having fairly strong leaders who are very clear in what they're doing, that has an effect as well.

Interviewer: What happened to the UK GS, you said they had some splits?

Respondent: That goes way back, 2001 I think. It got set up by someone who was very farsighted about it, even if he wasn't the nicest of people himself, and then got together this community of GS riders who were all into their GS riding, "We either have a GS bike or we aspire to it, let's do this, let's do that." This is the version I've heard and I know everyone involved so I think it's probably true. Having got this database of people who were all interested, he was then on the point of trying to sell that database to BMW Marketing without people knowing. I don't really care one way or the other, I can ignore junk mail but the person who had control of the website side of things said, "Hang on, you can't do that," so there was a split then. There was a split later on again where the person who controls the website disagrees with others and it's quite interesting the power struggle. It wasn't about one person wanting to have the power, it was just different ideas for the direction UK GS should take.

Interviewer: Was that all discussed on the forum? How did the users hear of that?

Respondent: I think what happened was those of the central core of old timers on it, it boiled down to should we have formal registration and get people to pay and therefore have liability insurance for social events. Because one of our senior members up in Scotland had hosted something that was non GS, it was some other bike riding thing and he'd led a ride out. Someone had had an accident on his ride out, it was the rider's own fault and they quickly said, "It was my fault, I didn't see the slippery patch," or whatever it was. Anyway, did some damage to their bike and they claimed on their comprehensive insurance. "I damaged my bike out riding, I need to claim to get the damage repaired,"

and the insurance company somehow found out that they were on an event and then sued the person who organised the event and led the ride out. This guy had two years of torment, almost losing his house because of that. So he looked into it a bit more.

The person who was claiming from the insurance company said, "It's not his fault, it's my fault," but the insurance company weren't having it. As soon as they have someone in their sights, they're gunning for them. So then he was saying to the GS's, "We have great times at GS events but if someone does have an accident, we need to cover whoever is responsible for organising that particular event. They've got to feel safe that they're not going to lose their house as a result," or whatever assets they may have. The old guard, the main movers and shakers somehow had discussions on the phone, maybe online, it wasn't openly online I don't think. Then they asked me because I've just started running an annual event for the GS. I looked at the list of names and thought this is all the people who are the most well known names in the club and they're all saying we think we need to go this way with it, having registration and therefore having liability insurance because we'd hate for someone to get stung on this, all because they're trying to help the club. But the one person who disagreed was the one who had control of the website so that's when the split happened.

I'm not saying he's right or wrong. I agreed we should have liability insurance because at an earlier meet, I'd broken my wrist in a ride out and therefore had to leave my bike behind, get the train home and then couldn't work for a while. If I'd have been someone who had kids and a mortgage and needed some sort of income, I maybe would've had to try and get some sort of insurance or payment but luckily I wasn't in that position. I could live on my savings for a bit, so I could see the importance of it from that point of view. If someone happens to someone on a Lands End ride out, if I'm going to get stung for something for them, then maybe we should have this liability insurance.

That's where it went and then because the person who handles the website can control all the communications, all most people knew was there'd been some big split, some people had gone off in a huff and set up an alternative club. Basically they were setting up a GS club that did have registration and liability stuff whilst the original website carried on how it was without the liability stuff going on. How it then appears on the website is quite heavily censored by the person who controls it but saying that, he's a friend of mine. He had his reasons. I might not agree with them but he just thinks we shouldn't be feeding into the insurance and the liability culture that we have!

Interviewer: These little kind of stories that happen around these communities, they're really interesting because I can imagine you maybe lose a really good moderator or some really important members which then could lead to the community almost dying down because from one day to the next, you suddenly lose your top 20 contributors or something like that. I've actually got no other questions, unless you have any questions for me, otherwise I'll let you go to the beach and enjoy your day and not spend your entire day on the phone!

Respondent: I will do that, but if you do have any more questions, do just drop me an email or give me a call but I bet you're just working your fingers to the bone now to try and complete it.

Interviewer: Yeah, I've got to do all the research by the end of August, then I've got another month to write it up. It looks all right, it looks like I'm going to do it. It's one of those things I'm doing this part time and then work always came in between it and when you start and stop, you never really get anywhere. I've just got your email, thank you very much, I might just watch that now instead of working on my literature review!

Respondent: It's only a few minutes long and it is in the interests of research! It appears several times on YouTube where different people have posted it up. I don't know if you'd get any more information about online communities from people's comments, negative or positive on it.

Interviewer: I will definitely include it because it's an interesting part, the fact that Horizons Unlimited has this open culture where there are no people bitching about other people. I think that's what led to their success as well because it can easily shut down a community if it's quite a hostile environment. That's great, thank you very much and all the best in Madagascar. I'll bookmark your blog and say in touch.

[End of recorded material]

[Start of recorded material]

Interviewer: It's Matt from Scottoiler. First of all, thank you very much for helping me, it's very much appreciated.

Respondent: No problem.

Interviewer: I'm doing my Masters dissertation about virtual communities and I've been speaking to the RealRider guys, to Zoe and Andrew, and they forwarded me your email. I don't really have any questions from one to nine, it's just meant to be a nice friendly chat. I thought if you could run me through how you came to using RealRider, that would help me a lot.

Respondent: I don't know, it's too long ago! I think it came via a post on Facebook. No it wasn't, it was that Zoe was on my LinkedIn network and she'd put a post up about RealRider and I think I downloaded the app from there.

Interviewer: Are you in the motorcycle sector as well?

Respondent: Yeah, of course.

Interviewer: That's how the connection was made, then?

Respondent: My LinkedIn profile, myself and three others are trustees of a charity so our network is quite wide around business as well as media and all sorts of things I have on my LinkedIn profile purely to get the word out about what the charity's doing, not necessarily that she was there because it was motorcycle orientated. It was probably more there because RealRider was a platform in which we can get the message out.

Interviewer: So you work together with them to promote your charity as well.

Respondent: Not closely together but I like to think their platform assists us with what we're doing. I was involved with Andrew with some of the early app testing. I helped them out a bit as well as them helping me out.

Interviewer: Now you're almost like a beta tester for them.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: How do you find that? What I'm looking for is the process how RealRider will develop in the future and obviously getting users like yourself involved is quite a big part of that.

Respondent: I think you'll find with those like myself, I've been riding now for 27 years. I've spent time instructing. We have quite close connections with the road policing units, bike rides, bike sales, that sort of thing that people like myself will automatically be constantly on the watch out for things like RealRider that turn up, purely because you're interested in the sport.

Interviewer: How do you find it? Do you think it's going to make a big difference?

Respondent: There's elements of it that are very useful. There's ideas they've got in mind that may be more useful for others than they will be to me but generally, it's a tool of the trade and it's an asset to have. Things like the emergency assist are always worth having, for any rider who's out riding by themselves. The online platforms can be for families that are at home so if people are out and about, you can save the route. Families know where you are, how far away from home. It's a good tool to have. I wouldn't say it's a social platform, not at the moment, although the aim is that it will become that.

Interviewer:	That's what I thought when I looked at it and I felt it's a great tool but still lacking the sociability aspect.
Respondent:	It's got a long way to go before it can keep up with the likes of Facebook and Twitter.
Interviewer:	It's something for the motorcyclists so I don't think it wants to compete with Facebook or Twitter.
Respondent:	No, but as a motorcyclist, you tend to use the features of Twitter and Facebook so people know where you are, not necessarily in the community but people who are just friends.
Interviewer:	Did you mention to either Andrew or Zoe what you said, that it's still lacking a bit of social features?
Respondent:	Yeah, I'm sure they're quite aware of what it's good at and what it's not good at. There's things it is good at although it does have some quite stiff competition. The route recording is quite good but it's not the best. There is still better out there.
Interviewer:	I wasn't aware of that.
Respondent:	There's another app that I use, I use a range of apps, doesn't matter if I'm on the motorbike or walking or whatever. There's two. One is called Ways and the other one's called [Unintelligible name 7:16] If you go to my website, I think it's Realtime GPS that we use so you can set the transmission times of the GPS on your phone every ten minutes back to the server. It'll ping it back and show it live on a web page, pretty much the same as Tracker will do. The only disadvantage is it does restrict it to three, the web API is only able to use three different bikes so for any one person who has their own personal website and they want to put their phone in their pocket and set its pinger ever 15 minutes, you can actually see where people are in the world. It is a global GPS tracker as well rather than just UK.
Interviewer:	That's pretty good. Did you say you're a member of other motorcycle communities as well?
Respondent:	Yes. As far as the motorcycle community is concerned, we're not members of clubs as such because of the politics associated with clubs but we like to have friends in different clubs around the country. We do get together with different groups, yes.
Interviewer:	I was more thinking about online motorcycle communities. I'm a member of RealRider but I'm also a member of Horizons Unlimited and Visordown.
Respondent:	The short answer is no, just purely RealRider is the only application and web app that we use. Most of the stuff we do, we run our charity around motorcycles because we have lots of bikers and riders and things like that. But we don't want to limit ourselves purely to motorcycles so we use more common interfaces where we can talk to people so we're very much into Facebook and Twitter and not so much just the motorcycling stuff.
Interviewer:	That's interesting because I spoke to another of the RealRider users this morning and she said exactly the same thing. She really likes RealRider and that's the main reason for her to use it. She's not really using anything else.
Respondent:	Yeah, it's the features of the app. At the moment, it's a tool, it's not a platform.
Interviewer:	One question I have here on my little piece of paper is even with regards to RealRider, what do you think are the most important elements to make it a successful community instead of just an app?

Respondent: As a community, I think it's got a long way for it to compete. I don't think it's ever going to compete with the likes of the closed or open groups on Facebook or Twitter. As a community, I can only ever see it as an application that's of benefit to you and the group you may be riding with.

Interviewer: Even if they would add something like a group feature or a forum?

Respondent: I'm in my early forties. The lads I ride with are between the ages of 25 and 60 and you'll find with a lot of them older than me is they don't use Smartphones. If they do use Smartphones, they haven't got a clue how to make the best of them and as a result, they know their way around Facebook but that's as good as it gets. They won't put any extra learning new platforms and quite a lot of the lads I ride with haven't got RealRider and have absolutely no interest in it whatsoever. They've been riding for 30 years without it, why should they bother now.

Interviewer: That's true. It's funny because that's what Zoe said as well, the girl from RealRider, she said guys coming to them had an old Nokia phone and asked if they can put this … they're interested in the platform but because they don't use a Smartphone, they can't use it.

Respondent: Yes. So many of my friends are still using the early HCCs and early Blackberrys and they don't upgrade their phone or software, they just got the phone out the box and that's how they use it. So from that point of view, it's always going to be difficult for RealRider to target anyone much older than I am.

Interviewer: That's interesting. You would say it's going to be predominantly Facebook and Twitter and RealRider's going to be like an app, that's what the main use is going to be.

Respondent: The way it stands at the moment, yeah.

Interviewer: That was one of the things I noticed when I first went on RealRider, the absence of a forum. I'm quite young, I'm up here in Scotland and I would rather use a forum where I could actually talk to people rather than having to find friends on RealRider.

Respondent: The days of forums are really for the techies and the geeks. Coming from that sort of background myself, I graduated in Computer Studies back in the early Nineties so I've grown up with forums as a way of communicating. I think now you've got such easy access to instant messaging and group messaging, what's the point of the forum, other than to answer really technical questions? And I know I've probably moved a long way away from when I used these forums as a general point of talking, so now it's just for searching for anything technical you want or problems you want to solve. I know people who are into, let's say, aviation or into flight simulators will use forums to discuss topics. But would you use it to discuss motorcycling? I don't think so. I don't know if you've been following lately about the Royal British Legion riders on Facebook, they have their own forum and they recently decided to close down their Facebook page. All hell has let loose because so many of them have said, we don't like the forum. Because you've got that instantaneous … if you like chat without having to log in via a web page to a forum.

Interviewer: So they actually preferred the Facebook page?

Respondent: Much preferred the Facebook page compared to the forum they've already got.

Interviewer: Are they going to keep the Facebook page?

Respondent: I think they've decided to keep it as a closed group on Facebook.

Interviewer: I might even try and contact them, that might be interesting to talk to them.

Respondent: It might be interesting in talking to their web guys about using the forum compared to Facebook. Don't get me wrong, Facebook has it's pluses and its minus points but generally, people are happier using things like Facebook and Twitter than they are using forums.

Interviewer: Using yet another platform.

Respondent: If you want to put a message out, I'm sure that RealRider, if they want to tell the world about what they're doing wouldn't use their own forum, they'd use Facebook or Twitter.

Interviewer: That's really interesting. I only had a couple of questions, unless you have anything you want to mention or ask me?

Respondent: No, I was just interested to see what the whole idea was regarding the research, what was the aim of the research.

Interviewer: I work in marketing for Scottoiler and initially my idea was to create a Scottoiler community but as soon as you think about it, there aren't going to be many people who want to have another forum about chain maintenance or something like that. We've got a Facebook page with 2000 followers so that is quite successful but when I looked into it, I met Andrew and I found a couple of other communities that I know are starting up, especially motorcycle communities. And I wanted to understand the process they're going through having to compete against established communities like Motorcycle News or Visordown and on the other side, they have to compete against Facebook and people organising things on Facebook. The one interesting thing about RealRider was their feature of tracking your ride, I've got it on my phone and I think it's a good idea. I don't think they make enough out of the social features because they don't have a forum on their website so I feel they're maybe missing out a bit.

Respondent: I've got 3500 Twitter followers and close to 600 Facebook followers and we get monthly between 500 and 700 downloads of our newsletter so we're not particularly big. We tried to launch a forum and we got about seven or eight people signed up.

Interviewer: So you're not only a user of RealRider, you're also someone that's in the position and has tried that yourself, that's really interesting.

Respondent: I've no idea why. We did put a poll out on Facebook to ask people why and never got any responses to it. We thought we'd crack four or five thousand people, we average just over half a million hits on our website every year.

Interviewer: That's pretty big.

Respondent: So we thought we'd have a reasonable sign up to a forum and we didn't.

Interviewer: Did you advertise it through your newsletter?

Respondent: Yeah, through our newsletter, Facebook and Twitter feeds and also had a banner on our website but we still didn't get people signed up.

Interviewer: What do you think the reason was?

Respondent: I think because people are very happy with social media as it stands. They're very comfortable, people aren't wanting to move away from the standard, from the dead-easy. If you want to go on a forum on your mobile, iPad or phone, you've physically got to go on the Web and log in. It's not a case of the notification is going to come through to you. You just click on the little Facebook thing and up it pops. People become lazy I suppose and very set in their ways.

