

Brand-Personal Values Fit and Brand Meanings: Exploring the Role Individual Values Play in Ongoing Brand Loyalty in Extreme Sports Subcultures

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ABSTRACT

We examine whether value fit—the degree to which brands reflect core motivating values attracting individuals to join subcultures—is associated with brand loyalty. We also examine how the core value driving involvement in a sub-culture influences the way consumers respond to social pressures exerted on it namely increased commercialisation and mainstreaming. We identify freedom, belongingness, excellence and connection as core values driving involvement in a sub-culture. Results are based on 19-depth interviews of consumers in the surf, snowboarding and skate subcultures.

INTRODUCTION

The plethora of brands, brand communications and brand meanings that typify developed economies has resulted in a ‘culturally competent consumer’ (Holt 1997, 1998; Kates, 2002a). In contrast, there is mounting evidence that most brand strategies fall short when it comes to understanding consumer values or the broader cultural contexts that shape them. Academics and managers of some of the largest global brands (eg. IBM, Coca Cola) have called for a consumer-centric view of brand management, including a better understanding of consumer values and the socio-cultural contexts in which brands are consumed, and the application of this knowledge to brand building (Rust et al 2004, Kates 2004; Thompson 2004). However, despite explicit calls (eg. Thompson 2004) for a cross over from consumer research to brand management, this area has remained unexplored.

Studies have revealed a deep and at times unconscious connection that binds some buyers with the brands they favour or indeed may become fanatical about (Fournier 1998; Thompson 2004). Some consumers congregate around brands towards which they exhibit a socially motivated attachment, in what has been coined ‘brand communities’ (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002), interpretive communities (Kates 2002a, 2002b), and/or consumption sub or micro-cultures (Celsi 1992; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Sirsi, Ward and Reigen 1996; Kozinets 1997). While related, some of these constructs are subtly distinct. According to Shouten and Alexander (1995) for example, a subculture of consumption, such as their Harley Davidson study group, is a “distinctive subgroup of society that self-select on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand or consumption activity” (p 43). Brand communities, on the other hand, comprise “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001, p 412). More flexible and less codified than subcultures of consumption, brand communities are able to ‘negotiate’ the meaning of the brand(s) they admire as part of a process of social interaction. Furthermore, brand communities do not typically stand aside from (or against) society at large, as subcultures of consumption may do, but rather, evolve in its midst, allowing for more flexible boundaries between those members inside of it and those individuals outside.

Consumers in these groups or subcultures often respond to marketing communications about their loved/hated brands through

a ‘values lens’ (Holbrook 1999). For example, consumers of natural drug therapies became more attached to alternative therapies after scientific reports questioned their veracity, because of a value system that was both anti-science and anti-modernity (Thompson and Troester 2002).

However past research on brand communities has focused on shared community values and how they impact brand preference, and has tended to relegate differences in individual values to the background, despite the fact that these differences are likely to have a major impact on how members of the same subculture perceive the brands on offer (see for example, Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Kates 2002b).

The aim of the study is to tentatively explore a number of issues. First, that a core or predominant individual value can be identified that explains why consumers attach themselves to a subculture, and that this may be one of a number of different values held by individuals of the same subculture. Similar to Mick and Buhl’s (1992) life themes, or to what Fournier (1998) called central life theme, these core values are the fundamental motivators shaping individuals’ decisions in life, including which sports they may choose to engage in and which lifestyle they choose to lead. Second, we expect that consumers’ core values drive their brand choice, and influence their ongoing perceptions of the brand within the subculture. Third, we anticipate that the core value held by consumers, as well as their brand preference, will be impacted by two other key dynamics, namely whether they have close or loose ties to the subculture (i.e. whether they are at the core or the periphery of the subculture), and how they respond to pressures experienced by the subculture itself, such as increased commercialisation or ‘mainstreaming’.

