THE FORMATION OF BRAND TRIBES AND THE SUBSEQUENT BEHAVIOUR OF BRAND TRIBE MEMBERS

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ABSTRACT

A recurring theme in the commercial industry is that of ever-changing consumer and social movements and the ensuing effect on consumer behaviour. One such trend which has emerged in recent years and remains largely under theorised is that of brand tribalism. To address this, this study attempts to investigate the influence of brand credibility and brand experience (through brand loyalty as a mediator) in the formation of brand tribe membership— from the consumer's perspective— and the subsequent influence of brand tribe membership on consumer behaviour. The conceptualised model and three hypotheses are empirically validated using a sample of 261 respondents. The findings indicate that there is a positive relationship between the aforementioned constructs and brand loyalty— as hypothesised. Further, the findings showed that there is a positive relationship between brand loyalty and brand tribe membership. Managerial implications of the research findings are provided.

KEYWORDS: Brand Tribalism, Brand Credibility, Brand Experience, Brand Loyalty

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1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

A recurring theme in the commercial industry is that of ever-changing consumer and social movements and the ensuing effect on purchase intent (e.g. Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2011; Cova & Cova, 2002; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Veloutsou, 2007; Gordon & Valentine, 2000; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009; Williams & Page, 2010; Rook, 1958). Kozinets & Handelman (2004) and Veloutsou (2007) emphasise the importance of tracking trends which threaten to transform the culture and ideology of consumerism and the subsequent effect on consumer behaviour. One such trend which has emerged in recent years is that of brand tribalism. It has become apparent that consumers are veering away from the traditional individualistic purchase behaviour of their predecessors; instead, consumers are entering a reverse cycle, whereby social dynamics – previously thought of as a constraint- is now embraced (Cova & Cova, 2002).

A vast number of researchers of the academic community agree that brand tribalism is a relatively new concept; under-theorized and under-conceptualized (Cova & Cova, 2002; Tuominen, 2011; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Mitchell & Imrie, 2011; Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013), however, brand tribalism, in itself, has been in existence for many years (practically speaking), preceding recent interest in its theoretical conceptualisation. Indeed, the vast majority of individuals today unconsciously belong to a brand tribe- as consumers and employees (Tuominen, 2011). Tuominen (2011) describes brand tribalism as the tendency of individuals to make purchasing decisions based on their shared belief in a brand, hence the word tribe is used. These individuals are more than just consumers, they believe in the brand to such an extent that they are unwilling to make purchases from other brands offering similar products or services. Further, members of brand tribes play the role of advocates (Cova & Cova, 2002, Cova, 1997, Tuominen, 2011) as they seek to promote and defend their tribe often with the intention of converting "non-believers", consequently growing their tribes. Such tribes have begun to emerge on a global scale, particularly in the mobile market (Taute & Sierra, 2014).

A brand tribe member can then be defined as any individual who has gained membership in a particular brand tribe. It is significant to find that little is known regarding the formation of brand tribes, particularly from the consumer’s perspective. There has been a tendency in recent studies to address the different forms of brand collective categories. According to Mashamwa (2016) credibility of brands are effective in all situations, it depends on the goal to be achieved. For instance, Goulding, Shankar and Canniford (2013) differentiate between subcultures of consumption, brand communities and brand tribes- which are often confused to amount to the same thing and are often incorrectly used, interchangeably. Goulding, Shankar and Canniford (2013) find that subcultures of consumption and brand communities differ in the way that consumption communities do not display political resistance or boast robust social structures. Furthermore, individuals of consumption communities enjoy membership of a profusion of groups. These individuals pick up and discard these groups at will, in an attempt to express their ever-changing identity. Gordon and Valentine (2000), support this point of view in their study.
The individual is constantly alternating between two states, namely a mutable one and a stable one (which is temporary). An individual’s stable state represents their identity at present. This is often reinforced through their purchase behaviour. There is indeed, sufficient evidence present in numerous studies to suggest that individuals form their identities through the act of purchasing in the market (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Gordon & Valentine, 2000; Spry, Pappu & Cornwell, Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2011). Brand communities, however, differ in the way that only one focal brand exists in a particular brand community. Furthermore, members of a brand community tend to acknowledge a moral responsibility they have to other members of the community (Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013). In many ways, brand communities are similar to brand tribes in the way that members feel strongly attached to the focal brand. Furthermore, members share rituals and possess similar mindsets. The underlying difference, however, is that brand tribes tend to be more playful (Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013), less structured and less formal. Emphasis is placed on collectivism toward achieving one’s passion, rather than fulfilling one’s social responsibility- as is the case with brand communities. It is of significance to note that the social value one obtains as a result of possessing tribe membership is of more importance to these brand tribe members than whatever is being consumed (Cova & Cova, 2002; Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013).