Interviewer:	What was the focus, what was the topic of your forum? How did you want it to drive people to your forum?
Respondent:	We're actually a grant funding charity that promote other charities in the charity world by giving members of other charities a voice, just to let people know what we were doing and try and build more support. But we didn't get the take up. I personally think linking in with other like minded groups is a much better way to get the message out. We can put a post on our Facebook page. If we just send a quick message to somebody else who's got 60,000 or 70,000 Facebook rights, we can see our reach up at 100,000 or 200,000 within a few hours. There's no other way we can do that without spending a lot of money.
Interviewer:	The seven or eight that did sign up, did you talk to them afterwards?
Respondent:	Absolutely but they were of the same idea as we were, they'd grown up with the forum idea and I don't think that's something the under 30s have a great deal of knowledge of or interest in. I may be wrong.
Interviewer:	Do you think you'll try it again maybe via Facebook? Like you say, it's a convenience thing.
Respondent:	I think there's two aspects to running a forum. The first one is the cost of setting it up, installing it and more importantly moderating it. The other side of it is getting users to go on there and have constructive conversations. I think people don't want so much to have conversations as to get information. People want RealRider to find out which roads are closed, which are full of potholes, which are covered in diesel and stuff like that but they're not interested in who's actually found those potholes.
Interviewer:	How do you think RealRider is going to manage that? I've only been on RealRider to look if there are any roads near me, I'm have a quick look and then off I went again.
Respondent:	You'll probably find 90 percent of the users are exactly the same. How can they change it? I have absolutely no idea! I think it's just become that digital thing, that people will use the Net to give their opinion or to look at what something says but not engage with what other people have said. For instance, you've only got to look at the X Factor, how many people Tweet when the X Factor is on. They're giving their opinion but they're never going to get a reply and they know that.
Interviewer:	It's just to voice their opinion.
Respondent:	Yeah, I'm saying what I want to say and they will look maybe on the ITV website to find out what's happening but never leave a comment in any of the news feeds. Do people still follow RSS feeds? I don't know, maybe business people do but I don't think Joe public does. I certainly don't.
Interviewer:	I only do it for Scottoiler for business reasons.
Respondent:	Yeah, for your own technical or stuff you may be interested in but not for a general … I think with RealRider, it forms part of a social activity. If your social activity is a football or swimming club, you will follow what that club is doing but you won't necessarily want to know what the rest of the football or swimming world is doing. That's it with RealRider, you may have one or two friends on RealRider who are people you ride with on a fairly regular basis but would you be that interested in what everybody else is doing? Probably not. I've got the app, I think that's superb, I think it's come a long way since I first sat down with Andrew and managed to set the emergency assist up in the petrol station and we spent a bit of time bouncing round roundabouts and all the speed bumps locally. I don't live a million miles away from where Andrew's living.

But other than that, the personal benefits, is there any community benefit and I don't think there is at the moment. I don't know how to create that, purely because it's a web based application. If that web based application could be as easily accessed as you can with Facebook or Twitter where you can see timeline feeds, what other people are doing, where you can post all via your mobile, then maybe it will be but not as a forum. I don't think it's anything I would be interested in getting involved with.

Interviewer: That's basically my interest in this research, to find out what they could do or what other communities could do to become successful and facilitate that social element. The one community that I've been talking to and that I think is really good at this is Horizons Unlimited, I don't know if you know about them?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: They are a forum or a community of adventure bike riders, so they do these round the world trips and the one thing they've done really well is organise meetings. They do over 50 a year all around the world and there was one in the UK a couple of weeks ago and that seems to be a successful thing, that they meet and you don't just have a user name online, you actually meet the people you talk to online and you can put a face to a name.

Respondent: That wouldn't interest me personally but that doesn't mean that thousands of others won't. As an application, it's applicable to everyone from age 16 to age 90 if they're on two wheels with an engine. It can be used as a tool. How you can then take that membership and create a community from it, you're never ever going to accommodate that full spectrum of people, are you?

Interviewer: Exactly, that's going to be the problem.

Respondent: I don't know if you remember going back to 2010, there was a charity ride to raise money in respect of a boy that died of cancer. That started out with one girl in Peterborough putting on her timeline a post, she was 17 on a 125, inviting a couple of her friends to ride over to RAF Lyneham and then ride. Four months later and 22,000 bikes later, that was turned into a ride. That was done via Facebook, purely and wholly via Facebook. If RealRider had 22,000 members, I can't see how one post on one of their timelines would reach that far.

Interviewer: Would you say that the RealRider membership focus is too wide and they've tried to target too many people?

Respondent: No, I think they've done well, the emergency assist is something every rider should ride with. I think the route rider and recorder is a good idea but I think are you trying to put too much into one application. Aren't you best doing what you're good at best? If you're good at making round wheels, you're not going to diversity into making square wheels as well, are you? They've got a unique selling point with the app as it stands and once it's working exactly as they want it, why not just stick with that. I don't think they're ever going to exhaust the people to sell to. I don't know how many motorbikes are on the road in this country but if they sell to all at a fiver a piece, they're going to be fairly rich people I would imagine. They've got that unique selling point, the emergency assist, the route recorder. If they could have that where people could embed that into their blogs or their web pages and have a real time factor for their families to look up, I think that is as far as the app needs to go.

Interviewer: So basically focusing on the app and leaving the social features to the established social communities.

Respondent: To establish around what they've already got on Facebook. They've already got X number of people signed up using the app, do they have that many people using the app actually liking their Facebook page?

Interviewer: I don't know, I think they have about 10,000 people using the app and about 2,000 or 3,000 on Facebook.

Respondent: There you are. So are people that interested in the social aspect? Or are they interested in the app?

Interviewer: You're right, almost all people did join RealRider for the app.

Respondent: I think what they're doing they're doing really well and why mess with something that's already working.

Interviewer: That's really interesting, thank you very much.

Respondent: No problems. I hope whatever they decide to do is as good as what they've already got.

Interviewer: Keep in touch. If we at Scottoiler can do anything for you guys, just drop me an email.

Respondent: If Scottoiler want to throw me a Scottoiler, I'd be more than happy!

Interviewer: I'll see what I can do!

Respondent: If you need any more help with anything, please don't hesitate, give us a shout.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

[End of recorded material]

Rachel

[Start of recorded material]

Respondent: Hello.

Interviewer: Hi, is that Rachel?

Respondent: Hiya, speaking.

Interviewer: Hi, yeah it's Matt from Scottoiler.

Respondent: Hiya, Matt.

Interviewer: Hi, how are you doing?

Respondent: Not so bad, thanks.

Interviewer: Yeah, thank you very much for agreeing, is this a good time to talk or should I call back later?

Respondent: No, that's fine, no, no, no, you're fine, I'm only cleaning my bike anyway so there's no problem.

Interviewer: Perfect timing then. Have you been out on a ride?

Respondent: I went for a test drive this morning on Royal Enfield 500 classic.

Interviewer: Oh nice.

Respondent: So it's a …

Interviewer: I lived in India for a while and I had one of those, they're beautiful.

Respondent: Ah, beautiful bikes aren't they?

Interviewer: They sound amazing.

Respondent: Really enjoyed riding it this morning, yeah, they do don't they?

Interviewer: Yeah, well basically what I'm doing, I work for Scottoiler full time but I do like a past time Masters degree and I've talked to Zoe and I talked to Andrew from REALRIDER about their community, because that's what I'm doing my Masters on.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: And I've asked them if they know a couple of people that are fairly engaged in the community that maybe have been there for some time and that would be able to help me with some of my questions.

Respondent: Yeah, that's fine, that's no problem at all, I mean we've all got to go through uni and if we help each other out, you know, bonus for, bonus for me, I don't mind.

Interviewer: Yeah. Basically the nice thing is that what I'm doing is not like a questionnaire with ask questions with answers from one to nine or something like that, it's just basically meant to be a nice friendly chat.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer:	Yeah, so the topic of my dissertation is like the process, how communities are created and how they're sustained and how they become successful and I think that REALRIDER's doing a really good job.
Respondent:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	But from like a user's point of view I kind of wanted to know like how you became aware of it and what your journey was from like finding out about it to joining it to like becoming a really engaged member.
Respondent:	Well I found about it because my boyfriend actually bought a paper, it was in one of his papers and there was like a review about it and all that kind of stuff, and he said well it's a fiver's worth but it's worth it. So I was looking at the web page and the web page was showing it was for free, so I thought well for a freebie let's just try it out and see what happens and since then, I use it most days now.
Interviewer:	Oh wow.
Respondent:	I've got, most of my friends I'm trying to get involved in this system as well. I actually set off the emergency assist three times in the same day, I had the ambulance service ringing me and all that kind of stuff on the first couple of attempts. And then Andrew put on the actual site itself, well, don't use the emergency assist, it's too responsive. So of course I didn't get that message and I just set it off and off I go, the next minute it goes off and then Andrew phones me, it's like, well, what are you doing phoning me? I thought I was going to get a phone call from the ambulance, and he goes oh no, it's just because we're supposed to be having the emergency switched off, I'm just making sure that you're all right, that sort of thing. So it kind of went on from there and I've got a few of my friends involved in it now, because I'm part of a motorbike group anyway, called Open Air Riders, in the local area, so they, a lot of people ask me about it and say is it worth it? And I just try to get loads of people on as much as I can. But I just use it to basically record my routes and share my routes with my friends basically. So that show I got in to it anyway, so.
Interviewer:	Okay, so I mean it's a fairly fresh and young community.
Respondent:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	But are you a member of any other motorcycle communities online?
Respondent:	No, it's just really, just REALRIDERS and Open Air Riders, to be honest Open Air Riders take up a lot of my time because I'm part of their committee as well, I'm doing their like a newsletter for them every four months and I've got, I work full time as well, I'm a full time carer as well on top of that. So I don't get out much in to groups but I do go out most days on my own bike on my own and I've actually got a ride out tomorrow where I've got one guy from my club bringing a few of his old mates along. So I do a lot of routes that I put on Facebook and stuff and ask people to just join along I they want to, so.
Interviewer:	Sounds nice.
Respondent:	Yeah, it keeps me occupied anyway.
Interviewer:	Yeah, no, it's really interesting, so you basically joined REALRIDER because of their mobile phone app off this emergency phone?
Respondent:	I did, yeah. I mean my boyfriend is always a little bit iffy about me going on the bike and it was really for his reassurance over mine. And now I've got it I can't go anywhere without putting it on, I feel like it's an emergency support network that if I was to come off, because I do a lot of routes where there's nobody that runs down

the roads that I use, and I just think it's absolutely brilliant that something's there to actually help me if I needed it. And at the end of the day if it does go off at least I know that someone's watching my back, because we all help each other in the biking community anyway, don't we? So it's quite good.

Interviewer: Yeah. Like one of the things here that I have written down is basically is there anything you don't really like about the REALRIDER online platform?

Respondent: The platform online? Oh, I've got to think now. I find the searches, people in the local area, a little bit difficult to use, but I'm starting to get the hang of that now, I think it was just a matter of trying to get used to it more than, rather than there was any problems. And it's a little bit difficult to also, when you've done the ride, to share the route directly on to Facebook or anything like that. You can put it on but there's people who aren't on REALRIDER who would like to know the routes that I've used, but there's no share function for that. So there is a couple of little glitches, but there's nothing drastic, that's really the only thing I can think of.

Interviewer: Have you mentioned that to Zoe or Andrew?

Respondent: No, no, to be honest I haven't had the chance to and I know they've got another version coming up and going anyway so I thought well I'll leave it until the version comes out and then see what they do. Because I've given a couple of little updates on a few things I think they should change, like when you're actually using the app there's nothing online to say you need to have the sound up on your phone, because if you don't have the, if you have the volume off for like your apps and stuff like that, if you don't have that up then the siren doesn't go off in your pocket, it just stays silent, it still does vibrate, it just doesn't sound. So there's things like that, that I've mentioned, but it's just little things that I thought well, they're still new, let's give them a chance to do what they need to do first and then see if I can, I don't want to give them too much and then them go oh God, she's asking again, you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yeah, no that's the interesting bit that I'm basically looking at is how this whole like users play together with the creators and if you suggest some feedback do the creators, do they take that feedback on and how do they develop their community?

Respondent: Well what site was it? I cant even remember now, I think there was, oh the, you know the delete function that they've got on the routes, that they've now got? Yeah, I said well that might be an idea because there's some routes that I don't particularly want to share that, you know, so they've developed that as part of their thing because they were this about that anyway, but I think because I've mentioned it they've put that in the latest version, which is quite good. But I can't really think of anything, I speak to Andrew so many times I can't actually remember these days, but I think that's one of the things that they've done for me anyway.

Interviewer: Is that like you call Andrew or he calls you and asks for your feedback?

Respondent: Well I get a lot of the, I do quite a lot of the testing for them of the new versions, they've got me one of their lists anyway, I don't know whereabouts, but they've got me on the list that I'm quite happy to test out the new versions. Like with the algorithm with the phone, the phone I've got is a Nexus 4, they were having problems with the emergency assist going off quite regularly. So I said to them well send me the newest version, I'm quite happy to test it out for you and let you know if there's any problems or anything, which my phone is encased with a magnet on it and it went off quite a few times with the magnet. So I mentioned that to him and he developed it again, and I'm back and forth with the emails rather than phone conversations to him, but there's a few things that we talk about quite regularly, so. But it's basically how are you getting on and all that kind of stuff, so.

Interviewer:	That's interesting, so you basically, you see like the new versions before everyone else sees it?
Respondent:	Yeah, more or less, he sends me quite a lot of new versions. I haven't got the latest one yet, but the android app, I was one of the first ones to get it and I was one of the first, I think it was the 4.2 version, was 4.1 version? I can't remember now, but he sends it to me in an email link, so I got that before anyone else just to see if it was working or not, so, which was quite good.
Interviewer:	Yeah, no, it's really nice that they do like almost like, or that you are so involved, I think that's a great thing.
Respondent:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	Do you feel quite involved in their process?
Respondent:	Yeah I do, yeah. I mean sometimes Andrew emails me and says have you seen this latest thing? I said yeah, yeah, I've seen it, that works really good and all that kind of stuff. But before he emails me I've noticed something slightly different, and he's always mentioning if there's anything that you think needs changing or anything that you're not really happy with or if there's anything that you think needs alerting slightly then just let me know. So I talk to Andrew, well, as I say, on the emails quite regularly, so it's quite good really. I feel like I've got someone there watching and making sure that the app's running okay, so I feel like I'm part of their development, which is great.
Interviewer:	Yeah, that's interesting because that's obviously what I've, this is kind of what I've read in the literature as well, you know how it is.
Respondent:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	Like you read tons of academic articles and it's quite nice when it all comes together and you see it actually happening in real life.
Respondent:	Yeah, yeah.
Interviewer:	No, that's interesting because like one of those questions that I have kind of written down is what you would think are the most important elements of like a successful or sustainable community?
Respondent:	No, you've definitely got to be part of the community, you've definitely got to keep in touch with your followers. I mean if I didn't have Andrew emailing me sort of every week or so making sure that the app's working all right I think I'd be there going, well what's going on? But I think to be honest it's great, I love the app, I love how it's progressed and I love how it's doing everything, so it's great really.
Interviewer:	It's one of the things that, I mean I've looked at so many communities now, it's one of the things that I noticed is that it doesn't have like a forum or something like that, because if, I mean if you say you've got some of your friends hooked up with this REALRIDER app like, would you not want, instead of sharing it on Facebook, if they had like some kind of facility where you could share it with your REALRIDER friends?
Respondent:	Yeah, well we do have that on the actual thing itself, because it just shows off everyone's route that's actually been putting them online and stuff. Most of the routes that I do, I'm quite happy for everyone to look at, you see, it's not, I don't really want like a folder just specifically for me because if I was looking at other people's files I wouldn't particularly go in to someone's and think I'll click on that one and have a look, it's quite nice to have them all there because I can just flick though quite a few times and see what there is. But the share function with the

Facebook is purely for those people who don't have the app, as I said before. So sometimes, I don't really, the forum situation, I hate forums to be honest, I absolutely hate them. We've got one for our, we've got one from our Open Air Riders and I'm on it, I do go on it, but I go on it like once every month, once every two months, I don't really use it very often, whereas Facebook I use all the time, alongside the REALRIDER app I use that all the time. So if it's there I'll use it but if it's something I have to go in to and log on to and all that kind of stuff, they're a pain really. I don't have full use of a computer anyway all the time. I've got a laptop but because it's so slow and stuff I just like using the phone app more than the forums I'd say.

