Dissecting Loyalty in Youth Cultural Movements

A Netnographic view on Indie Rock B(r)and Arcade Fire

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Dissertation written under the supervision of Pedro Oliveira

Abstract

Title: Dissecting loyalty in youth cultural movements: A netnographic view on Indie Rock B(r)ands Arcade Fire

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This dissertation aims at categorizing brand loyalty. Namely, fandom characterized loyalty. This type of loyalty is observed in the engagement fans show to music and the musicians. For this purpose, the thesis aims at understanding the brand relationship between the band (brand), music (product) and the fans (customers) through qualitative methods. The band analyzed is "Arcade Fire" and the research locations are the Reddit forums where fans demonstrate manifestations of fandom and appreciation to the brand. The band locates itself under a certain culture denominated by fans and critics as Indie culture. We analyze what fans value about the band as a brand and link the findings to the culture it associates with. Data was analyzed through netnography with a grounded theory approach. The results show that the alignment with the culture made fans value Indie traits in the brand. These being: anti-commercialism, anti-mainstream and how emotionally resonating the content is with listeners. With such branding universe in mind, we show how cultural branding in an Indie environment can benefit from using their indie characteristics to pursue original branding efforts which is done in an authentic way. This dissertation, therefore, discusses the implications of netnography within online music communities related to music and in other industries where there exists a high engagement in order to unveil a link between the brand and the consumer culture.

Resumo

Título: Dissecting loyalty in youth cultural movements: A netnographic view on Indie Rock B(r)ands Arcade Fire

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Esta dissertação tem como objetivo caracterizar a lealdade. Especificamente, a lealdade respetiva a ambientes onde existam fans. Este tipo de lealdade pode ser observado no envolvimento com que fans interagem com músicos e a música. Com isso em mente, a dissertação procura perceber a relação entre a banda (marca), música (produto) e fans (clientes) através de métodos qualitativos. A banda analisada é "Arcade Fire" e os locais de pesquisa consistem em fóruns de reddit onde se demonstram manifestações de fans e apreciação pela banda. Assim analisamos o que os fans valorizam na marca e no produto em termos de branding. Os resultados mostram um alinhamento entre a marca e a cultura mostrando que os fans de indie valorizam traços da cultura anti-mainstream, anti-commercial e emocional no produto e nas ações de marketing. Mostra que uma das principais características de uma marca é a sua autenticidade. Esta conclusões são comparadas com literatura onde se define que a autenticidade depende da cultura do grupo de consumidores. Esta tese, portanto, discute as implicações de estudar a autenticidade em comunidades de música online e outras indústrias onde existam um grande grau de envolvimento entre marca e produto.

Keywords: Indie Rock, Branding, Authenticity, Netnography, Digital insights

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1.Introduction

1.1 Problem definition and relevance

"Postmodern consumer culture has adopted a particular notion of authenticity that has proved particularly challenging to marketers. To be authentic, brands must be disinterested; they must be perceived as invented and disseminated by parties without an instrumental economic agenda, by people who are intrinsically motivated by their inherent value (Douglas Holt 2002).*"*

Douglas Holt refers a new challenge for brands that need authenticity in order to be relevant. The nature of authenticity in consumption is being contested as consumers become increasingly skeptical of marketing initiatives (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). Brands have a crucial role in society as creators of culture. They do this by joining shared beliefs, consumption rituals and conduct rules in a community; much like religion (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Because brands compose society´s fabric it is critical they be a vehicle to advocate sustainable values. Branding is one of marketing´s cornerstones and can be a vehicle for these values. Moreover, it is strategically important for companies to have a resonating brand to foster sustainable competitive advantage and increase control in marketing planning (Gounaris & Stathakopoulos, 2004). In light of these issues, this dissertation aims at dissecting loyalty in a consumption subculture to gather insights for branding (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

Research has shown us significant advances can be made by studying online music communities (Obiegbu, Larsen, Ellis, & O'Reilly, 2019). Furthermore, Fournier (1998), showed us that consumer insights can be yielded by analyzing life experiences as bonding to a brand can mean bonding to a lifestyle.

Music has always been a way to convey meaning and, in turn, be a brand. By creating a movement, music has the power of influencing several thousands of people at the same time and generate fandom. Fans are known for their attachment and we can see that in

their brand co-creation activities present specially in youth movements (Holt, 2002). These movements, in turn, only get amplified by the advent of internet which allows people to be part of much broader communities.

In order to tackle possible developments in brand loyalty one must take the perspective of the consumer. This approach allows us to see consumers as brand producers and not the other way around (Holt, 2002). Also, by taking the consumer´s perspective one can get a deeper understanding of what constitutes loyalty as a culturally influenced phenomenon as opposed to define it only in behavioral and attitudinal ways (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978).

In aiming to understand the link between the customer´s culture and loyalty, research has been mostly of qualitative nature (Fournier, 1998; Reilly, 2010). Researchers often use an ethnographic approach to yield insights from consumption subcultures and their practices (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). However, the high activity surrounding online music communities enables a netnographic approach. We therefore examine a modern sub-culture, Indie Rock, through the lens of "Arcade Fire´s" online fan-made forums in hopes of dissecting their loyalty to the b(r)and compare it with relevant consumer research literature.

1.2 Objective and research questions

The idea behind the dissertation is to provide an extended comprehension of brand loyalty by analyzing music fandom and suggesting that brands, an important part of modern society´s social fabric, should have an approach like how online music communities construct loyalty to music brands. With this in mind, we pose the following Research Questions:

Q1: What <u>factors</u> contribute to loyalty in music related fandom?

To which we form the following sub-questions:

> **SQ1: What <u>constructs and breaks</u> loyalty in <u>music related fandom online</u> pages?**

> **SQ2: How is <u>meaning</u> in virtual music communities <u>constructed</u>?**

The comprehension of these questions implies getting to know loyalty as a cultural influenced process. The factors discovered are expected to define the research universe in terms of their values and beliefs. The differentiation between the questions means that, whereas when we ask about what factors break and make loyalty we are asking about the patterns of behavior linked with an appraisal or condemning of the band and when we ask about the meaning in music

communities we ask specifically what themes are evoked by the participants in a concrete and personal way to justify their loyalty.

1.3 Dissertation outline

The first chapter includes the problem statement and the relevance of the research. Subsequently, a review of academic literature covering topics regarding brand loyalty and relationships is presented. This part is followed by the introduction of the methodology used where netnography and grounded theory are explained. The given investigation includes a thematic analysis building the basis for the development of grounded theory on an online community through discourses. On a final note, theoretical and practical managerial implications are concluded, and limitations and future research directions are discussed. Having explained the sub-questions and the outline, we moved to the literature review where topics such as human relationships and brand loyalty are addressed.

2. Literature Review

This Literature Review covers the dissertations main fields: Brand Loyalty, Consumer Cultures, Fandom in Virtual Communities and provides insights on defining indie culture.

2.1 Brand Loyalty

Loyalty in Marketing has been around since Copeland coined it as a critical part of any brand´s success in 1923. However, one of the first general definitions came decades later in psychology and referred to it as a "biased behavioral response to a brand made by a decision-making unit" (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978).

This definition lacked explanations and so divergences appeared as to which way we can explain and measure loyal behavior.

Initially, researchers defended loyalty should be measured by behavior, that is, the proportions or sequences of purchase (Kahn, U, Kalwani, Morrison ,1968). Then, the lack of explanatory power of a solely quantitative measure gave room for a hybrid definition where attitude played a role on defining how committed the relationship was (Jarvis, P & Wilcox, 1976). Finally, the lack of diagnosis made on behavioral factors paved the way for a third current that joined the previous behavioral/attitudinal qualities with anthropological/sociologic science; they intended to explore brand loyalty highlighting the consumer role in the construction of loyalty and the role of the brand in the construction of the self (Fournier, 1998). This latter group formed the bases for a conceptual framework that analyzed the phenomenon as a personal and culturally influenced process. That means each brand loyalty story is a story of its own and each with a powerful diagnosis on what constitutes the ever so abstract purchasing behavior (Fournier & Yao, 1997).