Yet another unique characteristic of brand tribe members and perhaps the pinnacle for those in the commercial field, such as marketing managers and advertising teams, is the loyalty brand tribe member’s exhibit to their brand tribe. Surprisingly, very little research has been conducted with regards to the concept of brand tribalism within a developing region. More specifically no research to date, at least to the best knowledge of the authors has been done on the matter within Southern Africa. Many have only now started to realise the strategic importance the concept of brand tribalism may possess in this day and age. Tuominen (2011) describes modern society as a collection of various tribes. The implications here are of significance. Firstly, if consumerism has transformed to the extent whereby a substantial part of society is now defined by brand tribalism, then more research in this area is required. Secondly, the theory is required to explain how the ideology of brand tribalism will ultimately affect consumers’ behaviour. Due to the lack of theory in this area, this study will seek to fill the void by investigating the indirect effect of brand credibility and brand experiences on brand tribe membership and the direct effect brand loyalty has on the formation of brand tribe membership thereby contributing to academic literature. Furthermore, Consumer Culture Theory is consulted and employed to provide a strong theoretical grounding for this study. In this manner, this study is necessary to broaden the narrow knowledge base currently in existence, thereby assisting researchers and practitioners who have a particular interest in this area. This study has practical implications for modern brands, thus practical implications are provided.

The rest of the article is organised as follows: A theoretical literature review, conceptual framework and hypotheses are provided. These are followed by the discussion of methodology, data analysis and conclusions are outlined thereafter. Finally, managerial implications, limitations and future research directions are given.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Consumer Culture Theory
Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is an interdisciplinary field thus comprising of multiple perspectives regarding consumers and consumer behaviour. Consumer Culture theory is a collection of a variety of perspectives, and does not provide a generic point of view- thus it is heterogeneous. Over the past 20 years, the theory has paid particular attention to the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects of consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) and has brought to light the sociocultural complexities of exchange behaviours and relationships. Furthermore, the theory is constantly evolving as a result of continuous research. The theory is built on the idea that individuals in modern society exist as part of a networked market, whereby they utilise the market to build images that reflect their self-identity.

Several studies over the last decade have tended to support this point of view. Gordon and Valentine (2000) describe the 21st-century consumer as constantly alternating between two states, namely: A mutable state and a stable state- which are temporary. An individual is in their stable state when they have adopted an identity, through the use of purchase behaviour, whereby they consume products from the market to build their desired image. Consumer Culture Theory is unique in that it addresses consumption and its antecedents in the social and cultural context. This type of ideology is significant as it has allowed for the conceptualisation of new ideas. For example relationship marketing, sub-cultures of consumption and brand communities. Chiefly, the theory underlies the theme of brand tribalism, which is central to this study. Although Consumer Culture theory is heterogeneous in nature, a common goal unites CCT researchers, in the manner that they all seek to decipher the cultural complexities in which the consumer is enveloped (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In addition, a further distinct characteristic of CCT is that it does not seek to place consumers into distinct, mutually exclusive categories; rather the theory accepts the premise of overlapping cultural groups.

On another note, critics question the validity of CCT, owing to the notion that a vast majority of these studies are qualitative in nature- substantiated by little statistical backing. Arnould and Thompson (2005) argue that this can be justified as pure coincidence and that the aims of the study drive the method employed. Further, several researchers have emphasised the necessity of this theory as a strategic resource, particularly in the augmentation of marketing strategies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Rook, 1985; Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Veloutsou, 2007). Moreover, the theory provides society with a means to explore how consumers derive messages from advertising and other marketing efforts and transform it into something of worth which they can utilise to enhance their image- particularly in a social context i.e. to raise their social status in their perceived societal hierarchy.

Arnould and Thompson (2005) suggest that CCT has advanced consumer knowledge through four research programs, namely: consumer identity projects, marketplace cultures, the sociohistoric patterning of consumption and mass mediated marketplace ideologies and consumer interpretive strategies. Several implications are inherent here. Firstly, that the consumer is goal driven and that their goal is to achieve a very specific identity.
This underlies the concept of brand tribalism; the idea that consumers are seeking a sense of belonging (Tuominen, 2011; Cova & Cova; 2002; Taute & Sierra, 2014). Secondly, under the notion of marketplace cultures; consumers are viewed as cultural producers. Cova and Cova (2002) support Arnould and Thompson's view point in their study; they suggest that tribes will exist regardless of intervention i.e. consumers collectively produce culture even when exempt from marketing efforts. This suggests that in today's society those in the commercial field should consider consumers as partners, not simply the target of their marketing efforts. Thirdly, under the notion of sociohistoric patterning of consumption, institutional and social structures influence consumption behaviour i.e. factors such as social class, community, ethnicity and gender – which very well may form the basis of tribes- influence consumption. Kuikka and Laukkanen (2012), argues against this point of view, suggesting that individuals do not become members of a tribe based on factors such as geographical location, sex, ethnicity, religion or any other common segmentation base, but rather by education and accomplishment. Wallendorf (2001) finds a common ground, suggesting that literacy is distributed by social class. Lastly, the work done by Arnould and Thompson (2005) suggests that consumers are interpretive agents. This is significant as it implies that marketing and other communicational efforts do indeed have some influential power in shaping consumer preferences. This is of particular significance in this study, where the central theme is to determine whether and which external efforts induce brand tribe membership.