Interviewer: No, that's interesting, so it's all your REALRIDER friends, you have them as friends on Facebook anyways?

Respondent: Yeah, yeah, so it's, you know, a bit of the best of both worlds, but to be honest I like it how it is, it's a forum, as I say it's something else to be going in to. And you've got blog updates and stuff like that on the REALRIDER app anyway so if there's something that I did or something that I've seen I can still put it on the blog or on the, you know, take a picture and stuff like that anyway, so there's quite a lot of share functions on the app itself. So the forum's going to be a little bit, something extra and I don't think that would work to be honest, but that's just my opinion.

Interviewer: No, it's interesting. Well the only really, the last question I would have is do you feel like REALRIDER's going in the right direction?

Respondent: Yes, definitely. If you can get it UK wide properly up and running it'll just take off big style around, I think it'll go worldwide before too long. Because they've got people in America, I don't know if you've seen recently, you've got people in America using the REALRIDER app, you've got people in like Jersey that have done a few, we've got people going across Europe and stuff. So I think if you can get the emergency assist up and running in the UK properly and adequately, because I know we've still got a few tweaks he needs to do, I think he's going to end up getting it big style, it's going to go global I think.

Interviewer: Sounds good, yeah, I mean we all hope that, I think it's a great, yeah.

Respondent: I really do hope for him, it's a great thing to have, it's a great function and those people, I mean have you read that story online about that gentleman, he came off and was left in the ditch for three days? It'll stop things like that.

Interviewer: Yeah, basically I met Andrew, what was it? Like a couple, well like nine months ago, something like that.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: And then when they were first launching it and yeah, he told me the story, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah, I mean it's going to stop that. And I mean I've got one friend on who does 230 miles a week, of a weekend, going camping somewhere and he's always, usually on his own, especially of the winter days when people stay in bit more. I mean I go out on my bike in all weathers and there's some times you think oh I shouldn't really be out in this weather, but I've got my REALRIDER app now so it doesn't really matter if I come off, I come off, end of.

Interviewer: And someone will now.

Respondent: So at least we've got something, you know, so.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's really interesting. No, I really appreciate that, Rachel.

Respondent:	No, no problem at all.
Interviewer:	I don't know, do you have any other questions or something?
Respondent:	Not particularly, I mean I usually put any questions to REALRIDER about anything, but I hope all this is helpful for these studies anyway.
Interviewer:	Yeah, no it is definitely, it's really interesting, basically REALRIDER is one of six communities that I'll look at and they all have different approaches and different like things that are important to them and it's really interesting to get like a broad spectrum from and then compare it from the users. You're actually the first use that I'm interviewing so yeah, no, thank you very much.
Respondent:	Oh well you've done very well, you've done very well so don't be offput by everyone else, we're all like, us bikers stick together basically and we're all sound people, you won't get very many people that aren't nice to be honest, honestly, I tell you that.
Interviewer:	No, that what I love about the motorcycle industry as well.
Respondent:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	It's a really nice industry to be in.
Respondent:	Yeah. I mean I broke down on the side of the road, well I got a flat front tyre a few months back, and I had loads of people stopping to see if I was all right and stuff, it was like no, I'm all right, I'm chilling, I'm under my tree, I'm quite happy. It was raining at the time, so.
Interviewer:	My story with my first motorbike that I bought, I bought it and then got out and it didn't have a, it was an old CB500 without a petrol gauge and I like ran out of petrol.
Respondent:	Oh nice.
Interviewer:	And then a nice gentleman and his-
Respondent:	Oh no.
Interviewer:	-girlfriend on a Harley stopped and got me petrol and was really, really nice, it was a nice introduction to motorbiking.
Respondent:	Oh that's nice. I mean I've, well I've been part of my motorcycle group for about, well, God, about 15 months, something like that, they only started in like January last year so I've been in it for a while. But I've seen the community grow and grow something like, because it was only, the group itself was only like half a dozen and it's just growing and growing. And the more people you meet the more people you feel comfortable around and it's just, it's the whole part of it, isn't it? It's the whole getting confidence off them, all that kid of stuff as well, it's great, I love it. If it wasn't for my bike I don't know where I'd be because I had maybe two or three friends that I saw regularly, now I've got hundreds, it's great, I love it.
Interviewer:	That's good, that is very good. Yeah, I don't want to take your time up any longer. Thank you very much, thank you.
Respondent:	No problem, if you've got any more questions you want to ask or anything feel free to ring me at any time or fax me or something.
Interviewer:	Okay.

Respondent: You're more than welcome to if there's anything you're not sure about or anything, I don't mind helping out if I can.

Interviewer: Sure thank you Rachel.

Respondent: No problem at all, good luck to you.

Interviewer: Thank you, okay, speak to you soon.

Respondent: No problem.

Interviewer: Cheers.

Respondent: Speak to you soon, bye now, bye.

Interviewer: Bye.

[End of recorded material]

<u>Zoe</u>

[Start of recorded material]

Respondent:	REALRIDER, Zoe speaking.
Interviewer:	Hiya Zoe, it's Matt from Scottoiler.
Respondent:	Hello, how are you doing?
Interviewer:	I'm good, how are you?
Respondent:	Excellent. It's 3 o'clock already, I don't know where today's gone.
Interviewer:	And Thursday already, I know, it's a busy time.
Respondent:	Right, well you are very welcome to have my time. How productive it will be considering how hot it is and how stressed I am will be a completely different matter. So if you don't get what you need I apologise now and we can definitely do some more at a later date, if you need it.
Interviewer:	Don't worry, Zoe, don't worry. This is the nice thing about this research method that my supervisor proposed what is basically just like a nice chat and then at the end of the chat, and at the end I'll compare the different interviews that I get and just try to get out as much as I can. It's a bit like, I'm a not a full blown academic, I don't really know what I'm doing, I'm just, try to get my degree and I mean this is like, I'm really interested in virtual communities and I wanted to do one for Scottoiler when I started this degree, but it's just we don't have the pull to do it and we don't have the money behind it to do it either.
Respondent:	You need a big commitment, not just financially but time.
Interviewer:	Yeah.
Respondent:	As much as anything, yeah, absolutely.
Interviewer:	One of the things that I already found is like you need to have like a clear purpose to drive users to your website.
Respondent:	Oh yes.
Interviewer:	And I don't know if we would have had that with out Scottoiler community. So we've got a little Facebook community that's steadily growing, but-
Respondent:	Good.
Interviewer:	-it's nothing like you guys.
Respondent:	You don't want to be us guys, I promise you, I don't want to be us guys at the moment.
Interviewer:	Oh God.
Respondent:	It's too hot.
Interviewer:	It's too hot, too hot and too much to do.
Respondent:	I don't function well in heat, that's why I live in the UK, I'm not used to this kind of weather.

Interviewer:	I know, I was in, I'm originally from Germany and when the BBC came through with the weather warnings I was just baffled because you get that like four, five months, not that much, it's not like southern Spain or anything like that, but it gets pretty hot in summer.
Respondent:	Yeah, I bet, I bet.
Interviewer:	Yeah. But you guys sound really busy.
Respondent:	Yes, yes. We're a small team, Matt, so it's a question of everybody pitching in and getting involved in everything and there are so many opportunities, I think, at the moment that it's kind of re-focusing, re-prioritising, taking stock of where we are right now. We're 23 weeks in, still very early days, still learning an awful lot and on top of our kind of day to day jobs of actually running the business add in to that equation all of the customer service requirement, and that kind of give you a bit of an insight in to just how manic it is.
Interviewer:	Yeah, I know.
Respondent:	We have three full time members of staff, that is it.
Interviewer:	Oh wow, I thought you guys were much bigger than that.
Respondent:	[Laughter] I think we do a bloody good job of actually making everybody think that. I mean we've had guys come up to us at events and they've said so who's behind this, who's the company behind this? Because they, I think they just look at the brand and just think it's some big American organisation or some big claims management company or an insurance company that are trying to branch off, and we kind of just go no, it's just us, you know, and they're like yeah but who owns it? Yeah, me and Andrew, oh.
Interviewer:	Is that like, do you think these customers are, I mean this is quite interesting, do you think they are, like they wouldn't be so willing to join if it would be like run by a big brand?
Respondent:	Do you know what, yes, I absolutely think that's the case and that's the feedback that we've got. In fact there was one guy that just said I didn't engage with you guys originally because I thought you were American, which is quite interesting. So I mean I took that as a big compliment because it's like well clearly you think that we're a lot bigger than we actually are. But in hindsight really thinking back on what he said that could have been massively detrimental.

But I have to say, Matt, that one of the things that we were quite determined to do from a very early stage is with being online and internet based we didn't kind of want to lose ourselves within the kind of Ethernet. We were really quite conscious that if we were going to do this we wanted to also have a human face to REALRIDER, which is why we've made such a commitment to actually go out and do as many of the events as we can. I mean again resource is an issue, both in terms of time, money and staff, and that's another reason why it's been Andrew and myself predominantly that have done the events because clearly we know the business, we know the technology, we're passionate about it. And it was really important that actually when we're speaking to these people we are just regular guys and girls that had a good idea and wanted to kind of share that with the wider biking community, and again I think that's something that we've managed quite well.

So on the one hand we have a big, sparkly brand that kind of does what it needs to in terms of, I think, build confidence, not just from a kind of user perspective but also clearly from a commercial perspective as well that made it a friendly, kind of approachable and certainly, in terms of how we manage our customer service and |

our feedback actually from the platform and things, I think you'll find that it is very personable.

Interviewer: Yeah, no, I have the same kind of impression that you guys would be a lot bigger and I mean you do so many shows.

Respondent: I shouldn't have told you, should I?

Interviewer: No, no, it's fine.

Respondent: You see, you're going to get to find out all our dirty little secrets now, Matt, [laughter] all under the guise of research.

Interviewer: Don't worry, don't worry. No, it's just because you were doing so many shows, like every time I email Andrew he says oh this weekend we're going to this show and this weekend we're going to that show, and I've seen him on three shows now.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: So he's like, I mean we do, like I do four shows a year and we do like six or seven in total with Scottoiler every year and I find it really stressful.

Respondent: It's just, yeah, it's exhausting because you have a whole weekend of it, plus the travel on top, plus any kind of camping that we've had to also become acclimatised to, it does take its toll without a doubt, and we've thrown ourselves in to it wholeheartedly this year and we've done that deliberately. However, what's been really interesting is that we've been able to take a good gauge really for the ones that we would want to clearly have a presence at, moving forward, and those that we have to realistically take a stance of it would be lovely if we had this amount of time, money and resource to be able to go to everything, but clearly we don't and we will suffer burnouts quite soon if we continue along these lines. So very much a test bed this year, see what works, see what doesn't work quite so well and look at kind of refining that plan really going in to next year so that we don't suffer executive burnout.

Interviewer: Yeah, so would you say like this, like all the shows, that is a start up thing, that's because you're trying to grow quite a lot? Or are you trying to grow and establish yourself, is that why you're going to all these shows?

Respondent: Oh, a multifaceted approach really, I guess. Yeah, I mean again it was just very much making sure that people understood the technology. We wanted feedback face to face from end users, that's been an excellent source of helping us developmentally, so that's been kind of crucial. Getting the brand out there, absolutely. Having a visible presence as far as the commercial sector's concerned manufacturers, etc. We had a lot of conversations with a lot of commercial organisations ahead of even getting funding for REALRIDER, and at the time there was a great deal, as you might appreciate, of kind of scepticism, will these guys actually ever make it to market? They've been talking the talk for such a long time and I think all eyes were on us really. So, again, come February when we actually went to market it was really pushing it for us to actually get to the ExCel Show in London, and again it was a big cost for us as a small business. But we said no, we need to do it because we need to prove to these guys we're here, we're out there, we're launched, we need business, you know.

Interviewer: And yeah, we follow through, yeah.

Respondent: Absolutely, absolutely. So having some exposure in MCN as well, I mean we had a great little piece early on in the publication. So what was very interesting was that we had riders who were actually coming up to the show having cut that article

out, holding their phone out and going can you put that on here? And, you know, it was a Nokia circa 1980s, no, I'm really sorry guys, I can't do that. [Laughter]

Interviewer: That's quite interesting.

Respondent: So it's a multi, again, multifaceted and lots and lots of different reasons why we kind of made that commitment. But it's kind of crucial for us really that we did that.

Interviewer: That's quite interesting. So I mean we always say that the bike market, the bikers are a couple of years behind so we've still got …

Respondent: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Whenever we have a customer on the phone we always have to ask do you have access to the internet, can we send you some pictures? But obviously that must be, for you guys that must be a huge thing because …

Respondent: Oh, like you would not believe. But we knew it, we knew it going in to this.

Interviewer: Yeah, I mean you must have researched that at the start.

Respondent: Yeah, absolutely. I think what surprised us is the disparity, I guess, between users, because we have some hugely, hugely knowledgeable users who are actually developers themselves, often, and their input has been fantastic and really helpful. And then right down to the lower level of what I've described there with guys that just don't have the equipment to be able to engage with what we're doing, and they're desperately sad about that. And some of them actually go on to say, all right, well you've now given me the perfect reason, I never wanted a smartphone before but you've now given me the ideal reason for getting one. And I tell you what's also interesting as well is we carried out a piece of research recently, just a general kind of snapshot picture of where we're at, what we're doing well, what we're not doing so well, blah, blah, blah, and, now what was the point I was going to make here? Oh I've completely lost my thread.

Interviewer: Something with technology?

Respondent: That's good isn't it?

Interviewer: Well you said, yeah, that, it started off with the technology side and then you said …

Respondent: Oh yes, I know, the point, yes, there is a point, was one of the questions that we asked was what other, either motorcycling related or non motorcycling related apps, are you currently using but in relation to motorcycling as a pastime? Because, you know, we are aware that kind of RunKeeper and Strava and all those types of apps, that actually some bikers are using, or trying to use, as part of their kind of motorbiking experience. Now over 50% said they had none, which was a real kind of eye-opener for us, I think, it was like oh, right. And actually that kind of goes some way to explain some of the issues that we've had with people actually understanding technology and some of the issues, again I talked about the disparity between those who have a lot of knowledge and those who have absolutely none. So those that have none, in some respects, are actually less problematic than those that have a lot, because those that have a lot have a bigger expectation of what they expect the technology should deliver, and also kind of graphical depictions and explanations as to how they would have it working, which, you know, so yeah, thanks for that.