Susan Fournier and Julie L. Yao argue that qualitative methods hold the key to understand loyalty in its full complexity. This method, often compared with anthropological research, can unveil the personal significance consumers invest in a brand (McCracken, 1993; Olsen, 1995; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

As mentioned in the introduction, Fournier (1998) also showed us that brand relationships can be looked upon as human relationships and noted that the biggest factors that categorize a strong brand relationship are the *Love and Passion* symbolizing the feelings that the brand is irreplaceable*, The self-connection* which relates to the extent in which a brand delivers to

identity concerns or life themes, *Interdependence* that is represented in the rituals of consumption meaning that habit alone can foster a strong relationship, *Commitment* where consumers pledge stability in their choice and *Brand Partner Relationship* that is a consequence of trust and predictability of performance (Appendix Fig 8.1).

These insights from Fournier paved the way for studying brand relationships in a socio-cultural way which is inherent in this dissertation´s methodology. It showed that mundane everyday habits are deeply rooted in identity (Thompson, 2005).

Identity, in a branding context, can be defined as the tension between how a person defines herself as an individual and how she connects to others and social groups in affiliative relationships (Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003). In simpler words, individual identity shows who is "me" whereas affiliative identity tells who are "we" (Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003). Meaningful brand relationships are not built around an alignment between product functionalities and personality traits but by how well a brand helps consumers attach to that identity (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). In this sense it becomes important to know where these cultural values that build identity come from.

2.2 Consumer Cultures

Qualitative research allows us to understand brands as an essential part of our cultural values, passions, beliefs. Those, in turn, lead to a clustering of consumers in groups (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Culture, in this dissertation, is defined as the general customs and beliefs of a group of people at a point in time (Dictionary, 2016).

An example of this clustering can be the people that have a specific musical taste. These form a community the consumer uses to express and define himself reciprocally (Bettman & Escalas, 2005). These communities also influence brand perception by being used as a reference and helping consumers decide whether the brand is or is not consistent with their values and so where their loyalty should lie (Bettman & Escalas, 2005).

Adding to this, the internet and its consequent dematerialization of possessions gave room for much broader brand communities (Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003). Goods and services became dematerialized and people from around the world started exchanging preferences and belonging in much wider imagined communities. This justifies that a community situated in America such as, for example, Saab automobiles fan club can receive a letter from a sixteen-year-old Italian

boy asking for pictures of a determined Saab car (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). These groupings of consumers exist beyond the realm of physical acquaintances.

These groupings are academically referred as Brand Communities. They can be defined as a specialized, non-geographically bound that unites people that admire the same brand. These share a *common consciousness, consumption rituals and their own sense of moral responsibility* (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Shared consciousness is a main requisite. It means that members feel a connection not only to the brand but to one another. It is a reflex of a sustained notion that you feel you know unmet fellow members (Anderson 1983). The fact that there are shared consumption practices, as for attending a football match, going to a concert or participate in a climate awareness manifestation, means that these groups have scripted practices that build *cultural capital* (Holt 1998). Cultural capital is built by *sharing the brand´s mythology* as a story, *integrating and retaining membership* which shows a going concern and *assistance in the use of the brand* which is felt as moral responsibility (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). In the case of musicians or a rock band analyzed the cultural capital is the shared knowledge of the band´s discographies, who their members are, how the band started and what topics does the music address.

Cultural capital is present in all brand communities and fosters the development of loyalty and brand salience (Jacoby and Chestnut 1978; Keller 1998). It also helps differentiate between people who are consistent with the group´s behaviors and beliefs and who isn´t (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

These oppositional differences can enhance a community´s strength (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). In a study regarding small neighborhoods, authors usually noted that the dominance of one organization led to the creation of an institution whose sole purpose was to counter the dominating organization (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Paharia, Keinan, Avery, & Schor, 2011). We have evidences of such relationships in Mac vs PC users, Coke vs Pepsi, One+ vs iPhone. Thus, an underdog effect in form of a counterculture is powerful in strengthening shared consciousness and loyalty. The stronger the differences between us and them, the stronger the ties within a brand community (Holt, 2002; Paharia et al., 2011).

Another overarching characteristic of brand community is that they have the power to influence consumers in the same way regular company made promotions would do. In fact, consumers are gradually becoming marketeers, mitigating previous marketeers determined beliefs/opinions behind the product (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). The main reason for this break

down in marketeers power is the existent public social spaces that have the capacity to create their own culture and judge branding efforts (Holt, 2002). The groups analyzed in this thesis are publicly created online spaces and with no commercial engineering surrounding their creation; its existence is purely expressional and functional. It's important to understand the role of commercialism counterculture in the creation of these public spaces as brand communities are simultaneously inspired and critical of their commercial roots; this is the key to understand the tensions in contemporary branding (Bettman & Escalas, 2005; Holt, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

In a contemporary branding landscape, counterculture comes as an outcry for authenticity ; consumers will view brands as valuable for identity construction when brand meanings are perceived to be authentic, that is, *disinterested* and *original* (Holt, 2002). In real life, brands often use its claim in being part of a consumer subculture in order to camouflage aggressive commercial intentions and create communities like Airwalk and Patagonia do with skateboarders and mountain climbers (Holt, 2002).

Authenticity, in this context, is a specific term Marketeers have studied for over two decades. It is a postmodern concept the consumer has adopted as a critical criteria for brand choice (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Holt, 2002; Keller, 2003). Brands are authentic in the measure in which they provide cultural resources to build one´s self (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). Evidence for this phenomenon can be found in consumption subcultures such as *The Mountain Man* (Belk & Costa, 1998), an yearly gathering in the mountain to celebrate old American customs and a simpler way of life and *The Bikers,* (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) that looked at how Harley Davidsons help consumers distance themselves from their daily lives and develop their own biker culture which takes forms such as being an outlaw to being closer to nature and freedom. The point these subcultures have in common is that they enable people to express themselves and be authentic in that expression. Therefore, authenticity, at a deeper level, is a juggling between the individual consumer and the collective brand community´s perception of what is authentic (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Holt, 2002; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

In music, authenticity has been studied by ethnography in a variety of music genres from blues, punk and Indie (Klassen, 2012). In essence, the pursuit of authenticity in music has led to the categorization of music into genres, the discrimination between styles and performers (Klassen, 2012). One accepted definition states that it isn´t a quality inherent in things but a shared set of beliefs influenced by consumer´s culture (Klassen, 2012). Another way in which we can

understand how a brand becomes authentic is in how it helps consumer´s pursue the desire to show others who they are (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010).

2.3 Fandom in Online Virtual communities

This research focuses on music in its authentic social and cultural qualities where loyalty is critical in holding the groups identity coherent. Music communities were chosen because they have fans interacting within and because fandom is premised, for this dissertation, as a loyalty-based relationship. Fandom (Fans) represent a relationship with an object of affection that's characterized by a high level of engagement (Obiegbu et al., 2019). This is an epitome of brand loyalty as cultural capital is strongly appropriated by the consumer in his identity construction.

It is a heightened expression of brand loyalty as it embroils:

1) repeat purchases (behavioral loyalty),

2) positive feelings towards the brand (attitudinal loyalty) and

3) engagement with the brand in the context of a community (experiential loyalty) (Obiegbu et al., 2019).

This way, we expect to find rich evidence for the existence of experiential loyalty in the research locations. Considering this review, we pose the question "what factors influence the construction of loyalty in music related fandom" and "how meaning is created by the forum posts in a discursive way".

2.4 Online Communities – Arcade Fire

The b(r)and we will analyze is Arcade Fire (AF). They are a prototypal indie rock mainstream brand with an active online following. The group achieved commercial success in the 2000´s after years of touring, recording and distributing music & merch on their own. They applied a do-it-yourself (DIY) method to their business and this approach, with its suggested creativity and independence, attracted an audience of indie rock fans. *Indie* is a widely recognized youth movement and constitutes a consumer´s subculture (Klassen, 2012).