### 2.2 Brand Credibility

According to Erdem and Swait (2004), brand credibility is a signal of quality and product positioning. In addition, Erdem and Swait express the cumulative effect past events and behaviours have on a brand's credibility at present. This is referred to as reputation in economic literature. In the existing literature, it is argued that brand credibility has a positive significant effect on brand tribe membership (Tuominen, 2011).

One of the most widely used theories, in the matter of explaining the formation of a consumer’s consideration and choice sets, is the cost-benefit approach (Erdem and Swait, 2004; Hauser and Wernerfelt, 1990). The higher the perceived benefits and the lower the perceived risks, the more likely a consumer will adopt a brand in its consideration set. A credible brand is likely to encounter less perceived risk by consumers and is desired where a brand's offerings are rich in experience and credence attributes, giving rise to consumer uncertainty (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011). In addition, brand credibility is influential, in the consumer's consideration and purchasing process, where desired information surrounding the brand is unattainable due to physical or financial barriers (Kuikka & Laukkanen, 2012). Moreover, a brand as a source of credibility results in lesser costs owing to an information search, thereby satisfying the cost-benefit theory (i.e. a more credible brand will result in reduced costs, therefore, it will more likely be considered (Tuominen, 2011). Erdem and Swait (2004), find that there are two notable sub-dimensions of brand credibility, namely: trustworthiness and expertise. Trustworthiness - which Erdem and Swait (2004) describe as the consumer's perceptions regarding the brand's willingness to follow through on promises made- holds greater value to the consumer than expertise- which is the capability of the brand to follow through on its promises.
Brand credibility can be sustained through consistent application of the marketing mix over time as well as consistent brand investment (Erdem and Swait, 1998). One of the ways that managers can do this is by constantly meeting or exceeding expected brand performance—as per the disconfirmation paradigm (Kanning & Bergmann, 2009). This, in turn, ensures that the brand occupies a consistent and credible brand position in the market.

2.3 Brand Experiences

Brand experiences are every interaction that occurs between a consumer and the brand. It involves a combination of an individual's five senses and is experienced at a brand's touch point. Each experience shapes the individual's perception of a brand. In the existing literature it is argued that brand experiences have a positive significant effect on brand tribe membership (Tuominen, 2011), unfortunately, there is no statistical evidence (to the author's knowledge) to support this theory. Arnould and Thompson (2005), in their study of Consumer Culture Theory, find that there is a relationship between brand experiences and institutional and social structures. According to Zarantonello and Schmitt (2011), consumers are not interested in buying products solely for their functional benefits but they are also interested in the experiential value the purchase and use of the product (or service) provide. Brakus et al. (2009) emphasise the importance of brand experiences in influencing customer satisfaction. Brands will require practices and gatherings exclusive to the brand tribe known as rituals. Rituals are imperative in sustaining brand membership (Rook, 1985; Cova & Cova, 2002). According to Brakus et al. (2009), brand experiences have four dimensions namely: a sensory dimension, an effective dimension, an intellectual dimension, and a behavioural dimension. In the current study context, it is anticipated that a satisfactory or greater than satisfactory brand experience, on a continual basis, will subsequently induce brand loyalty.