Interviewer: If you just change this and this and this and this and this.

| Respondent: | Exactly, exactly. And some of it's very useful, don't get me wrong, some of it's a distraction because some of it is, like I can probably guarantee that pretty much every bit of feedback that we have or every kind of comment or suggestion, it's not something that we haven't already considered or isn't already on the road map. There are very few that we get that kind of throw us a curveball and make us think, oh, that's interesting, haven't considered that before. So it's good because it's all ratification for what we're doing, but again that's the beauty of having such an engaged community, and they are engaged and they're very vocal and they're very forgiving, actually, in the main, which I'm sure that won't go on forever. But, you know, we do get a very general sense of, come on guys, we really want this to work, you just need to do X, Y and Z, I say, yeah, but that X, Y and Z takes time and money so it's never going to materialise as quickly as you might like. And actually some of it just might not materialise at all, so you have to continue to support us because otherwise none of this will happen.

So there's a very big balancing act that's going on at the moment and again, I tell you what else we're kind of learning from a community perspective, is some people want to have engagement all the time and they actually get quite offended if you don't communicate with them often enough, and then you have others that are just like whoa, stop with the information, it's too much, we don't need it, you know? So it's try and engage and find a balance between those that absolutely will eat information alive and the more you throw at them the better, to those that are just the more casual users that are just like I just want to use REALRIDER for the safety feature, I don't really, I'm not really interested in everything else that goes with it. So it's, yeah, it's, although it's a niche group, it's a very disparate group and not just in the sense of what they're riding but in the sense of their knowledge, their capabilities and their requirements, which makes it a very difficult community in a sense to try and find a balance. |
|---|---|
| Interviewer: | That's interesting, so it's a lot about communication. But the one thing that I find, that's why I wanted to talk to you guys especially was that REALRIDER obviously didn't go down the route of having like one of those standard platforms with like a forum and a photo base and things like that but actually went down the route and had like a custom made, I reckon it is a custom made platform. What made you decide to go that route instead of going down the route of like a standard system? |
| Respondent: | Vanity, no, no, believe you me, that would be a tough learning curve if we were just doing this from a vanity perspective. I think because we wanted to push the boundaries, Matt. I think there's a lot that the system does that the user wouldn't appreciate at this point because actually what we have found is that we're probably six steps ahead of where the industry is. It's very, very interesting that you've just said what you said about understanding the market and having to even ask them if they have access to internet, that wasn't so much a concern for us. But perhaps some of the technology that we've used within the system is so clever that we're not actually worried about the user's understanding, because the users in some respects don't need to understand. But it's the commercial organisations that we are having to work doubly hard to try and get them to understand how the system works.

But we knew that if we could get that system in place, okay, the planning might not be right for us to push the button and kind of maximise it, but it was kind of critical to have it there because this is how technology's moving forward and we wanted to embrace it rather than shy away from it. There are umpteen, as you'll know, umpteen forums, and that wasn't an avenue that we wanted to pursue. Actually they become incredibly different to moderate, if we want to moderate, should we moderate? You know, all the usual basic questions. No, that wasn't an area that we wanted to explore, so therefore it wasn't so easy as to just kind of pick up a traditional format and just say well actually we'll implement that. |

We wanted to push the boundaries as well, we had a very clear idea and I think what we've managed to do in this first situation is we've created a platform and an app with a lot of breadth to it because that, and that was deliberate, because we actually wanted to see, okay, what's floating people's boats? What are they interacting with the most? Where is the interest? We've now got a very good picture 23 weeks in and 10,000 users on of what people are liking and what they're not liking so much. And as a consequence that's allowed us, really, to kind of validate the business, the traction in itself obviously suggests that there is an appetite for what it is that we're doing. But it was kind of critical, really, for us to have this kind of breadth so that we could understand what was motivating users to actually engage with us so that come phase two, which we're about to enter in to a phase two development, we would add more depth to certain areas.

So there's some areas that we'll leave alone for the moment because obviously we've not got an infinite amount of cash, but there were other areas that we always had an aspiration that we would want to create a lot more depth to those areas to encourage a lot more use interaction, a lot more sharing, commenting, etc. But we didn't want to put that right the way across the platform because that could have been a kind of use of funds that might not come in to their own for another year or so. We wanted to make sure that any changes that we were going to make going in to phase two would have an immediate impact. So basically this whole process of creating something as elaborate as we've created has afforded us the opportunity really to enable people to kind of get stuck in to the areas that they want to get stuck in to and then kind of feedback on, oh well, if this did that then that would be far more valuable to us as a community. So that's basically helped shape and mould, really, phase two.

Interviewer: That's interesting because I think, well I've only had like two interviews so far, but you speaking about like a road map, speaking about phase one, phase two, I don't think that many other communities think that way, think ahead and actually have a plan.

Respondent: Don't get me wrong, to some degree what I didn't want to create was an animal that we had to manage to the far end of the fars, because, a is say, on such a limited team you can't do that. So some of the things like live chats and groups and forum stuff we deliberately had to leave out of the first phase, if you like, because we just, we weren't set up to deal with that. And I'm still not convinced that that's really what the kind of market is saying to us that they want. So it was, we had huge aspirations, if I tell you where we were at before REALRIDER was even born you would, honestly you would fall off your chair laughing.

Interviewer: That was kind of, that would be like my next question, yeah, if you could run me through the process of like even starting off before REALRIDER started as a community, so like what were the reasons for it?

Respondent: Ah, yeah, absolutely, well how long have you got? Because, Jesus, this is a story.

Interviewer: No, I know I spoke to Andrew once and he said that he used to work for like the council that would do the pothole service or something like that.

Respondent: Ah, yeah, well basically Andrew and I had a business prior to setting up REALRIDER, it was a public sector marketing consultancy and we effectively were commissioned by local authorities, Highways Agency was our biggest client, to develop, research and develop education, training and publicity materials for specific campaigns that they were running.

Mainly, our kind of main stay area or our area of expertise, if you like, was road safety. So our kind of first introduction to motorcycling came about from a number of local authorities saying that they had issues with motorcyclists getting themselves killed on the roads. So although motorcycling, or motorcyclists, should

I say, actually represent the lowest number of road users, they are the highest casualty statistic. So of course they were always a major focus really for public sector in trying to effect change and impact on casualties on an annual basis. So we started, well, we started basically a very antiquated website, this was before Facebook was around, trying to engage with, what councils were effectively calling the hard to engage with market, which was sports bike riders in the main, by offering up the opportunity for them to be able to share their very specific experiences of pants filling moments. They'd all had them, yeah.

Interviewer: Yes, we have.

Respondent: Near misses and it was basically collating stories, information, data and actually plotting longitude and latitude points on a map saying this is where this guy nearly came off and here's his story. And my God, the amount of stories that we had through was incredible, pages and pages, reams and reams of guys just sharing their experiences of what they'd faced out on the roads for others to kind of review and then take from it what they will. So that was a kind of very rudimentary start to REALRIDER, I guess.

We then went on from there to start producing road safety DVDs specifically aimed at, again, the sports type market in particular, who had been identified as been having, as having kind of skills deficits really and trying to encourage them back in to advanced rider training. Now we knew that a lot of these guys, they probably wouldn't hold their hands up and say they were the best riders in the world but they, by God they weren't interested in going to training courses, putting on a hi-vis jacket and riding around for their mates to point their finger at and laugh at. So we said, well, okay, if we're never going to get those guys in to training or even if there is a misconception about their understanding of what training is, advanced rider training, then maybe we need to be putting out materials that shows what the benefits are. So not what the actual process is but hey, as a rider this is what you could aspire to be, this is what you could aspire to do if you actually went for skills enhancement.

And so we produced a couple of DVDs on behalf of the Highways Agency that were hugely popular. There's rare [unintelligible - 00
:24:39] now but we still come across them, some organisations like the BMF, who are still giving out some of these DVDs to riders and they love it. It's not branded as being remotely road safety orientated, we took a definite stance that that isn't what we wanted to do. The Highways Agency took a very big gamble really because they went against what the Department for Transport were wanting to do, which was stick great big Think Bike logos all over it and they kind of resisted and said no, we're doing this for the greater good, we want these guys to engage with this, we don't want to put them off before they've even taken the DVD out the sleeve. And it paid dividends, there were hundreds and thousands of copies of these DVDs that went out. And we still get guys now, I mean Andrew was at a show at Billingham at the weekend and one guy was like, oh God, so you guys did this? And it was just like, yeah, we were behind it de, de, de, he went, can you sign my copy? For God's sake, honestly, anyway, so.

Interviewer: Well it's good because then these guys obviously have the prior history with you and maybe trust you more or trust in your new service.

Respondent: There's a big, there is a big, a big part of that is true, definitely, and it kind of opened the doors for us to organisations and institutions, like with the whole Emergency Assist there's nobody else, right, in the UK or beyond who actually has a system that feeds directly in to the NHS. And we know for a fact that had we not gone through the whole kind of pain and rigmarole of previous years doing battles with these types of organisations, understanding their processes, the protocols that they've taken, not feeling phased by it, there's no way we'd be sat here today as REALRIDER offering Emergency Assist, just not a cat in hell's chance. The

credibility of prior contacts, dealings with certain organisations, kind of opened doors to us that as a traditional new start up you just, no way would you have got in the places that we've got in the last few years, not a chance. So yes, it's all a means to an end, isn't it?

So effectively whilst doing those films we obviously did a lot of work with the air ambulance crews and they were saying to us at the time one of the biggest problems that they had was they would turn up at accident spots and found the bike but no rider, and the biggest issue for them was obviously working within the golden hour to try and locate the rider as quickly as possible. And there were incidences where they were actually having to deploy police helicopters with thermal imaging to try and find riders within this golden hour period. Well you can imagine that the time alone it takes to deploy a police helicopter, that's even if there actually one available and in the vicinity to be able to do that, is huge. The cost to the public purse is enormous, it's just a very cumbersome process that's not very accurate and a bit hit and miss really, I suppose. So that kind of stuck with us to be honest with you.

But then we carried on the business of actually running our business at the time, but then when the shift, the whole shift and change and focus on public sector and public sector activities changed, then really we had a big decision to make as a business in that we was going to try and ride out the storm, bearing in mind that we were dealing just exclusively with public sector and all of a sudden the iron curtain comes down and like not even going to, our business went from a multi million pound business to nothing, practically overnight, yeah.

Interviewer: Wow, that's a bit scary.

Respondent: And, yeah, but do you know what? We saw it coming, we saw it coming so it wasn't as scary as I depicted there, to be honest with you. And because we had kind of REALRIDER in reserve and we also had what had been a hugely profitable business that enabled us, because we made a very quick decision in that we were going to stop what we were doing and reinvest our finances really, if you like, in to pursuing REALRIDER, although it was a blow, it was upsetting, it was kind of like, well, we have new focus. And REALRIDER had kind of been sat on the back burner for a good couple of years really and we hadn't done anything with it, and thank God, because technology moves at such pace that had we even tried doing something with it two years earlier I don't think that we would have got as far as we've got now at that point.

But we took 18 months, I would say, to fully research the market, refine our business plans, go out and speak to manufacturers, speak to the motorcycling industry, start the ball rolling with the NHS, the emergency services, and just put a lot of time and effort in to making sure that what it was that we were hoping to take to market was going to be successful. But there's another reason why it took 18 months was because initially we had thought that REALRIDER would actually be a motorcycle simulator, not a physical simulator, an online game, effectively. And what, it was almost like the next iteration, if you like, of what we'd done with the DVDs.

Interviewer: With the DVDs, yeah.

Respondent: Absolutely, it was kind of taking that premise and putting it online. And actually we had access to all of the kind of road demographics because the Highways Agency send out vehicles that pick up all of this data about cambers and everything else about road safety, and we'd sort of actually taken that and recreated actual roads in an online environment and sides could effectively come together online to ride these routes together. So it was very much like an online simulator effectively but just in a games format, but with learning points. So it would still have been safety orientated. When investigating that fully, I mean at the time it would have

been a lot more cost prohibitive, and even now the costs that we were given at the time have probably halved now because technology's moved on at such a pace that we would have, effectively, have been looking for at least £3 million to even get going.

Interviewer: For this scheme, yeah.

Respondent: For this simulator, yeah. So we kind of ruled that out pretty quickly.

Interviewer: Yeah, understandable, yeah.

Respondent: And actually it was a conversation that we'd had in a meeting with one of the local games developers actually that kind of said to us do you know what? There's as much value, if you want to do this and this is what you're working towards then really what you need to be able to demonstrate, that there is an appetite for what it is, potentially, that you're going to produce. So what you guys have said to us, there would be merit in trying to create an online community first, get that community thriving and then do the online simulator. We thought oh, well there's an idea, okay.

So we kind of went back to circa 2003 and thought, well okay, we did an online community, in a sense, very antiquated, and actually they did engage and it was all about routes. So can we kind of take that premise, bring it totally up to date, as far as technology was concerned, and actually do we now have, in the form of smartphones, a potential solution to the problem that we were met with in 2006 with the emergency services saying actually we can't locate riders? Well, potentially now you can.

So that's the kind of background and that's why it took us so long and that's why it took us 18 months of kind of refining and defining, well what is it that we want to do? What can we do and what are we working towards? So it's interesting when you kind of say you've spoken to a couple of businesses that kind of don't have a staged or phased approach, we very much do because we've had to because actually we've got so many ideas that if we try to do it all at once we would sink before we've even started.

Interviewer: No, it does sound like the work before the community, compared to others, or even like my own ideas thinking, I mean that's what you can do today, you just basically think ah, I want to open up a community and-

Respondent: So that's what I'm going to do, yeah.

Interviewer: -a week later you can have it like sitting there, or even a day later. But yeah, you obviously, you've got this big purpose driven approach behind it and the USP for customers to come to you, yeah.

Respondent: Well it's interesting, isn't it? Because the community, for us, was almost a secondary.

Interviewer: That's the one thing that I've found with REALRIDER, yeah, that the, I wasn't really sure and that was something I wanted to ask you, if you would see the app as the real driver behind it at the moment or the community? Because I see it as the app being the big driver behind it.

Respondent: Yeah, you're right. But without actually going to market we didn't know, we didn't, it's very easy to get kid of lost along the way with what technology can actually do. So we basically rammed as much in to the first version app as we possibly could on a completely inappropriate platform, yeah, hindsight is a wonderful thing, we were limited with budget.

