

SOCIAL MEDIA AND VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES' ROLE IN THE CONSUMER-
BRAND RELATIONSHIP: AN ONLINE INVESTIGATION INTO THE
DEVELOPMENT OF CONSUMER IDENTITY

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Abstract

Academia's research into the influences and consequences of consumer behaviour have led to the emergence of several theories developed within consumer research or adapted from the social sciences. This research project provides a significant contribution to this tradition of consumer research by exploring the evolving role of social media in cooperation with brands to individuals' lifestyles, identity and consumption decisions. The research approach adopted was exploratory but designed to consider a research problem which had several angles. The research was concerned with discovering the drivers of consumer-brand identification that are influenced by the social media context, which then influence the development of identity and the consumer-brand relationship. This research problem guided the formation of several objectives and questions with the overall aim of understanding the relationship between identity, identification and the consumer-brand relationship due to the interactive environment of social media. This study fills a gap in the research where consumer-brand identification, consumer-brand relationships and social media brand communities interact but are not usually studied for their influence on each other. Consumer research has not fully outlined the composition of the social media brand community and the consequences to identity. The study adopted an interpretive approach consisting of netnography, in-depth interviews and social media monitoring to explore the brand community in this continuously evolving platform. The study consisted of eight interviews, five thousand hashtag posts and five thousand brand posts. The data analysis comprised of thematic analysis and the BASIC IDs framework, which revealed that social media brand communities have a strong influence on the development of consumer identity, by acting as a socialising agent that places the values of the brand and community at the core at the individual's self-concept. The social media brand community, though virtual, provides a real audience for individuals to express themselves. The process of identifying with the brand and the community, built the identity of the individual with the brand central to the development and accomplishment of his or her identity goals, prestige, distinctiveness and belongingness. As such, the brand and community develops the consumer identity but also support social as well as personal identity and other layers of the individual's self. The consequences of such being brand loyalty, brand and community commitment as well as passion plus the inclusion of these into the individual's self-concept. The social media brand community enhances the consumer-brand relationship due to the proactivity of individual interaction within the platform. Additionally, the emerging hierarchy provides structure that outlines the

measure of influence members have on each other and the development of a consumer culture within the social media brand community. The findings have implications for consumer research and practice. Modelling a process for the development of identity and the consumer-brand relationship as well as showing the hierarchy of membership within the social media brand communities provides a measure of structure that had previously been missing in academic discussion. The findings also give marketing managers a clearer outline of the environment to share their content and social media strategies. Researchers can build on this research by applying quantitative methodologies or executing similar studies in other types of brand communities.

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Dedication

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Chapter 1: General Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The link between social media, identity, and identification and consumer-brand relationships to the human experience has grown steadily over the past decade. The consequence of such a strong connection has caused the consumer literature to grow in addressing the impact of these concepts, separately and in collaboration with each other on the individual. However, there are some uncertainties about the consequences of the interaction of all these concepts in influencing the individual. This research seeks to clarify this gap in the knowledge by conducting an empirical investigation within the social media brand environment and developing a model that shows the development of identity and relationship in this setting. This chapter will outline the research significance, objectives, questions, setting, theoretical basis, contribution to knowledge and methodology used within the study.

1.2 Research Significance and Research Problem

The research problem of this study contemplates how social media brand communities influence consumer-brand engagement and the consequences to the individual's identity management as well as the consumer-brand relationships. Consumer research into social media's influence on consumer behaviour is essential for several reasons, motivating this investigation into the development of identity and brand relationships. Firstly, authors agree that social media's influence on the lifestyles of individuals and the culture of communities is reflected in its role in many areas of the users' lives, including identity, consumption decisions and interpersonal relationships (Bolton et al., 2013; Wang, 2017; Powers et al., 2012). Therefore, as social media communities evolve to have structure and hierarchies, as discussed in this research, it is necessary to create the framework for understanding these roles on the individual, the brand and the consumer-brand relationship. Secondly, the role of the brand is growing in the life of the individual, in terms of developing identity (e.g. social, personal, professional or country) and a collective means of affiliation as people become more fragmented along, religious, political or class structures. Hence, consumer research into the role of the brand will remain relevant as the brands give individuals the ability to identify acceptable values or identities and purposely show their place in their society (Kressmann et al., 2006; Mousavi, Roper and Keeling, 2017). Another justification for the research is the importance of identity to the individual in the development of personal relationships, professional or social affiliations and a distinctive sense of self (Belk, 1988; Stokburger-Sauer,

Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Kressmann et al., 2006). Therefore, it is essential to keep abreast of the changing priorities of society in relation to identity motivations and how developments such as social media assists in the achievement of these goals.

This research as noted above is significant in consumer studies as it addresses several research gaps identified within the literature review discussed in chapter two and outlines a model of consumer identity and consumer-brand relationship within social media brand communities. The research gap is discussed in more depth in section 1.3 of this chapter. The research is also significant from a practical perspective. There are increasing numbers of individuals using social media either as their full decision source or as an essential part of the process, including consumption choices. There is an estimated 2.46 billion users of social media in 2018, with over 135 million users engaging daily with these sites (statista.com). This number is a sixty-seven percent increase in daily usage over the past decade. This increase in members and daily users is reflected in the investment of marketing budgets of corporations to digital and social media outlets. Digital and social media budgets grew to fifty-two billion pounds in the UK and US alone and one hundred billion across the globe (Reuters, 2018). The social and digital media spend is forecasted to grow in the next five years (Jones, 2018). With a strong consumer engagement as well as marketing or corporate investment within social media, it is essential to have further investigation for studies to determine how engagement therein contributes to consumer identity. Research will continue to investigate the influences and consequences of engaging with social media brand communities on individuals, communities and societies-at-large. The emerging nature of social media brand communities create challenges of brand positioning (Dimitriu and Guesalaga, 2017), effective marketing communications (Key and Czaplewski, 2017) and consumer-relationship management (Trainor et al, 2014) for businesses. Therefore, from a practical perspective, research that uncovers the identity-based motivations of social media will assist marketing managers with crafting brand identities, images and engagement policies that build the requisite associations within the minds of their target audience and drive consumer-brand identification and consumer-brand relationships.

1.3 Research Gap and Contribution to knowledge

This study, through an extensive literature search, has identified several gaps that need to be addressed. This research fills a gap, in the literature, where consumer-brand identification, consumer-brand relationships and social media brand communities interact but are not studied for their influence on each other or the influence on consumers' identity. The main aim of the

research is, therefore, to outline how each of these influential concepts contribute to the development of consumer identity and a strong consumer-brand relationship. Firstly, there is a gap in determining a cohesive definition of the social media brand community. This study will frame the discussion around Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), who identified three markers of community within online collectives. Relling et al. (2016) argued that within brand communities especially online and social media brand communities (SMBC), there needs to be further investigation to discover whether there are any additional markers of community. Therefore, this research defines social media brand community and determines what elements including the original markers are required for a brand collective on social media to be categorised as a community. This includes the discovery of three additional markers of community in the social media brand community: individualisation, creativity and engagement. Furthermore, this research is concerned with the ability of social media to generate relationships and self-expression (Cabral, 2008) which contributes to the development of these brand communities. The research, therefore, will outline how this environment aids the development of consumer identity and the consumer-brand relationship.

Consumer-brand identification is an established process of developing one's identity by identifying with a brand (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Kressmann et al., 2006; Tuskej, Golob and Podnar, 2013). This version of identification is related to the concept of consumer-company identification as discussed by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) and has influenced the development of consumer-community identification (Popp and Woratschek, 2017; Ho, 2015; Johnson, Massiah and Allan, 2013). This study acknowledges that more research is needed into the identity-based motivations (Oyserman, 2009; Shrum et al., 2013) of joining social media brand communities. Therefore, the discussion outlines the identity-based antecedents of consumer-brand identification and the consumer-brand relationship as they apply within the social media brand communities. This includes the concept of disidentification (Wolter et al., 2011; Josiassen, 2011), which is not adequately covered within the literature. Consequently, the engagement behaviour of individuals who display disidentification within the social media brand communities and their motivations are outlined within the study. Hall-Phillips et al. (2016) argued that consumer research has ignored the role social media plays in building identification, leaving a quite noticeable gap in the literature. The results will show how the engagement behaviours develop consumer-brand identification as well as consumer-community identification. The study shows the multi-dimensional aspect of CBI in social media including the affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects.

The review identified theories which are relevant to the development of identity and consumer-brand relationships in the social media brand community, but that are not given sufficient attention in the literature. Firstly, there is currently inadequate academic research into the development of social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) within the social media brand community context. This paper contributes to this gap in the literature by addressing the development of social identity within the communities under investigation. Self-congruity (Sirgy, 1982) is not discussed, in relation to social media brand communities and the motivations of selecting or engaging with chosen communities. Furthermore, the lack of studies regarding self-congruity, as it relates to engagements within social media brand communities, motivates this research to contemplate at which level is there a self-community match within the social media brand community context. Researchers have spoken about social comparison theory and its application to social media (e.g. De Vries and Kuhne, 2015). However, there is need to determine its applicability in the case of social media brand communities. The social comparison theory has been applied to the social media environment. However, this research seeks to consider how it extends to the social media brand community. Consumer research has not adequately addressed the role that social media and the brand communities therein play in advancing the consumer culture. The research acknowledges that social media brings a balance of power in the relationship between brand and consumer (Venkatesh and Akdevlioglu, 2017) while supporting the development of an individual's identity (Black and Veloutsou, 2017). However, it falls short of declaring how social media brand community contributes to the establishment of an identity as a consumer as opposed to a producer. Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) attempts to account for the behaviour of consumers within a marketplace based on labels given to them by their society. As Consumer Culture Theory illustrates the pre and post-acquisition behaviours that motivate value (Arnould, 2007), this paper aims to contribute to Consumer Culture Theory research and determine the role of social media brand communities therein.

There is ambiguity in the process of consumer identity and consumer-brand relationship creation in social media even though online social media networks and brand communities are increasingly studied in consumer research. A central aspect of research is the ability to trace how individuals incorporate brands into their identity. Dittmar (1992, 2017) and Belk (1988) are among researchers who show that individuals use brands as a means of creating themselves by filling a perceived gap in their identity or expanding themselves based on their possessions. Fournier (1998) and researchers thereafter (e.g. Aggarwal, 2004; Lin and Sung, 2014; Xie,

Poon and Yang, 2018) show the importance of the consumer-brand relationship to individual and corporation. However, there remains a gap in modelling a clear process of consumer-brand relationship development within the social media environment. Much of the reason for this is the application of traditional consumer-brand relationship concepts, in this new media environment to avoid 'reinventing the wheel'. This is an understandably cautious approach but the investigation into the consumer-brand relationship online remains in a nascent state two decades later. As such, the research develops a proposed model of consumer-brand relationship development that considers the contribution of consumer-brand identification and engaging practices in social media brand communities to the identity of the consumer and the relationship with chosen brands. In such a way, academic and practical stakeholders can visualise the consequences of the social media brand community for both individual and brand, in terms of identity and relationship development.

1.4 Research Objectives and Research Questions

Research Objectives

The following research objectives were conceptualised in order to facilitate the development and execution of an empirical study to address the aforementioned research problem (section 1.2):

1. To define the drivers of consumer-brand identification within the online context of social media.
2. To examine the role of social media brand communities in creating the environment for the development of consumer-brand identification.
3. To determine the consequences of online consumer-brand identification concerning the development of identity and the emergence of the consumer brand relationship.
4. To understand the relationship between identity, identification and the consumer brand relationship as fostered on social media

Research Questions

Furthermore, the following research questions emerged based on the initial investigation of the conceptual and theoretical framework that form the intersection of this research:

1. What are the online drivers or motivators of consumer-brand identification?
2. How does consumer-brand identification influence the development of identity in members of social media communities?

3. How are brands used to develop the individual's identity (consumer identity) on social media?
4. Are there differences to consumer-brand identification inspired by online communications as compared to traditional communications?
5. What are the consequences of online consumer-brand identification for the consumer-brand relationship?
6. What is the role of the interactive web (social media) in developing consumer-brand identification?

1.5 Theoretical Basis for the study

This thesis considers several concepts, which have been heavily debated by scholars across a host of theoretical and practical disciplines. The evaluation of ideas or theories with so many perspectives, some of which may be diverse and others that may converge to form similar meanings has the potential to create complications in the discussion of said concepts. Therefore, it is crucial to establish the definitions of the concepts, as they will be applied throughout the entire thesis.

Identity

The concept of identity is essential to the study of the human experience, from social sciences, psychology and business among other disciplines. However, the multi-disciplinary range of this construct has made the formulation of a clear definition of identity quite a challenge (Scott, 2015). According to Lawler (2014), such difficulty results in the term being rather slippery in nature. Nonetheless, the ambiguity of the term increases the intrigue (Scott, 2015) and the academic interest across a range of research areas. The study of identity has made significant contributions to investigations in sociology and psychology (Jung and Hecht, 2004) and, importantly for this study, consumer research. Notably, Nagy and Koles (2014) explain that identity has a rich history of study within the social sciences. Indeed celebrated scholars from Freud to Mead to academics like Foucault and Bourdieu and current sociologists like Belk have explored what identity means within several contexts. The concept of identity has been heavily researched with the intention of defining and categorising its effect on human relationships and behaviour. Identity, according to Serafini and Adams (2002), is a social-psychological construct that essentially communicates what is important to one's self, while Belk (1988) uses self and identity as synonyms for a person's perception of who he or she is (Ahuvia, 2005). In

this manner, Scott (2015) argues that identity is more of an illusionary concept, than a real one; one that is always under construction. Identity is presented as both a process of negotiation with our society (Craib, 1998) and a set of beliefs about who an individual is (Black and Veloutsou, 2017). Kettle and Haubl (2011) determine that individuals all have a sense of who they are based on physical attributes, character traits, abilities and their perceived place in society; all of which combine to create their identity. Such a determination, presents grounds for a cohesive definition of identity, but does not consider the purpose of identity. Scott (2015) and Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) consider that identity is one's ideas about one's self and the roles that make one both unique and gives one a place to belong. This concept of identity creates a boundary between one's self and those around you (Scott, 2015) and makes one occupy a role by integrating the meanings of said role into one's performance of one's identity (Stets, 2005).

Several researchers have discussed identity not as one cohesive aspect of an individual but as several layers of being (Scott, 2015; Lawler, 2014; Nagy and Koles, 2014; Schau and Gilly 2003). These different layers may be separate based on a person's place at any given time (Brewer and Gardner, 1996), but are potentially united by one thread or aspect within one's self (Craib, 1998). The levels of identity most vastly discussed within the literature include personal identity, relational, material and social identity (Jung and Hecht, 2004; Lawler, 2014; Nagy and Koles, 2014). Within consumer research, the concept of the consumer identity is also a salient discussion currently underway. An additional layer of self to consider is the notion of the online identity, especially what it means within the context of the other layers. Consumer identity can be defined as an identity wrapped up in purchasing material goods to complete a deficit noticed in yourself (Dittmar, 2007). This layer of identity is shaped by supporting a particular brand or set of brands that communicate something important to yourself or the social category that one identifies with and according to Dittmar and Drury (2000) it is about presenting the appropriate image. Consumer choices are a means of consciously constructing an identity especially within a consumeristic society (Gabriel, 2015). One should consider this layer of the self (consumer identity), a supportive one to the other layers. Another form of identity that theoretically acts as the support for the other layers is that of online identity, a serious consideration within these evolving times of more readily accessible digital media. Online identity is similar to Cheney-Lippold's (2011) "algorithmic identity" where one's identity or self is categorised based on the manner in which individuals use the internet. Online identity has moved from being anonymous and fragmented by network or website to being

means of consistently representing one's self online (Bechmann and Lomborg, 2012; Garbasevski, 2015). Brannback et al. (2016) notices that one's complete identity shows what is relevant to an individual's context. One aspect of one's identity may be more important than another layer, in what researchers call identity salience. However, Lawler (2014) argues that the separate portions of identity are not easily divided but may be in tensions with each other. Based on this discussion, the conceptual definition the following is the definition of identity to be adopted within the context of the study. The sum of all the layers of one's identity (personal or individual, social, consumer, online and ego among others) which collaborate to create one's overall perspective of one's self.

Identification

Identity creation incorporates several stages or processes. An essential portion of this process of identity production according to Lawler (2014) is that of identification, which she defines as the creation of identity by "identifying with an 'other'. This 'other' can come in the form of people, organisations, brands, communities and any other segment or sub-segment of society. Identification is considered a cognitive process (Zhou et al., 2012; Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan Thomas, 2015) which allows individuals to develop a collective identity (Brown, 2000; Habibi, Laroche and Richard, 2016) around a favoured 'other.' Lawler (2014) argues that identification means you wish to join the narrative of the person or brand with which you identify. When identifying with a society or community, researchers note that it signals a sense of belonging (Brogi, 2014; Cheung and Lee, 2012), which is important to identity creation since identification caters to the desire for social identity (Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010). The self-brand overlap, as Trump and Brooks (2012) term it, is essentially a form of brand identity fusion (Lin and Sung, 2014) whereby the individual is identifying aspects of the brand to merge into his or her identity. The sense of belonging and identification speaks to a perception of oneness with a group of persons (Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010) who one deems is similar to oneself or possess values and characteristics that one believes is desirable. Habibi, Laroche and Richard (2016) argue that shared consciousness and feelings of community contribute to the growth of identification. The process of identification in developing one's identity has been discussed for decades and is evolving to incorporate the influence of new technologies on individual lifestyles and communities. Identification can be positive regarding the 'other' that one feels a sense of belonging to or kinship with, or negative where one feels a lack of connection with some "other" and that becomes a core part of one's identity. Scott (2007) argues that disidentification can be essential to identity development and take several other

forms such as deidentification and ambivalent identification among others. Disidentification, in this case, is the rejection or separation from any association with the perceived behaviours or characteristics of a category of persons (Josiassen, 2011). For example, a person may disidentify with a consumer grouping or brand based on the fact that he or she believes that the typical consumer of that brand is dissimilar to him or her and the brand goes against his or her values. Therefore, identification on the one hand and disidentification on the other is defined herein as social means of developing one's self by associating or disassociating one's self from a group of people or organisations that possess what matches one's perception or society's belief as positive or admirable characteristics or image.

Consumer-brand Relationship

According to Veloutsou (2009), the concept of the consumer-brand relationship, as a form of interpersonal relationship, has been a long-established approach in consumer research. The notion of the consumer-brand relationships was proposed and proven by various researchers including Fournier (1998) in her seminal paper to Lopez, Sicila and Moyeda-Carabaza in their 2017 examination of identification in brand communities. In this relationship, consumers develop emotions or connections to brands (Fournier, 1998) for a variety of reasons such as identity creation or similarity. In seeking to form a definition of the consumer brand relationship, it is essential to understand that individuals perceive brands in the same manner that they do other people (Keller, 2012). Consequently, one can argue that individuals then form relationships with brands in the same way and for the same reasons that they do with other persons (Aggarwal, 2004; Keller, 2012). The concept of the consumer-brand relationship emerged as researchers sought to examine the reasons behind repeat purchase behaviour. Repeat purchase behaviour or, on the surface of it, customer loyalty has since been broken down into simply purchasing out of routine or convenience with no emotional connection and the purchase made out of a true sense of connection to the brand and its values. While Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009)'s definition of the brand relationship as any bond that brings buyer and seller together accounts for financial, physical as well as emotional bonds, Aggarwal (2004) considers it to be an intimate bond usually reserved for friends and family. The ability of humans to anthropomorphise inanimate objects has proven the basis for the consumer-brand relationship (Aggarwal, 2004; Hudson et al., 2016). Anthropomorphising brands allows consumers to apply human characteristics to the brand and aids the process of viewing brands in the same manner as people (Fournier, 1998). Therefore, consumers can connect with brands based on perceptions of the brand's characteristics and behaviours (Veloutsou and Moutinho,

2009) despite the fact that the brand is not a person or living creature. As Fournier (1998) explains the consumer believes the brand can form a valuable relationship partner based on the characteristics that consumer places on the brand. Furthering, Fournier's (1998) work, Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann (2005) view this approach to brand relationships as consumer-centric and define brand relationship quality as the consumer perception of the brand as a fitting partner in an enduring relationship. This research will delineate the consumer-brand relationship as the direct and or indirect connection between consumer and brand based on the brand's symbolic meaning and the consumer's perception of a self-brand connection. Consumer-brand relationships are brand-initiated or consumer-generated based on agreed meanings between the brand and the consumer.

Brand Community

The concept of community has evolved over time in academic and general discourse. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) argue that community is a central to social theorists and philosophers and show that the concept has broken through its initial restrictions to adopt a broader meaning. Communities, therefore, come in various forms and collectives. Consumption communities are such collectives which allowed the members of the community to have emotional bonds and relationships to each other and to the brand (Brogi, 2014; Lopez, Sicilia and Moyeda-Carabazza, 2017). Zaglia (2013) identified several such communities within the overall concept of the brand community which include online brand communities, small group brand communities, virtual large network communities and brand fests. Brand communities research has a long history within the consumer research (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2015) seeking to examine the social networks of brand users to show how the brand is essential to connect people with each other (Carlson, Suter and Brown, 2008; Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012). Brand communities are founded on the shared value or interest that is the brand which makes them specialised consumer communities in the view of Zaglia (2013). The most cited definition of brand community in the past decade and a half is that of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, pg. 412) in their breakthrough paper which states that a brand community is "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. It is specialized because at its centre is a branded good or service. Like other communities, it is marked by a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility." A subcategory of this community is the social media brand community, which is a brand community founded and located in a social network site such as Facebook (Park and Kim, 2014). This research project adopts Kaplan and Haenlin's

(2010, p. 61) definition of social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”. These platforms act as facilitators of user-generated content are agreed among the literature for a strong environment for engaged online communities where brands and consumers share their stories (Haji et al, 2017; Kao et al., 2016).

1.6 Methodology

The research adopts an interpretivist paradigm based on its participatory, exploratory and open nature of data collection. Interpretivism rejects natural science techniques as inappropriate for the study of human behaviour and phenomenon (Khan, 2014; Kim, 2016). There are many stories within the social media context and therefore, interpretivism has been chosen because it presents the full and complex experience of the study’s research field (Lecompte and Schensul, 1999; Tsang, 2014). To support the interpretive paradigm within this study, a qualitative methodology is used for several reasons. In the words of Belk (2017) qualitative research provides a perspective to a research project that statistics and numbers cannot, thus providing the grounds for such an approach to be used in this study. This research will be performed in the qualitative tradition and use the tools of netnography (participant observation) and in-depth interviews, incorporating one quantitative tool (i.e. social media monitoring). Three global brands were selected who appeared on Forbes top ten list of engaged online brands over a period of three years. The data is collected across official brand pages on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and the hashtags from within those sites. The research uses a qualitative sampling plan incorporating purposive sampling for brand communities and social media professionals with quota sampling for content and individuals. The social media posts included in the data set from brand pages were 5,000 posts while the posts gleaned from the hashtags were 5,000 posts. This was reduced from a total collection of 761,894 from the brand pages and 26,758,660 from the hashtags to ensure relevance. The research data collected was analysed using thematic analysis` and supported by the BASIC IDs framework, as originally developed by Lazarus (1973) and initially incorporated into consumer research by Cohen (1999).

1.7 Research Setting

Social media is hailed as a ubiquitous influence on modern lifestyles (Bolton et al., 2013; Wang and Kim, 2017). The socialising, shopping, media viewing and information acquisition habits of individuals have adjusted or in some instances wholly transformed since the explosion of the internet to mass consumption in the late 90s and early 2000s. A significant feature of the

mainstream success of the internet and digital media in the past decade has been the growing popularity of social media which allows people to connect with new and old “friends” and followers while sharing interests and perspectives. This capability is hailed as empowering to the person (Lopez, Sicilia and Moyeda-Carabazza, 2017) with regards to the relationships to other people, organisations and brands. The internet (especially social media) has taken the world a step closer to full globalisation of information and knowledge share (Sobre-Denton, 2015; Stromquist and Monkman, 2014) with people able to interact with others locally, regionally as well as internationally. The power of the internet has been reflected in the influence on the consumer-decision process of individuals in consumer societies across the globe (Powers et al., 2012; Andrews and Bianchi, 2013). As such, brands have taken a vested interest in the development of official pages and profiles on social media to accompany their owned websites. Additionally, users create their forums, pages, profiles and groups on these networks to source user reviews, troubleshooting advice and general information or opinions regarding any area of interests, including brands. Together with the concept of the hashtag, a device on most websites (#hashtag) which uses the number sign and any relevant word to gather all posts regarding a specific topic, these settings create the atmosphere for brands and individuals to gather, gain information or interact with each other. In this way, it generates a community or collective that are centred on the brand and its values. This community, that is produced according to the structure created by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001), has a shared consciousness (love for the brand, respect for the community), moral responsibility as well as rituals and traditions. There are consequences for identity development and the consumer-brand relationship due to the social media brand community. These communities are hailed for strengthening of brand equity (Thompson et al., 2017), development of brand love and advocacy (Wallace, Buil and Chernatony, 2014) and brand attachment (Sierra, Badrinarayanan and Taute, 2016), has consequences for the individual’s identity as well as the consumer-brand relationship. The purpose of this research is to find the connections between the concepts of branding, community, social media and identification which are fostered within this environment to determine the specific nature of the influence on the development of such identity and relationship.

These concepts are central to the progress of consumer research and are often discussed independently. This study seeks to explore how they interconnect to shape identity and relationships, via the influence of decision-making, sense of self and social identity. Independently, they are all extensively discussed within the academic literature. However, with

the evolving nature of each construct, it is timely to discuss how aspects of social media and branding intersect to influence brand relationships and identity. Identity is important to the performance of many individual roles and is significant in decisions made personally, socially, professionally, politically as well as commercially. Therefore, there are many theories and concepts developed to reflect this significance to several disciplines. Theories such as self-completion theory, self-expansion theory, social identity theory and identity-based motivation among others join the overall identity theory in trying to account for the role of the individual on society and vice versa. This research takes an interest in the role of identity in consumer behaviour within social media brand communities plus the role of the collective on the individual. As Lawler (2014) notes, the topic of identity requires constant investigation. The social setting of the world continues to change due to political, social or cultural developments and these transformations influence the individual development of identity. Garbasevski (2015) argues that identity is a social construct built in relation to social expectations. Therefore, as social expectations and realities change, research needs to be conducted to explore how those changes are affecting identity creation or expression. Social media and its growth in popularity and usability across many spheres of individual life, is one such change which can be credited with the adjustments to human behaviour and identity develop. There are several studies which investigate identity development due to social media or its effect on the consumer decision-making process and brand relationships. However, very few consider how these two areas of the human experience are joined in mutual progress. This study, therefore, makes up for the deficiencies in this area.

This study has identified consumer-brand identification (CBI) as the core of the relationship between these different concepts. As a form of social identity, (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Wolter et al., 2016; Tuskej, Golob and Podnar, 2013), consumer-brand identification helps one to categorise one's self in relation to a number of one's identities (for example, social, personal and professional). Additionally, consumer-brand identification allows one to signal one's level of accomplishment (Harmon-Jones, Schmeichel and Harmon-Jones, 2009; Marquardt et al., 2016) fulfil one's self-definitional needs (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Tildesley and Coote, 2009; Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence, 2013). Identification is essential to the development of identity since identity is in the words of Lawler (2014) the creation of self by identifying with an "other." Therefore, one can argue that consumer-brand identification is the creation of self by identifying with a brand. Researchers such as Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012), Tuskej, Golob and Podnar (2013) and Lam et

al. (2010) agree that identification is a process of feeling sameness or a sense of belongingness with a brand.

In this way, CBI provides support for the self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1982) by showing that individuals will identify with brands who they view as similar to their actual or real selves (Kressmann et al., 2006; Torres, Augusto and Godhino, 2017). In developing this sense of similarity or sameness, there are cognitive and behavioural features, according to the literature, to the development of consumer-brand identification. For instance, Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) identify affectual bonds such as brand warmth, brand distinctiveness as well as memorable experiences, while Papista and Dimitriadis (2012) and Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2015) describe consumer-brand identification as a cognitive process of self-categorisation. Consumer-brand identification is developed via marketing communications and other consumer-brand interactions that allow the individual to realise there is a measure of sameness either on an identity (Kressmann et al., 2006) or a value basis (Tuskej, Golob and Podnar, 2013). The development of consumer-brand identification in the age of social media brand communities has its process (Wolter et al., 2016; Wang, 2017; Wu et al., 2017). Consequently, this media has significance in the creation of self via the identification with brands and their communities via a process of socialisation. Therefore, there are drivers of consumer-brand identification that are affective and cognitive in nature. However, the process of development does not end with consumer-brand identification but develops through brand loyalty, brand advocacy, satisfaction and brand trust (Sen et al., 2015; Marzocchi, Morandin and Bergami, 2013; Nam, Ekinici and Whyatt, 2011) to the consumer-brand relationship.

The consumer-brand relationship is an essential research topic because it is a strong influence on consumer loyalty (Albert and Merunka, 2013), consumer decision-making (Babutsidze, 2012; Berzonsky et al., 2013) and brand equity (Buil, Martínez and Chernatony, 2013). The internet is credited with changing the process and nature of brand relationship development due to its empowering of consumers (Brodie et al., 2013; Labrecque et al., 2013; Yngfalk, 2016). The evolving process has consequences on the identity of the individual as well since theories such as self-expansion theory (Belk, 1988) and self-completion (Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1982) show that consumers incorporate brands into their sense of self and use these materials to fill perceived gaps in their persona. The process of consumer-brand identification allows individuals to choose brands who are appropriate for this process as well. The consumer-brand relationship has been positively compared to the interpersonal relationship (Fournier,

1998; Smit, Boner and Tolboon, 2007; Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012). However, Aggarwal (2004) relates it more to an exchange relationship with benefits for both parties. While Ahuvia (2005) notes that brand love exists in such relationships, the love can be analogous to the connection between people in the minds of Xie, Poon and Zhang (2017). The consumer-brand relationship is useful in shaping individuals' identities (Dittmar, 2007; Stokburger, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Kressmann et al., 2006) and is driven by the identity motives of the individual (Oyserman, 2009; Gabriel, 2015). Therefore, the links between social media and this form of affiliation are crucial for researchers to investigate and forms a vital portion of this study. Ultimately, the inter-relation of consumer-brand identification and the social media brand community interact to collectively and independently influence the process of identity development and consumer-brand relationship management. This research seeks to thoroughly investigate the nature of this influence and discuss the implications for practice plus theoretical research.

1.8 Thesis Outline

Following this general introduction chapter which presented the research gap, questions, objectives and setting of the study, this thesis will follow the following structure:

Chapter Two: The research is conducted on the foundation developed by previous literature and the theories that emerge from the disciplines of consumer research, psychology and sociology. These are discussed in chapter two which houses the literature review. Herein, we analyse the conceptual and theoretical framework. Concepts from consumer behaviour (i.e. identity, consumer-brand identification, consumer-brand relationships and brand communities) are evaluated to provide the necessary background for the research. Theories discussed include self-presentation theory, social identity theory, self-expansion theory, consumer culture theory and self-congruity theory. Consumer-brand relationships remain central to the execution of consumer research, forming the basis of seminal works by Fournier (1998), Albert and Merunka (2013), Aggarwal, 2004, Belaid and Behi (2011) and Belk (1988) among others. Relationships' influence on identity is extensively discussed within theories such as Self-Expansion theory or Self-Congruity theory (Aron and Aron, 1986; Sirgy, 1982). Additionally, these two concepts, brand relationships and identity, are continually influenced by evolutions in society, for example, technology. Social media is a development whose influence on people's relationships and identities has been a source of investigation in research (Hudson et al., 2015; Cheney-Lippold, 2011).

Chapter Three: This chapter outlines the exploratory approach taken to the execution of the research. An interpretivist paradigm was suitable for this research due to the participatory nature of the methods within this paradigm that facilitate the natural emergence of patterns from the perspective of the respondents. The design was qualitative for several reasons such as the ability to contextualise a situation, provide reasons for a phenomenon, evaluate the effectiveness of current structures and generate theories. This chapter also discusses the choice of purposive and quota sampling from brands chosen, social media professionals interviewed plus the selection of content from active, passive and lurking members of social media brand communities. This research used the qualitative methodological tools of netnography (participant observation) and in-depth interviews and one quantitative tool of social media monitoring as a support to the insights that emerge from the exploratory techniques. The data analysis consisted of three phases supported by qualitative research software, nVIVO. This software was chosen due to its suitability to both small and copious amounts of data. These forms of data were imported into nVIVO either from Microsoft Word (interview transcripts), Microsoft Excel (tweets from the hashtags) or pulled directly from the websites and social networks. nVIVO facilitated the cleansing of the data to remove any information that was corrupted or not in English. Such action was taken to ensure that the data being coded and categorised were relevant for the research objectives.

Chapter Four: In this chapter, the results of the empirical study are presented based on the application of a BASIC IDs data analytical framework. Social media's influence on identity development is contextual to the individual, since one's behaviour inspires the associations that builds one's self-concept and view of the community to which one is associated. Identity development, within this context, boosts self-esteem and connects a person's positive feelings about themselves with a brand or its community. This digital tool creates the stage for one to display one's identity to one's audience. The continuous expression of one's self has consequences for the individual's identity. Consumer-brand identification is essential to the development of consumer identity and brand relationships. However, as a concept it is a spectrum, whereby one's level of identification is affected by one's brand experience. Strong consumer-brand identification has consequences of brand loyalty, passion and customer lifetime value. The social media brand community strengthens consumer-brand identification as well as the consumer-brand relationship. The online drivers and consequences of consumer-brand identification within social media brand communities are outlined in affective, cognitive and behavioural categories of social media brand community engagement. There are several

differences between consumer-brand identification in online and offline contexts. Further to moral responsibility, shared consciousness and traditions/rituals, there are additional markers of community within the social media brand community. These are engagement, creativity and individualisation. Social media brand communities are developing a measure of hierarchy based on behaviour of the member types. The markers of community and the hierarchy facilitates conformity into the consumer culture of the social media brand community.

Chapter Five: The results are analysed as they relate to consumer literature within the relevant topic areas. Establishing behaviour as both an antecedent and consequences of identification is a new revelation within research. This paper contends that since engagement, expression, creativity, search and share are all behaviours that can generate consumer-brand identification, behaviour is an essential motivator of identification and thus identity and the consumer-brand relationship. Engagement is a behavioural concept with affective and cognitive drivers as well as consequences. Creativity is an engagement process but is discussed as a separate theme because, while it is a motive for engagement, it is an independent behaviour with consequences to the identity and consumer-brand relationship. Expression, in a number of forms, communicates one's identification, relationship with the brand and conformity or non-conformity to the community. The various types of search show a measure of trust and respect for the veracity of opinions or knowledge shared by members of the community. Affect, in terms of attitudes and emotions, are strong influences of consumer identity, even though this exploratory research did not seek to determine which category is a stronger motivator. This study is among the first to explore the sensations that users experience by participating in the social media brand community and the role this plays in contributing to the development of consumer-brand identification, consumer identity and the consumer-brand relationship. Imagery as a category has themes such as visuals, self-portrait and use of brands, which show that these representations are express of self, designed to serve as identity validation and share individuals' narrative with their audience. Cognition is a process of an individual mentally assessing a self-brand or self-community connection which drives the identification with brand and inclusion of such into their self-concept. Interpersonal relationships exist between community members and the brand as well as each other. These relationships drive the identity of the individual and self-expansion based on the individuals' goals. The consumer culture, defined by the socio-cultural aspects of these platforms, drive the socialisation of individuals into a consumer identity that places the values of the brand at the core of identity. This culture is co-created with the brand and the members therein. Privacy issues such as data leaks and

unauthorised use of information, threaten the viability of these communities, if they cause users to return to the previous anonymous nature of the social media environment. Individuals are being more open with the information they disclose and their self-expression due to growing trust with the communities. However, brands and social media brand communities need to take steps to prove that their environments are trustworthy, especially in light of how important these spaces are being demonstrated in creating and managing social media communities.

Chapter Six: This discusses the conclusions and implications for the research in relation to both theory and practice. The contribution to knowledge is assessed, while the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are contemplated. This research answered several questions noting that the motives of affect, cognition and behaviour are not clearly divided from each other but work together to influence the development of consumer-brand identification. The research confirms that there is a link between identification and identity. Therefore, the identity that is created through consumer-brand identification is consumer in nature. However, this consumer identity supports the other layers of an individual's identity. User-generated content and levels of engagement are large drivers of identification within a social media brand community. The consequences of consumer-brand identification are in favour of both brand and consumer. The research also addressed several research objectives, which influenced the planning and execution of the study. There are a number of implications for consumer research. The conceptual model helps illustrate the development of identity and brand relationships within social media brand communities. The research shows the malleable nature of identity, in relation to social changes. The introduction of a hierarchy within this environment also shows how humans affect each other due to their position within a social media brand community. The findings provide marketing managers with a clearer concept of the social media environment that they can use to shape their content and social media strategies. Future researchers should consider applying quantitative techniques to this study such as questionnaires to test the model and findings within other social media brand communities.

The following figure 1 visualises the structure of the thesis:

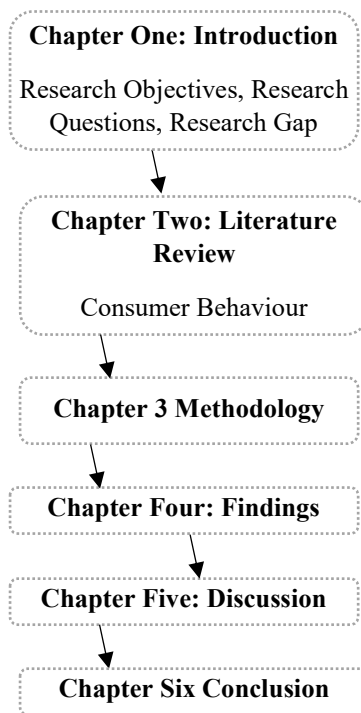


Figure 1 The Thesis Structure

1.9 Summary

The importance of social media to the lifestyles of a broad cross-section of global society has led to changes in consumption behaviours, identity development/expression and the formation of relationships. The influence of the activity within these environments to shape the identity of their users is facilitated by the collaboration of communications, branding and community to socialise individuals and teach norms or values that can be applied either inside or outside of the platforms. The individual can use the information within these communities to determine whether the brand or the community are suitable entities to use in shaping their identities. This research seeks to consider the process by which consumer-brand identification and consumer-community identification develops within social media. Furthermore, it aims to reveal the consequences of consumer-brand identification on the individual's identity and the consumer-brand relationship. In so doing, the research seeks to explain the results of identification and identity development within the social media environment as it benefits the consumer and the brand. Research on consumer brand identification (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Wang, 2017) has not thoroughly examined the differences in motivations as it relates to these environments and the pre-digital age and this study addresses that gap. It also investigates how the communities advance the development of consumer culture by facilitating the

development of an exclusively labelled 'consumer identity' as the follower of a brand. Additionally, this research creates a model that displays the role of social media brand communities in nurturing consumer-brand identification, identity and the consumer-brand relationship. Due to the nascent nature of research in this particular intersection of theoretical concepts, this study adopted an exploratory methodology. The next chapter forms a review of the literature relevant to the area of study to develop a sound theoretical model.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Consumer-brand relationships remain central to the execution of consumer research, forming the basis of seminal works by Fournier (1998), Albert and Merunka (2013), Aggarwal, 2004 and Belk (1988) among others. Relationships' influence on identity is extensively discussed within theories such as Self-Expansion theory or Self-Congruity Theory (Aron and Aron, 1986; Sirgy, 1982). Additionally, these two concepts, brand relationships and identity, are continually influenced by evolutions in society, for example, technology. Social media is a development whose influence on individuals' relationships and identities has been a source of investigation in research (Hudson et al., 2015; Cheney-Lippold, 2011). This review discusses the factors within the social media brand community that generate identity and develop consumer-brand relationships. The review follows the subsequent structure: section 2.2 speaks to the theoretical framework of the study, outlining the theories that inspired the development of the research, while section 2.3 addresses the conceptual framework. Section 2.4 identifies the research gaps and section 2.5 summarises the chapter.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study is comprised of theories that address identity management through conspicuous behaviours such as relationship, consumption and presentation. The framework also includes theories, which consider how the socio-cultural context of an individual will inspire the manner in which self is constructed and displayed within one's respective networks. Therefore, there is a split between identity management (self-expansion theory, self-congruity theory and self-presentation theory) and socio-cultural positioning (consumer culture theory, social identity theory and social comparison theory).

2.2.1 Self-Expansion Theory

Self-expansion theory (Aron and Aron, 1986) considers the development of identity by expanding one's sense of self to include important others. This theory furthers James' (1890) argument that one's self consists of one's family, social relationships and possessions. Self-expansion presents the argument that there is a blur between self and the important other in a relationship (Aron and Aron, 1986). Considering that brands are relationship partners (Fournier, 1998; Valta 2013; Wu et al., 2017), the self-expansion theory applies to consumer research. Love, as a strong motivator in consumer-brand relationships, (Ahuvia, 2005; Batra Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012; Park, Eisingerich and Park, 2013) makes it possible to include

brands into the self in a similar manner to a human relationship partner. The view of self-expansion, via the lens of consumerism, opens the theory up to criticisms of materialism, self-esteem issues and social inequality. Reimann et al. (2012) contends that in including others into self, the individual includes the positives as well as the potentially negative characteristics of the others in the close relationship. The use of others to expand self is criticised as an inappropriate manner of building self-esteem and the reason people, especially consumers, fall prey to predatory relationship partners and business practices (Papasolomou, 2017; Minor, 2012). The belief that one's self is incomplete without a wealth of consumer goods is a condition of consumerism (Papasolomou, 2017; Guerra, 2016) that creates a potentially obsessive pursuit of material goods. As the lines between the citizen and the consumer continue to merge (Yngfalk, 2016), within the context of self-expansion, the distinction between the individual and the brands they love can become unclear to the detriment of their selves.

2.2.2 Self-Congruity Theory

People's mental representations of self overlap with those of significant others including inanimate objects (Trump and Brucks, 2012). Self-congruence has been identified as a strong motivator for consumption decisions (Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010; Yusof and Ariffin, 2016; Sirgy, 1985; Ibrahim and Najjar, 2008). Consumers purchase brands that match the values or characteristics of their actual or ideal selves (Sirgy, 1982; Kressmann et al., 2006; Koo, Cho and Kim, 2014). The self-brand match is credited with customer satisfaction (Hosany and Martin, 2012), emotional consumer-brand connection (Koo, Cho and Kim, 2014), brand identification and brand loyalty (Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010), self-esteem and consistency (Sirgy, 1985) plus favourable brand attitudes (Parker, 2009). Self-image congruency theory is used to account for consumer behaviour in various contexts (Orth and Rose, 2017; Hollebeek and Kaikati, 2012, Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence, 2008). Subsequently, marketing campaigns are developed to match the selves of the target audience (Mazodier and Merunka, 2012; Zhu and Chen, 2015; Koo, Choo and Kim, 2014). However, the theory is not without its limitations. Self-congruence can be considered inadequate in its ability to classify consumer decisions. Aaker (1997) believed that there was weak empirical support for the self-congruity links due to the need to address each dimension of personality. However, matching each dimension with a brand's identity is highly unlikely since it may appeal to all aspects of an individual's self or only to a single characteristic. In Thompson and Loveland's (2015) article, they conclude that it is highly improbable that a single theory will be able to show all the identity-related consumption actions in isolation.

2.2.3 Self-Presentation Theory

The work of Goffman (1959) has inspired research into the human need to present a desirable version of themselves to an imagined audience. Essentially, self-presentation is the act of creating an image of ones' self in the minds of others (Brown, 1997; Kramer and Haferkamp, 2011). Therefore, self-presentation displays an aspect of the individual for validation by a community (Kietzmann et al., 2012; Colliander et al., 2017). The endorsement of others' identity (Kietzmann et al., 2012) creates a special bond between the communicator and the endorsed (Krasnova et al., 2010; Flanagin, 2017). Baumeister and Hutton (1987) spoke about pleasing one's audience and constructing one's ideal selves as motives for self-presentational acts. The individual is seeking to fit-in and create him or herself by expressing the desired self. Marcus (2009) contends that self-presentations as identities are not themselves illegitimate or fake. In fact, Kramer and Haferkamp (2011) note that the overwhelming motivation of self-presentation, is simply to guide the impressions others have of the individual, not necessarily to perform acts of deception but to amplify the attractive aspects of themselves (Chen and Marcus, 2012).

Social media's mainstream popularity means that it's now a stage for acts of self-presentation in the manner that Goffman (1959) discussed (Bullingham and Vasconcellos, 2013). The ability to share information regarding one's self has made social media a powerful tool of self-presentation (Schau and Gully, 2003; Ellison, Heino and Gibbs, 2006; Seidman, 2013). Privacy concerns are dictating how people present themselves online via their personal information (Bazarova and Choi, 2014). However, the individual search for community remains a powerful motive for self-presentation (Seidman, 2013) often overriding concerns about disclosing personal information. The central motive remains to manage the impression of the individual among the audience (Kramer and Haferkamp, 2011; Ranzini and Hoek, 2017). Ellison, Heine and Gibbs (2006) note there is a greater control over self-presentation acts online, therefore consumers in brand communities can determine their self-presentation goals (Schau and Gully, 2003) and what profile elements, (e.g. profile picture, personal description), are needed to achieve these goals.

2.2.4 Consumer Culture Theory

Consumer research is often supported by theories developed in other disciplines such as psychology and sociology. However, there was the determination to create a theory that would give consumer studies their own epistemological and ontological foundation. Consumer Culture theory (CCT from henceforth), which initially synthesized approximately twenty years

of research, traces the development of knowledge within consumer research. Arnould and Thompson's (2005) landmark, and somewhat controversial article, is credited with the initial thrust of Consumer Culture Theory. In their words, consumer culture denotes "a social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend are mediated through markets" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, pg. 869). They argue that this is not a unified grand theory and posit that it does not aim for nomothetic claims. However, they note that CCT researchers do have a shared theoretical foundation focused on the cultural groupings that comprise a broader socio-historic context that is influenced by globalisation and capitalism. This theory addresses a collective of theoretical perspectives that consider the link between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings. This paper published within the Journal of Consumer Research focused on four research streams: Consumer Identity Projects, Marketplace Cultures, the Socio-historic Patterning of Consumption and Mass-mediated Marketplace Ideologies and Consumers' Interpretive Strategies.

The research stream consumer identity projects considers the role of the marketplace in creating socially accepted symbols that consumers use to manage their identity. Marketplace cultures centre the consumer as producers of culture and the practice of using shared consumption practices to generate social solidarity. The sociohistorical patterning of consumption consists of research that consider how the social roles and positions of consumers are influenced by institutional and social structures, further impacting consumption and vice versa. Within the stream of mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies, research examines the manner in which consumers own interests are mined to provide support for prevailing agendas in society. Commercial messaging creates norms of consumption and lifestyle which are then interpreted by consumers, who may then embrace or reject these norms. These four streams collectively address the manner in which socio-cultural, economic and mass communications aspects of the relevant societies' influence people's identity at various levels and determine aspects of performance and presentations of said identities. Considering the development of CCT from the flow of four streams, allowed Arnould and Thompson (2005) to create a theoretical base that was varied and showed the interconnections between identity, society and consumption from a variety of perspectives. This included a short consideration of how the digital space is influencing said developments from the views of Schau and Gilly (2003) and Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) within the context of an economically and culturally globalised world.

The theory was designed to investigate consumers within their context as a means of unveiling their motivations for consumption (Arnould, 2007). CCT arose as a direct result of the powerful wave of postmodernism with social science and humanities research (Coskuner-Balli, 2013). Consequently, the theory contemplated the ideological foundations of consumption (Fischer and Sherry, 2009), and how this is driven by post-modernism's ideals. Arnould and Thompson (2005) note that the theory was developed due to the calls from academic circles for a distinguished collective of theoretical knowledge about consumption and marketplace knowledge. In answering this call, the theory tries to consider how individual meanings are connected to the cultural, historical and marketplace contexts within which they are developed. Some of the purpose for its creation is not fully ideological but pragmatic as well. For instance, Fitchett, Patsiaouras and Davies (2014) note that CCT was devised as a means of adding visibility and creditability to consumer research. To accomplish these goals, the theory adopted an interpretive tradition (Fitchett, Patsiaouras and Davies, 2014). In searching for consumer research legitimacy by branding the practice of the research with a theoretical direction, Ostergaard and Bode (2016) determined that CCT added a pragmatic approach to interpretivism within the practice of consumer investigations. The stream of research reviewed to form CCT shared a qualitative, interpretivist and postmodern categorisation (Thompson, Arnould and Giesler, 2013) that placed the consumer as an active agent in the marketplace within the context of neo-liberalism (Fitchett, Patsiaouras and Davies, 2014). This allowed consumer researchers to demonstrate the significance of consumption to personal, social and economic and cultural aspects of life. One can link such a significance to the concept of layers of personality (Goffman, 1959; Lawler, 2014) to show that consumption supports all the aspects of an individual's identity.

Ultimately, the theory's synthesis of the consumer research and its interpretivist nature provided the unifying nature that Arnould and Thompson (2005) denied creating initially. Additionally, creating the consumer culture theory disproved the allegation that there was little theoretical or conceptual foundation underpinning consumer research (Askegaard and Scott, 2013; Moisander, Penaloza and Valtonen, 2009; Cova, Maclaran and Bradshaw, 2013). Proving that there were common threads and foundations underlying consumer research can be hailed as one of the successes of CCT. This theory was quite successful in achieving its aims considering the unsympathetic and disinterested marketing context facing the initial discussions of CCT (Fitchett, Patsiaouras and Davies, 2014). Therefore, it was able to achieve the widespread profile for consumer research (Cova, Maclaran and Bradshaw, 2013) with the

research environment that was one of the initial purposes for the search for a consumer research specific theory. Furthermore, Ostegaard and Bode (2016) decided that CCT provided a powerful basis for direction and developing a manual for conducting interpretive consumer research. CCT was successful in showing how individuals use the act of consumption to add balance to their lives and communicate their “selves” (Hollebeek and Kaikati, 2012). In illuminating the role of consumption in peoples’ identity creation, one can argue like Cova, Maclaran and Bradshaw (2013) that CCT succeeded in subsuming post-modernism and its meaning into its tradition.

The development of a theoretical foundation underpinning consumer research created an academic uproar to which Arnould and Thompson (2007) had to respond, in defence of their article. For instance, Askegaard and Linnet (2011) identified several limitations of the initial article such as the methodological approach chosen to develop the theory. In their estimation, a thematic review, while quite in-depth, has objectivity and sample issues. Askegaard and Scott (2013) note that the authors excluded some influential sources that were essential to giving a more nuanced view of consumer research. The authors themselves (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) stated that they did not include a number of sources, including Journals dedicated to the discussion of consumer culture. This potentially cast doubts on other academic commentators’ claims that they created a common theoretical thread. However, it shows there was shared values among the sources that were included in the theory. Another important critique of note with regards to the CCT was the twenty year period chosen for inclusion within the paper, in light of the decades-old tradition of consumer research. Askegaard and Scott (2013) argue that CCT covered too short a time span in the development of the theory, referencing Levy (1959) in stating that earnest consumer culture research began in the 1940s. Essentially, CCT is said to fall into the same trap that it was trying to avoid and which consumer research often falls victim, i.e. the over-reliance on the individualisation of consumption. Researchers such as Masander et al. (2009) note that such a focus does not fully account for the socio-cultural systems that inspire consumption, despite the fact that this was the aim of the emergence of CCT in the first place.

Arnould and Thompson (2007) addressed some of the critiques of the emergence of CCT by arguing that the rush to establish an epistemological tradition led to a surplus of PhD and early academic research papers, which resulted in an erratic and inorganic development of the theory. Thompson, Arnould and Giesler (2013) support this argument stating that these early studies were undermined by misconceptions and the competition for research resources. This was the

direct opposite of the systematic process, which the authors had envisioned. The challenges of CCT from its inauguration centre on what Fitchett, Patsiaouras and Davies (2014) believe is an inability to appreciate the ideological and historical circumstances in which the CCT arose. Additionally, the inclination of CCT to rely on individualised accounts from consumers, which was not the original aim. Furthermore, these considerations indicated that there was a measure of ambiguity in CCT due to the multiplicity of perspectives and dissent of early CCT studies (Ostergaard and Bode, 2016). This multiplicity of perspectives is interpreted as a bad thing, however, it is not necessarily bad just a theory growing through its growing pains and is essential to develop a sound foundation of ideas that have been thoroughly tested and examined for what is veracious about the claims that from the core of the theory.

2.2.5 Social Identity Theory

The social identity theory addresses how one's group identity influences one's sense of self. This theory speaks to the impact of a layer of one's identity on one's whole self as well as one's interactions with one's society (Brown, 2000). Lawler (2014) supports Goffman (2009) in declaring that social identity is the identity individuals possess due to their membership in social categories. Tajfel and Turner (1979, pg. 40), whose work led to the emergence of the social identity theory, define social group as a "collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in the common definition of themselves and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and their membership of it." Furthermore, social identity theory was created to be an examination of how one's behaviour and identity is influenced by one's social categorisation (Wright, Aron and Tropp, 2002; Hogg, 2016). Subsequently, Tajfel and Turner (1979, pg. 40) defined social identity as "the aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging." In this theory, the individual's need to maintain a positive image of both themselves and the social groups to which they belong (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Martiny and Kessler, 2014) influences attitudes and behaviours (McKinley, Mastro and Warber, 2014). As such Terry, Hogg and White (1995) was able to successfully link this theory to the theory of planned behaviour and Brown (2000) showed the positive social identity boosts self-esteem.

Social identity theory has been influential in providing insight into the development of individual and collective identity (Hogg, 2016; Lopez, Sicilia and Moyeda-Carabaza, 2017). However, there are limitations to this theory. Firstly, such an approach to identity creation adopts an 'outside-in' attitude, meaning identity is created in relation to values that the

individual perceives as important to others. Such an external approach to identity leaves the individual open to high levels of social comparison, which can affect self-esteem and self-concept (Reynolds et al., 2010; Thompson and Loveland, 2015; Abrams and Hogg, 1988) because the individual is searching externally for points of distinctiveness. This identification may also lead people to perform extreme behaviours on behalf of their favoured social group (Trump and Brucks, 2012), due to a higher level of self-consciousness, which allows members to put group interests above self-interests even if those interests have negative consequences (Abrams and Brown, 1989; Cheek and Briggs, 1982; Lee, 2014). Notwithstanding these negative consequences, Brown (2000) notes that it is a strong influence on individual's behaviour and possesses affective as well as cognitive elements in the contribution to individual's behaviour. Such a discussion of cognitive and affective portions of identity and identification is also discussed within consumer research and the concept of consumer-brand identification by Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) and Lam et al. (2010) and this review will go more in-depth with that link in Section 2.3.2 of this chapter.