2.4 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty describes a component of consumer behaviour whereby a consumer demonstrates their faithfulness to a brand through two dimensions namely: attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty (Rundle-Thiele & Mackay, 2001; Kuikka & Laukkanen, 2012). Actions such as repeat purchases (i.e. behavioural loyalty) and positive word of mouth (i.e. attitudinal loyalty) demonstrate brand loyalty (Chinomona, Mahlangu & Pooe, 2013). Simply put, brand loyalty is the tendency elicited by individuals, whereby they continue to purchase products from the same brand as opposed to purchasing the item from competitors. This is a key objective for most brands since repeat purchases mean greater revenue and lower acquisition costs (Cova & Cova, 2002). This concept is especially admissible to brand tribalism. Arnould and Thompson (2005) suggest that brand tribe membership originates from brand loyalty. Moreover, various studies have linked the ideology of loyalty as being an underlying characteristic of a brand tribe member. Cova and Cova (2002), segment brand tribes into four distinct groups namely: low participation individuals, active members, practitioners and devotees. Mitchell and Imrie (2010) supplement Cova and Cova’s (2002) research whereby they identify a fifth role which they term “chief”. These segments seem to be influenced by brand loyalty thus there is an opportunity to analyse loyalty as a factor- and an influence on brand tribalism. In the current study context, brand loyalty resulting from brand credibility and satisfactory brand experiences, on a continual basis, is expected to induce brand tribe membership.
2.5 Brand Tribe Membership

Tuominen (2011) describes brand tribalism as the tendency of individuals to make purchasing decisions based on their shared belief in a brand—this is the definition employed in the current study. A brand tribe member can then be defined as any individual who has gained membership in a particular brand tribe. Tuominen (2011) through their research finds that individuals may be members of several brand tribes to express an element of their identity at different points in time. Gordon and Valentine (2000) address this concept in their study where they refer to two different states an individual can be in at any point in time, namely a mutable state and a stable state which they term a “moment of identity”. This concept of a moment of identity supports Tuominen's findings. Although brand tribes have practically been in existence for many years, "brand tribalism" is a relatively new term within the commercial community, with little research currently available on the subject.

According to Tuominen (2011), brand tribalism is significant for the reason that modern society is moving towards this concept. In addition to this, members of a brand are more than just consumers; they are promoters and advocates of their brand (Cova & Cova, 2002; Tuominen, 2011). For a business entity, this means less expenditure is required for activities such as acquiring new customers, resulting in an overall growth in profits. Tuominen (2011) further describes brand tribalism as possessing potentially unique characteristics offering those in the commercial field—more specifically marketers—the opportunity to analyse the concept and utilise the benefits possibly to yield a competitive advantage. Cova (1997) and Cova and Cova (2002) discuss brand tribes in their study and contrast the Latin micro social marketing perspective with that of traditional marketing theory and concepts currently in use. Further, they are able to describe brand tribalism in a marketing context whereby they dissect brand tribalism and are able to segment tribe members into four distinct groups namely: low participation individuals, active members, practitioners and devotees.

Mitchell and Imrie (2010) supplement Cova and Cova’s (2002) research whereby they identify a fifth role which they term “chief”. An individual’s “rank” seems to be related to their loyalty to the brand which in turn may be influenced by brand credibility and brand experiences. Kozinets and Handelman (2004), address consumer movements in their study whereby they touched upon the idea of consumers uniting together in support of a single brand, however, they call for greater conceptualisation in this area. Goulding, Shankar and Canniford (2013) discuss facilitating the formation of brand tribes using qualitative methods, with a particular focus on the tribe—the study fails to acknowledge the individuals perspective. Furthermore, little research has been conducted from a quantitative approach. Tuominen (2011), acknowledged this in their study, stating that further research on the topic is required. Goulding, Shankar and Canniford (2013), suggests that individuals do not become members of a tribe based on factors such as geographical location, sex, ethnicity, religion or any other common segmentation base, but rather by education and accomplishment.
Cova and Cova (2002) support this in their study, where they describe a tribe as a collection of heterogeneous groups (i.e. is inclusive of several segments) linked only by a shared passion or emotion- Consumer Culture Theory makes provisions for this point of view. Cova and Cova (2002) expand the concept by describing a brand tribe as a group of individuals with shared consumption behaviour and social interaction based on shared values. In the current study context, brand tribe membership is expected to result from brand loyalty which itself is induced through brand credibility and satisfactory brand experiences, on a continual basis.

3. Conceptual framework and hypothesis

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model of the study. Drawing primarily from Consumer Culture Theory while simultaneously focusing on external factors (unique to the consumer) expected to induce brand tribe membership, a conceptual model is developed. The model consists of four basic constructs, namely brand credibility, brand experiences, brand loyalty and brand tribe membership which were thoroughly reviewed in the previous section. Brand credibility and brand experiences provide the starting point for the model and directly affect brand loyalty which in turn induces brand tribe membership. Simply put, the model presents a conceptual framework for investigating the indirect effect of brand credibility and brand experiences on brand tribe membership and the direct effect brand loyalty has on the formation of brand tribe membership. The hypothesis developed hereafter explains the associations among the constructs in more detail.