METHODOLOGY

Given the exploratory and qualitative nature of our enquiry, interpretive interviews were judged to be the best way to capture the complexity of consumers’ personal values, embed these values within a sub-cultural context, and uncover the values behind consumption choices and reactions to brand-marketing communications (Kates 2002a, 2004; Strauss and Corbin 1998). We selected consumers involved in three sporting subcultures—surfing, skating and snowboarding. These sports have identifiable communities in Australia, and several Australian brands such as *Ripcurl* or *World* actively target these communities, and have expressed concerns about mainstreaming in recent years.

Consistent with theory building research and our discovery-driven purpose, our sampling technique sought to generalize to theory rather than be statistically representative. Therefore, a convenience sample was used with interviewees contacted through a market research agency. The agency was asked to provide interviewees from a diverse demographic background who stated they were actively involved in at least one of the aforementioned sporting activities. Importantly, these respondents represented varying levels of sub-cultural involvement, from periphery to core, as illustrated in Table 1. A total of 19 in depth individual interviews were conducted with consumers actively engaged in surfing and other extreme sports.

TABLE 1
Profile of Respondents

Name	Age	Gender	Occupation	Subculture	Status
Brandon	27	M	Public Servant	Skate	Core
Ryan	20	M	Student	Surf	Core
Mark	28	M	Customer Service & Artist	Skate; surf	Core
Marcio	27	M	Project Manager	Snow	Core
Sam	22	M	Snowboard Instructor	Skate; snow	Core
Anthony	24	M	Real Estate	Surf	Core
Christie	29	F	Account Executive	Surf	Core
Steve	21	M	Personal Trainer	Surf	Core
Joshua	20	M	Musician	Surf; snow	Core
Ashleigh	18	F	Student	Skate	Periphery
Jason	31	M	Police Officer	Surf	Periphery
Justin	22	M	Snowboard Instructor	Snow	Core
Wesley	14	M	Student	Snow	Periphery
Kieran	15	M	Student	Skate	Core
Kerry	26	F	Personal Assistant	Surf	Periphery
Hamish	28	M	Management	Surf	Core
Andrea	33	M	Personal Trainer	Surf	Periphery
James	19	M	Student	Surf	Periphery
Fiona	24	F	Student & Customer Service Agent	Surf	Periphery

The interviews were conducted by a trained assistant and supervised by two of the authors. To probe consumers' attachment to the sport and reasons for engaging in these activities, general questions were asked to allow respondents to tell their story in their own terms (McCracken 1988).

More direct questioning and floating prompts were also used to explore consumers' responses and issues of interest as they arose throughout the interview. Questions focused on specific activities of brands such as sponsoring events or high profile sportspeople within the sport, or on critical incidents relating to perceived breaches or reinforcement of the brand's values (cf: McCracken 1988). Paraphrasing was also used to clarify interviewees' responses, and to ensure the interviewers understood the consumer's response and allow for any follow up questions (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Interviews lasted one hour on average and were all audio-taped and then transcribed by an assistant.

Analysis occurred after each interview to allow the responses to influence subsequent interviews. After an initial careful reading of the transcripts, open coding took place whereby text from each interviewee was classified into emerging categories. This was followed by axial coding, whereby categories were related to sub-categories and categories were linked at the level of properties and dimensions, and then by selective coding for further integration and refinement of theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Dialectical tacking occurred throughout these two later stages whereby emerging concepts from the data were connected to, and enriched by, prior research (Spiggle 1994). As this analysis occurred independently, the authors met regularly to confirm interpretations and theory.

FINDINGS

We identified four focal values that attracted consumers to their sports, and then influenced their responses to brand activities and the commercialization of their respective sports (see Table 2). Our analysis revealed that, in most cases, consumers had one driving value in their choice of activity, even when they identified with other value motivators (that is, one typically took precedence over the other three).