Indie is mainly represented by three characteristics: anti-commercialism, DIY attitude and differentiation from the mainstream (Hibbett,2005). However, the values above mentioned are being challenged by their spreading and growth. Absurdly, Indie values have successfully been marketed to a broader consumer bases and its members are increasingly endorsing mainstream distribution as means of spreading; the need to spread the culture surpasses the values themselves (Hibbett, 2005; Klassen 2012). According to the previous authors, AF position themselves with these three values making their claim as an *indie* band eligible. If we find evidence of these traits in the loyalty discourses from the forums, we might be able to explain that the factors that lead to loyalty to AF are rooted in a consumption subculture.

Previous netnographic studies have shown that studying online music communities can yield insights regarding brand loyalty (Gelman & Rosnay, 2019; Obiegbu et al., 2019). This dissertation follows a line of music communities research aimed at studying consumer relationships. In this case, the research will look upon the loyalty construct as it is important for contemporary branding strategy to know what makes a relationship authentic and, therefore, eligible for a loyal bound with consumers (Holt, 2002).

The literature showed that loyalty can be expressed through experience with the brand and amplified when shared with others in a brand community. It also showed that fandom can represent loyalty as it implies high engagement. Then, it further contextualized the reader towards modern branding and the challenges brands are facing with a counterculture of consumers that use consumption to gain sovereignty from marketing practices. As Holt (2002) explains, the postmodern branding paradigm values brands as cultural resources that in turn help each consumer determine aspects of their identity; in order to be eligible to be part of one´s self, brands must be perceived as authentic within a community.

Since a brand´s culture form the ground for brand loyalty, marketing mix activities can be analyzed and measured by its fit with consumer´s culture and brand communities.

3. Methodology

In order to understand the results, the reader should be familiar with the research universe. Furthermore, this chapter aims at explaining the process used to obtain insights from the group´s participants. The findings are intended to help characterize the reasons behind a loyal behavior among music fans hence helping firms understand how to best develop branding strategies.

The focus of the work is a cultural characterization of the groups in order to derive insights about why the fans like/dislike the music, what the music means to them and what do they like about the b(r)and. The band exists as a metaphor for a brand and the results found regarding their loyalty aim at being translated into practical pointers for branding.

3.1 Netnography

In order to understand the factors behind loyalty in online music communities a netnographic approach was chosen. Netnography is defined by Kozinets (2002) as a new type of qualitative research that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study computer-mediated communities. Because it analyzes online forums there´s an unobtrusive nature in collecting data making it a useful tool to analyze phenomenon without fabricating an environment as it needs to be done to conduct interviews or focus groups (Kozinets, 2002). Another characteristic of netnography is that it enables researchers to naturally see consumer to consumer interactions such as word-of-mouth, searching for information, complaining, among others. The method also enables researchers to understand authentic relationships because these are largely social constructed phenomena and online forums are social interactions among consumers (Rageh, Melewar, & Woodside, 2013).

This method proves useful in the community we´re studying as we expect to find representations of fandom and, in consequence, loyalty (Obiegbu et al., 2019). This way we will be able to:

1) Analyze consumer identities and in what topics they link their life with the brand.

2) Know the general opinion behind the band´s marketing initiatives and in turn generalize what factors are valued in them.

However, netnography is a subjective method of conducting research and so the researcher´s knowledge should be considered. This happens because the netnographer is translating the data through his perspective. This constitutes a limitation as discursive analysis through text is not

as rich as face to face interactions (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018) and interpretations are always subject to the researchers background (Kozinets, 2002). The author, prior to research, was lightly familiar with the research universe´s culture. This light knowledge of the research universe revealed useful in understanding the forum language and at the same time limiting a biased interpretation of them.

The unfolding of these relationships will have the objective to ground theory inductively. This means that *verbatim* terms from the online groups will be analyzed and grouped as codes, then will be put together in groups and finally connected among themselves forming a thematic network. Codes are chosen based on how frequent they relate to a specific theoretical formation. That is, if in the forums we find several discourses relating to the efficiency of marketing practices in AF we would consider words in sentences related to marketing practices and group them together. This grouping would then give birth to a category which would symbolize the occurrence the verbatim terms describe. In a third step, the categories would be put together in themes that would represent higher orders of thinking. This way, through the participants own terms, we can get a clearer understanding of a phenomenon and relate it to any research rationale. This method known as grounded theory is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to derive inductively theory about a phenomenon (Aloudat, 2016).

3.2 Entrée

The study used the brand AF´s related fandom forums online as the research universe. The total eligible 37 threads analyzed were inside < r/arcade fire >.

The groups were chosen based on being built around the indie rock genre and because of the high volume of online activity surrounding it. Due to the large dimension of the group the research universe didn´t limit itself to the forums but included connections and hyperlinks to other forums which were also observed. Therefore, the research universe comprised more than the above referred forums. The full list of the titles of the threads analyzed can be seen in the appendix.

The netnography began with a Google search. The first objective was to identify suitable groups to conduct qualitative research around fandom. Some of the first used keywords used were "arcade fire where should I start forum reddit" and "arcade fire reddit" as well as "Arcade Fire what I love about". However, the prior process to find such group in the first place was with a

mix between the number of results in searching for "music forums Indie" and the literature available the band. In the end, AF was chosen as the b(r)and for analysis.

The criteria for the thread choice was the number of participants and the content posted in them. Because consumers rely on brands for expression (Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003), posts where chosen based on how they represented relationships with the band. So emotional posts as well as personal opinions were the most sought. The first community analyzed is called < r/arcadefire > which the author became a part of. It´s a reddit forum with 12.9 thousand members created in December 2013.

It´s main posts were about album reviews, inquiries about the meaning of lyrics, expressions of why a certain aspect of music or lyrics resonated and the judgment of marketing initiatives. In the forums, the researcher looked firstly at the title of the posts and number of comments. The objective was to find discussions and comments that seemed personal. The purpose was to analyze the brand from the consumer´s perspective.

It was found that the most recent active forums were about reviews of "Everything Now". That was the AF´s latest musical release which was in July 28 in 2017. The album´s "Everything Now" lyrical content addressed society´s saturation of products and consumerism (Evstatieva & Shapiro, 2018). The album was perceived as hollow by most forum participants as they considered it a deviation from previous releases. The comments in the threads gave insights as how the release of new content by the band affected the construction of loyalty. Posts criticizing the band where one of the main topics approached in the search as knowing what deconstructs loyalty mattered for the research. The majority of the posts selected were talking about music and emotions so several examples of experiential loyalty were found (Obiegbu et al., 2019).

3.3 Collection of archival data

The search started by looking for the most active threads. Any threads associated with album reviews, recommendations or opinion discourses that contained more than 30 posts were deemed relevant. Analysis of such threads were relevant as the discussions would continue for several posts where it was possible to observe how the community divided itself opinion wise. Threads that contained discursive examples of appreciation for the band were thoroughly analyzed. The findings in these threads helped construct keywords to search for more threads which revealed useful in find relevant topics (keywords such as Everything Now, Massive Tour,

early days, accordion, among others). After reading the threads, the most relevant posts were copied to a word sheet totaling on 282 posts of archival data for coding.

Data analysis was carried out by identifying in the posts words that repeated and that consisted of an appreciation or depreciation about the band, the band´s marketing activities and the music.

A thematic network was then built on excel joining codes (repeated words) in categories and the categories in a theme. The codes gave rise to three categories that gave rise to one theme: Authenticity of the band´s work. (Appendix fig. 7.4)

3.4 Ethical considerations

The researcher presented the objective of the study to the < r/arcade fire > forum where most posts were collected. It presented it through the publication of a post to whose reaction was a positive one by the participants in the forum. The collection of any personal information from any post was explicitly foregone for the protection of the participant. All names and forms of identification were excluded from the study unless requested otherwise.