![Figure 1: Conceptual framework](image)

- **Brand Credibility**
- **Brand Experiences**
- **Brand Loyalty**
- **Brand Tribe Membership**

**H1**

**H2**

**H3**
3.1. Brand credibility and brand loyalty

According to Tuominen (2011), perceived brand authenticity is expected to contribute to the formation of a brand tribe. Brand credibility is a signal of quality and product positioning (Erdem and Swait, 2004) - this is constructed over time as a direct result of cumulative past events. The consumer will evaluate the brand based upon internal criteria developed as a standard by which to assess similar brands within a specific industry.

Brand credibility also referred to as a brand's reputation in economic literature; is a psychological factor which could facilitate repeat purchases i.e. behavioural brand loyalty (Rundle-Thiele & Mackay, 2001; Kuikka & Laukkanen, 2012; Chinomona, Mahlangu & Pooe, 2013). To put it another way, a credible brand reduces uncertainty, therefore, putting the consumer at ease, when making the decision as to whether to invest their resources in a particular brand or not. This notion is supported by the cost-benefit approach (Erdem and Swait, 2004; Hauser and Wernerfelt, 1990). The higher the perceived benefits and the lower the perceived risks, the more likely a consumer will adopt a brand in its consideration set. A credible brand is likely to encounter less perceived risk by consumers and therefore, it can be postulated that:

\[ H1. \text{ Higher levels of brand credibility are positively associated with higher levels of brand loyalty.} \]

3.2. Brand experiences and brand loyalty

According to Tuominen (2011), experiences felt through interaction with the brand is expected to contribute to the formation of a brand tribe. Brand experiences are every interaction that occurs between a consumer and the brand. They are subjective, internal consumer and behavioural responses evoked by brand stimuli (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009). Consumers are not interested in buying products solely for their functional benefits but they are also interested in the experiential value the purchase and use of the product or service provide (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2011). This is especially true for brand tribes (when compared to brand communities) which are seen to be more playful (Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013), less structured and less formal. Emphasis is placed on collectivism toward achieving one's passion, rather than fulfilling one's social responsibility, hence experiential value is of paramount importance. A brand experience, not unlike perceived brand credibility, is a psychological factor; satisfactory brand experiences trigger repeat purchases i.e. behavioural brand loyalty. This notion is, too, supported by the cost-benefit approach (Erdem and Swait, 2004; Hauser and Wernerfelt, 1990). The higher the perceived benefits and the lower the perceived risks, the more likely a consumer will adopt a brand in its consideration set. A satisfactory brand experience results in a higher perceived benefit thus, it can be posited that:

\[ H2. \text{ Satisfactory brand experiences are positively associated with higher levels of brand loyalty.} \]
3.3. Brand loyalty and brand tribe membership
Brand loyalty is the tendency elicited by individuals, whereby they continue to purchase products from the same brand as opposed to purchasing the item from competitors. Arnould and Thompson (2005) suggest that brand tribe membership originates from brand loyalty. Moreover, other studies have linked the ideology of loyalty as being an underlying characteristic of a brand tribe member. The notion is that a loyal consumer of a particular brand will ultimately become so attached to the brand that they will inadvertently become members of that particular brand. The consumer will soon become accustomed to the rituals of the particular brand; they will adopt a role within the brand (Cova and Cova, 2002; Mitchell and Imrie, 2010); they will defend and advocate the brand as a natural response to "non-believers" (Cova & Cova, 2002, Cova, 1997, Tuominen, 2011). Therefore it can be proposed that:

H3. Higher levels of brand loyalty are positively associated brand tribe membership

4. Methodology

4.1 Sample and data collection

Data was obtained from consumers who are currently members of a brand tribe at the University of the Witwatersrand- both staff and students alike, in the city of Johannesburg, South Africa. The research sampling frame included several lists of courses containing students and staff from different faculties- examples are 1st year Commercial Law, 2nd year Media, 2nd and 3rd year Law, 3rd year Marketing. This study makes use of structured data collection, where questionnaires are prepared in advance and questions are asked in a prearranged order. This process is direct and thus non-disguised. All questionnaires consist of fixed-alternative questions where respondents are asked to select from a set of predetermined responses. Descriptive, multiple cross-sectional surveys were physically handed out and thereafter self-administered. Surveys asked respondents to identify a brand with which they feel they have a deeper sense of attachment; the rest of the survey then asked them to respond to the measurement instruments in relation to the brand which they have identified. The researcher then collected the survey on completion. The initial sample size was 300, of which 261 questionnaires were completed correctly and was analysed; 17 were not completed correctly and were removed; 22 were never returned. Ergo, 261 usable questionnaires were retrieved and were included in the final data analysis, therefore, representing a response rate of 87%.

