

# Imagined Communities

## How businesses can leverage imagined communities:

Evolution, trends and their relevance today

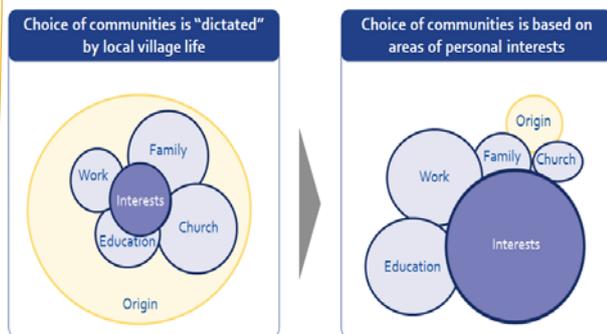
### Humans have always been drawn together:

Communities have formed since humanity began in order to survive, bond and thrive.

There was a time when your community was limited to those in a defined group, often restricted to your origin or other area of close physical proximity:

- Your family
- Your village
- Your church

Communities now have a more global reach, are more diverse and more virtual. Furthermore, people are expressing their interests, beliefs and opinions, and changing their behaviors more than ever before.



### Imagined Communities are based on groups that have a common interest but do not necessarily meet

Benedict Anderson argues in his thought-provoking book published in 1983 entitled *Imagined Communities* that communities were historically based on nationhood, under the pretext of political and economic gain. Therefore communication principally through print media played a big role in people relating their identity to their nation.

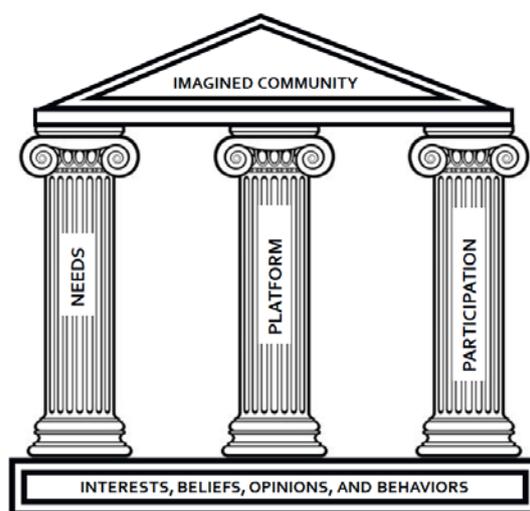
Due to globalization and advancement in technology, particularly in transportation and

communication, we argue that there is a long-term shift from people identifying with communities of origin to communities of interest.

### This trend can have many business implications for:

- The way we connect with others
- The way we behave and consume
- The way businesses appeal to us and how we react to them

### The fabric of an *Imagined Community* is comprised of 3 main pillars:



- **Needs** – what is the basis of this connection or bond? Is it a strong or loose link? Is the bond formed out of necessity or interest?
- **Platform** – how do people access this community? Do people meet in person? Do they use the internet to connect? Is communication one way?
- **Participation** – do people feel free to express themselves? Is participation controlled or monitored? What role does each person play in participation?

Businesses should consider each of these pillars to either create or leverage existing communities.

Companies use different approaches, depending on the maturity of the industry and size of the interest group

- Businesses set the rules & tone of the group

Create

- Businesses adapt to the rules of the group

Existing

Big brands that we know today have either created a new or accessed an existing imagined community. Market segmentation is not new and neither is brand building. However, imagined communities are a form of self-segmentation in which people make choices and communicate what their needs and interests are. Therefore, identifying relevant groups for your business and determining your approach to draw value from self-formed interest groups is key.

### Considerations when accessing an existing imagined community:

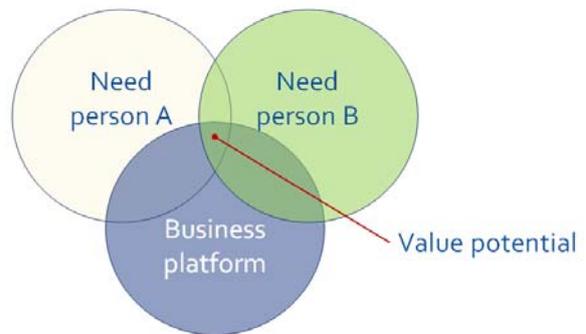


- **Access** – whether you have the ability to create or access existing communities & how the access is granted
- **Action** – whether your role is to observe, participate or influence
- **Reaction** – whether the community will accept or reject the outsider’s role

Businesses must be aware of the potential challenges of an existing group and manage the communities’ well-being and expectations. Therefore, *know* what the community’s interests are, what your business capabilities are and where these overlap.

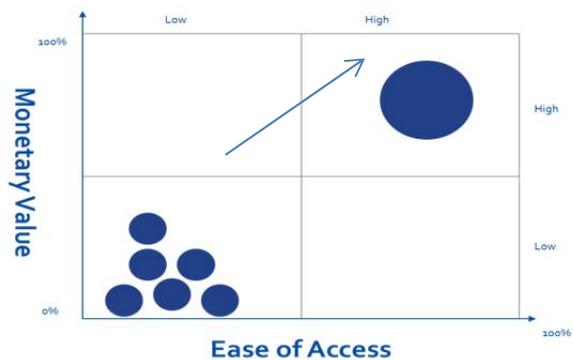
### How to draw value from an imagined community?

Firstly, one must identify the crossover between people’s interests and what your business can provide.



Secondly, if there is no current platform bringing together this community, a business can provide this service to target a group with common interest. This allows them to monitor and perhaps influence the way the imagined community interacts, and to boost participation to an ideal level.

Finally, a business can create value by enlarging



the crossover of the community’s and the businesses’ capabilities to maximize value for both parties.