The researcher committed to carrying out the study in compliance with ethical standards being the nature of the comments very personal and the nature of the study itself very personal for fans.

4. Thematic Analysis

In the construction of loyalty in the online groups we found that one of the most praised qualities in the bands is the authenticity of their work. This notion contrasts with the perception that the music (product) exists with solely a commercial intention. Thus, a theme was developed: Authenticity.

Authenticity builds loyalty

Authenticity may seem particular to the individual but is deeply influenced by the beliefs of the consumer's subculture. It's mentioning often appears in codes such as "sincerity"," honesty"," genuine" and "true". One of the most recurrent disputes among participants in the groups was about judging new music and marketing initiatives which we will denominate henceforth as <u>original content</u>. Data suggested that participants tend to construct loyalty towards new original content if it is perceived to be consistent in respecting an anti-commercialism ethic, an anti-mainstream ("seeming uninterested") edge relating to the fan´s personal identity. These three characteristics form the group´s biggest strength as a brand. These translate as listeners expecting authentic content which is emphasized through lyrical content, music production, recording processes and marketing initiatives.

4.1 Identity Appropriation

Personal Identity, here, is defined as the common ground the music content (lyrics and instrumentation) finds with fans. It is a category that accounts for the discourses of appreciation in, especially, song lyrics and their connection in an album theme. The following lines explain how a connection between the fans identity and the one conveyed by the music positively influences loyalty in a fandom relationship.

Music content is one of the most discussed aspects of the band in the forums, followed by marketing initiatives and the mentioning of other bands. The conceptuality of an album, that is, how the different songs are connected in making one story, was one of the decisive factors for showing positive engagement with original content for most participants. The songs connection contributed to the strengthening of a relatable identity fans related to. This helped construct part

of their personal identity with the music which, in turn, helped creating a loyal fandom relationship.

Evidence of this relation between album thematic and identity connection can be found in AF´s "Suburbs". The record depicts what is life in the suburbs contrasting the housing development and highway construction with the boredom associated with isolated areas characteristic of American suburban cities. Nevertheless, the album paints the following scenario in a way that feels nostalgic and romantic (Cohen, 2010). According to most participants, the album was perceived to be coherent in its concept. Below, one example of a discourse relating to the positive effect on the album´s coherence.

User 1:" I found that I didn't skip a single track and when I had finished, it really felt like I had listened to an album that had a lot of attention paid to the sequencing and how the themes of the tracks contributed to the overall album. "

Music content, when coherent, was observed to be appreciated for most participants in the study. Another comment shows a user talking about the album as a whole and not about songs in it. This shows the importance for fans that the song connection inside an album has in creating an identity/message the fans seize for them:

User 2:" On Funeral, Arcade Fire uses vivid imagery and personal tales that describe interpersonal struggles, as well as the turmoil associated with impermanence. On every album since then, while many argue the strengths/weaknesses of Neon Bible, The Suburbs, and Reflektor, one thing has been constant: Arcade Fire has always had a community-oriented, "we're all in this together" approach to adversity."

One observed way this identity appropriation can happen is through nostalgia. According to Holbrook (2019) it can be defined as a preference for activities or products associated with the past.

Discourses from the groups refer to how listening to music takes them back to a past time, helping them remember it and thus becoming part of one´s life. Here the discourses relate to the justification of a favorite album under the reddit thread "What is your favorite Arcade Fire album". Here, a user refers to "Suburbs" as it relates to the time when he lived in the suburbs.

User 3: "It's about basically me and my generation. I grew up in the late 80s / early 90s pre internet, in Dallas suburbs like Plano or Houston suburbs like sugar land, places where the room to grow meant new clean neighborhoods and strip malls. I love that it's not slagging the suburbs or praising them. It's a subtle muddy trip through a past that doesn't get much nostalgia."

Another user talks about the same record and how it relates to his living experience also in Houston. In the full comment he places the album as his favorite because it gives him feelings of nostalgia.

User 4: "The album is a nostalgia trip into a childhood spent in Houston, along with dreams of what it was like, nuclear apocalypse and frustration with the kids of today for being too hip to dance (Rococo). Funeral is a great album as well, but it never gripped me like the Suburbs."

Another example of this discourses is user 4 referring to "Funeral", the band´s debut (first) album which was followed by "Neon Bible". In this case, the album was released seven years before the post.

User 4:" I must have been like 15, 16. The album had been out for a little while, but it was definitely before Neon Bible was released. I must have been in my room at my parents' house and at that time I was really into discovering new music. I don't really actively search for new artists like that anymore, but many bands that I discovered then (such a great time for indie music) I still consider to be my favourites."

Nostalgia to a brand can constitute an indicator of a loyal relationship to a brand (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003). In fact, nostalgia is connected to authenticity because it involves creating an aura around a product which is created with the brand´s essence (Brown et al., 2003). This way, nostalgic relationships give the music (content), and consequently the band (brand), characteristics the listeners appropriate to define a past time and feel the music belongs more to them.

Moreover, it seems the nostalgic creation is positively moderated by events such as when people go through changes in life or face extraordinary settings. The argument is that, when going through changes that are important periods of a person´s life, the music/ product´s that one has

or uses at the time plays a big role in affirming such change. With this, a brand becomes more valuable to a person by being present and so loyalty is developed. The explanation is that when someone is aiming at distancing from a past-self it may pursue actions to attenuate that distance. Some of those actions are reflected in product/content consumption. If the brand/music enables the pursual of an independent identity, it becomes an unconditional support for that goal and thus a loyal, intimate relationship is formed.

In the comments analyzed, most appraisal to music related to how the music helped people go through certain events in life. Such as the post from user 10 talking about one of the first times he heard "Suburbs" and why is it an important album for him.

User 5: "I picked it up on a whim during a late-night trip home from a day of helping my mother. She has multiple sclerosis and it's about 2 hours on the road each way, so it provides a lot of dedicated listening time. I was in line with the cd and this girl told me that I was going to really like it so it prompted me to pay special attention."

This shows that the product´s / brand´s attributed and functional abilities aren´t the only necessary condition for the creation of loyalty. The environment in which the brand is used highly influences one´s perception of it and therefore decides what it means to the consumer and whether it becomes nostalgic or not. For user 5, the symbolic companionship in more difficult times comforts the person and relates with the life struggle related to his family in the car trip. This environment makes listening to the music a special occasion and therefore helps create an enduring link between the music and the occasion.

As user 6 tells us, the fact the context was a first concert weighted for the choice of a favorite album by AF.

User 6: "I'm going to say Everything Now. It's probably more due to sentimental reasons. It's the first Arcade Fire album that my teenage daughter and husband gravitated to and played front to back over and over again. It was the soundtrack to our life for a good year and a half. And first concert my daughter ever attended. With all that said, Funeral is a close 2nd. "

As found, changes in one´s life can give brands that are present a special meaning. The brand, essentially, takes part in a person´s life and creates the nostalgic feeling which altogether increases loyalty to that brand.

This has been studied by Fournier (1998) where he showed that consumers can develop intimate relationships with brands that are present in life-changing moments. These moments can be moving out of home, marriage, parenting, going to college, among others (Fournier & Yao, 1997).

Finally, and as literature and data suggests, this identity connection becomes authentic when original content finds common ground with the listener´s lives:

Many indie rock fans, much like everyone, go through moments of distress and struggle. Several crises from global warming, war conflicts to personal conflicts are normally digested in a negative way. Resonating music finds common ground with those struggles and lets consumers create meaning and give a personal link to the content independent from marketing texts. This aspect shows the construction of loyalty starts with the listeners relation to the original content´s problems it talks about. And in fact, it was found the bulk of the posts found were of high sentimental value. The emotional character of the band´s content, meaning that the lyrics talked about feelings, was found to be one of the most important factors in creating loyalty in the forums. Emotional content is important to Indie Rock fans because the culture values expression and earnestness (Klassen, 2012) ("It contrasts with the Marlboro man"). It shows how the consumption culture shapes what is considered authentic and legitimate.