4.2 Sample description

Table 1 represents the demographic profile of the participants. The majority of the participants are female- accounting for 52.1% of the sample- this fairly represents the population of the University of the Witwatersrand as well as South Africa- 51.4% of the population is female (Statistics South Africa, 2012). It can also be seen that the majority of the sample were younger than 21 years of age making up 60.2% of the sample. This is significant for two reasons: Firstly, the majority of the sample is therefore predominantly made up of youth.
Secondly, this is significant specifically in a South African context since the majority are considered “born-frees”, from a political and social point of view- meaning they were born post-Apartheid Era. From a marketing perspective, it can be seen that the majority of the participants belong to the Generation Z segment, i.e. Individuals born after the year 1994 (Williams & Page, 2010)-making them younger than 21 years of age at the time of writing. Almost double that of Generation Y- those individuals born between 1977 and 1994 (Williams & Page, 2010) - putting them between the ages of 20 and 37 at the time of writing.

Table 1: Sample demographic characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>125</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>52.1 %</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>100 %</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>&lt;21</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>60.2 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>35.6 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Measurement instrument

Research scales were operationalized on the basis of previous works, however, adjustments were made where required to ensure suitable scales were utilised in the research context. A five-item scale was used to measure brand credibility adapted from the previous works of Erdem & Swait (2004) and Spry et al. (2009). A two-item scale was used to measure brand experiences, adopted from Zarantonello & Schmitt (2010). A three-item scale was utilised to measure brand loyalty, adopted from Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) and Chinomona, Mahlangu & Pooe (2013). Lastly, a four-item scale was utilised in order to measure brand tribe membership, adopted from Veloutsou & Moutinho (2009). All the measurement items were measured on 7 - point Likert-type scales that were anchored by 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree to express the degree of agreement. Individual scale items are listed in Appendix.

4.4 Measure validation

In accordance with the two-step approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) and further advocated by Chinomona and Pretorius (2011) prior to testing the hypotheses, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted with the purpose of scrutinizing the reliability, convergent and discriminant validity of the multi-item construct measures using statistical software- namely AMOS 22. AMOS was used to determine whether or not the model fit is adequate. Overall acceptable model fit are indicated by Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) ≥ 0.80; Adjusted Goodness-of- Fit Index (AGFI) ≥ 0.80; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) values ≤ 0.08; Incremental Index of Fit (IFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Relative Fit Index (RFI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) values ≥ 0.90; PCLOSE ≥ 0.05 and Chi-square degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF) value < 3.
Recommended statistics for the final overall-model assessment show acceptable fit of the measurement model to the data: chi-square value over degrees = 142.811 (69), CMIN/DF= 2.070; GFI = 0.929; AGFI = 0.893; IFI = 0.960; TLI = 0.947; NFI = 0.926; RFI = 0.902 CFI = 0.960; RMSEA = 0.064; PCLOSE = 0.059. Loadings of individual items on their respective constructs are shown in Table 2, composite reliability and validity values are shown in Table 3, while the scale construct correlations are presented in Table 4.

Table 2: Accuracy Analysis Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Construct</th>
<th>Mean Value</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Test</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Item Total</td>
<td>α Value</td>
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<td>Brand Credibility (BC)</td>
<td>6.194</td>
<td>0.901</td>
<td>0.889</td>
<td>0.817 0.826</td>
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<td>BC 1</td>
<td>6.32</td>
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<td>0.796 0.860</td>
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<td>0.682 0.754</td>
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<td>BC 4</td>
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<td>BC 5</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td></td>
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<td>BE 1</td>
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<td>BE 2</td>
<td>3.95</td>
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<td>0.438 0.592</td>
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<td>Brand loyalty (BL)</td>
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<td>0.662 0.743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BL 3</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.652 0.740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Tribe Membership (BT)</td>
<td>5.678</td>
<td>1.138</td>
<td>0.792</td>
<td>0.643 0.743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT 1</td>
<td>5.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.643 0.743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT 2</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.610 0.741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT 3</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.527 0.535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT 4</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.527 0.535</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: C.R.: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Reliability; * Scores: 1 – Strongly Disagree; 3 – Neutral; 7 – Strongly Agree *significance level: *** p<0.01 for all the factor loadings Measurement CFA model fits:

χ²/(df) = 751.679 (314), p < 0.01; GFI = 0.889; AGFI = 0.866; IFI = 0.914; TLI = 0.904; CFI = 0.914; RMSEA = 0.056.
In terms of reliability, it can be seen from Table 2 that the Cronbach's coefficient α (or Cronbach's Alpha) for each construct is greater than 0.6, furthermore the individual item loadings are all greater than 0.5, thereby indicating acceptable reliability as more than 50 percent of each item's variance is shared with its respective construct (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Chinomona & Pretorius, 2011). Moreover, the overall reliability of the data collected is 0.866, indicating acceptable reliability. In addition: Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance extracted (AVE), Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) and Average Shared Variance (ASV) were calculated in Table 3. It can be seen that the Composite Reliability for all of the constructs are greater than 0.6 and most approached 0.7 thus marginally accepted, thus indicating acceptable internal consistency and reliability. It can also be seen from Table 3 that AVE values were above 0.4 and most approached 0.5 thus also marginally accepted (Fraering & Minor, 2006; Chinomona & Pretorius, 2011).