Interviewer:	Which one was that?
Respondent:	The app itself?
Interviewer:	Yeah.
Respondent:	It's a means to an end, but it's not how we would have wanted it to be.
Interviewer:	Oh okay.
Respondent:	Because in actual fact what we didn't want to be accused of was going out there and producing an app when everybody else was doing that, you know? Again it's very easy for people to say, I know, I've got an idea for an app, I'm going to put it out there and that's what I'm going to do. The app, for us, was actually secondary to the platform, the platform for us had more value at the time. But what's happened is, obviously as the company and the business has evolved, the thing that we thought was yeah, nice to have, the Emergency Assist, becomes the biggest USP and the biggest selling point. So of course …
Interviewer:	So how is it, why do you think that happened? Just because it was the company, your supporters or your companies behind driving it or you driving it yourself even though you didn't really want it to?
Respondent:	I don't know, that's the beauty of evolution isn't it? You put something out there and you kind of don't know how it's going to go and sometimes the public surprises you. I think we always knew the Emergency Assist had huge potential, but I don't think that, I think we thought that the community might actually be a bit more sceptical and cynical than it actually has been. And again we talked about, earlier on, the people's understanding and acceptance of technology. So we didn't want to put all of our eggs in to that basket necessarily because if you had a cynical bunch of people who thought that actually we just produced something that was going to record speed, report back to an insurance company and they would never be allowed to ride again kind of thing, then we certainly wouldn't ever intend for that to be the image that went out there. But we probably know how cynical and sceptical these people are and ultimately if you're saying that potentially we're tracking your route, the first thing they say is well why are you tracking it?

So we've still got a big education process to go through, there's still a lot of work that we need to do to invest in helping people to understand how Emergency Assist works. But in actual fact there's been a lot more accepting of the technology than we thought perhaps, and maybe it's because it's that whole vulnerability factor, isn't it? You know, people think actually if this, potentially, when I'm out on my own could be the very thing that saves my life, then why would I not? I think that's the reaction. |
Interviewer:	And like you said everyone has that situation at least once where they went around a corner-
Respondent:	Exactly.
Interviewer:	-a bit too wide.
Respondent:	That's the commonality, yeah, is that pants filling moment, that's what it goes back to, the whoa, it could have been so much worse. Or they know somebody who has had an off or they actually have been involved in a really bad accident themselves. So that's the commonality, that is the one thing, other than the actual act of riding, that they can all identify with and I don't think that we had fully appreciated how strong that was and how big a draw that would be.

Interviewer:	So why do you think that the, I mean obviously, yeah, the software and the app is a driver behind it, but what do you think would need to be done with the community, like not getting the right people or is it content or is it maybe lack of, like you said, you don't have a forum or something like that so people cannot interact with each other?
Respondent:	It's limited what people can do online I think at the moment. But again that was deliberate, that goes back to the whole looking at the breadth of what potentially could be on offer and not concentrating on developing areas so deeply. But now I think we have a much clearer understanding, having had the time directly with the community. We're also about to embark on some online focus group testing as well and to kind of ratify where we think phase 2 needs to go, and we now think we know exactly where the kind of key motivations are for people, potentially. So, you know, you get those that say actually we're not social and we're not interested in social, but actually what they're saying is they don't want another Facebook, and that's never what we intend it to be, which is why it's so crucial for us to position ourselves as not just, you know, we started out, very naively, calling ourselves a kind of a social community and we've kind of dropped that quite quickly because actually it's just not right for the market, that's not what they want. But they actually do want to be social, they just don't want to be seen as being involved in a Facebook type scenario.

So what these guys do want is they want connectivity, they want to be able to identify other riders in their area, they want to know what they're riding, they want to know whether there's going to be any commonalities there. They want to know whether those people are actually interested in going on a ride out together. They want to share those routes, they want to explore new routes, yeah. So all those things are very social, they just don't like it wrapped up in that whole social networking guise, they really rebel against that, so. |
Interviewer:	No, that's good because I was thinking exactly, that was my thoughts exactly. I mean I'm part of the, I don't know if, you probably know about meetup.com-
Respondent:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	-and the motorbikers up here, they use Meetup to organise ride outs, but they don't have the functionality that you have, they don't have like a map functionality or anything like that.
Respondent:	But we need to be doing more of what Meetup does, do you know what I mean?
Interviewer:	Yeah, no, I find it really interesting that, I find your approach really interesting to basically draw, make people aware of the brand, make them use your product, but the social aspect is a phase two project where people are already aware of the platform and then you add or functionality.
Respondent:	Indeed, indeed, because for us, shall I tell you what it is, Matt? And I'm not saying that this is right or wrong because bear in mind that we've never done this before, we've not done social communities so, and you can read all the books in the world but I don't think anybody has the answer, everybody has a different take on it.
Interviewer:	I know, I know, yeah, this is what this is all about, yeah, like I can tell you from my research it is all scattered across and everyone that tries to find the ultimate answer immediately fails because there is no ultimate answer, yeah.
Respondent:	And the bigger problem that we've got now is that we're all benchmarked against the likes of Twitter and Facebook, so if you're not Twitter or Facebook you're a complete and utter failure, and it's rubbish because at the end of the day. I mean one of the things that I would like to think that we, as a company in whatever guise we've operated in, is we're very good at working with niche audiences, and for me

that was always the attraction. I don't think I ever, ever would have wanted to do a social type community for a general audience because I just think you're [unintelligible - 00:41:38] to nothing. But we definitely saw that there was a market for looking at niche audiences and looking at their very specific requirements.

But it's like breadcrumbs, isn't it? You put down these little bits of breadcrumbs and you hope that people will actually pick up on it, and if you can actually involve them in the process of development and make them feel inclusive and make them feel like their comments and their feedback are welcome, no matter what they are. And sometimes it's really hurtful, it's painful, because you know yourself that it's far from perfect. But at the end of the day I also accept that with a lot technology start ups sometimes the reason they don't even get off the ground is because they're so busy trying to perfect what their offering is that they lose sight of actually getting to market. And I was very clear that, okay, it's not perfect, it's far from perfect, it's not really exactly what we wanted it to be, but hey, let's go for it because actually if we miss this opportunity then somebody else is just going to get in there before us and do it.

So at some point you've got to stick your neck out and just think well, okay, if we can manage the process and if we do it in beta form and if we say we're going to give away the first 10,000, because actually those 10,000 are very valuable to us because they, effectively, are testers, they're our eyes and ears, they're telling us what they want to see in future iterations, their help, it's worth the pain to go through that process because we now have a much, much clearer idea. And actually some of it's just ratifying what we already believe that you know what? If I can turn around to our investors and say well actually these guys are just telling us exactly what we thought two years ago, I don't think there's any harm in that, do you know what I mean? And the thing is as well, as I say, they're very accepting and very tolerant and even those that aren't fully engaged, and again this bit of research that we did kind of really surprised us at how much more engaged they were or they were telling us they were than we thought they were. So those that aren't quite there, we know that they're still there, they're lurking, they're watching, they're waiting, we'll get them so long as we are producing what they're telling us they want to see, no more difficult than that. And I made that sound easy and I know it's not, but that's, it's about listening, listening, what do they want?

Interviewer: No, it's interesting because it reflects what I've found so far is like it's gaining people's trust by listening to them.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And then involving them in the process of developing.

Respondent: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Because that's how you get them on board.

Respondent: And that's always what we wanted to do, always, always what we wanted to do. There was very little point in us going out there with a fully polished product that they then turned around and said it looks nice but it does nowt that I want it to do, what a waste of money that would have been, eh?

Interviewer: No, I found exactly that, I've got another contact in the US that I'm going to talk to later and they're not even starting up, they only have about 100 fans or something on Facebook. But because they get these guys in early and keep the communication close with them, that means that they have some people that feel really valued by the community.

Respondent: Absolutely, well they're your ambassadors.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: Absolutely and, you know we found that. What's been very, very interesting actually during the course of this last 23 weeks and attending the various events from having, from not being on people's radars at all and having to start from the basics and explain who we are, we now go to events where we get guys running over to us, getting their phones out and going, look, I've got your app, and actually guys I've got a problem with this, can you show me how this works? De, de, de, de.

                 So we're getting variations now on those that still haven't got a clue who we are and what we do to those that have actually some awareness but haven't done anything about it, you know, we've had like guys who say well actually, no, I remember getting an email and I haven't actually done anything about it, but now I'm going to go back and have a look at it. And to those, as I say, who are now walking around, I mean we were at the Kelso show a couple of weeks ago and one of the guys, you know, we know these guys by their first name now, that's how sad it is, you know, so when they come up to us at shows, oh, hiya, how you doing? And one of them was like, right, I've got the Widows Sons sat over there, he went I've been trying to tell them about REALRIDER he said, but they won't listen to me, he says, so will you come over and do a talk to them? Yeah, yeah, no problem.

Interviewer: That's really good.

Respondent: Load of hairy arsed Harley Davidson riders, quite intimidating, went over there, 20 minutes later they were like, and where do I download it? Oh it's great. And then get back to the office and it's like we've had an invitation to go up to the Thunder in the Glen event and, you know, and Aviemore at the end of August, so we're now officially friends of the Widows Sons, which apparently is quite a big deal, so. But it is great, but again that's why the human interaction is just as important as the online. Get your brand ambassadors on the ground, get them doing your hard work for you, get them actually interacting with others and telling them how it works. I love it, that's just as important. But especially with some of the cycling community, they always said motorcyclists are inherently social offline, what we wanted to do was encourage that social, that being social, that sharing, that sharing of experiences and just bring it online.

Interviewer: Yeah, well now you've got to do like, I know it's early days and you obviously have, there are priorities, but have you got things planned like a meet up or something, a REALRIDER meet up? I know these are always quite …

Respondent: Track days, all sorts of stuff, yeah, absolutely, it's all there, it's in the road map, it will all come down to funding at the end of the day, you know?

Interviewer: Is that like, that's, I know that the initial push to get members on board was to give the app away for free, but I reckon the business model behind it is more getting the manufacturers and like companies like us on board.

Respondent: Absolutely, get them to bloody pay for it.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's not actually …

Respondent: Yeah, we don't want our users to pay if we can help it. Although I tell you what's very interesting, what's materialised quite recently, Matt, is that, and again doing the shows, that's why it's so important, is that essentially, sorry, someone's just trying to phone my mobile, just ignore that, is that essentially what they're saying to us, with the Emergency Assist in particular, is there's this kind of look of incredulity that comes in to their face when you kind of say it's a one off £4.99 payment and they're like what? Really? Oh, well how can that be? And then, of

course then it starts the whole conversation about well how are you making your money?

So we're actually having internal discussions at the moment because there is a lot of work that we can do to actually improve the Emergency Assist and a lot of things that we can do around the app and calibrating the app and make it a lot more sophisticated, create a learning algorithm, but all this does take money. But if that could actually be supported by a subscription base model, not masses, but also from a credibility point of view, that if somebody feels that a couple of quid is leaving their account every month, which means that they are covered for emergencies if it's activated and that they're covered under our system, that could actually be a shift in our business model for the positive, do you know?

Interviewer: Yeah, it's funny because that's exactly what I thought when I, I mean I got in early enough, I got in for free, but I wasn't, even when I saw the price, £4.99 one off, that's great, that's great value for something that could save my life.

Respondent: Yes, exactly, but then the whole questioning kicks in of well if I paid that £4.99 six months ago am I still covered? De, de, de. So it's a conversion that we're having internally at the moment, rest assured whatever we do decide as a business to do, that anybody that's a founder member will always be treated as such and will never have to pay anything ever again. And that's one of the benefits of actually joining at such early days is that even though they haven't activated on the app, because some of them have actually got smartphones that aren't actually compatible with what we're running at the moment. But that's not to say that in six months, 12, 18 months' time, that they won't have an upgrade and then all of a sudden they have a smartphone that they can actually download the real live appropriate, they won't pay a penny either.

Moving forward we have to consider it because ultimately if it actually enhances the credibility of the product and people feel safer because they're actually paying a nominal subscription towards it, then obviously from a business perspective we'll say well great, because that helps our revenue, brilliant, but it also endorses and just cuts out that little bit of doubt in somebody's mind as to whether it's a genuine service, do you know?

Interviewer: Yeah, because also that, I've read that, in one of the studies that I read was basically the comparison between advertising based community versus a subscription based community, and they basically said that yes, you have less people signing up but those that do because of the subscription-

Respondent: Are engaged.

Interviewer: -they're more engaged.

Respondent: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. And it's interesting because we will explore that more fully, I think, as time goes by, because at the moment if we do introduce a subscription it will purely be for the Emergency Assist, so people will still have access to the community and the community features, irrespective of whether they do or don't use Emergency Assist. But I think moving forward, I think developmentally so many things that we actually are looking at, at the moment, that would definitely add value, then a membership model wouldn't be out of the question either in the future. If there was enough value to the user, then we think that that's another area that I think we would consider moving forward as well.

So there'll probably be different levels of membership and there'd still be a free, have certain aspects that were free as well because we wouldn't want to disclude anybody. But again, like you say, it's about ratcheting up engagement in certain areas and some people are certainly more switched on to some aspects that we

might want to deliver than others. So it's about developing a system that's flexible, I think.

Interviewer: Yeah. No, it's just interesting because obviously at some point you have made the decision to go with a free advertising based model instead of the paid subscription model.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah we did. A premium model, we didn't want a barrier to entry really, you know. And again we didn't want to be massively heavily reliant on advertising either, and what we felt was more valuable was not selling third party data, we're not about that whatsoever, but providing business insights. Again you're talking about a very backdated industry, they have nothing, they have no research, they have, they're working with very little knowledge about the market and it's staggering, it's staggering the lack of research that there actually is. So again we kind of figured well if we've got an active community who were engaged, then how valuable is that information to manufacturers, to associated commercial organisations about what these guys are doing once they ride their bike off the forecourt? Because at the moment they've no idea, not a clue. So data insights, business insights, was another area really that was kind of a biggie for us really.

Interviewer: I suppose that was also because you already had all the connections in to the industry.

Respondent: Yeah, that's right, we did a lot of homework, we went round and talked to an awful lot of people and because, yeah, we've worked with the industry for such a long time, it wasn't difficult to have those conversations either. In fact the biggest that we had, ironically, was in order to actually secure our funding we had to demonstrate that there was definitive interest from the industry and associated bodies connected to the industry, and in order to do that we had to go and we had to wear our heart on our sleeves a little bit, we tried to protect ourselves as much as we could by getting as many people as we could to actually sign NDAs, but once you're out there and your concept's out there it's not very difficult for someone to come along and take the premise of it and maybe if they were in a better position run with it. And we had that very scenario with Bennetts. So we were speaking to Bennetts a long, long time ago and they were showing all of the signs of oh yeah, that's interesting, yeah, we definitely want to be involved in that, de, de, de, de, and then like nine months later they launched Bennetts-Social.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: It's like argh. They've done it badly so I'm not too worried.

Interviewer: You know, it's funny because I've seen it and I don't think I even joined, but I find it interesting because like you said this one, Bennetts, is quite clearly backed by a big company and I wouldn't want to join.

Respondent: Where's the benefit? Absolutely, they're fishing in their own pool, which is what we said to them in the first instance, which is why we didn't feel too threatened when we spoke to them, was that because the way that we were approaching this from all angles was we were independent. We're not associated with anybody, we have no external interests, it's not about what you ride, it's about where you ride, so therefore it was appealing to bikers of every age and genre.