The influence of social identity theory extends Consumer Community Behaviour (Sierra, Badrinarayanan and Taute, 2016). Ouwerkerk et al. (2016) are among researchers who show through their study of Apple and Blackberry fans that consumption and branding are measures of social identity. They show that the "in-group" and "out-group" behaviours and categorisations outlined in the social identity theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979) apply within brand groupings, with fans revelling in their superiority to the opposite fans by virtue of the success of the brand they support. Reed II (2012) argues identification causes ties to grow between individuals and other people or groups. Such a perspective of social identity provides support for Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen's (2012) link of consumer-brand identification and social identity. Additionally, as Tuskej and Podnar (2018) and Marzocchi, Morandin and Bergami (2013) show the brand identification's positive consequences for the company can be traced to the consumer's connection or social identity identification with each other. Wang (2017) determines that these social identification with the community drives connection and Kleine, Kleine and Kernan (1993) shows that social identity theory captures consumer behaviour, in so much that consumption patterns are designed to achieve identity goals. Therefore, throughout the literature there are concrete links between consumption, branding and social identity. For instance, Black and Veloutsou (2017) discusses how brands are part of the material individuals use to construct their own selves as well as their group identity. The current thesis considers the trajectory of this self and social identity creation

within social media brand communities and the consequences for the consumer-brand relationship.

2.2.6 Social Comparison Theory

Festinger's (1954) Social comparison theory identifies the need to evaluate one's opinions and abilities in relation to those of other individuals. These evaluations can have positive or negative results depending on whom one is comparing oneself with (Lee, 2014; Haferkamp and Kramer, 2011). De Vries and Kuhne (2015) reasoned that social networks such as Facebook not only increase comparison but inspire individuals to self-present the image that one has a much higher standard of living than is the truth. Similarly, Shen (2012) explains that the ability to display one's purchases and lifestyle is one facet to the increasing applicability of Social comparison theory to the study of varying aspects of online human behaviour such as consumption activities. Social comparison on social media is believed to be more detrimental to the self-esteem because one is comparing one's authentic identities with those presented online which may not be the true experience of the individual (De Vries and Kuhne, 2015; Charmley, Garry and Ballantine, 2013). Therefore, within the consumption process, judgments based on one's experience and resources can threaten one's self-esteem and confidence, should they be dependent on material possessions. When comparing themselves, people use criteria such as personality traits (Lee, 2014), possessions (Shen, 2012), physical attractiveness (Heferkamp and Kramer, 2011) and achievements (Powdthavee, 2014) to evaluate how their lives match up to others in the social hierarchy (Spence et al., 2011 Bessenoff, 2006). The act of social comparison is a cognitive process (Suls, Martin and Wheeler, 2002) with consequences (Spence et al., 2011) such as depression (Nesi and Prinstein, 2015) in the individual and stronger bonds within the social group (Powdthavee, 2014). The evaluation of possessions is also an increasing basis for social comparison between individuals. Individuals use others' possessions to determine their status within society (Shen, 2012).

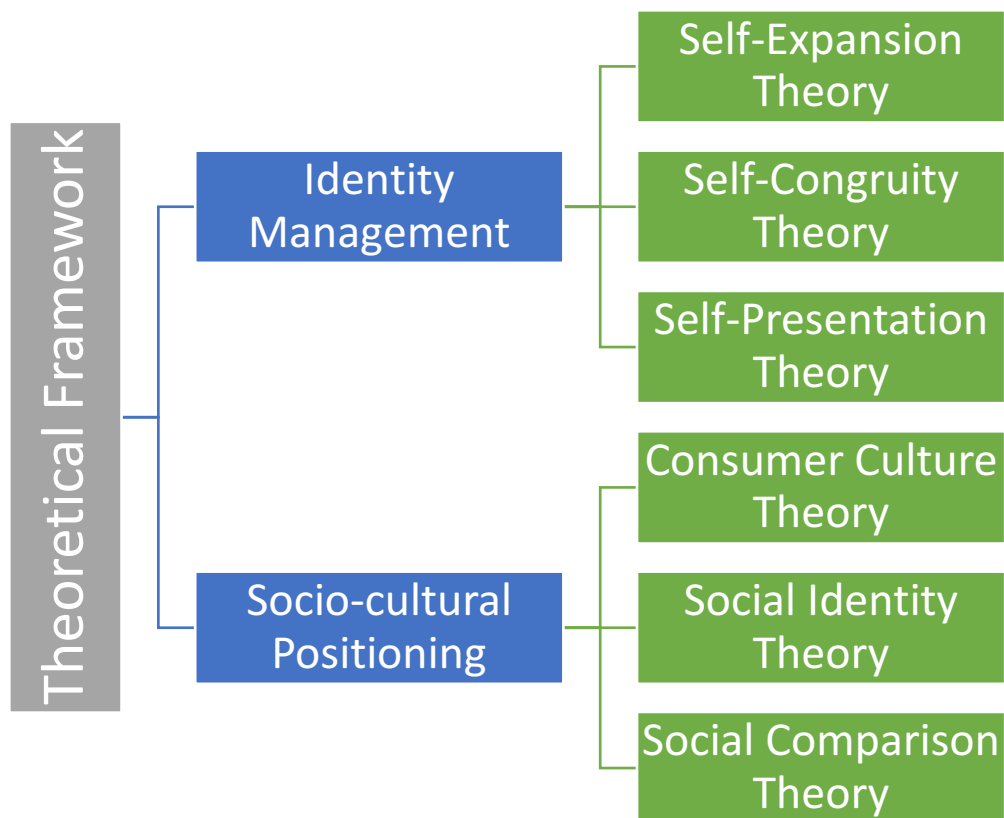


Figure 2 The Theoretical Framework

2.3 Conceptual Framework

2.3.1. The concept of Identity Development and Expression

There are many theories regarding identity, which signal its importance to the evolution of society and reflect centuries of research. For instance, Nagy and Koles (2014) speak of the colourful history of identity research within the social sciences. The pervasive collection of theories is known as Identity Theory, which is a historical review of the circumstances under which various identities are developed and the subsequent influences on relationships within society. Several definitions have been posited as a result of this extensive look into identity (synthesised in table 1). Lawler (2014) defines identity as collective action produced in social interactions but argues that it is challenging to form one definition of identity because of its varied terms, e.g., sense of self, one's social categories, selfhood, etcetera and the fact that it is continually reinterpreted. Garbasevschi (2015) argues like Lawler (2014) that identity is constructed in social discourse, where individuals adjust their presentation to match social expectations. Wang (2017) calls this evaluative identity, whereby individuals assess the standards of their social context and adjust their identity accordingly. In an attempt to add structure to the study of identity, Nagy and Koles (2014) identify several predictable stages of identity development and four distinct identity levels, i.e. the individual, relational, social and

material. The concept of various identities is a widely accepted concept in research. For instance, Goffman (1959) stated that there are several layers of identity within each individual. Furthermore, Thompson and Loveland (2015) argue that research needs to focus even more on multiple identities.

Identity, according to Serafini and Adams (2002), is a social-psychological construct that essentially communicates what is important to one's self, while Belk (1988) uses self and identity as synonyms for a person's perception of who he or she is (Ahuvia, 2005). Scott (2015) argues that identity is more of an illusionary concept than a real one; one that is always under construction. Identity is both a process of negotiation with our society (Craib, 1998) and a set of beliefs about who an individual is (Black and Veloutsou, 2017). Kettle and Haubl (2011) determines that individuals all have a sense of who they are, based on physical attributes, character traits, abilities and their perceived place in society; all of which combine to create their identity. Scott (2015) and Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) consider that identity is one's ideas about one's self and roles that make one both unique and gives one a place to belong. Several researchers have discussed identity not as one cohesive aspect of an individual but as layers (Scott, 2015; Lawler, 2014; Nagy and Koles, 2014; Schau and Gilly 2003). Consumer identity is a layer defined by purchasing material goods to complete a perceived deficit in one's self (Dittmar, 2007). This layer indicates one's social category that one identifies with and according to Dittmar and Drury (2000) is concerned with presenting the appropriate image. Reed II et al. (2012, pg. 12) defined consumer identity as "any category label to which a consumer self-associates either by choice or endowment." Online identity is a form of what Cheney-Lippold (2011) referred to as "algorithmic identity", where one's identity is categorised based on manner of internet usage.

Identity is formed from the meanings that are assigned to various roles in society (Stets and Serpe, 2013). Jung and Hecht (2004) referred to this performed identity as enacted identity. Rambe (2013) argued that an aspect of an individual's identity includes the public performance of self to an audience. Identity is a narrative of people's lives reflected in their life experiences (Ahuvia, 2005). Smith, Fischer and Yonghian (2012) call self-presentation a performance, which relates to the self-presentation theory (Goffman, 1959) discussed in the theoretical framework (Section 2.2.3). These performances present one's identity narrative in a manner that one believes will have the most positive influence on the community's perception. This process, called identity management, is an evolving practice that changes as the individual manoeuvres through the various stages of life (Smith, Fischer and Yonghian, 2012; Gerhart

and Sidorova, 2016). Identity management gives the impression that one's identity is a project to be managed through the use of available resources (Gabriel, 2015). The self-concept includes self-esteem (Sirgy, 1982), social identity (Stokburger-Sauer, 2010) and possessions (Belk, 1988; Ahuvia, 2005; Trump and Brucks, 2012; Reimann et al., 2012). The narrativisation of the self-concept is what Schofield and Kupianen (2015) credit with the emergence of identity. Self-image is a critical portion of the self-concept and subsequently, the identity (Parker, 2009). Furthermore, identity can be theorised through the lens of a variety of philosophical perspectives. For instance, Tracy and Tretheway (2005) adopted a post-structuralist approach to discussing identity management within the world of work. They dispense with the real self/fake self-dichotomy by showing identity as a complex and multi-dimensional concept that is shaped by various discourses e.g. employment, family etcetera. The current study considers the identity creation where the discourse places the individual in the consumption realm of social media brand communities, thereby constructing a consumer self.

2.3.1.1 Antecedents and Consequences of Identity Development and Identity Expression

Stets (2005) recognises two different strains to the study of identity theory: (1) the influences that social structures exert on one's identity and (2) the impact of identity on behaviour. This is a two-sided perspective of identity, i.e., antecedent and consequence. Serafini and Adams (2002) call identity a social-psychological process built through identification and imitation while Sparks and Shepherd (1992) wrote of identity's vital role on intention and behaviour. Oyserman (2009) argues that choices are identity-based, but the precise link between identity and choice are not necessarily well delineated. However, one is inspired to act in line with one's perception of one's identity. Appropriately, Sirgy (1982) recognises that an individual may have several identity-based motivations that are either harmonious or competitive. These motives include the need to belong with similar people and the desire to be considered unique. Vitality, these motives, conflicting or harmonious, inspire attitudes, perceptions and human behaviour within a consumption context. Shrum et al. (2013), speak of six identity-based motives which could be considered behavioural antecedents (self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, belonging, efficacy and meaning).

Other identity antecedents include emotion, identification and socialisation. Emotion is an antecedent identified by Stets (2005), along with social structure, in helping individuals decide on the type of person they wish to be. Furthermore, emotion is linked to social structure as one of the affective aspects of social identity (Luhtanen and Crocker, 1992; Voci, 2006; Winkler,

2018). The concept of identification is both an antecedent and consequence of identity. Lawler (2014, pg. 4) considers identification an antecedent, arguing it is the “building of identities by identifying with an ‘other.’” Additionally, Wu et al. (2017) argue that identification supports the desire for self-definition as well as two separate antecedents, i.e., need to belong and need for uniqueness, as identified by Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012). Therefore, identification is a portion of identity development that actively links identity motives with their desired consequence, i.e., an identity that individuals can be content with and claim ‘this is me’ and ‘this is where I belong.’ Community values are a driver of an individual’s identity management. These are communicated via socialisation which may be formal through educational, religious and employment institutions (Schneider, 2016; Mikeska, Harrison and Carlson, 2017) or informal via relationships and lessons from friends, family, social clubs and the media. Socialisation guides the roles, categories and meanings of various identities of an individual. Socialisation shapes individuals’ sense of self and their perception of their place in society while engineering, within those who conform, an identity that reflects the collective identity of the community (Burke, Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2017).

Behavioural intentions and behaviour are positively correlated with the development of identity (Paquin and Keating, 2017). Identification, relationship and group membership together with social categorisation plus status are among the critical consequences of identity development. Behaviours include choices made (Oyserman, 2009), consumption (Shrum et al., 2013; Hillenbrand and Money, 2015), language and speech (Larina, Ozyumenko and Kurteš, 2017) and mannerisms (Giddens, 1991). Sirgy (1982), Kressmann et al. (2006) and Oyserman and Lewis (2017) argue that people behave in identity congruent manners. Identification can act as a consequence of identity creation in that one tends to identify with people, organisations or structures that are similar to one’s self (Kressmann et al., 2006; Nguyen, Wu and Chen, 2017). Therefore, one can use identification to create one’s identity and then further identify with others who share comparable identity traits. Consequently, identification is a collective step in forming communities based on shared identities or common interests (Habibi, Laroche and Richard, 2014). Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) argue that personal identities are not the only motivator of behaviour, but one’s relational and social identities are also important to the consequences of identity development.

Self-congruity, as a theory spoken of in the theoretical framework (section 2.2.2) is important to the development of identity within the context of this study. The process of self-congruity acts as a means of identity verification which is a fundamental basis for consumption choices.

Identity verification search accounts for individual emphasis aspects of self within a community that will gain positive responses (Lopez, Sicilia and Moyeda-Carabazza, 2017). Reed II et al. (2012) describes identification verification as the role of audience feedback in gauging the progress one has made towards achieving identity goals. Stets and Serpe (2013) believe that identity verification is achieved once individuals believe their audience perceives them in the way they perceive themselves. The aspects of self which individuals determine to be important are the ones more frequently invested in (Orth and Rose, 2017; Brenner, Serpe and Stryker, 2014). These salient aspects of identity will influence how an individual behaves or the identity that is presented within certain situations (Stets and Serpe, 2013).

2.3.1.2 Consumption, Brands and Identity

Research for centuries has supported the idea of a relationship between possessions and self (James, 1890, Belk, 1988; Kleine, Kleine and Allen, 1995; Dittmar et al., 2014; Kings, Moulding and Knight, 2017). Brands, as symbols within an individual's identity and lifestyle, are rooted in the sociological school of symbolic interactionism. According to this tradition, society forms as a result of social action and interaction. Furthermore, identities gain meaning as a consequence of these interactions (Stets and Serpe, 2013). Brands are communications tools for these socially crafted meanings (Trump and Brucks, 2012) and act as creators of purpose in people's consumer behaviour (Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence, 2013). Within a consumer culture, one buys goods to express an ideal self or fill an identity gap (Dittmar, 2007). Therefore, the brand stands as a powerful connection to that desired or ideal self, by carrying the meaning within consumption, identity creation and expression (Thakur and Kaur, 2015; Veloutsou and Mountinho, 2009). Ahuvia (2005) and Thompson and Loveland (2015) recognised that consumption assists in the construction of individuals' multiple identities. Dahl and Milne (2009) investigated how consumers use consumption through the lens of their various selves. They show how consumers manage conflicting identities with consumption, demonstrating that individuals make purchases in line with specific aspects of themselves. Consequently, participating in consumer culture dictates that purchasing be done to portray the role, social status and other key markers of personal identity, hence the Selfridges marketing campaign and the Dittmar and Drury (2000) declaration "I Shop Therefore I am."

Consumer culture creates an identity in its own right, that of materialism (Topcu, 2016). Shrum et al. (2013) decoded that materialism is the construction of self. At the core of a consumerist society, for good or bad, every consumption choice is a self-defining choice (Gabriel, 2015).

Therefore, luxury brands, as well as fast-moving consumer products, are marketed as close to the identities of the target consumers (Swani and Milne, 2017). Chernev, Hamilton and Gal (2011) argue that brands no longer focus on functional attributes but seek to fit into their consumers' lifestyles. This connection aims to create the relationship between the brand and the customer (Brown et al., 2005; Gurhan-Canli, Hayran and Sarial-Abi, 2016). The subsequent self-brand overlap (Trump and Brucks, 2012; So et al., 2017) produces self-congruity brand loyalty (Marticotte, Arcand and Baudry, 2016). Importantly, consumption is the act of creating one's "self," while the brand is the means of expressing self. Therefore one is saying 'I shop therefore I am ... everything positive about what this brand represents'.

The literature has accepted the notion that people choose brands that are self-relevant (Schau and Gilly, 2003; Chaplin and Roedder, 2005; Wallace, Buil and Chernatony, 2017). The brand may be relevant to a consumer's entire self-concept or just one aspect of their identity, either way, there needs to be a sense of self or value congruency (Tuskej, Golob and Podnar, 2013). Consumer-brand identification (CBI) is a cognitive and affective step of establishing a self-brand connection due to relatability with brands based on perceived similar identities and values (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Belaid and Behi, 2011; Wu et al., 2017). Marketers, who create brand personas, deliberately nurture the consumer-brand connection. Huang, Mitchell and Rosenaum-Elliot (2012) consider this a co-creative process between brand and marketer. Aaker (1997) established that brand personality is a means to treat brands as though they are humans and Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009, pg. 315) agree saying that "brands are entities with their personality." The establishment of brand personality creates the connection that binds a consumer to a brand (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Black and Veloutsou, 2017). The act of creating a brand personality is a marketing act of differentiation that creates value for customers (Chernev, Hamilton and Gal, 2011). This differentiation helps with the formation of the consumer-brand relationship based on the concepts of brand love (Ahuvia, 2005; Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012), identification (Huang, Mitchell and Rosenaum-Elliot, 2013), identity creation (Belk, 1988; Trump and Brucks, 2012) and loyalty (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012). Marticotte, Arcand and Baudry (2016) further show that loyalty, connection and identification motivates not only love for one's chosen brand but also the need to harm a rival brand.

The consumer-brand identification that leads to brand relationship causes such a strong sense of what Hillenbrand and Money (2015) call psychological ownership, which Lin and Sung (2014) argue that individuals will feel that a brand's transgressions threaten their own

identities. On the other hand, the human desire to think profoundly about themselves could lead many to ignore the negative information about a brand and remain loyal to protect their positive sense of self (Swaminathan, Page and Gurhan-Canli, 2007). Therefore, consumer-brand identification and its positive links to brand loyalty, brand preference (Chernev, Hamilton and Gal, 2011) and personal identity is a secure connection to materialism and the use of brands to help define, express and maintain a confident self-image. Belk (1988) led a thread of consumer research by defining individuals according to their possessions, arguing that humans use their possessions wittingly and unwittingly to manage the communication of one's identity as well as declaring one's self a brand supporter, e.g., "I am an Apple Fan Boy" or "I love Samsung". Consumer identity communicates achievement of an identity goal, e.g. Mercedes-Benz shows financial success or social mobility. In supporting the concept of identity-based consumption, Thompson and Loveland (2015) proposed the Identity Investment theory, which determined that individuals proactively use brands to invest in important aspects of themselves. Within this framework, identity and consumption have a reciprocal approach on each other.

2.3.1.3 Social Media and Identity

Social media and consumption interact to influence our identity by guiding our relationships (Lawler, 2014), including those with brands (Labreque; 2014; Vazquez et al., 2014). Therefore, social media influences our identity and enhances the ability for brands to exert a role on our identity management. Lawler (2014) contends that the virtual world, of which social media is a vital member, motivates more individuals to ask the question 'who am I'? Cheney-Lippold (2011) termed this virtually created identity, an 'algorithmic identity.' As Bucher (2017) explains, social media, especially Facebook, notices the power of their content and seek to expose their members to information that will evoke a specific emotion. In doing so, social media controls the posts an individual sees via the manipulation of the algorithms on which the sites function. These algorithms, according to Cheney-Lippold (2011), have the power to place the users within categories of identity depending on how they use the internet. These identity categorisations facilitate individuals gathering to voice their opinions and finding people with similar interests. Chernev, Hamilton and Gal (2011) state that such ability enriches the user's social identity. According to Scott (2007), communication is essential to the development of social identity since Jung and Hecht (2004) posited that identity is co-created by including others in one's sense of self. With Black and Veloutsou (2017) noting that brands' identities are co-created on social media with the consumer and the brand, one can argue that in creating a brand's identity users are creating their own identity.

Voyer, Kastanakis and Rhode (2017) argue that the co-creative process allows users to create their identities according to the brand and construct the brand's identity according to their values. The global nature of social media communities influences identity development. Firstly, the process of socialisation means that the values, characteristic criteria and social norms that influence one's identity development may now include norms from outside one's own normative culture. Writers such as Sobre-Denton (2016) and Stromquist and Monkman (2014) consider social media a true force of globalisation on individuals' lifestyle and identity, especially in spreading a brand-centred lifestyle. However, social media is carrying on the convention of traditional media for decades, i.e., communicating what ideal identities and social roles are to a global audience. Previously the consequences were that the social norms were that of a largely western nature due to the pervasive distribution of North American and Western European media (Stevenson, 2014; Curran and Park, 2000) but social media shares influences from a wider cross-section of the globe. Secondly, the networking power of social media means that influence is multi-directional, the individual exerting similar power to the collective. Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) argue that identity motivated actions on social media are inspired by content and norms therein. Thirdly, social media, as an identity cue, is being credited with more narcissistic personalities. Andreassen, Pallesen and Griffiths (2017) determined that social media emphasises individualism, causing people to be more inwardly focused. This may be due to the practice of displaying one's best life on the internet as a means of impressing one's virtual but real audience. Consequently, there is a somewhat competitive nature to one's identity management that is similar to Festinger's (1954) discussion of the social comparison phenomenon.

Self-disclosure is a strategic practice of identity expression on social media (Thompson and Loveland, 2015). The personal information shared on social media act as self-identity signals (Garbasevski, 2015) allowing individuals to present themselves in the ideal light. Thus, there is the impression that persons present fake personas on social media (Rambe, 2013; Vishwanath, 2015). While this was a serious consideration, more people are revealing their actual identities on social media (Lin, Fang and Jin, 2017) and their avatars are a reflection of their real selves and not just covers for the identity (Nagy and Koles, 2014; Oyserman and Lewis, 2017). Belk (2013) in his article extending his (1988) treatise to the digital world declared that Facebook is essential to self-presentation for its users while Hollebeck and Kaikati (2012) reveal that Facebook facilitates expression of real and ideal versions of oneself. Therefore, social media in the view of Smith, Fischer and Yongjian (2012) is ideal for identity

management, due to its nature of self-promotion. The identities presented online are subject to identity verification as well. Belk (2013) notes that tweets and responses add value to one's online identity collection. The persona promoted is validated based on the identity signals within the social media platform according to one of the first academic writings on social media sites, i.e., Donath and Boyd (2004). The self-disclosure can be conscious and strategic on the one hand, but Kaplan and Haenlin (2010) argue that it may be unconscious, with likes and opinions expressed providing subtle identity cues. The use of real names and personas on social media (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Lin, Fang and Jin, 2017) supports this belief whereby one may like posts or make comments that are congruent with one's sense of self. Also as Sun, Rau and Ma (2014) defend, participation on social media may serve to fulfil certain self-presenting or popularity needs.

Social media allows for identity management due to the ability to customise the content shared, such as music or television shows to suit the self-expressive needs of the individual (Chernev, Hamilton and Gal, 2011). The explosion of sites such as YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat allows one to express one's self as well as one's brand preferences more efficiently (Marriott and Buchanan, 2014; Lin, Fang and Jin, 2017). Essentially, social media helps to display consumption as a means of connection between identity layers (Enginkaya and Yilmaz, 2014). Displaying consumption behaviours creates a community online of brand lovers and enthusiasts. Within these online brand communities, brand managers nurture identity-building activities because, as Habibi, Laroche and Richard (2016) argue, self-identity markers are important for individuals getting involved in a community. The involvement in the community is varied from posting reviews and original content or news, commenting on others posts, liking or sharing posts to remaining silent, so to speak, by not actively participating therein. However engaged people are within a social media brand community, there is the creation of social identity (Relling et al., 2016) that strengthens the relationships between the individual and the community. Wang, Butt and Wei (2011) note that participation within the online brand communities helps individuals acquire a desirable social identity. This social identity online influences the consumer-decision process (Teo and Yeong, 2013; Fang et al., 2016), the consumer-brand relationship (Kim and Drumwright, 2016), intentions, attitudes and actual behaviour (Wang, Yu and Wei, 2012). Critically, these social media motives influence community engagement behaviours, which reinforce one's social identity (Lee, Kim and Kim, 2011). The online use of brands that are identity congruent (Catalin and Andrea, 2014) indicate that brands and social media are self-expressive supporters of social identity.

Dey et al. (2018) show the importance of the social media selfie to the various segments of the population, whereby individuals use this tool to display their real selves or themselves in the most attractive way possible. They extend this conversation of using social media selfies as a means of identity management by displaying a measure of assimilation into a host country (e.g. South Asians in the UK). They show that selfies support the cultural identity of the individuals by creating a link between the real life and virtual world. Social media also impacts the management of brand identity in relation to what Rokka and Canniford (2016) refer to as brand assemblages. Rokka and Canniford (2016) show that the construction of brand meaning has become complex negotiations between multiple parties due to the influence of digital technologies. The selfie trend threatens the brand image because it takes the brand out of the context intended by the company and the user can manipulate how the brand is presented and associated outside of its narrative and history. However, while social media makes these conflicting brand assemblages more visible, in the world of pop culture this was always an issue for brand associations. For example, Crystal's CEO publicly disassociated from the mention of the brand in songs from hip-hop stars such as Jay-Z due to the identity of the intended target for the organization.

| Definition | Source |
|--|---|
| Identity is collective action produced in social interactions | Lawler, 2014 |
| Identity a social-psychological construct that essentially communicates what is essential to one's self | Serafini and Adams, 2002 |
| Identity is both a process of negotiation with our society | Craib, 1998 |
| The meanings that are assigned to various roles of individuals in society | Stets and Serpe, 2013 |
| Identity is a set of beliefs about who an individual is | Black and Veloutsou, 2017 |
| Identity is one's ideas about one's self and roles that make one both unique and gives one a place to belong | Scott, 2015 |
| Identity is a layered process and concept that includes personal, relational, social and material layers among others. | Goffman, 1959 Lawler, 2014 Nagy and Koles, 2014 |
| Social identity is the identity of persons by virtue of their membership in social categories | Lawler, 2014 Goffman, 1959 |

| | |
|--|---|
| Social identity is “the aspects of an individual’s self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging”. | Tajfel and Turner, 1979 (pg. 40) |
| Consumer Identity is a layer of identity wrapped in purchasing material goods to complete a deficit noticed in one’s self | Dittmar, 2007 |
| Consumer identity is “any category label to which a consumer self-associates either by choice or endowment.” | Reed II et al. (2012, pg. 12) |
| Online identity is state of categorising one’s self according to how one uses the internet, referred to as an “algorithmic identity” | Cheney-Lippold, 2011 Schau and Gilly, 2003 |
| The sum of all the layers of one’s identity – Personal or individual; Social; Consumer; Online and Ego, etc; that collaborate to create one’s overall perception of one’s self independently or in relation to the society at large. | This study’s definition |

Table 1 Definitions of identity

2.3.2 The Development of Consumer-Brand Identification

Supported by the social identity theory discussed earlier in this chapter (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Wolter et al, 2016; Tuskej, Golob and Podnar, 2013) identification speaks to the desire to belong to a particular social group (Johnson, Massiah and Allan, 2013; So et al., 2017). Defining identification can be simple, on the face of it, with Carlson, Suter and Brown (2008, pg. 286) referring to it as “the degree of overlap between an individual’s self-schema and the schema s/he holds for another target object.” However, the vast array of objects with which consumers identify makes identification complex (Curras-Perez, Bigne-Alcaniz and Alvarado-Herrera, 2009). Alternatively, Lawler (2014) argues that with identification, one wants to be a part of the story of the other with which one identifies.

2.3.2.1 Brand Identification and Consumer-brand Identification

In their influential 2013 article, Albert and Merunka (2013) treated brand and consumer identification as two distinct concepts within the umbrella of consumer-brand identification (hereafter referred to as CBI). Tildesley and Coote (2009, pg. 627) describe brand identification as “the utility of brands in fulfilling consumers’ self-definitional needs” and Albert, Merunka

and Valette-Florence (2013) place brand identification at the core of consumption. Meanwhile, Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012, pg. 407) consider CBI as the “consumer’s perceived state of oneness with a brand.” Tuskej, Golob and Podnar (2013) states that CBI is the sense of sameness between the brand and the consumer. Examining these definitions of CBI and brand identification, they appear to be describing the same concept. Furthermore, Lam et al.’s (2010, pg. 6) definition of consumers “psychological state of perceiving, feeling or valuing his or her belongingness with a brand” has been cited in descriptions of both CBI and brand identification (Becerra and Baderinaryanan, 2013, Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; So et al, 2017). Therefore, there is an additional measure of ambiguity to an already potentially confusing discussion about CBI and brand identification as separate constructs.

The process of CBI has been described either extensively as a cognitive one or as one which possesses both cognitive and affective features. For instance, Papista and Dimitriadis (2012) view CBI as a cognitive self-categorisation process, a description that is supported by Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2015), and Wolter et al. (2016) in adapting Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) definition of consumer-company identification to the CBI realm. These illustrations of CBI as cognitive tend to ignore the affectual features that are equally as essential to CBI. Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) identify feelings toward the brand, warmth, emotional perceptions of the brand and fondly held memories of brand use as essential affective aspects of CBI. Therefore, it is essential to understand how CBI’s affective aspects are formed. These aspects of CBI help individuals pursue salient aspects of their existence (e.g., sense of self) (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012). As such, CBI addresses both personal and social identity layers (Carlson, Suter and Brown, 2008; Tuskej, Golob and Podnar, 2013; Lawler, 2014) although Wolter et al. (2016) argues that the personal aspects of CBI carry more weight than the social features.

CBI relates to the self-congruity theory. As Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) and Carlson, Suter and Brown (2008) note, it relies on the identity of the brand and the individual being in sync. Consumers will identify with a brand that matches their ideal or actual self-schema (Sirgy, 1982; Kressmann et al., 2006; Torres, Augusto and Godhino, 2017). Tuskej, Golob and Podnar (2013) agree, noting that since brands act as quasi-personalities, individuals will treat their characteristics as their own. CBI, therefore, places the brand at the core of an individual’s identity, supporting self-congruity as well as Black and Veloutsou’s (2017) discussion about co-creation of consumer and brand identity. Thus within consumer culture (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), the brand is the vessel of consumerism to guide the

socialisation of consumers into a consumption-driven society. The importance of CBI within this study was also due to its relatability to the self-expansion theory as explored by Belk (1988). Kuenzel and Halliday (2010) note that, as the consumer views the brands as an extension of self, the strength of the identification increases. The term ‘strength’ of identification is used by several researchers to show the power or depth of the connection between the individual and the brand on the basis of identity (Forehand, Desphande and Reed II, 2002; Bartsch et al., 2016; Hua et al., 2017). Product category is a facet of influence in the manner in which individuals develop CBI. Lopez, Sicilia and Moyeda-Carabazza (2017) note niche products carry stronger CBI, while Kim, Han and Park (2001) argue that expressive brands are more strongly linked to CBI than non-expressive or utilitarian brands. However, newer research shows that both publicly and privately consumed brands hold a similar sense of CBI for the individual (Elbedweihy et al., 2016). Therefore, more brands, regardless of involvement level or category, are seeking to generate consumer-brand identification.

2.3.2.2 Consumer-Community Identification

Brands are established symbols of social identity. The brand community is also a crucial source of social identity, e.g., Apple and Harley-Davidson communities (Johnson, Massiah and Allan, 2013). The community as described by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) is centred on the brand, which have social meaning that lead to identification with brand and community. Such is developed on the basis of shared brand commitment (Torres, Augusto and Godhino, 2017; Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010, He et al., 2017). So et al. (2017) recognise that consumer-community identification occurs when individuals perceive themselves to be related to the group’s main characteristics. Identification with the brand community can lead to a psychological sense of community (Zhou et al., 2012; Carlson Suter and Brown, 2008). Popp and Woratschek (2017) argue that consumer-community identification is affective in nature, hence their use of the term psychological sense of community. Moreover, Kuenzel and Halliday (2010) argue that brand community identification enhances the feeling of group membership. Subsequently, this creates a sense of solidarity among members (He et al., 2017) that corresponds to Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) sense of moral responsibility.

Consumer-community identification allows people to see themselves as members of a group with distinct characteristics from other groups (Voci, 2006; Bartsch et al., 2016). In this way, individuals view their communities as the in-group and others as the out-groups (Voci, 2006; Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010). Identification, a key factor in building the brand community,

according to (Lopez, Sicilia and Moyeda-Carabazza, 2017), depends on the brand's differentiation and the individual's ability to use it to satisfy a need for distinctiveness and affiliation (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006). Lopez, Sicilia and Moyeda-Carabazza (2017) acknowledges that this is especially true for niche brand communities. The consumer-community relationship is called brand community identification by Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann (2005) and defined as the degree to which a consumer considers him or herself as an integral part of the community, by Habibi, Laroche and Richard (2016). Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) argue that identification within the community is related to affective commitment and kinship between members, noting that identification signals consumer agreement with the norms, traditions and rituals of the community. Consumer-community identification, therefore, potentially strengthens one's identity as a brand consumer.

2.3.2.3 Consumer-Company Identification

Consumer-Company identification is the process of using the identities and characteristics of companies to define one's self socially (Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn, 1995; Kang Alejandro and Groza, 2015). Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), who argue that customers identify with companies that help them achieve pertinent self-definitional goals, brought the concept of customer-company identification to prominence. In their widely cited work, they claim that the act of identification is developed based on the company's identity attractiveness, distinctiveness, prestige, trustworthiness or any salient aspect of the individual's identity that matches the company. Different types of companies, therefore, have the ability to serve as identification primes based on an aspect of the individuals with which they relate, e.g., social ventures (Hall-Phillips et al., 2016). One can identify with a company and not with all of its sub-brands or communities (Marzocchi, Morandin and Bergami, 2013) but these multiple facets of identification may enhance each other (Adjei, Noble and Noble, 2010).

2.3.2.4 Disidentification

Consumer-brand disidentification is the process of brand rejection. According to Wolter et al. (2016), this is an act of self-definition, where one deliberately excludes a brand from one's self-concept. Josiassen (2011) argues that this is a largely ignored area of consumer research, a claim that pertains to current times, with few papers delineating the terms and conditions of consumer-brand disidentification specifically. However, links can be drawn from the "us versus them" attitude within social identification (Bhattacharya and Elsbach, 2002).

Disidentification is not merely the opposite of identification. It is wilful opposition to a company (Wolter et al., 2016). Disidentification inspires hatred for the company and even joy in the face of crises (Einwiller and Johar, 2013). One can display one's disidentification in ways such as joining anti-brand communities (Dessart, Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou, 2015) and acting as a consumer activist against the brand and its communities. Drivers of disidentification include identification with interest groups that represent the opposite of perceived negative values of the brand or community (Josiassen, 2011). Disidentification can lead to brand avoidance (Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009) and may be politically motivated (Sandikci and Ekici, 2009), leading to rejection of the company and its brands. Disidentification is an oppositional motivation, which can be triggered by the acquisition of companies with which the consumer does not identify with (Chang et al., 2015) or any range of factors that threatens a consumer's personal or social identities.

2.3.2.5 Antecedents and Consequences of Identification

Researchers such as Wolter et al. (2016) discuss identification with a two-factor model of antecedents and consequences. Furthermore, Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) categorise the concept into affective and cognitive drivers. Torres, Augusto and Godhino (2017) stated that affective drivers have more influence in developing CBI than cognitive drivers. Lam et al. (2013) break the drivers down to instrumental and symbolic rather than affective and cognitive, believing that collectively these two drivers add brand meaning while, according to So et al. (2017), CBI is formed as a direct consequence of the meaning a brand brings to a consumer's life. As seen in several studies (So et al., 2017; Elbedweihy et al., 2016) antecedents have direct and indirect effects on the development of CBI. There are many motives credited for the development of CBI, such as personal-brand connection (Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann (2005). The brand-self similarity or the self-congruity motive (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Kressmann et al., 2006), whereby the match up of personality or even values (Tuskej, Golob and Podnar, 2013) leads to CBI. Another widely agreed motive is that of brand distinctiveness, which is the ability to meet the users need to be unique (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Torres, Augusto and Godhino, 2017), However, So et al.'s (2017) findings disputed this claim, possibly due to the difference in product categories between their studies. Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) identify brand social benefits, memorable brand experiences (Torres, Augusto and Godhino, 2017), self-definitional needs (Wolter et al., 2016; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003), self-enhancement and self-verification motives as drivers of CBI.

Tuskej, Golob and Podnar (2013) identify the consequences of CBI on consumer behaviour such as word of mouth (Popp and Woratschek, 2017; Davvetas and Diamontopoulous, 2017) and brand commitment (Wolter et al., 2016). Tuskej, Golob and Podnar (2013) and Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) recognise brand advocacy or championing as a definitive consequence of CBI, which has a direct influence on consumer relationships (Popp and Woratschek, 2017) due mainly to brand loyalty (Sen et al., 2015; Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010). Repeat purchase intention and behaviour (Davvetas, Sichtmann and Diamontopoulous, 2015), satisfaction (Nam, Ekinci and Whyatt, 2011), brand equity (So et al., 2017) deeper brand experience (Wolter et al., 2016), self-brand integration (Elbedweihy and Jayawardhena, 2014), as well as brand passion (Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence, 2013) are consequences. CBI has benefits for the company such as increased spending and the willingness to pay more for the brand by consumers (Davvetas and Diamontopoulous, 2017; Carlson, Donavan and Cumiskey, 2008). Furthermore, intense feelings of identification is a strong immunizer against negative word of mouth (Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012) and competitive actions (Haumann et al., 2014; Elbedweihy et al., 2016). CBI, according to Davvetas and Diamontopoulous (2017), works to mitigate against post purchase regret, allowing the customer to maintain a positive attitude towards the brand. So et al. (2017) speaks to enhanced brand evaluations due to CBI while Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn (1995) identify greater purchase frequency as positive outcomes of identification. Brand trust (Marzocchi, Morandin and Bergami, 2013; Dimitriadis and Papista 2010) is a motivating factor between CBI and brand loyalty (Kim, Han and Park, 2001). Significantly, these CBI consequences combine to improve the consumer brand relationship quality, (Dimitriadis and Papista, 2010), by increasing the brand preference (Tildesley and Coote, 2009), boosting self-esteem (Lin and Sung, 2014) and positively moderating the consumer belief about product or brand quality (He, Li and Harris, 2012; Keller, 2012). Ultimately, both brand and consumer receive cognitive, affective and economic consequences of consumer-brand identification.

2.3.2.6 Social media influence on consumer-brand identification

Social media's potential influence on CBI is multi-dimensional by enhancing traditional precursors to CBI (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Tuskej, Golob and Podnar, 2013) while adding new antecedents of its own. However, research has not attempted in real depths to consider the unique antecedents from social media to CBI. Hall-Phillips et al. (2016) argue that the role social media plays in building identification has mostly been ignored by academia, leaving a quite noticeable gap in the literature. They argue that the ability to create

one's own identity and engage with others including the brand facilitates the development of consumer-brand ties. Thus, the level of engagement between brand and consumer (Vazquez et al., 2014) brings an interactive aspect to the development of consumer-brand identification. Hall-Phillips et al. (2016) then support Dessart, Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou (2015) in acknowledging that the engaging nature of social media is a contributing factor to CBI. The act of participating, sharing, learning and co-creating combines with the socialising to communicate values and generate the necessary brand-self connections and associations (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Elbedweihy et al., 2016) that lead to CBI.

Lippold (2011) critiques this form of developing CBI declaring that in social networks individuals' identifications are largely created for them. This would imply a level of passivity in identity creation, which is counter to the widely accepted notion that CBI is not passive but a deliberate and strategic form of identity management. Adjei, Noble and Noble (2010) notice that there are positive links between online brand communities and identification. Lopez, Sicilia and Moyeda-Carabazza (2017) show that these positive links are largely due to consumers' ability to satisfy their need for affiliation and distinctiveness in social media brand communities. Wu et al. (2017) note that identification with online brand communities influence consumer behaviour and enhances BRQ. However, Hollebeek and Kaikati (2012) note that social media communications build identification without the need to own the product, a feature they consider unique to the online space.

2.3.3 The Development of the Consumer-Brand Relationship

The consumer-brand relationship has been a crucial focus for consumer research for several decades (Arikan, Yilmaz and Bodur, 2016; Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Fournier's widely respected (1998) article about brand relationship quality inspired research by writers such as Casalo, Flavian and Guinaliu (2010), Smit, Bronner and Tolboom (2007), Xie, Poon, Zhang (2017). This work is extensively cited in the literature and shows how important research into the consumer-brand relationship is (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Hudson et al., 2015; Park, Eisingerich and Park, 2013). Arguably, the prominence of consumer-brand relationships in research is due to the augmented function of brands as relationship partners (Aggarwal, 2004; Davvetas and Diamontopoulous, 2017) which sees their role in individuals' lives become more central.

2.3.3.1 The Story of the Consumer-brand Relationship

The investigation of the consumer-brand relationship arose from social research on interpersonal relationships (Xie, Poon and Zhang, 2017). The idea that the consumer-brand relationship is similar to interpersonal ones is supported by marketing professionals (Aggarwal, 2004; Xie, Poon and Zhang, 2017). However, not everyone agrees that the relationship is similar to the interpersonal one. Chang and Chieng (2006) relegate the consumer brand relationship to an accumulation of consumption experiences. Aggarwal (2004) determined that it was more of an exchange-based relationship since some money must be traded for product or service. A more apt analogy, in his view, would be of the celebrity/fan relationship which includes personal and impersonal aspects. Essentially, the notion of the interpersonal relationship has attractiveness because of the meaning brands bring to individuals' lives (Fournier, 1998; Arikan, Yilmaz and Bodur, 2016) similar to the relationships with friends, family and romantic partners (Cavanaugh, 2016). The exchange foundation of the consumer brand relationship (Xie, Poon and Zhang, 2017) based on social exchange theory creates relationship norms (Blocker, Houston and Flint, 2011; Li and Li, 2014). As Xie, Poon and Zhang (2017) state social exchange theory considers that individuals feel obligated to return favours when they benefit from others, even organisations. This flow of give and take resembles interpersonal relationships.

The consumer-brand relationship has several measures to assess its strength. Brand relationship quality, examined by Fournier (1994, 1998), considers the six dimensions of emotional, behavioural and cognitive connections within the consumer-brand relationship types. These six dimensions are self-brand connection, nostalgic attachment, behavioural interdependence, love, intimacy and partner quality (Fournier and Yao, 1997; Kim, Park and Kim, 2014; Giovanis and Athanasopoulou, 2017). These connections can be witnessed in short and long-term relationships with varying factors of price, taste/utility, legacy or nostalgia (Woodside, 2004) to forge deep relationships with brands (Escalas and Bettman, 2005; Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013). Brand relationship quality is a potent mediator between marketing activities and outcomes (e.g., CBR) (Arikan, Yilmaz and Bodur, 2016; Fournier, 1998; Papista and Dimitriadis, 2012). BRQ, therefore, is credited as an appropriate customer based indicator of the strength of the consumer-brand relationship (Hudson et al., 2015; Smit, Bronner and Tolboom, 2007). The concept of quality applies across relationship type, from potential friends to casual friends to close friends to best friends (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009; Fournier, 1998). The measures of brand relationship strength have transitioned from brand loyalty to brand relationship quality (Alvarez and Fournier, 2016). However, they still hinge on the

strength of the connection between brand and consumer on the basis of people appreciating brands the way they appreciate people (Reimann et al., 2012; Li and Li, 2014). The strength of the relationship can also be signalled by people's willingness to change stores until they find their chosen brand (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009).

Consumer-brand relationships possess cognitive and affective elements (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Kim, Han and Park, 2001), including brand love and brand attachment (affective) plus brand trust and CBI (cognitive). Developing the consumer-brand relationship is a proactive process from both parties' perspective. Brands communicate attractive messages to find brand evangelists (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Marticotte, Marticotte and Arcand, 2016) while consumers choose brands whose identity overlaps with theirs (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000; Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou, 2013; Xie, Poon and Zhang, 2017). The self-expansion theory, supported by Belk (1988), shows that consumers expand to include their brand relationships into their self-concept. The identity motive for the consumer-brand relationship (Fournier, 1998) means that the relationship is formed on the bases of self-brand connection (Giovanis and Athanasopoulou, 2017) and how well the brand facilitates the consumer's self-definitional goals (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Lam, Ahearne and Schillewaert, 2012). Therefore, meaningful consumer-brand relationships are important to individuals' self-concept.

2.3.3.2 Motivators and Consequences of the Consumer-Brand Relationship

The antecedents of the consumer-brand relationship include cognitive and affective features. For instance, brand attachment (Belaid and Behi, 2011; Park, Eisingerich and Park, 2013), brand passion (Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence, 2013) and brand love (Ahuvia, 2005; Davvetas and Diamontopoulous, 2017; Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012). Additionally, brand trust (Becerra and Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; He, Li and Harris, 2012), brand identification (Lam et al., 2013, Albert and Merunka, 2012, Wang, 2017; Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012) and brand commitment (Sung and Choi, 2010; Zhou et al., 2012) are essential to a strong consumer-brand relationship. Brand passion, as noted by Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence (2013), is affective in nature and describes consumers' emotional attachment to the brand. Brand attachment speaks about becoming bonded to the brand on the basis of a positive experience (Xie, Poon and Zhang, 2017; Park and Kim, 2014; Payne et al., 2009), brand attractiveness (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Elbedweihy et al., 2016) or the warm memories one associates with the brand (Arikan, Yilmaz and Bodur, 2016). While

consumers may not admit to their interpersonal relationships with the brand (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009), it is widely accepted that they love their brands (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Bagozzi, Batra and Ahuvia, 2017).

The ability of the brand to satisfy prestige, emotional, physical and community needs is also a strong antecedent of the consumer-brand relationship (Park and Kim, 2014; Malthouse et al, 2013; Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012). Additionally, brand trust is a cognitive and affective antecedent of the consumer-brand relationship (Escalas and Bettman, 2005; Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013). Brand trust is the willingness to believe in a brand's promises and quality (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013). Like brand trust, brand identification has been categorised as cognitive and affective antecedent (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Lam et al., 2013). In discussing the antecedents one cannot ignore satisfaction (Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012; Papista and Dimiatriadis, 2012) which speaks to the physical, emotional and relational gratification one receives from interacting with a brand as a consumer (Giovanis and Athanasopoulou, 2017; Valta, 2013).

The consumer brand relationship is critical as a tool of differentiation (Fournier and Yao, 1997; Popp and Woratschek, 2017). The concepts of brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Giovanis and Athanasopoulou, 2017), brand equity (Buil, Chernatony and Martinez, 2013; Blackston, 1992) and brand advocacy (Tildesley and Coote, 2009) are benefits of the consumer-brand relationship. Similarly, repurchase intention, purchase, profitability, as well as resistance to negative information and competitive actions are brand favoured consequences (Lam, Ahearne and Schillewaert, 2012; Huber et al., 2010; Valta, 2013; Cheng, White and Chaplin, 2012; Elbedweihi et al., 2016). These benefits signal a successful brand whose value is strong among the stakeholders in the market, especially the customer (Blackston, 1992). This simplified description of brand equity as examined by Keller (1993) and Aaker (1992) is important because the more strong consumer-brand relationships a brand has, the stronger its brand equity. One can examine brand equity from a consumer-based perspective, like Keller (1993) or from the framework of Aaker (1992) which lists brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and other proprietary assets within the make-up of a strong brand equity. Brand loyalty distinguishes from the simple act of repeat purchase (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973) and adds an angle of brand preference and love to the continued use of a brand.

The consumer-brand relationship also benefits the consumer who gathers the social benefits of affiliating with the brand and gets the sense of achievement that accompanies fulfilling one's

identity goals such as self-verification, self-distinctiveness and self-enhancement (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Blocker, Houston and Flint, 2011; Elbedweihy et al., 2016). The perceived self-expansion (Trump and Brucks, 2012) has a strong influence on consumer choice and behaviour (Babutsidze, 2012; Malar et al., 2012) as well as brand evaluations (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009). Consumer-brand engagement is a mutually beneficial consequence of the consumer-brand relationship. Engagement, in this sense, speaks to the consumers' positive, dedicated and passionate view of the brand (Dwivedi, 2015). Engagement, satisfaction and brand loyalty together reinforce each other (Shankar, Smith and Rangasawamy, 2003; Dwivedi, 2015). Additional brand-related consequences include barrier to entry for competitors, increased sales revenue, strong customer base and a strong brand valuation (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2001).

2.3.4 The Evolution of the Brand Community

Community is a term with a long history (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Hammedi et al., 2015) which has taken several shapes over the past few millennia. However, there is a common thread that guides each discussion or definition of community, that of sharing, belonging and agreement. A definition that demonstrates such, is by Scarpi (2010, pg. 14), who defines communities as "social groups with shared relationships, shared conventions and a sense of membership ... communities are a social network where individuals create and share meaning (traditions, experience, influence) developing a sense of meaning". These communities are based on shared value or purpose and have benefits for the collective and the individual. The literature shows that as commercial activity increased, marketplaces became a community in their own right (Brogi, 2014; Hammedi et al., 2015). Seraj (2012) dated this phase to about two thousand years ago, stating that these communities were interactive possessing social as well as economic benefits with the public discourse and knowledge share a major part of the value created therein. However, those marketplace communities were like many other local communities, i.e. they were geographically bound (Hammedi et al., 2015; Madupu and Cooley, 2010).

While there is some tension between society and community as concepts, with the latter posited as more people oriented (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001), the tension is not necessarily founded on fair evaluations. For instance, the introduction of print press was predicted to damage community but that did not occur and neither did the destructions foreseen with brand community or technology (Turner et al., 2016). In fact, as community evolves, instead of destroying itself, one can argue that it simply becomes more sophisticated with added layers,

e.g. more tools of communication or interaction. One such added layer is that of the brand community, which is not necessarily geographically-bound but possesses the consumers and brand admirers, who share a connection to the brand (Thompson et al., 2017; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009). Within this format of community, the shared value is the collective interest in the brand (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Kuo and Feng, 2013). While this form of community is not restricted to location, there remains a feeling of belonging that binds members and the brand (Zaglia, 2013; Graffigna and Gambetti, 2015). These collectives of brand users and brand lovers situate themselves in online spaces to learn and share about the brand, forming communities that generate value for brand and users online.

2.3.4.1 The nature of a successful brand community

The facets of a brand community, which make it successful and sustainable is of interest to consumer research. He et al. (2017) determines that when the collective develops the qualities of a community, as outlined by the sociological construct, developing rules, boundaries and norms, members gain the commitment that leads to cohesion plus community survival. Such an argument supports Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) markers of community, which became the standard by which subsequent investigations of community were assessed (Laroche et al., 2012; He et al., 2017). Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) markers were consciousness of a kind, sense of moral responsibility and established rituals and traditions that create a facilitating environment for the belongingness, meaning and commitment within a community (Schau, Muniz and Arnould, 2009; Zhang and Luo, 2016). However, Relling et al. (2016) argue that within brand communities especially online and social media brand communities (SMBC), there needs to be investigations to discover whether there are any additional markers of community. Essentially, the nature of the community is the strength of the relationships between its members, marked by commonalities, identification and the desire to share communal resources (McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002; Hur, Ahn and Kim, 2011). However, within the brand community context, there is a commercial nature to the relationships (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Scarpi, 2010; Zaglia, 2013). Notably, the brand community becomes a brand in itself (Schembri, 2009; Graffigna and Gambetti, 2015) with all the meanings, relationships and identity motives that accompany integration of brands into consumer lifestyles.

Muniz and O’Guinn (2001, pg. 42) described the brand community as “a specialised non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relationships among

admirers of a brand.” The psychological nature of the bonds that bind customers, who may never meet in person (Carlson, Suter and Brown, 2008) removes the geographical limitations of a thriving brand community. However, some brand communities do possess a geographical element, e.g., H.O.G.S, the famed Harley Davidson community that is credited with turning around the fate of the company (Brodie et al., 2013). According to Madupu and Cooley (2010), these geographically-bound brand communities have the same limitations as traditional communities such as size, location and accessibility, while the psychological brand communities and SMBCs do not face the same restrictions (Carlson, Suter and Brown, 2008; Brogi, 2014; Stokburger and Wiertz, 2015). In fact, as He et al. (2017) note, brand communities are more accessible globally, due to the internet. Therefore, the brand community becomes a group of people with shared interest in the brand (Kuo and Feng, 2013; Kim et al., 2008) connected by the internet regardless of their location (Shang, Chen and Lao, 2006). In such a case, the internet becomes a location for the members to connect (Brogi, 2014), thus adding a virtual location to the concept of brand community (He et al., 2017, Ku and Feng, 2013). Madupu and Cooley (2010) define virtual community as an aggregate of individuals who share an interest and interact on technologically-mediated platforms. Hence, online brand communities are location independent (Stokburger and Wiertz, 2015) collections of customer-customer and customer-brand relationships (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002; Zhang and Lou, 2016). Social media brand communities are ideal for brand to invest and co-create value (Schau, Muniz and Arnould, 2009; Kao et al., 2016; Kaplan and Haenlin, 2010; He et al., 2017) on the premise that relationships carry significant benefits for the brand (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006).

The brand community is created either by the consumers or the organisation (Jang et al., 2008; Homburg, Ehm and Artz, 2015). The literature recognises that brands are growing more supportive of consumer-generated brand communities (Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann, 2005; Thompson and Sinha, 2008). The most popular example in literature is that of the Harley-Davidson company and the owner group H.O.G.S, which while started by consumers, receives funding from the company and is evangelised to new owners. The format of a community (consumer-generated or company-generated) has no definitive influence on its success (Gruner, Homburg and Lukas, 2014). However, there are several factors which signal a level of success within a brand community. Firstly, recognise, as Fournier and Lee (2009) argue, that brand communities exist to serve the need of consumers. Secondly, the ability to help an individual achieve their consumption goals (Healy and McDonagh, 2013) means that the brand

community is successfully acting as a reference group for the individuals. The success of a brand community is not indicative of an absence of oppositional opinions. Many times those voices are from people who do not identify with the brand (Felix, 2012) and can join since social media brand communities allow relatively free access (Gruner, Homburg and Lukas, 2014). Another measure of success within the brand community is the sense of community or, as Blanchard (2008) calls it, sense of virtual community. The sense of community is essential as it decides the sustainability of the virtual community (Abfalter, Zaglia and Mueller, 2012), which is the aim of all interested companies.

McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002) state that a community is made up of its member entities and researchers have tried to assign labels to the various member types. The popular terminology within academia is that of active user, passive user and lurker (Carlson, Suter and Brown; 2008; Hartmann, Wiertz and Arnould, 2015; Sun, Rau and Ma, 2014; Lai and Chen, 2014). Madupu and Cooley (2010) characterised these users by behaviours whereby lurkers are those who participate in non-interactive behaviours such as browsing and reading the messages posted within the virtual or online community without engaging or responding. They further allocate active users and passive users to actions within the interactive behaviour category such as posting original brand-related content, sharing others brand-related content, commenting, liking, replying and otherwise engaging within the community. The ratio of lurkers to active is believed to be 100:1 (Madupu and Cooley, 2010; Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2016). Much of the attention in the literature is often focussed on making the lurkers into more active and useful members of the community (Bishop, 2007; Kang, Tang and Fiore, 2014). However, Hartmann, Wiertz and Arnould (2015) recognise that while active participation leads to increases in commitment, lurking is an act of vicarious consumption with its outcomes, such as spreading positive word of mouth (WOM) (Madupu and Cooley, 2010; Barreto, 2014) about the brand and the community (Erkan and Evans, 2016). Therefore, one could argue that they are active in a sense, even if that activity is not specifically within the community itself.

There is other terminology used to describe members and examine their level of engagement within the community. For example, Felix (2012) names four types of users based on their level of identification within the brand community. In his categorisation, insiders have high identification and a high social orientation or level of social relationships with others in the community; minglers have lower level of identification; devotees have lower social relationships; and tourists have both lower identification and lower social relationships. De Valck, Van Bruggen and Wierenga (2009) identify six member types according to the level of

integration within the community, core member, conversationalist, informationals, hobbyists, functionalists and opportunists. According to their calculations, functionalists and opportunists are the largest portions of the memberships with core members comprising a mere six percent. These different categorisations of the membership within SMBCs provide a more complete picture of the membership composition than the simple lurkers, active and participant framework allow. They also provide evidence of a level of hierarchy which is contrary to Habibi, Laroche and Richard's (2014) view that there are no hierarchies in online brand communities. Noble, Noble and Adjei (2012) speak to the label of peer super user who is an unpaid brand champion who through thought leadership and initiative become a community leader. These members are alternatively called lead users (Marchi, Giachetti and de Gennaro, 2011; Kratzer et al., 2016) or influencers (Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch, 2017). Lead users and influencers are often granted access to specialised brand knowledge, or new products ahead of the general brand community or marketplace (March, Giachetta, Gennaro, 2011). Dimitriu and Guesalaga (2017) recognised that social media changed how consumers behave in relation to brands and sought to identify these behaviours. They also sought to define new consumer segments by their behaviour on social media. For example, brand content seekers will display brand tacit engagement, which is basically behaviours that are not publically visible on social media. In so identifying the various behaviours and segments, they add a measure of complexity to the discussion of membership and engagement within social media. However, it also stops short of determining a level of hierarchy within social media brand communities, which this current study establishes using a netnographic methodology.

2.3.4.2 The Ingredients of Successful Brand Community

Schouten, McAlexander and Koenig (2007) argue that brand communities create experiences that add value to the customer. These generate positive brand community experiences (Park and Kim, 2014; Kuo and Feng, 2013). Within the context of a solid brand community, there is the feeling of reciprocity among members (Chan and Li, 2010; Mathwick, Wiertz and DeRuyter, 2007). This inspires participation and the provision of assistance to other members (Nambisan and Baron, 2010; Johnson, Massiah and Allan, 2013; Simon, Brexendorf and Fassnact, 2016), based on the desire to contribute to the positive brand experience often at no cost to the brand. The need to create a positive brand experience is supported by Hollebeek, Juric and Tang (2017) who devised the virtual brand community engagement practices protocol. An engaging community is one where knowledge is being shared, (Koh and Kim, 2004; He et al., 2016) and user-generated content (Smith, Fischer and Yongjian, 2012) is

celebrated (Huatz et al, 2014; Halliday, 2016), while the consumer is empowered (Brodie et al., 2013; Labrecque et al., 2013). This environment promises the consumer a sense of belonging (Kim et al., 2008; Kim and Drumwright, 2016). As Parmentier (2015) argues, brand communities are a hybrid social activity and co-creation space, that fulfils self-definitional and presentation goals (Siedman, 2013; Davis, Piven and Breazeale, 2014) as well as self-validation needs (Schau and Muniz, 2002; Maricotte, Arcand and Baudry, 2016).

Antecedents of a sense of brand community could be categorised as self-identity, relational or reward motives. Considering self-identity motives, the framework of social identity theory is applicable, as the brand and community are symbols of social identity to support the consumer's self-concept (Kim et al., 2008; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Simon, Brexendorf and Fassnact, 2016). Brand community identification is an antecedent of a sense of community (Zhou et al., 2012; Hua et al., 2017). Algeisheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann (2005) define brand community identification as the strength of the consumer's relationship with the brand community and the extent to which he/she feels like a sense of belonging to the community. This sense of belonging is vital due to its credit in creating a self-community match (Hua et al., 2017). In much the same way a self-brand match precedes CBI and the consumer-brand relationship, the self-community match is a driver of the brand community identification (Algeisheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann, 2005; Popp and Woratschek, 2017). Writers also link brand community match to the sense of brand community (Zhou et al., 2012), in line with the human desire to participate in behaviours that are self-congruent to perceptions and values (Khaldi, 2014; Kressmann et al., 2006; Wallace, Buil and Chernatony, 2017). The self-discovery (Madupu and Cooley, 2010), self-presentation (Davis, Piven and Breazeale, 2014) and self-expression (Lin, Fang and Jin, 2017) drivers are also self-identity motivations which show that users are using the brand and the community to manage their identity and the perception that others have of them.

The relational motives are the desire for belongingness (Hakala, Nummelin and Kohtamaki, 2017) and connection to similar others, which enhances the information quality (Islam and Rahman, 2017), usefulness (Kao et al., 2016; Kuo and Feng, 2013) and social integration of the brand community platform (Carr and Hayes, 2015; Peters et al., 2013). Therefore, community managers need to provide opportunities for members to interact with minimal intervention (Fournier and Avery, 2011; Halliday, 2016). In this way, the community becomes known for its problem-solving (Adjei, Noble and Noble, 2010), entertaining (He et al., 2017; Gummerus et al., 2012) enthusiastic (Lai and Chen, 2014; Zhang et al., 2017) and engaging

nature (Nadeem et al., 2015; Wang, 2017; Hudson et al., 2016). The reward motives are those of social capital (Habibi, Laroche and Richard, 2014; Nambisan and Baron, 2010) or monetary reward (Garnefeld, Iseke and Krebs, 2014; Hua et al., 2017). Social capital is about enhancing one's standing (Baldus, Vorhees and Calantone, 2015). Mathwick, Wiertz and De Ruyter (2007, pg. 833) define social capital as the "intangible force that binds society together by transforming self-seeking individuals into members of a community with shared interests, shared assumptions about social relations and a sense of the common good." This can be credited for the harmony (Zhang and Luo, 2016) within brand communities that lead to actions being collective actions in which individuals comply because they have internalised the social identity of the brand community (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002).

2.3.4.3 Consequences of a Strong Brand Community

There are consequences which were antecedents and therefore exist in a cyclical relationship with brand community. Identification and social capital are positive consequences to engagement with the brand community (Johnson, Massiah and Allan, 2013; Zhou et al., 2012; Hua et al., 2017). The consumer-brand relationship is a consequence of the brand community. While Thompson et al. (2017) say that the brand community enhances the consumer brand relationship, Felix (2012) recognises that engagement within the brand community does not always translate to initiation of a relationship with the company or the brand. A strong consumer perspective benefit of participation within a virtual community is the fulfilment of one's identity goals (Wu et al., 2017), which was also an antecedent. Consumer benefits also include social influence (Wang et al., 2016; Vernuccio et al., 2016), confidence (Marzocchi, Morandin and Bergami, 2013; Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012), satisfaction (Brodie et al., 2013; Casalo, Flavian and Guinaliu, 2013), insider knowledge (Schau, Muniz and Arnould, 2009; Kornum et al., 2017), and constant connectivity (Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014; Pasternak, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2017). These features theoretically increase the level of user commitment to brand community (Kuo and Feng, 2013; Giovanis and Athansopoulou, 2017). There are acknowledgements of the brand-related benefits of an engaged community including: loyalty (Hsieh and Wei, 2017, Munnukka, Karjaluoto and Tikkannen, 2015), stronger brand equity (Thompson et al., 2017), profitability (Nambisan and Baron, 2010; Poyry, Parvinen and Malmivaara, 2013), brand advocacy (Wallace, Buil and Chernatony, 2014), evangelism (Scarpi, 2010; Marticotte, Arcand, Baudry, 2016), love (Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012) and brand attachment (Sierra, Badrinarayanan and Taute, 2016; Zhou et al., 2012). The brand community creates not only attitudinal and behavioural loyalty

(Luo, Zhang and Liu, 2015) but oppositional loyalty which is the resentment of rival brands and communities (Madupu and Cooley, 2010; Thompson and Sinha, 2008; Dessart, Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou, 2016). Such resistance to negative information (Madupu and Cooley, 2010; Mousavi, Roper and Keeling, 2017) helps the brand with customer retention (Malthouse et al., 2013; Nisar and Whitehead, 2016) and supports quality and length of brand community membership (Zhang et al., 2017). A strong brand community is a cost-effective tool (Clark, Black and Judson, 2017; Tiago and Verissimo, 2014) that generates new ideas and powerful promotional opportunities (Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden, 2011; Mangold and Faulds, 2009), which has reach outside the community itself due to the concept of EWOM or electronic word of mouth.

Long-held as a valuable promotional tool by companies, word of mouth has transitioned online (Baka, 2016). EWOM, according to Daugherty and Hoffman (2014) is the statements about the brand made via the internet. The act of EWOM can be placed directly in the social media brand community (SMBC) or one's profile (Smith, Fischer and Yongjian, 2012; Chahal and Rani, 2017). The notion of brand trust is enhanced by EWOM combined with positive brand experiences (Jung, Kim and Kim, 2014; Chahal and Rani, 2017) which then builds on the satisfaction from previous interactions (Casalo, Flavian and Guinaliu, 2010), boosting perceptions of usefulness and ease of use (Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou, 2013; Jokar et al., 2017; Barger, Peltier and Schultz, 2016). Brand attractiveness is increased (So et al., 2017; Saboo, Kumar and Ramani, 2016), which improves purchase and repurchase intent (Wang, Yu and Wei, 2012; Baker, Donthu and Kumar, 2016) and the brand evaluations (Li and Li, 2014) of community members. Altogether, these benefits assist the company in improving the brand relationship quality (Hsieh and Wei, 2017) by including the customer-company-member within the brand story (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012) which generates the brand-self connection for which strong consumer-brand relationships are celebrated.

2.3.4.4 Social Media Brand Community

The technological advance of social media is no longer hailed as revolutionary. In fact it is now considered by many academics as ubiquitous (Peters et al., 2013; Kucuk, 2016). However, the effect on the consumption experience has been a revolution (He et al., 2017). This creates a conversational environment (Park and Kim, 2014) that generates value for brand and user (Laroche et al., 2012). Social media has been defined in a few ways. Kaplan and Haenlin (2010, pg. 61) influentially defined them as “a group of internet-based applications which build on the

ideological and technological foundation of Web 2.0 and which allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”. Consequently, Cabiddu, DeCarlo and Riccoli (2014, pg. 175) stated that “social media are browser or mobile-based applications that allows users to create, edit, access and link to content and/or individuals,” and Carr and Hayes (2015) noted that social media are channels that allow for self-presentation to a variety of audiences. In Kietzmann et al’s (2011) definition they noted that social media uses mobile and web-based technologies to facilitate an interactive environment for sharing, co-creating, discussing and modifying user-generated content.

The commonality between these definitions is the digitalisation of communications (Berthon et al, 2012) allowing users to act (Peters et al., 2013) in self-expressive ways (Simon, Brexendorf and Fassnact, 2016) that exhibit their creativity (Von Wallpach et al., 2017) while linking them to other similar and essential individuals (Marzocchi, Morandin and Bergami, 2013). The environment of social media is recognised as beneficial for the development of the brand community (Habibi, Laroche and Richard, 2014) and Laroche et al. (2012) defined SMBC as communities initiated on the platforms of social media. Importantly, they note that these SMBCs, possess Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) markers of community (shared consciousness, shared rituals and traditions and moral responsibility). SMBCs are a place for individual identity management (Gensler et al., 2013) where brands are used as signals of identity (Simon, Brexendorf and Fassnact, 2016). Therefore, the incorporation of brand into the self-concept is being demonstrated in SMBCs to publicly express affiliation with the brand and community (Ho, 2015; Wang et al., 2016).

Social media brand communities facilitate the communication of social identity (Jin and Huang, 2017; Kwon and Wen, 2010) and allow users to develop relationships with the brand and other members (Zhou et al., 2012; Simon, Brexendorf and Fassnacht, 2016). In such a manner, the user moves from being a passive follower in a consumer-brand relationship to a proactive agent (Hajli, 2014; Yuksel, Milne and Miller, 2016) with a say in the development of the brand story (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012; Gensler et al., 2013). This has been an instrumental factor in social media communications changing the interactions between individuals and companies (Munnukka, Karjaluo and Tikkanen, 2015), making the direction multi-directional (Vazquez et al., 2014) using a many-to many-model (Mossberger, Wu and Crawford, 2013). This concept of a many-to-many model of social media communications creates a fast-paced and continually evolving environment (Gurhan-Canli, Hayran and Sarial-Abi, 2016) based on all the solutions for platform, brand and product development, therein

(Fuller, Matzler and Hoppe, 2008; Parmentier, 2015). However, it nurtures a sense of reciprocity (Chan and Li, 2010) between the different members of the brand community.

Brands should tailor their communications to each specific platform they engage with (Smith, Fischer and YongJiang, 2012). Some platforms are text-based, video-based, photo-based, audio-based (e.g. Soundcloud, Spotify) or live action based (e.g. SnapChat) or try to cater to all these capabilities (e.g. Facebook), generating a different nature of engagement (Kietzmann et al., 2011) earning the communications plan that is apt for the social media site. The literature addresses how brands can capitalise SMBCs for the consumer-brand relationship. Kaplan and Haenlin (2010), show the need to be active in creating content and responding to user content and Labrecque (2014) shows that consumers desire engagement from brands they reach out to on social media. Kietzmann et al. (2011) spoke of several functional blocks of social media including identity, conversations, sharing and relationships. Taken together, these blocks are definite signs to companies that they should use SMBCs for the nurturing of relationships (Tiago and Verissimo, 2013), on shared identity, reciprocity (Mathwick, Wiertz and DeRuyter, 2007; Surma, 2016) and proactivity from both brand and consumer.

Within this context, the audience is the media (Fischer, 2015) mainly on sites like YouTube, with its Broadcast Yourself motto, thus inspiring self-expression among users (Smith, Fischer and YongJiang, 2012). With the advent of Periscope, Facebook LIVE, SnapChat, Instagram LIVE and the video capabilities of YouTube, more people are taking to social media to share their views and sometimes brand-related content in ways that inspire the consumer-decision process (Powers et al., 2012) of consumers on social media. Consequently, these evolutions of social media keeps users connected to the SMBC constantly. The creative environment on social media is characterised by the concept of user-generated content (UGC). Smith, Fischer and Yongjian (2012) show that the presence of UGC is an excellent signal of success for the SMBC. UGC is a form of EWOM on social media whether it presents itself in the form of posts about the brand, showing brand preferences by liking a brand page or its posts (Erkan and Evans, 2016). Tiago and Verissimo (2014) argue that engagement increases the quality of the SMBC and the success of the brand's institutional websites as well as search engine results (Yang et al., 2016).

The benefits of SMBCs include trust, loyalty, engagement, repurchase/purchase intent, ROI, positive WOM, brand equity and brand commitment (Munnukka, Karjaluoto and Tikkannen, 2015; Zhou et al., 2012; Bidmon, 2017; Swaminathan, 2016). The SMBC also improves the

brand's attractiveness, by elevating brand perceptions and evaluations. Authentic engagement, especially in the time of crisis builds the positive reputation of the brand and the community (Ott and Theunissen, 2015). Thus, users will become more inclined to show brand consumption in SMBCs as a sign of their consumer and self-definitional needs being met (Davis, Piven and Breazale, 2014). Users will continue to use the SMBCs in a way that is congruent to their self-perception and sense of self (Khaldi, 2014) and as such work to improve the attractiveness of the community they belong to (Saboo, Kumar and Ramani, 2016; Wang, 2017). This is also an established avenue for brand awareness (Enginkaya and Yilmaz, 2014) and consumer socialisation (Wang, Yu and Wei, 2012), initiating the consumer into the brand community.

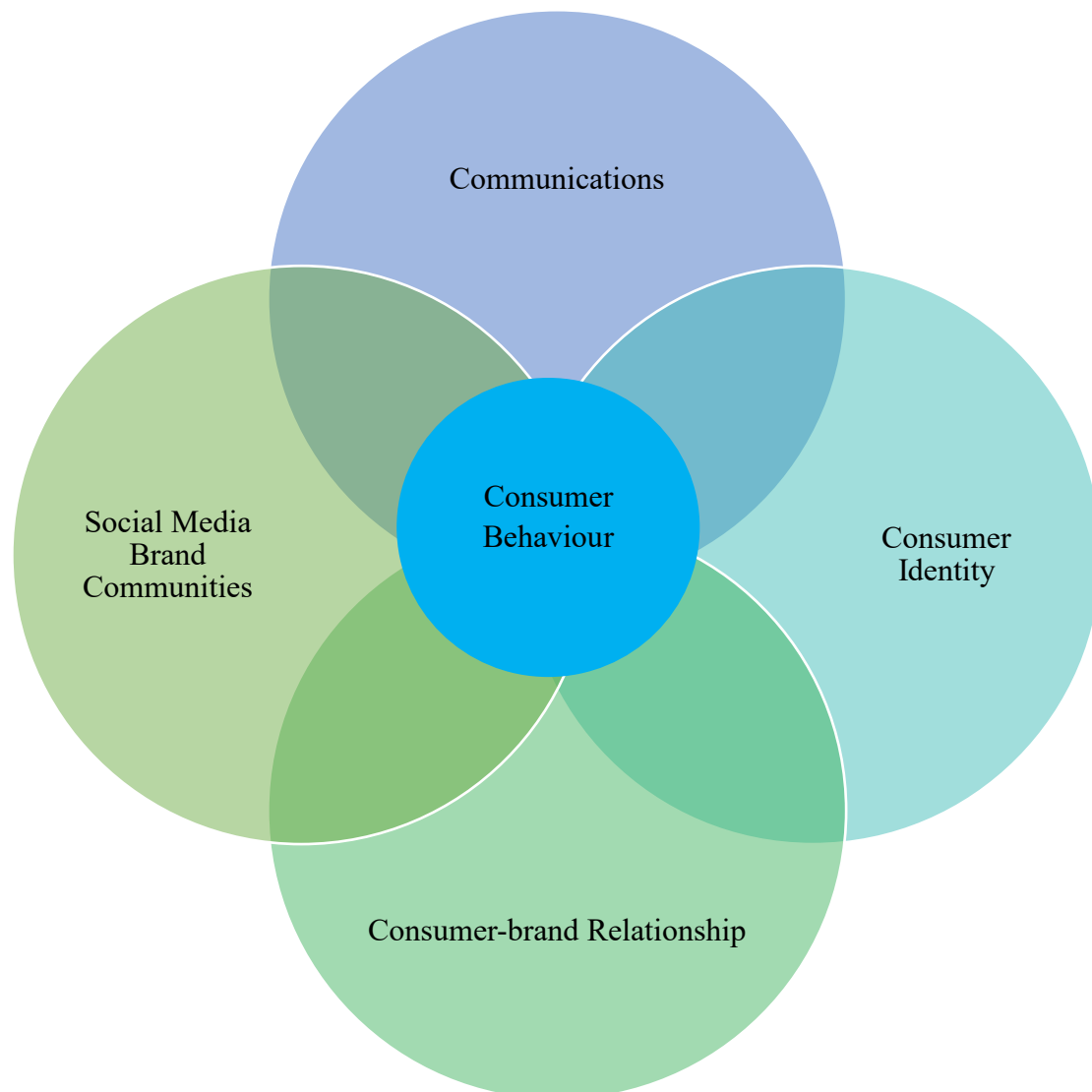


Figure 3 The Conceptual Framework

2.4. Research Gap

In reference to the research gap, first discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.3, this review seeks to outline the gaps in the literature and discuss the contribution to knowledge of this. There is much discussion in the literature about consumer-brand identification, social media brand communities and consumer-brand relationships. However, there are insufficient studies that investigate how these concepts influence each other and contribute to the development of consumer identity. This is essential to study considering that identity is a major influence on consumer choices (Oyserman, 2009) and that the consumer-brand relationship is important to both stakeholders in the relationship (Fournier, 1998). This research will address this gap in the consumer literature by outlining a process of how each of these concepts link to contribute to the development of consumer identity. Addressing the gaps will start by considering the constitution of a social media brand community, attempting to show its full composition and definition in alignment with the framework developed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) and the markers of community within online collectives. Relling et al. (2016) note the need for further research to uncover further markers of community especially within the social media brand community. This research sought to discover more markers of community, and did so with the revelation of individualisation, creativity as well as engagement.

The current research supports the work done by researchers such as Lam et al. (2010) Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012), Kressmann et al. (2006), Tuskej, Golob and Podnar (2013) on the concept of consumer-brand identification. Additionally, this study acknowledges the contribution to various types of consumer-based identification made by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) in relation to consumer-company identification and Popp and Woratschek (2017), Ho (2015) and Johnson, Massiah and Allan (2013) in terms of consumer-community identification. These works show how identity-based motivations (Oyserman, 2009; Shrum et al., 2013) influence consumer behaviours. This study extends these motivations to consider how this influences choice of joining and engaging with social media brand communities. In so doing, the study identifies affective, cognitive and behavioural antecedents as well as consequences to the consumer-brand identification, consumer identity and consumer-brand relationship. The study also shows how disidentification (Wolter et al., 2011; Josiassen, 2011) is displayed within the social media brand communities. This was not previously addressed in the consumer literature. In line with the importance of social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) to consumer research (Kuenzel and Halliday, 2016) this study addresses the development of social identity within social media brand communities. In this

way, both arms of the theoretical framework in Figure 2 are considered, that is, identity management and socio-cultural positioning. This include addressing social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) within social media brand communities. Furthermore, Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) attempts to account for the behaviour of consumers within a marketplace based on labels given to them by their society. As Consumer Culture Theory illustrates the pre and post-acquisition behaviours that motivate value (Arnould, 2007), this thesis aims to contribute to Consumer Culture Theory research and determine the role of social media brand communities therein. In so doing, the research contributes to consumer research by clearly articulating the process of consumer identity creation and the development of the consumer-brand relationship within the context of social media brand communities. This is done via a proposed model of consumer identity creation and brand relationship development that considers the role that engagement within social media brand communities have on consumer-brand and consumer-community identification and the subsequent links to consumer identity and brand relationships.

| Research Gap | Research Contribution |
|--|--|
| More research is needed into the Identity-based motivations (Oyserman, 2009; Shrum et al., 2013) of joining social media brand communities. | This study outlines the identity-based antecedents of consumer-brand identification and the consumer brand relationship as they apply within the social media brand communities. |
| The concept of disidentification (Wolter et al 2011; Josiassen, 2011) is not adequately covered within the literature. | This study discusses the engagement actions of individuals who display disidentification within the social media brand communities and their motivations. |
| Hall-Phillips et al. (2016) argue that the role social media plays in building identification has mostly been ignored by academia, leaving a quite noticeable gap in the literature. | The results show how the engagement behaviours develop consumer-brand identification as well as consumer-community identification. The study shows the multi-dimensional aspect of CBI in social media including the affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects. |

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| <p>Muniz and O’Guinn (2001), identified three markers of community within online collectives. However, Relling et al. (2016) argue that within brand communities especially online and social media brand communities (SMBC), there needs to be investigations to discover whether there are any additional markers of community.</p> | <p>This study uncovers three additional markers of community in the social media brand community. Individualisation, creativity and engagement. These markers cover affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects of identification, identity creation and consumer-brand relationships.</p> |
| <p>The ability of social media to generate relationships and self-expression (Cabral, 2008), makes it a hypothetically beneficial environment for the development of consumer identity and the consumer-brand relationship. This needs further empirical research.</p> | <p>This study outlines the consequences of engaging social media brand communities to consumer identity development and the consumer-brand relationship.</p> |
| <p>There is ambiguity in the process of consumer identity creation and consumer-brand relationship in social media even though online social media networks and brand communities are increasingly studied in consumer research.</p> | <p>This study clarifies this ambiguity with a conceptual model for online social media consumer-brand relationship development and consumer identity and definitions of concepts such as engagement as well as discussion of behaviours that influence identification, identity and consumer-brand relationship.</p> |
| <p>There is currently inadequate academic research into the development of social identity within the social media brand community context.</p> | <p>This paper contributes to this gap in the literature by addressing the development of social identity within the communities under investigation.</p> |
| <p>Self-congruity is not comprehensively discussed, in relation to social media brand communities and the motivations of selecting or engaging with chosen communities.</p> | <p>Furthermore, the lack of studies regarding self-congruity, as it relates to engagements within social media brand communities, motivate this research to contemplate at which level is there a</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| | self-community match within the social media brand community context. |
| Researchers have spoken about social comparison theory and its application to social media (e.g. De Vries and Kuhne, 2015). However, there is need to determine its applicability in the case of social media brand communities. | The social comparison theory has been applied to the social media environment. However, this research seeks to consider how it extends to the social media brand community. |

Table 2 Research Gap and Contribution

2.5 Summary

Brand relationships have been at the core of consumer research in light of the influence they have on individuals' identities and companies' success. Several theories such as self-congruity theory or the self-expansion theory have been developed or adapted to account for the manner in which brand relationships affect individuals' sense of self. As social media continues to grow in importance to daily lives, the effect on consumer-brand relationships and identity becomes more pertinent to consumer research. The theoretical framework of this study (figure 2) addresses identity, relationships and consumer culture considering personal and socio-cultural influences to the development of self and social connections. The conceptual framework (figure 3) examines where the concepts of identity, communications, relationships and brand communities intersect to show the various influences and consequences of consumer behaviour. Based on this review, this study identified several gaps as it relates to the application of several relevant theories within the context of the social media brand community. Additionally, it proposes a cohesive model to account for the development of the consumer-brand relationship. Therefore, the subsequent chapter will outline the methodological approach to addressing these research gaps.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Chapter two considered the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that form the basis for this study. Building on the various theories and concepts discussed in that review chapter, this research examines the influence of social media brand communities on the creation and expression of consumer identity through the process of consumer-brand identification and the maintenance of a robust consumer-brand relationship. Consequently, this chapter offers an outline of the method of conducting the research reported in this thesis. This methodology chapter examines the paradigm to be implemented, the research epistemology and ontology, the research design, the sampling frame, the data collection, the ethical considerations and the data analysis procedure of the study. The chapter adopts the following structure

Section 3.2 outlines the research objectives and questions while section 3.3 discusses the research design, including research paradigms, epistemology and ontology as well as methodology. Section 3.4 speaks to the sampling plan and section 3.5 considers the data collection tools used in the research. While section 3.6 outlines the data analysis framework, section 3.7 discusses the ethical issues through which the study navigated. Section 3.8 speaks about the limitations of the study and finally section 3.9 summarises the chapter.

3.2 Research Objectives and Questions

3.2.1 Research Objectives

The literature review and the identification of the research gaps in the previous chapter informed the development of research objectives for the study. As Khan (2014) identified research objectives as an essential catalyst for the selection of research methods, it is determined to discuss these as well as the research questions prior to discussing the research strategy chosen for this study. The research objectives determine the types of data required as well as the types of questions to be asked of the research. Therefore, the method of data collection and analysis are chosen to match the requirements of the research objectives. This study aims to create an understanding of the psychological underpinnings of the consumer-brand relationship as developed across social media platforms within the context of brand-related behaviours. Consequently, the research objectives are:

1. Define the drivers of consumer-brand identification within the online context of social media.
2. Examine the role of social media brand communities in facilitating/creating the environment for the development of consumer-brand identification.

3. Determine the consequences of online consumer-brand identification in relation to the development of identity and the emergence of the consumer brand relationship.
4. Understand the relationship between identity, identification and the consumer brand relationship especially as it is fostered on social media

3.2.2 Research Questions

Similar to the research objectives, the research questions act as a guide to the creation of the research strategy. This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the online drivers or motivators of consumer-brand identification?
2. How does consumer-brand identification influence the development of identity in members of social media communities?
3. How are brands used to develop the individual's identity (consumer identity) on social media?
4. Are there differences to consumer-brand identification inspired by online communications as compared to traditional communications?
5. What are the consequences of online consumer-brand identification for the consumer-brand relationship?
6. What is the role of the interactive web (social media) in developing consumer-brand identification?

3.3. Research Design

This study investigated the drivers and consequences of consumer-brand identification within the context of the social media brand communities. Furthermore, the research considered how this influences the development of consumer identity and the consumer-brand relationship. The study was then designed to answer the research questions based on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks discussed in chapter two. This study adopted an exploratory research strategy within the social media brand communities under investigation. Gray (2014) describes exploratory research as studies that explore a phenomenon and asks questions about it to determine the value of further investigations. An exploratory design was chosen due to the open-ended nature of the investigation, wherein, this study is sought to uncover the nature of the social media brand communities from the perspective of the individuals/members therein with little to no pre-set ideas. This research strategy can be considered cross-sectional, in that data was collected over one period of time (12 months) using interviews, observation and monitoring techniques. The research design or strategy of this study covers its theoretical perspective or paradigm (interpretivism), its epistemology (inductive), its ontology

(constructionist), its methodology (qualitative) and its data collection methods which will be discussed in subsequent sections and subsections of this chapter.

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Research Design | |
| Epistemology | Inductive |
| Theoretical Perspective | Interpretivism |
| Ontology | Constructionist |
| Methodology | Qualitative |
| Data Collection Methods | Netnography/Participant Observation, In-depth interviews, social media monitoring |
| Data Analysis | Thematic Analysis and BASIC IDs framework |

Table 3 Research Design

3.3.1 Research Paradigm of this study

The theoretical perspective adopted by this study is that of an interpretivist paradigm. This was chosen for several reasons such as a link with its constructionist ontology, inductive epistemology and the participatory nature of the data collection techniques. Interpretivists view reality as a result of social construction. The nature of the social media brand communities supports such a view and leads to the determination that interpretivism is a relevant research approach to explore these settings. These settings are largely constructed by the members, managers and other stakeholders within the communities who determine the meanings and structures therein. Interpretivism is therefore, the open and exploratory research paradigm that will allow for the natural emergence of patterns in the words of the members and participants, therefore giving a rich context to the conclusions that will be made about the phenomenon of social media and its influence on identity and consumer-brand relationships. Another reason for the use of the interpretivist paradigm within this research is its growing prominence within consumer research as shown in table 4.

Discussing research paradigms within the context of the research project is essential as it sets the foundation for the research framework and underpins how researchers create and share the knowledge about a particular phenomenon under study. In addition to the choice of epistemological and ontological approach, the research paradigm grounds the methodology by discipline directs the design and execution of research instruments and provides the foundation for data analysis (Lecompte and Schensul, 1999; Braun and Clarke, 2013). A research

paradigm as defined by Guba and Lincoln (1994, pg. 105) is “the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of the method but ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways.” Interpretivism, a label seen as somewhat interchangeable with phenomenology and constructivism (Lecompte and Schensul, 1999; Shaw and DeForge, 2014), rejects natural science techniques as inappropriate for the study of human behaviour and phenomenon (Khan, 2014; Kim, 2016). As such, they adopt participatory methods to investigate social science and to interpret the human experience from the perspective of the participants (Tsang, 2014; Lecompte and Schensul, 1999). The techniques within this paradigm emerged as researchers became aware of the shortcomings of applying solely scientific knowledge to studying the complex, uncertain and at times ambiguous human environment (Kim, 2016; Chong, 2010). This evolution is a result of researcher belief that people’s belief about their world changes over time and according to various interactions with others (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994; Lecompte and Schensul, 1999). As such, constructs are not fixed and immutable but can lead to new ideas and theories as realities change (Lecompte and Schensul, 1999). Therefore, research should mirror these realities and be relevant to those being researched. Interpretivism is not seeking to tell one story but to present the complex developments that form the foundation of a specific phenomenon (Lecompte and Schensul, 1999; Tsang, 2014).

It has been argued that the participatory nature of interpretivist research has created a blur in distinguishing between researcher and participant (Lecompte and Schensul, 1999; Parker, 2007; Kozinets, 2010). This blur combined with the view of the concept interpretation leads to critiques that this research is subjective thus threatening its validity (Lecompte and Schensul, 1999; Allen, Burk and Davis, 2006; Trotter, 2012). However, the drawbacks associated with subjectivity are balanced by the relevance of the research and richness of the findings to the population at the centre of the research (King and Horrocks, 2010; Rossman and Rallis, 2003). Interpretivism studies the realities of individuals and seeks to present a well-rounded account of a human phenomenon than the causal research of positivism which seeks to present a well-ordered explanation of the same phenomenon (Tsang, 2014; Khan, 2014). The proposed benefits of interpretivism such as relevance to the population, report of a phenomenon from the perspective of those living that experience and transferability to other similar situations (Nastasi and Schensul, 2005; Khan, 2014; Trotter, 2012) temper the criticisms. These positive aspects allow researchers to be confident in the use of the associated techniques to present research that is as sound as any presented by positivists (Tsang, 2014; Kim, 2016). Criticisms

include a perceived lack of scientific soundness, sample sizes that are too small for generalisation, and replicability issues (Goulding, 1998; Trotter, 2012; Sauermann and Roach, 2013). Interpretivism's belief that reality is socially constructed influences the way research is developed, executed and analysed (Tsang, 2014; Chong, 2010) allowing for researchers to possibly more creative in the way they investigate, craft and tell the complex stories of their participants.

| Research Paper | Paradigm | Research Topic | Methodology |
|--|----------------|---|--------------|
| Belk (1988) | Interpretivism | The role of possessions in the sense of self. | Qualitative |
| Fournier (1988) | Interpretivism | Developing a theory of Brand Relationship Quality | Qualitative |
| Dittmar (1992) | Interpretivism | Material possessions as a reflection of identity | Mixed |
| Kozinets (1997) | Interpretivism | X-Philes Subculture of consumption | Qualitative |
| Muniz and O'Guinn, (2001) | Interpretivism | Brand community | Qualitative |
| McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig (2002) | Interpretivism | Building Brand Community | Mixed |
| Aggarwal (2004) | Interpretivism | The Effects of Brand Relationship Norms on Consumer Attitudes and Behaviour | Quantitative |
| Ahuvia (2005) | Interpretivism | Loved Objects and Consumers' Identity Narratives | Qualitative |

| | | | |
|--|----------------|--|--------------|
| Escalas and Bettman, 2005 | Positivism | Self and brand meaning | Mixed |
| Kressmann et al. (2006) | Positivism | Links between self-image and brand loyalty | Quantitative |
| Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) | Positivism | Brand relationships | Quantitative |
| Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi (2012) | Interpretivism | Brand love | Mixed |
| Reimann et al. (2012) | Positivism | How consumers relate to brands | Quantitative |
| Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) | Interpretivism | Drivers of Consumer-Brand Identification | Mixed |
| Trump and Brucks (2012) | Interpretivism | Mental Representations of Self and Brand | Qualitative |
| Zhou et al. (2012) | Positivism | How do brand communities generate brand relationships | Quantitative |
| Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence, (2013) | Positivism | Brand Passion | Quantitative |
| Tuskej, Golob and Podnar (2013) | Interpretivism | The development of consumer-brand identification | Mixed |
| Valta (2013) | Positivism | Do Relational Norms Matter in Consumer-Brand Relationships | Quantitative |
| Zaglia, (2013) | Interpretivism | Brand communities in social media networks | Qualitative |

| | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|---|-------------|
| Lin and Sung (2014) | Interpretivism | Brand identity and brand relationships | Mixed |
| Park and Kim (2014) | Interpretivism | The role of social network websites in the consumer–brand relationship | Mixed |
| Black and Veloutsou (2017) | Interpretivism | Co-creation of brand identity, consumer identity and brand community identity | Qualitative |

Table 4 The Research Paradigm, Epistemological and Ontological and Methodological approaches within several prominent consumer research papers of the past 30 years.

3.3.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is the philosophy of developing knowledge adopted by a particular researcher or research paradigm. According to Sykora et al. (2015), epistemology examines the process of uncovering what is known about reality. Simply defined, epistemology is centred on how knowledge about a particular phenomenon is developed. In other words, epistemology considers the relationship between the researcher and the knowledge that emerges from the research (Shaw and DeForge, 2014). Martin (2014, pg. 17) defines epistemology as “pertaining to the study of knowledge”. Bryman (2012) states that epistemology asks the question of what is acceptable knowledge within a particular discipline. The research community of that discipline creates the standards regarding the credible means of uncovering knowledge or facts about the phenomena within that area of research. The researcher may adopt either a “top-down” process (deduction) or “bottom-up” process (induction) in gaining new knowledge (Ormston et al., 2014). Ormston et al. (2014) argue that qualitative research is often considered to be inductive, implying that quantitative research is deductive. Similarly, positivism has been identified as deductive and interpretivism as inductive (Bryman, 2012; Nastasi and Schensul, 2005). Ormston et al. (2014) note that such categorisations are over-simplifications since there is no pure induction or pure deduction but most research plans are a synthesis of these two approaches. Furthermore, other epistemological approaches such as retroductive and abductive logic are also emerging as labels for the ways that researchers develop knowledge (Blaikie, 2007; Ormston et al., 2014). Therefore, as paradigms emerge so do different ways of developing knowledge. The current research project has adopted a dedicated inductive process of identifying patterns that emerged from the data gathered from observations of the social

media brand communities under investigation, thereby using an interpretive or qualitative approach to the research project. Within the context of consumer research, the interpretive approach increasingly viewed as acceptable a means of knowledge creation or discovery as the positivist method (Pomies and Tissier-Desbordes, 2016). Tadajewski (2006) notes that for decades a positivist epistemology was the dominant means of knowledge creation within consumer research. However, the credibility provided to consumer research by various researchers such as Fournier (1998) and the consumer culture theory has shown the value that the interpretivist epistemology brings to consumer research (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011). Therefore, this study will adopt an inductive approach to the addition of knowledge within the context of social media brand communities, proposing the model/theory based on the data collected during the investigation.

3.3.3 Ontology

Another essential aspect of the discovery of knowledge that underpins the practice of research is that of ontology. Ontology covers a paradigm's beliefs about the nature of reality (Sykora et al., 2015). This means that the ontology of the paradigm is concerned with the reality of the social world and experiences. Tai and Ajjawi (2016) note that ontology asks the question are the things individuals perceive in the world there, in reality. Various social ontological approaches investigate the appropriateness of objective investigations into the social world, as the physical world, as opposed to more subjective methodologies (Ormston et al., 2014; Bryman, 2012; Heaviside, 2017). There are several ontological terminologies discussed in the literature such as realism and idealism, objectivism and constructionism, realist and relativist. Realism states that an external reality exists independent of our beliefs or understanding, while idealism argues that no external reality exists independent of our beliefs and understandings (Ormston et al., 2014). Objectivism decided that social phenomena is presented as external facts that are not within our influence and constructionism believes that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being shaped by the perspective of social actors and in a constant state of negotiation (Bryman, 2012). Realist argue that there is one objective reality that exists free of interpretation while relativist argue that individual perception of the world changes according to their own experiences (Heaviside, 2017). These different terminologies are intertwined with and influence the different paradigms and methodologies of research. Within this research project an interpretivist or constructionist ontology is adopted to discover knowledge of the community under investigation in the perspective of several types of stakeholders within the context of a social media brand community.

3.3.4 Research Methodology

This research project adopts a qualitative methodology to gathering the data required to answer the research questions. Qualitative research is described as a naturalistic approach to understanding phenomena without the use of statistics or other quantitative measures (Golafshani (2003; Straus and Corbin, 1990). Therefore, qualitative methodologies are designed for examining meaning and in-depth “cause-of-effects” explanations (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006), which were the basis for its choice within this study. Qualitative research is an observational and interpretive design that is created to develop understanding through a process of inquiry (Khan, 2014) and is descriptive in nature. This allows the researcher to present a holistic account of the phenomenon in the natural setting of those under investigation. The use of interviews, netnography and record reviewing in the form of social media monitoring supports the illustrative approach (Allan, 2003) that allows the concepts and theories to emerge naturally from the data without preconceived hypotheses (Urquhart, Lehmann and Myers, 2010; Lingard, Albert and Lewinson, 2008) thus not forcing the researcher’s concepts onto the data (Glaser, 2002). The data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach as discussed in Braun and Clarke (2013). Categories and codes emerged over an iterative process. The thematic analysis and coding led to the identification of categories which matched the BASIC IDs framework to be discussed at section 3.6 of this chapter.

Research Methodology Rationale

Considering the above discussion, the research design adopted by this research project is largely a qualitative methodology. This choice was made for several reasons. Mainly, the functions of qualitative research, as described by Ritchie and Ormston (2014) of contextualising a situation, explaining the reasons for a phenomenon, evaluating the effectiveness of the current structures and generating theories, strategies and actions, lead to its relevance for the purpose of this study. While Bryman (2012) identifies qualitative research’s subjectivity and difficulty of replication as hardships of the methodology, Belk (2017) understands that qualitative research gives context to a research project that numbers and statistics are incapable of doing. Since this study is exploring the characteristics and nature of the emerging social media environment to determine how this setting is influencing behaviour, the ability to gain context is useful for the purpose of the research. Additionally, the open-ended nature of qualitative research (King and Horrocks, 2010) provides the narrative of the research from the perspective of the participants. The direct perspective of the participant is useful within the context of social media where there has been much research but the tool

remains nascent due to its constantly evolving tools and technologies. Therefore, Khan's (2014) explanation that qualitative methodologies are best suited for exploration led to its incorporation within this study as exploring such an environment with little or no preconceived notions aids with the natural emergence of codes or categories. Another advantage of qualitative research is its provision of rich data (Rossman and Rallis, 2003; Mackay, 2012). This rich data is especially applicable to netnography which provides full descriptions on the social aspect of the technological environment (Sandin, 2006). Therefore, this research examines how the social media brand environment facilitates the growth of consumer identity and the strengthening of the consumer-brand relationship. The focus on measurements within qualitative methodologies rely on more elements than numbers (King and Horrocks, 2010). It is also useful to provide narrative support that explains the links and concepts within a model, especially an early stage model, explaining links between concepts. Ultimately, the rationale for the use of qualitative methodologies is quite rational in the tradition pragmatic research, which creates the methodology based on what is best for the study and looks for similarities between methodologies rather than differences (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005).

3.3.5 Triangulation

A supportive quantitative technique, in the form of social media monitoring, was included as a means of triangulation. The inclusion of this tool, though quantitative, does not signal that this is a mixed methods research. The use of social media monitoring provides support for the qualitative data without any explicit aim of quantifying the results. Social media monitoring, in this context, is a form of methodological triangulation, which is suitable to provide support in the case of phenomenological research (Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie, 2013). This research method meets the criteria of quantitative tool within this research's methodological triangulation. The large sample sizes and vast data sets (Sykora et al., 2015; Tedeschi and Benedetto, 2015) are elements of the social media monitoring that are prominent within quantitative research. The aim of this type of triangulation is to build the credibility, transferability of the results and dependability of the qualitative research (Nastasi and Schensul, 2005). Triangulation ensures research validity and reliability by collecting data, either from a variety of sources or through a diversity of methodologies (Pachidi Spruit and van de Weerd, 2014). Triangulation provides a level of soundness to the data collected and allows the results to be more complete (Ostlund et al., 2011; Trotter II, 2012). A sound argument for triangulation especially within interpretive research is the reduction of researcher bias by forcing the researcher to consider the subject from directions that he or she may not

have previously held or challenging any preconceptions that may leak into the discussions of the findings (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The reflexivity provided by triangulation enriches the research process and deepens the findings providing for a research project that is of sound quality and validity (Ostlund et al., 2011). Researchers may view triangulation as a responsibility, in some instances simply going through the motions. However, the real consequence of triangulation is a richer discussion, a deeper knowledge of the subject area and of all stakeholders influenced by the environment or study and a project that truly considers all the perspectives relevant to an investigation (Mkono, Ruhanen and Markwell, 2015). Triangulation deepens the contribution that any given project, such as this one, makes to the development of knowledge by assisting the researcher in identifying the many gaps that exist in a discussion and how these gaps can be addressed by the research (Ostlund et al., 2011). As an accepted tool in the development of research quality, triangulation is used from the perspective of both of different methodological tools as well as several data sources to ensure that the data provided is rich, appropriate and considers the research questions from several angles. Trotter II (2012, pg. 399) declares “If the same information is acquired from multiple, unconnected sources and multiple methods (e.g. Interview, Observation, Survey) then both qualitative reliability and qualitative replicability have been achieved.” This view is supported by researchers, such as Carter et al. (2014), Ritchie and Ormston (2014) and Bryman (2012) who show that triangulation helps to build the replicability and reliability of qualitative research, important in an academic environment that can devalue qualitative research due to the perception of less generalisability. However, the aim of triangulation within this project is to act as a confirmation of research conclusions as shown by Nastasi and Schensul (2005). Therefore, this research has triangulation by methodology, data and techniques to ensure that the social media phenomenon in relation to identity and the consumer brand relationship has been thoroughly investigated from several perspectives.

3.4 Research Sample

This project’s research sample was drawn from the social media brand communities of three global brands across the official brand pages on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The sample was also extended to include posts drawn from the hashtags within these sites used by the brand as well as individuals to converse about reviews, opinions and other major brand related developments. The sample includes both people and the respective posts or sampling of context as described by Bryman (2012) to show the social media setting. Selecting the sample in this manner was developed due to the need for data from participants who are truly

immersed in the communities under investigation at various levels of participation. The sampling process was a mixed purposive and quota sampling framework. The aim is to increase the chances that the data collected is truly representative of the experience and development of the social media brand community. In consideration of Malinen (2015)'s argument that sampling within online brand communities is a challenge due to the various types of content to be found therein, one considers that the diversity of the platforms that form this community also increases this difficulty. As Khan (2014) explains, sampling helps to produce authentic results that are relevant to the whole population under investigation. Since researchers cannot be everywhere and interact with the entire everyone impacted by the issue (Salmons, 2016) creating a sample that matches the population helps to maximise the efficiency of the research considering all the resources available to the researcher. In crafting the sample for this project, several questions were asked to ensure that the information applies to the population addressed by the research (Moutinho, Goode and Davis, 1998). These questions included: what is the criteria for being part of the target, where are the target (online or offline; regional or global), what is the relevance to the research questions and objectives, what is the size of the target, and is the aim generalisation or transferability of the results produced by the research? These questions aided in the development of a relevant sample plan for the project.

3.4.1 Sampling Plan

This project uses a qualitative sampling plan incorporating purposive sampling in the choice of brand communities and social media professionals. The brand pages were chosen according to several criteria such as their global appeal and social media levels of engagement while the social media professionals including community managers and psychologists were also chosen within the purposive technique to ensure that individuals were chosen who were able to provide the information needed to answer the research questions adequately. Furthermore, a quota sampling process was applied to the choice of content and individuals quoted from within the communities. This approach was adopted to gather content that reflects different levels of participation of individuals within the social media brand communities. These different levels of participation referred to as active, passive and lurking participants are described more in the next segment, sample description. The sampling plan considered that sampling is executed differently within qualitative and quantitative methodologies based on the purpose of the research. Quantitative research calls for a more random sampling plan that allows for generalisation and statistical analysis (Neuman, 2006) while qualitative methods use purposive sampling, which is a non-probability style of sampling (Bryman, 2012). In qualitative research,

the sample is chosen to provide in-depth accounts of the environment under investigation from the perspective of those living within the said setting (Goulding, 1998; Nastasi and Schensul, 2005). This leads researchers to adopt a more purposive sampling procedure where participants are chosen based on set criteria which can provide the information being sought after to answer the research questions (Goulding, 1998; Bryman, 2012). Contrary to some contention, purposive sampling does not hamper the quality of the research in light of issues raised by quantitative researchers such as lack of representation, or the perceived inability to generalise the results to the wider population of the study (King and Horrocks, 2010).

Quantitative researchers aim for more randomly selected samples in greater sizes. This choice of the sampling frame is often credited as the most appropriate for numerically representative studies. However, while there is no guarantee that the random process produces a more representative sample than a sample that is chosen specifically of participants with the ability to provide the specific data needed by the researcher, the ability to generalise results to wider population makes quantitative the arguably more valid process of sampling (Trotter, 2012; Tsang, 2014). The representation issues are addressed in this project as the quota sampling, as Wilson (2014) delineates, takes steps to ensure that diverse voices within the population are represented in the research. Within truly random sampling, there is the probability that an important perspective is missed or not accounted for within the reporting of the research. Therefore, to account for the smaller sample size within the qualitative research, this plan collects many more social media posts to generate conclusions and seeks to include more diverse types of participation from user, community manager and psychological perspectives. The aim here is the level of transferability of the results to social media brand communities (Nastasi and Schensul, 2005; Salmons, 2016) therefore, the sampling plan, while non-probabilistic will have relevance beyond simply this project.

3.4.2 Sample Description

This study explores the influence of the intersection formed between the brand and social media platforms on the development of consumer identity and the strengthening of the consumer-brand relationship. As such, the tools are used to measure and collect data specifically within the social media environment and from the perspective of those therein. Consequently, there are three main sample populations extrapolated from the various social media platforms that are used to generate the brand community. The first sample population is that of brands which are global and engaged on social media, thereby facilitating a social media brand related community. To be included within this study, the brand had to fit within Kozinets' (2002)

criteria for a choice of community. The most essential criteria, within the context of this research, is an active and engaged presence within four major social media platforms, that is Facebook, the juggernaut of all the networks with over one billion users as of 2016, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Active engagement within this context is considered as daily posts of diverse content and responses to comments left by fans on the page. This dual-direction communication is the hallmark of social media and the effect made on the relationship between consumer and brand and produces data which Kozinets (2002) considers to be rich in its descriptive capabilities. The social media networks were chosen due to their scope internationally, their public nature as discussed by del Fresno Garcia, Daly and Sánchez-Cabezudo (2016) and the ease of observing the multi-directional conversations and interactions that are ongoing within the platforms. A subsequent criterion for choice of brand beyond social media engagement is the cross-sectional relevance to a diverse segment of the global population. As such, consumer brand within technology, Apple was chosen due to its international appeal and the dedication of their fans on social media. Consumer brands within the international corporation of Coca-Cola and popular makeup brand, L'Oréal are also included within this study due to their messaging and ability to align themselves with their targets' identity and self-worth as well as their international and social media appeal. These brands were included due to their prominence on the Forbes 2016 list of most influential brands on social media, which is an industry-related and respected chart of social media brand leaders.

The second tier of the sample is the social media user or community member. These individuals either like the brand's official page, are members of a fan group or create content which they share within the brand-related hashtags. In considering, the assignment of quotas for these social media users, this project combines definitions used by Abfalter, Zaglia and Mueller (2012) and Sloan, Bodey and Jones (2015) to incorporate three significant categories of participation: active users, passive users and lurkers based on their level of initiative in the exchange of knowledge within the social media brand communities. Essentially, there are different terminologies used in the literature for these types of users but this project adopts these categories because they are sufficiently descriptive of the nature of the online participant. For the purpose of this research, active participants create posts within the social media brand and/or fan pages, participate in co-creation initiatives and review the brands either on their blogs, profiles, forums or the brands' fan pages. Passive users do not create the content, leave the reviews or participate in discussions but will like a post, either from the brand or a fellow user, showing some engagement with the community. These individuals may ask a question

concerning a fellow user's experience. However, they are unlikely to initiate the content creation or conversational activities within the social media platforms regarding the brand. Finally, lurkers are those who like the page of the brand but never participate, like or become involved in the discussions in any way (Abfalter, Zaglia and Mueller, 2012). They may visit the page, search the hashtag(s) and consume the information but they never make their presence known or contribute to shared knowledge being built within the social media environment. The sampling decision within this population of the study is the quota approach to choose a number of participants from within each of these categories. The aim of this approach is to determine whether the level of activity within the social media environment of the brands is a contributing factor to the development and expression of consumer identity within these individuals.

The third population sampled from within the social media network is the social media professional. The sampling within this population is also purposive to find marketers, brand fan page leaders and psychologists who operate within the social media and are able to clearly articulate their observations about social media fan pages influence on the development and expression of consumer identity. These individuals are daily involved in the practice of creating social media marketing plans, curating fan pages or studying the development of identity and self-esteem within the setting from an interdisciplinary perspective. The aim of collecting data from this population is to get an unbiased perspective on the interactions within social media that can triangulate and support the data observed within the settings and collected from the perspective of users themselves. Each of these populations, brands, users and professionals are polled and researched within the environment which is under investigation, that is, social media. This is due to the relevance of the study being conducted from the perspective of those most involved and invested within the social media environment and is supported by King and Horrock's (2010) and Kim (2016)'s argument that the population should be polled and researched within its own natural environment.