In thread 1, users explain this Indie Rock approach on finding common ground with the listener and thus comparing music as being a friend:

Thread 1:

User 7: "side note: y'all ever feel with music that listening to an album is like being with a friend? I know this album inside out and it never fails to bring me back to reality."

User 8: "Yeah I feel that way. I once saw an article that suggested people who watch a tv show through multiple times start to feel like the characters are their friends and that seems like it could apply to albums as well."

User 9: "Especially with artists and lyrics that I relate to personally, it feels like someone (the artist) is there to remember/verbalize those emotional experiences, and it feels to me like a deep personal connection with someone else through a shared experience. I feel this especially with AF music and lyrics. Warm and tingly."

Again, the message and lyrical content pays an important role in shaping one´s interest for the band. Literature underlines this notion on life-struggles; connection between consumer and brands has been shown to be built on the basis what are academically called life-themes ; this relationship between consumers and brands is deeply rooted in personal history and highly important to one´s concept of identity (Fournier, 1998).

Furthermore, it aligns with the notion that brands enable the building of one´s self and helps them pursue the desire of showing to others who they are (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010).

4.2 Anti-Mainstream

Another way the participants justify their discursive loyalty is by stating what the brand stands for as opposed to mainstream values. This means that one aspect that constructed loyalty was the band´s stance along with a determined counter-culture present at the time. According to participants, AF stands for values such as honesty, being earnest and feeling in an "externally-directed fashion" which, according to the overall opinion, were not mainstream values at the time the music act was starting to get popular in the late 1990´s. This is well represented in the comment below:

User 10: "Here's the thing about Arcade Fire: a lot of people slag on them for not being "challenging" music but in a specific way they are. They challenge you to let go of the the carefully built foundations of irony, apathy, and personal self-directed angst that popular rock has forced upon you since the Dawn of the Alternative Era. They challenge you to be earnest, without feeling awkward about it, and to simply feel, in a grandiose, externally-directed fashion."

This comment places AF as a part of a counterculture because it stood against mainstream values. By taking the concept further, it was found the listener´s valued the bands´ non-popularity as it made them feel they were closer to them and were more special. The comments below illustrate that point:

User 11: "It's gratifying to find good music that is still obscure "hidden from the world"

But it loses of it's charm when everybody can hear it " You cursed the sun when it stepped to your girl". And it,s never gonna be the same again. You will never be this one guy that disovered funeral and that fell in love with this strange album and that used to share it with only his best friends."

And

User 12: "I'm often guilty of this, myself. I think a lot of people are like me. We complain about the music on the radio but when we hear a song we discovered a couple of months ago, we can't help but feel a bit disappointed that it's popular now. Like we lost something "now your just a song I used to know " ;)"

We can clearly see the impact of being popular or "hidden" to the participants in the forum. The data suggested that this belonging to a counterculture gave a voice to fans that were living in a cultural tension. Cultural tension can be defined as the pursual of behaviors that are contradictory to one´s culture. The cultural tension, in this case, can be understood as a shift in the music consumption culture (apathy, irony vs earnest, feel) that culminated with the rise of Indie Rock and Post-rock genres that started to appear throughout the late 90´s. This means the music/lyrics gave a voice to a tension few b(r)ands at the time were highlighting and thus become important to listeners and drove the loyalty construct.

However, the passage of time and the band´s overall evolution in popularity led their loyalty to be questioned which created two fronts: one front confronting the band´s change in musical style and in status (becoming increasingly famous) and other defending the group was still authentic in their work and that new counter-cultural values have just evolved as they did. The comment below illustrates this latter opinion:

User 13: "Yep, I'm very interested to see how Everything Now will be viewed 10 years from now. In my opinion, EN is a very good album, but Arcade Fire has set such a high bar for themselves that it seems a bit beneath their talents, knowing full well what they're capable of. I think it'll be looked back on fondly, as a representation of the culture at the time."

It shows a listener talking about "Everything Now", AF´s most recent original content, which was where most recent fandom polarization began. Most participants in the forum stated "Everything Now" deviated from what AF originally stood for and that it didn´t connected with

them. This deviation from the counterculture meant the band wasn´t perceived as authentic for some fans and hence their loyalty was questioned. The comment below shows the message wasn´t received well and hence the connection was practically non-existent for some listeners:

User 14: "Over and over, Arcade Fire's message comes through as presumptuous and arrogant. Instead of messages of "We're all in this together," which are apparent on their previous albums, the message I kept hearing was, "You all have problems that we don't have." Instead of thoughtfully dissecting the complexities of the situations or being inclusive, they chose to simply name the problems and the types of people they have problems with, and then end the songs."

This shows the loyalty relationship, in the b(r)and is a dynamic one continuously being negotiated upon new original content releases. In this case AF were judged for being mainstream and not appealing as previous releases. Therefore, the belonging in a counterculture can be both an asset and a liability in terms of branding.

Belonging to counterculture influences positively the construct of loyalty for AF fans. In fact, counterculture can be beneficial in branding. In terms of generating ties within a community being part of a counter-culture has positive effects ; ties between people of the same community increase when a common enemy is perceived and is inherent in the group´s shared beliefs (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Furthermore, counter-cultural dimension helps create the perception that what the band stands for is authentic because it seems as the brand is not interested in being part of something bigger than what they already are (uninterested) and are different from most cultural texts being produced by being different from mainstream (original) (Holt, 2002).

This also goes in accordance with Klassens (2002) view on indie culture aesthetics where he claims the validation process of whether a product is authentic or not in Indie Rock passes through whether it has or not anti-mainstream traits. This category relates to authenticity as, for indie rock fans, being anti-mainstream is a quality that makes a product/music eligible for identity appropriation. Another quality of the same nature is anti-commercialism.

4.3 Anti-commercialism

As described in the literature review, the band´s started distributing and recording their songs independently without any affiliation to record companies. This resonated with the fans which saw in those actions an example of independence from the record industry standards. This anti-commercialism character of the band influenced positively the identity connection behind the group´s first music albums. User 15, in the comment below, talks about the band in their early days and how they lived while touring reflecting on their humble origins:

User 15:" they were the sweetest, most sincere people. they were humble and very happy to get to be on the road in a shitt*[1] van playing music. they were actually in a mini van and a chevrolet monte carlo. "

The several opinions regarding the band´s origins were even characterized by some participants as an "hipster" band. The comment bellow explains the word ("a hatred for selling out") and relates it with anti-commercialistic practices:

User 16: "For lack of a better term, I consider them a "hipster" band. Back in the day it was "punk" bands, but the mentality is the same: a hatred for "selling out," a topic that has popped up before on this sub. Making money is viewed to be the antithesis of artistry and inspiration. If the band actually manages to get famous through genuine artistry, it puts them in a very weird place. Many will call them sellouts just for receiving money, regardless of the source. "

Here the user talks with prejudice about the extreme opinion that selling out is considered an artistic "sin". Although this comment condemns this extreme view, most participants had a diverse opinion. In posts regarding album reviews, most discourses were condemning "Everything Now´s" album conceptuality which, by criticizing modern society´s consumption habits, was ironically perceived as commercial and cynic. One of the ways these perceived commercial intentions where observed by participants is in the "massive tour setting" and structure of the live shows. For many participants in the forums the album first intent was to provide a grandiose show instead of giving a story "theme" the fans could relate to like they did with previous music releases, as the comment below shows:

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[1] The language in the discourses was conserved as found in the forums in order to preserve the linguistic traits. This way we have an idea of the language it is used and emphasize the unobtrusive nature in netnography.