Freedom was the most common value cited by all respondents and was discussed in ways similar to that identified by Arnould and Price (1993) in their investigation of white water rafting and by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) in their research on the Harley Davidson subculture. For our respondents, freedom related to being able to express one's creativity and individuality. There was also evidence of anti-establishment and getting free from the daily grind that is society, work, or school, and being a part of something not subject to the rules, processes (such as joining clubs) or structure of more mainstream and commercialised sports such as tennis.

Another value emerging recurrently from the data revolved around belongingness, and the sort of social bonding Turner (1977) labelled "Communitas" and which Celsi described as shared experiences or, as Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry (1989) put it, a "shared flow". The vast majority of respondents emphasised that while the practice of these activities were solitary pursuits, they were enjoyed most when enacted in the company of others, and that this resulted in desirable social outcomes, such as friendship, emulation, or simple story telling.

Despite the gregarious and social aspects of their sports, many of our respondents also appeared to relish the individual performance and challenge of their chosen activity, a value we have described as excellence, and which was also identified by Fournier (1998) as a key foundation for strong brand relationships.

The last major value related to a notion of connection and it captured feelings similar to what has been articulated in studies of topophilia (eg. Tuan, 1974). This included a strong sense of connection to a physical place (a geographic location, a beach, a particular resort, or mountain etc) and to others who were at one with place or had a long affiliation with it. It was also about the benefits of this connection, for example rejuvenation and self-renewal through communing with nature.

We identified differences in values depending on how involved in the sub-culture the consumers were. Consumers were classified as being core or peripheral members of a subculture: Core members were those actively engaged in an activity. In many cases these consumers often defined their identity around this activity and

TABLE 2
Values, definitions and text examples

Value	Definition	Text examples
Freedom	Not being bound by rules or procedures; escape from an ordered world	<p>“There is this kind of sense of freedom with surfing...” (Andrea WF33)</p> <p>“I don’t have to travel half way across the world just to go skateboarding” (Sam, WM22)</p> <p>“... free from the normal rushes of the world having time to think, having time out from your normal life...” (James WM19)</p>
Belongingness	Being part of a community; shared experiences; being part of something greater than oneself.	<p>“We’re all mates and we all do stuff together, so we all hand around together, wear the same clothes, are in the same sport... it’s good to fit in, just so you’re labelled as a surfer when you’re going out” (James WM19).</p> <p>“It’s good to be part of a tribe, part of a team... like most things in life, you’re better off doing them together aren’t you?” (Andrew)</p> <p>“It’s good to have 4 or 5 at least other people to go riding [snowboarding]... it builds up a god atmosphere within the group, so it makes it even more enjoyable” (Justin WM22)</p> <p>“We all get fall together, get up together, and encourage each other to keep going” (Joshua WM20).</p>
Excellence	The pursuit of continuous improvement in personal skill level and achievement	<p>“To be out there, trying new things, exploring the boundaries... to try a new surfing move or achieve some thing or just see yourself get better” (James WM19).</p> <p>“If you pull a trick, some of the tricks are really hard and it takes a lot of practice to actually work them... people get excited ... people cheer on someone who puts in a lot of efforts” (Mark WM28).</p>
Connection	An emotional, spiritual or experiential link with place, time, and / or nature.	<p>“Growing up at the beach and everyone did it, my brother surfed, all my family surfed so I got into it” (Hamish WM28)</p> <p>“You feel like you’re just part of a bigger pictures, being our in the ocean... it’s like your world stops and another starts” (Mark WM28).</p>

in the right season (summer for surf, winter for snowboarding) such activities took up 80 per cent of their time. These consumers usually identified more with freedom, excellence, or connection. Peripheral members fell into three groups: new members, previous members and image associates. New members often identified with belongingness because they were interested in becoming a recognised member of the sub-culture. As such, they stressed belonging to the tribe, or being part of something, as a core value (see Table 2) rather than more personal values. Previous members were those that had once partaken in the sport, but due to work or family commitments no longer engaged heavily (or at all) in the actual sporting activities. Again, these consumers stressed belongingness, but more out of a desire to retain some link to something positive in their past. Image associates were consumers that joined the sport largely because they liked the image associated with such activities. These consumers stressed belongingness, but this related more to an idealized image of what the sport stood for. These consumers rarely (if at all) engaged in the focal sporting activity.