3.4.3 Sample Size

The sample size herein is based on a non-probability framework based on collecting data until there is a level of saturation. As a qualitative study, the sample size is small especially in comparison to that of the quantitative studies. Ritchie et al. (2014) states that the small sample size is appropriate for several reasons such as the richness of data provided by qualitative research and the intensity of the data provided. The quality and quantity of the data provided per unit is of such vastness that to conduct it with larger sample sizes would deem the research analysis unmanageable. The quantity of the social media posts collected, there was a data set

of 761,894 posts from the chosen brands' pages which on cleansing for relevance was wiled to 5,000 posts. This exceeds even Neuman's (2006) approximation that one thousand is an adequate sample size for investigating larger populations in a manner that would allow for generalisability. However, the focus within this research is replicability as states is the aim of qualitative sampling by Trotter II (2012). Within the hashtag the posts were reduced from 26,758,660 to 5,000 posts to ensure that the posts analysed were relevant to the research being conducted. The choice of three main brands within three industries, technology, consumer, and cosmetics facilitate the research's ability to account for a range of consumer experience that contribute potentially to the creation and expression of identity within a particular social context. Within the sample of the professionals the sample was purposively divided within two categories, brand community leader and social media psychologist. Within this group, a snowball sampling approach was also adopted with participants suggesting another relevant participant for interview until the responses start to repeat and reach that level of redundancy. This is in line with an established qualitative mode of determining sample size. This is different to quantitative sampling which chooses a specific number by which to delineate sample size (Nastasi and Schensul, 2005; King and Horrocks, 2010). Qualitative sample sizes are deemed to be adequate when they provide sufficient information to the point where the same themes keep being repeated (i.e. redundancy) or no new themes are emerging from the data (i.e. saturation) (Allen and Wallendorf, 1994; Brod, Tesler and Christensen, 2009). The sample size within qualitative research is also based on providing a level of diversity within the respondents which is covered by the three main populations stipulated previously.

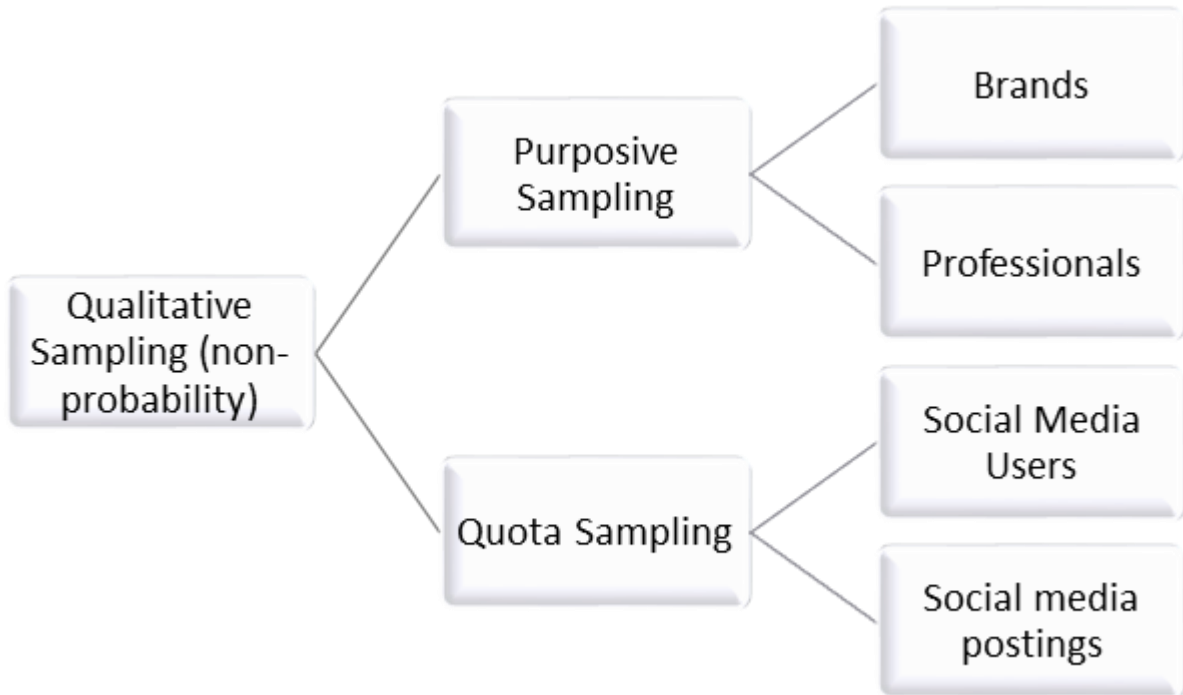


Figure 4 Sampling plan adopted in the research

3.5. Research Tools

This research used the qualitative methodological tools of netnography and in-depth interviews and one quantitative tool of social media monitoring as a support to the insights that emerge from the exploratory techniques.

3.5.1 Netnography

The core aspect of this data collection process is that of a netnography in the tradition of Kozinets (2010), which is an evolution of the market-oriented ethnography of (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994) adapted to be appropriate for the internet. As Kozinets (2002) argues, netnography is a methodology developed as a critical response to the growing role of the internet in the consumer-decision process. Social media is becoming more widespread, as new applications and software to make aspects of life such as travel, dining, communications more convenient are continually being introduced to the market. Therefore, it is increasingly important to understand how the social media community is affecting consumer lifestyles to understand the evolving role of the media in future consumption patterns (Brännback, Nikou and Bouwman, 2016). Therefore, this study investigated the influence of the social media brand community on the development and expression of identity via the use of netnography which is a naturalistic form of research (Chong, 2010). An online ethnography, termed netnography, follows the academic phenomenon created by Kozinets (1998, 2010, 2006) and used by several

researchers (Carter, 2005; Sandin, 2006; Schembri and Latimer, 2016) within a variety of disciplines such as business, education and psychology. Netnography, (Kozinets 2002, pg. 2), ‘uses the information that is publicly available in online forums to identify and understand the needs and decision influences of relevant online consumer groups.’ Sandin (2006) says netnography captures participants in their “natural environment” and thus give insight into their “naturally occurring behaviour.” This natural behaviour as it applies to the social media environment associated with brands includes searching for information, forming relationships, communicating and sharing advice and shopping online. The objective therefore of the study is to determine how these behaviours reflect the creation and expression of consumer identity and develop the consumer brand relationship.

Netnography needs to generate trust between researchers and their respondents to strengthen the data collected mainly in tactics such as narrative inquiry that calls for the participants to respond to the researcher directly. This is in line with Lecompte and Schensul’s (1999) argument that researchers within ethnographic studies should try to establish common ground with their participants while being mindful of how their identity will influence the responses within the research environment. Within the online setting, this calls for the researcher to have some level of social capital that the respondent can trace or call on to determine whether this particular research request has merit. Social capital (Trepte and Scharkow, 2016) is “the manner in which individuals benefit each other based on their encounters, interactions, empathy or mutual understanding.” This long-standing concept of social capital in psychology is essential within online research where the researcher can carry out member checks on participants but the respondent is also more easily able to carry out identity and credibility checks on the researchers. As netnography itself is a descendant of anthropology and sociology through its roots in ethnography (Chong, 2010), the researcher needs to immerse him/herself into the community under investigation. Such immersion will not be easily facilitated without trust or social capital nor the facilitation of an emic or insider view of the research environment. An insider view is seen as essential to illuminating the construction and influence of a culture or sub-culture on its members (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). The hashtags and social media pages within this study are being treated as a sub-culture within the broader online culture and thus is shaping the minds and identities of its users. Therefore, in this consumer-oriented netnography, the trust of the consumer is essential to gaining the trust needed to allow the respondents to feel free to reveal their consumption lives and the effects on their identity in a

world where such influence can be seen as shallow and individuals judged for their use of brands in this way.

At the centre of this netnographic study is the role of social media interactions on the development of identity and the consumer-brand relationship. The brands highlighted, i.e., Apple, L'Oréal and Coca-Cola, were chosen due to their high levels of engagement on social media sites and the strength of their social media communities as noted in their presence on several annual editions of the Forbes (2013-2016) list of most engaged brands on social media. These brands are global powerhouses within technology and fast moving consumer goods segments of the economy and on their own steam have revolutionised the lifestyles of many people across the globe. Therefore, combining their inherent influence with that of the social media platforms they use to communicate with their followers, this study seeks to use these brands as examples to empirically reveal the role that social media is playing in identity and consumer-brand relationship building. The research focused on the interactions on their social media pages and within the brands' associated hashtags whether created by the brands' followers and consumers. The aim is to establish the brand's social media pages and hashtags as a community according to the definition given by (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) to show that these communities have the social identity effect on personal identity as noted by Ajzen (1985). These communities were observed according to the participant observation technique which Sandin (2006) shows have been used in business and academia since the late 1990's. Therefore, the aim of the participant observation arm of the investigation is to identify patterns or categories based on the conversations that would identify this as a community. Additionally, these categories and interactions would be analysed to determine how they act as tools of learning for the consumer while assisting in the development of consumer-brand identification which strengthens the consumer-brand relationship (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012). Daily visits to the community for four months to gain real-time data will be augmented by archiving conversations dating back at least two years to show the effect over a set time on the relationships and therefore identity and the consumer-brand relationship. The method is designed to show how the interactions via textual posts, videos, photos by members of the community and the company together with comments on those posts reflect the motivators or drivers of online consumer-brand identification as hypothesized such as consumer-creativity, innovation, engagement and commitment.

Netnography Rationale

There are several reasons that netnography was selected as appropriate for this study. Firstly, it is an open-ended form of research that uncovers population characteristics, the dynamics of the research problem and solutions, due to its exploratory nature (Kozinets, 2010; Brännback, Nikou and Bouwman, 2016). Secondly, the success of netnography in business and technology related research studies (Kozinets, 2010; Schembri and Latimer, 2016; Brännback, Nikou and Bouwman, 2016) and a variety of other disciplines was an influence because it showed the potential necessary to reveal the relevant data to answer this study's research questions. Netnography's ability to reveal significant moments in the participants' lives (Chong, 2010) is a major factor in its success across disciplines. A third reason for the inclusion of netnography within this project is that it facilitates triangulation of data and methods efficiently. Therefore, the addition of social media monitoring data as well as interview data will not make the process more complex but will enhance the project because the data can easily be integrated. Furthermore, as an in-depth qualitative method, it is a rigorous means of gathering data by observing people in their habitat. However, critics argue that it is subject to researcher bias which is a drawback for scientific studies (Kozinets, 2010). One benefit of Netnography over traditional ethnography is the access to archival data and interactions mean that studies can be conducted for significantly shorter periods of time (Kozinets, 2010; Kulavuz-Onal and Vasquez, 2013) and provide valid results. Another benefit of the netnography is that the data collected is not restricted to mainly textual data but can include pictures, audio and video recordings in light of the nature of the technology (Boon, 2013; Schembri and Latimer, 2016). Despite these factors which make netnography attractive, some weaknesses needed to be mitigated against to ensure its successful application. As an adaptation of ethnography, it shares some of the strengths and weaknesses thereof. However, with the new technology comes new issues regarding the quality of the research that cannot be ignored such as concerns about the identity of participants, fears that views being expressed are the real views of the respondents. These are easily balanced by triangulation of research notes, data sources and member checks (Kozinets, 2010; Sandin, 2006). Importantly, one should also note that as technology evolves, the separation between online and offline life is disappearing (Abfalter, Zaglia and Mueller, 2012; Bechmann and Lomborg, 2013) making this form of investigation appropriate for the study of online influence to people's identity and lifestyles. Technology's evolution also reduces the applicability of the critique of user anonymity incrementally and strengthens the reputation of this hybrid methodology (Kozinets, 2010; Mkono, Ruhanen and Markwell, 2015).

This research followed the steps of a traditional ethnography applied within an online environment as described by Sandin (2006) and Kozinets (2010). Firstly, entering the culture or group to be investigated, i.e. the hashtag and social spaces of the brand; secondly gathering and analysing data to produce trustworthy data interpretation and results; thirdly, implementing the research in a manner that is ethical and harmless to the participants; and finally checking members' authenticity and getting the feedback of participants. This project is a two-tiered operation. These are participant observation and in-depth interviews.

3.5.2 Online Participant Observation

This study conducted a programme of participant observation for twelve months. During this time, the social media pages of the case brands of Apple, L'Oréal and Coca-Cola were liked or followed and the hashtag observed for interesting posts and conversations between individuals and representatives of the brand posting under the brand's official account. On occasion, the researcher would post interesting facts about the brands and ask for thoughts or alternatively, the purchase of the product would be shared within the social media hashtag of the relevant post or ask for reviews or advice on the best brand to choose between the chosen brands and their competitors. Additionally, posts made by others would be responded to asking for clarification or even reasons for the opinion shared. This method of research was chosen because of participant observation's proven ability to record data on behaviours that are not easily reported by a respondent in an interview (Moutinho, Goode and Davis, 1998; Kozinets, 2010). Participant observation accomplishes this by researching the users in their natural setting, which is social media for these participants. For this study, the research location is logged as the online world because the investigation centres on revealing the effect that participating in this environment has on the individuals and their relationship to self and brand. These sites are locations of collective and individual learning that Sandin (2006, pg. 288) argue help to "define what it means to be a citizen and a consumer." Thus making these sites the perfect location to research the development of consumer identity and the development of the consumer-brand relationship. As early as 2002, Kozinets was showing that individuals were using online channels to form consumer groups or communities to share ideas. This consumer-led development necessitated the development of market research to match their lifestyle. Such was the motivation for the conduct of this study involving visiting the social media pages of the chosen brands daily to capture the conversations therein between the brands and the users, daily monitoring of the interactions within the hashtags used by the brands and members of the internet community chatting about their feelings about the brands. As Kozinets (2010) notes

the ability to archive data is one of the strengths of netnography as it allows researchers to examine the development of relationships in the online world over a period of several years in the past, something not afforded by the traditional ethnography. Several websites or pieces of software such as 'SocioVIZ', 'Tagboard', 'Tweetdeck' were used to capture the relevant tweets and conversations and log them for analysis using nVIVO.

3.5.3 In-depth interviews

There are several types of interviews used in consumer research, such as the semi-structured, open-ended and structured. This research chose the in-depth version, which were conducted over the internet, via communications software SKYPE, to speak to social media professionals and psychologist from the USA, Asia and Europe. Eight interviews in total were conducted. The interview was chosen as a form of data source and data type triangulation, which Nastasi and Schensul (2005) and Collis and Hussey (2014) show help to reduce bias in data sources and methods. In line with Braun and Clarke (2013), the purpose of the interviews in this case was to gain from the knowledge and expertise of these professionals and their observations within the social media platforms in relation to the brand and the influence on the consumer identity and the consumer-brand relationship. The interviews were conducted at different time periods to coincide with the participant observation aspect of the research study. These interviews were held online using the internet video communication tool Skype. Skype allowed the interviews to be conducted at the convenience of participants across the globe will facilitating the observation of body language and facial expression in a similar manner to face to face interview (King and Horrocks, 2010). The interview, which is the second major form of data used by ethnographers (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994), was used to support the data of the observation, data mining and social media monitoring segments of the research. Within this research the in-depth interview was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, the in-depth format allows the researcher to gather comprehensive stories from the respondents' perspective in regard to the phenomenon under investigation as Nastasi and Schensul (2005) clarify, while providing data that can be used to create graphic depictions of social networks. This ability to display social networks is useful within this research in showcasing how the networks support the development of consumer identity and develop relationships between customers, brands and each other based on the activity within the social media network of a brand. Secondly, the in-depth interview allows the respondent and the researcher the flexibility to interact with pre-determined concepts and add any additional information that would not have been identified previously, creating rich and sophisticated data sets (Khan, 2014). This depth of data allows

interpretation to be stronger and dig deep into central reasons for the respondents' claims (Moutinho, Goode and Davis, 1998) making it largely appropriate for use in exploratory research. Thirdly, the use of in-depth interviewing is a sound and well-executed technique in social sciences (King and Horrocks, 2010) that have been used extensively and with much success in consumer research (Fournier, 1998; Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Dittmar and Drury, 2000). The success of in-depth interviewing in these disciplines is due largely to the ability to glean meaning and experience from the respondents of the study. The social media environment under investigation is creating a phenomenon in the lifestyle of its users and in-depth interviews together with observations are agreed as an effective means of understanding the specifics of the new phenomena (Tsang, 2014).

There are disadvantages of the in-depth interview such as the extensive reliance on the researcher to create a comfortable environment for the respondent, the high cost of high quality interviews (Moutinho, Goode and Davis, 1998), the dependence on the quality of the interviewer (King and Horrocks, 2010; Bryman, 2012), and the time-consuming process. However, it is an excellent tool of research for gaining an understanding of consumer concepts from the perspective of a variety of stakeholders (Rossman and Rallis, 2003; King and Horrocks, 2010). These disadvantages are the focus of many critiques who believe it is too subjective and that respondents could easily lie or misrepresent themselves in the research especially in sensitive topic areas (King and Horrocks, 2010). The interview is also criticised for being artificial (Rossman and Rallis, 2003; Branthwaite and Patterson, 2011). This critique can be used towards most tools of research outside of ethnography which observes people within their own habitat. However, the data produced by in-depth interviews are rich and communicate a broad range of experiences (King and Horrocks, 2010). Interviews are also sound research tools as hypotheses can emerge from such qualitative data that can be tested in collaboration with quantitative techniques or using ethnographic observation (Sherman and Strang, 2004). The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed to extract the respective themes and concepts for interpretation phase of the research. This process is an established method of determining what themes were continually being represented to the point of saturation (Khan, 2014). In this way, the data gleaned from the interviews, observations and data mining can be linked and used in support or rejection of each other's conclusions (Rossman and Rallis, 2003)

| | | | | | | |
|-------------|-------|-----|-------|--------|-----|------|
| Interviewee | Total | Men | Women | Europe | USA | Asia |
|-------------|-------|-----|-------|--------|-----|------|

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social Media Professionals | 5 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Social Media Psychologists | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 8 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 |

Table 5 Demographic layout of the interview participants

3.5.4 Social Media Monitoring

The social media sites were monitored for twelve months and posts and comments collected that dated back three years via the use of Tweetdeck, SOCIOVIZ and TAGBoard over social media sites of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. This data is useful and widely available since there are few barriers to entry for use of social media and businesses can easily monitor the interests and personas of their target consumers. Social media is a requirement for some consumers, in terms of engaging with their chosen brands, and therefore is an active customer relationship management and market research tool (Tedeschi and Benedetto, 2015). While this is a relatively new research tool (Branthwaite and Patterson, 2011) in relation to the complete history of consumer research, it is proven to be valuable in the “medium of the digital age” (Berthon, Pitt and DesAutels, 2011) due to the diversity of data and information presentation. For example, one can have textual information on Twitter, photographic data on Pinterest, Flickr or Instagram, video content on YouTube and all of the above on Facebook, which would present a rich and varied perspective from people of various segments across the globe. Social media is integrated into each area of the current lifestyle within a significant segment of the global population in developed as well as developing countries (Pfeiffer et al., 2014; Bolton et al., 2013). Therefore, more research is needed to monitor the opinions shared on these networks using the tools appropriate for conducting systematic investigations on digital media. Social media monitoring, as defined by Branthwaite and Patterson (2011, pp. 435), scrapes media sites for spontaneous opinions about brands “using software to code the value judgements inherent in the words used.” The opinions expressed are diverse (Tedeschi and Benedetto, 2015; Moreira, Seruca and Ferreira, 2015) therefore in scraping and monitoring the researcher needs to be knowledgeable about which data to include within a media that is in its nature “noisy” (Colbaugh and Glass, 2010). Due to the high amount of data produced and the need to be selective, social media monitoring as a tool is both observational and exploratory on one hand and quantitative on the other hand. In incorporating aspects of ethnography and

quantitative surveys (Branthwaite and Patterson, 2011), social media monitoring as a research tool gives researchers the ability in theory to be able to get insight into the spontaneous and immediate perspectives of the respondents (McKay, 2013) thus giving you a “snapshot” into that particular time (Zhang and Vos, 2014).

There are persuasive arguments in favour of the use of social media monitoring as a tool of research that makes this method ideal in quantitative, qualitative and mixed research plans. Due to its large sample sizes and the numerical presentation of data, it is in itself a rigorous research tool (Sykora et al., 2015; Branthwaite and Patterson, 2011) while capturing the sentiments expressed in the words of the respondents. The ability to uncover the perspective of those who are influencers as well as the mass target population (Tedeschi and Benedetto, 2015) means that research encompasses diverse perspectives when informing marketing or policy decisions and examining what are the major influences of individuals’ perspectives about brands. The diverse tools that consist of social media networks such as blogs, chat-rooms, rating websites, video and photo sharing websites and podcasts (Zhang and Vos, 2014) are positive indicators for social media monitoring. These features reveal more means for researching consumer behaviour since the widespread use of social media is inspiring more significant expression of opinions among users (Moreira, Seruca and Ferreira, 2015). A challenge with such vast content to review is that analysis can prove to be a daunting task for an individual researcher. However, with the introduction of several automated programmes and applications, much of this burden is lessened for the researcher (Chaney et al., 2016), as these software developments conduct much of the data scrape and create new possibilities for textual and visual content analysis (Kluver, Campbell and Balfour, 2013). These positive attributes in providing insight into the instant and candid opinions of individuals about brands and the roles these brands play in their lives plus the ease of analysis are primary reasons for the choice of social media monitoring as a tool within this research project. It is appropriate for the aims of the research and the location within which the research is being conducted.

On the other hand, the positives of social media monitoring must be considered in light of the several drawbacks identified in the research. While social media monitoring is an appropriate tool of research to monitor consumer behaviour and opinions, Branthwaite and Patterson (2011) warn that social media monitoring may cause the inexperienced researcher to get distracted from their research objectives. As Veeck and Hoger (2014) detailed, much of the feedback on social media can be “shallow” or “irrelevant” and this can lead the researcher away from the information that can address their research questions. A consequence of the vast data

collected through social media monitoring is the cost, concerning both labour and finance, of constantly monitoring these websites (Colbaugh and Glass, 2010; Tedeschi and Benedetto, 2015). This cost leads to the use of software, which while making it easy to collect and analyse the data on social media, is criticised by Sykora et al. (2015) for keeping the human researcher “out of the loop” which boosts the incongruity and context-poor aspects of social media. Furthermore, Branthwaite and Patterson (2011) show that the lack of feedback on such posts combined with no direct contact or interaction with the responses means that it is difficult to explore the context of the posts and fill in any gaps in researcher understanding of the sentiments expressed on social media. This research attempts to address that critique by running an automated monitoring process alongside a manual process to be able to ask relevant respondents for clarifications on certain opinions. This action is designed to add context to instant posts that may not fully communicate the meaning intended by a social media user. The attempt to add meaning to the expressions of opinions is designed to counteract any possible demographic misrepresentation that may exist due to the skewed numbers of those on social media (Veeck and Hoger, 2014). Ultimately, a major challenge regarding social media monitoring is the lack of clarity concerning the establishment of ethical standards. As Lunnay et al. (2015) argue this could hinder the future use of social media in research since researchers and ethics bodies “err on the side of caution,” thus missing the benefits of using this tool for research.

Principally for this project, Branthwaite and Patterson (2011) declared social media monitoring as an excellent tool for research as it is ideal for spontaneous self-expression and the boosting of self-image. Thus, giving shape to the use of social media to identify and gauge these expressions of self-concerning brands. These are found by a network of hashtag tools (SocioViz, Tagboard, and Tweetdeck) to mine the hashtags of the chosen brands since users who post about their chosen brands, negatively or positively apply the use of hashtags to increase the chances for widespread exposure for their content. Additionally, the brands’ social media page were monitored to uncover and follow conversations that prove to be insightful about people’s opinions about the brands. The websites of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram were monitored in this way. The content that this process of social media monitoring gathers relates to expressions of positive or negative reviews of the brands, defence or support for brand initiatives, thoughts regarding the communications of the brands whether they be advertisements, social media posts or promotions and any user-generated content within the

brand domain. These inform the research questions and objectives by giving relevant content directly from the perspective of the individuals being researched.

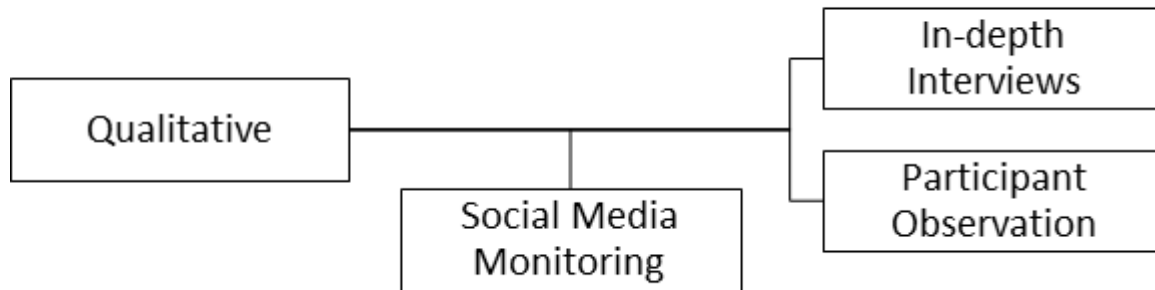


Figure 5 The Research Tools

3.6. Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is a ‘black hole’ (St. Pierre and Jackson, 2014) due to the challenging task of infusing the process with creativity and intellectual rigour (Doos and Wilhelmson, 2014). According to Neuman (2006, pg. 457), ‘a common criticism of qualitative research was that data analysis was not made explicit or open to inspection.’ However, while there has been much progress in relation to that ambiguity, there is no one-size fits all approach to qualitative data analysis (Salmons, 2016). The act of creating a communal understanding from the data that is varied and raw makes the process of data analysis complex but as the researcher seeks to ‘make sense’ of the data, a clear meaning emerges (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994), data analysis is central to the realisation of research objectives (Mayer, 2015). The data analysis adopted a process of data collection, data reduction or cleanse, data displays and the formation or conclusions. The data analysis process was therefore, a thematic in nature. Such a process is a staple of qualitative data analysis (Graue, 2015) and allows the process to be less intimidating than it appears at first glance. Importantly, it must be noted that though this process seems linear, St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) note that this impression is false since analysis occurs continuously including during data collection.

This research project’s mixed data in collection methods and format makes the analysis process even more intricate. However, the use of data triangulation as a means of data analysis is adopted as one means of interpreting the data gathered from the different methodological stances in order to strengthen the conclusions drawn (Graue, 2015). The data collected was mixed in nature and volume but analysed within a qualitative framework to match the research approach. There are several methods of data analysis adopted to facilitate the different types of

data collected. Data analysis took place in three phases with the aid of qualitative software, nVIVO. This data analysis software is useful for both large and small amounts of data (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). This project had small amounts of data in the form of interview transcripts and large data gleaned from corporate websites in addition to posts from the hashtags, fan/brand pages as well as fan groups on social media. These forms of data were imported into nVIVO either from Microsoft Word (interview transcripts), Microsoft Excel (tweets from the hashtags) or pulled directly from the websites and social networks. nVIVO facilitated the cleansing of the data to remove any information that was corrupted or in a different language to English. This process was to ensure that the data being grouped, coded and categorised was relevant for the purpose of the research.

The first stage of the data analysis began when the posts within the software were coded using a balance of descriptive and in vivo coding. The descriptive coding utilised a word or phrase to define the individual social media posts, passages within the interview transcripts and segments of data mined from the corporate websites, while the in vivo coding used a phrase from within the data. This is in line with the process of coding described by (Saldana, 2015). This process yielded a total of eighty codes. The second level of analysis was a thematic analysis which generated twenty-six themes in total. The process of analysis within nVIVO supported the use of the memo function to categorise the codes and themes that were similar. Thematic analysis was chosen due to its ability to answer a variety of types of research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2013) and on the basis it can analyse any form of data or research approach, whether inductive or deductive. This method of analysis showed a similarity of the themes and categories within this research and the categories within the framework known as BASIC IDs. The 'D' within the framework was the feature with no similarity to the data within this research and as such was not included within the analysis or findings.

BASIC IDs

The thematic analysis led to the development of categories which aligned with the analytical framework called BASIC IDS as developed by Arnold Lazarus in his 1973 study regarding behaviour therapy that has been used in several research fields and incorporated within a marketing context due to Cohen (1999). This move saw BASIC IDS used for consumer research projects including online chat room discussions and reviews of consumer-generated advertising (Boon, 2013). BASIC IDS represent behaviours (what people do), affect (how

people feel), sensations (what people experience through their senses), imagery (what people picture in their minds), cognitions (how people think), interpersonal relations (how people deal with others) Drugs/health (what substances people use and how well they are) and the sociocultural aspects (the contribution that society makes to individual development). Each of these features is not necessarily included within the context of this research thesis. While the concept of BASIC IDs is a set framework, it can be applied in accordance with the specific context of the research. Consequently, Cohen (1999) argued that the analytical framework can be applied to marketing contexts and adapted to suit the needs of the research. In fact, it was his study that added the final (s) sociocultural aspects to the BASIC ID framework. Therefore, this project adapts the BASIC IDS interpretation to include the first six features (BASIC I) and the (S) of the data analysis framework for this research. These are the aspects that are deemed more relevant to the themes and categories that were extracted from the data sources in respect to the formation of identity and consumer-brand relationships built on brand-based interactions on social media. In line with the BASIC IDS framework, this process of data analysis sought to understand how the seven features are reflected in the social media brand communities to develop or express the desired identity and to form as well as maintain relationships between the consumer and the brands.

| BASIC IDs | Description |
|-----------|---|
| Behaviour | The things people do within the setting |
| Affect | Any feelings or emotions of the users within the setting concerning the brand, the community or each other. |
| Sensation | The things that users experience through their senses in relation to the brand or the community |
| Imagery | What users picture in their minds about the brand or its community |
| Cognition | How people think about the brand or its community |

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Interpersonal Relationships | The formation of relationships with others in the community. |
| Drugs/health- | What substances people use and how well they |
| Sociocultural aspects | The contribution that society/community makes to individual development |

Table 6 The BASIC IDs Framework (Lazarus, 1973) as it was applied in the study

3.7. Ethical Considerations and Discussions

The academic discussion regarding ethical considerations within research is often conducted in a binary manner. On the one hand, ethical research is necessary in order to be considered influential and responsible to the society served by the research (Shumar and Madison, 2013). On the other hand, there is the concern that the ethical requirements will hinder the collection of information that is truly reflective of the target population (Parker, 2007; Rageh, Melewar and Woodside, 2013). For instance, should full consent be requested for ethnographic observation, an ethical requirement, the participants may change their behaviour and therefore, skew any report on that specific environment. However, as Kozinets (2010) argues skipping these ethical steps can damage the reputation of researchers and hinder future attempts to collect data in those environments. Ethics is a serious consideration for the creation of research that is sound, valuable and useful in the sectors of the society most likely influenced by that specific research. The significance of sound ethical practice of research applies to both qualitative and quantitative research (Khan, 2014) but the discussion can be complicated since issues of ethics are not universal in their conceptualisation or application (Parker, 2007). Greenwood (2016) shows that these rules allow for transparency and effectiveness in research that is designed for social release and impact. Much of the academic literature concerned with ethics speaks about how to perform research ethically. Thus establishing, on the face of it, universal principles in the execution of ethically sound research such as informed consent, autonomy and beneficence. According to Greenwood (2016), these research principles are created to protect against poor research concerning fabrication, falsification and plagiarism. Conversely, certain researchers argue that these seeming universal rules of ethics bureaucratises social science research and acts as a hindrance to the freedom of researchers (Hedgecoe, 2016). Therefore, researchers face a battle to conduct research that is true to the findings and respectful to the rights of the participants. This balance is essential to research that is useful but not exploitative, and an especially grave concern in ethnography which can be

arguably considered within a context of “colonialism” if the researcher is an outsider, extracting information on a sensitive or underprivileged group (Shumar and Madison, 2013). Qualitative research on a whole calls for stronger research ethics according to Khan (2014) because these methods are often intrusive into the lives of the participants.

With the intent of creating ethical standards and rules, many educational institutions and research bodies have created ethical committees such as University Research Ethics Committees (URECs). These committees attempt to create ethical guidelines for the performance of ethical research and provide oversight to ensure that researchers are abiding by university and country rules of ethics. Hedgecoe (2016), Hammersley and Traianou (2011) and Doyle (2011) are among the researchers that argue these measures are motivated by the need to protect the image of the institution to ensure that there is no fall-out to the reputation of the university or research body should reports of unethical practice emerge which could affect the establishment’s standing in their respective sector. However, researchers such as Kozinets (2002) and del Fresno Garcia and Peláez (2014) place the responsibility for the execution of ethical research firmly in the hand of the researcher. This responsibility is extremely vital in the digital age to develop rules for ethics in this new environment which Lunnay et al. (2015) believe is unproven for ethical research. Therefore, they argue that the researcher is specially tasked with proving they have researched in an ethical manner. The social media environment challenges any claim to universal ethical and moral standards while adding further fragmentation to the practice of qualitative research which Hammersley and Traianou (2011) argues intensify the differences between philosophies concerning the ethical practice of research. The social media world provides unique challenges to established ethical rules and calls for its own set of ethics regulations. Sandin (2007) identifies concerns regarding the identity of the participants within these social media communities. The question is raised as to whether users are who they say they are and are stating their accurate and exact opinions at any given time. This is a sound concern as Parker’s (2007) argument with regards to ethnographic research can be extended to netnography that the aim is to ensure an appropriate representation of the host communities. Kozinets (1997) argues that the online environment’s accessibility makes it extremely essential that extra steps are taken to ensure that research is ethically and soundly conducted. In line with this argument, Lunnay et al. (2015) said that consent must be detailed and accessed at different levels, e.g., getting permission to use data or photos for analysis only, display in thesis and present at academic articles and presentations. Research participants safety must also be protected while holding their revelations in strict confidence

and guarding their privacy (a strong consideration in the social media climate, in which privacy settings can change and be a primary concern for users) (Sykora et al., 2015; Lunnay et al., 2015). Xun and Reynolds (2010) say that consent can be obtained electronically since this is online, a paper signature should not be considered mandatory. In their case they typed the consent within the chat boxes on their online interviews and consent was then accepted when the participant entered the online discussion. However, this approach is different from Lunnay et al. (2015) who argue even in these spaces consent must be written.

In the context of this research, dedicated information sheets were created and shared on a dedicated website for the respective target segments and research instruments as suggested in academia by Carter (2005). Additionally, consent forms were sent to the interviewees ahead of time and within the link to the information sheet about the netnography was placed within the social media communities and hashtag conversations to make participants aware of the research being conducted. This was to ensure that there was a spirit of beneficence, openness and honesty in the execution of the research to build trust and respect among all types of participants. All participants were assured of the confidentiality of their answers and that the data will only be stored for a maximum of three years. They were also informed of its use within the publication of a PhD. thesis and academic journals and presentations. Ethical approval was granted from the UREC of the university after assurance of the performance of the research in accordance with the university and national regulations. This project considers Sandin's (2007) and Kozinets' (2010) conceptualisation of the member checks to ensure that the research has a measure of internal validity and transferability. This is important since as previously mentioned, it is hard to ensure that people online are who they claim to be. Therefore, executing techniques such as searching via Google or Bing, helps to triangulate the member names and stated opinions or experiences helps to maximise the probability that the collected data is authentic and truly representative of the social media communities under investigation.

3.8. Limitations of the study and steps to mitigate against them

Each piece of research is subject to its intrinsic limitations as well as those associated with the methodology it adopts. This project is a social media netnography which incorporates social media monitoring, observation, participation and interviews. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) identify several issues with ethnography which Kozinets (2010) argues also apply to netnography. To overcome these limitations, this project used Nastasi and Schensul's (2005) suggestion to deliberately search for evidence to contradict initial conclusions and the norms

of the community. Together with the practice of data and method triangulation, this suggestion was included to add balance to the limitations of the study. Acknowledging limitations of studies is important to the development of research (Boon, 2013) for usefulness, transparency and accountability. According to Kozinets (2010), previous researchers' unethical behaviour within these communities may cause participants to distrust a researcher and limit responsiveness. This distrust can hinder access to a purpose-driven brand community (Sandin, 2007). Therefore, accountability and transparency is a sound way to build trust between the research community and the broader society. Sandin (2007) notes that netnographies have informant identity issues. Since on social media and various virtual communities, participants often use aliases, it is harder to confirm real identity in some cases than in regular ethnographies. This could in some researchers view handicap the validity of the information or data gathered. Carter (2005) suggests searching the aliases and names of the participants on search engines to gather demographic data and test the validity of data given.

The limitations of the study include the practical considerations of entrance and researcher influence. The project was entering into the public spaces of the brand communities with the knowledge of the brand. However, researchers considered the view of the members who may not consent to being researched or observed. As Allen, Burk and Davis (2006) and Kozinets (2010) state, these ethical considerations can delay a research project as participants might change their behaviour due to the presence of the researcher in the community or the brand may be concerned with competitors benefiting from the research using their data. Kozinets (2010) also noted that scepticism by members especially in consumer-generated virtual communities is a hindrance to full access and has ethical implications for research. It is essential to obtain express permission before starting research and identify leaders whose support who can be gained before announcing one's presence and setting of a hailstorm of criticism as that experienced by Kozinets (2010) in his first netnographic exploit. Sandin (2007) notes that announcing researcher presence in the community has ethical implications for the alteration of consumer behaviour versus being a silent observer, but Carter (2005) believes that being open about researcher presence and purpose is assuring to the participants. A sound approach to combating these issues is to spend more time within these environments for persons to become comfortable with one's presence in the community. This comfort is necessary for the free flow of information and support in the research. However, time is constrained even though Sandin (2007) notes that netnographies tend not to need as full a length of time as ethnographies. This could be due to the ability of the researcher to access archival data from previous posts in online

environments (Kozinets, 2010). This researcher mitigated these data and trust issues by creating a blog with the various information sheets about the research and its purpose and distributed within the respective hashtags intermittently through the research process. Additional limitations of the study were the reliance on the English text within these communities. This means that the results can be generalised to English speaking communities. The netnography was also limited to three brand communities and may not be applicable across other brand or industry types, even though this research considered brands from several product types. Also, the information collected within this project is applicable over the 2014-2018 period it covers. Therefore, the data could foreseeably be different before or after that time. It is also noted by Boon (2013) it is hard to gain the opinion of members who are less outspoken.

3.9 Summary

Social media has transformed the process of communication between companies and their consumers. With the prospect of a growing social media space and increasing influence on the lifestyle of users, this project explored the role that social media is playing in the development of consumer identity and the consumer-brand relationship. A research paradigm rooted in the open-ended and exploratory interpretivism was chosen to create a study that investigated the problem from the perspective of the participants within the social media platforms. Consequently, a qualitative methodology was incorporated to focus on the rich data that can add context to the links and relationships being formed between individual, identity and brand. The interpretive and qualitative sphere was chosen in order to keep an open-ended approach to the research whereby, pre-conceived notions and hypotheses were not forced upon this still nascent and evolving environment which faces new changes and developments with the quick rate of technological development. The open-ended and naturalistic approach to research led to the choice of qualitative techniques of online participant observation and in-depth interview in line with netnography used in support with the tool of social media monitoring of quantitative. This study remains a qualitative study since the social media monitoring was not used to quantify the results or test hypotheses but as a tool of support and triangulation for the qualitative methods. The participant observation, which allowed the researcher to collect data in real time of what individuals were saying across four major social media sites of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, was a means of gathering peoples' words and perspectives in their own words. This was important to gather the unfiltered perspectives without the restrictions of the researcher's pre-conceived questions, which would be the case for structured interviews and questionnaires. While qualitative data research is described as a "black hole,"

this projects' analysis was conducted using the BASIC IDs framework whereby the codes and categories generated during interpretation helped to organise the environment along seven features. BASIC IDs represent behaviour, affect, sensations, imagery, cognitions, interpersonal relations, drugs/health and socio-cultural features of a particular network or society. This study incorporated the features except for drugs/health which was not relevant in this context. The ethical process, in line with the University Research Ethics committee regulations, were applied within this research data collection process. These research steps were taken in order to achieve the stated research objectives and answer the research questions. The findings of the data analysis and the answers to those research questions will, therefore, be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlines the use of a qualitative methodology of research. This chapter discusses the findings generated by the execution of the chosen data collection methods. The study adopted a netnographic exploration within the social media community of the global brands Apple, Coca-Cola and L'Oréal, which consists of official pages managed by the brand's communications teams, fan groups curated by individual users and the associated hashtags within websites Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter. The data collection yielded a data set of 761,894 posts from the chosen brands' pages which was cleansed for language and was reduced to 5,000 posts. Within the hashtag, the posts were cleaned from 26,758,660 to 5,000 posts. Interviews were conducted via email and skype, with verbatim quotes being included herein. Thematic Analysis was used to interpret the data with the assistance of nVIVO software. The analysis supported the categories within the BASIC IDs framework developed by Arnold Lazarus (1973). Social media monitoring of the various profiles of the brands was facilitated using online programs of TagBoard, SocioVIZ and TweetDeck. The research findings within the chapter are presented in the following manner. Section 4.2 discusses the analytical framework of this study. Following this, section 4.3 examines the key observations of the data analysis. While section 4.4 focuses the online drivers of consumer-brand identification, section 4.5 proposes a model of consumer identity and consumer-brand relationship development and Section 4.6 summarises and concludes the chapter.

| Apple | L'Oreal | Coca Cola |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Macbook Pro, Macbook Air• iMac, iPod, iPad, iPhone, iOS• Apple Watch, Apple Music, Apple TV | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• TrueMatch, Infallible, Revitalift, AgePerfect• Colorista, Fera, Elvive• Garnier, Maybelline, Magic | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coca Cola, Coke, Diet Coke, Coke Zero• Coca Cola Life, Coca Cola Cherry, Coca Cola Vanilla• Dasani, Minute Maid, Powerade, Fresca, Sprite, Fanta |

Table 7 Family of brands within this study

4.2 Application of Analytical Framework

4.2.1 Thematic Analysis

The coding process revealed a total of eighty codes from the data sets. The thematic analysis yielded twenty-six themes. These themes and codes are in relation to the activities in the social media brand communities and how these influence individuals' sense of self, the community and their chosen brands. Themes uncovered such as engagement, creation, expression, search and knowledge/opinion share all categorised as behaviour within the context of the communities. These themes emerged from posts made by members and the reactions in the form of likes, comments, shares and retweets which act as validation to the original posts. Identified themes of happiness, sadness, pride, anger, disdain, disappointment, hate, grief, mixed feelings plus support are considered within the affect category and generated due to memorable experiences with the brand and community. There are hedonic and utilitarian aspects of the brand generate certain sensations that build the connection between the brand and the consumer. The hedonic aspects reflected herein regard the emotions the individual's experience by using the brand especially as it relates to achieving their identity and community goals. The utilitarian aspects speak to the value of the brand fulfilling the physical needs of the consumer. Themes of visuals, self-portrait and use of brand are covered within the category of imagery, while self-brand connection, self-community connection are categorised within cognition. Shared values, shared identity, shared narrative and communications all speak to the interpersonal relationships within the community. Rules, traditions, responsibilities, norms and socialisations all speak to sociocultural aspects that give a community its form. These themes are collected according to their similarity and placed into categories.

4.2.2 BASIC IDs Categorisation

The BASIC IDs analysis framework was developed by psychologist Arnold Lazarus (1973) to establish the dimensions of human personality within the context of psychotherapy. The framework outlines eight features that influence the human development of personality, which are: behaviours (what people do), affect (how people feel), sensations (what people experience through their senses), imagery (what people picture in their minds), cognitions (how people think), interpersonal relations (how people deal with others), drugs/health (health and lifestyle choices) and the sociocultural aspect (the contribution that society makes to individual development). This comprehensive analysis was incorporated into the exploration of the social media brand community within this research, using seven of the eight features: behaviours, affect, sensations, imagery, cognitions, interpersonal relations and sociocultural aspect. The

eighth feature of the framework (d:drugs/health) was not reflected in any of themes emerging from the coding and thematic analysis process. The framework has been successfully applied to other consumer and communications research previously such as Boon (2013), Berthon, Pitts and DesAutels (2011) and Shabbir et al. (2014). The successful use of BASIC IDs within these studies suggested that the framework was appropriate for this research for several reasons. Firstly, the analytical framework facilitates identification of behavioural patterns of individuals within the setting that are shared, thereby forming the basis of community by collective action. Secondly, the shared emotions and motivations expressed within the social media communities combine with the behavioural patterns to reveal the strength of the interpersonal relationships or connections in the decisions of the consumers as well as their identity development and expression. Thirdly, the community expressly shares the imagery, sensations, behaviours, feelings and thoughts with regard to each other and the brand.

4.2.2.1 Behaviour

This study considers behaviour to be all actions within social media brand communities. These actions do not necessarily signal membership with the community but do indicate an interest in the activities therein. Actions observed across the community include creating posts, either of original content or someone else's posts that is brand-related content, commenting on posts, replying to or mentioning others in tweets, liking or reacting to posts, sharing or retweeting/reposting a post, blocking or reporting a bully or troll or anyone whose content an individual deems to be abusive, insensitive or against the norms of the social media brand community or social media at large. These behaviours have varied motives based on the user as well as consequences for the individual as well as other members. The actions carry meaning based on the identity motives of the individuals who perform them and those who observe and react to them, acting as ways to convincing them the brand is suitable to achieve pre-existing goals and thereby worthy of commitment or loyalty. The identity motives include communicating one's identification or disidentification with the brand and the community and the brand and the community or the love and passion one feels for said brand based on either of its hedonic or utilitarian features. The behaviours have been categorised based on the observations according to specific activities, which are: engagement, creation, expression, search and knowledge or opinion share.

Engagement

This study defines engagement as the act of creating or reacting to conversations within the social media environment. In doing so, engagement is given the cohesive definition that other researchers (such as Maslowska, Malthouse and Collinger, 2016; Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014; Martinez-Lopez et al., 2017) have attempted with varying measures of success. Further discussion of such attempts are undertaken in chapter two section 2.3 and chapter 5 section 5.2.1.1. Herein, I discovered that engagement signals a measure of investment in the outcome of a conversation, from the perspective of both individuals and brands within the community. There are several behaviours that signal engagement within the community such as creating posts, commenting, liking, reacting, replying, making suggestions, sharing posts or giving troubleshooting answers to queries and requests. It is important to note that these behaviours do not independently signify the development of consumer-brand identification and/or consumer-community identification or a commitment to a positive online brand experience for fellow members and a favourable brand reputation for the company online. The content of the conversation is the greater signal that one is identifying or disidentifying with a brand or community. The ensuing definition of engagement provided by a US-based social media professional shows the conversational nature of the relationship between parties on the social media platform:

“Social Media Engagement is the relationship between listening and content. It is a two-way flow of information between two entities, formerly referred to as producers and consumers. Social media engagement refers to the setting in which both participants takes on, both, the role of producer and consumer. This requires both parties to be listening and creating content. Listening can mean consumers are paying attention to branded communications, or brands listening to consumer communications. For content, it can relate to status updates or more in-depth, rich media.” (US Social Media Strategist)

The following exchange between a member of the public and the Coca-Cola Facebook page’s management shows that not all engagement is positive or a sign of identification. However, such engagement can nurture consumer-brand or consumer-community identification if the content is useful and the brand is responsive:

Potential Consumer: *Can you confirm explicitly whether Coca-Cola is vegan or not? All I can find is an old thing online that suggests it contains no products derived from mammals, but obviously fish are not mammals.*

Coca-Cola: *Hi, none of the Coca-Cola and Schweppes brands contain milk, eggs or any products derived from mammals. However, a few of our drinks contain small traces of fish gelatine, these products are Lilt, Lilt Zero, Kia-Ora Orange Squash No Added Sugar and Schweppes Orange Squash. Hope this helps.*

Potential Consumer: *Coca-Cola No, it does not help - it's the same non-answer that I found on the internet; you could have literally copied and pasted it. Fish are not mammals, so you have not answered a question that all other companies answer simply: As you have not answered my question and I don't know if you will be notified about responses, I shall ask again: Are any of your products suitable for vegans, yes or no? Vegans do not eat any animal products.*

Coca-Cola: *Apologies for any confusion. We can confirm that Coca-Cola is free from animal derivatives and therefore suitable for vegans. The following drinks are not free from animal derivatives and are therefore unsuitable for vegans. • Lilt • Lilt Zero • Kia-Ora Orange Squash No Added Sugar • Schweppes Orange Squash*

While the previous conversation between potential consumer and corporate representatives represents a customer service interaction, Appendix D (A) consists of a thread, which occurred underneath a user-generated review video that received eight hundred and sixty-three comments. Such an engaging video has two significant consequences, i.e., building the social capital of the reviewer and generating community identification among members. The usefulness of the content is celebrated, while the further expertise of the creator and other commenters is sought. Therefore, the video showed influence on consumer decision-making process as well, where individuals share their decision to buy based on this review. Brands need to be aware of these types of videos and the influence exerted on the decision-making process and boost the posts as much as possible. Boosting the post, either by sharing it, liking it or thanking the poster in a monetary or other reward, will build the social capital of the creator and act as a way to encourage more positive conversation around the brand. However, the brand

has to be careful not to be seen to be taking the credibility of its creators or influencers away due to these rewards. This is needed to continue the influence these types of videos have on the consumer decision-making process.

Creativity

Creativity forms the second behaviour identified in this study and is considered the action of developing content that is of interest to self and others in the community. This study leads the way in forming a definition of creativity within social media brand communities. Creativity takes several forms such as reviews, tutorials, live experiments and demonstrations, use of the products in a novel way as well as creating marketing communications. User-generated campaigns are widely hailed in the research for their role in consumer decision and brand awareness as discussed in chapter two section 2.3.4.4. I found that these campaigns are created from the full range of community membership (influencers, active users, core users, and those who are not, on the face of it core to the community). Within the context of the sample brands, actions such as experimenting with shampoos, make-up and hair dyes, unboxing of new technological releases and suggesting product flavours are creative and reflective of consumer-brand identification. Such identification means users are proud to be linked on social media with the brand and will use their social capital to benefit the brand's reputation in the community. Alternatively, one can identify with the social capital to be gained by openly supporting or denigrating a particular brand.

Being creative online with the brand creates stronger levels of consumer-brand identification by strengthening the self-brand connection. The conversation with a community leader revealed that creativity builds a connection and identification because it allows the user to be heard. Creativity is a reflection of one's identity, personal views and relationship to the brand and community.

“It gives a connection to the brand because we can be heard. With broadcast media, they had no idea what we were thinking at the other end of the broadcast and we had no venue to do that. If you did, you had to have pretty good initiative to do it and more proactive to do it whereas now you have all these tools at your fingertips, you can just let people know what you are thinking and there is more ability to that that has allowed people to be more creative and more verbal about their thoughts and their identity.” (US-based Social Media Consultant and Community Manager)

Creativity is expressed in the initiative to develop reviews of the product while expressing them in a manner that is attention generating, interesting and useful to the decision-making of the other social media users. The captions seen in Appendix D (B1) show reviews that are in video, text and audio while displaying how the products can be used in a variety of circumstances. Creativity is expressed in the form of tutorials in which users are able to teach other members how to use the various products. For instance, the following quotes are captions from tutorials for using Apple software, make cakes in the shape of Coca-Cola Bottles or use L'Oréal hair care or makeup products. More quotes can be seen in Appendix 4 (B2).

Apple Motion 5: Music Visualizer Tutorial <https://t.co/I2uyBgAHrr>

How to make a @CocaCola birthday cake! <https://t.co/w3nZ7yQTTY>
#birthday #cake #momlife <https://t.co/ZxV56hof5s>

See how I upped my haircare game with @LOrealParisUK
<https://t.co/8ze1RqkzJ4>

Expression

Expression is the third activity in the category of behaviour. Expression fulfils individuals' identity motives by allowing them to freely share their identity and views with others. Expression allows consumers show brand use as a tool of self-communication of their identity to the social media brand community. In other words, the act of participation within the social media community to express one's views or demonstrate the use of the product, bridges the gap between the offline and online selves. The brand community, in connection with the brand itself, makes individuals' online identity more reflective of their daily lives, identity and relationship with the brand. The act of making or commenting on a posts is a self-expressive act which can communicate love or hate, happiness and excitement or disappointment and sadness with a brand's development or anger with a brand. The users observed within the communities express several aspects of themselves in relation to the brand (e.g. interest, love, happiness and joy, how the brand makes them feel about themselves). Collectively, the act of expression demonstrates consumer-brand identification by showing the influence of the brand on the consumer's happiness, values and life in general.

Within the communities, users are observed to express interest in the brand, whether it is fleeting or long-term interest. The tweets below show users who are interested in the brand,

either by developing interest over time or at the start. More quotes can be found in Appendix D (C1).

Totally impressed with the latest #iphoneupdate which says a lot as I'm not an #Apple fan at all, perhaps I will be now

Hay Jesus Me dat I love coke like my life depends on it

Love L'Oréal foundations!! My current fav is the pro glow

The brand community is a space where the consumers express their love for the brand and what are the foundations of the love (e.g., diversity, ability to express self, quality of the brand, the widespread of the offerings). The love for the brand is also extended to the brand's messaging and campaigns that may have had a positive impact on the individual. The comments below display love for campaigns posted either within the hashtag of the brand or under a YouTube video featuring the promotion. More quotes found in Appendix D (C2).

I love the @LOrealParisUK / Princes Trust advert so much meaning behind it?

Coca-Cola I'm you're biggest fan!!! I love Coca-Cola (from someone whose name is coca.col05)

@Apple I like the Ad, it is creative

The love for the brand, expressed within the community, can signal a relationship and develop for a variety of reasons. Brand love can grow due to nostalgia and what the brand means its community. For example, CoCa Cola's Christmas advertisements are a global signal that the holiday season is about to start. Secondly, the love can stem from the utilitarian aspects of the product, e.g., Apple, where there are many posts that laud its superior performance, innovative features and practical uses especially considering the competitors. Thirdly, brand love can emerge from an appreciation of the employees and quality customer service. Therefore, a combination of legacy, personal experience, utilitarian appreciation, service and people translated to the passion and love by the consumer to express their thoughts about the brands on social media.

As the following quote from a UK-based social media psychologist identifies the brand role in creativity is due to its expressive nature:

“Brands have an influential role in expressing the identity of individuals. Creation of Facebook posts, Instagram videos, Snapchat stories are creative acts with the aim of putting one’s best face out there. Therefore, one is creating the masks of one identity. Brands help create those masks.”
(UK-based Psychologist)

The community is also a place for members to express their happiness with a brand or its marketing campaigns. The posts below show the levels of happiness expressed by members, with some users even being moved to tears by the presence of their brand and/or campaign at various locations: More quotes are available at Appendix D (C3).

Could cry after seeing the @LOrealParisUK campaign in @superdrug today! Is this real life?! Been so excited to share this...

Are you ready for #iOS10 #Apple UK 6pm @Apple Excited!