User 17: "The two worst things for me are the fact that the album is very clearly pinned on a massive tour setting, equip with a recurring intro and outro, big hit single kicking things off, and anthem after anthem. Secondly, it's their first album where a large, album-spanning theme isn't present. That's a huge disappointment, considering the indication that there would be thanks to the title, lead singles, and cover."

In the comment below, user 18 states that the band showed multiple variations of marketing initiatives instead of releasing the album and letting the product work for itself. Here the perceived volume of marketing initiatives mitigates the identity connection the content could have.

User 18: "Anything with their Social Media manager and about 10 different versions of the LP release leaves me cold, obviously some kind of comment on modern consumerism or a stab at irony but that itself is still pure marketing bullsh*t, I had a feeling they were disappearing up their own chuff but this kind of confirms it for me. Why can't they just release an album on its own merit and cut the marketing BS???"

This notion of commercialism is evident in the AF´s forum as the group is currently considered a mainstream act. This commercialistic intent can be visualized as one extreme of a continuum where authenticity exists in the other side.

Holt (2002) argues that firms increasingly pursue actions to create more perceived authenticity. As this competition for authenticity increases the consumer becomes more and more skeptical that these attempts are just commercial acts. He argues that, marketeers crave to tap into cultural texts that haven´t been touched by corporate sponsorship. In this quest, brands look to offer anti-mainstream cultural texts just as Starbucks does by staging local folk artists in some of their venues (Holt, 2002).

This continuum notion is underlined by literature where the efforts to make a brand visible and to create awareness are usually perceived with a commercial intent and therefore deviate from what could be considered authentic (Holt, 2002). This way, the brand doesn't appear original or uninterested which are two ways of becoming authentic in consumer´s minds (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Holt, 2002).With the premise that authenticity drives loyalty, commercial intent

may be a factor that mitigates it. However, commercial intent is defined by fans' perceptions that may have different definitions depending on the sub-culture.

The empirical analysis dissected appreciation discourses about the AF brand. With the thematic analysis we concluded that authenticity, in AF, is moderated by three aspects that are congruent to indie culture: identity appropriation, anti-mainstream and anti-commercialistic. These three categories don´t exist independent of each other. Identity appropriation was observed to be a result of a loyal relationship where resources such as coherence in lyrics, important life events that created nostalgia were considered authentic because they fitted with indie culture. Furthermore, Anti-mainstream and anti-commercialism can be viewed as filters that original content must pass by in order to be considered authentic. The three, together, show that authenticity, shown in the codes of "sincerity"; "honest"; "real", is what drives the construction of loyalty to a brand (Appendix 7.4, Thematic Network).

On chapter five we indicate the conclusions and conclude that the construction of loyalty resulting from the appropriation of authentic resources depends on the culture of the brand community and derive examples of managerial implications for the case of AF in indie rock.

5. Conclusion and Implications

5.1 Main conclusions

This dissertation based on netnography revealed the link between brand (band) and consumers (fans) was rooted in the values of indie culture. The data suggested one theme to explain this process: the authenticity in the band´s new original content. New original content are the new releases the band promotes, whether they´re music videos, interviews or products sold via merchandising. Data has shown evidence of experiential loyalty (Obiegbu et al., 2019) and corroborates the view that consumer´s seek authenticity in consumption (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Holt, 2002). This dissertation has qualitatively shown how music fans use brand resources they consider authentic to define part of their identities and to justify their loyalty. On that light, it proposes brands use an approach to branding based on creating brand elements that are authentic for the consumption culture it aims to do business in.

Authenticity, under an Indie Rock scope, is a process of validating any original content the band releases under three characteristics: connection with the fan´s personal identity and displaying anti-commercialism and anti-mainstream characteristics.

Firstly, the identity it gives to consumers comes often from the music´s lyrics and/or context in which the music is listened. Falling short of expectations in lyrical content made the fan base, in the majority, feel betrayed by the band and further questioning the b(r)ands ability to put forward resonating original content. With the same logic, fulfilling the expectations on lyrics influenced positively the construction of loyalty. In this case, it was observed fans would take the music seriously and relate it with their lives. These examples of discursive fandom generated replies relating to how others placed the songs in their lives which encouraged further sharing. The result was more engagement in the online community through a virtuous circle of sharing one´s personal life.

Secondly, it was observed that participants valued content that stood against mainstream values. In the observed data, participants 1) feel the band belongs more to them when it has little popularity and 2) praise the band´s stance on sincerity and "earnestness". These opinions generated a certain degree of polarization mostly because the band is currently perceived as a mainstream act. Some fans stated the band had lost the anti-mainstream quality upon the release of "Everything Now" whereas others view it as an evolution in the band´s song writing and musicality. These division showed that the anti-mainstream quality the band can have is not

limited by the band´s popularity. This underlines literature regarding under-dog branding where a brand can harness its humble and problematic origins to signal perseverance and determination as an example of success (Paharia et al., 2011).

Moreover, a third brand strength observed was the anti-commercialism character the fans praised in the early days and not in the present. For an Indie Rock project, the perception of being commercial is highly regarded as unauthentic (Klassen, 2012). In this case, whenever a participant commented on the "mass marketing machine" behind the new original content it did it with disregard and distaste. His comment would be, usually, followed by replies reinforcing the same criticism. This insight can be tied to Holt´s argument that perceived authenticity is mitigated by the pursual of commercial efforts. Following this tradition in literature, the average indie rock fan can be compared to the "liberatory post-modern consumer" that tries to restructure his/her identity through consumption against market imposing forces (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995).

Overall, the findings point to a conceptualization of brand loyalty that is fandom based. As stated in the literature review, brand loyalty started being defined with a focus on behaviors, particularly purchasing behavior and moved on to be defined in a cultural locus. However, the construction of loyalty was found to be rooted through an analysis of the experience the consumer had with the brand. This observation, through netnography, enabled the deconstruction of the discourses into the one factor that made a brand text eligible to resonate with the consumer. Authenticity. A set of beliefs influenced by a consumption culture (Holt, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

The main insight this dissertation brings is the positive effects on loyalty yielded through an alignment between the brand and culture it targets. Culture branding emerges, therefore, as a method for brands to be resonant in a clean and simple way in a noisy world.

5.2. Managerial Implications (Its contributions to AF´s fan retention)

The main managerial significance of this dissertation lies in the retention of fans of Arcade Fire and namely how a perception that the band´s work is authentic can impact retention. The main source of income for a brand such as AF is touring with live shows. Worldwide, touring revenues from live shows are estimated to be around 5.5 billion US dollars in 2019 having been steadily increasing since 2015 with 3.93billion (Statista,2020). It is estimated that most revenue comes from touring so the focus in retention of fans that go to the shows is crucial for this artistic act.

As data shows, the construction of loyalty in Indie Rock fandom online communities is influenced by how authentic the fans perceive the band´s work. This authenticity comes across as the content the brand releases being aligned with anti-mainstream, anti-commercial stances and in being relatable for listeners. The retention of a fan base is important as the group is currently considered a mainstream act that relies on the concert revenues for the creation of new content and its consequent evolution. On the face of new content releases, namely the album "Everything Now", loyalty in online communities has been questioned and this had repercussions on the fan base and the potential to negatively affect AF´s revenues.

The major insight of this thesis is that brands should look for the consumption culture´s they aim to do research in. This cultural concern helps brands maintain their loyalty over time as communication is consistent with the consumer and the brand´s culture. This is useful for PR strategy mainly in music and entertainment industries.

Some aspects the band should consider in the next content releases in order to appeal to the larger already existing following base:

a) The music´s content should address autobiographical aspects of the band´s life in the lyrics. The group should write about themselves. In music composition, just like in content creation for advertising, creators can either harness biographical aspects of the brand or relate it with external events.

The second way creates a link between the external events and the brand. This can backlash against the band because, if there is no real authentic association between the brand and the event, consumers will regard the brand as taking advantage of the external event for commercial intentions and won´t regard the new content as authentic. This

was the case for new content Everyday Now, that unlike the previous albums it didn´t have a resemblance with any of the band´s origins or life story.