Each type of sub-cultural member (core / periphery) also differed in their brand behaviour and attitude towards commercialisation and mainstreaming. This was driven by their focal value, and is explored in more detail in the next section.

Values and brands: how focal values drive brand choice and meaning

The values identified above also drove brand choice and reactions to commercial activity (including mainstreaming) per se

(see Table 3). Brand choice relates to preferred brands in relation to sub-cultural activities rather than brands per se (which were not examined).

Those who valued freedom used this value when selecting brands for sub-cultural activities. The key driver here was the rejection of brands that they saw as “selling out” to the commercial machine. For example:

“I think they’re a hype machine. I think they’ve done very good, making a lot of money. They do put on the contest and they make the Bell’s Beach and the Hawaiian thing, but those things are going to happen regardless of their major sponsorship. They’re just in there, plugging in their logo where they can. That’s the evolution of the sports world, though... I’m pretty sure Quiksilver is on the stock exchange, so we’re talking about people who don’t even surf now, investing in that company to make a profit. Everything changes-the company doesn’t become just about the community and working with the sport in terms of setting up the right environment for people to really grow out of that sport. It’s become more about how many people can we get sucked into, make it cool, make it fashionable.” (Mark WM28)

Mark’s position was representative of many surfers who engaged in the sport due to a desire for freedom. Those members who are openly sceptical of the establishment, including big business and mass marketing, view the recent mainstreaming of the

sport very negatively. For members like Mark, the change in ownership structure has led him to reconsider a brand that played a major role in developing surfing in Australia. Now, he questions the brand's motives, and even its commitment to surfing events through sponsorship, dismissed as largely irrelevant. Such brands have also lost value for Mark because the desire to make money has led the brand to target consumers who do not surf, and therefore quality has also been reduced. Mark questions the quality of the brand in two ways. First, by identifying real decreases in the quality of the prints. Second, by questioning the motive behind such changes, stating that these brands have become more interested in exploiting populist images of surfing and focusing on fashion instead of the values associated with surfing. For example:

"Some of the latest fashion I've seen lately has been funny, because people obviously just got a heap of paint on their hands and have just smudged it and have worn that out to nightclubs and stuff and why not? It looked a bit messy and stuff, but it's kind of cool. It looks like they've been in a fight with food or something. Now everyone is wearing it and they've never touched a surfboard. In that way they've lost their elite market, which is something they should definitely try and hang onto, really."

As a result of this perceived 'selling out', Mark has ceased buying surf brands altogether, preferring instead to buy customised clothes made by a surfer friend. For example:

"I kind of look at Rip Curl and Quiksilver now and cringe, to know that—I think Quiksilver started up in Torquay or somewhere. To think that it's just gone from being a small shop to a multi-million dollar, a billion dollar industry probably. I don't really go into surf shops any more for clothes. I've got a mate who pretty much looks after my board down the beach and he does them up, which is kind of nice."

In contrast to freedom-loving members, members valuing belongingness saw brands and marketing activity in a very different light (see Table 3). Belongingness was also a more complex value than freedom because the meaning of this value appears to split along core-periphery lines. For example, Fiona (WF24) who is a previous core member, now attempts to retain an association with that community by purchasing brands she believes will help her fit in and be identified as a member of the surf subculture. For example:

"Rip Curl, Billabong, and then there's also brands which I don't think are the main surfing brands, like Roxy. It's more of a mainstream version of what those other brands are, to try and appeal to a greater number of people, people that don't actually surf or people that live in the city... I suppose ultimately it's to feel as though I kind of fit into that niche. These are definitely things that you don't consider, but I'd say it's to fit into that little pocket of wherever I want to be, so if I wear those clothes, it's because I want to probably represent that part of me."

