TACKY AND PROUD

Exploring Tecnobrega’s Value Network
by Ana Domb Krauskopf
Tacky and Proud: Exploring Tecnobrega's Value Network

By Ana Domb Krauskopf

Executive Summary

Media industries are currently navigating a period of relentless transformation. Due to its industrial, technological and cultural affordances, the music industry has played the role of loss-leader in these shifts. Understanding the behaviors of music audiences can provide insight into the nature of this transformation, perhaps pointing towards ways in which these processes can be experienced as productive growth rather than inevitable downfall.

This paper explores the role of audiences as productive actors in the music industry and uses the value network as an analytical tool to facilitate the process of locating audience involvement and specifying the audience’s role as creators of economic and symbolic value.

Why Tecnobrega?

Our main case study in this white paper is Tecnobrega ("Cheesy Techno"), a grassroots Brazilian music industry found in Belém (the capital city of Pará, a northern state of Brazil). This study is based on the ethnographic research conducted during ten days of interviews and participant observation in Belém in March 2009. Belem is a city of only about 1.5 million people, yet it hosts approximately 4300 Tecnobrega parties a month, and 1700 concerts by Tecnobrega musicians (Lemos & Castro 162). Tecnobrega audiences are composed primarily of working
class young people in their 20s, an unsurprising fact given that 38% of Brazil's population is between the ages of 15 and 29. Tecnobrega evolved outside mainstream media, yet it became a successful music scene thanks to its innovative forms of production, distribution, promotion, and its strong relationship with audiences.

Tecnobrega has also benefited from increasing widespread internet access throughout Brazil. According to the Center of Studies on Information and Communication Technologies, 17% of Brazilian households owned a computer in 2005. By 2008 this number had increased to 27%. Internet access within the household increased from 13% to 20% in the same period. While in 2005 the majority of households with Internet used a dial-up connection (65%), today 58% connect at broadband speeds (Comitê Gestor da Internet no Brasil). As in many nations outside of the US, mobile web penetration is ahead of computers per household. In 2008, 70% of the population used cell phones (up from 55% in 2005) and 24% of them were already using them to download music or videos. (Comitê Gestor da Internet no Brasil). Access to technology, along with the audience’s impetus to participate, created a fertile arena for creative appropriation of technologies, be it through music sampling or music sharing.

In the midst of this increasing technological development, Tecnobrega artists have implemented a business model that responds to their audience’s context. Tecnobrega’s creators do not enforce copyright, relying on audiences and pirate networks to spread their content. The result is a loyal and tremendously participatory music scene, where the audience’s engagement is as much part of the events as the shows themselves. Fans distribute, promote and “bring the heat” to the Tecnobrega environment. This paper will describe Tecnobrega's value network, tracing the way monetary and non-monetary value moves through the system.

**Breaking Away From The Value Chain**

To appreciate the breadth of the audience’s participation, it is first necessary to understand the audiences’ actions and map their engagement. Understanding the value they provide to industries requires them to be acknowledged as participants within an industry’s broader value production scheme. The manufacturing industry’s standard tool for the analysis of value generation is the **value chain**, a model that has long described the processes of music industries as well. Such a model struggles, however to effectively account for the role of media consumers - audiences. When adapting the value chain to media industries, the role of the audience/consumer is
commonly anchored at the end of the productive process, ignoring the variety of multi-directional exchanges of audiences participating within the modern media landscape.

A value network provides a more detailed way to understand the relationships between the respective participants contributing to the success of media industries, while retaining the basic idea that value increases as products circulate. The network is a dynamic concept with fluid dependencies. Analyzing the circulation of value around a network provides a more nuanced way to account for the value audiences add to media properties as it recognizes that they are not the end-point; many are involved in the creation, distribution, and promotion of content.

A value network approach can also highlight activities that fall outside the realm of the monetary economy but which nevertheless add value to the industry as a whole, such as the work of consumers acting as grassroots intermediaries. The Tecnobrega network is made up of two complementary sub-networks, one dedicated to monetary transactions and a second one where symbolic exchanges take place. The latter sub-network is where social capital circulates. Symbolic and economic value emerge out of different types of transactions, but it’s the co-existence of these different forms of value that energize the Tecnobrega industry. The DJs’ recognition of their audience, the social bonds built around the parties, that is what motivates the fans’ loyalty and economic support of the industry.

The main actors in the Tecnobrega network are the DJs, the musicians, the audience (and superfans), the event producers and the sponsors. While some actors, like the event producers, sustain the network primarily through monetary transactions, others, like the DJs, trade mostly in symbolic capital, publicly recognizing the fans’ and the musicians’ contributions to the environment. It is the synergistic relationship between these actors, and between the types of value that they produce, that creates and sustains the Tecnobrega environment.

Beyond Tecnobrega
Prioritizing social capital and audience participation is not exclusive to Tecnobrega, nor is it the only industry where the productivity of audiences are revealed by value network analysis. For this reason, the paper also explores the value network of American political satire talk show The Colbert Report.
Conclusions

Many media properties today, could benefit from acknowledging their audience as active participants in the value generation process. Recognizing them as actors beyond the act of “consumption” is a key step towards being able to locate the different forms of value that today’s creative and engaged audiences produce.

If industries move to embrace the different types of value produced by their audience, this can then be incorporated into the industry’s value generating process. Taking this stance means companies can spend their time, energy and money uncovering new strategies to benefit from the value provided by all the agents in the value network around a property, rather than expending these resources trying to enforce one-way value flows.

Adopting a value network approach provides insights into the way value is generated around media properties or industries, and the contributing roles different actors play. By overlaying monetary and non-monetary relations in the network, it is possible to account for different types of value as well as identify their interactions.

Whether for Tecnobrega or The Colbert Report, audiences have already engaged with content by adding their own contributions. Content owners now need to understand what motivates their behavior and decide if and how they will recognize audiences as both consumers and collaborators.