The pursual, therefore, of elements such as the brand story, the life-themes of its creators and other biographical aspects may contribute for an anti-commercialistic perception of what the brand puts out promotion wise and be better received by the fans.

b) Make some tour venues and concert locations smaller. By alluding to a humbler set they can harness the band´s underdog origins and amplify their voice within the existent following base. Participants in the forum praised the time when the band used less electronic instruments (nostalgia) and were less mainstream. Discourses showed that being exclusive and perceived as not mainstream generated a feeling that the band belonged more to the fans that knew them. This can be easily achieved by increasing the percentage of gigs in clubs as opposed to music festivals.

However, this tactic may not be effective in attracting new listeners and expanding revenue. It only serves for the maintenance of a loyal relationship between existing fans.

c) Another insight for branding that comes from the harnessing of nostalgia can be the creation of "making off" videos of their debut album "Funeral". The inclusion of old brand elements on new branding efforts is often called retro-branding (Brown et al., 2003). Retro-branding comes from using aspects of the brand´s aura and bring them to new releases in an original way. This means the brand AF could benefit from using musical instruments they used in the past (accordion, violin, metallophone, among others) to convey the atmosphere they become known for. However, this pursual for old brand elements shouldn´t compromise the originality of new work. In order to avoid so, branding focus should go to the concepts that made the brand an icon (Brown et al., 2003). One example of these concepts is which stories the consumer´s tell between themselves about the brand (Brown et al., 2003). In the case of AF, a dimension that underlines this notion are the anti-mainstream ideals the band has since its creation.

These tactics are some examples on how one can harness the brands strengths discovered via netnography. On a larger scope, the method proves useful in asserting a brand´s strengths and showing the language consumer´s use to describe them. By using the method of grounded theory and by focusing on the patterns of discourses of Indie Rock fans of AF we found that indie branding aligns with the quest for authenticity in

our generation (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995) meaning that brands (other than music groups or music labels) can harness their anti-mainstream and anti-commercial qualities in positioning to resonate with consumers. This goes in alongside with the theoretical research made on Indie branding (Harti, 2019; Klassen, 2012).

5.3 Theoretical Implications (Its contributions to understand indie branding)

Indie brands are characterized by challenging the mainstream (Hibbett, 2005; Klassen, 2012). In the dissertation we advance a characterization of indie rock based on its values of anti-commercialism, anti-mainstream and externalization of emotions. According to several discourses in the <r/arcadefire> forum, the discourse of emotional content was regarded as an act of resistance to the already existent social behaviors in the 90´s/2000´s. This challenge referring to feeling in a "externally directed fashion" in rock music is no longer observed with the sedimentation of Indie rock and other sub-genres. This means that what was previously an anti-mainstream feature or stance won´t mean it will still be in the future. This alludes to the transformative nature of consumption cultures that, like people´s opinions, change with time.

This change poses a challenge for brands that crave to remain authentic in their message and at the same time adapt to the changing consumer cultures. In fact, counterculture representing consumer culture is a contradiction because the systems that aim at keeping an artistic product "hidden" from mainstream are the same ones that want to promote it as hidden from the mainstream to the world. In the case of AF, the band had reached worldwide success and still represented an example of an Indie Rock brand as data suggests. This underlines the notion that true Indie branding doesn´t exist as a pure concept but rather as a term used to define a product/movie/music that defies what is already in vogue. What is pure in Indie is its desire to be different and seek distinction from what it constructs as mainstream and not only being hidden or obscure from it.

It aligns with one of the branding pillars in traditional marketing which is the one of pursuing differentiation. A key example that followed branding initiatives towards an anti-establishment audience was VW in 1959 with the DDB advertising agency of the VW Beetle and its revival in 1990´s. What both campaigns had in common is that they were targeting a youth counterculture. In the 60´s it showed the car showing off its unimpressive features such as its size and power which were against advertising conventions at the time (Brown et al., 2003 ;

Hibbett, 2005). In the 90´s with the campaign "Drivers Wanted" it aimed at transmitting a message that the consumer was the one in charge instead of being passive followers of marketing texts. The context of both messages made it appealing to indie audiences that were seeking to emancipate themselves from marketing initiatives. Here we can observe how the message changed throughout time but how the indie ideals of challenging the status quo remained. The result from both VW add campaigns was a loyal fan base built upon cultural branding.

This dissertation, by looking at how fans discourse their loyalty in the forums showed that it is a phenomenon negotiated with cultural beliefs. The dissertation contributes therefore to the line of research in cultural branding and in exposing the tensions between commerciality and authenticity in Indie branding.

Culture exists within the consumer´s minds and it dictates rituals of consumption and pop culture that, with time, becomes history. In this sense, brands are but films, books, paintings and rock bands. All have a contribution to society´s fabric. That contribution, in order to be perceived authentic, must not come by an appropriation of existing culture as in taking a free ride from the movies, climate manifestations and press but by contributing similarly.

Summarizing, the theoretical implications are the inclusion of commerciality and the changing nature of what is considered authentic for Indie branding. Furthermore, we found that the commerciality is seen as an antithesis of authenticity and that has consequences for the way a manager can promote his/her brand and leaves suggestions for further research as shown below.

6. Limitations and further research suggestions

6.1 Limitations

Even though brand communities, as defined, have cultural capital, there is research criticizing its construction in online communities. They argue that, with an increasing fragmentation of members, each user is logging in for different reasons and exposing different facets and needs individually (Weijo, Hietanen, & Mattila, 2014). It is important to acknowledge this limitation as the groups used in the research exist online and might be too fragmented to have an evident cultural capital.

Another limitation is that this study focuses on the fan (consumer) side type of the loyalty phenomenon. A focus from the artists perspective or from fans of other musical genres could give insights to the values in each band and how they link with their marketing practices. The artist, here judged as the brand content creator, may have a specific intent different from the one´s judged by the forum´s participants. This way, the link between what a brand means and what its releases is ill defined in this research.

Furthermore, the ethnography study did not consider members who weren´t active in the forums so the large number of participants in each forum is in fact a lower number. The opinion regarding arcade´s fire new album was polarized in the forums as most comments were condemning it. We may encounter different opinions by going to a music concert and talking with the audience about the new music.

6.2 Suggestions for Further Research

By studying how people interacted in online forums and related to a music brand a series of hypotheses arise. In this section we look at them as suggestions for future research in branding.

The first hypotheses refer to the role of the situation in which the product is consumed and how it may influence its loyalty. With music, data suggests that the context helps creating a link between the music and the memories associated with the situation. Does this extend to other products rather than music? And how can one account for such an effect? This would represent a difference between the classical approach of measuring the success of the product´s relationship in respect to a fit with the target´s needs and persona description by introducing the new variable "context". This variable would account for the set of scenarios transcribed by Fournier (1998) in which a person goes through moments of change. Examples of these are

"moving out", "marrying", "parenting", among others. This hypothesis tests whether those moments lead to a creation of nostalgia to a product.

The second hypotheses refer to brands harnessing their origins to reach authenticity and show determination and success. The hypotheses is that this positive effect (Paharia et al., 2011) can be mitigated by a significant increase in marketing activity. As found in the forum´s discourses, fans tended to condemn most marketing initiatives as being commercial and against the authenticity proposal the band has. This duality (commerciality, authenticity) might show a contradiction for brands that when harnessing their origins for the sake of authenticity in branding might very well sacrifice it. This could be reviewed in a qualitative manner through an historic analysis of brands pursuing marketing activities related to their underdog status.