*I cried during the Moments of Happiness video 😊 #cocacola
#happy50tdub*

The community is also the place the users express their values and whether the brand is reflective of those values. For example, users will show that they value diversity of representation within the media and celebrate L’Oréal for being able to capture such value within their social media or traditional campaigns. Alternatively, they may celebrate innovation and creativity and give credit to Apple for representing those particular values and show their use of Apple products as a way to show their innovative self and commemorate those standards within the brand.

Search

The fourth aspect of behaviour, observed herein, is the act of the search. Users enter the community to search for various types of data relating to the brand. There are three types of search observed within the brand communities. The first type of search is the information search. The types of information being requested range from troubleshooting information for product repair or accessories that will assist in the successful use of the product, software options information, product release information (e.g., prices, dates, distribution centres), and product options information. This will be used to aid the consumer decision-making process. This behaviour removes some of the inherent risks from the most expensive brands.

Additionally, the chances the brands will fulfil one's identity goals are enhanced because the individuals' influencers are similar to themselves. The following comments from social media reflect information search in the form of questions and calls for help. These information searches are often answered by other individuals and sometimes, like the example discussed with Coca-Cola above, by the brand itself. More quotes can be found in Appendix D (D1).

Did anyone actually get the #iPhone7Plus last Friday?? Seems delayed for weeks and weeks now... #welldone #Apple @Apple Joke

Hey does coke life have sativa weed in it?

Is the shade range for the L'Oréal pro matte different in America? I feel like all the light shades here have a pink undertone

Opinion search is the second form of search identified. In this case, the individual is looking for subjective opinions about the brand, its products or communications. Opinions (positive and negative) are freely given, indicating mutual respect and commitment towards the level of online engagement and enhancing the online brand experience for each other. A positive consequence of opinion search is consumer-brand identification because the information tells the individual how the community and the brand matches the self. The following social media posts show users asking what others think of particular aspects of the brand. For more, see Appendix D (D2).

I've finally upgraded to iOS10. Can someone tell me all the features I need to turn on/off please thx?

On the search for iPhone 7 in NYC is the struggle

Has anyone tried L'Oréal true match foundation? Any good?

The third form of search is the community search. On becoming a brand user, an individual will search the various social media networks for the community (e.g. corporate/brand page, fan hosted group or hashtag community) that shares their values. The following quotes show users searching for community either by displaying how they feel when they are within the brands' stores or showing the level of excitement they feel to be finally able to access their brands' community. For more, see Appendix D (D3).

*Saw a ton of people wearing apple watches at the Apple Store, of course
(most of the employees). Felt right at home.*

*Can we as an iPhone “family” all go with the excuse that the “latest” IOS
update removes one from all WhatsApp groups?*

*Is it me or are @Apple events & products underwhelming. Used to be
excited for a new release. It's like is that it? #allfluff. #macbook2016*

Knowledge/Opinion share

Individuals share their opinions either in response to a search or request or independently. The share behaviours are seen in terms of reviews, tutorials, comments on information requests or unboxing posts. Unboxing posts are social media unique behaviours in which the user opens the new tech, e.g. iPhone or MacbookPro, and gives subjective opinions on camera. These videos are either recorded and uploaded on YouTube or shared via SnapChat, Periscope, Instagram Live or Facebook Live and use the unboxing hashtag as well as the relevant brand-related tags. These share behaviours can indicate a measure of relationship with the brand and the community by displaying significant levels of consumer-brand and consumer-community identification. The members by participating in this behaviour enhance each other's' positive brand and community experience. It is essential that brands are aware of these user-generated behaviours that happen independently of their marketing communications initiative. They can build the creator's relationship with the brand as well as those who consume the content. Consequently, they can occur outside of the company's knowledge but have a more powerful influence than the brand's own initiatives. The following are captions to videos and pieces of content that share users knowledge about the specifics of a brand's uses and functions as well as their opinion about quality. More evidence provided at Appendix D (E).

*In India have seen @cocacola doing it v well to reflect different
prices/consumer segments/usage patterns :)*

*I fundamentally disagree with the pack designs. Why is diet coke marketed
so strongly at women? Men like it too. And some women even like coke
zero.*

*How much #sugar is in a #CocaCola supersize cup?
<https://t.co/HZMRmNDtgn>*

4.2.2.2 Affect

The second BASIC IDs categorisation applied in the research is that of affect. This term refers to those posts observed that revealed member's affectations towards the brand and its community. Affect in this context is the use of language to express emotions with regards to a specific situation. Within the community, social media users share how the brand makes them feel to each other. These expressions provide insight into their sense of self and the identity goals they are fulfilling by using the brand or by interacting with the community. The emotions or feelings shared within these communities are happiness, pride, disappointment, anger, hate, grief and a mixture of feelings. These are important to be identified since decisions are made not only on the brand's cognitive links to the individual but the emotional connections and reactions as well. Therefore, it is crucial that brands and researchers understand the specific nature of the emotions that drive the decision-making process.

Happiness

The emotion of happiness is a reflection of consumer-brand identification. The happiness displays the aspects of the interactions with the brand that inspire the individual to form the relationship with the brand. The following quotes show a number of conditions under which happiness is shared within the communities. Firstly, happiness is communicated regarding the utilitarian features and reliability of the brand's quality. Alternatively, it is also framed as love for the beauty of the product. The happiness is also referred to as tears of joy over the brand as well as what the brand means to the individual. These posts show that users are willing to share their happiness with the community. For more, see Appendix D (F1).

*My long time go to hair care @lorealhair @elvive7 @el_vivedelorealparis
and @lusterpink @lusterspinkintl - have been using these two for AGES!
And love the result they give my curly locks #haircareproducts #hair
#curlyhair #oil #gel #lorealparis #lusters*

*Total! I am glad that those campaigns of @CocaCola that move the <3
proud of being Latin*

*I'm so glad you took the time to do these tests. I picked up an A6300
because of you and will now probably grab one of the new MBP's because
of you.*

The happiness in these posts contribute to consumer-brand identification because one remembers how the brand makes one feel in the moment. The brand becomes a positive portion of the user's life narrative and sharing the experience online is a feature of presenting the best aspects of one's real lives online, as an act of identity management. The success of the product in meeting needs and expectations increases one's happiness and consumer-brand identification due to the goodwill that is applied to one's perception of the brand, leading to a willingness to share one's positive experience in the brand community.

Pride

Another emotion on display is member pride with the brand and being affiliated with said brand. Firstly, members feel pride at the market position of the brand. For example, Apple fans are proud to defend the accomplishments of the company who are proven innovators in computers, tablets and mobile phone technologies and the software developments that accompany them. Secondly, they express pride in the values of the brand. For example, L'Oréal members are proud of the brand's inclusion and diversity reflected within campaigns like True Match, L'Oréal Paris Prince's Trust and Beauty Squad. Thirdly, users show pride at the popularity of a brand. For example, Coca-Cola users show pride at the widespread use of the brand within various retailers internationally and the relationships coke has with major sports franchises and stadiums. The pride in Coca Cola's popularity also leads to a lack of respect for retailers who do not stock the brand. For more, visit Appendix D (F2).

*So proud to see @LOreal_UKI @UNESCOUK fellow Dr Sam Giles
honoured as an International Rising Talent <https://t.co/FncY67XGKY>*

*Proud to be a #Coca-cola Next Gen LGBT Fellow, when I see ads like this.
@CocaColaCo @CocaCola <https://t.co/sdiNqRtpTs>*

*Proud to have become an Apple Teacher today. Check it out @AppleEDU
#AppleTeacher*

Disappointment

Individuals also use this space to express disappointment in the brand or an aspect of its products or communications. The following quote from a social media community manager shows that users display their disappointment out of an instantaneous need to complain or due to some measure of ill-treatment and they are therefore looking for validation of their experience:

Most of the time they leave negative reviews at the heat of the moment, they are unhappy, somebody treated them poorly, their expectations were not met or they were discounted as far as their value as a person and their feedback. (Us-based social Media Professional)

The following quotations show people who share their disappointment with the product because of an impulsive reaction to a negative experience with the brand. The result could be a request for return of the money paid, or signal that they are changing brands or simply just the expression of their disappointment in the company overall. There are more in Appendix D (F3).

This coke tastes like water syrup I want my money back @CocaCola

*Sorry @Apple fed up with no space, poor camera and expensive contracts
hello @sonyxperia love it already!*

*@Loreal don't know how your company is run in France but in Canada it
is a sorry joke.*

The disappointment with customer service, quality or a social issue supported or not supported by the brand can draw either impulsive posts or well-thought-out think pieces about the source of one's disappointment in the brand. The expression of disappointment is not necessarily a sign of disidentification but must be monitored and responded to appropriately by the brand. Failure to do so has the potential to lead to further disappointment that threatens both identification and relationship. The following posts show that consumers show their disappointment with the brand. There are more at Appendix D (F3).

Apple hasn't been innovative since Steve Jobs died

*Here's is the real reason I don't like Apple. They made all their electronics
dummy-proof. Anyone can use it. But, it's too dumb for me.*

The brand's decreasing quality is also a source of disappointment for consumers as the following posts show. For more, see Appendix D (F3).

*For the life of me, I'll never be able to explain the quality drop and
mismanagement at #Apple other than saying #RIPSteveJobs Sad reality*

I am disappointed. I thought loreal would have invested more in the packaging

The post below shows that the disappointment is also due to the consumers' perception that the brand is failing in relation to the competition. For more, see Appendix D (F3).

*After watching the Keynote last night, safe to say Windows won this round.
I am disappointed, Apple.*

Anger

Anger is not necessarily rooted in disidentification. However, it is an important emotion for brands and community leaders to address, since the hate-filled posts are shared more frequently than positive ones. The anger is displayed in hashtags and on the brand pages with users sharing their feelings even on posts that are unrelated to the issue(s) that their anger. The anger can reflect disidentification as seen in the following post. There are more quotes in Appendix D (F4).

All the fan-boys come out with their ridiculous justifications as to why it's so amazing. It's not.

The root of the anger may also lay within the users' views of social issues in relation to the brand's handling of that particular concern. There are more quotes in Appendix D (F4).

@CocaCola You treat your employees like slaves

I wonder how people will feel once they find out @Loreal still tests products on animals in China....

While the anger may be due to a bad experience, should the brand manage the situation appropriately, there will be no loss of consumer-brand identification. In fact, those users become champions for the brand in response to the company's responsiveness to their situation. The following post shows that the anger can be taken seriously based on the preferences of the individual and the importance of the brand and its products have within the users' life. These preferences are expressive of the users' personal views on product quality, brand values as well as relevance to the consumers' lives. The anger, as displayed in the following posts, can display a sense of anger at the quality of the utilitarian aspects of the brand (e.g. taste or colour). There are more quotes in Appendix D (F4).

The new @CocaCola #life is horrible, stick to #cokezero from now on.

#disgusting

The emotions expressed also include disdain at the direction the brand is taking or its decreasing quality and competitiveness in the market. The disdain is more threatening to a brand than anger or disappointment because it often links to the failure of the brand to live up to expectations which can threaten user's social identity and therefore influence loss of identification and/or relationship.

Hate

Hate for a brand, its decisions and various aspects of its nature is also shared within the communities. This hate is rooted in negative experiences, perceptions of social irresponsibility, poor brand quality, the brand's treatment of its community and even love for competing brands. Openly displayed hate can signal disidentification with the brand or community. The following posts show people who hate the brand because of specific reasons (e.g., software update, failed application of hair dye), ethical details or general causes. There are more quotes in Appendix D (F5).

I hate you @Apple and I hate ios10 I hate you so much @Apple

Did you read their china section? I hate animal testing & I'm not a L'Oréal stan lol but it's something worth considering

No amount of ads can convince me to drink basically poison @CocaCola

Grief

The grief on display is in response to a brand-related situation. This includes grief over the loss of a brand champion (e.g. the death of Steve Jobs). The grief can be tied to the loss of brand position or quality which was the basis of original identification with the brand. The following posts show users grief for death, drop in quality or political affiliation of the brands. There are further quotes in Appendix D (F6).

Don't blame me for nothing you are the one talking about apple is not software. But I forgive you. The grief got you tweeting in tongues

@CocaCola it's a sad day. How dare @Utah go with @Pepsi? Truly horrible decision

*I really wish the @Loreal Pro Matte and Pro Glow would work for me but
sadly all they do is break up and break me out. 😞*

Mixed Feelings

While some of the feelings expressed are clearly defined feelings, others are mixed and show a measure of conflict about different aspects of the brand, whether love for the product but hate for the experience of consumers or love for one sub-brand but hate for another within the same family of brands. For more quotes, see Appendix D (F7).

*Really love #Apple products but really hate how they make life difficult for
those who aren't on the Very Latest Thing they have to offer.*

Thing is I like #CokeZero but don't like #dietCoke very much ... #strange

Affect feelings are displayed in relation to the brand but also regarding the community as well. Therefore, the community leaders also need to monitor how the consumers are feeling about the space.

These feelings include:

Kinship – Members share of their kinship and love for the community which display engagement and reflect consumer-community identification. The kinship can be developed due to reliability and usefulness of the information provided by the community, appreciation for the support given members and love for those who are similar in brand choice as the individual.

Support for the community's initiatives – Users show their support for community initiatives and the community at large by participating in events e.g. live tweeting and unboxing or reacting to these by sharing or liking the content. This shows commitment and consumer-community identification and displays a moral responsibility and shared consciousness with the community and its members.

Happiness with the community– The happiness with the collective is developed due to memorable experiences, the usefulness of the information, the sense of affiliation and the social capital garnered with in the community and the relationships developed with others therein. This happiness develops consumer-community identification, community satisfaction as well as commitment. This could be nurtured by the company to build the identification and relationship with the brand. However, it is not a definite link that consumer-community identification will link to consumer-brand identification.

4.2.2.3 Sensations

The engagement with the brand and its community generate sensations with individuals that are physical and/or emotional in nature. These sensations are inspired by both the hedonic and utilitarian aspects of the brand, which lead to consumer-brand identification. Utilitarian aspects speak to the physical features or benefits of using a brand, whether it is taste on the tongue, refreshing nature of the drink, feel on the skin of the makeup or fit in the hand of the mobile device and the users communicate their importance to the brand identification process and brand relationship. This importance shows that product quality is an essential link to consumer-brand identification and plays a substantial role on developing the consumer-brand relationship. The following posts share the sensations created by the brands' utilitarian features or benefits: There are more quotes at Appendix D (G).

*@LOrealParisUK such lovely products, made my hair feel very weightless
with some nice volume*

I love drinking coke coca cola it's refreshing.

The hedonic aspects create sensations such as joy, pride, love, respect and even nakedness in the absence of the brand as seen in the quotations below:

I forgot to wear my apple watch this morning and now I feel so naked

*I absolutely LOVE and respect everything that @LOrealParisUK is doing
atm.*

4.2.2.4 Imagery

Consumer-brand connections create imagery based on the individual's perceptions of the brand and those planted by the company's marketing communications. The connection with the imagery shown in the community communicates the self-brand connection. Brands can use these display of imagery within the communities to gauge the size of the gap between their intended positioning and the perceptions by the community. For example, L'Oreal's intended positioning is different from the perception of its social media community, even though the community has a positive image of the brand. Imagery is displayed in several ways to show the connection with the brand. The prominent use of selfies communicates the self-brand connection. These digital self-portraits, as defined by Dey et al. (2018), in chapter two section 2.3.1.3, place the user and the brand on full display to illuminate how the brand builds the individuals self-narrative. They are, therefore, important to the expression of an individual's

consumer identity, as are videos of product use, unboxing and demonstrations. These visuals also show engagement with the community, where they act as part of its traditions and rituals. Imagery, therefore, signals relationship and connection between the brand and the community. The following quotes display how users take selfies to display their use of the brand and the effect they believe it has on their personality. For more, kindly see Appendix D (H).

*Shoutout to ios10 for finally combining my mirror selfies w regular selfies
so I can reach peak narcissism*

*Train selfie ☞ on the way to the L'Oréal academy Leeds! #lorealacademy
#colourkeys <https://t.co/4bJR66T7Fw>*

*Went to a random @CocaCola machine in the mall and selected a
#CokeZero and out came a #ShareACoke with NICHOLAS!!! How
awesome! #LuckyDay*

The imagery was used via wearing of the brands conspicuously, for example, use of the MacBooks at the British Museum. However, previously it was harder to display the use of inconspicuous brands. Social media facilitates the display of both types of products, signalling identity motives in purchase and consumption.

*When I identified with Armani man it changed my identity. I portrayed
myself as more this Armani type dude. Then I realise it was not worth
spending that kind of money on clothes just to validate my identity. But we
are all susceptible to that and we must be aware. But someone buying a
brand may not be them associating with the brand, they just happened to
like this one particular design of the brand so they bought it. It is the same
online and offline, these days, the only difference is with social media we
get to showcase that and reinforce that. (Social Media Psychologist, The
Netherlands)*

Imagery represents the lengths people will go to display their commitment to or identification with the brand and its community. For instance, tattooing a brand on one's body shows that the brand is enmeshed in one's self-concept to the extent that one is willing to permanently mark one's body and possibly answer questions about the said tattoo for an extended period of time. For more, kindly see Appendix D (H)

*Honestly thinking about getting the @Apple tattoo #Apple
#AppleEverything*

*Be your own kind of beautiful #ink #tattooed #cocacolalife #enjoycocacola
#cocacola #tattooedgirl*

4.2.2.5 Cognition

Cognition is the fifth category of BASIC IDs used in this work. This study relates cognition to the knowledge and understanding of the brand and its community in the minds of its users. Cognition inspires identification by revealing the self-brand match based on the perception of shared personality or values. Such a connection relates to both brand and community identification. This identification can be on an identity-motivated basis (as discussed by Oyserman, 2009) or on a values basis (Tuskej, Golob and Podnar, 2013). This study found that consumers share their cognitive process and what the brand or the community means to them using words such as “I think”, “I know”, “I understand”, “I recognise”, “I agree” and “I acknowledge”. The consumer shows how they build the trust and loyalty to the brand by mentally associating positively with the brand in terms of quality, identity and values. The posts below show the thinking process that goes into making decisions as displayed on social media regarding the brand:

*I think bottle redesigning is a great risk yet @CocaCola has done it well
every time #BrandChat*

*I feel I must applaud @CocaCola on a great decades-long campaign. I
think of tacos and cheeseburgers, I imagine drinking coke original w/ it*

The following quotation from a social media community manager discusses the mental process of developing consumer-brand identification based on perceptions of similarity, affirmation and relatability. The purpose of sharing these thoughts are for the individual to benefit with being associated with the brand’s positive aspects.

*I see a lot of correlation where they will say ‘I’m like this’. Now the cubs
are winning and all of a sudden people start identifying with ‘oh my gosh
the cubs, oh my gosh I feel like them and for a long time I went without any
affirmation to what I am doing and now all of a sudden you win. I
understand the struggle’. I have seen those comments where people would
never have consumed the brand before but now they identify with*

something that's out there highly visible about the brand and they share with their friends, their own personal take on it. (US Based Social Media Social Media Professional)

The perceptions of self-brand match are communicated within the community with the potential to further drive expectations of brand quality, customer service, brand experience and brand engagement in members. Therefore, cognition has a powerful influence on the consumer-decision making process as well and the decision to make this brand a portion of one's identity. For instance, the following quotations show the expectations of the users and the consequences of meeting or not meeting those expectations for the brand and the community:

@Loreal Wanted a double extension mascara from Boots at Trafalgar Square, London but none of them had the hygienic seal round them. So left

It's so amazing how many Apple employees just stand around in that store and I have to wait until Wednesday to have anything done 😊

The nicest little old man helped me at the Apple Store yesterday. He handed me my new phone, asked if I was happy and then gave me a hug. 🍷

The study shows the importance of identification as a means of recognising a brand's promise. Consequently, individuals relate to the brand based on the potential or actualised role the brand has in fulfilling a hedonic or utilitarian aspect of their life or identity. The various types of user-generated content (e.g. reviews, unboxing, comments) reflect a cognitive connection to the brand and the community while displaying how the brand matches their view of themselves. The following post is an example of the features of the product building a cognitive link to the brand:

So I picked up the loreal Infallible paints from my local CVS drugstore. They're like a thick lip gloss very pigment and not sticky at all they come with a doe foot applicator. When you eat it does come off a little and transfer on your glass they do have a sweet smell I would give them a 7 🌟

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Some posts, like those below, display affective, behavioural and cognitive components of identification simultaneously:

How absolutely beautiful are these L'Oréal polishes? The packaging alone has me like 😊. Sweet gift from a special lady all the way from Canada c?

*♥. Can't wait to try them ALL!! #thanksyousweetfriend #loreal
#lorealpolish #newproductstotry #nailpolish #lorealparis #beauty
#beautyproducts*

Used this last night and now my skin feels amazing! Highly recommend!

#Loreal #smooth #detoxmask #skin #bright... <https://t.co/gDIVOsBM57>

4.2.2.6. Interpersonal Relations

An essential portion of a community is the strength of the interpersonal relationships therein. These relationships are based on shared values, shared identity and a shared narrative. The brand community's shared value and narrative is developed over time by engaging with the membership about the brand and the shared identity is one of consumption. The relationships within these communities are developed in relation to the responsiveness of the members and leaders to each other. When a member asks for help and receives comments or answers, the usefulness of those actions causes an appreciation of the community to develop. This is reflected in future conversations where the individuals refer to each other and even tell other members that a specific individual is useful and engaging. There are interpersonal relationships between members but also with individuals and the brands. At the core of the membership, especially within fan groups, the same experts or influencers respond to many queries and are singled-out to answer questions by older members of the community who are aware of their expertise in the matter. The interpersonal relationships are also signified by the members' inclination to defend the brand to those, member or not, who are criticising the brand unfairly by replying or writing think pieces that justify the actions of the brands in question. Therefore, the interpersonal relations observed within the community are person-to-person, person-to-brand and person-to-community, described in figures 6 and 7. These signify a measure of community within these social media gatherings due to the trust that results, the reciprocity that emerges and the desire to return to the community to ask more questions or answer those of others.

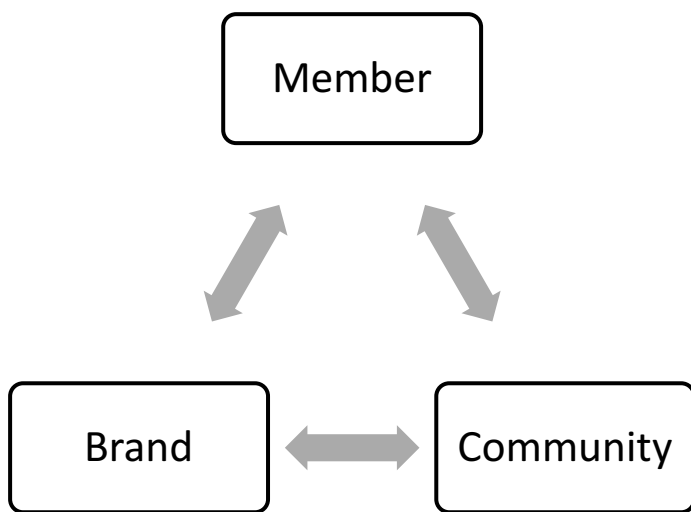


Figure 6 Multi-directional community conversations

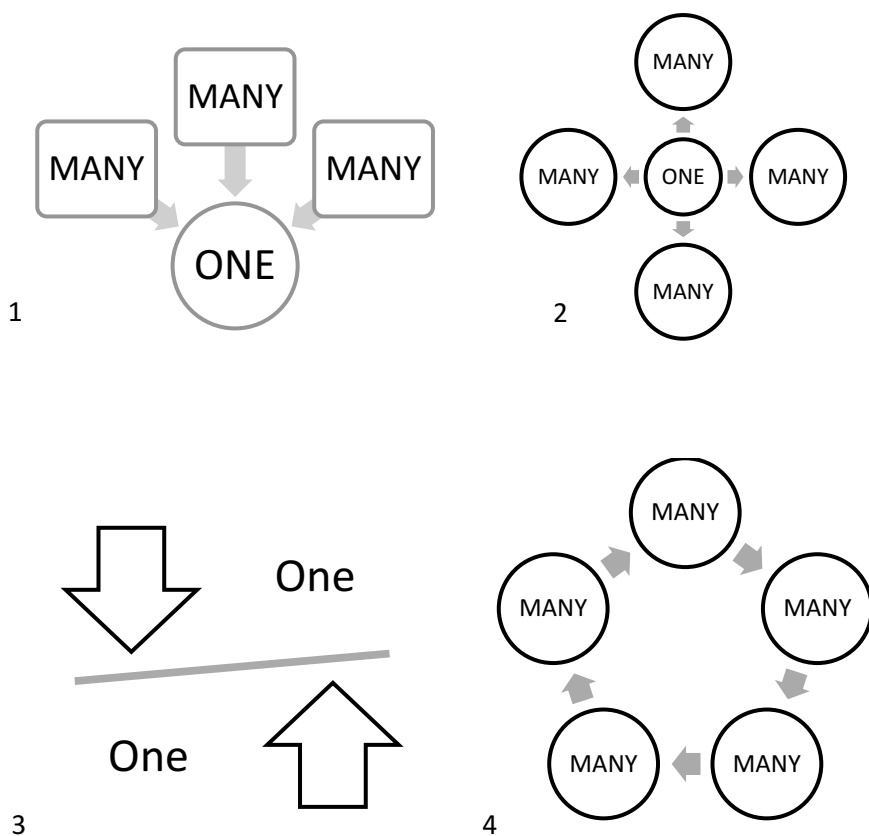


Figure 7 Multi-directional community conversations: 1. Many-to-one, 2. One-to-many, 3. One-to-one, 4. Many-to-Many.

4.2.2.7 Socio-cultural aspects

This aspect relates to the norms created by the rules, traditions and responsibilities of the community. The social media brand community depicted in this study is simultaneously looser (in that it involves various networks and platforms) and tighter (there are more markers of community herein) than the regular concept of online community. Ultimately, there remains the similarity of social and cultural norms that dictate behaviour of the members and allow the community to be considered a sustainable and defined unit. This includes things such as acceptable language, humour and sarcasm and the means of communicating with each other. Traditions shape the expectations and commitment of community members while creating a social bond. The socio-cultural aspects of the community creates the terms of participation (e.g. posting, commenting, acceptable language), the levels of hierarchy and the ways of interacting with each other. Within fan pages and groups, these aspects are spelt out in the rules, allowing people to know what the group represents, the behaviour that is acceptable and the consequences of a breach of conduct. Corporate pages set these terms and conditions and it is the role of the page manager to block, delete or handle any unbecoming behaviour in the group. The hashtag aspect of this is more open due to its lack of direct brand or fan ownership and will see a much looser display of the socio-cultural ties, and individual members are more responsible for their behaviour although some aspects of the culture of fan pages and groups remain such as unboxing, reviews, questions and troubleshooting. However, even within these hashtags, members will inform each other of the rules and norms.

Socio-cultural aspects such as language, humour, rules and traditions are essential because they act as tools of socialisation for the development of the individual within the community and generally in society. The process of learning and its effects on the socialisation of the individual is a term Chiang et al. (2017) described as intangible within social media brand communities. However, these tools are proving to be strong drivers of socialisation especially among the younger consumers as is the perspective of the social media psychologist, quoted below:

This is increasingly the case. As more individuals, especially those in Generation Z, start to use social media as a means of not only socialisation but socialising. Socialisation is a combination of self-imposed and externally imposed rules, alongside the expectation of others. So if everyone else is doing it, using social media for socialisation in a form of knowledge and language acquisition and developing their social skills, then why not, why couldn't it be a tool of socialisation? For example, there is a

strategic use of emoji's as opposed to the strategic use of body language. How we express ourselves, starts to form through emoji's as well and with regards to that I also wanted to talk about socialising because when we are socialising, we are learning about each other. (Social Media Psychologist, The Netherlands)

While it is important to understand the community's influence on the socialisation of its members, acknowledging the brand's role is also crucial due to its place at the centre of the community and because it is the reason individuals engaged with the space initially. Socialisation influences how individuals perceive the community, the brand and any match with these aspects and themselves. The following Netherlands-based psychologist believes that brands influence this process due to the ability to use them to either form or display their preferred identity:

Brands bring with them a certain image and in society and part of human nature we all have this innate drive to want to fit into certain groups. Brands really do that well because we all want to be seen as part of a group, for example, individuals who want to come off as classy or sophisticated may then want to choose brand X, Y, Z which portrays that, let's say Armani men or something and they will associate with that brand as opposed to brand a, b, c, which may be like Nike, if they wanted to appear more sportive. Therefore, basically the whole idea of brands is that it validates their preferred identity display as a whole or at that point of time in their lives. So it is important to note that our sense of self and identity is constantly changing and brands help us to shape this change.

The socio-cultural aspects are essential to include in any discussion of the consumer-brand or consumer-community identification since these features of the community drive the engagement that generates the meaning, sense of belonging and psychological membership that drives the identification. This observation within the communities under study support Zhou et al. (2012) who are among writers who show the symbiotic relationship between identification and psychological membership of a community.

| Coding (e.g.) | Themes | BASIC IDs | Description |
|---|---|-----------------------------|---|
| Liking, reacting, answering, reviews, interests, love, information search, community search | Engagement, creation, expression, search, knowledge/opinion share | Behaviour | The things people do within the setting |
| Customer service experience, brand direction, memorable brand experience, quality. | Happiness, pride, anger, disappointment, hate, grief, mixed feelings, support | Affect | Any feelings or emotions of the users within the setting with regard to the brand, the community or each other. |
| Joy, pride, love, respect, nakedness, feel. | Hedonic, utilitarian | Sensation | The things that users experience through their senses in relation to the brand or the community |
| Selfies, videos, tutorials, reviews. | Visuals, self-portraits, use of brand | Imagery | What users picture in their minds with regard to the brand or its community |
| I think, I know, I understand, I acknowledge, I recognise, I agree. | Self-brand connection, self-community connection | Cognition | How people think about the brand or its community |
| One-to-many, many-to-one, many-to-many, one-to-one | Shared values, Shared identity, shared narrative, communications. | Interpersonal Relationships | The formation of relationships with others in the community. |

| | | | |
|---|--|-----------------------|---|
| | | Drugs/health | What — substances people use and how well they |
| Language, humour, live tweeting, unboxing, reviews, tutorials, live trials. | Rules, traditions, responsibilities, norms, socialisations | Sociocultural aspects | the contribution that society/community makes to individual development |

Table 8 Sample of the Codes, the Themes and their fit within the BASIC IDs categorisation

4.3. Key Observations

This section will discuss in-depth the key observations of the thematic analysis and the BASIC IDs analytical framework as well as the implications for the concepts that form the core of this study: identity, identification, community and brand relationships.

4.3.1 Social Media and Identity development/expression

Based on the observations herein, I determined that social media’s influence on identity development is contextual to the individual. Since individuals react to situational cues differently, the change to identity is initiated at the layer of personality. This coincides with Goffman’s (1959) discussion of layers of identity. While the influence starts at the level of personality, other levels such as social and consumer are affected by the content and participation in social media brand communities. The UK-based psychologist notes that social media’s influence starts on this layer because it “reflects our own desires”. The following respondent, a social media psychologist, states that the changes are due to individual factors such as culture, ethnic background and one’s social support group and personality traits:

“Identity consists of a collective of beliefs and values which are developed over time and as a result of our life experiences. Social media actually essentially allows us to showcase parts of this development. But actual changing of identity is entirely dependent on the individual factors, with regards to the personality. So that can include a lot of macro things, like culture and your ethnic background or your social support group. But alongside of this it also involves a combination of the micro things and this is your personality traits, so your susceptibility to external influences, so certain people may become more susceptible to having their identity

develop in a different way compared to others as a result of social media.”

(Social Media Psychologist, The Netherlands)

Furthermore, the greater influence on identity development is the way one uses social media, rather than the tool itself. The internal dialogue, inspired by one's use as well as the emotions and associations, influences one's self-perceptions in addition to one's view of the community. The internal thoughts create the criteria for self-definition and influences self-esteem as one compares self to others within the community and the networks. The community is an external influence on that internal dialogue that helps to set values, interests as well as aspects of one's identity e.g. identity goals as discussed by the following psychologists:

“The ways in which one uses social media influences one's identity development. The internal dialogue, emotions and associations as a result of this use and the algorithms directly manipulated by the social media companies. These algorithms gather information about identity from the social media community at large and feeds it back to individuals who can then choose to adopt or reject these identity cues.” (UK-based social media Psychologist).

The amount of ads and external influences being presented to the individual influences identity development, for example, I notice, the less time you spend on Facebook, when you actually log back into Facebook, when you scroll through your newsfeed you will find more ads than posts of your friends, and if you are using Facebook more consistently then you don't and you are thrown these messages of oh you should be like this, or you happen to go the gym a lot, we are going to target Swole watches [brand of watches for fitness enthusiasts], that's going to influence the development of your identity because you start to think well I do gym a lot, I do want to become Swole and I am that kind of person and you start to see that influence the development of who you think you are.” (Social Media Psychologist, The Netherlands)

A key finding of this study is that various generations engage in the community in the same manner. Any differences lie in the motive for engagement. While all generations are expressing themselves, younger generations also use it for the purpose of identity validation:

“Generation plays a small role. Only in so much that Generation Z especially, has no context outside of digital media or no ‘pre-Google’ memory. Therefore, social media or digital media has been influential in their lives. However, while older generations have context previous to social media, they are still influenced by social media in the creation and expression of their selves and views.” (Social Media Psychologist, UK-based)

“Millennials and Generation Z are more likely to use social media as a way to express their identity. This is because they are growing up in a day and age as social media has come about and so social media has become a bit of a norm for these generations. There are studies that show there are differences in reasons of using social media for the generations and since Generation Z is the one most likely to grow up with social media being the norm than the older generations, they are more susceptible to have that influence and develop the formation of their identity. For instance the use of SnapChat in classes to share what professors are saying or at parties to show this is what I am doing and as we start to show off these certain traits, we are actually reinforcing the idea of this is who I am”. (Social Media Psychologist, Netherlands)

Observations reveal that social media facilitates identity expression by creating the stage for one to show one’s self to the audience. This audience may be virtual, but it is real, unlike the imagined audience spoken of by Goffman (1959) and discussed further in chapter 5 section 5.2.1.3 of this thesis. The self-expression in these communities are not without consequences for the individual’s identity as shared below:

“It allows you to showcase oneself and one’s personality. Take into account the fact that one gets to feel like you are “on stage” you may tend to over exaggerate certain traits in yourself now at the same time it makes one more susceptible to identity changes as a result of the increased social comparison because then when you start comparing yourself to other people you start to feel like maybe I should be little bit more like this person and the repeated messages there we start to change our identity to

match those of others again, given the need to fit in.” (Social Media Psychologist, the Netherlands)

Such self-expression reflects the affective portion of identity development which influences self-esteem and shows the self-brand and self-community connection. However, the social comparison and socialisation within these communities is a harm to self-esteem, especially if one is unable to display use of the brand due to unaffordability. The connection the brand gives to others is also a source of self-esteem:

“The ego validation achieved depends on the individual again. But being associated with the brand can bring about all the positive feelings that they have with the brand. It can increase self-esteem if the person is feeling particularly positive about the brand or it could be the connection the brand gives you to others that helps your self-esteem and if the person is incapable of affording the brands they love that can influence their self-esteem in a negative way as opposed to positively.” (Social Media Psychologist, The Netherlands)

4.3.2 Consumer-Brand Identification

The community shows that a brand’s utility influences affective, behavioural and cognitive aspects of consumer-brand identification. The quality of the products provides both a sense of personal satisfaction that strengthens the emotional connection between the brand and confirmation that the consumer made the correct brand choice. Additionally, the ability to boast to one’s friends about the success of the purchase, both conspicuous and inconspicuous, increases the strength of consumer-brand identification while leading to further engagement with the brand and the community. The following quotes depict captions of posts where individuals reveal their identification with brands for a variety of reasons, e.g., quality, innovation or physical features:

@CokeZero it’s unbelievable how good you taste baby

Sorry #Android. I see why many likes the freedom, but it’s just not as refined, cleverly designed, and stable as what #Apple has to offer.

I love True match foundation. At first I thought it looks cakey, but when I kept using it, it turned out to be amazing.

Crucially, these spaces show that consumer-brand identification differs even within the family of brands. Therefore, it is possible to have consumer-brand identification with one of the brands and disidentification with another member of the same family. This determination followed the observation of negative comparisons as followers of the two brands view each other as competitors. Remarkably in some situations, the family of brands is hosted within the same loose networks of social media brand community. However, brands and consumers do create separate online spaces for each sub-brand (e.g. separate brand pages and separate fan pages per brand). There are sometimes shared hashtags (e.g. #tastethefeeling for all of Coca Cola's brands). Individuals will enter the pages and hashtags of the "competing" sub-brands to complain and voice their disidentification or identification, as seen with the quotes below:

Anybody else notice that an opened bottle of regular @CocaColaCo in the fridge stays okay but a bottle of @CokeZero quickly freezes? Why?

I like IOS 10, but I hate Watch OS3. It removed so many cool features and didn't really give us anything else. Bad move by Apple.

@CocaCola All that money and your website is that trash? Go look at Pepsi's website. I will now be drinking @pepsi!!!

4.3.2.1 Consumer-Brand Identification and Consumer-Brand Disidentification

The analysis reveals that consumer-brand identification is not static. It modulates in strength depending on brand experiences such as crises, political concerns and customer satisfaction. Therefore, consumer-brand identification is depicted herein (figure 8) as a spectrum, with identification at one end and disidentification at the other. Positive perceptions and experiences can guide the individual towards the identification end while negative opinions and situations can lead closer to the disidentification end, strengthening or weakening the construct to the point that an individual who once identifies with a brand now disidentifies with the brand and vice versa.



Figure 8 The Identification-Disidentification Spectrum and their motivations

The following quotes show various levels of identification or disidentification with the brand. These quotes reveal how disappointment with perceived quality, tastes and corporate practices drives disidentification among people who previously identified with the brand and identification with someone who either disidentifies with the brand or were neutral. For more, see Appendix D (J).

Try as I might, I can NEVER get used to #CokeZero. 'New taste'; yeah right. You've made it worse! Eekh!

Remember when we used to look forward to Apple events. But now we dread which feature will be cut.

@Loreal is this how you are presenting them now? If so I won't be buying it anymore.

The move along the spectrum not only has potential to hurt the brand, in terms of lost sales and profits, but also broken brand loyalty. As seen within the posts below the move to disidentification can cause a break in the relationship which also hurts the individual, who feels disappointed in the brand. These break-ups are often facilitated by breakdowns in poor brand experience, customer service and the brands own customer-relationship management programme. Therefore, it is important that companies manage these aspects of the customer

experience as individuals will share the reasons for the dissolution of the consumer-brand relationship and the way the break-up made them feel, revealed in comments below. For more quotes, kindly see Appendix (J).

I miss Loreal already 😞❤️🐱?

Today I really missing #SteveJobs. This is the first year when I didn't buy any product from #Apple since October 2008.

The observations in this study reveal that identification can be a conflicting process for consumers. Affective aspects can override cognitive concerns to ensure that the individuals identify with the brand. Consequently, while the consumer thinks the brand is unscrupulous in business practices or the products are unhealthy, the performance, taste and feel of its products stops disidentification from taking root in the individual, causing him or her to ignore the negative aspects of the brand perception. For example, an individual who believes that soft drinks are bad for the health but loves the taste of Coca-Cola or who loves Apple products but recognises some product inconsistencies:

I love #Apple products, but how many iMac 'brain-farts' must I put up with? Random zoom and the amazing rogue mouse

I don't know what life-shortening compounds they've put in it, but new @CokeZero tastes amazing. Too amazing to care about life-shortening.

4.3.3 Markers of Community on social media

I found that the social media brand community has the key markers of community as outlined by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) regarding moral responsibility, shared consciousness and traditions and rituals. However, I discovered that there are additional signs or markers of brand community within the social media environment, i.e. engagement, creativity and individualisation. These are considered markers of community because they must be present for the community to be sustainable, active and useful.

Moral Responsibility

In the context of the social media brand community moral responsibility is co-created between administrators and users. The moral responsibilities are determined by setting and conforming to the rules and traditions of the community. These rules and traditions are developed between the managers as well as the users. The concept of co-creation here is important to the individual

sense of ownership with the brand and community as well as the social capital among members of the collective and beyond. Therefore, users who are involved in the collaboration are celebrated by other users and managers. Setting and participating within these rules and traditions signify an individual's sense of moral responsibility to the community and other members as well as a self-community connection. The more individuals develop this sense of moral responsibility, the stronger the community has the potential to become. This study supports Muniz and O'Quinn's (2001) determination that moral responsibility is an essential marker of community and further discusses our shared beliefs in this regard in chapter five section (5.2.7).

Below is a sample of the rules from an iPhone fan page on Facebook. These rules set the tone for the moral responsibility and expectations of behaviour in the group. These rules were co-created between the members and the comments reflect this due to highlighting the member(s) who helped create the rules:

Android fanboys shouldn't mind if someone cracks a joke on Android OS. They need to realise what kind of place they have joined at the first place. Better unjoin the group than creating havoc or any kind of hatred.

Any kind of discussion on Android OS or Android devices is strictly prohibited. It just piles up unnecessary comments & wall posts. Take help of popular websites if you want help for non-Apple devices. We strongly stick to Apple related news and nothing else. Do not start hatred towards Android or the users of Android. You will be warned just once if you try to aim anything towards Android or Android users.

We allow you to ask for off-topic questions inside the group but the posts will be deleted when the purpose is served. Please stick to technology or web related off-topics ONLY. We still don't encourage you to talk about Android. Read Rule #7 & 8. (We are including this rule just because we don't want to disappoint our members who are very tech savvy as much as we are)

You can wish your friends and other fellow members on their birthday by starting new wall posts. There will be no limit to the number of wall posts at the moment.

Posting Off-Topic photo comments on help posts is strictly prohibited.

Those who are asking for help and those who are helping can post screenshots or photos related to the matter. “Trolling” & “rage” pictures will be deleted. Those members who likes to post photo comments must do it on other posts.

The following are comments under said rules which shows a level of engagement with the rules and the desire for credit to be given for the act of co-creation of the culture within the community:

USER101- When did the rules here were changed to iLAW? Coz I remember Me n USER 102 were discussing somewhere few days back that v should rename the rules to iLAW.. I guess the topic started with Aaila or something.

Administrator - Rule #22 was added by USER 101 & iLaw was added by USER 102

Shared Consciousness

Shared consciousness, in this context, is based on a shared interest and/or use in the brand. Users show their search for shared consciousness by requesting whether other members had similar reactions to theirs to some aspect of the brand, as seen below:

Haha, fangirled over the kiss for no reason. Who else?

Did anyone else come here because they heard the Electro Swing?

While wearing Apple Watch, your Mac senses when you're nearby & logs you in automatically. It's ready to use as soon as you wake it up. #OS3

Is it me or are @Apple events & products underwhelming. Used to be excited for a new release. It's like is that it? #allfluff. #macbook2016

@Apple is acting like every person with an iPhone doesn't have this problem <https://t.co/aVgp7JC0GX>

One can link shared consciousness to desire to engage with the community. Such is the motivator behind Coca Cola's #Shareacoke campaign, which yielded responses in which

people share their use of the brand and how it enhances their relationships to their community, friends and family. Therefore, shared consciousness leads to behavioural consequences such as support for the community's initiatives. This support shows commitment to the community, that can operate separately from the brand because it represents the relationship with the group of individuals and what that group of individuals signify to the member:

It really depends on who you already have community with and what their interests are because if you have connection with somebody and something's important to them and of value to them then whether you are aware of what the situation is or not you will be more open to hearing it and saying, I am going to support you, what is it. So I think that's where you see some of that, identity is still with people connecting with people and saying 'I align with you. Our core values align, so if you are having issues here, we are probably aligned on that so let me know what's happening and I'll support you or I'll be there for you, or even just vicariously support you either way'. So I think in that way people still identify, there's still that connection with people. Again it's just the different tools that we use. (US-based Social Media Consultant and Community Manager)

Shared values are a measure of shared consciousness reflected within the social media brand communities, as evidenced by the support for the value of diversity in L'Oréal's community, innovation in Apple's and community in Coca-Cola. This supports the work of Tuskej, Golob and Podnar (2013) who show shared values as a precursor to consumer-brand identification. Recognising shared values within the context of the social media brand communities, this study proposes that shared values and shared consciousness are therefore antecedents of consumer-community identification as well.

We are so proud to announce these two gorgeous women @NeelamKG & @iammariaborges are the new faces of Loreal Paris
<https://t.co/l6Lh8IsxzF>

Thank you @LOrealParisUK for making this campaign so diverse! Happy to see beautiful #WOC representing. 🍷

Rituals and Traditions

This study determines that rituals and traditions form the norms of social media brand community engagement. These rituals and traditions are observed across all the social network platforms and build the perception among individuals that their posts will be seen and responded to by brand, administrator or other member. Considering the links to moral responsibility, discussed above, these rituals therefore, contribute to consumer-brand identification and the consumer-brand relationship. Examples of rituals observed within the communities include live tweeting, posting on Snapchat, Instagram Stories, Facebook Stories or the live version of these social media sites with brand-related information following a major launch or event. For instance, the following quotes for Apple events show live reaction to the news of major brand launches for these companies. There are more quotes in Appendix D (K)

I truly hope there are people out there that don't upgrade every single year.

#Apple #AirPod #iPhone7PreOrder #iPhone #AppleEvents #chaching

After watching the Keynote last Night, safe to say Window's won this round. I am disappointed, apple.

The display of use of product/brand via selfies or videos is not only a tool of self-expression, it is a ritual, in which people at different phases of the purchasing process share their use or anticipated use of the brand. A popular phenomenon, on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and SnapChat is that of the unboxing video, often with the hashtag #unbox which shows the individuals opening their tech and giving honest first impressions with the community. Unboxing is becoming a trend in makeup brands such as L'Oréal for discussions and first impressions on packaging, appearance, utility aspects such as colour and feel of the product on the skin, often with trials of make-up or hair product application to give a review. This ritual or tradition has the potential to influence the consumption decisions of the other members of the community who can through their honest reviews get a feel for the utilitarian and important features of the product. More quotes are presented at Appendix D (K)

Unboxing Macintosh PowerBook 1400. Still complete including manual book. Apple support card. @makemac <https://t.co/tHk4SkQw9l>

Giving reviews or progress about the workings of the product/troubleshooting requests is a pertinent tradition present in all aspects of the social media brand community. Reviews may be the most important ritual from the brand's perspective because it helps to establish the brand

positioning and gauge whether the brand positioning. Reviews, as a tradition, are also highly important because they also act as engagement, which is good for the brand's social media reputation and they also signal a sense of moral responsibility, which is good for the community. They are also useful for the individual as they provide sound and unbiased guidance to aid the decision making process while displaying reviewer creativity and knowledge, thus building their social capital within the community:

*Updating to #watchOS3 is a nightmare! Been going for 2 hours with 2
hours to go! #apple #applewatch*

Watch OS3 is like Whoa! Great job @Apple

*Watch OS3 is currently being (slowly) installed on my Watch. iOS 10 has
been good so I'm hoping this won't go <https://t.co/FxzuCph16w> :)*

4.3.4 Social Media Engagement, Community Development and Identity

These observations are critical to the discussion since the markers of community inspire continued interactions with the social media collective. Engagement is a proven additional marker within these communities based on the investment brands and individuals make to ensure that the platforms are engaging. Brands within this study inspire engagement by creating dedicated customer support profiles such as @applesupport that encourage users to share their stories and experience and the managers will contact the user and facilitate the ease of the issue. They also create specific sites to show their community work such as @lorealdiversity to connect with the community on the basis of shared values and generate discussion about an important topic. The brands also create engagement by encouraging the users to share content on specific campaigns with either a prize or prestige to be won, e.g., share a coke or the real thing hashtags on social media. Using the social media tools in these manner means the brands are engaged in a way that goes beyond usual marketing communications purposes of convincing audience to purchase to positioning the brand as one that is truly interested in the interest of their consumers and replies and fixes issues appropriately, cares about the issues of its community and loves to see the happiness of its customers. This engagement actions improve the relationship and is heralded by consumers who mention the brand and the handle, RT the solutions and publicly thank the organisation for the assistance saying things this is 'why I love Apple' or this is 'why I love Coca-Cola' etc. It is essential for a brand to nurture the process of engagement as highlighted by Social Media professional and community manager and respondent in an in-depth interview:

I encourage them to look for low hanging fruit. So we look at the reviews over hundreds of review sites and then engage people who have given positive or negative reviews and that's the kind of conversations I have with the brands is let's start with these people and their circle of influence.

They have already raised their hands and let you know they want to publically be affiliated with their approval or rejection of your brand. Let's engage them because then we can learn what their true concerns are. This is someone who already has a vested interest in the brand either from the fact that they like it they are passionate about it or they disapprove but either way they have raised their hand to let you know. The next stage is engaging those who instigated and getting to know their circle of influence, who they are contacting, where they're spending their time and I encourage them to look for the commonalities. (US-based Social Media Consultant and Community Manager)

Therefore, the brands are more proactive in generating engagement from the social media community. They encourage users to give reviews, make connections with influencers who can then motivate their fans to engage with the brand on social media and purchase the brand for their own use and share/incorporate user-generated content within their own branded content. For instance, within the following posts, the brands' official profiles are filled with requests for feedback or questions and receives responses and engagement in the form of mentions, retweets and reposts, likes and reactions:

We're always eager to hear feedback and suggestions from our customers.

You can tell us more here: <https://t.co/ODFtc9V7Tq>

User retweeted Apple Support @AppleSupport Mar 23 Replying to @user go ahead and ask your question via DM and we can get started. 0 replies 1 retweet 1 like

Loreal Paris UK - Thanks for your review on how you stick to products that work well for your skin

Conversely, individuals within social media communities build engagement in a variety of ways that reflect their level of identification with the brand or the community. According to

the following, individuals make demands of the brands. The reaction of the brands to these demands show that the engagement is not a one-way process:

@Apple the new swipe up menu is awful. Change it back

Why #apple? This may be my last #iPhone. Please don't sneak an update that would disallowed using my phone without buying a new one!

Another user-led means of engagement is the suggestions that users make to the brands. These suggestions are aimed at making the brand reflect the needs of the users:

@tim_cook @gruber watch OS3: swipe up should invoke dock, not button. Would be much easier and is used much more often than the settings

@LOrealParisUK when will you be bringing the infallible pro glow to England?? I'm DYYYYYYING to use it and review it!!!

Dear @CokeZero, can you stop putting names on sodas, I feel like I'm drinking someone else's drink. Plus I never can find my own name.

Furthermore, individuals engage with the brand community to share the specifics of the brand that they love and/or hate. These comments are designed to show what about the brand causes the identification and what may pose a threat to the relationship. There are more quotes available at Appendix D (L).

@AppleSupport I love the new "dock" feature, too. Watch OS3 has made this watch run so much better.

I love the @LOrealParisUK / Princes Trust advert so much meaning behind it!

@CokeZero how come you've changed the taste of zero? Tried yday was not impressed. Preferred old one.

Engagement is also reflected in the praise the user will give for positive customer service:

@LOrealParisUK amazing service at #Watford store from #eve. Thankyou for making me look glamorous!! #happy #makeup

An engaged consumer will repeat the brand slogan within the community and with their own followers:

Always Coca cola

Engaged consumers give reviews on branded content and tell the brand how to garner their custom:

I think coca cola are taking the piss with this add

@ProcterGamble if you put athletes on the packaging, I will buy. Off to finish my @alexmorgan13 @CokeZero #thatsGold #Rio2016 #conversion

A user who is engaged in social media brand communities will share the compliments of the brand and positive comparisons to competitors:

Well done @CokeZero ! I love your new improved taste! I'll start buying you instead of @PepsiMaxUK

Thank you for making the best soda in the world. @CocaCola

Here I am stuck drinking crap @pepsi product and there's a @CocaCola ad taunting me <https://t.co/G3oqHSMRks>

Considering the engagement between the brand and the individuals, this research finds that the essential aim of positioning the brand within the mind of the consumer in a pre-determined manner is achieved in some cases but not in others. For instance, the #shareacoke campaign was designed to have the consumer feel like coke is the brand to bring families together. This is reflected in much of what the public thinks about the brand. For example, within an interview, the respondent indicates that she associates Coca Cola with sharing and having a good time with family and friends. Following this conversation in the #brandchat hashtag, a Twitter community that gathers weekly to discuss brand related matters, concurred with this image of the Coca Cola brand as seen below:

People like to share experiences with others. Even if it's just drinking a #coke or #drpepper #brandchat

People love something they can get their hands on and share with friends.

People love to feel included! #brandchat

Engaged brands inspire community and create the culture of individual engagement within the space:

Consumer interaction works. Customers want to be heard always.

The marker of creativity, identified within this study, is measured by the use of the brand to experiment with the look and the art as well. The following terms relate to creativity observed in the social media brand communities: experiment, tried, attempted, created, made up, innovation, taking risks, designs, spices up, revolutionary. The creativity is seen in blogs or social media posts that showcase the results of these creative acts as a means of building influence in the community which has implications for self-esteem, feelings of accomplishments, confidence and relationship to the community and brand. There is also the anticipation of being creative with the product or brand. The brand that keeps innovation is celebrated by those who in their online discussions show themselves to be creative:

@Converse allows customers to create their own sneakers designs. What better way to express yourself?

The creativity that allows for self-expression does not even have to be centred on the brand. Alternatively, the creativity can represent what the brand allows the individual to develop. For example, Apple allows fans to create beautiful photos and audio-visual representations of things they love under the hashtag #takenwithaniPhone. Such a capability facilitates self-expression and community/brand relationships with the consumers. Alternatively, artists can use their devices for their artistic endeavours and are happy to share that with the apple and wider social media community:

*Time to do some drawing and photo editing on my new @Apple #pencil
#ipadpro #photoshop #thenextpicasso... <https://t.co/3UZFW1xof1>*

*Experimented with some @Loreal #colorista spray today! Kinda like it
#pinkhair*

*Walk home #photography #vscocam #coventry #edgy #river #scirburnalove
#iphone #iphone7 #iphone6? <https://t.co/VWtjOrUVR0>*

The marker of individualisation, uniquely revealed in this study, refers to the use of the brand to express one's meaning and self-definitions. These individualisations mean that the community have to give the individuals the means to express themselves, either their needs or desires or their values for response from others to be useful and successful.