In terms of validity, Convergent Validity was measured by looking at the factor loadings in Table 2 and the AVE and CR values in Table 3. It can be seen that the AVE values are all greater than 0.4 and most approached 0.5 while the CR values are all greater than 0.6- therefore marginally accepted (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Furthermore, all the CR values are greater than their AVE values. Lastly, all the factor loadings are greater than 0.5, therefore, Convergent Validity is evident (Chinomona, Mahlangu & Pooe, 2013). Discriminant Validity was measured by looking at Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) and Average Shared Variance (ASV) and comparing it to AVE- in Table 3. It can be seen that MSV and ASV are both less than AVE, therefore discriminant validity is evident. To guarantee discriminant validity it is necessary to look at the correlations between constructs in Table 4 and the Factor Correlation matrix with the square root of the AVE on the diagonal in Table 5. It can be seen that the correlations are all below 0.8 in Table 4 while the square root of the AVE on the diagonal in Table 5 is greater than all the correlations with other factors. Therefore, discriminant validity is evident.
5. DATA ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilised to estimate the relationship between the constructs based on the conceptual model presented as Figure 1. A two-step approach was used, with the measurement models tested prior to testing the structural model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Chinomona & Pretorius, 2011). The model is acceptable in terms of overall goodness of fit. Acceptable model fit are indicated by CMIN/DF value < 3; both GFI and AGFI values ≥ 0.80; RMSEA values ≤ 0.080; IFI, TLI and CFI values ≥ 0.90. The results indicate that, CMIN/DF (2.655); GFI (0.902), AGFI (0.857); IFI (0.935), TLI (0.918), CFI (0.935), and RMSEA (0.08) therefore achieved the suggested thresholds (Chinomona & Pretorius, 2011). This suggests that the model converged well.

The results in Table 5 provide support for all three of the proposed hypotheses. The first postulated hypothesis was the relationship between brand credibility and brand loyalty. Consistent with hypothesis one (H1), results indicate that higher levels of brand credibility are positively associated with (and are therefore expected to induce) higher levels of brand loyalty. The second posited hypothesis was the relationship between brand experiences and brand loyalty. Likewise, in support of hypothesis two (H2), the results indicate that satisfactory brand experiences are positively associated with (and are therefore expected to induce) higher levels of brand loyalty, however, the p-value is insignificant. Two reasons exist that may explain this. Firstly, a possible reason for this insignificance is that South Africa is a developing country and the measurement instruments utilised to evaluate this relationship were assessed in a developed nation. Burgess and Steenkamp (2006), suggest that this is problematic. Measurement instruments originating from the Western world may be too long and complex for individuals of emerging markets. Secondly, brand experiences are surrounded by subjectivity, thus although the hypothesis is supported the relatively high standard deviation (as compared to the other constructs) may be the cause for this insignificance. The third and final postulated hypothesis was the relationship between brand loyalty and brand tribe membership. Consistent with hypothesis three (H3), results indicate that higher levels of brand loyalty are positively associated with (and are therefore expected to induce) brand tribe membership.