So that, in itself, was what we thought the bigger appeal would be for them. But they clearly liked the premise of what it was that we were talking about and they've taken the bare minimum, the fundamentals, if you like, and produced Bennetts-Social. Well good luck to them because, as you say, and then in fact I saw a sponsored post on Facebook last night, 135 likes, great, four very damaging comments, about four very disgruntled customers who couldn't have been more scathing. But there you go, that's the risk that you run when you run your own

community as well, isn't it? You have to take the good with the bad, so, whereas we were offering them a very independent platform and the ability to have all the kind of same insights they'll we'll be generating from their own site but without the kind of uber critical people pointing the finger and saying you're a pile of shit. So hey ho, you live and you learn, eh.

Interviewer: Yeah. No, that's really interesting and one question, just to get that in here as well, is like what would you think are the main, the most important elements for a successful or sustainable community?

Respondent: Flexibility, don't go in to it thinking that you have all the answers and make sure that you have a model that can scale or retract accordingly. Perhaps don't offer too much too quickly, that's one learning point I would say from our own experiences, that I think now, looking back, although we did it deliberately in giving ourselves a lot of breadth and not enough depth, I think that we could have scaled that back a little bit and we could have found a bit more of a balance.

Interviewer: And then, what like scale out features over-

Respondent: Indeed.

Interviewer: -over half a year or a year or something?

Respondent: Indeed yeah, absolutely. I think perhaps the way in which we've gone about it was the expensive way to some extent.

Interviewer: It might come back to what I said about this small community in the US, that they, like you said you might have appeared too big right from the start.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Because you offered too much right from the start, yeah?

Respondent: Quite possibly, quite possibly.

Interviewer: That's really interesting, yeah.

Respondent: And I don't know if I'll ever have the answer to that and you might get somewhere closer than me, Matt, but yeah, start small and have big aspirations.

Interviewer: Sounds good. That's great stuff, Zoe, thank you very much for that, I don't want to keep you any longer, it's been almost an hour and a half.

Respondent: No problem, you know where I am, Matt, so if there's anything that kind of comes up when you go back and you listen to the tape that you want to explore further, just drop me an email and we'll sort out a bit more time, I've no problem with that whatsoever.

Interviewer: The one thing that's in my consent thing here, if I use, do you mind being quoted in the dissertation or would you …

Respondent: No, that's fine, yeah.

Interviewer: That's fine, okay, cool, that's great.

Respondent: Lovely.

Interviewer: Yeah, I've got another couple of interviews tonight but I'll drop you an email tomorrow, if that's okay?

Respondent: Yeah, that's absolutely fine, no worries.

Interviewer: Cool, thank you very much.

Respondent: All right, well I hope it was useful.

Interviewer: It was definitely useful, it was very useful, yeah, thank you very much.

Respondent: Good, you're very welcome, all right. Good luck with the rest of your interviews.

Interviewer: Thank you, all right.

Respondent: Take care, bye.

Interviewer: See you, bye.

[End of recorded material]

ABR – Alun

Interviewer: Hi, Alun. Thank you very much for helping me, very much appreciated. I can tell you a bit about my research. I've started this two years ago when I was working with Scottoiler, I started this part time Master's, and it kind of fell through the cracks and I did a bit of work here and there but then work came and...

Respondent: You've been doing this for two years, Matt, perhaps you should be telling me how to create a successful forum!

Interviewer: Well, I hope that, I will send you the dissertation and everything at the end, and I hope you get something out of it. I've got like another month and a half to finish it and yes... So it's going to be quite a busy time, but, yes, it's great that we get to do this today so I can work on that over the weekend.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: Basically, I have a couple of standard questions here but it's not meant to be some silly interview with questions from 1 to 9 or something like that, it's just meant to be like a nice and friendly chat. I'm just interested in understanding what drove you to create a community, so what was like the very first step, how did you come to start it?

Respondent: Here's the irony of it. I don't know if you know but we've got another magazine called Adventure Travel, I think we just pointed that out. I'd been happily doing that for 15, 16 years instead of had a nice life. What I mean by that was I could get away for about 3, 4 months a year, travelling the world trying to climb and call it work.

It must be about 4.5 years ago, I had a motorbike accident, busted my hand and my arm up, so I couldn't train, couldn't do anything for about six months. During that since months, geez, I have to go back another step. I had three passions when I started at Adventure Travel. One was travel and mountains and so on. The second one was rugby, the third one was motorbikes. All right? So I thought if I'm going to work myself, it's got to be something I want to do, hence Adventure Travel.

So motorbike accident four years ago when I thought well, I can't train and I can't motoring and I can't do this, can't do that, let's start that magazine I always wanted to do, a motorbike magazine. So the irony is Adventure Bike Rider started from a motorbike accident. I knew there was a gap in the market, I looked at what was out there and the motorcycle magazine sort of thing was dominated by Bauer titles, Bike Ride, MCN and so on.

I've been a motorcyclist 35, geez, almost 40 years now, and I'd stopped buying magazines about 10 years ago. They didn't write about anything which resonated with me as a motorcyclist.

Interviewer: It's always the same thing.

Respondent: Yes, and I think the big reason for that is because the industry was dominated by Bauer and there was just one publishing house putting out 90% of the magazines and I think they were all listening to themselves too much rather than actually seeing what was going on out in the industry.

So I had this strong hunch, I'd been in publishing for a long time so I knew how to publish magazines, but I had this strong hunch that based on what I thought, and what all my mates who were into motorcycling thought, there wasn't a motorbike magazine out there that reflected the dreams, desires, aspirations.

So that was the original thing. Then I thought okay, if I'm going to do this magazine, we're now in the internet age, I've got to have a website to go along with it. I put a forum on the website, this wasn't something I saw as seeing taking off just like that. I just put a forum on there because

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well, I suppose everybody else has got a forum, let's stick a forum on there.

As I was developing the magazine over the first six months, it would just be me talking to myself on the forum, you know, and I would put up, if you ever go back to the earliest blogs on the site and forum posts, you'll see it was just my rambling thoughts of the day and so on.

Then somebody else turned up on there, then about four other people turned up on there, and for a while it was just about four or five who were just chatting on there. So it wasn't anything big or anything, and then Adventure Bike Rider was ready to launch. I launched Adventure Bike Rider, and I think this is the crux of what happened. That Adventure Bike Rider hit that sweet spot.

Interviewer: Definitely.

Respondent: Motorcycle magazines were dominated by one company that I truly believe weren't talking to their customers but were just talking to each other within the office and they believed their own. You know what I'm saying? When you get so insulated and so powerful, which Bauer did, they were just looking across desks at each other and they believed their own talk.

Interviewer: Yes, they also expected to just share their articles in between the magazines...

Respondent: Yes, and they were patting each other on the back saying, "Aren't we doing a wonderful job," whereas all the motorcyclists and customers out there, and the motorcycle industry was all moving off with this tangent, whereas Bauer dominated the magazines just in their own little groove and weren't bothering to look what was happening out there. Some of the motorcycling manufacturers were doing the same, if you look back to four or five years ago. Because Adventure Bikes were taking off, really taking off.

Yet the publishing industry reflected an age of motorcycling which probably died in the mid-90s. So anyway, so when the magazine was launched, the forum almost immediately, it just hit this sweet spot with people and people thought, "Wow, that's the magazine I've been waiting for!"

Interviewer: Yes, I've talked to a few users and lots of people said that, it's exactly that's what they were, they were waiting for this and that's the magazine that really speaks to them.

Respondent: Yes. So I think that was ripe to be done, it was ready and waiting to be done, and I think what that magazine done as well is give, and if I'd been a reader, I would have seen this magazine and I would have thought, "Geez, somebody recognises I'm around as well," and it would have immediately given me an identity as a biker. Because like I'm saying, the media just didn't reflect me at all. You either had to be a sports bike riding guy or you had to grow the goatee and sit in a Harley with your leather waistcoat on. But nobody reflected where the market was going and that was the 50-year-old guy who'd done with the sports bikes and was never going back, and that's the critical thing. He'd been there and done it and he wasn't going back.

But nobody was reflecting him. There were motorbike magazines with classic bikes, but nobody was reflecting what people really were now. So it hit that sweet spot, and I think because it hit that sweet spot and that it was targeted at me really. I knew there were lots of people who thought the same as me around.

Interviewer: So you did your research before...

Respondent: No, not really. I've got to be honest with you, Matt, the amount of research I threw at this was I opened the window a couple of days and looked at what bikes were riding past. It really was as basic as that. I just knew that there was a huge gap in the market for this magazine, and what I had to do.

The idea I knew was spot on, the key to it was getting the execution right. Do you know what I'm saying? It was a readymade market, the doors were all open. What I had to do was make

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sure that I walked through the right doors. So it was the execution of it which had to be done right. Immediately when the magazine came out, it hit that sweet spot and the forum just started.

Interviewer: Yes, so you would almost say that without the magazine, the community, the website would have taken a lot longer to take off?

Respondent: Oh, without a doubt, Without. A. Doubt. If, I don't think it would have been as strong as it is because the magazine holds it all together in a way. The magazine gives people identity as well. It's more than a magazine in a way. It's got the ideas in there, hopefully got the inspiration in there and the knowledge. But in addition to that, it's actually given a section of motorcyclists, including me, an identity which wasn't available through any other magazine out there.

To come back to the other part, I look at rugby now, I might do that third magazine at some stage, you know, so that I've got the travel, the motorbikes and the rugby.

I look at rugby magazines and rugby magazines look as though if they're produced by men in grey suits.

Interviewer: Not by actually people that are in...

Respondent: Yes, they look as if they're produced by men in grey suits guffawing down in Twickenham. You know? Which reflects how rugby used to be. Again, I look at myself, I'm in my 50s now, I look at all my mates who grew up playing rugby in Wales and all stuff like that, and we're not these grey suits thing. I think if somebody brought out a rugby magazine that was a little bit less serious and a bit more fun orientated, that would work as well.

I always remember Will Carling's quote when he said that 'Twickenham is just full of boring old farts'. Then he immediately lost the captaincy for England. But he was right, and that's reflected in the rugby media as well.

Anyway, that's off the point, but I think that's why Adventure Bike Rider took off.

Interviewer: It's funny, I talked to one of your users yesterday and he said, yes, he came to the website and to the forum through the magazine and he reads the magazine every time but I asked him why he thinks it's more important to him, because he was a new rider, he got into motorcycling and then had your magazine and Adventure Bike Rider as like a starting point because it was exactly what he was looking for. But when I asked him why it's more important to him, he actually said the forum is more important to him now because he made friends there and he found the advice he was looking for.

Respondent: Yes. The other thing with the forum is, and this has been it for me from day one, it had to be an inclusive forum rather than exclusive. What I mean by inclusive, the adventure is what happens between your ears, it's not the bike you're on. So whether you are riding a 125 or you're riding a Triumph Rocket, you are welcome.

Whether you're only travelling through Calais or to Ullapool, or if you're going round the world, you are welcome. There's so many websites out there where they're just pissing contests, and I always want to keep that out of there, and I think we've managed to do that to a great extent.

I was stuck to that very rigidly in the beginning and I wouldn't tolerate these pissing contests, and I think what that's got on the forum now, there's generally, because that ethos has been in there, it's almost self-governing in that now. If somebody comes on there, 'I've ridden up Mt. Everest on the back wheel' sort of thing. So what? It's great that you've had the opportunity to do that, but so what? Because I know from Adventure Travel, if you haven't travelled out of Birmingham all your life, going to Leicester is an adventure. Right? It's all relative.

I've spent the last 18 years of my life going to the Himalayas and the Sahara and climbing Himalayan peaks and I hiked across Iceland.

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Interviewer:	Wow.

Respondent: You can die hiking across Iceland, you can't really die, unless you fall off a motorbike, you can ride across Iceland in half a day or two. So don't those sort of things is far more out there in a way then riding a motorbike across there because you've always got a quick escape route on a motorbike as long as you have fuel.

But that doesn't matter to me. If somebody has gone on that adventure to Leicester, I'm happy for them. Do you see what I'm saying, it's all relative, isn't it? I've never encouraged pissing contests and I don't want the website, the forum to become that. I think when you see forums go like that, that's when they're on the way down.

Interviewer: Yes, you said that's now self-governing because you were quite rigorous at the start?

Respondent: Yes. People who were coming on the site, I think every forum in the world, the word is 'troll', isn't it? You get people that come on there, and they are sort of keyboard warriors, they add nothing to forums other than, "My dad's bigger than your dad," that sort of stuff. Those sort of people eventually kill forums. You can have people like that that actually contribute in good ways as well, and they're okay, as long as people are contributing in meaningful ways, that's fine. But people who just come on just to troll, they're not part of a community.

I didn't know that was one of the answers but I think if you do that sort of thing at the start, the community itself becomes intolerant of that. You've also got to get good moderators because I think the other thing I've seen is because I own it, I'm in a position where because I own the thing, my influence can be too big on posts, and I've seen this and that's why I've stepped back a bit from the forum.

Interviewer: Okay, that's interesting.

Respondent: When I post, I'm not just another poster now, I'm Alun who owns it.

Interviewer: You even have you like red badge or your administrator badge.

Respondent: Yes, but I'm still the same guy who was posting on there day one as I am now, but people's perception of me, and this is the key, is it has changed. Instead of it being sort of 'Alun who rides a motorbike', it's 'oh, he owns ABR', do you know what I'm saying?

So any post I put out there carries a bit more strength with people and I can offend people too easily. Do you know what I'm saying?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So I do post on there but I'm very reluctant to put things on there now because I can influence a post too much.

Interviewer: So you said you've taken a step back?

Respondent: Yes, I feel I have to, because like I'm saying, I feel that my posts could influence discussions too much just because of people's perception of me. I also think, and I do think like this, that that forum is the community's forum. I might own it, but it's the community's forum, and I've always stuck very, very hard to not having commercial influences on there.

Interviewer: Because that happens quite a lot.

Respondent: I've turned down loads of business because as you can probably imagine, the forum is so busy and popular that people want to advertise on there. They want to promote commercial products on there and I've got to turn this down because this is the members' forum, they are part of the

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site. I can commercialise whatever I want on the other pages and quite rightly I should because if we don't make a profit, there is no ABR.

But on that forum, I've kept it, there's a couple of box ads at the top but they're almost insignificant if you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Well, I suppose that's like people see that this is actually advertising, they know a banner ad at the top is your standard advertising, but as soon as someone tries to do like a covert -

Respondent: Yes, we've been strict on that, the odd one gets through but the policy is no commercial stuff, because that's another thing I've seen on forums that once you let one person do it, everybody wants to do it and why shouldn't they be able to do it if one can do it, and then what you get is a forum which stops becomes a membership room for the members and it becomes something where you're just blasted with advertising. It's like having adverts in the middle of your film, you know?

Right now we've almost got the BBC there where you know if you're going to watch whatever, A Touch of Frost, it's on for two hours without any ads. I think if we relaxes on that, what you'd have is American TV where every five minutes you're interrupted by an advert.

Interviewer: What I always find worse and which kind of ties in with that is product placement where they think they're so clever and put stuff right in the film and then it's actually an advert.

Respondent: Yes, I think I'm of an age in maturity to spot product placement, if you know what I mean? The odd thing, if it's a contributor who contributes valuably, a valuable contributor to the forum and they also happened to be in the industry and if somebody has, say for example we've got somebody on who sells carburettors. If one of the members has got a problem with their carburettor and this other member who sells carburettors comes on and he says, "Well, look, one way of fixing your carburettor is like this, blah-blah-blah," and he gives valuable advice but then he also says, "and if you can't do that, I actually do sell them," I'd let that go through. But if somebody just come on and said, "You need this," then that's an advert.