*I loves me ♡♡, when I get called to play a role I go all out #lorealparis
#voluminouslashes #loreal eyeliner #maybelline #foundation #wetnwild
#lipcolor*

*I'm an @apple person but seriously...iOS10 and watch OS3 are
phenomenal*

I discovered that the social media brand community enables displays of individualisation whereby members show the use of the brand in relation to how they see themselves. Individualisation is vital to the social media brand community member. This is done in several ways including the use of the brand within the profile name (e.g., @ipodlover), showing how the brand matches personal interest (e.g., @greeneyedglam and L'Oréal), and using the brands to build one's reputation and financial ambitions (e.g., bloggers on influenster, a social network site designed to build influence on a specific topic area). A consequence of individualisation in the brand community is the integration of the brand into the identity of the individual who is susceptible to external validation and who is seeking ego validation:

The engagement on social media acts as a conscious search for external reinforcement of identity. This includes cultural and personal identities in relation to the individual. (UK-based Social Media Psychologist)

The ego validation achieved. It depends on the individual again. But being associated with the brand can bring about all the positive feelings that they have with the brand. it can increase self-esteem if the person is feeling mainly positive about the brand or it could be the connection the brand gives you to others that helps your self-esteem so it entirely depends and if the person is incapable of affording the brands they love that can influence their self-esteem in a negative way as opposed to positively. (Social Media Psychologist, The Netherlands)

Another consequence is the perception of enhanced identity and self-esteem by use of the brand in association with someone who uses or champions the brand based on the positive message of brand overall or of a specific campaign:

*When your Women is a @LOrealParisUK Girl #Winning ;)
@LydiaEmillen <https://t.co/fsBuoELjdc>*

E.g., This is the new Coca-Cola campaign to support Latinos. A very good idea! Proud to be Latinos #DéjateVer

4.3.5 Community Hierarchy

Contrary to established thought in the research community, I discovered that the social media brand community is evolving and becoming sophisticated enough for a hierarchy based on member types and behavioural patterns. The identification of a hierarchy is important since there are consequences to identity, identification and the consumer-brand relationship. The hierarchy is herein determined by the value the member adds to the community. The influence was assessed based on the level of engagement or response to posts by others within the environment, which determined the respective positioning with social media brand community. These terms were used based on the usefulness of content, level of activity and the type of content posted. The layout is detailed as follows:

Influencer – This member guides the opinions of others in the community and therefore provides great value to the brand and the community. They may also be the reason individuals purchase the brand or join the community. Their actions affect the development of consumer-brand and consumer-community identification. They come in the form of celebrity, social media personality, a regular individual or even an industry blog.

Active member – These members are proactive in engaging with the community. They create posts that are useful and entertaining to the other users within the community. Active participation can generate identification in self and in other members who engage with the community and therefore these users have an evident value to the community.

Passive member – these users do not create or engage actively but are responsive either by liking or commenting on the posts within the community. They are reactive and not proactive. Their presence is not necessarily useful or valuable but they make up a number and at least return to the community for information and knowledge and are being influenced towards consumer-brand identification or consumer-brand relationship.

Lurker – these are the users who are members of the community but do not participate at all either by creating or reacting. This research finds that many, especially in the case of Facebook page likes, have forgotten they joined the page and due to the algorithm manipulations of social media do not see the content of the page to react even in a passive manner. Their value to the brand is titular and serves to fill a number or metric in the community or fan page.

Opportunist – those who recognise the popularity of the community and post their own content that may or may not be related to the brand. These posts are designed to ride the commitment or popularity within the community and build the creators profile. They can often disguise themselves as influencers or active members of the community. While the other types of use of the brand can lead to identification and relationship, this one will not because there is not the expectation of brand-related support.

Membership within the hierarchy in social media is found to be fluid with two main categories of membership:

Transitory or transient members are those who only posts for a short time, with no signs of influence on identity or community support. Tweets may be transitory but may show sense or expression of identity even though the individual only tweets or engages with the community a handful of times.

Committed or long-term members are regular posters and tweeters, retweeters who show up in more than one conversation or hashtag brand related, mentions and replies, use the brand to build influence in the community.

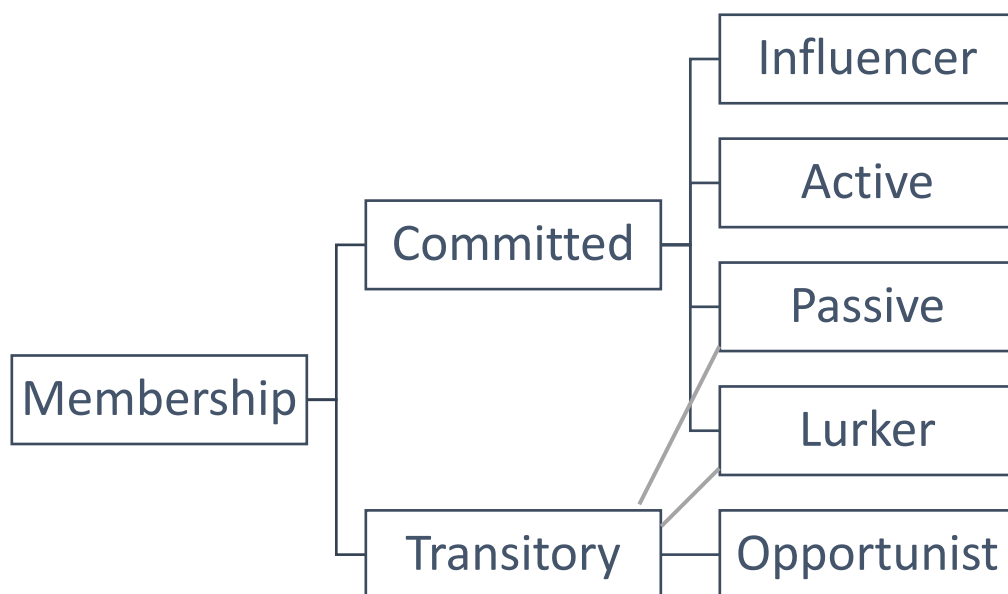


Figure 9 The hierarchy within the social media brand communities

The hierarchies are developed based on their level of activity within the platform, the level of commitment they display to the brand and the community plus the types of content posted. Influencers and active users are committed, opportunistic users are transitory, while passive users and lurkers can abide under both transitory and committed members.

The community hierarchy helps to gain trust for users to ask questions:

*I currently have an #iPhone5s. Should I upgrade to an #iPhone7?? #Apple
#September16? #iPhone7launch pic.twitter.com/xJmk6Ajcr7*

*Can you have slide to unlock and Touch ID on iOS 10?! Sometimes I don't
want to use my fingerprint other times I do #apple #ios10*

The community hierarchy gives legitimacy to the concept of reviews. The structure is transparent and allows users to be able to know the veracity of the opinions being shared about the brand or the experience. Therefore, posts like those below can be trusted for their usefulness and authenticity. There are more quotes at Appendix D (M1).

*Unplugging my #iPhone6 just dropped me from 100% charged to 96%
charged. Seriously, a fire-breathing #android is better than #apple crap.*

*While wearing Apple Watch, your Mac senses when you're nearby & logs
you in automatically. It's ready to use as soon as you wake it up. #OS3*

While it adds credibility to the reviews, the existence of a hierarchy in this context does not limit who can share in the community. The hierarchy develops authentically as individuals engage and members gain a perspective of who is knowledgeable about the brand. Members indicate those who are useful within the community and in such a manner the hierarchy is user determined.

4.3.6. Self-Brand and Self-Community Match in Consumer-brand Identification and Consumer Relationships

Individuals use the community to express the self-brand match, which shows the importance of the community in developing and expressing consumer-brand identification. The self-brand match can be reflected in the use of the brand to achieve a specific look:

*Did apple learn nothing from google glass? People love technology till it
makes them look like tools. #AirPods*

Self-brand match is also a sign of national value and quality:

*This #IPod was lost in year 2012 from me, thought it went while I sold my
old car n use to plug this in there. Got it today from one of the bags stored
in storeroom. It still works and it's made in USA n it was made during year*

2008 or 09. Not an #Apple user but still made my day when it turned on and thinking about the quality.

It can also display a sense of superiority or high self-esteem:

*One thing for certain you ain't ever hear of a iPhone blowing up #apple
#iPhone*

Personality traits are also shown in the discussions of the self-brand match on these social media platforms:

So swipe to unlock is gone and the gun emoji. I don't like change hence why I am still on version 8.2 and that was an accident #apple

*#iPhone7 on is way ... #apple #appleaddictisadisease ? #? #ios10
<https://t.co/mrUj4ypRRq>*

Looking more into the Apple Watch OS3 "Breathe" app - think it applies in lots of circumstances in my life!

The self-brand match sets expectations from chosen brands:

Stability is more than a feature why I look for Apple products. What's yours? #apple #macOSSierra #CrossoverLif

As a 20+ year Apple computer fan I'm seriously concerned and disappointed in the latest product refresh. You can do better Apple. #Apple

Like take Apple for instance. Before anything else they're a computer that made a 📱 so you automatically shouldn't expect greatness y'know.

The self-brand match also displays on social media what one finds important:

My dad won't get iOS10 because Apple would take away his gun emoji?

I'll take @LOrealParisUK over all the high end makeup/hair/skincare in the world, every single day...they ALWAYS do it best #Loreal #love

4.4 Online Drivers of Consumer-Brand Identification

The online drivers of consumer-brand identification within social media brand communities are categorised, herein, as affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects of social media brand

community engagement. The affective drivers are self-expression needs, feeling integrated into the brand story, community-self connection, love, brand value match and emotional consequences related to the use of the brand and participation within the social media brand community, while cognitive drivers are the self-brand match, consumer expectations, identity completion, brand and product knowledge. The behavioural drivers or motivators are information search, knowledge share, language, review and opinion share and requests, in sum the behaviours that are markers of engagement within the online environment. These drivers were gleaned based on the conversations between members within the social media community and are discussed in more detail in the next few paragraphs.

4.4.1 Affective Drivers of Consumer-Brand Identification

The affective drivers relate to the emotions and attitudes towards the search for self and community via the brand. The first of these identified in the brand communities under investigation is the need for self-expression. Using brands to express identity on social media fulfils the need for ego validation. The need to “show-off” to others, especially those who are the objects of social comparison, drives the choice of brands with which to identify combined with the lack of validation received previous to using the said brands or social media tools to express one’s self. The meaning of the brand helps one to self-express as a brand follower or person. The self-expression is validated by likes and positive reactions to one’s posts which then feeds the feeling of ego validation:

“Showing off and social comparison. It is about ego validation. That’s how the Facebook “like” works – once you get one, you want more.” “The need to impress ties into ego validation – wanting to feel looked up to among others. People are trying draw state from external sources. But fundamentally it is a way of saying we are doing well for ourselves and we need to feel that validation.” (Social Media Psychologist, The Netherlands)

A second affective online driver of consumer-brand identification is the tangible connection to the brand story because of engagement with the social media brand community. The feeling of belongingness that comes from psychological membership with the community and the thought of contributing to the development of a brand, drives the relationship with the community and with the brand and allows an individual to feel connected to the brand’s story thereby driving or motivating a measure of consumer-brand identification. This feeling of connection to the brand leads to consumer-brand identification is connected to the sense of brand ownership seen in posts in consumer-created fan groups and pages such as those below:

It is about the good feeling. When you are in a winning group people love that you know we are on the winning. And we share that bond. (Quote of Social Media Psychologist, Netherlands)

For example, now the cubs are winning and all of a sudden people start identifying with 'oh my gosh the cubs, oh my gosh I feel like them and for a long time I went without any affirmation to what I am doing and now all of a sudden you win. I understand the struggle'. I have seen those comments where people would never have consumed the brand before but now they identify with something that's out there highly visible about the brand and they share with their friends, their own personal take on it. (Quote of Social Media Professional and Community Manager, USA)

That personalization is valued by today's customer. Many want to be a part of the brand & define how they experience it. People like to share experiences with others. Even if it's just drinking a #coke or #drpepper

Additionally, the community-self connection is an affective online driver that encompasses both emotional bonds and positive attitudes towards the community. The happiness and love that emerges as a relation to the engagement with the community creates a community-self match, which engineers consumer-brand identification and consumer-community identification. This is observed in tweets, Facebook posts and comments and Instagram posts that celebrate the usefulness and engaging nature of the community and declare the love for each other:

I think you still have that social foundation that like attracts like, originally when they see people excited and doing things within all the social platforms and communicating about things that they're interested in then people do identify, they do jump in and they see that these are people who have similar interests to me, whether they match who I am exactly in values or even in personality style, may or may not be a good fit, we'll find that out later but we have something in common and so we reach out and connect with them online (US-based Social Media Consultant and Community Manager)

*Saw a ton of people wearing apple watches at the Apple Store, of course
(most of the employees). Felt right at home.*

*Can we as an iPhone “family” all go with the excuse that the “latest” IOS
update removes one from all WhatsApp groups?*

*For y’all who like makeup - @Loreal Infallible Paints lip colour is
incredible and so pigmented*

The love for the brand is an online driver of consumer-brand identification. Based on the observations within the community, this love is developed due to positive utilitarian and online experiences between the brand and the consumer. As the love for the brand increases, the link between individual consumer values and those of the brand grow stronger and strengthens the consumer-brand identification. Brand love does not necessarily result in consumer-community identification but can act as a moderator in its development:

*@AppleSupport I love the new “dock” feature, too. Watch OS3 has made
this watch run so much better.*

*Thank you for reviewing these products, I will definitely try them out:).... I
love love love Loreal products!!!*

I love Coca-Cola!!

The emotional consequences related to the use of the brand or association with the brand community such as happiness, joy, pride and excitement are also affective motivators of consumer-brand identification and consumer-community identification. These emotional consequences lead to the realisation that there is a self-brand connection and thus the consumer identification with the brand and community that inspires these positive attitudes:

*Thank you @LOrealParisUK for making this campaign so diverse! Happy
to see beautiful #WOC representing. 🙌*

*I’m so happy they’re finally using men to advertise their products You go,
L’Oréal!!!!*

*I’m happy for this commercial because I truly love L’Oréal Paris product
they are amazing I’m glad for the new shades for deeper skin tones we all*

*need that because most of us like myself mix two foundation in order to get
the perfect shade..... kudos L'Oréal*

4.4.2 Cognitive Drivers of Consumer-Brand Identification

The cognitive drivers of consumer-brand identification are reflected on social media by persons noting the cognitive processes that lead to the realisation of a self-brand connection. The use of words such as think, realise, appreciate, and know, inform the research and the community of the thoughts of the individual towards the brand. The cognitive process is not always cleanly separated from the affective process as this research shows they are often displayed simultaneously. The first cognitive driver noted is the self-brand match which is developed by acknowledging a similarity between one's self and the image or value communicated by the brand:

*I think bottle redesigning is a great risk yet @CocaCola has done it well
every time*

*iOS 10, barely figure it out. All I keep thinking is how the heck are all the
baby boomers going to figure this out. #iOS10 #iPhone7*

*I think @Apple is the number one brand for introducing something new to
the market, they are always "just-in-time!"*

The expectations of the consumer built via online and offline communications present a perception in the mind of the individual of what can be accomplished concerning their identity and community goals (e.g. self-completion, fit-in). These expectations and the perceptions of their fulfilment are cognitive drivers of consumer-brand and consumer-community identification as they are based on the mental evaluations of the brand, community and their role in the individuals' life:

*I have normal skin so I think I'm going to try the foundation. I use the pro
glow and I love it.*

A girl isn't complete without her lashes ? ❤️~lorealparis

Could not live without #cokezero right now

The level of brand and product knowledge received via participation within the social media brand community creates a cognitive layer of consumer-brand identification. This leads to the trust, loyalty and brand preference that a brand benefits from due to the consumer confidence

in the brand to deliver on its promise based on their knowledge of product quality, brand meaning and positioning:

Stability is more than a feature why I look for Apple products. What's yours? #apple #macOSSierra #CrossoverLif

2016 MacBook Pro being compared → <https://bhpho.to/2gFnhoo> VS

2015 → <http://amzn.to/2nhcxPO> best windows alternative!

<http://amzn.to/2modGHR> my suggested configurations/drives in description! Make sure to smash that like button so more eyes see this video! If you enjoyed it please share it as well on forums, Facebook groups, etc. When you know it will help someone!

4.4.3 Behavioural Drivers of Consumer-Brand Identification

The online behavioural drivers of consumer-brand identification are all linked to engagement behaviours in the social media brand community. They include information search, language, knowledge share, review or opinions share and requests and responses comments to brand-related posts within the community. These actions influence consumer-brand identification directly and indirectly by generating the cognitive and affective process of identification:

What I've seen is they are either really positive like a positive testimonial or they really like this. I see a lot of correlation where they will say 'I'm like this'. 'I enjoyed venture2' 'Liked it'. 'I appreciate good quality like this'. I've seen people leave comments like that and then the big thing is sharing, I look at who they share it with and what they say when they are sharing it. Timing often coincides with a major event in the brand story.

(US-based Social Media Consultant and Community Manager)

4.4.4 Consumer-Brand Identification, Social Media Community and Identity

Identification with the brand and community allows an individual to be more easily socialised into that community's culture. Social media is a strong socialisation tool for those within the community who are submerged within the use of the media, regardless of age. The confidence with the veracity of the information within this media shapes their worldview and perspectives on themselves and their community. This socialisation influences the way they speak and interact with each other. For example, the increasing use of emojis (as its own type of body language) is a form of socialisation into the use of appropriate language for the community.

Learning and abiding by the rules is a signal of one's desire to psychological membership of the community. Conformity shows respect for the traditions of the community:

“This is slowly becoming the case. As more and more individuals especially those in Generation Z start to use social media as a means of not only socialisation but socialising. There is a strategic use of emojis as opposed to the strategic use of body language. How we express ourselves, starts to form through emojis. (Social Media Psychologist, The Netherlands)

Furthermore, brands act as a symbol of socialisation to indicate that individuals are conforming to a specific society or segment of society. Brands are a signal to what category one identifies with. Therefore, a brand is both something to identify with and to signal one's social identification. The adoption of a brand is based, therefore, on socialisation as a result of a self-brand match but also a self-community match. Socialisation within a brand community nurtures the self-brand and the self-community match. The power of socialisation in social media is due to the strength of consumer ability to compare themselves to each other. This power enhances our desire to express uniqueness or fit with those who are the objects of social comparison. The ease of self-expression caters to those who are always on a stage and need to be positively viewed by their audience. This is a result of the search for identity for which brands and communities act as catalysts:

“Individuals now have the capability to display and flaunt their possessions. We like to show it off to, in psychology terms the imaginary audience, so individuals identity become much more assimilated into and with the brands among the individuals who seek external validation more so than those who do not. The use of social media is increasing our social comparison. We like to compare notes with other people and this has become more pronounced because we are trying to find our individuality and in a sense brands give us this outlet to associate with them on identity basis.” (Social Media Psychologist, The Netherlands)

4.4.5 Consumer-Brand Identification offline vs Consumer-Brand Identification Online

In comparing the development of consumer-brand identification in online and offline iterations, there are several major differences. Firstly, the social media brand communities engineer, behavioural drivers and consequences of consumer-brand identification in addition to the

affective and cognitive drivers identified regarding offline CBI development. Secondly, while the purpose of the development of consumer-brand identification remains the same, the scope for the social media has expanded with influences being fed from a global community in real-time rather than simply marketing communications and the imagined community, with its location-based restrictions. Therefore, social media is proving to be both the reason for identification as well as the tool of expressing the identification. Since brands and other users are engaged within the social media community, the information they share assist in the development of consumer-brand identification. In a third and connected point, the consumer-brand identification witnessed due to social media is a result of more proactive behaviours on the part of the users. Their engagement and creativity, showcased in reviews, tutorials, advertising creations, blogs and other forms of user-generated content, mean that they take more responsibility for their own identification with the brand and the community. Consequently, the ease of social media brand communities, in facilitating the use of brands as a tool of self-expression, has increased the tribal nature of consumer-brand identification, whereby users visit the community to develop their views based on those of similar community members:

The scope has changed. It is about experience. It is about potential for expression and positionality. It is about connection to brand, self and community. However, the scope of influences to Consumer-brand identification has changed and become interactive, global and constant. Constant due to 24/7 membership in the online brand community that can contact you anytime via notifications, retweets, shares, information requests etc. Interactive and global – able to share brand and non-brand related experiences with the members of the community. For example multiple wishes of happy independence to members of the Apple Facebook Community from the subcontinent shared by all members of the community as well as regular brand-related information search and share such as troubleshooting, product suggestions. The experiences of the global nature of the community is a potential boost to what one can learn as a member and as one's knowledge increases so does identification with members of the community as well as with the brand. ((US-based Social Media Consultant and Community Manager))

The way we socialise now is so different with the tools that we have available and the gathering places have changed which now is online, but we still are communicating and building relationships online. (Social Media Psychologist, The Netherlands)

4.4.6 Consequences of Online Consumer-Brand Identification

Concerning the consequences of online consumer-brand identification for the consumer brand relationship, the results indicate that there are affective, cognitive and behavioural consequences that links consumer-brand identification to consumer-brand relationship. The affective consequences have been revealed as brand love, brand loyalty, brand trust, possessiveness, desire, feelings of distinctiveness and belongingness, while the cognitive consequences are increased social capital, boosted self-esteem, respect, self-validation, perceptions of prestige, attraction, confidence, and brand preference. The behavioural consequences include repeat purchase, repeat engagement with the community, participation in online and offline WOM, creating user-generated content that presents the brand in a positive light, defending the brand against negative reviews or reputational attacks, sharing branded content from the company and other members. The link between these behaviours and the brand is the reciprocity they communicate between brand and user as well as the meaning of the brand integrated into the individual's identity and their lifestyle. The posts that signify this demonstrate brand visuals. Users communicate directly 'I am using this brand for', to show that the brand is a part of their life. The affective and cognitive consequences create the relationship bond and the behavioural consequences provide evidence, in more ways than money, of relationship or relationship intent on the part of the social media brand community member.

| Consumer-Brand Identification | Driver | Consequence |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Affective | Self-expression needs, show off desire, belongingness, and contribution to community, happiness, joy, pride, excitement, community-self connection, love, satisfaction. | Commitment, brand love, brand trust, community love, community loyalty, community trust, brand loyalty, possessiveness, desire, distinctiveness, belongingness |

| | | |
|-------------|--|--|
| Cognitive | The self-brand match, consumer-brand expectations, mental evaluations of the brand role in life, brand and product knowledge | Self-esteem, social capital, respect, self-validation, brand preference, rejection of negative information. |
| Behavioural | Information search, knowledge/opinion share, review, comments, engagement, creation, expression | Repeat purchase, repeat engagement, positive WOM, user-generated content, brand advocacy, brand championship |

Table 9 Representation of the drivers and consequences of Consumer-brand Identification in the context of social media brand communities

4.5. A Proposed Model of Consumer Identity and Consumer-brand Relationship Development

Based on the research results, I recognized that the process of developing consumer identification and consumer-brand relationship is multi-layered. The social media brand community contributes to this development by providing a space for individuals to inform and fulfill their identity goals. While Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) identify these essential human identity goals as affiliation, distinctiveness and prestige, I have added the need for self-expression to that list. These goals are fulfilled within social media brand communities, since the networks that support these collectives serve as venues to find similar minds while expressing one's self. Identity motives (prestige, affiliation, distinctiveness and expression) are vital features to identify, considering that it is established within research that identity drives major decisions made by individuals even consumption. This is the basis of the identity-based motivation model (Oyserman, 2009), which supported the work of the self-congruity theory, developed by Sirgy (1982) and is discussed in chapter two section 2.2.2. Individual use of consumption to develop identity and signal socialization into their society and where they can be situated in that society's social strata forms a significant basis of the consumer culture theory. The social media brand community contributes to this process due to its nature (being a consumption collective) and by acting as a tool of socialization, teaching acceptable values and how the brand supports these causes

Fulfilling one's identity goals are the route individuals take to be complete individuals in the tradition spoken of by Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1981). Therefore, they enter the social media

brand community with either the implicit or explicit goals of feeling a sense of belonging (affiliation), and being a member of a collective that allows them to feel good about themselves and their social identity (prestige). Additionally, they are able to be associated with an identity that is distinctive based on its values and contribution (distinctive) while communicating their values, opinions and self-identity (expression). Furthermore, these identity motives, independently or in collaboration with the social media brand community, generate motivators of consumer-brand identification, which this study categorizes as the affective, behavioural and cognitive features that cause individuals to connect with a brand on a values or identity basis. Affective features are those which develop the emotional connections with brands, while cognitive aspects speak to the mental process that inspires these connections. Within the context of this study, behaviours are actions within the social media brand community or offline that contribute to consumer-brand identification. These behaviours include information search, knowledge and information share, reacting, commenting and posting among other content creating actions spoken of in section 4.2.2.1 of this chapter. This study leads the way in categorizing behaviour as a motivator of consumer-brand identification and not only a consequence. These motivators also lead to consumer-community identification, which is a connection with the community based on the individual's perception of shared values, interest and identity.

The social media brand community nurtures consumer-brand and consumer-culture identification and forms its own consumer culture supported by socio-cultural norms, markers of community as well as a hierarchy and content creation. The consequences of such are also categorized as affective, behavioural and cognitive aspects that are the result of maintaining identification with the brand. These consequences are one link between the development of consumer-brand or consumer-culture identification and the development of consumer-brand relationship. They also link the development of consumer-community and consumer-brand identification with the creation and expression of a consumer identity. However, these features (consumer-brand relationship, consumer identity and consumer-community or consumer-brand identification) are also depicted as having a continuous, circular and reciprocal bond with each other that will be nurtured by the social media brand community as well as any touch points the individual has with the brand and its community offline.

The model depicted below adopts a circular visual with identity motives, consumer-community and consumer identification, consumer identity plus consumer-brand relationships being shown in a circle with arrows showing their reciprocal influence on each other. Their influence

on each other is also nurtured by the individual entering the brand community (at the centre), due to their identity motives and participating in certain content behaviours, while adhering to the markers of community, the consumer culture and the hierarchy of the community. These behaviours help to nurture consumer-brand as well as consumer-community identification, identity as well as the consumer-brand relationship. The link between identification, identity and relationship within the social media brand community is moderated by certain consequences of identification e.g. brand loyalty, brand trust, brand evangelism and others listed more thoroughly in section 4.4.6 of this chapter. The purpose of the model was to show a proposed visual or depiction of the process of consumer identity and consumer-brand relationship development within the context of the social media brand community. This model shows that these aspects are developed in relation to the nature of the community and the influence said community has on the individuals being able to create and express themselves as well the connections they develop with the brand and other consumers. Identity motivations inspire the user to enter the community. The behaviours therein drive consumer-brand and consumer-community identification whose consequences for brand and consumer lead to the development of consumer identity and the consumer-brand relationship.

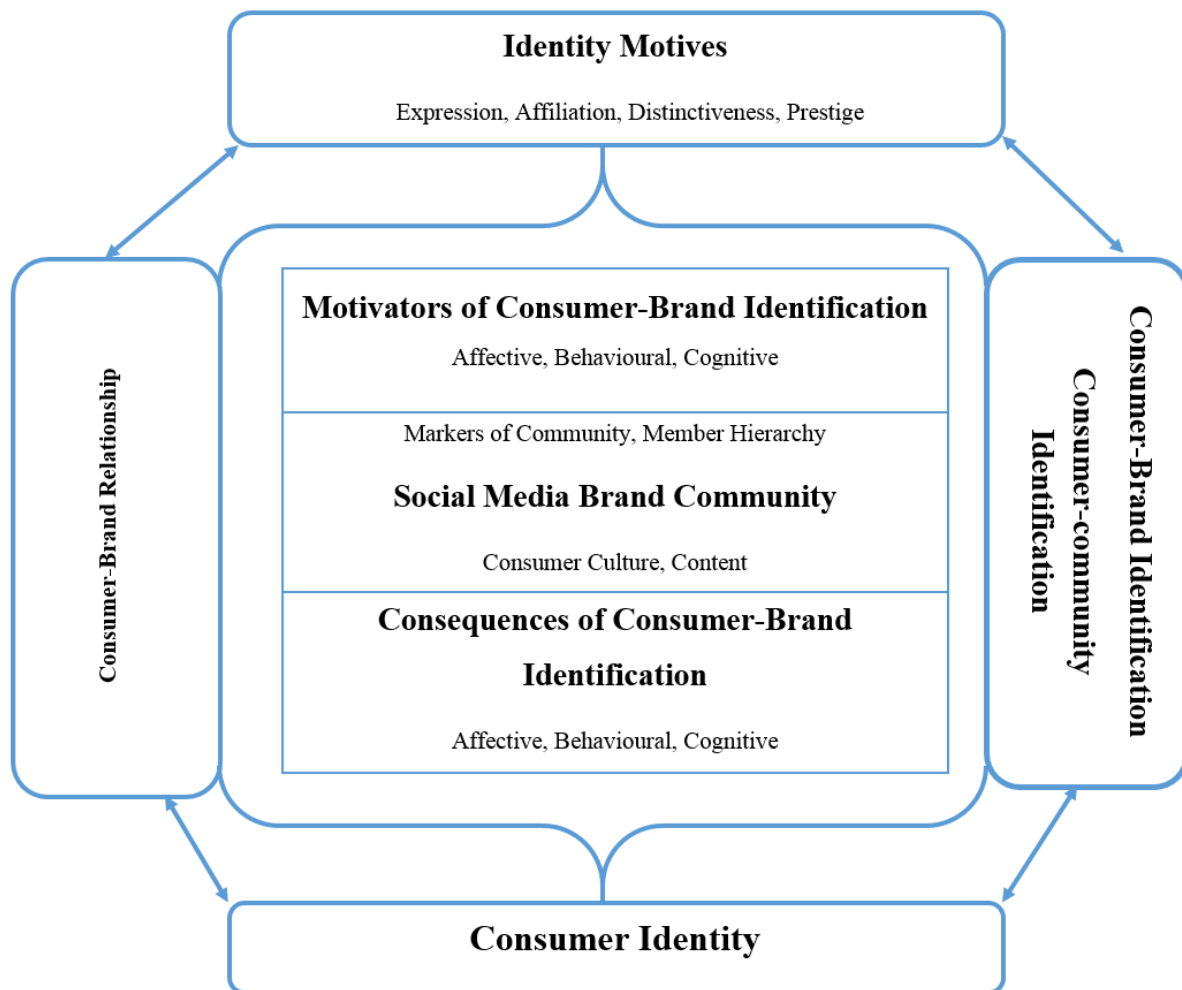


Figure 10 Conceptual model describes the process of identity creation and consumer-brand relationship development within the social media brand community.

4.6 Summary

A thematic analysis supported the incorporation of the BASIC IDs framework for data analysis. There are several categories within this study of Behaviour, Affect, Sensation, Imagery, Cognition, Interpersonal Relationships and Socio-cultural aspects with several themes within each category. These create the environment and culture that facilitate identity creation plus relationship development. The influence of social media communities on the individual's identity starts at the level of personality. There are behavioural, cognitive and affective motivators and consequences of consumer-brand identification which moderate the development of consumer identity and the consumer-brand relationship. In addition to shared rituals and traditions, shared consciousness and sense of moral responsibility, markers of community within the social media brand community are engagement, creativity and individualisation. This hierarchy within social media brand communities, as outlined in this study, is based on the manner in which one uses the community (influencer, active, passive,

lurking or opportunist) and the level of membership (committed or transitory). These roles reflect the self-categorisation of the individuals with respect to their roles within the community. The conceptual model depicts the multi-layered process of consumer identity and consumer-brand relationship development. Within the community, affective, behavioural and cognitive drivers of consumer-brand identification are developed due to the influence of the other members as well as the content and engagement therein. These lead to affective, behavioural and cognitive consequences of consumer-brand identification, further progressing to identity development and the consumer-brand relationship. These findings are significant to the research community for several reasons. First, they show the evolution of the social media brand community, which is becoming more sophisticated and inclusive of a hierarchy. Secondly, the study identifies global consumer culture as a growing influence on the development of consumer identity. This creates social status and/or tribes, not necessarily by nationality or region but by brand and social media platform allegiances. Thirdly, the findings demonstrate the real-time nature of identity creation and consumer-brand relationship development. Furthermore, these findings are significant because they prove that the process of socialisation identified within these communities affect not only the individual but the brand as well. Therefore, both brand and individual have an equal role within the development of the relationship and each other's identity. Finally, this research shows that fragmented platforms can be used to form one community based on usefulness, pragmatism and the meaning that they carry to the members. Within this study, the hashtags, brand pages and fan groups are separate platforms in their own right but create the environment, holistically, of an engaged, useful as well as successful community that benefits both brands and individuals or consumers. The next chapter will further discuss the significance of the research findings in relation to the relevant academic discourse.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

Chapter four revealed the findings of the study analysed using Thematic Analysis and the BASIC IDs framework. This study falls in line with consumer research within concepts of consumer identity, identification, brand relationships and social media brand community. As such, it provided insight into the role of social media brand community in the development of consumer identity and consumer-brand relationships. The use of netnography within a qualitative research tradition investigated how individuals use the brand and the community to construct and express themselves. These have implications not only for the individuals within the social media brand communities but in their offline selves as well. This chapter will discuss these findings in relation to consumer research literature. This chapter adopts the following structure: section 5.2 discusses the categorisations from the analytical framework while 5.3 contemplates the key observations of the research. While section 5.4 ponders the influence of community on identity, 5.5 considers the role of social media on consumer-brand relationships. 5.6 examines the conceptual model and 5.7 summarises the chapter.

5.2 Analytical Framework Discussion

5.2.1 Behaviour

Behaviour has five themes, which are engagement, creativity, expression, search and knowledge/opinion share. These are action-based features of social media traced through the posts, reactions and comments made within these communities. Behaviour is both a motivator and a consequence of identity creation plus consumer-brand relationship management. A major consideration for such a conclusion, is that behaviour is an explicit facet of the social media environment. One's searching behaviour will lead to the information and connections that form the basis of one's identification with the brand or community. Therefore, the proactive search for information and engagement with the community forms its own antecedent together with affect and cognition, which were also previously identified by researchers such as (Lam et al., 2010; Tuskej, Golob and Podnar, 2013; Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012). Behaviour is its own definitive antecedent in relation to the nature of the social media brand community. However, the research community should consider behaviour is an antecedent in the development of identification in offline contexts, even though it may not have been explicitly identified as such.

5.2.1.1 Engagement

Engagement has been given a definitive framework supported by the findings (chapter 4, section 4.2.2.1). This study conceptualises engagement as behavioural concept, with affective and cognitive antecedents as well as consequences. Consequently, engagement is the act of creating or reacting to conversations within the social media environment. One may initiate the interaction by making a post identifying one's experience with a brand or asking other's for their familiarity. Also one may make comments on the posts created by the brands, sharing one's knowledge or like, love or follow their creations. This study considers that there are hedonic and utilitarian motives to engagement, e.g. the need to self-enhance, impression management, reviews, and commerciality of the message together with the purpose of the content. Engagement has significance within the social media context because participation in the conversations signals one's investment in the outcome of the brand and community. Such investment can be emotional and psychological based on one's affective connections to the brand. However, it may also be financial, because the research shows that users of the community develop a sense of pride at the profitability of the companies they support. The engagement with the brand, in the online and offline contexts, leads not only to sales for the brand but a desire, on the part of the individual to see their brand grow in revenue as well as reputation. This need motivates further engagement with the brand and positive reviews in the social media brand community to ensure that members have positive experience. Another consequence is the desire to defend the brand against critical comments by members of competing brand communities or those who may have had a bad experience with the company. The study provides this framework of engagement behaviours (creating and reacting), its meaning (investment in brand/community success) and consequences (brand defence, contribution to a positive brand/community investment) in light of the absence of such a strong framework in previous literature. Maslowska, Malthouse and Collinger (2016) considers the lack of consensus in conceptualising engagement on the various components of the concept (behavioural and psychological) within the literature and this study provides a cohesive definition of engagement to address this lack of consensus. This study argues that engagement can't be separated from any of the components discussed in previous. It is both a motivational state, as described by Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie (2014) and an interactive process (Martinez-Lopez et al., 2017).

Engagement is a significant aspect of the success of a social media brand community. Proactive and reactive engagement on the part of the individual members are the aspects of the brand

community that builds perceptions of the environment as useful. Therefore, organisations have to adopt a deliberate approach to the social media environment and create an atmosphere across the relevant platforms that inspire engagement with their fans on the platform. However, their attempts to engineer engagement must not feel forced or overly choreographed for their benefit. Such an impression would distract from the user-generated nature of social media. Their interactions must be genuinely conversational. Therefore, they must not only make posts from their accounts but respond to the subsequent comments as well as to consumer-initiated statements. This calls for dedicated monitoring of not only the brands' own pages or profiles but also hashtags and fan-generated accounts dedicated to the brands. Failure to have such a conversational approach returns the brand to the broadcast facets of traditional media which are rejected within the social media context. Brands can generate engagement by understanding their role in helping their users build social media capital by celebrating not only their influencers but also their average fans who make useful and insightful contributions. In this way, the brands make the fans feel like the celebrities and support the growth of their influence within the social media brand community. However, the brands should seek the permission of the users before sharing their names/profiles and content within their posts. Such an action shows the dedication of the brand to the individual and builds respect due to the permissive nature with regards to the individual's privacy and intellectual property. The creation of community managers has been an approach by several brands. However, these individuals need to consider themselves engagement officers understanding their role as being not only celebrators of the brand but of the members as well. The fact that brands have a sound role to play in inspiring engagement within the social media environment is echoed by Harmeling et al. (2017) who argue that consumer engagement is deliberate on the part of the company, while Pongpaew, Speece and Tiangsoongnern (2017), note that an organisation's communication is a motivator of engagement for the individual. The arguments of Pansari and Kumar (2017) and Schultz (2017) also provide support for the findings, within the current study by showing that brands need to be strategic in their social media behaviour to drive engagement.

5.2.1.2 Creativity

Creativity is a theme, in its own right, separate from engagement for several reasons. Firstly, the individual's creativity is motivation and consequence for engagement. An individual's creativity inspires the development of ideas or comments that provide solutions. Creativity's symbiotic relationship with engagement gives it a measure of dependence on the related theme. Consequently, much of the content created within social media brand communities generate

further engagement from other members. The second reason this theme is discussed independently is that this behaviour within the community stands on its own merit as an act with consequences such as consumer-brand identification and consumer-brand relationship. Moreover, Malthouse et al. (2016) link individual's creativity with producing user-generated content to identity and relationship maintenance as well as purchase decision. A third rationale for the separation of the themes in this discussion is the intrinsic nature of creativity to the individual. The findings show creativity reflects one's identity. In other words, it is the consumers' interests that drive their creativity. Finally, creativity stands on its own because it causes the content developed to be interesting, insightful and useful. The creativity of the users is central to the community being perceived as useful. The benefits are not only limited to the perception of the community but are extended to the empowerment of the individual. As a consumer of the brand or member of the community, being able to express one's self creatively provides the individual with a vital say in the creation of a brand environment that serves his or her interests. Considering the scale of those contributing to the environment in such a way, negotiating the terms and conditions of the community, this creates the democracy that social media is being credited with introducing to the brand community (Healy and McDonagh, 2013). The displays of creativity endear a sense of commitment to the community since individuals are dedicated to something they helped create. Therefore, creativity helps create the psychological sense of ownership for the brand and the loyalty that is a further consequence. For the brand, there are benefits of increased social media reputation and thus equity based on the boosted respect for the organisation based on the diversity and creativity displayed by both the firm and individual members. Therefore, creativity creates the consumer culture that drives the community, the empowerment and democratisation that inspires the individual and the brand reputation, profitability that supports the firm's strategies. The literature reflects the findings of this study noting that creativity gives consumers a role in creating the value of the brand (Berthon et al., 2012), empowering the individual (Davies and Elliot, 2006) and designing a community in their own image (Black and Veloutsou, 2017). Ultimately, the user-generated nature of social media means that the creativity of individuals are embedded in the fabric of brand communities.

5.2.1.3 Expression

Expression, in its many formats, as a behaviour has significance for the individuals' identity motives and possesses consequences for individual as well as brand. The various formats (such as audio-visual, text, live video, pictures) allow individuals to declare their interests, love,

identification or affinity for a brand, its community and the meaning brought to their selves or lifestyles. Hence, expression as a theme speaks to the role social media brand communities play in supporting the individual's identity motives. These motives are varied. However, they can be covered by the general motivations (need for affiliation, desire for prestige, search for distinctiveness) which are delineated by Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen's (2012). Expression within the social media community aligns with these motives in a logical manner whereby, social capital gains cover prestige and distinctiveness while, connecting with others who appreciate their input and shared values satisfies the need for affiliation or belongingness. The information gained reduces the risks of making poor consumption choices which is in itself a consequence of community, but is not an identity motive in its own right. Rather, it is an identity motive where it connects with the desire to find a brand or community that is congruent with the individual's own values or character. Therefore, there is also a strong link to the identity motives of belongingness or affiliation within these environments.

Expression also has implications for the development of commitment within the members of the social media brand community. Expression is an essential facet in the display of the markers of community as defined by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) in an individual. Expression allows people to show that they have a feeling of moral responsibility to the community, they share the interests and values plus they are determined to participate in the rituals or traditions of the collective. The individuals are able to express themselves and the meaning of the brand community to their lives. The community's congruence to the individual's sense of self is an important signal of the crucial role that consumer culture driven by consumerism plays in the socially constructed identities of individuals. Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2015) determine that expression builds the community-self connection based on congruence between the individual, the brand and the community. In such a way, expression also addresses the additional markers of community revealed as individualisation, creativity and engagement, in the current research findings. Sharing the meaning of the community and the brand to the individual allows expression of creativity, participation in engaging behaviours and revelling in individualisation. Therefore, expression, as a tool of sharing one's self with the community, is a behaviour that shows the important role of brands in shaping the social identity of the individual (in the tradition of Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and creating the persona which the individual would be proud to be associated with and communicate with others. These aspects (markers of community, self-congruence, social identity and self-expression) influence the development of commitment due to feelings of kinship and the perception that the community

reflects the individual. Expression, reflects the strategic and deliberate act of self-presentation to show the congruence of the brand and community to the individual's self in line with the self- image congruency as proposed by Sirgy (1982). It is through the tool of expression, that the virtual audience on social media becomes a real audience for the individual to present themselves and perform their roles. Expression, thereby makes Goffman's (1959) concept of the imagined audience, transform into a real audience with the capacity for reactions (such as likes, loves or even negative votes) that can shape future presentations. Brands need to be aware of these aspects of the social media brand community (self-presentation and self-congruence) and the importance of self-expression in shaping people's behaviour online. Acknowledging such will help shape the marketing communications and conversations with their community to allow the individuals to connect with the brand while understanding its suitability for speaking about themselves.

5.2.1.4 Search

The identification of three main types of search within social media (information search, opinion search and community search) is noteworthy because these behaviours are instrumental in people finding information that they can use to shape their identity, self-expressions and relationships to brand or community. These searches can be considered additional activities in line with Gummerus et al.'s (2012) declaration that behaviours are changing in relation to consumer-brand interaction due to social media. The importance of classifying consumers' changing behaviours cannot be ignored, as these actions show researchers and marketers the evolution of individuals, networks and societies as a whole. Significantly, acknowledging the changes facilitates brands' abilities to create strategies and methodologies that will connect with their target audiences. These behaviours need to be evaluated to assess any positive or negative consequences. Individuals are becoming aware that social media brand communities, especially those managed by fans not directly employed by the corporation, are unbiased sources of quality information. This research finds that each type of search can be motivated by multiple drivers. For instance, information search serves the need to ensure the decision to purchase a quality product that fulfils the purpose set is less risky. Simultaneously, it can enhance the chances of choosing a brand that addresses one's identity objectives by gaining that information from individuals who have similar interests and values as one's self. Accordingly, Lopez, Sicilia and Moyeda-Carabazza, (2017) the information search signals a search for brands that are congruent to the individuals and can act as a tool of identity

verification. Consequently, the sub-theme of information search provides support for theories such as self-congruity, self-enhancement and social identity.

The opinion search sub-theme generates consumer-brand identification or disidentification by generating responses that reveal on an emotional level, the positive or negative experiences of members with the brand. Brands such as Apple, Coca-Cola and L'Oréal have recognised the importance of both information and opinion search, reacting by creating social media profiles to facilitate the sharing of useful data with users. Therefore, simultaneously, information is shared and opinions influenced by strategic brand action, nurturing an environment that invites future information and opinion search. Chu and Kim (2011) link opinion search directly to trust, as the individual trusts the community enough to depend on them for information that guides their decisions and shapes their identity. Opinion search signals trust in the community based on the relatability of individuals with similar individuals who share interest in the brand. The members trust each other due to shared desire not to waste time and money on a product that does not satisfy their utilitarian or hedonic needs. Trust is also based on the perception that individuals have nothing to gain or lose from creating a review based on their experience. There is no benefit to be caught as an individual faking a positive or negative review. To build on the foundation of trust, brands need to ensure they do not fake reviews or appear to be bribing individuals for fake reviews. Fake positive reviews may garner short-term interest or growth in the company, however, in the long run such misrepresentations damage the trust in the brand, community and social media platform. The community search sub-theme adds a deliberate element to the integration of community into self based on identity and value congruence. Community search is designed to find a community that fills either their utilitarian or hedonic needs or both. Therefore, search behaviour is a reliable indicator of consumer-brand identification, consumer identity and the consumer-brand relationship.

5.2.1.5 Knowledge/Opinion Share

This study considers knowledge/opinion share a relational behaviour that shows a self-brand connection that supports consumer-community as well as consumer-brand identification. The actions, themselves quite varied, range from reviews, tutorials, comments, troubleshooting and solutions, unboxing videos that share user opinion, requires an investment of time and interest in the community's success. The users share content that highlights both utilitarian and affective benefits of the brand, which has the ability to therefore connect with other users who are searching for products that fill either or both of these uses. As a behaviour, knowledge or opinion share can reflect the information, opinion or community search sub-themes discussed

above or they can be independently motivated by the individuals' needs. Hau and Kang (2016) directly link the servicing of individual needs and sharing to social capital as well as members' role within the community as lead users. However, there is an additional perspective to be considered whereby users willingly share knowledge from both influencer, active and sometimes the more passive members without consideration of their own social capital alone. Another major motivation observed was a desire to ensure that there is a positive experience for themselves and other users, due largely to the feeling of kinship with the other community members. Therefore like Hollebeek, Juric and Tang (2017) and Simon, Brexendorf and Fassnact (2016) this study's findings note that individuals feel responsible to create value within the social media brand communities of which they are a member.

The knowledge/opinion share theme of the behaviour category contributes to the positive experience of members within the social media brand community. Thereby, this boosts the reputation or perception, in the marketplace, of this community as a useful and user-friendly community. Therefore, it behoves brands to encourage the knowledge/opinion share and other behaviours that grow the perception of their brands and communities. Allowing such information sharing, troubleshooting or myth-breaking is beneficial, especially in situations where those myths could be harmful to the establishment and maintenance of relationships. Encouraging knowledge share/opinion share and engaging with those posts as a brand is important since the impact of these behaviours can be felt outside of the social media brand community sphere. Likes, comments and posts within communities are funnelled through the timeline and/or tracker of the friends/followers of individuals who interact with the brand. Independent knowledge share posts within hashtags are also seen within the individuals profile as they are posted within the respective account but boosted by presence in the hashtag. Likes and loves on Twitter and Instagram can be seen by followers, indicating to an individual's personal community the brands and communities that interest the individual. Twitter also provides occasional push notifications to individuals' devices of the posts shared or liked to followers, influencing not only interaction between individuals but also the reputation (positive or negative) about the brand. Such engagement is also important as this helps boost the ability of brands to have their posts be seen authentically within the timeline of their own fans and followers. Therefore, brands have to ensure that they are monitoring all the respective behaviours as indicated above to gauge the perceptions being developed about their brands and be able to guide in some cases the conversation and react appropriately to those interactions initiated by various stakeholders in the social media space.

5.2.2 *Affect*

As an exploratory research project, this study did not aim to determine which feature of identification (affective, cognitive and behavioural) had the strongest influence on the development of identity and the consumer-brand relationship. Extant research has made several attempts to assess which one of these aspects have a stronger influence on the development of identity and relationships. For instance, Popp and Woratschek (2017) argue that identification is a largely affective process especially as it relates to the generation of psychological sense of community. Torres, Augusto and Godhino (2017) argue that affective drivers of identification are stronger than cognitive drivers. However, the complementary nature of these drivers to each other, together with the consideration that they drive each other, means that they are equally important in determining the development of consumer-brand identification. The revelation of new categories of motivators together with the data collected guided the assertion that each feature (affective, cognitive, behavioural) are essential to the development of consumer-brand or consumer-community identification and consequently consumer identity and brand relationships. However, the affective features, that drive the connection to the brand, can often overrule the cognitive drivers in the process of purchase decision-making. On the one hand, an individual may recognise, cognitively, the brand's faults, for example, poor product quality or high costs. However, the love for the brand and the emotions elicited from brand use may surpass this knowledge and allow the consumer to continue to purchase the brand. However, this does not mean that the individual has ignored their cognitive processes. These aspects just work together to influence the ultimate purchase decision. This finding is similar to Giovanis and Athanasopoulou (2017) who found that the affective drivers of identification influence price tolerance and the consumer-brand relationship. Affect, which is defined herein as the use of language to share emotions of feelings, is used to declare how individuals integrate the brand or community into their selves. The expressions of affection reveal essential insights into the individuals' sense of self, identity goals and how these are fulfilled by using the brand or social media brand community.

Affect (emotional connection) is essential to the formation of a connection with the brand or community on the basis of self-congruity. For example, L'Oréal, Apple and Coca Cola's social media communities display the importance of values to match those of the individuals in order to prevent negative feelings and disidentification. In observations on these sites, Coca Cola's alleged destruction of rainforests and L'Oréal's history of animal testing conflicts with eco-friendly and humanitarian values of individuals who then communicate their disidentification

with the brand in the community spaces. Alternatively, diversity initiatives such as hiring minority spokespersons and influencers drove positive emotions toward L'Oréal as a brand that supports the identity goals of many of its diverse target audience. Therefore, the affective elements of identification contribute significantly to the acknowledgement of one's social identity on the basis of membership within the community and relationship with the brand. The findings are relatable to those of So et al. (2017) who list an affective component to the development of social identity, terming it an investment in the connection. As the individual is using the brand to bring some meaning and structure to his life, the affective aspects of social identity provide the basis to include features of the brand and community into the self (Belk, 1988). These emotions generate the brand trust that inspires consumer involvement and brand loyalty. These conditions also generate the brand love spoken of by Albert and Merunka (2013) who note that this feature makes the brand irreplaceable to the consumer. This provides a rationale for the grief and disappointment this study shows are communicated within the communities on a brand's missteps or the break-up of a consumer-brand relationship. The love they feel makes the process of separation between brand and consumer similar to one of an interpersonal relationship, though potentially not as hurtful to the individual. The importance of brand trust and love within the development of an organisation's reputation or profitability shows that this affective connection is critical. Therefore, brands need to use this to form the basis of the marketing communications or engagement strategies, viewing engagement as ongoing.

The affective motivations for consumer-brand identification inspire engagement and consumer-brand relationships. However, there are affective consequences for consumer-brand identification as well. The brand love, loyalty and trust endeared in the individuals support feelings of possessiveness, desire, distinctiveness and belongingness that shapes the individuals' view of themselves as well as the place of the brand or community in their lives. Such consequences have implications for identity and relationship development, modelling the positive self-esteem and self-evaluations of individuals. The reliance on brands and their communities can also harm the self-esteem, engineering feelings of loss or failure if one is incapable of displaying said features in on or offline contexts. Nesi and Prinstein (2015) concur noting that depression can be a result of engaging with these communities. Realising where one falls short of the ideal identities displayed in these spaces may make an individual feel inadequate especially should he or she be incapable of showing those same facets of identity (for example, knowledge or experience of the brand, or conspicuous consumption of its related

products). Therefore, the enhanced social comparison driven by social media brand communities and the social networks on a whole, not only influences persons construction and expression of self but also their beliefs about themselves. While social comparison is a cognitive process (Suls, Martin and Wheeler, 2002), many consequences of its reality are affective in nature. There are positive affective consequences of identification, such as the stronger bonds with the collective (Powdthavee, 2014; Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010; He et al., 2017) and the brand. These influence the moral responsibility and shared consciousness aspects of the markers of community. These bonds are also partially responsible for the consumer attempts to defend their favoured brands against attacks from other community members or even antagonists. The bonds are given partial responsibility because they work in partnership with the individuals' view of the brand as part of themselves in motivating the need to defend the brand. The brand fusion spoken of by Lin and Sung (2014) supports this finding that the inclusion of the brand in self contributes to users defending their brands, sometimes passionately, against who they may sometimes view as interlopers or outsiders in the community.

5.2.3 Sensations

The current investigation is among the first to explore the sensations that users experience by participating in the social media brand community and the role this plays in contributing to the development of consumer-brand identification, consumer identity and the consumer-brand relationship. The themes that emerged within this section were categorised as either hedonic or utilitarian, based on the rational or emotional benefit received by the individual. During the course of the netnographic observation, it was noticed that consumers shared the sensations (both physical and emotional) created in relation to their use of the brand and participation within the brand community. This evidence suggests that these sensations are important to the development of a connection between the brand, the community and the individual, whether the sensations were created based on the hedonic or utilitarian aspects of the brand. Both these aspects were deemed equally important to the development of consumer-brand identification. Along a similar line, Pöyry, Parvinen and Malmivaara (2013) determined that there is support for the theory that online consumption behaviours are motivated by hedonic and utilitarian factors. They determined that both factors influence these behaviours, albeit in different manners. Cooperatively one may consider, as is revealed by the netnographic approach adopted by the current study, that the physical benefits of using the brand such as taste, refreshment, fit-in hand, or feel on skin are important to building a relationship with the brand and the

community. This connection motivates purchase or repurchase decisions in relation to the brand, showing that product quality is not actually dismissed by the consumer in the process of developing the consumer-brand identification or the consumer-brand relationship. The use of purchases to shape identity and form relationships based on feelings shows the support for all of the categories listed above and further support of uses and gratifications theory.