Wearing the brand Roxy enables Fiona to retain her past link with the surfing culture, even though she understands that the Roxy brand trades more off the fashion of surf rather than any real link (making surf boards, wetsuits and other equipment used directly in the activity) to surfing per se. Thus, her desire for belongingness drives a positive evaluation of the brands that best enable her to still fit into the surfing niche. In contrast to freedom-loving consumers like Mark, Fiona accepts mass, fashion-oriented surf brands be-

cause they allow her to feel like she remains in touch with the subculture. For Fiona, mainstreaming of surfing is fine because it places the sport on a more viable footing. Brand-related activity such as sponsorship is viewed positively because it contributes to the continuing health of the sport (in contrast to Mark's dismissal of such activity), as illustrated by the comment:

"I've never done any competitive surfing or anything, but it is important that they help keep it all alive and help people, anyone starting out, achieve things and stuff."

For new peripheral members of the subculture, brands act as a signal or ticket for group membership and they contributed much to the central value of belongingness. James (WM19) for example, wants to wear "what everyone else is wearing". As Kieran (WM15) puts it, "you don't want to be the daggy left out one". For such 'image associates', brands were chosen in a similar way to how Fiona chose the Roxy brand, in that brands that resembled a perceived surfing lifestyle were chosen regardless of their commitment to the sport. For these consumers, mainstreaming was never a concern, presumably because they were themselves active participants in the mainstreaming process.

The value of excellence drove consumers to value brands that performed to high standards, had a proven track record and made ongoing commitments to quality. For these sub-cultural members, the brand was only as good as any one of their products. For example:

"When you take surfing seriously, it's working best in good gear. The first thing you need apart from a surfboard is a really good wetsuit and every time I buy a wetsuit, I make sure I buy the top of the line because it's worth every cent given how much you use it, so I've bought a Rip Curl wetsuit and different brands are better for different types of gear. Even though a lot of the surf brands spread across just about every piece of surfing gear that you need in clothing and stuff, normally the best wetsuits you can get are the Rip Curl wetsuits because they're the first ones. Surfboards, there are just so many surfboards on offer. A lot of the time you want a custom made board, so I'm not too hooked on the brand, as long as I get a good shape, a good board. It's not only about the design, the looks and stuff, which attract a lot of people that don't actually surf, but it's about how practical it is." (Marcio, HM27)

Marcio's quotation uncovers a number of brand attributes valued by excellence-focused consumers, including an appreciation of quality-related details, a desire for the absolute best quality and functional performance and the denigration of fashion orientation in favour of practicality. Consumers like Marcio also had a preference for customised products because these would be made to fit their personal preferences, local conditions, and body shape and size. For these consumers, mainstreaming was not seen as a major problem.

"Burton still is a huge company, so I suppose you could call it—I don't know, it's probably got corporate ranks and stuff in its hierarchy and all that sort of stuff, but the guy that started it is still the owner of it and stuff like that, but it is a big company... They're keeping it real, but they're still commercial, still growing and trying to increase their profit, obviously. You need to do that and I think half the reason they become successful is because they've had their product out there for so long and back in the 80's when it wasn't big, it was banned at

TABLE 3
Values, Brand Behaviour, and Attitudes to Mainstreaming

Value	Brand choice	Attitude to mainstreaming
Freedom	Anti-establishment brands, or brands are owned and run by members of the sub-culture	Either exit sport for less mainstreamed activities, or reduce that investment in the subculture by focusing more on personal interests. Brands per se start losing value.
Belongingness	Core: brands that are associated with sustaining the community. Periphery (new): brands recommended by expert others. Periphery (new, previous and image associates): brands that are perceived to be representative of sport's lifestyle	Core and periphery (previous) viewed mainstreaming as evidence of success: Therefore it will benefit community because it will sustain the sport. Periphery (new and image associates) did not recognize mainstreaming as an issue.
Excellence	Functionality, proven track record and ongoing commitments to quality.	Mainstreaming was viewed positively in general, unless it involves attracting image associates. Some concern that mainstreaming could lead to attracting of brands that take short cuts for commercial gain.
Connection	Brands that reflect local place, commitment to nature, commitment to sport, and are involved in actual activity.	Concerns about overtaxing resources, but generally accepted as it allows more people to connect with experience.