Table 4: Factor Correlation matrix with square root of the AVE on the diagonal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>BE</th>
<th>BL</th>
<th>BT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>0.780</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>0.670</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>0.432</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.834</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT</td>
<td>0.527</td>
<td>0.431</td>
<td>0.543</td>
<td>0.701</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Results of structural equation model analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesized Relationship</th>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Path Coefficient</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Credibility (BC) → Brand Loyalty (BL)</td>
<td>H1</td>
<td>0.654</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Experiences (BE) → Brand Loyalty (BL)</td>
<td>H2</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>Insignificant (P = 0.645)</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Loyalty (BL) → Brand Tribe Membership (BT)</td>
<td>H3</td>
<td>0.586</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: χ2 (df) = 780.940 (319); GFI = 0.884; AGFI = 0.863; IFI = 0.909; TLI = 0.909; CFI = 0.909; RMSEA = 0.057; ***p<0.01.
6. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study is first and foremost to investigate the influence of two variables (namely brand credibility and consumer brand experience) on brand loyalty as well as to investigate the mediating influence of brand loyalty on brand tribe membership. In order to empirically evaluate these relationships a sample of 261 respondents, from the University of the Witwatersrand was used. All three of the proposed hypotheses were supported, indicating that brand credibility positively influences brand loyalty; brand experiences positively influence brand loyalty; brand loyalty, in turn, positively influences brand tribe membership. However, the relationship between brand experiences and brand loyalty (Hypothesis 2) was not statistically significant. Perhaps this can be accredited to the subjective nature of brand experiences which may be highlighted by the relatively high standard deviation observed of the construct. Important to note about these findings are that both hypothesis 1 and 3 are significant at the 1% significance level. Perhaps this is because brand credibility is more likely to reduce perceived risk. Following the cost-benefit approach, the higher the perceived benefits and the lower the perceived risks, the more likely a consumer will adopt a brand in its consideration set (Erdem and Swait, 2004; Hauser and Wernerfelt, 1990). This study is one of the first to look at the formation of brand tribes from a quantitative perspective. Moreover, to the best of the author’s knowledge, this study is the first to look at the formation of brand tribes from the individual’s perspective. Furthermore, this study is the first of its kind to be conducted in the context of a developing nation i.e. South Africa. Overall the findings of the study contribute to the narrow knowledge base available at present, further, it provides practical support to the notion that practitioners can, in fact, induce brand tribe membership.

6.1. Managerial implications

The results of this study provide useful implications for practitioners such as marketing managers in developing regions in southern Africa but more particularly in Johannesburg, South Africa. The overall implication for managers is that they can influence the induction of brand tribe membership. Firstly, it is useful for practitioners to note that brand tribes can be created by focusing on creating and augmenting brand loyalty. Ergo, managers efforts should be directed towards achieving brand loyalty first as the findings suggest that brand loyalty has a positive significant effect on brand tribe membership. Furthermore, at least two of the ways one can do this is by improving the brand’s overall credibility- i.e. creating a brand that the consumer can trust as well as providing a satisfying brand experience. One of the ways that managers can do this is by constantly meeting or exceeding expected brand performance - as per the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm (Kanning & Bergmann, 2009). For instance, managers should attempt to find out more about their customers, specifically what they expect from their products or services. Thereafter, specific procedures can be developed to ensure they continually exceed, or at the very least, meet expectations. Additionally, the study also provides added insights and contributes new knowledge to the existing body of literature regarding brands and brand tribalism specifically in a southern African context.

6.2 Limitations and future research

Although this study is positioned to make theoretical contributions and provide deeper insights into the formation of brand tribes, it is not without limitations. Firstly, the majority of the sample is younger than 21 years of age- accounting for 60.2% of the sample.
Although literature supports the theory that younger consumers are more brand-centric and thus epitomise the concept of brand tribalism, the results would have been more informative had the sample included other age groups in more equal quantities. Secondly, measurement instruments were adapted from sources where research was predominantly done in developed regions. Burgess and Steenkamp (2006), argue that emerging markets, such as South Africa's, are characterised by lower levels of formal education, therefore measurement instruments constructed for developed regions, which requires a greater degree of sophistication, may not be suitable.

Howbeit, it can be argued that since the respondents were all members of a higher education institution, they possessed the recommended level of sophistication required to respond to the measurement instruments provided, adequately. Thirdly, the findings are particularly representative of Johannesburg, South Africa. Replicating this study in other parts of South Africa would have improved its substantiality. Fourthly, since the concept of brand tribalism is relatively new, several definitions are currently in existence. Although the majority of these definitions are fairly similar, the ability to generalise these findings comes into question relative to the definition used. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, although brand tribalism is expected to positively influence purchase behaviour, in theory, this study did not statistically evaluate the validity of this assumption. Furthermore, there is literature that suggests self-identity could influence the formation of brand tribes; however, self-identity was not tested statistically. Ergo, future research could extend the current conceptual model.

REFERENCES


Author: Jarryd Sigamoney


Appendix: Construct Measurement Items

**Brand Credibility**
BC1. This brand has the ability to deliver what it promises
BC2. This brand delivers what it promises
BC3. This brand’s product claims are believable
BC4. Over time, my experiences with this brand have led me to expect it to keep its promises, no more and no less
BC5. This brand has a name you can trust

**Brand Experiences**
BE1. This brand induces feelings and sentiments
BE2. This brand is an emotional brand

**Brand Loyalty**
BL1. The next time I need that product, I will buy the same brand
BL2. I intend to keep purchasing this brand
BL3. I am committed to this brand

**Brand Tribe Membership**
BT1. This brand is right for me
BT2. Using this brand does something good for me
BT3. This brand fits my image
BT4. This brand is related to the way I perceive life