It's a fine balance, so I would be prepared to let go any valuable contributing member that will answer problems and then at the end of it say, "The alternative is I do do this." That's fine. If somebody comes on and says, "This is what I do," then it's off. I think that's held us in good stead as well because otherwise a forum can get overtaken commercially and when it does that, again, it just sucks that community thing out of it.

Interviewer: Then that's you and your moderators controlling that?

Respondent: Yes, and the moderators are forum members, they are part of the community.

Interviewer: They've volunteered or...

Respondent: They volunteered.

Interviewer: That's great, that's really good, I think that's really important to get them involved.

Respondent: Yes, it's essential because when a forum grows as well, one person can't possibly, some days we have so many posts on there, you couldn't possibly read every post. So yes, you need, but also your selection of moderators is a key as well, because moderating is a very fine balance. If you get a bad moderator, that's another one which can seriously affect the membership as well.

Interviewer: So how did you choose your moderators?

Respondent: It was, to a great extent you've got to go on instinct here, because I watched the posters on the forum over a period of months and I thought who are the level headed guys here, who are the ones that don't, anybody who gets really too sort of 'my car's bigger than your car' and he isn't

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prepared to see any other way is probably not a good moderator.

If somebody says, "Well, you say my car is bigger than yours but let's get the measuring tape out and have a look." Do you know what I'm saying? That's a moderator's response.

Interviewer: Yes, objective approach to it.

Respondent: Yes, and they have to have an objective approach because people do get very involved in forums and it becomes a part of their life as well and they can get emotionally involved in it, and therefore your moderators have to have that ability to walk the line rather than sort of jump by the side. So getting good moderators is an absolute key.

Interviewer: One thing I have written down here, it was quite interesting, we were speaking to Alan Colvin and he said that in the past you tried to get a point system in there to rank members and that had a bit of a backslash?

Respondent: Yes, the forum software came with a, it was like a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down type thing on there where you could vote people, give them a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down. That was being abused where there was a group of people, this only came to light on a certain thing but it was being abused. There was a group of people who were all sort out of order. There were a couple of people who made about three or four profiles and it was the same person and they were giving thumbs-up to themselves. Unbelievable but there you go, and they could give multiple thumbs-down to other people as well, even though it was one person.

There was a group of about three or four people who had done this and they had multiple personalities on there and there were giving multiple thumbs-up and multiple thumbs-down to each other and themselves, but also targeting individual members of the forum who were seeing their thumbs-up go down by about 20 things on a day and thinking, "What the hell have I done here?"

So I thought overall that was open to abuse so I thought let's take it out.

Interviewer: That's interesting, apparently you didn't just take it out, right, you asked the forum members if they wanted to keep it or not?

Respondent: We asked the forum members whether they wanted to keep it, I made people aware of what was going on and I believe the overall consensus was that it can be abused, it has been abused, it's open to abuse again. There was not a technical incident for us to stop that abuse, and it was faceless abuse. If somebody was posting stuff like that then it's there, you could see who's posting it up, you could see who was doing it, but these sort of thumbs-up and thumbs-down were anonymous. It's one of those things, it was open to abuse, it was being abused and we can't stop the abuse, so we took it off, and that was after it was opening up to forum members as well, we took it off.

Something like that is a big decision because you're never going to please all the people all the time, that's for sure. But it was another one where, my own personal feeling on it was yes, it was right to take it off as well, but if the members said we want to keep it on, I would have kept it on.

Interviewer: That's why I wanted to bring it up again because that's like actually the textbook way of doing these kind of things. It's like if, you know how like Facebook or Google always changes things without getting people involved and then people just get angry because they're not involved in this decision. But this is really like a really good example how you got the members involved, you asked their opinion and then you did it based on their feedback.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: That's really good. The one thing, when I looked at Adventure Travel, what I noticed is that they don't have a community.

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Respondent:	Ah, Adventure Travel, we did have a community, we had to pull it off the Adventure Travel website, and this is one of the big things as well. Both our websites are running on software which is about 3.5 years old now, and Adventure Travel got massively hacked.
Interviewer:	Oh, really?
Respondent:	Yes. Every time we cleared out all the crap, it was just pouring back, we were just getting an enormous amount of spam on there and so on, and I decided there was one person's job was almost to clear up every day, and I thought this is totally unproductive, we've got to stop this. It came to the point where I thought the only way I can stop this is by closing down all points of entry. So if you ever at the Adventure Travel site now, there is no way of signing up or anything like that which is a bit of a shame but we've actually got the new Adventure Travel site is up and running on a different address now, we are checking through everything and making sure that that's all done and fine.

But with Adventure Travel, we're not going to have a forum on there, we're just going to have comments and encourage comments on there, on features and so on. The reason for that is Adventure Travel's a very, very broad subject matter. One issue with the magazine, we could have kayaking between New York and Chicago or we could have rock climbing in the Himalayas, so whilst it's a broad interest magazine, it's not really a community because the person who goes kayaking is not the same person who goes rock climbing. Do you see what I'm saying? |
Interviewer:	Yes, so you wouldn't get, if you had these two people talking to each other, they might not have anything to talk about.
Respondent:	Yes, so whilst the magazine is of interest to people, it's a general interest magazine, its subject matter is so wide that you don't get a close knit community. So what are we going to do with the Adventure Travel on that is we're just going to encourage comments on specific features and things we're doing. We've decided to focus on different things in there, and it's going to be a different sort of website to Adventure Bike Rider.
Interviewer:	I know you said that last week you were updating both sites, so that was Adventure Bike Rider as well?
Respondent:	Yes, because the software we're going to use, it's going to be the same software for both sites. Adventure Travel was a lot easy, it's totally new software, I think where websites are going is all in this, it's where websites automatically resize depending on its responses. So we're going up to responsive on that, and that's been interesting in itself because whilst the original template is responsive, it does not necessarily mean that all the things you fill in that template with are responsive. So there's a lot of testing that's got to go on like that.

But it's going to be the same technology we're going to be using with Adventure Bike Rider. So the Adventure Travel site was smaller, easier to do and we needed to do it quicker because we've just had to shut down points of entry on there. So that is what we're going to do, that's what we're going to launch first. Then we've got a template for the Adventure Bike Rider site, when we update that.

So Adventure Bike Rider will be updated, it's a bit of a mammoth task on that one to be honest. But that's all going on in the background now, and we may get our mistakes on the new Adventure Travel site rather than wait... |
| Interviewer: | Roll it out on the bigger side, yes. That's interesting, it's that move to responsive, is that because people are now browsing it with tablets and things like that? |
| Respondent: | Yes, and tablet sales have just overtaken in the last couple of months sales of laptops and PCs, and people buy tablets primarily for viewing rather than interacting. So if you think that now people are buying these products more for viewing than they are for interacting and there's more |

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of them being sold now, you've therefore got to offer a facility which is responsive to viewing, whatever you're doing it on.

Interviewer: That's true. It's funny, when you said about Adventure Travel that it's not one community. I'm talking to one guy in the States who wants to create a motorcycle community for all motorcyclists.

Respondent: It wouldn't work.

Interviewer: It wouldn't work?

Respondent: That's a very strong opinion off me but it wouldn't work. Let's put it this way. There's one company in the UK that could have done that and that's MCN, and they couldn't do it.

Interviewer: Yes, I agree with that, it's not really a community that they have.

Respondent: No, and if MCN couldn't do it, I have no idea what this guy's backing is or something like that, but MCN is still the most profitable title in Bauer's portfolio by the way. It's a massive cash cow for them. Now, if they couldn't do it, I can't see...

Interviewer: When I was talking to him, I was thinking naturally you would always move towards a specific segment like adventure travel or sports bike or racing or something like that, or you would move naturally towards a specific brand.

Respondent: By doing a big, all-encompassing forum community, you're actually fighting against what the web is there for. If you have a look at the web, the web every year is diversifying into smaller and smaller niches. It's not going, the days of the big niches were the at the early days of the web, you know, but now it's going into smaller and smaller and smaller niches.

I even look at, Cardiff City, and there's multiple forums for Cardiff City which reflect different types of supporters. So even the football supporters are very, very passionate, so they've all got that same passion but there's enough difference between the supporters to have different levels of forums.

The difference between motorcyclists I think is even more pronounced than football supporters, and the identity of people within the motorcycle industry is different. Somebody who's a trials rider has virtually nothing in common to somebody who's a heavy duty Harley Davidson owner. I think what you're trying to do is the impossible task.

Interviewer: That's what I was wondering because if it would be possible, then someone else, some other community would have managed to do it.

Respondent: There's also the thing which a lot of people forget by the way is a website costs money and the busier the website the busier it costs. We've had to upgrade our server twice in the history of ABR just because of the bandwidth, the amount of visits and so on. We've not got a massively powerful standalone setup for ABR and it uses a lot of bandwidth. Plus it needs to be maintained and so on.

So there's a lot of costs with websites, and the only way you can recover those costs is through some sort of commercial operation. The obvious one is advertising. When you come down to advertisers now, if you've got a general interest motorbike website, who's going to advertise on that? Because if I was Honda, I'd look at my range of motorbikes and I've got cruisers, I've got off-road, I've got adventure bikes and so on. Now where's the best place for Honda to advertise adventure bikes?

Interviewer: Yes, they want to have a specific targeted community.

Respondent: Absolutely specifically targeted, and I think this is the thing. You can have a good idea, and it

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can be a good idea, but it can be a lousy business. A good idea that's a lousy business ain't going to be around for long. A good business which is a lousy idea will be around a lot longer.

Interviewer: Yes! That's very true. That's funny because one of the things I was wondering about, I thought as soon as I saw ABR was yes, they're going to be successful because it's UK based and there's no one else in the UK. I reckon you obviously know about Horizons Unlimited and APV Rider.

One of the other communities I'm talking to is Horizons Unlimited but even talking to them I've kind of felt that they have a very different focus than ABR so it kind of ties in with that when you say this idea of special segments and special markets. Yes?

Respondent: Yes. I just think, and the majority of bikers who buy adventure bikes in the UK, yes, the ultimate dream is you'd like to ride around the world or something like that, and that's brilliant that people have that sort of thing. But the reality is the vast, vast, vast majority of us are not going to get the time or the opportunity to do it. But as long as we can keep that dream alive, that's great. I think that's what ABR is about, keep that dream alive whether you do it or not, and I think the day you lose that dream is the day when you really get out the pipe, put the slippers on and settle down to pat the dog on the head.

Interviewer: That's it, yes.

Respondent: But it's all about keeping that dream alive, and it's probably that for me. Because I'd love to think that someday I will ride my motorbike around the world, I'd love to think that I would be stopping off en-route climbing mountains, so I'd combine the passions. The reality is for me to find the time and the opportunity to do that, it's hard for me to do that. There's other things I'd like to do as well, like I'd love to go to the States and spend six months hiking the Appalachian trail. That's been one of my dreams to do, but I think when you get wrapped up in a business as well, you just can't walk away from the business for six months.

Because you've got employees, you have a responsibility to employees and everything else then. I'm keeping my own dream alive, and that's good enough for me. As long as I can keep that dream alive that I'll do it one day, that's good enough.

Interviewer: Yes. I think you've done a really good job with ABR. I don't know if I can teach you anything, I don't think so! Did you do any research into like community building or something before you even started it?

Respondent: No, none at all.

Interviewer: So it was all like from being a forum member yourself or something like that?

Respondent: I wasn't even on any motorbike sites to be honest with you.

Interviewer: Well, you've done well.

Respondent: I genuinely think, it's like I say, there are lots of good ideas out there, but it's executed, it's the execution of them which is the key. I think it's a combination of the idea was good because there were open doors there, and I think the execution of it, I had 15, 16 years' worth of experience of publishing behind me, and I think that helped. Put those two things together with a big dollops of, you know, the wind's got to be behind you as well, and I think we had that because the industry was changing over. So we were actually talking to the industry, at the time they were saying, "Yes, we'll advertise with you, that's a great idea."

So I think when you get those three things together, it's a lot easier than coming up with, "I'm going to do a general interest motorbike website." You're fighting against the tide on that.

Interviewer: Yes. It's really interesting. I don't actually have any other questions, I don't want to keep you...

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Respondent: Well, I hope that's been of interest to you, Matt, anyway.

Interviewer: Yes, it's been really, really good and some really helpful stuff and it's nice to see what you find. I'm not an academic myself, I'm quite keen when this thing is over and done with but it is quite interesting to see how theory ties in with reality.

Respondent: Never rule out good luck.

Interviewer: Thank you very much, Alun.

Respondent: Cheers then, Matt.

Interviewer: All right, cheers, thank you. Bye.

Respondent: Bye.

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ABR - Alan

Interviewer:	Hi, Alan, it's me.
Respondent:	Hi Matt, how are you?
Interviewer:	Yeah, basically what it is I'm in the last stages of my dissertation and I'm going this part-time and it's been quite busy – I have to finish my primary research by the end of August and then finish by dissertation by the end of September, so very much appreciated that you will help me. And I have already posted in the Adventure Bike Rider forum and in the Scottoiler threat. Basically what it's about, I'm writing my dissertation about virtual communities and I really wanted to speak to six virtual communities, online communities, and one of them I wanted to have Adventure Bike Rider because it was so nice to meet you and to meet the other guys from the forum when you were up here. And I just thought like Adventure Bike Rider seems to have like a really good atmosphere.
Respondent:	Yeah, the arseholes seem to leave very quickly. It's true though because some of these things it's all nasty, nasty, but with AdventureBikeRider I think there's been a few guys tried it but Alan he monitors it very – well, he does it a bit nicely bu he doesn't let anybody take the Mickey out of folk because you shouldn't do anyway. I had a few people dug at me but I just take everything tongue in cheek and just give it back to them like that and I find they don't bother me. But I suppose you get that in forums because that's the first forum I've ever been on. I've never used a forum before. I've never been on a forum, I've never been into anything like that and on this one I met a lot of really nice people through it and basically that's it.
Interviewer:	So what made you sign up for this forum?
Respondent:	Because I got the motorcycle magazine and I bought the motorcycle magazine and I saw you could do it and I thought oh, this is quite good, I find a lot of interesting information and then I started to put bits on it and my experiences and people seemed to be interested in that. And invite a few people and went camping with them and met a lot of decent folk, really good folk. And there's not any bitchiness in it, as I say because I don't – I'm not really – if they start all that I'll just walk away, I'm not interested in that and I'm not interested in politics in motorcycling and I couldn't care less. I'm beyond that, so that's I find that you don't get that on that forum. Everybody's entitled to their opinion but sometimes if folk get out of order they are told to shut up and get out.
Interviewer:	And it's mainly Alun that monitors that?
Respondent:	There's another guy, James, he's a cop and I get the impression he's not been motorcycling all that long, but he can be quite dogmatic and quite ruthless and I think quite a few time he has been told to shut up because – have you been on the BMW GSer's forum?
Interviewer:	No, I always go on the main page and see – there's always interesting topics…
Respondent:	I know there's a lot of idiots on that and they're very much the guys that know it all and they all walk about as if they're Ewan McGregor and Charlie Boorman and I know both Charlie Boorman and Ewan McGregor because I was a bit involved in that but anyway you know the BMW suit they wear? Well, some guys buy motorbikes and they go in there and think I want to look like that and they buy all the gear and we call them twat suits. But in my naivety I didn't realise that word means something else, I didn't know that. And so – honestly, I didn't know, I must be naïve. So anyway I made a wee comment an that Neil he gave me dogs about that. And I put that on the forum in all innocents and he went complete tits: "Oh you can't because its a women's thing" - and I didn't know that. A few people defended me so he backed off, so I know he can be quite – sometimes he can be self righteous or whatever you like to say, but I put that down in all honesty, I didn't know what that meant 'til he told me, because that's what people do call them. You know the kind of guys I'm talking about…