a lot of the ski resorts, snowboarding was, Burton and two other brands were pretty much the only boards you could buy and all the better riders were choosing Burton over the Gear, because obviously Jay Burton was the person that designed and started the company and he rides the same boards.” (Sam WM22)

Sam's view of the Burton brand remains positive in the face of increased commercialisation because it still commits to quality improvements, and has a pedigree associated with top performance and pioneering technology. Even though Sam recognises that Burton is a large corporate company, he values their continued commitment and, like many other excellence-oriented consumers, believes that ongoing commercial success is due to continued functional performance. For these consumers, brands also offered value when developed by people actively engaged in the sport.

For these consumers, mainstreaming gave rise to a few problems. First, mainstreaming encouraged the entry of other brands into the market. For example, many snowboarders questioned how Rossignol (the main ski brand) could credibly make a good snowboard given their lack of previous development in the area. Rossignol also struggled for a time because they represented skiing, which was seen as the main 'enemy' of snowboarding. Second, mainstreaming could attract 'image associates' who did not engage in the focal activities but wanted to be connected with those who were. In contrast to freedom-loving members, excellence-loving members viewed these consumers negatively, rather than viewing the sport as having sold out. Finally, these members were often worried that brands would take short cuts to appeal to the mass market, and thus may reduce quality standards. As a result, they became more conscious of past track record, quality standards and product testing.

As noted, our respondents expressed the need for connection in many different forms (see Table 3) including country-of-origin,

heritage, or repeated involvement in important events. James (WM19), for example, described the recurrent presence of key surfing brands, and emphasized a sense of both time and space:

“I think it's Billabong, I think their motto is 'born at Bell's'. Ripcurl first sponsored the Rip Curl Pro down at Bell's Beach, just brands that are just true to surfing and have always been there, always sponsoring people, always sponsoring comps. They are really popular overseas and that's really good because they're an Australian brand and they've just expended so I think that's good. I think they are good brands that are true to surfing.”

For James (WM19), the desire for connection drives him to choose local brands over larger, global brands. This is not driven by anti-commercial motives, but rather, a desire to have a product made by people with knowledge and experience of local conditions.

“I think I have one of the first boards they ever brought out and it was made by a local down at Torquay, so he's got general knowledge and everything and I think a lot of the big brands aren't even made in Australia. A lot of their boards are made overseas, so I'd definitely go back to this board just because it's thinner, it's fast, it's really fast, it's easy to move because it's so thin and I'm a little person, so it's a lot easier to manoeuvre, so I think that's good, because I'm that type of surfer that likes to do tricks and stuff.

(Probe)... So again it's more to do with the actual product, rather than the brand?

Yes, the brand I think just put their name on it, where the product, it really depends on who's made the product rather than the brand, who's just given them the funding or whatever and just stuck their name on it, so I'd definitely go back to a Beach Crew board, just because—and they do advertise it as

being locally made and stuff, like by a local hero on the bottom of it or something, so just general knowledge behind it."

In James' passage above, the value of connection drives his search for extremely localized products that enhance his experience of local conditions. Driven by a commitment to place, connection-prone consumers favour smaller brands that tailor their products to local conditions and support local surfers and events. For Anthony (WM24), commercialisation is problematic only if it attracts image associates, because they have no contact with the experience of surfing. For example:

"There's one thing that made me annoyed when I was a little kid, when I did go down surfing and the kids across the road who never knew anything about surfing, they never went to the beach, all wore the same clothes as me. I said why are you wearing them when I'm the one surfing? That made me annoyed, but now everyone does it. You probably see a kid walking around in a Quicksilver t-shirt who's never been to the beach before. It's just one of those brands, they just buy the brand."