The inclusion of sensations within the consideration of the development of the community is essential. Sensations of varying types form the initial realisation that there may be a positive connection between individuals and others. This is true in romantic relationships, friendships and other interpersonal interactions and is proving to be important in the consumer-brand connection as well. The realisation that one enjoys the brand acts as the foundation for future purchase as well as engagement with the brand and its community. Via these sensations, the possibilities are developed that the brand may serve one's physical or hedonic needs, not to mention one's identity motives such as expression, prestige, distinction and belongingness. The work of Ribeiro-Cardoso and Pinto (2010) and Arnold and Reynolds (2003) provide support for sensations' inclusion in this research's data analytical framework by declaring that this feature, in both utilitarian and hedonic perspectives, shape the purchasing motivations and behaviours of individuals based on their personality types, roles and identity motivations. Furthermore, Lam et al.'s (2010, 2013) use of instrumental (utilitarian) and symbolic (hedonic) terminology in their discussions about motivations and consequences to consumer-brand identification also show the importance of these features in the development of identity and the consumer-brand relationship of individuals. Sensations (utilitarian and hedonic) are clearly observable within the social media brand community in relation to consumer-brand and consumer-community identification and relationship, extending the relevance from the offline shopping environment to the online setting. The sensations expressed within the setting build the connection with the brand and the community and prove the individual made the correct purchase choice. The validation of purchase decision is made by analysing whether the brand fits the needs of the individual on an identity (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012), an image (Sirgy, 1982; Kressmann et al., 2006) or a values basis (Tuskej, Golob and Podnar, 2013) and whether the community meets the belongingness needs of the individual.

5.2.4 Imagery

The themes apparent within this category are visuals, self-portrait and use of brands. These themes show not only the importance of brand to self but also the consumer-brand relationship and the consumer-community connection. The research findings address the consumer-brand

connections which create imagery in the minds of the consumer, therefore, influencing their sense of self and identification with said brand or its community. These images, shaped by marketing communications and brand community engagement, are representations of the experience of users with the brand. The most prominent current visual of this nature is the much discussed selfie, which is a way individuals use to show the prominence of the brand to their lives. Kedzior, Allen and Schroeder (2016) call this a phenomenon, acknowledging that selfies play an important role in shaping consumer identities due to their prominence in the lives of individuals. They argue that the selfie is not as trivial a feature of social media as it is presumed in popular discussion, however, that they carry major importance of marketing in terms of branding, consumer behaviour and market research. The stated importance of selfies within the development of consumer identities is not overplayed based on the findings of the current research. This study found that these digital self-portraits are great tools to display the individual's narrative on social media that show how the brands fit into their lives and communicate the consumer identity (that is their role or purpose as a user of a particular brand). Branded selfies show experience and knowledge to the community, which builds credibility and supports the development of social capital. These selfies demonstrate the importance of the brand to the individual's sense of self. The brand's visuals communicate a particular set of identity cues as well as values. Therefore, the display of that brand in one's selfies states the measure of congruence between one's self and the brand to the audience. Selfies are, thus, good expressers of consumer identity, and as Lim (2016) note places the individual at the forefront of the narrative.

These brand selfies (Presi, Maehle and Kleppe, 2016) shape the individual's identity. However, they also shape the culture of the community. Such visuals have become part of the consumer culture of the social media brand community due to their role as one of the rituals and traditions of the space. These selfies are aspects of the rituals which are essential to show off use of the brand by the individuals. Therefore, selfies in the context of the social media brand community are not only about self-creation but about co-creation of the brands and the communities. Additionally, the use of imagery displays the social identity of the individual, which is either the brand, its community or the segment(s) of society (class, profession, education) that is congruent to the consumer's self-image. Selfies therefore, in their alignment with Tajfel and Turner's (1979) discussion about the human need for human belongingness, are not the shallow signals of narcissism that pop culture have decided but another manner in which human beings attempt to form connections with each other. Additionally, these are forming part of the need

to self-evaluate in comparison with each other that forms the basis of Festinger's (1954) theory. The reactions of friends, followers and other stakeholders who view these self-portraits influence individuals' view of themselves as well as how they choose to present themselves in the future. Hence, the curation of self-image online is a continuous process which is aided by the likes, loves and comments. Those images that receive the most positive responses are replicated in other posts while others which receive negative or even no response are culled from the social media space and are not reproduced. While, De Vries and Kuhne (2015) argues that social networks force individuals to display a better standard of living than is fully accurate, another perspective adopted within the current study determines that individuals are not presenting an untrue image of self. They are presenting the best possible authentic self at the time of the post, based on what the community deems as acceptable selves.

5.2.5 Cognition

The themes of self-brand and self-community connection, which emerged in the data analysis, considered the consumers' mental evaluations of the brand, the community plus the platforms where the information regarding these facets are received (social media, mobile devices etcetera). Studying these thoughts and evaluations are essential to understanding how consumers make purchase and repeat purchase decisions as well as how they develop brand and community trust, attachment, identification and loyalty. Cognition which is the fifth category of the BASIC IDs analytical framework used in this study, relates to the understanding of the brand and its community in the mind of the users based on their experiences. Consumers' identification with a brand is bolstered by a cognitive match with the brand and the self, facilitated by the perception of sameness with the brand's personality and/or values. Cognition is an accepted antecedent by research in the development of identification (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012), identity (Lawler, 2014) and the consumer-brand relationship (Ahuvia, 2005; Wang, 2017). Cognitive connections with brand and community identification lead to consequences such as trust and loyalty and signal the start and/or maintenance of a sustainable consumer-brand relationship. This cognitive process of acknowledging the brand value helps the individual to generate the awareness of their group membership (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006) which helps shape their consumer identity as well as their social identity. Therefore, the cognition process can work simultaneously on several layers of the human identity to shape behaviour and relationships.

The process of self-categorisation within the social media brand community is both an implicit and explicit procedure. The individuals explicitly signal their self-categorising as members of the team by liking or following the brand or consumer pages or groups of the community, sharing information, asking questions, giving reviews or similar behaviours. These actions start, however, with the implicit acknowledgement to self that this community serves the need that one has for affiliation (Graffigna and Gambetti, 2015), for trustworthy information about the brand (Colliander et al., 2017) and the endorsement of one's identity (Kietzmann et al., 2012). The process of identification and self-categorisation is based on perceptions of similarity, affirmation and relatability. Identification can be considered the cognitive portion of social identity development which accounts for declarations of disidentification with competing brands observed within the community. These differentiations are made not only in regards to the brands but also to the members of the competing brand community. This shows the relatability of the social identity approach (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, Turner et al., 1999) to the community space. The network of brand communities can be considered a society, albeit a virtual one, with each brand community representing a node by which individuals can use to communicate their categorisation within that overall social space. Therefore, the brand community shapes online and offline social identity which may have separate meanings for the individual and add another layer to the performance of identity. This consideration within the study supports the concept Cheney-Lippold (2011) developed as the 'algorithmic identity' which is categorising one's self by use of the internet. However, this process is not self-categorisation, as much this is engineered by the programming and coding of information which one receives that acts as a guide towards the categorisation.

Cognition has consequences for the development of brand trust due to expectations of brand quality, service and experience. Brands need to consider not only in their marketing communications, forming these cognitive expectations but also in their product quality and customer service delivery. Having an integrated approach between product design, creation and quality plus communications, together with customer experience, lays the foundation for managing consumer expectations. This includes setting and exceeding the requirements for product performance that drive cognitive connections between consumer and brand. Therefore, as Escalas and Bettman (2005) show brand trust and loyalty, which are cognitive, are essential to the consumer-brand relationship and must be nurtured by the organisation. While Papista and Dimitriadis (2012) speak about these communities nurturing brand relationships of differing strengths, this exploratory study did not go into measuring the varying strengths of

the relationships observed therein. However, these findings did consider that there are cognitive aspects of the connections which work independently of affective features to produce the consumer-brand relationships. These cognitive aspects of the relationship are cultivated by the brand in collaboration with the community members to produce the community where people trust the brand and each other. Therefore, they would compare themselves positively with users of other brands.

5.2.6 Interpersonal relationships

This research considered the interpersonal relationships within the community, determining the role they play in the development of consumer identity and identification. These interpersonal relationships include the other members of the community as well as the brands represented by said community. Such relationships are based on shared values and identities plus a desire to become a player in the collective narrative of the brand. Therefore, interpersonal relationships are shaped by both personal and social identity layers, which are informed by the consumer layer within the context of the social media brand community. These findings are reflected in the research of Sen et al. (2015) who argued that social identity needs to consider the consumption-oriented influences of personal identity in contemplating the development of the relationships with the brand. The results also support Oyserman (2009) who show that these identity-based motivations influence the generation and maintenance of the consumer-brand relationships. The interpersonal relationships within the brand community drive the perceptions of the brand as useful. These relationships are based not only on affection or knowledge of each other but also on a shared love and interest in the brand. This shared interest in the brand or desire to learn more about the brand itself can generate trust and love for the community. In such a way not only do the individuals choose brands that are congruent to their self-concept (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000; Xie, Poon and Zhang, 2017) they choose to engage with the social media brand community in a similar manner. Fournier (1998) speaks to the identity motive for the consumer-brand relationship, which is formed on the bases of self-brand connection and self-definitional goals. This is reflected in the relationship with the community and its members, suggesting that the consumer-community relationship is important to individuals' self-concept, particularly their online identity layer.

The brand communities, within this study, showed the measure of reciprocity, whereby individuals feel compelled to play their role in the relationships within the brand and the community. Such reciprocity is seen in willingness to share their knowledge and opinions with the other members of the community. As they grow connected to the community, individuals

want to play their role in a collective with which they feel a kinship. The popularity of sites such as Yelp and the desire to seek and give reviews within social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Reddit. This concurs with the reciprocity spoken of by Chan and Li (2010) and Mathwick, Wertz and DeRuyter (2007) noting that said feelings of reciprocity are signals of a feeling of community among the members, which can, as Nambian and Baron (2010) argue, inspire participation and helping of other members. The interpersonal relationships herein between the brand and the individual do reflect more of an exchange basis as spoken about by Aggarwal (2004), however, that does not mean the connections are weak as the exchanges made via consumption are essential to individual sense of self as well as the perceptions of others with whom persons interact. The relationships with other individuals are also on a similar exchange basis where the sharing of information and opinions are respected by the vote of thanks or by retweeting and sharing in order to boost the profile of the individual(s) providing the knowledge. These virtual exchanges, which in the case of the brand mirrors the financial exchange and the case of the community, a more personal sense of reciprocity, have strong implications for the interpersonal relationships herein and the intent to further these interactions. The multi-directional interactions unveiled in the findings and represented herein in figures six and seven (in Chapter 4) are depictions of reciprocity. Those conversations could at any point be uni-directional but that would make the community less engaging. The desire for users to hear from others including the brands mean not only are they willing to give but they expect to receive as well. This multi-directional mode of communication is responsible, in the view of Chan and Li (2010) for the feelings of reciprocity between community members but can be generated by the brand who can make the environment one that facilitates engagement and communication (Smith, Fischer and YongJiang, 2012). The reciprocity seen within these brand communities (Apple, L'Oréal and Coca-Cola) account for the level of continued engagement and commitment observed within the community as well as their prominent position on social media leader boards regarding influential social media brand communities. In terms of the commitment, individuals feel a sense of kinship with the members and the community-at-large to desire that they benefit from their experience with the brand.

5.2.7 Sociocultural Aspects

The socio-cultural aspects of the community reveal links between consumer-brand identification, consumer-community identification and the consumer-brand relationship. This is facilitated by the nature of the community (e.g., humorous, tech-oriented, collective-minded,

fun), the language of the users (what is acceptable) and the rituals and traditions (e.g., live tweeting, reviews, unboxing, tutorials). These aspects of the community generate the expectations and the identification that links individuals to brand and to the community. These socio-cultural aspects create the terms of participation, levels of hierarchy, ways of interacting with each other, whether it is an open, private or closed community and the culture that is the norm. This cultural norm drives the consumer-community and consumer-brand community by creating the meaning of the brand and the community to the individual as well as the feeling of belonging together with the psychological membership. These aspects of the environment cause it to be perceived as useful and important to the individual. The themes emergent in the data analysis (within this category_ are shared values, shared identity, shared narrative, communications, emotional connection and love. These features create the socio-cultural environment that is specific to the specific community. The socio-cultural aspects address created by the rules, traditions and responsibilities ascribed to the members of the community. Within the context of the social media community, this is a looser variety than the regular concept normally assigned to this concept (Hammedi et al., 2015). However, the mutual interest in the brand and the shared behaviours around the networks provide the basis for these platforms to become a defined unit or community. While, the fragmented nature of separate platforms does not inspire thoughts of community, these spaces function in this manner because there is the kinship that is clearly observable in such spaces. Moreover, there is the commitment to these spaces that facilitate the development of a sense of community. The social media brand environment can be described as a community despite its presence across several platforms in the forms of pages, groups and hashtags due to the presence of shared consciousness, moral responsibilities and rituals and traditions as defined by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001). Regarding the facet of moral responsibility, this is shaped by the rules (terms and conditions) of the community which were either explicitly or implicitly determined by the community.

The social media brand community represents an evolution of the concept which has several possible implications for society as a whole. The brand centred focus of the community strengthens the consumer culture of its users which reflects in offline contexts as well, concerning how individuals treat other humans, the judgements the form of others based on their possessions and the means in which people assign value to each other or themselves. This can potentially reinforce the materialism already a feature of a consumer-driven global society. The consumer culture within these platforms and communities potentially support the classism or elitism that exists in broader society, within a media whose role was perceived as bringing

people together, being a source for democracy and removing the last vestiges of class from the globe. On the face of it, the social media brand environment has adopted its own unique sociocultural aspects that form the bond of community and accomplish the goals of democracy and class-free nature. The fact that everyone, in theory, has equal influence due to the co-creation of community values and identity. The individual members as well as the facilitators of the community (whether they be the company or other consumers) share in the development of the terms and conditions of membership or participation. In co-creating the rules, the members adopt a vital role in developing the meaning of the community. Therefore, this makes the community seemingly democratic. The co-creation of the community according to their own image is an essential portion of the socio-cultural aspect of these settings. The community identity is co-created with user and administration (much like the brand is co-created between user and company, as espoused by Black and Veloutsou (2017)). By creating the community image, they are creating their own image and expressing their values. This is an act of self-expression that builds self-esteem and social capital together with a measure of prestige for having played an instrumental role in crafting the rules of the community. Therefore, the members shape the structure that breeds commitment and the terms of engagement with the brand community. Since, as Brodie et al. (2013) argue, engagement is an interactive process, it is fitting that the rules of said engagement are co-created by all the parties expected to abide by those rules. These rules are also enforced with punishments for those who do not conform. Individual members or administrators can take a number of actions such as banning, reprimanding, blocking, restricting activity in the community or reporting the individual to the platform itself, e.g., Facebook. These actions are taken to ensure that the sense of moral responsibility remains strong and that individuals know there is a reason to conform to the norms of the community.

Another feature of Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) markers of community that are observed within these social media brand communities is that of the rituals and traditions. Behaviours such as live tweeting significant launches or events for the brand, or unboxing technological purchase and uploading instant reactions are means of participating in the community that indicates a measure of commitment to the brand. A related point is provided by Champniss et al. (2016) who noted that participation shows one's self-categorisation as a community member. These rituals and traditions increase the measure of activity and engagement within the community which has positive consequences for the brand and the community. One might say that such a reliable measure of participation in the rituals signal strong social media equity

(social media brand equity) for the brand. This is represented by the presence of the brands (L'Oréal, Coca-Cola and Apple) on yearly industry charts measuring organisations' social media engagement. Furthermore, these rituals and traditions, in partnership with the moral responsibilities, help shape the norms of the community in which individuals are socialised. Active acknowledgement of these rituals supports the growth of the influence of individual members, the facilitation of roles within the community, as individuals learn more about each other and their capabilities, as well as the development of that community's social hierarchy.

Shared consciousness is also a measure of one's socialisation into the community, established by reading and agreeing to abide by the rules, by recognising the sanctions that are placed on one's self should one infringe upon a rule and being able to observe and participate within the traditions or rituals appropriately. Shared consciousness helps indicate the presence of identification within the individuals and the formation of a relationship with brand or community. The shared consciousness means of developing identification relies on the self-brand match spoken of by Trump and Brucks (2012) and Kressmann et al. (2006). Shared consciousness helps the individual be aware that the brand and the community will serve his or her identity goals. These aspects also determine whether, there is a consumer culture (Arnould, 2005), which was proven within the communities under investigation, whereby users were open about their use of the brand and the community to shape their development and presentations of self. Identifying with the collective as well as the brand facilitates an individual's socialisation within the social media brand community. Furthermore, the display and use of the brand allows individuals to indicate their conformity and socialisation within the community.

5.3 Key Observations Discussion

5.3.1 Identity Development and Expression in Social Media Brand Communities

The observations that emerged due to the data collection carries significant implications for the manner in which academia and practice discuss social media and its role in shaping human behaviour. The importance of understanding how social media influences identity is paramount to revealing how people will treat each other, shape laws in the future and consumption patterns. For instance, the finding that social media brand communities exert influence on individuals in a manner that is entirely contextual to that person means that one cannot adequately evaluate this platform's influence without considering how it is fully integrated into people's lives. Bolton et al. (2013) spoke about social media being integrated into each aspect of generation Y's lives. Such integration means that the social media platforms and brand

communities influence the identity of the individuals in so much as these spaces provide support for the other influential aspects of people's development and expression of self. Therefore, different individuals may interact with the same platform but have different consequences due to the other influences in their lives, whether they be religion, culture, education or otherwise. As individuals' identity development begins at the level of personality, it is important to note that all the other layers, including social, professional and consumer, which are supported by participation within social media brand communities are a reflection of personal desires. Therefore, this study further supports Goffman's (1959) layers of identity, but notes they are not indivisible or easily compartmentalised. They work in relation to and in support of each other.

Considering what aspects of social media and its resident communities influences identity and relationship development gives insight into the behaviour of individuals therein. The revelation that one's manner of using social media, in other words, one's behaviour has a stronger influence on identity development than the tool itself, shows how much of an explicit process self-creation is in relation to digital communities. The interactions on social media and its communities guide the internal dialogue, emotions as well as the associations that influence self-perceptions. However, this influence is not inherently passive, it is one that individuals have deliberately sought after in shaping their view of the world around them, e.g., a specific brand and whether it is congruent with their particular identity goals. While, Cheney-Lippold's (2011) view of the algorithmic identity, raises questions as to the explicit nature of identity creation, the algorithms in question, created by the social media platforms are guided by the behaviours of the individuals. Therefore, this gives the impression that even in such a case of algorithmic manipulations on the part of the social media organisations, the individual's behaviour guides their identity development as well as their access to content that would influence such a process. The role that these aspects exert on internal thoughts is crucial. Internal thoughts guide the creation of criteria or self-definition and the realisation of one's identity goals. Therefore, these thoughts are those which lead directly to the boosting of self-esteem and confidence as well as feelings of belongingness with a brand or its community. Therefore, the fact that one's own behaviour has an impact on the external influences as well show that even in implicit aspects of self-creation there is a measure of explicitness.

The role of age or gender within one's use of social media has formed the core of many academic studies over the past decade and a half. However, this study does not indicate that either of these essential facets of an individual's identity is crucial to determining how they use

social media brand communities. Within the communities under investigation, various generations used the tools in the same manner as spoken of above in the BASIC IDs outline. Across social media as a whole, the findings herein show that age is also not necessarily a determinant of one's use of social media as much as one's comfort level with technology is, supporting the theory of planned behaviour and the technology acceptance model. The difference in generation is not observed herein. This supports White and Cornu (2011) in separating from Prensky (2001) concept of the digital natives which was primarily hailed in extant literature as a guide in analysing acceptance and behaviour on social media. Schofield and Kupianen (2015) are among those who agree that digital natives are more influenced in their identity development, due to the ever-present nature of technology in their lives. This is more along the lines of the current investigation, which shows that motives for using the social media brand community or the platform is where the difference lies in terms of integration into one's lives. All generations use these tools as measures of identity creation and expression. However, younger generations add the motive of identity validation as well. This can be credited to the view that they are still at an impressionable stage of their personal development. Ultimately, social media use for identity creation and relationship development is an experiential process that applies across generations, since consumerism and the love for brands does not end as one grows older.

Social media brand communities also benefit from the platforms nature as a facilitator of identity expression. Social media brand communities create a real audience for individuals to express their identity desires and their brand relationship ambitions. The audience is deemed real because there is a quantifiable response to said expressions or performances of identity and brand relationship. This has consequences for the individual as well as for the community. As discussed, the level of activity increases the reputation of the brand as engaged with its consumers and therefore, as a caring entity. The community also benefits due to the perception of being a useful source of information and interaction. Therefore, brand equity and community equity (the value of the social media brand community in the eyes of relevant stakeholders) becomes stronger. The individuals' self-esteem and social capital also grow because the community and others from the social media platform generally see them as expertise or influencers. The concept of the influencer which has been heavily discussed in industry articles and academic literature is an interesting phenomenon within the social media brand sphere. An influencer can be someone who deliberately developed their voice to be used for a specific topic(s), or conversely, it can be someone who built up over time a name for themselves without

the strategic intent. Influencers can be paid or unpaid, but are able to leverage their prominence for other forms of remuneration. However, what is even more striking is that social media has taken away the need for an individual to be a celebrity or other notable persona to pose as an aspirational figure. The influencers within the social media brand communities and platforms become somewhat of a celebrity in their own right. Therefore, for brand, community and individual, social media's nature has profile building consequences.

The findings, in this study, provide links to several theories concerning identity development extending them to the field of social media brand communities. These theories include social identity theory, self-presentation theory, self-congruity theory and self-enhancement theory. As Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) determine, social identity within the brand community affects consumer-brand identification and integration of the brand's images into an individual's identity. Engagement within social media brand communities fosters social identity with brand and community. Thus, leading to the use of the brand and the community to communicate an individual's social identity online as well as offline. The social identity is, therefore, a cue in identifying the intention of individuals to engage with social media brand communities. Scott (2007) and Veloutsou (2009) both reach similar conclusions to this, arguing that interactions within the groups are essential to building social identities. These connections in the view of Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) help make the individuals aware of their membership in the community. This study finds that social media brand community engagement helps an individual feel complete. The finding brings the theory of self-completion, as expounded by Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1981) to the social media community. This study determines that engagement shapes the individual's identity on several layers (personal, social, professional) on a consumption level, therefore creating a consumer identity. A consumer identity, as one who purchases or uses a specific brand, is a form of social identity. Dittmar (2007) links consumer identity to self-completion by arguing that the consumption is purposed to fill a deficit in one's self. Therefore, this research considers that for an identity to be that of a consumer variety, the consumption of the brand or product must shape the individual's sense of self and self-presentation. The findings of this research also find alliance with the work of Oyserman (2009), by confirming that individuals engage in social media communities in manners that are congruent to identity, thus proving the identity-based motivation model as well as the self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1982; Kressmann et al., 2006; Orth and Rose, 2017). Islam, Rahman and Hollebeek (2017) similarly showed that the self-congruity theory is applicable within online brand communities.

5.3.2 Consumer-brand identification in social media brand communities

Identity within the community as a function of social identity is facilitated by consumer-brand identification. The proactivity of individuals in interacting with brands and the community accounts for consumer-brand identification being stronger due to the introduction of social media. The role that consumers exert in brands matching their sense of self, as well as their identity goals, strengthen the connection between brand and individual. Wolter et al. (2016) provide support for this finding that consumer-brand identification deepens the relationship. Identification within this context has drivers which add another dimension, that of behaviour, to those traditionally considered within extant literature, those are affective and cognitive. This is important to note because the behavioural motivators or drivers are part of the reason consumer-brand identification is a more proactive process within the context of social media. Furthermore, this makes identity creation an explicit process. The brand also has a strategic role to play in the development of consumer-brand identification within the social media brand communities. Much like the utilitarian and hedonic aspects of the brand create the affective and cognitive drivers of consumer-brand identification, the brand and the community provide the safe environment for the individual to engage, create, express, search, share or otherwise participate in behaviours that will drive identification. Within the context of the development of consumer identity and brand relationships, identification should be considered a collective effort that is split three ways. The quality, values and personality of the brand collaborate with the empowerment, usefulness as well as the connections of the community and the initiative, goals plus the actions of the individual to develop the consumer-brand identification. These aspects of the identification process also bring a measure of confidence to the individual about the accuracy of their consumption choice.

While consumer-brand identification is often spoken of in a clear-cut and logical manner, it is not a static concept. An individual does not on identifying with a brand, remain in that state until the end of their life. Their identification with the brand will increase or decrease in strength over time due to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the brand. Also, should they find out something disturbing about the brand, or the organisation behave in a manner that they disagree with, consumers level or measure of identification will decrease. Thus identification is a fluid concept, which brands have to be careful to nurture, through continued engagement with their consumers. Ensuring that as an organisation, the brand is aware of consumer desires and values, and how these change over time, will assist in avoiding crises that would break the connection but also in creating the appropriate response, should a crisis arise, with the potential

to harm the consumer-brand identification. The need for accurate crises management strategy to prevent situations from escalating into dramas that can break the connection is especially needed in the current social media climate, where conversations about the brand's missteps, in a community or on a hashtag, can cause a decline not only in stock prices but customer perceptions. For instance, Torossian (2017) in a Forbes article, singled out Pepsi and United Airlines for their part in the largest PR crises of that year. The source of the crises in these cases, caused the organisations to become news headlines and trending topics on Twitter and other social media. However, it is the reaction (or non-reaction) that caused the negative disconnect with the audience. These situations, especially the Pepsi case (the brand apologised to the model in the advertisement and not the target audience), show that brands need to avoid taking their consumers for granted.

Consumer-brand identifications reside at the end of a spectrum with disidentification at the other end. The more satisfied an individual is with their brand, the closer to consumer-brand identification they move along the spectrum. Alternatively, dissatisfaction personally, disappointment together with other members of the community and outrage at the brand's behaviour will lead to disidentification. This means that consumers may identify with a brand at one point but disidentify with same at some point in the future and vice versa. Wolter et al. (2016) consider disidentification a wilful opposition to the brand and one which also has implications for self-definition. Such a consideration, highlights the observations, in the current research, whereby individuals wilfully enter a brand's social media communities to display their hatred of the brand. Einwiller and Johar (2013) speak about disidentification and the role it plays in brand hatred. This means like identification, disidentification is a proactive concept. However, there are levels to the development of disidentification, if one once identified with the brand previously. The behaviour may come after a period of unconsciously developing the distrust of the brand and possibly fighting the break-up of the brand relationship that is a result of moving from identification to disidentification. The adverse experience, review or knowledge about the brand that caused the disconnect surprises individuals, who are often resistant to breaking the connection with the brand. One considers that individuals find the break-ups of the brand relationships hurtful due to the critical role brands and their communities are increasingly playing in identity development and expression. Sung and Choi's (2010) research shows that another reason for the hesitance is the emotional investment the individuals made in the consumer-brand relationship. As Fournier (1998) shows that consumer-brand relationship quality is vital to individuals, brands need to ensure that the brand experience

is consistent to maintain consumer-brand identification and therefore the consumer-brand relationship.

Another aspect of the fluidity of consumer-brand identification is the connection between an individual and the family of brands. The findings show that a consumer can identify with one brand (e.g., Diet Coke) and disidentify with another member of the family of brands (e.g., Coke Zero). The individuals in the brand community show their level of identification with each brand and may even view the 'other' brand as competition. This is important for organisations to understand in determining the naming, visual and brand identity of their offerings to audiences. Such differences in identification between a family of brands are the opposite of the 'halo' effect. The positive associations of the one brand does not mean beneficial perceptions or attitudes towards a related brand. The differences in utilitarian features, for example, taste of Diet Coke over Coke Zero, as well as the hedonic aspects, for instance, feeling accomplished with an iPhone 6 that can easily be displayed versus a MacBook Air which is not as conspicuous. Interestingly, both Coke Zero and MacBook Air have been recently discontinued or retooled brands from their respective portfolios. Due to the lack of certainty around identification, an essential strategy brands must use online is to create separate social media brand communities for each sub-brand even in the existence of an overall corporate brand page. Individual groups, pages and hashtags gives each set of sub-brands their dedicated sub-community, that caters to their specific context while allowing them to declare their commitment without opposition from fans of related brands, who still view members of such collectives as 'others.' Such a discussion around the fluidity of consumer-brand identification adds a measure of complexity to a construct that has already been described by Curras-Perez, Bigne-Alcaniz and Alvarado-Herrera (2009) as multifaceted.

The utilitarian aspects of the brand are essential to both cognitive and affective portions of the consumer-brand identification. This disputes claims made by Hagtvedt and Patrick (2009) that there is no such link, however, as the individual gains the utilitarian benefits that he or she associate with that product and it is surpassed in many cases it builds the trust and the reliance on the brand to be able to deliver those facets on future purchases. The sense of personal satisfaction then strengthens the emotional connection such as affection and perceptions brand superiority by being able to boast to one's circle of influence about the success of the purchase, thus strengthening the consumer-brand identification. Such a finding contradicts extant literature that places satisfaction as a hedonic motivation, however, this study considers that the knowledge and confirmation of the brand to fulfil this need is a cognitive process activated

on use of the brand. In support of Pöyry, Parvinen and Malmivaara (2013), this study shows that the social media brand community may themselves be hedonic or utilitarian in nature, thereby providing the environment by which these benefits sought by consumers can be satisfied. This is accomplished via information search, knowledge share and other engagement behaviours that are encouraged within the community and serve to enhance the cognitive and affective measures that drive identification, identity and relationship development. Likewise, Scarpi, Pizzi and Visentin's (2014) research determined that utilitarian motives are essential to people's behaviours such as WOM and even price consciousness. The hedonic aspects of the brand also create sensations such as joy, pride, love, respect and even nakedness in the absence of the brand communicated within the communities show the importance of emotional sensations in individuals' purchase. They also demonstrate the relevance of identity motivations to purchase, to brand connection and brand community membership. Research has established the importance overall of hedonism in influencing consumer behaviour (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). Pöyry, Parvinen and Malmivaara (2013) note that there has been some discord in the literature regarding what behaviours in online behaviours (browsing, searching, chatting and shopping) can be considered rational or utilitarian or emotional and hedonic. This study considers that online behaviours by nature can fulfil both of these aspects of the individual due to the lack of compartmentalisation of actions in relation to the needs that they serve.

Kwon and Jain (2009) show how utilitarian and hedonic motivations work together to produce the desire to make purchases. This is confirmed within this research, whereby one motivation (utilitarian) may complement the other (hedonic) or the realisation of one motivation (hedonic) may inspire the other (utilitarian). In this way, the motivations work not as two separate aspects of a consumer's purchase process but are collaborators in the consumption choice and its consequences to the consumer's identity, identification and relationship with brands. This aspect of the research opposes the findings of Scarpi, Pizzi and Visentin's (2014) argument that these two motivations have vastly different routes and consequences. However, they argue that consumers purchase for fun and needs, while researchers may need to consider that there are more reasons to buy and use products. Additionally, what may be considered a fun or emotional consideration by extant literature for the individual may be a very functional and instrumental need in the fulfilment of the purchase and identity motivations. Pöyry, Parvinen and Malmivaara (2013) show that hedonic motivations have greater scientifically proven links to consumer behaviour patterns while the links to utilitarian motives are not as significant.

However, in the context of this social media netnography, persons display their utilitarian as well as the hedonic motivations in equal measure in the processes of information seeking, troubleshooting, reviewing and knowledge sharing. Therefore, the need to determine direct separations of behaviours according to the type of motive is not as essential within the setting of the social media brand community as it has been offline in the view of researchers. Further research is needed to confirm or deny that assertion. However, with the determination that hedonic and utilitarian motivations work simultaneously to influence behavioural patterns which can be motives as well as consequences to identification, identity and relationships, this research advocates for studies that no longer need to separate these aspects of consumption behaviours. While they are distinguishable, cognitive and affective, their consequences are intrinsically linked in accomplishing individuals shopping objectives.

The images posted on social media brand communities are not limited to the use of photos. Videos of the self and the surroundings also abound which show the opening (unboxing) of new products, reviews, use and demonstration of the products to those in the collective and social media at large. The choice to display these images and videos show a deliberate choice to participate in the traditions and rituals of the online community as developed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001). Imagery, therefore, shows not only individual self-concept but speaks to the commitment to the community, signalling identification and relationship with both the brand and the community. The selfies as well as the videos and other forms of imagery shown in these communities display a sense of self-presentation. Pounders, Kowalczyk and Stowers (2016) and Kedzior, Allen and Schroeder (2016) note that selfies are tools of self presentation, while Ellison, Heine and Gibbs (2006) recognise that there is greater power for self-presentation online. Therefore, the self-presentation theory as advanced by Goffman (1959) whose research showed that there was the need to present an acceptable image of one's self to the audience. This audience may have been imagined in his work, but this study shows that the online environment creates a real audience (online) for one's display of self. The audience shapes the tools (platforms) and symbols (brands) one uses to fashion that desirable self-narrative. Furthermore, the online environment supports the shares of these images that display the multiple layers that Goffman (1959) would have introduced to the academic literature. Individuals are simultaneously displaying the personal, social, online, community and consumer identities that their chosen brands support when they share their images with the community.

5.4. Community Considerations on the development of identity

The findings proved that the community is one defined unit even though it is spread across several platforms (e.g. applications, websites or hashtags) because they collectively and individually possess Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) markers of community, with additional markers identified as engagement, creativity and individualisation. The concept of hierarchy within the social media brand community, outlined in this study, goes against traditional concepts of the structure therein. Habibi, Laroche and Richard (2016) argue that these are collectives without structure or hierarchy. However, this study considers the user types (e.g. influencer, active, passive, lurker and opportunist). This research adopts the user types (active, passive and lurker) as outlined by Hartmann, Wiertz and Arnould (2015), Sun, Rau and Ma (2014) and Lai and Chen (2014) while adding influencer, which is an industry-related term for those within the environment who are able to have the greatest sway of the other individuals within the society due to popularity or the trust with their expertise. Such findings show that the concept of social media brand community has evolved into a sophisticated entity in which the hierarchy is determined by the value each member contributes to the collective. The concept of the hierarchy has an impact on identity, consumer-brand identification and the consumer brand relationship. As an individual, one understands intuitively where one stands at any point in the engagement with the community and behaves to suit one’s role. However, that role or identity within the community is not a static, it can transition at different stages or depending on changing behaviours. For instance, one can move from lurker, to passive, to active and even ultimately to influencer within the space as one engages within the community or deepens the relationship with the brand, the community or leaders of the collective. One’s identification with the brand and the community can grow despite one’s position on the hierarchy. As one learns from the community and gains social capital from participating within the environment the identification with the brand deepens. This is a result of positive brand community experience (Simon, Brexendorf and Fassnaact, 2016) that engaged members work hard to create as a collective.

5.5. Further considerations of social media influence on relationships

These relationships within the community are varied in length to reflect the information and opinion exchange nature. There are individuals who either started the communities or have been engaging repeatedly over time and there are those who are more short-term and may interact fleetingly or only as they need information or opinions. These fulfil the concept of the social exchange theory (Xie, Poon and Zhang, 2017) who shows that individuals will return

favours when they benefit from others, even organisations and will help those parties. There are certain antecedents or motivations which are present within these communities even before it reaches this state of mutual exchange. They cover the features of cognitive, affective and behavioural motives of these relationships. This study is leading in considering engagement and its subsequent behaviours (knowledge/opinion share, creation, information search) to be behavioural motives of identification, consumer identity and the subsequent interpersonal relationship with the brand and its community. Other writers note cognitive aspects such as consumer-brand identification, brand trust and brand commitment (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Martinez-Lopez et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2012) while others speak of affective aspects such as brand passion (Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence, 2013). This study shows that each of these features (affective, behavioural and cognitive) work in relationship to each other to develop the interpersonal relationship with the brand and the community. Additionally, certain identity-related motives (Oyserman, 2009; Reed II et al., 2012) are observed within the subject communities to generate the interpersonal relationships. A search for self-congruity (Sirgy, 1982; Kressmann et al., 2006) are important to the initiation and sustenance of relationships within these environments. Essentially, people deliberately enter into relationship with the community and the brand knowing what their purpose for said relationship is as well as what they were willing to reciprocate as a member of the community.

There are some essential consequences to the presence of the interpersonal relationships based on the findings. This study is among the first to show that the socialisation, credited to participation within the community, is as a direct result of the relationships formed therein. The reciprocity generated by these relationships, garners the desire to conform to the social norms of the relationship. Wang, Yu and Wei (2012) speaks about consumer socialisation as people's determination to match the community to which they belong. The consequences, furthermore, are also considered affective, cognitive and behavioural in nature. The interpersonal relationships inspire engagement and its related behaviours, while motivating the individuals to be evangelical in their promotion of the brand and its privileges to members (new and old), non-members and their friends and followers. This proves the research by Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013) and Scarpi (2010) that the consumer-brand relationship inspires brand advocacy and brand evangelism. Within the context of these social media brand communities, brand evangelism is observed in the form of giving effusive, positive opinions about the brand and its community. This concept is also the driver behind the defence of the brand and its community to those who may be harshly critiquing or arguing of the inferiority of the brand

and its users. Brand defence is rooted in the interpersonal relationships formed in the community and with the brand, but also the users own sense of self and need to be on the positive side of the brand community arguments. Like Lin and Sung (2010) showed in their work, the brand user fuses his or her identity with the brand and this causes them to reject negative information about the brand that will threaten their self-concept. The same can be said about the community. The consequences of the interpersonal relationships are also in line with the self-expansion theory as spoken of by Belk (1988) whereby these relationships are included into the individuals' self-concept. This can be seen with both the brand and the community, based on the findings of this research. Additionally, the community, brand and relationships therewith are sound tools used to self-present to others online and offline, in a manner that presents the image of the individual which he or she wishes to convey. This extends Goffman's (1959) work to the social media brand environment, where the aim of these performances is identity endorsement or ego validation.

5.6 Model considerations for the development of identity and consumer-brand relationships

The model proposed in chapter four, section 4.5 addresses the role that social media brand community in facilitating the development of consumer-brand identification, consumer identity and consumer-brand relationships. These features are independently and collectively important to the organisation as well as the individual. Therefore, consumer research has focused on understanding how these aspects are developed and their impact on an individual's identity and positioning in society. Additionally, studies have discussed the growing importance of brands to creating and expressing selves (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 2017). In so doing, research has shown that brands are not inanimate objects but essential facets in the human quest to find or create meaning within their lives (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Social media's growing influence on daily lives (Bolton et al., 2013; Wang, 2017) has influenced many aspects of individuals lifestyles (Powers et al, 2012; Brännback, Nikou and Bouwman, 2016). In line with this understanding of social media's influence on lifestyles, Belk (2016) updated his 1988 treatise to show that digital media provides new ways to express self as well as to communicate, purchase and learn among other multiple functions to the human experience. Other researchers such as (Black and Veloutsou, 2017; Tuskej and Podnar, 2018) show that brands and social media combine to enhance the manner in which individuals create and present their selves to their audience. However, this model developed based on the qualitative study depicts the power of social media brand communities to construct consumer identity and consumer-brand

relationships, moderated by the consumer-brand and consumer-community identification that develops therein.

The process as visualised in the model shows that individuals' entrance and interaction within the social media brand communities is precipitated by their identity motives. This supports theories such as the self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1982; Kressmann et al., 2006) which argue that individuals make decisions in line with their self. Another theory that this study's model provides validation for is the identity-based model by Oyserman (2009) which shows that identity is a major inspiration for many human decisions. Therefore, one can argue that the importance of identity in the human experience drives the entrance into social media brand communities and its subsequent consequences of consumer identity and brand relationships. This study adds expression as a human need to the affiliation, distinctiveness and prestige discussed by Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012). Expression is a need because this is how individuals convince themselves as well as others of their identity, a point this study has in common with (Lin, Fang and Jin, 2017; Chernev, Hamilton and Gal, 2011). Brown (1997) argues that self-presentations to others is a powerful way of proving to one's self the merits of one's identity. These needs (expression, distinctiveness, affiliation and prestige) synthesise Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs regarding safety, love/belonging, esteem and self-actualisation within the context of the social media brand community. Participating within the community allows one to feel positively towards one's self due to the perception that one belongs to a positive community. Such a need is essential since, as Tajfel and Turner (1979) and Martiny and Kessler (2014) among others have discussed, humans need to feel positively towards self as well as one's social groupings. This is important for esteem needs as depicted by Maslow. It also covers within this study prestige and distinctiveness needs where one feels esteemed and respected by others due to the positive perceptions of the groups one is affiliated with. Participation and membership within community covers the need for affiliation and belonging discussed by Maslow (1943), Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) and this study. The sense of belonging among similar others builds confidence and provides a sense of direction and meaning for an individual's identity. A consequence of the sense of belonging, prestige, esteem and distinctiveness is the feeling of security in self due to being led to making the right decisions for mental and physical well-being within one's communities.

These identity motivations drive individual entry into social media brand communities but also provide the basis for evaluating the community and brand to determine one's identification with either or both of them. This study goes further than Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and

Sen (2012), Lam et al (2010), Tuskej, Golob and Podnar (2013) and (Nguyen, Wu and Chen, 2017) in showing the motives of consumer-brand identification as affective, cognitive and behavioural in nature. Consumer-brand and consumer-community identification is nurtured based on the emotions, thoughts and behaviours of the individuals and their influencers within the social media brand community. Therefore, identification is depicted as a collective action as well within the case of the social media brand community. The collective nature is confirmed in the role that these spaces play in the socialisation of the individual (Wang, Yu and Wei, 2012) seen within this study. Socialisation teaches them what is acceptable language and behaviour within the community, but also helps them find that they can identify with the brand and community on the basis of shared values as well. Tuskej, Golob and Podnar (2013) shows values as an important facet of identification. This study confirms such a declaration, especially as it relates to consumer-community identification in light of the consideration that shared values is a marker that must exist for the collective to be considered a community. The support provided by these communities for the consumer culture theory in the wider sense of identity development and socio-cultural positioning also nurtures identification. This support can also provide a solid rationale for the observation that identification within these communities is stronger than that in previous research. The behavioural facet places some of the responsibility at the feet of the individual, however, the addition of the community facet means that the influences are greater as well providing more intimate ties to the brand for the individual, therefore, strengthening the consumer-brand identification.

Lawler (2014) describes identity as the creation of self by identifying with an “other”. This study considers that consumer identity therefore, is that “self” developed by identifying with a brand. This identity or self is guided by the social media brand community and the consequences of the identification with that community and the brand at its centre. These consequences are also affective, cognitive and behavioural in nature in line with the literature (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Popp and Woratschek, 2017). The consequences include confidence in self-expression that allows one to speak with security of one’s values, characteristics or accomplishments by the display of the brand or one’s experience with the brand offline and within the social media brand community. This self-expression also shows how one expands to include the brand and the community into one’s self-definitions (Belk, 1988). Additionally, the identification with the brand and community allows one to display without fear of ridicule how the brand overlaps with one’s self-concept. The observations with this study shows that self-presentation theory (Goffman, 1959) and

Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) are relevant due to the nature of the behaviours within the social media brand community. The acts which are displaying one's self to a virtual but real audience helps individuals to compare themselves with each other based on how they are placed in the community's hierarchy and the reactions their content receives from other members. The reactions (positive or negative) helps determine future self-presentations and the socialising effects of the community. The community is a social identity in itself, due to one's feeling of belonging to that space and a way to communicate one's social positioning to the wider society. This social identity is linked to one's consumer identity via its basis in the consumption behaviours and desires of the individual. They are both nurtured within the context of the community by its engagement behaviours and how individuals learn from each other's content shown in the various rituals, traditions and other markers of community such as creativity and individualisation.

The model shows how these concepts, the social media brand community, identification and consumer identity result in the consumer-brand relationship. As Fournier (1998) considers there are various types of relationships between individuals and their brands and the quality of these relationships are important for the consumer. Social media brand communities provide the avenue to develop these relationships regardless of type. These relationships are supported by the identity motives of the individuals, their identification with the brand and its community and the engagement behaviours within the social media brand community. Xie, Poon and Jang (2017) speak about the reciprocity of brand relationships and these are evident within the social media brand community. This is shown in the willingness to advocate on the behalf of the brand, to enhance the community experience of other members as well as the willingness to share their expertise. These provide the grounds by which the community is evaluated as useful and engaged with the six markers of community revealed in this study. The role within the brand herein must be proactive as well as reactive in fostering the relationships herein. Labreque (2014) shows that consumers expect reactions from their brands they engage with in social media, therefore, brands must create and execute engagement policies while continuously monitoring their social media community for interactions from their existing and potential consumers. They must also create the atmosphere by which their consumers feel empowered to share with others and ask questions or perform the search behaviours identified earlier in this chapter. The brand must be proactive in co-creating with their users and participating in the engagement behaviours with the community. The relationship within these community supports established brand concepts such as brand loyalty, evangelism, equity,

identity and brand positioning. These are all, however, created with the social media brand community as a catalyst for their generation.

5.7 Summary

The social media brand community is an essential feature to the development of consumer identity and consumer-brand relationship. The process of socialisation within these spaces cultivates consumer-brand and consumer-community identification. The individual identifies with the brand based on shared values and identity, entering and participating within the community based on their own identity motives. Thus behaving in a manner that is congruous to their notions of self. The social media brand community exists across several platforms but consists the markers of community and a shared purpose that unifies them into one collective. The markers of community within these, on the face of it, unstructured communities create a level of hierarchy based on the manner of which people use the community and the influence they develop within the environment. The concept of hierarchy within the social media brand community, outlined in this study, goes against traditional concepts of the structure therein. Within the social media community, there is a behavioural aspect to the motivators or drivers of consumer-brand identification. Additionally, the social media brand community is increasing the role of the brand in the development of the individual due to the strengthening of a consumer culture within that environment. Therefore, the development of an identity as a consumer of such a brand (e.g., Apple, Coke, and L'Oréal) is essential to the individual as it allows him or her to be seen by the positive values of the brand and to be associated with the engaged community. Brand and community identification leads to affective, cognitive and behavioural consequences which grow to build the relationship between the brand and the consumer. They include brand love, advocacy, loyalty and social relationship capital, benefiting both brand and consumer. Ultimately, the social media brand community makes the consumer more responsible for their own relationship with the brand but also increases their influence over other consumers' brand relationships.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the thesis and findings of the investigation while detailing the research contributions as well as the implications for theory and practice. The chapter is outlined as follows: section 6.2 summarises the main findings of the study. Section 6.3 addresses the research questions while section 6.4 speaks to the research objectives. In partnership, sections 6.5 and 6.6 discuss the research gap filled by the research and its subsequent contribution to the academic discourse. The research implications for theory and practice are evaluated in sections 6.7 and 6.8 respectively, while section 6.9 addresses the research limitations. Section 6.10 provides recommendations for future research and finally, section 6.11 will provide the concluding remarks to this study.

6.2 Summary of Main Findings

A major revelation of this research is that social media's influence on identity development is contextual to the individual. As individuals react to situational cues differently, the change to an individual's identity starts at the level of the personality. The manner in which one uses social media is a bigger influence on identity development than the tool itself since one's behaviour inspires the internal dialogue as well as associations that builds one's self-concept and view of the community to which one is associated. Social media's role as a facilitator of identity-expression was also a crucial aspect of this study's findings. This digital tool creates the stage for one to display one's identity to one's audience. The audience here is virtual but real, not imagined as previously stated. The continuous expression of one's self has consequences for the individual's identity. Use of social media for relationship development and identity expression is not a generational thing but an experiential thing. The person's personal experience with technology, on the whole, plays a more important role than their age. Various generations use the social media in the same way across platforms. However, the motive for the use is where the difference lies. All generations are expressing themselves. However, younger generations use it more for the purpose of identity validation.

Consumer-brand identification is not static but adjusts in strength based the consumer experience with the brand and the self-brand match. Therefore, the concept of identification is depicted as a spectrum with consumer-brand identification at one end and disidentification at the other, influenced by either positive or negative brand experiences respectively. The transition along the spectrum from consumer-brand identification to consumer-brand

disidentification causes a break in the consumer-brand relationship that is hurtful to the individual, who feels like the brand disappointed them, broke their trust or even deceived them. Within a product line, individuals display consumer-brand identification with one brand and disidentification with another member of the family. The study determined that consumer-brand identification is stronger due to social media due to the interactive nature of the tool. Consequently, the consumer-brand relationship is stronger due to the ability of multiple sides to participate in conversations about the brand. In comparing the development of consumer-brand identification in online and offline iterations, this research identified several significant differences. These differences are the addition of behavioural drivers to the context of consumer-brand identification, the global scope of consumer influence on identification development and the proactivity of the individual in the process. The social media environment facilitates user engagement and creativity, which generate a measure of personal responsibility for consumer-brand and consumer-community identification. The research shows that the different aspects of consumer-brand identification work in collaboration with each other. However, they can also conflict with each other. For instance, affective aspects of consumer-brand identification (attitudes and emotions) can often override the cognitive aspects that lead to consumer-brand disidentification (knowledge/information) to ensure a consumer maintains a level of identification with the brand.

There are affective, cognitive and behavioural consequences that link consumer-brand identification to the consumer-brand relationship. The social media brand community has the key markers of community as outlined by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) in terms of moral responsibility, shared consciousness and traditions and rituals. This research finds that there are additional signs or markers of brand community within the social media environment, i.e., engagement, creativity and individualisation. The markers of community, i.e., shared consciousness, moral responsibility and rituals and traditions, are motivators of engagement within the social media brand community. These elements allow the social media brand community to be sophisticated enough for the emergence of a hierarchy which includes member types based on behaviour. The hierarchy has consequences for the development of identity, identification and the consumer-brand relationship. The level of positioning within the hierarchy was determined in accordance usefulness of content, level of activity and the type of content posted. Membership within the hierarchy in social media is found to be fluid with two main categories of membership: Transient/transitory and Committed/long-term. Influencers and active users are committed members, opportunistic users are transitory, while passive users

and lurkers can abide under both transitory and committed members. Social media is a robust socialisation tool for those within the community who are submerged within the use of the media, regardless of age. Furthermore, brands act as a symbol of socialisation to indicate that individuals are conforming to a specific society or segment of society.

6.3 Addressing the Research Questions

The goal of this research was to strengthen the academic and practical understanding of consumer identity and consumer-brand relationships within social media brand communities. This was accomplished by the creation of a model that shows how these communities are catalysts for the creation of consumer-brand identification which facilitates the development of consumer identity and the formation of consumer-brand relationships. In such a way, this research builds on previous work while addressing a research problem, made up of several moving parts. Firstly, the research was concerned with determining the drivers of consumer-brand identification that are influenced by the social media context. Secondly, the study was designed to consider the role of online consumer-brand identification in developing consumer identity and the consumer-brand relationship. Therefore, this investigation aimed to support the provision of academic insight into the consumer-brand relationship within social media brand communities. Consequently, several research questions emerged due to the review of the previous literature and the identification of a research gap, whose answers directly speak to the research aim and problem.

The first research question asked what are the online drivers or motivators of consumer-brand identification. These are affective, behavioural and cognitive drivers of consumer-brand identification observed within social media brand communities. The affective drivers such as the need for self-expression show how important the brand is in the online context, especially within social media brand communities, in fulfilling an individual's identity goals such as identity prestige or the need for belonging that accompanies membership with the brand community and ownership of the brand. These are all related to the development of online consumer-brand identification. The motives unique to this research such as happiness, joy, pride and excitement are emotional consequences of brand use and will lead to consumer-brand and consumer-community identification. The cognitive drivers of consumer-brand identification online reflect the realisation of a self-brand connection with the use of words such as think, realise, appreciate, and know signalling the meaning of the brand, and by extension the community, to the individual. These reveal the expectations of the individual for the brand and its community. Behavioural drivers are the links between the engagement

behaviours of individuals and their influencers and the development of consumer-brand or consumer-community identification. While, this study is the first to identify behavioural drivers as a motive for consumer-brand identification it must be noted that these categories are not cleanly separated from each other but collaborate with each other to drive consumer-brand identification online.

The second research question queried how consumer-brand identification influences the development of identity with social media brand communities. In answering, this question, the research built on the work of researchers such as Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012), Tuskej, Golob and Podnar (2013), Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), Wang et al. (2017) and Lawler (2014) who wrote extensively about the link between identification and identity. The study shows that while the scope and nature of consumer-brand development may change due to the characteristics of the online environment, the purpose of identification remains the same and as such supports the previous work on consumer-brand identification and identity. The need for a meaningful self-definition forms the foundation of consumer-brand identification in a similar manner as religious, political or national identification. Social media brand communities facilitate this process by nurturing the user's identity as an agent of socialisation. The affiliation with the brand and its social media community generates the self-categorisation and social identity that influences several layers of the individuals' identity, including their consumer identity. Therefore, consumer-brand identification within social media brand communities enables an environment where the identity of the brand, community and individual are all simultaneously co-created by all stakeholders who engage within that setting. The value to identity then includes self-esteem, identity validation, a sense of accomplishment, and feelings of distinctiveness as well as affiliation.

The third question is concerned with how brands are used to develop the individual's identity (consumer identity) on social media. The construction of a self in this manner produces a consumer identity due to the practice of displaying one's consumption. However, this shows that the consumer identity is used to support the other layers of their identity such as personal, social and professional. While Seidman (2012) and Wang et al.'s (2017) research showed that people are more open with sharing their real identity online, this research shows that brands shape the identity and persons share the personal information that they believe will build their credibility as a faithful follower of the brand. This realisation is essential since, as Felix (2012) discusses, consumers do not only define themselves by the brands they consume but also by those they avoid. Choosing to define one's self by the brands one hates could account for the

number of instances of disidentification seen in the data. Consumption choices are self-symbolising as the brand is chosen based on the level of similarity or dissimilarity to the individual and their personal values.

The fourth question addresses the differences between consumer-brand identification developed online versus that developed offline. The first difference is that the behavioural drivers of consumer-brand identification are more readily observable in the social media brand community. The second significant difference noticed is the scope that social media provides additional influences to one's identities from global consumers, removing any location-based restrictions on communications. This means that individuals from across the globe can in real-time contribute to the experiences that endear consumer-brand identification in an individual. Therefore, the motives are not limited to brand marketing communications or other consumers in a similar geographic location. This second difference magnifies the point that social media is both a driver and tool of expression consumer-brand identification. In a third argument, the consumer-brand identification within online environments is deemed to be more proactive, on the part of the individual, than those spoken of in offline contexts. The engagement levels and creativity showcased in reviews, tutorials, advertising creations, blogs as well as other forms of user-generated content, indicate that consumers are taking more explicit responsibility for their own identification with the brand and its communities.