Overall, this dissertation hopes to shine some light as in which way branding ties are made. When dealing with consumer behavior, one always need to take into consideration the time frame and the group of people analyzed. Behaviors will probably never be explained in a fully deterministic way by one unified theory. We must, therefore, separate them in clusters of consumers and explain them with partial theories. In this case, the question "What drives loyalty?" was the initial driver for the research. This fundamental question is one of marketing´s fundamental searches. The suggested answer to that question was reached by restricting the timeframe to the last two decades and by restricting the group to music fans because of the loyal relationship these fans had to the music and the band. Data showed a match between a culture (indie rock) and the brand´s strengths which were translated in authenticity. This agreed with the frameworks proposed by Holt which regarded the consumer only using authentic resources for the creation of meaning to their lives. As branding theory advances, companies should keep in mind that selling is too often mistaken with marketing. Authentic consumer value is what will define the brand leaders in the future to come. As Kotler suggests:

"Marketing and selling are almost opposites. Hard sell marketing is a contradiction. Long ago I mentioned that marketing is not the art of finding clever ways to dispose of what you make. Marketing is the art of creating genuine customer value. It is the art of helping your customers become better off. The marketer's watchwords are quality, service, and value."

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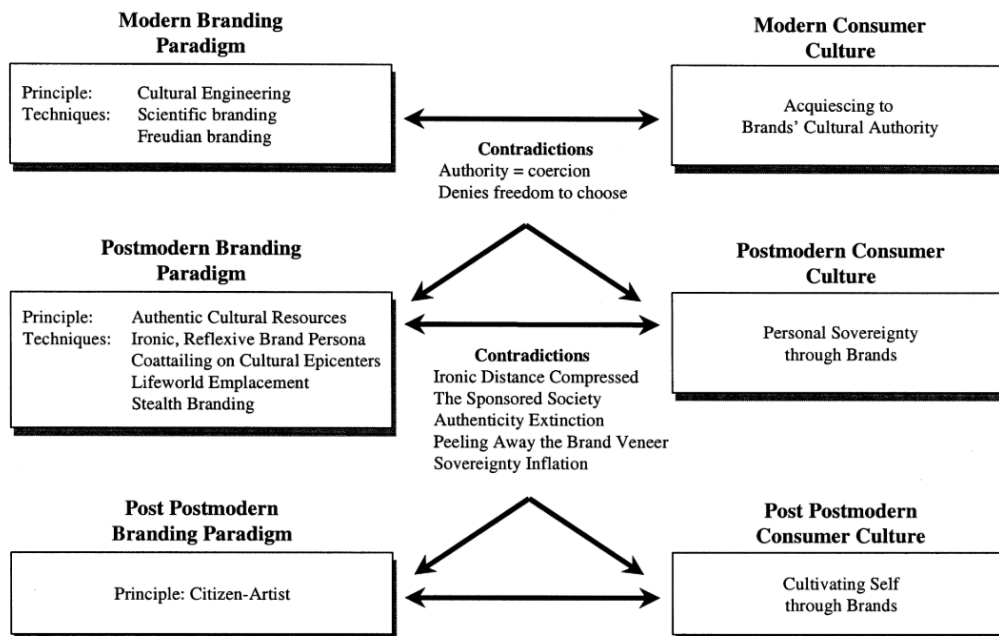
8.Appendix

8.1 Brand Relationship Quality and it´s influences – Susan Fournier, 1998

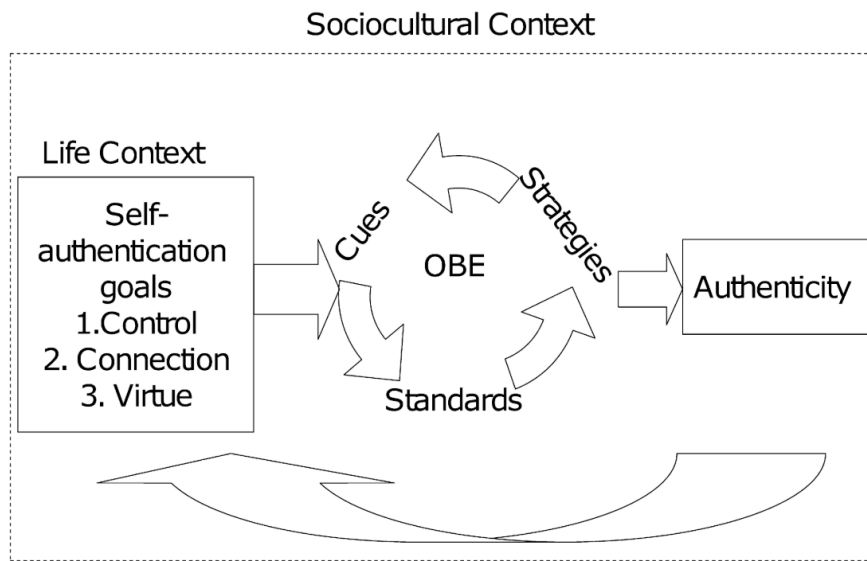*Source: Consumers and their Brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research*
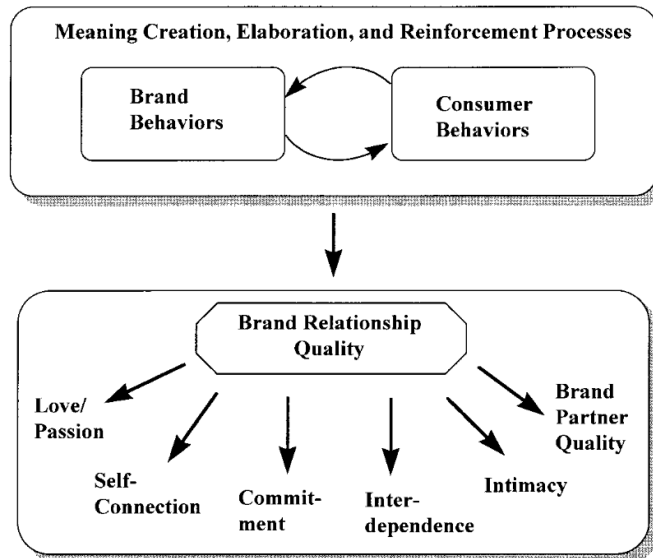
8.2 – Dialectical model of Branding and Consumer culture – Douglas Holt, 2002

Source: Why do brands cause trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture

8.3 – Authenticating objects, brands and experiences – M. Beverland and F. Farrely, 2010

Source: The quest for authenticity in Consumption: Consumer´s Purposive Choice of Authentic Cues to shape experienced outcomes

8.3 Codes and coding organization

Codes	Codes	Codes	Categories
Production	nostalgia	Mood	**Anti-commercial**
Lo/Fi	memorable	Stressed	
Self-Produced	childhood	Therapy	
Authenticity	adolescent	Relaxation	
Real Emotion	homesickness	"What feels right"	**Anti-Mainstream**
.true	youth	Nostalgia	
original		Confessional	
genuinity	Cheesy		**Personal Identity**
Sincerity	Embarassing		**Nostalgy**
Close	mediocrity		
Substance	conservative		
	unemotional	Experiment	
Identity	corny	Change	
Personal		Musical Direction	
Generation		Inconsistent	
Persona	Obscure		
personally	challenging		
feelings	hidden		
personal	discovered	Marketing	
personal myself	popular	Catchy	
heartbreaking	conventional	Commercial	
relatability	popiness	Massive	
empathy	underground	Album theme	
queer	unique	Thematically wholesome	
honest	mysterious	bloated	
souls			
gay			

Theme	
Anti-commercial	Authenticity
Anti-mainstream	
Nostalgy	
Personal Identity	

8.4 Thematic Network

Themes

Authenticity

Categories

Personal Identity

Anti-commercialism

Anti-mainstream

Eg. Codes

Identity
Personal
Generation
Persona
Feelings
Heartbreaking
Nostalgy
Confessional
Youth

Lo-fi   Catchy
Self-produced   Commercial
True   Massive
Original   Bloated
Genuinity   Corny
Close   Thematic
Sincerity
Substance
Unemotional

Hidden
Obscure
Challenging
Discovered
Popular
Conventional
Popiness
Underground
Unique
Mysterious