This also leads to the rejection of brands that do not have a heritage of engaging in the focal activity, or brands that try and crossover from one sport to another. For example, asked which brand represents snowboarding for him, Sam (WM22) emphasizes the heritage of the brand, in this case it pioneering status among snowboarding brands:

"...Burton, obviously, I guess they're the leaders of technology in snowboarding and they put a lot of time, a lot of testing, a lot of people and a lot of money goes into what they build, so they're trying to create a product that is perfect for snowboarding and they have a lot of testing."

As can be seen in James and Sam's responses, 'connection' for these brands can stem from an early involvement in the sport. This is recognised by both core members like Sam and periphery members like James. For similar reasons, Sam rejected Solomon or Rossignol because they are 'ski companies' and would not want to 'cross over'. These brands, being new to the sport, cannot boast the same connection to it as Burton does and they suffer as a consequence. The connection is at times very personal: the connection with Burton, the brand, goes back to Burton, the man, who is known to have created the first snowboard and therefore is credited for spawning the entire snowboarding movement. This type of veneration for older brands is also apparent in the skateboard community where Vans is perceived as one of "*the bands that initiated everything*".

Connection with place also afforded some brands an edge with core members. Just as respondents recognised the value of the Australianness of some brands, others valued the association with specific locations, be it Torquay (a local Victorian Beach) or Bell's Beach. In other words, the sense of place which motivated so many of our respondents to take up their sport, resonated when the brands established a strong geographical presence or associated themselves with mythical places. For surfers, the beach brought on nostalgic feelings and some brands were able to embody similar emotions. For Hamish (WM) the connection goes back to childhood and the beach:

"Rip Curl would be the one that stands out the most. I think in Australia, it's one that—it's a Torquay company. There's a lot

of Rip Curl around in Victoria particularly and the majority of my stuff is Rip Curl as well...

...It probably comes back to brand favouritism as well, because my dad worked for Rip Curl for a while. He had this new Rip Curl towel and all this promotional stuff they gave him so I guess at a really young age, I just had Rip Curl imprinted in my brain.

...I guess when I look at the logo it reminds me of being a kid. (Probe): What else do you recall?

Wiping out a lot, just going to the beach, spending heaps of time at the beach."

CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although exploratory in its intent, our study highlights the need for a more dynamic approach to subcultures. In particular, brand meanings and relevance appeared to shift in accordance with three main factors: whether consumers were closer to the core or periphery of the subculture, the primary value that linked them to the sub-culture, and pressures experienced by the subculture as a whole, such as mainstreaming. Despite the fact that we are limited in our ability to generalise these findings even to the small populations we examined (Australian surfers, snowboarders and skaters), we believe that evidence of such diversity within and between subcultures offers fertile grounds for future research. In particular, the degree of value fit between sub-cultures and brands deserves a closer look as different responses can clearly be seen within each sub-culture in response to the core values examined here. Furthermore, a longitudinal approach would seem warranted given our observation that consumers' evolving role within sub-culture seems to influence their response to brands.

Another possible explanation for our results, well worth investigating more formally in future research, could be that the 4 core values we identified in this exploratory work are really 4 expressions of a more fundamental search for authenticity, a concept increasingly described as crucial in the consumer/brand literature. For example, for freedom-motivated respondents, authenticity may be ascribed to brands that remain truly linked to the sport, whereas excellence-driven respondents define a brand as authentic if it performs best and the belongingness-seekers identify authentic by what their reference group uses or wears. Clearly, this hypothesis deserves to be examined with a larger sample of respondents for each of the three subcultures described here, as well as other subcultures beyond them.

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