A fifth research question inquired about the consequences of online consumer-brand identification for the consumer brand relationship. These consequences consists of affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects. The affective consequences were identified as brand love, brand loyalty, brand trust, possessiveness, desire, feelings of distinctiveness and belongingness, while the cognitive consequences are increased social capital, boosted self-esteem, respect, identity or self-validation, perceptions of prestige, attraction, confidence, and brand preference. The behavioural consequences include repeat purchase, repeat engagement with the community, participation in online and offline WOM, creating user-generated content that presents the brand in a positive light, defending the brand against negative reviews or reputational attacks, sharing branded content from the company and other members. These aspects complementary and expressions of such consequences within the brand communities relies on a positive brand and community experience on the part of the individual or a sense of moral responsibility to the other members therein. These consequences benefit both the brand and the individual leading to a long-term relationship, increased customer lifetime value and profitability for the brand.

With regard to the final research question, what is the role of the interactive web (social media) in developing consumer-brand identification, the data illuminated the role of social media in connecting individuals to community, communications, values, brands and influences that inspired consumer-brand identification and identity. Prior to online media, these influences were fragmented into separate tools. However, social media creates the environment to empower individuals via their chosen set of networks, websites or applications, which work in tandem with each other. As researchers such as Belk (1988), Harmon-Jones, Schmeichel and Harmon-Jones (2009) and Trepte and Loy (2017) note, individuals receive their cues and tools of identification from education, religion, family and employment among other segments of society. However, as society becomes more fragmented and less categorised according to the previously mentioned classifications or even race and class, the online tools such as social media had the potential to be used as a means of fulfilling the role of those traditional groupings. Therefore, online tools potentially serves as the source of personal, social, professional selves supported by one's consumer identity.

6.4 Addressing the Research Objectives

This study has four research objectives which influenced the choice of paradigm, methodology and research tools. The first research objective was to define the drivers of consumer-brand identification within the online context of social media. Previous research has established that brand identification assists with fulfilling consumers' self-definitional needs (Tildesley and Coote, 2009; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Wang et al., 2017). However, with the establishment of the online tools of communication and community development, this influence is in a state of evolution. This research shows that the process of online consumer-brand identification is different both in scope and nature to that previously discussed. The process of consumer-brand identification, as developed due to social media, is more proactive on the part of the individual and creates a more tribal relationship. This tribal relationship between the brand and the consumer results in a collaborative process of brand and individual identity creation that reflects the influence of the socialisation of the brand community on both the brand and the consumer. Goulding, Shankar and Canniford (2013) note that consumer tribes create a transient environment where people use the space as an escape from their daily lives. However, they note that there is a process of socialisation within these tribes even though technically they cannot be considered subcultures or communities. Within this study, it is noted that the tribal nature does, however, exist as some users are transient and come only for the purpose of escape or for information and do not return

once that purpose is achieved. However, the social media brand community is fully adopted by other users, who claim membership, as a tool of developing consumer-brand identification that can lead to the understanding of acceptable characteristics and the ability to create and express their identity on the internet and social media but also offline in their daily lives. As such, the drivers of consumer-brand identification within the social media environment are defined by this research as the affective, cognitive and behavioural motivations which lead to a self-brand connection based on the individual's positive brand and social media community experience.

The second research objective examined the role of social media brand communities in facilitating the environment for the development of consumer-brand identification. The findings of this study establishes the brand as central to creation within this context of a consumer culture which leads to the creation and expression of identity within these communities. These self-expressions are central to user-generated postings within social media brand communities and reflect the development of consumer-brand and consumer-community identification. Therefore, the social media community's role in developing or facilitating consumer-brand identity rests in creating the environment for self-expression and continued conversation around the central brand. Such consumer identification has consequences for the identity of the individual members of the community. The brand acts as an "other" that can be identified with (Lawler, 2014; Lam et al., 2010), as a symbol of social identity (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Trump and Brucks, 2012) and as a signal of accomplishment within an individual. The social media brand community's ability to facilitate brand and individual identity has a strong influence on the development of consumer-brand identification. The ability of the individual to participate in the co-creation of a brand in his or her own image creates a brand that has a stronger potential for the self-brand match and therefore consumer-brand identification.

Another objective required the research to determine the consequences of online consumer-brand identification in relation to the development of identity and the emergence of the consumer brand relationship. This research has found that the brand is used to communicate or create the persona of the individual as they wish to be acknowledged by the various audiences on social media. In so doing, the individuals form relationships with the brand and the social media brand community. This intersection of relationships is then essential to the online and offline presentation of an individual's sense of self. There are several consequences such as brand evangelism, ownership of the brand's fortunes, collective determination of the terms of the relationship, set expectations and reprimands or punishment for the brand breaking

those set terms. The level of consumer empowerment due to social media in the consumer-brand relationship has been discussed in the literature. However, this paper contributes by showing the moderating effects of a sense of consumer identity and consumer-brand identification to the positive consequences for the relationship. For instance, the social identity of the individual strengthens this vital relationship because the brand is both a symbol of that consumer's position within society (e.g., class, education, profession) and a community with its own social categorisation. There are several consequences for the consumer-brand relationship due to online consumer-brand identification created in social media brand communities. Firstly, the nature of the relationship changes to a more interactive relationship, where the bonds are stronger due to the ability of both parties to communicate with each other as, on the face of it, equal partners. The interactive nature of the relationship generates bonds, trust and loyalty that means the brand has a loyal consumer who will advocate within their personal profiles and the social media community on behalf of the brand. Secondly, the scope means that the brands can form these interactive relationships with individuals from outside of their national borders via the social media community and with multiple consumers either simultaneously or one on one. Thirdly, the connection generated between the individuals strengthens the consumer-brand relationship because they socialise each other in the values of the brand, they validate each other's positive view of the brand serving as echo chambers of the reasons why the brand deserves to be held in high regard.

Finally, the research had the objective of understanding the relationship between identity, identification and the consumer brand relationship especially as it is fostered on social media. There are different ways of developing identity and one of them is the process of identifying with another (Lawler, 2014) that may be attractive for one reason or another, e.g., they give one a boost of self-esteem or social position. This study shows that this is reflected online (e.g., social media) where people identify with brands and share this on their preferred social media network as a way of creating their identity. Importantly, social media creates powerful consequences. For example, social capital (Habibi, Laroche and Richard, 2014; Nambisan and Baron, 2010), self-esteem boosts (Zeugner-Roth, Žabkar and Diamantopoulos, 2015; Lopez, Sicilia and Moyeda-Carabazza, 2017), brand connections (Fournier, 1998; Black and Veloutsou, 2017) and advocacy (Wallace, Buil and Chernatony, 2014; Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013) have implications for the use of brands as a tool of identity creation. The community has positive consequences for the brand as well such as brand loyalty,

improved brand equity, brand social media capital (developed by becoming well-regarded on social media by individuals as well as industry pundits), and engaged community.

6.5 Research Gap

The consumer culture of social media brand communities is a gap in the research considered by this study, noting that these environments are purveyors of this instrumental theory that influence lifestyles online and offline, especially considering that social media is integrated into the lives of many of its users. Furthermore, this study considered the role of the social media brand community in the development of social identity. This space is recognised as its own form of social identity as well as a tool of communicating such to one's audience. The paper also addresses the dearth of studies considering the relevance of the self-congruity theory within the context of the social media brand. Moreover, this paper shows that social comparison is a major facet within these communities, something that was not extensively discussed previously. This study built on past research by determining the antecedents and consequences of consumer-brand identification that are unique to the social media brand communities. Also bridging the gap in the research by considering the links between consumer-brand identification, identity and the consumer-brand relationship by developing a propositional model for such. The research determined whether there were additional markers of community according to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) identifying three further indicators of such within the social media brand community. The next section will discuss how filling these contributed to academic research.

6.6 Research contributions

A major contribution this research has made is the consideration that the manner in which one uses social media is a bigger influence on identity development than the tool itself. A rationale for the role of behaviour in these environments on shaping consumption, personal and social identities is also the exposure of one's self to the socialisation influences of others by participating within the communities and internalising the lessons learnt therein. This somewhat informal process helps members adopt an identity that matches the collective identity of the community (Burke, Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2017). Therefore, this study extends self-congruence to group behaviours within social media brand communities. The socialisation narrative also speaks to the individual search for belonging and affiliation spoken of by Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012), Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) and Wang et al. (2016). The behaviour such as sharing, seeking, engaging, creating shows not only desire to be influenced by the socialising forces of the community but to contribute as well. The proactivity

and socialisation also have a strong relationship to the act of self-presentation, allowing the individual to be able to be strategic in how they disclose factual information and characteristics about themselves, to highlight the best aspects of their selves. As such the work of Goffman (1959) applies to this real audience whereby one can get real-time feedback on one's self-presentations that allow the individual to make amendments to those representations to keep sharing the type of posts that get positive reactions, such as likes, and avoid those that garner negative comments.

This study is among the first to show that the generation gap has no real influence on the engagement behaviours within social media brand communities. In fact, the research argues that various generations use the social media platforms in the same manner. The only difference highlighted in the generations is not behaviour but the underlying motives. While all generations desire self-expression, the younger generations (Y and Z) are more likely to use it for identity validation. As such, this research, disproves Prensky's (2001) digital natives position, although that spoke more in relation to education, and aligns itself more with Cornu and White (2011) who show residence within the environment, leads to the engaging behaviour that builds comfort with the technology and thereby continued use. This research shows the use of social media for relationship development and identity expression is based not on generation but experience within the space. There is also no difference across the gender spectrum either, in confirmation of Nadeem et al's (2015) study.

This research has proven that consumer-brand identification is not a static process but is more of a spectrum of strength ranging from identification to disidentification. The strength herein increases or decreases in strength based on brand crises, political affiliations of the individuals, a measure of congruence with the individual as well as the satisfaction of customer expectations. Therefore, positive perceptions and experiences potentially boost the consumer-brand identification while disappointment with the brand and negative perceptions can decrease the strength of the identification and lead to disidentification. Furthermore, an individual that once identified with a brand can now disidentify with the said brand and vice versa. While the term strength of identification has been used by other researchers (Forehand, Desphande and Reed II, 2002; Bartsch et al., 2016; Hua et al., 2017), this research is the first to consider this essential aspect of identity development, a spectrum of connection. Wolter et al. (2016) consider disidentification the wilful opposition to a company or brand, however, this research takes this further by showing it can be seen as a relationship breakup. Additionally, this study considered that the level of identification changes within the family of sub-brands within a

company. This research thus shows that consumer-brand identification is stronger due to social media due to the proactivity and behaviour of the individuals who can learn from and teach each other and therefore, more effectively shape the community and brand to the image they desire.

This study is the first to accredit behaviour as both an antecedent and consequence of consumer-brand identification. The two-factor model of antecedent/consequence of consumer identification is established within academic discussions (Wolter et al., 2016, Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012; Lam et al., 2010). However, this study states that the behavioural patterns drive the development of consumer-brand identification. Furthermore, each aspect of identification relates to each other and therefore form an intricate web of affective, cognition and behaviour that generate consumer-brand identification. This research discussed this in relation to the social media brand community, however, the findings may cause the need to be considered within offline contexts as well, that behaviour is an instrumental aspect of consumer-brand identification development. This study also discovered the online drivers of identification which are separate from the traditional drivers of consumer-brand identification. These aspects, especially the behavioural drivers, are unique to the online and social media brand community and separate from those identified by writers such as Tuskej, Golob and Podnar (2013), Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) and Wang et al. (2017).

The consequence of online consumer-brand identification for the consumer-brand relationship are affective, cognitive and behavioural. The online drivers are more made visible within social media by the users who share their behaviours and their relations with the brands and the community. The link between these behaviours and the brand is the reciprocity they communicate between brand and user and the meaning of the brand integrated into the individual's identity and their lifestyle. Even further distinctive online drivers revealed by this study include happiness, joy, pride and excitement which also double as motivators of identification. The online drivers and consequences of identification lead to the development and maintenance of the consumer-brand relationship such as loyalty and commitment. They also have consequences for the community relationship. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) speak of the facets of the consumer-community relationship as markers of community (moral responsibility, shared consciousness and traditions and rituals). This research identifies additional markers within the social media environment (engagement, creativity and individualisation) which are present to provide a sustainable and active brand community. As

such, this study has been among the first to make amendments to the markers of community framework developed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) according to the evolution inspired by changes in technology.

An essential contribution to the study of social media brand communities made by this study is the determination that this environment has evolved and has become sophisticated enough to facilitate the development of a hierarchy. Various member types are assigned based on behaviour and the hierarchy is herein defined by the value the member adds to the community. The value added is assessed based on engagement and response with each other in the social media brand community. These terms were used based on the usefulness of content, level of activity and the type of content posted. These member types are: influencer (whose popularity and influence within the community is capitalised on by the brand to introduce new communications and products to the other members), active member (who are proactive within the space, creating and sharing things that are useful to the community), and passive member (who are not creators or active engager but are responsive in liking the posts). These three types of members are assigned to the committed level of membership within the hierarchy. The second level of membership is that of transient which includes passive member, lurker (who do not participate by creating or reaction to posts made within the community) and opportunists (those who capitalise on the popularity of the community and post links to their own interests). Transient members show the level of community support or markers of community while committed members display those markers possess a member of commitment to the community and the brand. This discussion of hierarchy disproves Habibi, Laroche and Richard's (2014) position that there are no hierarchies in online brand communities. De Valck, Van Bruggen and Wierenga (2009) and Felix (2012) also provide indications of the concept of a hierarchy of membership within brand communities, but this study was the first to delineate specifically how this hierarchy would be depicted.

The collective contribution of the above led to the development of the model of consumer identity and consumer-brand relationship development within the social media brand community. This shows that consumer identity and consumer-brand relationship development is a multi-layered process. According to this model, the individual's identity needs (expression, affiliation, distinctiveness and prestige) drives entry into the social media brand community. Such an explanation of the decision to enter supports Oyserman's (2009) identity-based motivation model but makes certain adjustments to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow (1943) outlined the various identity motivations of individuals, noting that as individuals fulfil

the needs at one level, they seek to satisfy the needs on the level above until they accomplish self-actualisation. Within this project, the motivations of physiological needs and safety are included within the driver of affiliation. The psychological membership within the community helps fulfil the basic needs by reducing the risks associated with purchases for brands, especially within those product categories, e.g., food and water. The esteem need is covered by the need for prestige while self-actualisation is included within accomplishment of each of these needs collectively. Under this study, social needs and security needs need not be separated as security is proven to be better in numbers and therefore both needs are served simultaneously. What this study shows, with regard to Maslow's model, is that many of the needs are not clearly defined but work in relation to each other and are better fulfilled due to membership within a community. On entrance to the community, the affective, cognitive and behavioural motivators interact to drive consumer-brand and consumer-community identification. These motivators are moderated by membership type and hierarchy in influencing consumer identity. Furthermore, there are affective, cognitive and behavioural consequences to consumer identification which in turn are motivators to the consumer-brand relationship. There are community influences to both the consumer-brand relationship and consumer identity which are socialisation, identity creation, self-expression, community feeling, shared values as well as shared identity. Collectively, these aspects of the social media brand community are powered by engagement behaviours and content such as unboxing videos, live video, review, FAQ, troubleshooting, comment, retweet, like, tweet, post, selfie, user-generated content, branded content. This study provide the most comprehensive discussion and definition of these engagement behaviours thus far.

6.7 Implications for Theory

There are several implications for academic study based on the possible directions for consumer research. The conceptual model illustrates the development of consumer identity and the consumer-brand relationship in the social media brand community. Such a model helps to understand what aspects of identity and relationship development remain consistent with previous academic research and which features are changing due to the influence of technological advances such as social media. Additionally, it demonstrates how malleable identity as a concept is to changes in society. Furthermore, this study provides an understanding into the hierarchical structure that is emerging as social media brand communities become more organised across the various platforms. The research's depiction of the hierarchy shows that there is structure to the community despite its apparent fragmentation across platforms, pages

and groups. The importance of articulating this membership structure resides in being able to explore the manners in which individuals influence each other and develop a profile within the social media brand community that guides their self-expression and the development of identification and relationship with the brand. Also, while this hierarchical structure provided needs further testing and exploration, it provides the foundations for showing that the relationships between social media brand community members are more complex than accounted for in academic discussions. The findings show the socialising role of social media brand communities in the development of consumer identity. Teaching acceptable values and characteristics by which an individual can self-create and express according to consumer culture. The influence is apparent in the expression of self online and offline and therefore, shows that research needs to focus even more precisely on the nature of this socialisation. This study has proven Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) thesis on the markers of community applicable, even in the case of one that is as fragmented across platforms as the social media brand community. The presence of their original markers and additional one's engagement, individualisation and creativity support the assertion that these spaces do form a community and require further investigation to build on the current study. The additional aspect of behaviour as an antecedent that consumer-brand identification is an evolving process. Additionally, this finding implies for research that behaviour has been a condition for consumer-brand identification, just never explicitly identified by researchers. Therefore, this implies that research even into established concepts within consumer research needs to be evaluated against evolving conditions but also in relation to previous conditions as well.

6.8 Implications for Practice

Marketing managers are also stakeholders in the implications of this research study's findings. Practice needs to consider the implications of the identity-based motivations of individuals' behaviour patterns in regards to social media and brand endorsement. Having a clearer perspective of such will enable brands to strengthen their engagement policies in social media in terms of strategy, tone, frequency and language. The co-creative consequences of the identity motivations for engagement and consumer-brand identification means that brands need to be more informed about various aspects of the identity of the stakeholders they interact within the social media brand communities beyond name, demographics and profile criteria. This study helps them determine what those identity motives are that drive engagement on the part of the individuals. This will strengthen levels of interactivity within the social media brand community and the engagement intensity of individual members. A further consequence is the

reinforcement of the consumer-brand relationship. Additionally, marketing practitioners would enlarge their concept of the social media brand community by considering the findings of this study. Currently, many frame this community as their brand pages or dedicated hashtags but need to expand this to include user-created fan pages, groups and other hashtags. This would improve their market research and co-creative practices within the social media environment by understanding while it seems fragmented, the events in one space to influence the others. Therefore, brands would need to be both proactive and reactive as necessary. They need to be proactive in generating the content that is inspiring and interesting, fuelling engagement. However, they need to be reactive to the content of other users who would otherwise not be recognised by the brand due to which social media platform or tools they use for their content creation. Marketing managers need to consider how to better integrate the concept of co-creation into the traditional aspects of their marketing communications, in light of this research's revelation of its role in identity development and the consolidation of the consumer-brand relationship. Including the above in their planning process would assist the marketing managers in the integration of social media into their integrated marketing communications plans.

6.9 Research Limitations

Each study has its own particular limitations based on timing or resources and this section discusses those of this research project as well as some steps taken to mitigate these restrictions. Firstly, this study has a strong focus on qualitative methods, which in the literature raises questions about reliability and validity due to ability for generalisation. The use of other types of quantitative methods, for example questionnaires, are arguments that research traditions would posit improve the generalisability of the research findings. However, this apparent issue was addressed directly through the use of data and technique triangulation. In regard to the data triangulation, the research gathered information from multiple types of sources (average user on social media, psychologist as well as social media professionals) to analyse and determine the replicability of the categories and conclusions emerging from the research. The data was also drawn from both brand owned and user-generated social media brand settings to gather as much data to widen the potential for ability to replicate the research in studies with other communities or product categories. Furthermore, technique or tool triangulation made use of multiple qualitative tools to collect data that can be confirmations and strengthen the generalisability of the results and support the development of the propositional model of identity and consumer-brand relationship development in social media brand communities.

Additionally, the collection of mass data from social media monitoring, which is considered a quantitative technique, adds an important element to boost the reliability and validity of the findings. Secondly, the study included three core brands from three different product categories, which demonstrates the replicability of the research methodology in varying conditions. However, more brands from a wider cross-section of industries would improve the transferability of the research. Netnography research is also subject to critiques applied to ethnography as well (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) such as interviewer bias. Therefore, this research adopted Nastasi and Schensul's (2005) suggestion to deliberately consider evidence that contradicts the research conclusions. Such a recommendation aligns positively with the constant comparison method of the grounded theory approach to research.

The nature of social media itself has been a critique for other research studies conducted on the platforms. For instance, Sandin (2007) argues that netnographies have informant identity issues. Since on social media and various virtual communities, participants often use aliases, it is harder to confirm real identity in some cases than in regular ethnographies. This could in some researchers view handicap the validity of the information or data gathered. Carter (2005) suggests searching the aliases and names of the participants on search engines to gather demographic data and test the validity of data given. For each piece data included herein, such searches were conducted to ascertain the veracity of those individuals behind the post and ensure they were not bots (profiles created by algorithms). A researcher has to be careful not to alter drastically the behaviour of the participants. This is identified as a limitation for netnography by Sandin (2007) who examined the dynamics of announcing one's presence in the virtual communities as a researcher versus being a quiet observer. However, cloaking one's presence within the community is unethical and largely the reason behind scepticism of researchers in communities offline as well as online (Kozinets, 2010). This study, therefore, followed Carter's (2005) advice to be open to the virtual communities. The research purpose was stated and shared via a dedicated website within the social media community which provided information, including the tenets of confidentiality and anonymity to assure participants of the respectful nature of the research. Gaining access to a purpose-driven and active virtual community can be an issue (Sandin, 2007; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Kozinets; 2010). This is due to mistrust of researchers, fear that information may be used in unethical ways not disclosed and protectiveness of the sanctity of the members to communicate freely without being observed. These were also shared with all the interview participants for their informed consent to be involved with the research. Another seeming drawback of the

research is that time was constrained even though Sandin (2007) notes that netnographies tend not to need as intense a length of time as ethnographies. This could be due to the ability of the researcher to access archival data from previous posts in online environments (Kozinets, 2010).

6.10 Recommendations for Future Research

This research had clear restrictions upon the extent to which it could tackle the social media brand community environment and its influences on identity and the consumer-brand relationship within one study. However, future research may wish to follow-on from this study and consider different ways in which to analyse the findings in different contexts. Firstly, this research considered brands within technology, cosmetics and fast moving consumer goods industries. Consequent researchers may want to consider additional industries such as fashion, hospitality and entertainment to determine whether the research findings apply in those settings as well. The additional industry comparison will confirm the importance of brands, who are both hedonic and utilitarian in nature in the creative as well as self-expressive functions of an individual's identity. They will also strengthen the research available that shows the increased consumerism due to social media and how such is influencing identity and consumer-brand relationships. In hand with this research into other industries, is further studies into other brand communities such as from Reddit, 9GAG and other social media networks that are emerging as strong collectives of individuals around their favourite brands but were not included in this study. Including other social networks, especially new ones or those being used for a revised purpose will keep academic research up-to-date with evolving technology and its role in the consumer experience. Researchers may also wish to focus on single networks (for example, Facebook, Twitter or Instagram) or on only the hashtag to repeat or expand this research. This would reveal whether the findings that apply across networks, as well as hashtags, are fully repeated to the single aspect of the community and what nuanced features exist with regard to the specific social media tool.

Future researchers may also consider using quantitative methods such as questionnaires within the communities to test and prove the model within the different contexts. The focus of this research was exploratory and therefore used a stronger focus on qualitative techniques. However, qualitative or mixed methods to investigate similar or other communities and brand/product categories could provide great support for the model or provide adjustments to show the development of identity and consumer-brand relationships within these increasingly important communities. Forthcoming consumer research may also desire to focus on mobile

media communities used by singular brands around their consumers to consider how they influence consumer-brand identification, identity and the consumer-brand relationships. As a focus is being pushed in some corners for brands to create their own media outlets to capture their community, in light of social media algorithm changes that are limiting the content seen by community members, the earned media of social media brand communities may soon face a challenge by the owned media of applications produced by the brand for its consumers. In such a case, researchers need to consider the specific nature of these communities independently or in comparison with social media and the influence on identity and consumer-brand relationship. This research focussed strongly on consumer-brand identification in terms of developing the identity and consumer-brand relationships. However, the findings disclose that the social identification produced by the community itself has a definitive role to play in the social media context of the development of identity and the consumer relationship. Future researchers may want to focus specifically on the role of consumer-community identification within social media brand communities on the development of identity and the consumer-brand relationship.

6.11 Summary

This research adopted a netnographic approach to the study of consumer behaviour in the social media environment. As social media platforms become increasingly integrated into the lives of individuals, it was essential to consider how these networks collaborate to influence consumer behaviour. This study shows that the user-generated nature of social media makes the brand communities strong influences on consumer behaviour due to the effect on the fulfilment of the individuals' identity goals, such as prestige, distinctiveness and belongingness. It also showed the complex nature of social media brand communities that produce a hierarchy of users that add structure to an otherwise fragmented community. The hierarchy exists in collaboration with the markers of community (shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, sense of moral responsibility as well as engagement, individualisation and creativity) to provide a measure of cohesion and structure to a fragmented set of networks. The addition of behavioural antecedents to the conceptualisation of the consumer-brand identification is new to academic discussions in addition to cognitive and affective motivations and consequences. The identity motives of prestige, distinctiveness and belongingness inspire engagement with the social media brand community, while the user-generated nature of these platforms drive expression and creation of self. This is due to the socialising effect that participating in and learning from the interactions within these brand communities. Together with the fulfilment of

the aforementioned identity motives, entrance in these communities facilitate the development and maintenance of the consumer-brand relationship. These social media brand communities may be fragmented across networks, including pages, groups and hashtags created by either the brand or the consumer. However, they connect to provide a measure of social capital for the brand and the individuals based on the usefulness of the interactivity within these spaces. These prompt brand loyalty with a desire to participate in brand evangelism or word of mouth on the part of the individual as well as improved brand equity and profitability from the perspective of the brand. Finally, the study of identity, identification and the consumer-brand relationship is essential due to the influence on consumer behaviour as well as corporate practice in addition to the mounting importance of social media in a growing cross-section of individuals' lives.

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Appendix A: Social Media Psychologist Interview Schedule

Identity creation

1. How has social media changed the development of identity in your observation?
2. Is there any truth to the argument of social media as a tool of socialisation?
3. What role do the brands play in this socialisation of individuals?
4. Is this role more pronounced now than before social media?
5. What are the major factors of social media that influence the development of identity?
6. How is this influence on identity played out in the various generations? E.g. Millennials, Generation X, Baby Boomers etc. Is one generation more likely to use social media to develop their identity? Is one generation more likely to use social media to express their identity?

Identity expression

1. How does social media facilitate the expression of identity?
2. Are brands used to express identity in the same ways offline and online?
3. What are the strongest motivations for using brands to express identity online?
4. Who are individuals more interested in impressing online? Friends? Family? Acquaintances? Strangers?
5. How does the use of brands to express identity impact their self-esteem or feeling of self-worth?

Relationships

1. The consumer brand relationship is stronger because of social media or is it no noticeable strength witnessed due to social media's influence?
2. What do you think is the most influential aspect of social media on the consumer-brand relationship?
3. How powerful are consumers in their development of their relationship with the brand due to the influence of social media?
4. Who has the power in the relationship or is it a 50-50? How do other people in the community influence the relationship?
5. How does this influence the development and expression of identity?

I thank you very much for your participation. If there is anything you wish to add or ask feel free to contact me.

Demographic

Gender: Male Female

Company Role: _____

Community Role: _____

Length of time in that role _____

Appendix B: Social Media Professional Interview Schedule

Social Media Engagement and its effects

- 1. How would you define social media engagement? What role do brands play in encouraging social media with their fans online?**
- 2. How would you measure engagement on social media? Are there certain ways of telling when people are more engaged with a brand on social media?**
- 3. How does this engagement influence the individuals? Is there any influence on the identity creation or expression of the individuals? What about the social media engagement is such a strong influence on the identity of the individual? How is this usually expressed on the fan pages or professional profiles of the individuals?**
- 4. How is this influence on identity played out in the various generations? E.g. Millennials, Generation X, Baby Boomers etc. Is one generation more likely to use social media to develop their identity? Is one generation more likely to use social media to express their identity?**
- 5. How would the engagement influence the brand's identity? Is the engagement between brand and consumer more powerful now in the wake of social media or is it that the engagement is more noticeable?**

Consumer Brand Identification

- 1. What is your understanding of consumer-brand identification? How is consumer-brand identification developed? How is this aided by social media interactions between brands and their audience?**
- 2. How does social media help individuals identify with brands more? Are fans identifying with brands more now? What drives this increase or decrease? What are the main motivations of identification? Is this different online and offline in your opinion?**
- 3. Who is the initiator of consumer-brand identification? Do consumers go looking for the brands or do brands plant the seed of identification?**
- 4. How would you measure or observe levels of identification in someone's behavior?**

Consumer-brand relationship

6. **The consumer brand relationship is stronger because of social media or is it no noticeable strength witnessed due to social media's influence?**
7. **What do you think is the most influential aspect of social media on the consumer-brand relationship?**
8. **How powerful are consumers in their development of their relationship with the brand due to the influence of social media?**
9. **Who has the power in the relationship or is it a 50-50? How does other people in the community influence the relationship?**

I thank you very much for your participation. If there is anything you wish to add or ask feel free to contact me.

Demographic

Gender: **Male** **Female**

Company Role: _____

Community Role: _____

Length of time in that role _____

Appendix C: Ethical Approval

EXTERNAL AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
uel.ac.uk/qa
Quality Assurance and Enhancement



24 August 2016

Dear Kathy-Ann,

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Project Title: | Social media and virtual communities' role in the consumer brand relationship: An online investigation into the development of consumer identity. |
| Principal Investigator: | Dr Ayantunji Gbadamosi |
| Researcher: | Kathy-Ann Fletcher |
| Reference Number: | UREC 1516 156 |

I am writing to confirm the outcome of your application to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), which was considered by UREC **on Wednesday 20 July 2016**.

The decision made by members of the Committee is **Approved**. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Your study has received ethical approval from the date of this letter.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with your research project, this must be reported immediately to UREC. A Notification of Amendment form should be submitted for approval, accompanied by any additional or amended documents:

<http://www.uel.ac.uk/wwwmedia/schools/graduate/documents/Notification-of-Amendment-to-Approved-Ethics-App-150115.doc>

Any adverse events that occur in connection with this research project must be reported immediately to UREC.

Approved Research Site

I am pleased to confirm that the approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site.

| Research Site | Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Online questionnaire SurveyMonkey, | Dr Ayantunji Gbadamosi |

Approved Documents

The final list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as follows:

| Document | Version | Date |
|--|---------|----------------|
| UREC application form | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |
| Participant Information Sheet – questionnaire on SurveyMonkey.com | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |
| Consent Form – questionnaire on SurveyMoney.com | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |
| PhD Research Questionnaire Consumer Identity and Virtual Communities | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |
| Participant Information Sheet – internet data | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |
| Consent Form – internet data | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |
| Participant Information | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |

| | | |
|---|-----|----------------|
| Sheet – internet public data | | |
| Consent Form – internet public data | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |
| Participant Information Sheet – Skype interviews | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |
| Consent Form – Skype interviews | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |
| Participant Information Sheet – narrative inquiry via email | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |
| Consent Form – narrative inquiry via email | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |
| Social Media Professional Interview Schedule | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |
| Social Media Psychologists Interview | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |
| PhD Narrative Inquiry Consumer identity and Social Media Brand Communities | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |
| Letter from Apple press office stating that they are unable to assist with the research project | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |
| Letter from P&G office stating that they are unable to assist with the research project | 3.0 | 24 August 2016 |

Approval is given on the understanding that the [UEL Code of Practice in Research](#) is adhered to.

The University will periodically audit a random sample of applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research study is conducted in compliance with the consent given by the ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Please note, it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of this project.

Yours sincerely,

p p Fernanda Silva Administrative Officer

University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)

Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk

Appendix D – Findings Quotations

(A) Behaviour

Engagement under the user-generated video that shows influence on consumer choice:

The review was based on the release of the 2016 model of the MacBook Pro which inspired the following comments among others. Each comment is given by different viewer of the video and shows the importance of user-generated reviews on building the connection between the brand and the consumer.

Subscribed! Excellent review! Helped me make up my mind about buying one!

Thanks for another great review! I am on the fence between maxing out a new MacBook and a late 2015 iMac, do you think the iMac would stomp the new MacBook or not so much? Thanks

Excellent been waiting for this!!! Thanks max!

Thanks for the review, great job! I've ordered MBP 2016 after that :)

I'm waiting for this one to decide whether to return the 2016 one or not.

Very thorough comparison cheers I find it hard to believe that they don't include the dongles in the box though at that price. p.s. subliminal at 13:42

How do you monitor the processor clocking while it's decoding?

Great video. People always get upset when Apple get rid of old tech on their new computers, but without companies like Apple pushing new technology, there would be no progress. I remember the outrage when the first iMac came out in 1998 with no floppy drive, even though the floppy drive was a hideously outdated piece of technology by 1998 standards. The same thing happened when Apple got rid of optical drives, mechanical HDD in laptops, and now the USB type-A port. Apple deserve some criticism for their implementation though. USB adapters cost next to nothing to make so they should have included at least 2 free adapters with

each MacBook as a goodwill gesture instead of forcing people to buy their overpriced adaptors. The 12" MacBook needs more than one USB-C port.

A computer with only one port is not forward thinking, it's just stupid.

I totally agree. Some of these videos on the new 2016 MacBook Pro they must have spent a lot of time coming up with the most ridiculous arrangement of plug-in accessories they could think of. Thanks for your diligence to do some real testing and providing numbers for those tests.

Final Cut Pro always kicks Adobe Premier's butt when it comes to rendering. I don't know why Adobe doesn't put more effort into their development to optimize Premier for the Mac. Oh well their loss.

I'm so glad you took the time to do these tests. I picked up an A6300 because of you and will now probably grab one of the new MBP's because of you.

This is exactly what I needed to see. Really great video! Mad how much faster FCPX is.

This video needs more views, you give an actual and objective review, rather than jumping on the bandwagon. Thank you

Good video, hope you could make more of this sort of content in the future

Best review I've ever watched!!! At last a real "pro" comparison, this makes me hate to love the 2016 version, thx a lot :)

Oh god I love this review! Thank you so much!

Apple increased the price too much, that's the problem. The machine isn't bad, but isn't outstanding. And they are trying how much they can charge us for a not so expensive machine to make. Seriously, no one asked for thinner machines. Put the batteries back again and people will be happier. What's the deal? Go back to professionals (as in the past when PC ruled) without a "professional" machine?

Just a very good review. Learned a lot. Thanks!!!!

Spectacular! This is a leap and bound in professionalism. I appreciate the detail and precision in your work!

(B) Creativity

(B1) Creativity is expressed in the initiative to develop reviews of the product while expressing them in a manner that is attention generating, interesting and useful to the decision-making of the other social media users. The following captions show reviews that are in video, text and audio while displaying how the products can be used in a variety of circumstances:

Apple #iPhone 5S vs Motorola Moto X Full Comparison #Review:

<https://t.co/yBWxa5k1r3> via @YouTube

Where was Apple going with this no charging and listening to music at the same time?

Have Apple's AirPods Met Their Match? Reviewing The Veho ZB-1

Wireless Headphones | <https://t.co/AHrkwjJHjg>

Check out my review of the @Apple iPhone 7plus @YouTube

<https://t.co/37WFaUhjPa>

Apple Watch 2 first ride review - Bike Radar <https://t.co/zpbNriG46B>

iPhone 8 review iPhone 8 rumours apple iPhone 8:

<https://t.co/fxSUm6lxU5> via @YouTube

Microsoft Pix for iOS is a solid camera app hobbled by sad sacrifices -

Windows Central <https://t.co/xndLcTz7TS>

Setting up mum's iPod touch has reminded me how much better Apple

Music looked on iOS 9, it's ugly now.

On its 10th Anniversary here's how the original iPhone compares to the

iPhone 7 #Apple <https://t.co/5ikyoljblZ> <https://t.co/4vvrFKJj4R>

I used to use L'Oréal's pro matte+pro glow but separate or mixed, both formulas never worked well with my concealers and showed texture

The @Loreal Magic Retouch sprays are my FAVOURITE thing atm! 🐱 I have a step by step on how I use it on my... <https://t.co/koRGDkbR9M>

How to: Colouring my relaxed hair (NO BLEACH) using L'Oréal HiColor <https://t.co/jgHkxUUszj>

#L'Oréal coal mud mask! Let's see how this cleans my face and tightens my pores! #coalmask 🐱🐱🐱🐱🐱 <https://t.co/XvpPsn9yTJ>

(B2) Captions from tutorials for using Apple software, making cakes in the shape of coca cola bottles or using L'Oreal hair care or make up products

Format your Mac and install OS X again [tutorial] <https://t.co/UXJDgMIOUS>

Slick Walk By Transition Effect - Adobe Premiere Pro CC Tutorial <https://t.co/1rBjMAKt8i>

How to fix a jammed Switch controller #apple #reviews <https://t.co/JttJzpGrFQ>

Setting up #Email account on your #iPhone. Check our tutorial <https://t.co/VxJSnQeshY> #Apple #IOS #HowTo

How the Apple Watch Can Help You Reach Your Fitness Goals <https://t.co/0LLZJ6VHww>

How to use Siri on the Mac #androbrix1 #android #apple #reviews #latest <https://t.co/Y9ssVpEwvk>

How to free up storage by finding and deleting large files you don't need on your Mac <https://t.co/nNzzhPcXhL> #OSX #Apple #tech

How to move apple photos library to external hard drive <https://t.co/Of9Yb960DG>

How to Turn Photos into "Memories" on macOS: Apple Photos will automatically scan your... <https://t.co/dw8xdmGyXl>

*How To Make Coca Cola Cake in Shape of Bottle <https://t.co/I9YjM8gqsy>
#cocacola #cake <https://t.co/H9MHGpShi4>*

*How to make a @CocaCola birthday cake! <https://t.co/w3nZ7yQTTY>
#birthday #cake #momlife <https://t.co/ZxV56hof5s>*

*See how I upped my haircare game with @LOrealParisUK
<https://t.co/8ze1RqkzJ4>*

*How To: Dye your hair BRIGHT RED with Loreal Excellence HiColor
<https://t.co/6m5YVXJibi>*

(C) Expression

(C1) More quotes expressing interests in the brand over time or from the start of knowledge of the brand:

I wanna cry I like apple watches sis.

I like the Apple Music app.

Happy Easter I like CokeZero

Coke Zero is really nice

I like @CocaCola

*They are! And I got the infallible foundation from L'Oréal and I've used it
maybe 4 times and it's really good!*

I like L'Oréal. The new brow pencil dupes eye brow wiz that's great.

<https://t.co/HFM7lVuInd>

Wearing my all-time fav lip combo! Loreal Choco laque and Buxom

Samantha lip gloss! 😘😘 <https://t.co/0fRYyxCEgp>

*@CocaColaCo every time drink cocacola @pizzahut, it's always my
favourite memory 😊*

(C2) Tweets expressing love for marketing campaign or social media posts:

*No need to press skip ad on your #YouTube ads @Loreal I even show these
to my daughter*

@Loreal y'all doing so good I love it <https://t.co/b6aegudj7P>

I love this ad, and I never love ads: it's got great music and choreography!

First video advertisement I didn't hate

*@CokeZero I've never loved a drink as much as I love CZ. The tastiest
product on the market. Thank you for your awesome consumer beverage.*

*When you haven't had #CherryCoke in a while and forget how good it
tastes. #CocaCola*

*I love #apple and #technology! Making videos and being in control is such
a great feeling!*

So inspiring love this campaign!!

(C3) Expression of Happiness

Searched the L'Oréal website for this, super excited to try it!

*Fantastic #campaign from @Loreal @PrincesTrust #SelfWorth #inclusivity
#diversity #confidence #training #becausewe'... <https://t.co/8DRpzKJXNo>*

*Is feeling excited. I am going to be getting the iPhone 7 next weekend
hopefully!!!*

(D) Search

(D1) Information search

*Is there a way to recover files that were deleted from the trash bin? #Mac
#Macintosh #apple #macpro*

*Please give some suggestions for the alternatives of Apple EarPods
@geekyranjit, howz QCY Q29?*

*Anyone with Apple Music know how to download these songs? They won't
download! <https://t.co/Mp2jirUyCF>*

*I can't find Vanilla Coke 0 and I'm here in Japan with Pro Wrestling
NOAH for 6 more weeks. HELP?!!!*

My question is how do I find my true match?

When will this be released in the UK, L'Oréal?

(D2) Opinion Search

What do you do if your iPhone keeps showing the Apple logo??

*I'm thinking of jumping to the beta. But it's my only device. Worth it? Does
it run better now?*

Men can't be super fans? Or is this an over correction?

*What trends of today do you think will be seen as weird by the people of
tomorrow?*

(D2) Community Search

I still haven't updated to ios10 gang

My question is how do I find my true match - I think L'Oréal's website

Searched the L'Oréal website for this, super excited to try it

(E) Knowledge/Opinion Share

*I have very quickly come to love the new Nike+ Apple Watch - the watch
face is gorgeous, the band is more breathable than the standard sports
band, and you even get your last run listed at the bottom of the watch
screen! You can see my normal morning run there (well, what I have been
pushing myself to do recently!), which I think is cool. Touch the Nike logo
to go right to the Running app! Sweet! Happy Halloween!*

*I feel like some L'Oréal products are so much better than other drugstore
products though. Especially this infallible line. When I tried the pro-matte*

foundation I was using the Estee Lauder double wear, and the pro-matte worked almost just as well and had olive (yellow) tones that I needed for only a quarter of the price.

F) Affect

(F1) Happiness

*Looooooooove my new Lip Paints - I mean look at those beautiful colours
Thank you @julietta_mademoiselle & @lorealmakeup for the win ❤️❤️❤️*

Love it! So glad I was able to get one of Papi's at the Roast!

Making me cry 😭😭 I love you L'Oréal 😊! ❤️

I've literally cried all day. My wife JUST bought us @Apple watches!

*Or at least make people "feel" something. Laugh, feel warm, feel important
... etc. I like that you say "a part of." #Fuzzies*

Apple products are for people that like to be told what they do and do not want...I like to make my own decisions on what I want for phone/computer.

*I love #apple and #technology! Making videos and being in control is such
a great feeling!*

*I love the @LOrealParisUK / Princes Trust advert so much meaning
behind it*

I loves me ❤️, when I get called to play a role I go all out #lorealparis

I love the diversity

*Another reason why I love March Madness is because of @CokeZero 's
social arena and social media monitoring during games*

I finally have a Coke w/my name!

Nice! I like this! First advert I actually felt it was worth watching, because we're all worth it!

(F2) Pride

[UPDATE] Congrats Deepu!!! So proud and excited that you are part of a Loreal Beauty Product ❤️🇫🇷#ILoveParis... <https://t.co/ixfwDUhKwG>

And I'm proud of you, @_loreal. Always.

@EmilyCanham just saw u on a L'Oréal billboard! I'm so proud of you! X

I think I'll never give up Coke. Both Grandmas had one a day and I'm #PROUD to have inherited the taste for Coca-Cola

Hey @CocaCola I always enjoy drinking a glass of you whenever I go to a diner. Especially when they mix in that cherry syrup hell yeah

(F3) Disappointment

Sent them like 5 emails. Never got a response so not sure. Sorry. Use standard Apple pod app

@CocaCola as an avid Coke drinker, I'm disappointed that my last 2 20 oz bottles have been flat upon opening.

Very upset with @CocaCola.... gave me my change but no drink. #wtf

You certainly know how to upset your customers Apple! You used to be great, when you kept your upgrades compatible. Now you insist we have rubbish Apps which can't be deleted and irritate everyone with your non-compatible 'upgrades,'

I like IOS 10, but I hate Watch OS3. It removed so many cool features and didn't really give us anything else. Bad move by Apple.

I know how it feels – I also used to be an Apple fanboy. Unfortunately, these days Apple is lagging behind.

As a 20+ year Apple computer fan I'm seriously concerned and disappointed in the latest product refresh. You can do better Apple. #Apple

It's been two months since the apple watch 2 launched. Reason I bought one. How is this not supported yet? :(

Very disappointed buying the Glam Nude CC cream - it blends in brown, so far from nude! I look like I've had a bad fake tan

Guess I'm buying an Android phone next year because Apple decided to just take a s%\$# on their product

It is like #Apple is surviving on past glory! And yes the competition itself is fragile!

Apple are losing it, and it's fast. Today you can buy a PC for less money and with more performance.

(F4) Anger

A company that profits from identifying and exploiting the insecurities of people are the ones preaching that we shouldn't doubt ourselves? Oh the irony. On top of the fact half of the people in this advert and models/extremely attractive in general contrasting against those who aren't anywhere near as successful/good looking and would never have any issues with what the "message" that's being put across.

Another error in assessment. Apple makes a very big deal about its iOS and the new apps for the iPad 2. Without good software there's nothing to use.

Overrated very dodgy company who make enormous profits, avoid tax and place 200 billion in tax havens, buy their phones by all means but they are part of the reason the poor continue to be just that

Apple and the commercialism it brings is incredibly dangerous. We need to start regarding these unnecessary obsessive technologies before we live in a planet that has been torn apart by the environmental destruction that the creation of these inventions brings. Distance yourself from the temporary sedation and see the bigger picture.

*Excellent pricing strategy by #coke for the #CokeZero product in India.
Small can for INR 20....2-3 sips and it's over.*

Is #CokeZero named for the taste?

I'm not stupid. @CokeZero doesn't taste like Coke. I don't mind that, I like the taste of Coke Zero. I just can't stand the lies.

How come you've changed the taste of zero? Tried yesterday was not impressed. Preferred old one.

I have tried the dirty pink and found the exact same problem. I have quite thick hair but was only doing the ends. It ran out so quick. It was a mad dash down to Superdrug to buy more bottles. The colour looked great but after I wash it had come out my hair and toned my ends like a blue ish green colour. Wouldn't recommend this

I will not be buying @Loreal products in future after seeing some horrific animal testing videos last night

@Loreal Stop testing on innocent animals, I want to believe on your politic privacy but how? You should post a video showing your lab 😊

(F5) Hate

*@L'Oréal I hate you for what I just seen 😊 #stoptestingonanimals #loreal
<https://t.co/QR7xEHESW4>*

@lorealparis I just hate your products now. Nobody should buy loreal. It's not at all smudge proof! Huh! Need my money back!

I finally tried the loreal infallible pro matte and it's trash in terms of the colour. The texture and whatever is nice but omg the colour

I just drank @CocaCola for the first time in a month and a half and I actually hate it now. Who have I become?!?!? #waterallthetime

@cocacola I hate you.

Apple, I hate the new iOS, damn this update. #apple

I just hate that. I have my reasons for keeping the OS I have.

I hate my Apple iPhone

I hate apps lol I'm never going to be an app developer it Sucks apple sucks

My phone is literally dying slower with battery saver mode tired off I hate apple

I hate Apple but I can't stop using their products. Please improve your chargers; phone battery life ???

(F6) Grief

Apple hasn't been innovative since Steve Jobs died

As an Apple fanboy, I will admit that the post-Steve Jobs era of apple events has resulted in underwhelming presentations.

Sad to see @CocaCola event this evening hosted not by an MP but by lobbyists @politicshome-Dods

(F7) Mixed Feelings

New iOS is a bit of a mixed bag #apple

Mixed emotions about iOS10

I like IOS 10, but I hate Watch OS3. It removed so many cool features and didn't really give us anything else. Bad move by Apple.

Why is diet coke still around when coke zero exists?

When will people learn #CokeZero is not an acceptable replacement for #DietCoke? Seriously.

(G) Sensations

Feeling my look today :-) u can never go wrong with L'Oréal's lipstick

That auburn loreal eyebrow filler looks good on you cutie

I love this whole line of eyeshadows. The colours last, and look good.

I wish the shade range 4 loreal pro matte was better bc I really have had it on for 12 hrs (thru rain, humidity and a nap). It still looks good.

(H) Imagery

Selfie with Apple Watch, because I might actually use these "free site seal" logos for TLS certificates?

I liked a @YouTube video <https://t.co/fmJGFLueCF> MacBook Pro with Touch Bar Unboxing & First Reactions!

@CocaCola my favourite soft drink is coca-cola the others do no justice

*#CocaColaForMe #cocacola is forever the drink for me @CocaCola
<https://t.co/Tk7cX65whE>*

Love 😊😍👉— drinking CocaCola

My daughter thinks all good drinks are @CocaCola

(I) Interpersonal relationships

*Referring to the product in relational terms - Hi Baby! #applewatch #series1
<https://t.co/pIXa4M1qWL>*

I'm such a #nerd for #Apple products. Placed my preorder & ONLY have to wait until #November for delivery haha!

I know that Nomophobia is the fear of not having your cell phone. But what do you call your fear of not having your #AppleWatch??

I'm pretty sure my blood is like 5% Coke. @CocaCola does that entitle me to a lifetime supply?

(J1) Disidentification

Apple used to be really good at software. What happened #iOS10

You certainly know how to upset your customers Apple! You used to be great when you kept your upgrades compatible. Now you insist we have rubbish Apps which can't be deleted and irritate everyone with your non-compatible 'upgrades,' which do little to enhance the product and everything to irritate your customer base by making existing ancillary products redundant. You forget people don't have the money you do but that might be because we pay more tax than you do! That can't help with your falling sales either. The veneer really has worn thin.

*Apple used to lead cool, now it follows cool, and sucks, you suck apple
Drugstore Makeup is getting expensive. Not so called affordable anymore..*

I miss Loreal

*@Loreal total rubbish. Hair still same colour as before. #wasteofmoney
#disappointed*

*Thank you for being a compassionate advocate for animals. I'm
disappointed to hear this about @Loreal*

*#Apple #iphone7 I'm disappointed with this iPhone 7, honestly my iPhone
5 seemed a lot less glitchy and buggy..*

*Completely disgusted and disappointed with my latest experience with
@Apple*

*@AppleSupport I regret making the upgrade. I've been a diehard #Apple
fan, but they're making it hard to stay a diehard. @Apple*

*As a 20+ year Apple computer fan I'm seriously concerned and
disappointed in the latest product refresh. You can do better Apple.*

(K) Rituals and Traditions

Live Tweeting

*So much freaking out over #apple dropping the 3.5 mm jack, the same thing
Motorola did with the Z and Z Force just the day before*

*#Apple was so courageous to ditch the headphone jack that they included
the adapter in the box. Total cop out.*

*So #Apple Watch has no killer app? How about having an app with all my
loyalty cards? So tired of dragging out my #Paneras card...*

*Sorry #Android. I see why many likes the freedom, but it's just not as
refined, cleverly designed, and stable as what #Apple has to offer.*

*Used to be after #Apple events, everyone gushed, then lined up. Now,
everyone complains, then lines up.*

*As they killed the floppy disk (you may want to google it), the CD... now
Apple is killing the cables for a better wireless world. #thinkdifferent
#thinkApple #beApple okay I went too far Art by Turgay Mutlay*

*Hell...I'm thinking of buying the HTC 10 instead of downgrading to iPhone
7...thanks #AppleEvents..*

Do you know how does disappointment feels like? Watch Apple events

One of the best parts of Apple events is hearing Twitter complain about the product while still planning to buy it once it's released.

Disappointing Apple events are becoming a trend

The Apple events actually depress me now-a-days. Meh indeed Cal, meh indeed.

Dios Mio the Apple events are boring these days!

Remember when we used to look forward to Apple events. But now we dread which feature will be cut.

'Member when Apple events were exciting? I 'member.

Apple needs to overhaul their "events" more than their MacBook's. Been doing the same thing for over a decade. #appleevent

Is it me or are @Apple events & products underwhelming. Used to be excited for a new release. It's like is that it? #allfluff. #macbook2016

Unboxing

I added a video to a @YouTube playlist <https://t.co/94dxxoismV> Apple iPhone 8 - iPhone 8 Plus | Review & Unboxing March 2017

Just ordered my iPhone 7 Plus! Can't wait! #apple #iPhone7Plus #ATT

In a first, I got myself up and went to the @Apple store this morning to pick up my reserved #iPhone7 - was fairly painless. #newtoy

My first "Take a minute to Breathe" message from the Apple Watch OS3 upgrade. I kind of like it! <https://t.co/GdJvzQWVay>

*Laps around the park. #BuggyFit #Health #Fitness #FitDad #Fitspo
#Exercise #AppleHealth #AppleWatch #GymFree #Fit
<https://t.co/KY4gGY2uhb>*

I cycled indoors for 0:20 with the Workout app on my #AppleWatch. Good end of the routine <https://t.co/RTD4lVHqYt>

*I completed a 1:08 workout with the Workout app on my #AppleWatch.
#fitness #gym #weightlifting #Restart <https://t.co/2oC3ge0fyS>*

*Day one with the iPhone 7. I need to charge and to use my head phones.....
#priceofprogress #apple*

I went for my first walk with my #AppleWatch. <https://t.co/eAkBmOwLOa>

*I walked indoors for 3.51 KM with the Workout app on my #AppleWatch.
#fitness #workout #workhardplayhard <https://t.co/sbOm8ayE35>*

*When I take a shower after, my hair looks superhuman it naturally fluffs
up. I use loreal super moisture conditioner only*

(L) Social Media Engagement, Community Development and Identity

@AppleSupport I still can't get watch os3?! <https://t.co/h2bEoJfCKW>

@AppleSupport not liking this new iOS10 at all

Updated my phone to iOS 10! Loving the new text features @Apple

Well played @Apple! Most dysfunctional update ever. #iOS10 #apple

*I adore the @LOrealParisUK true match #YoursTruly campaign, it's a
celebration of diversity! <https://t.co/tRTaxb05Gd>*

*I absolutely LOVE and respect everything that @LOrealParisUK is doing
atm. They are recognising smaller bloggers & pro...*

*I want to keep it forever. So many compliments today from strangers...
thanks for fab products #loveloreal*

*I love the @LOrealParisUK True Match #YoursTruly campaign. So
beautiful and inspiring #beautyblogger #beauty*

(M1) Community hierarchy gives legitimacy to reviews

*If you're upgrading to iOS 10, do yourself a favour and enable
transparency and stop motion reduction. At least so far, the experience has
been phenomenally beautiful...*

I'm having way too much fun with this new IOS10 update!! It's great to annoy everyone!!!! #ios10 #apple #iPhone

Not a fan of this apple update at all?

Well let's test iOS 10 in real life... Booze, half charge (well 48%) and watch OS3 is dead. (Without a workout)

iOS10 So far has been a good update. Kind of #Meh on the "Watch OS3" for the apple watch. <https://t.co/ersdj87RaX>

Well done apple IOS 10 is. Apple Watch OS3 is lovely too. Many new features. BOOOOM!!!

Yes I do like watch os3 but find the battery is dying a lot quicker, probably due to the hap tec time telling.

Am impressed with IOS10 and Watch OS3 -doesn't look much on the surface but Apple have done a great job at addressing the little things

Less than an hour after updating to #iOS10,I already know I'm not gonna like it. Definitely plenty of improvement needed.

New iMessages is just so much fun #iOS #Apple