Interviewer:	Yeah, these two thousand pound suits.
Respondent:	Aye, they go into the BMW shop and BMW must go, "Here is these guys, great" And they end up spending two or three grand in boots and all the rest of it and then they go out and they get wet and it frightens the life out of them and they sell it. But that's the kind of guy you get on that site. But as I say that's the only site that I have ever been on and I quite enjoy it. I find it quite addictive…
Interviewer:	Do you think it's like also the members, like you said, like the members defended you. I mean in research that I've found it's basically that if you have like a virtual community there's always some kind of code of conduct where all people agree…
Respondent:	Fair enough, that's understandable, you can't be abusive or racist.
Interviewer:	I just think in a community if there's some kind of agreed rules?
Respondent:	No, I know they've got the rules but I stick to the rules. Okay, I go in with a bit of tongue in cheek, I don't take life too seriously. They've had people who do. A bit of devilment, a bit of fun as well, because that's what it should be. I get a lot of pleasure out of the forum, it is addictive. I noticed that because I'm – I mean I've never used a forum and I'm on the forum nearly every day, even when I was away abroad I was on it.
Interviewer:	Is it because you're so much involved, like friends that are on that…
Respondent:	As I say, I must've – I would say in the forum I would say I've met – my garage is on the way up north and I must have met eight or ten guys on that forum that I've actually spent time with and every one of them has been all right, there's not any prima donnas or people like that who know everybody, but, no, I find it's just – it's good sensible guys that are interested in motorcycling and it's like a lot of things if you get involved – I mean I used to be involved with the BMW club years ago, but I find if you're involved with a one make (= 1 motorcycle brand) club, people get tunnel vision and if you get tunnel vision people don't see anything out of the box. Well, if you on another bike – and I'm talking about anything, like if you join a – I don't know what can you say, Mini Couper group or club everyone thinks they are the best cars in the world. But here its quite mixed. In my opinion I think BMW are a load of rubbish now, they're not as good as they were, but that's just my opinion because I was across in Germany and I did the HPN tour and I mean he worked for BMW in the research and development department and he told me that BMW could sell washing machines now, they couldn't care less. He says they could sell anything, he said they're just money, money, money. And he said I don't really like the direction of the company I said I know the quality's rubbish and one mate got his bike replaced under warranty. But a brand new bike because it wasn't fit for purpose and that's the first time I've heard that happen in my life, so I'm not impressed – I like the old ones but the new ones do nothing for me at all.
Interviewer:	What was interesting was that you basically you read the magazine and that's when you joined the community.
Respondent:	I didn't know anything about it until I saw the magazine. I mean that magazine's quite hard to come by. I told Alan that. You can't get it in a lot of shops and in fact the shop in Byres road, the newsagent had it. I think Alan knows that the distribution in Scotland is not very good because everything is through John Myers and they've got control over everything, any newspapers in Scotland, any magazine, which no doubt you know that anyway in your business. But as I say that's how I got onto the website.
Interviewer:	I guess you also read like MCM and other magazines but you never really wanted to – I know that MCM has a community and things like that, but it never really…
Respondent:	I don't really like MCM. I think it's the SUN newspaper of motorcycling. And I mean I think I told you I got TOURENFAHRER and other magazines and I get a lot of my information before

it's on there and I give it to Alun even before they get it in the UK because there's a lot of articles there. Like I know they did an article on your stuff about the Scottoiler and BMW collaboration.

Interviewer: In the Motorrad magazine, yeah.

Respondent: Motorrad magazine they did an article about that. There's a lot of stuff as I say sometimes I get stuff from my pals in Germany and I send it to Alun so he's got it before anybody. I enjoy the forum, I think it's all right. And also one thing I would say, I've sold two motorbikes through that and never had any hassles, no hassles at all. I sold two bikes and people have come up, paid their money, no hassle, no mucking about. Nice people.

Interviewer: Like you said you had a couple of guys coming up that you've met and obviously you go on these camping trips, do you think that the ones that you've met in person you've got like a better connection on the forum with?

Respondent: That's it, yeah, we're all kind of in similar situations, I might be older than some of them but I don't take things too seriously. Just get a good laugh, good fun, few beers and talk about motorcycling, put the world to right and that's it. I must say…

Interviewer: It's interesting because on of the things that is in the research is that basically if you know someone online only and then you meet them like in real life that really helps because you then almost like put a face to a name.

Respondent: Yeah. As I say there's one guy turned up and he lives where I live in the west end and a lot of them come up on their way up north. I said to a few of them it's open invitation if you want to pop in for a cup of coffee whatever, a sandwich, you're more than welcome. A few guys have done that, guys I've never met, just have turned up, and the guys are okay. And that's what life's about. You've got to help each other and connect each other. But as I say I haven't met any arseholes on that. Okay, I know there's a couple of guys, in fact he's quite nice to me now that's on that site and he's a know-it-all., he knows everything about everything. I've been sarcastic to him a few times on that and he's kind of my back so somebody else will be getting that. But I've been told through the, what do you call the guy that looks after it all.

Interviewer: The moderators.

Respondent: Yes, one of the moderators is Alun (Site Administrator) and I said: "We've got a guy and he's an arsehole" And he said we know he's an arsehole, he's been warned, you're not the only one that's complained about him. But I realised he's just a know-it-all.

Interviewer: And that's quite easy so you can always go to Alan and like say oh this guy something…

Respondent: Yeah just put a complaint in. Someone put something in ages ago about Auschwitz for a weekend it'll be a good laugh and all that. But I told him right away you can't do that. You can't say that it was a good laugh and he was told to shut up, you know. But I find most of the people are pretty friendly.

Interviewer: And what if someone like new – like I know that Adventure Bike Rider has grown quite a lot over the last…

Respondent: Oh, aye, it's more than – I'd like to know how many folk are on that now. I mean I haven't even looked to see how many there are. A lot of people use it now and there's a lot of people come from the GS riders club, from their forum, a lot come across to that. And I think they come across because they see it's friendly and it's not just politics and backstabbing, it's just nice people. I think Alan's got – he's got a winning formula. And its because his magazine is the only one in Britain.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's what I thought as well, he's doing a good job.

Respondent:	I think when Alan started that magazine I said to him – I spoke to him on the phone and I said about I hope you're not going to be like Tourenfahrer (German Magazine).
Interviewer:	No, that was quite good, yeah.
Respondent:	I said I hope you're not going to be like that. Its full with Touratech adverts. And he says, oh, no – he hadn't heard of Tourenfahrer which I thought was surprising, I thought that's who he's copying, but, no, no, he hadn't heard about that either.
Interviewer:	I'm just here on my computer and just checking it out now.
Respondent:	It's a brilliant magazine. Very good. And if you – they'll send you a newsletter. It's a good magazine.
Interviewer:	They only have a magazine, they don't have a community– well…
Respondent:	I don't speak German– no, I don't know. I don't think – I don't know. They send you – I get a newsletter from them, but I find that's a really good magazine and in fact when I was away in Germany and I told you one of the guys I think he had a company called Lomo.
Interviewer:	Yeah, they do drybags.
Respondent:	The guy in their marketing he's a nice guy in Germany. He asked me to go to a BMW do and show some products and details because they were going to sell more in Europe. But yeah I really like Tourenfahrer and there is another one, another magazine that does Adventure bikes as well, but....
Interviewer:	Horizons Unlimited, I don't know if you know them.
Respondent:	There's another one, there's – I've got a copy in the house. When I get home I can let you know that one, it's a very good one as well and it's all adventure bike stuff as well. Another german magazine because I don't think Tourenfahrer is owned by Bauer is it?
Interviewer:	No, I don't think so.
Respondent:	I know they own Motorcycle News. I think they own a lot of the magazines. I know they are one of the biggest publishers I think in the world.
Interviewer:	Yeah, probably now in the world, yeah.
Respondent:	I don't think – I'm pretty sure that Tourenfahrer are independent. A bit like Adventure Bike Rider. And hopefully it stays that way, it's not a case of somebody will come along one day and offer Alan a lot of money for it, like Bauer and take the magazine over. I think if they do that it'll go down dramatically because they could be selling cornflakes, they couldn't care less.
Interviewer:	And do you think that could happen to Adventure Bike Rider as well?
Respondent:	Oh definitely with someone in the background like that because I know they are very sensational like all that stuff in Motorcycle News. A lot of stuff I put it down as sensationalised rubbish. And a lot of general motorcycling and I'm not really interested in the racing as well, I've got no interest in that whatsoever. I'm into adventure style motorcycles so yeah I got a lot of praise for the Adventure Bike Rider forum.
Interviewer:	Is there anything that you don't like?
Respondent:	Anything I don't like? Let me think. I don't think so. If there was any guy that tried to be cheeky they get told to shut up which takes care of that. No, I think people are not narrow minded, they're quite open which I like. It's not a case of as I said before the one make (=

Motorycle brand) forums and they can't see past them.

Interviewer: I mean some of the communities that I look at at the moment is like new website that's starting and they have like where you can like arrange meet ups because you can also track your route that you're going or like have maps and things like that. I mean is that something – Adventure Bike Rider at the moment only has a forum.

Respondent: He doesn't do that and also Tourenfahrer they do a thing, a hotel directory for the whole of Europe and they do an app for that. And I think that's a bloody good idea and you can buy it. In Britain its five Euros and thats a great idea. It gives you a place and a photograph of it and how to get there so you can put it in your SatNav, I like that idea. I mean obviously Alan's just limited resources, he only started – I mean it's not been going as long as that, so I think he's done very well in the time he's done it.

Interviewer: I think it's really impressive because that's definitely there wasn't anything like that in the UK before.

Respondent: No, there was nothing. I mean I said to Alan I said I'm not sucking up to him because I call a spade a shovel. I said it's amazing that you've got every major manufacturer in that timescale advertising in the magazine, that's not an easy thing to do. As long as it doesn't become, as I say, like a Touratec catalogue because I know – I'm one of these guys that does not have any time for them at all. I've heard a few bad German stories, guys in Germany have told me.So that's my opinion.

Interviewer: Can I ask you one last short question? It's basically just one question I have written down here that I've tried to ask all – it's what do you think are the most important elements for a community to create a community?

Respondent: Friendliness.

Interviewer: Say that again.

Respondent: Friendliness.

Interviewer: Okay, so like the atmosphere in the community.

Respondent: Atmosphere, yeah, uh-huh. Because I don't notice when people join they always post (an introductory message) and I always say welcome. It's nice to be nice to people. And I think people see that and it's not just a closed community you can't get into it because it's all cliquish, like some clubs can be. And I think as long as it's not cliquish and it's dominated by certain people.

Interviewer: I've done that as well, I've like posted my welcome message. Is that like what most people do?

Respondent: That's what I do. And also I put you down, you are on my friend list, so I've done that. And if folk are OK than that's what I do.

Interviewer: I've not really looked into that but that's like one of the functions of this forum that you can mark people as friends, right?

Respondent: Yeah. And one thing they did – they stopped doing it, people have ratings and they stopped that because that was becoming a bit nasty, because obviously when folk thought somebody was a tosser they could make a lot of people saying that and it wasn't nice. So Alan stopped that and if somebody took a dislike to somebody you could actually do a lot – it wasn't nice. So Alan took six months and then he stopped it.

Interviewer: It was almost like cyber mobbing, cyber bullying.

Respondent: Yeah. It was and he stopped it and he also – and to be fair to him he had a referendum on it to ask people's opinion and everybody said you should stop that and he did, so it wasn't a case of him taking over and doing it that way, he did it and at least asked people's opinion, so that's good. And he doesn't – I've noticed things – he lets things go on that forum because there's people maybe advertising and they're not supposed to advertise stuff on that and he'll let certain things go away. Sometimes it's blatant advertising but he's okay as long as folk don't go over the top. I think he's really fair.

Interviewer: That was great. Thank you very much. I will give Alan a call after lunch I think and see if I can get him on the phone.

Respondent: Tell him I was asking for him.

Interviewer: I will.

Respondent: He knows me as Moto Al, so the guy's all right.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And so that's – so you can put me in the raffle for that thing anyway.

Interviewer: Great. Have a good day and see you soon, I reckon.

Respondent: See you soon. You take care.

Interviewer: Cheers.

Respondent: Bye then, bye.

Stage	Element	Keywords
Inception		
	Purpose	Goal
	Focus	Target Audience, Area of interest defined
	Codes of conduct	Rules, Norms and policies, Netiquette, Codes of behaviour, Guidelines
	Reputation	Trademark, Tag line, Branding
	Business Model	Revenue, Funding, Advertising-driven, Subscription, 3rd Party involvement, Fees
Creation		
	Anonymity	Discretion, Identity, Personal information
	Security and Privacy	Handling data sensitively, Access, 3rd Party access
	User-centred design and Evolution	User ideas, User needs, User preferences
	Identity Persistence	Identify other members, Username, User history, Recognizing users.
	Reliability	Stability
	Performance	Fast reaction time
	Usability	Intuitive, Ease of use, Interface
Growth		
	Content	High-quality content, Up-to-date content, Unique content, Exclusive information, Expertise,
	Attracting members	Existence of offline ties, Actively drive members to join, Advertising, Events, Offering privileges to members
	Integrating new members	Assistance, Pairing up with established members, A place to feel welcomed

	Growth Management	Controlling member numbers, Boundaries,	
	Reaching critical mass	Large number of members, Self-sufficient, Self-sustainable	
	Interaction support	Encouraging interaction	
	Trust building	Clear identification of goals and operators, Transparency, Member profiles, Safety and security, History	
	Personalization	Of platform according to members needs	
	Offline events and meetings	Real-world events, Meetups	
	Neutrality	In selecting and presenting offers, Remaining neutral	
	Transparency	Goal of platform, Transparent when choosing offers or presenting information	
Maturity			
	Online events		
	Sales and offers	Exclusive offers for members	
	User tools	Working and creating content, User content	
	Permeated management and control	Getting users involved, Voluntarism, Moderators, Ranking system, Sharing responsibilities, Handing over control	
	Recognition of contributions and loyalty	Rewards, Status, Status symbols, Social recognition, Visibility of contributions, Incentives	
	Subgroup management	Sub forums, Private areas and forums, Narrowly focused sub forums, Gathering places	
	Feedback and development	Member satisfaction, Development according to feedback	